WRITINGS OF EDWARD PAYSON

by Edward Payson

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Edward Payson, compiled for study and devotional reading.

99 Chapters

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Chapter 2

S. A CLASS OF SINNERS EXCLUDED FROM MERCY.

A CLASS OF SINNERS EXCLUDED FROM MERCY.

It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor.— Isaiah 27:11. My hearers, there is no error or mistake into which the wayward mind of man can fall, against which a warning or caution is not given us in the Bible. The passage which has just been read, is admirably adapted, if it was not expressly designed, to guard men against an error, which, though not often openly avowed, prevails, I suspect, very extensively. The error to which I allude is this: When sinners hear of the dangers to which they are exposed, and of the miseries which will be their portion hereafter, unless they repent, they often say in their hearts, we are God's creatures; he has brought us into existence without our consent; he is therefore bound in justice to take care of us, and to prevent our existence from becoming a curse. And even if he is not bound in justice to do this, yet he is merciful; and he will surely show mercy to his own creatures; he will not forsake forever the work of his own hands. We cannot therefore believe that he will make any of us miserable forever.

We cannot doubt that, in some way or other, he will secure the final salvation, if not of all men, yet of all who are not more criminal than we have been. He will either save us without conversion, or, if conversion be necessary, he will cause us to be converted before we die. Such thoughts are, doubtless, entertained by hundreds and thousands who never avow them; and they serve to harden those by whom they are entertained in a false and fatal security, which scarcely any thing can disturb. Now it seems as if our text was uttered on purpose to sweep away all such thoughts, and to disturb the false peace which they produce. In this passage God adverts directly to the fact, that he is the Former, the Creator of those whom he, notwithstanding, threatens to destroy. He says, respecting at least one class of sinners, He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor. As if he had said, Though I am their Creator, and they are my creatures, though I am the Former of their bodies and the Father of their spirits; yet I will execute upon them all my threatenings, I will deal with them according to the rules of strict justice, and treat them as if there were no mercy in my nature. Let them not therefore hope to escape, because their Maker is their judge. Let them expect no more favor, than if they were to be judged by a stranger. My hearers, if there are any among you who do not regard the threatenings of Jehovah as idle words, they will doubtless wish to know of what characters he speaks, what class of sinners he threatens to treat in this manner. They are clearly, though briefly described in our text. In discoursing upon it, I shall endeavor, I. To illustrate this description II. To show the terribleness of the threatening here denounced; and, III. To prove that it is just.

1. The characters here mentioned are described as persons of no understanding. But what is here meant by understanding? Certainly not what we commonly mean by that term. Certainly not reason, or intellectual abilities. No one can suppose that the persons here censured and threatened were idiots or madmen. Had this been their character, they would have been incapable of sin, and consequently undeserving of punishment. The word, understanding, is obviously used

in this passage, as in very many others, to signify spiritual understanding, or knowledge of religious truth. Thus we are told in one passage, that to depart from evil is understanding; in another, that the knowledge of God is understanding; in a third, that a good understanding have all they that keep his commandments; and in a fourth, that Christ's words are all plain to him that understandeth. Of course, to refuse to depart from evil, to be ignorant of God, and to disobey his commands, and to find Christ's words unintelligible, are proofs that, in the sense of the text, men are without understanding. In another passage we are told, that he who followeth vain persons, that is, he who imitates sinners, and walks in their ways, is void of understanding. Our Savior intimates that, to be ignorant of the defiling power of sin, and of the sinfulness of our hearts, is also a proof that we possess this character. And in another place he intimates, with equal clearness, that unbelief; or the absence of faith in him, is a proof that men are without understanding. In fine, we are told in general terms, that wicked men understand not judgment, but they who fear the Lord understand all things; and that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

It is evident, then, that a man may possess great intellectual abilities, may be wise with respect to this world, may have acquired much knowledge of subjects not immediately connected with religion, and yet be without understanding in the sense of our text. They are so. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand. And what was the result of his examination? They are all gone out of the way, there is none that understandeth, no not one. We are also assured that madness is in the hearts of the children of men; and the prodigal son, whom all men naturally resemble, is represented as having been beside himself, till he resolved to return to his father. But some may ask, if all men are naturally without spiritual understanding, and if, as the text asserts, God will not have mercy on such as sustain this character, will it not follow that he can have mercy on none; that all must perish? I answer, it must be recollected, that the persons referred to in the text were God's ancient people that they had been favored with religious instruction; that they had been clearly and repeatedly taught their duty, urged to perform it, and warned of the consequences of neglecting its performance. Of course, they had enjoyed many most favorable opportunities of acquiring spiritual understanding, of becoming wise unto salvation. They had the word of God in their hands; they had religious teachers to explain it and press upon them a compliance with its contents; and they had been the subjects of many providential dispensations, both merciful and afflictive, which were designed and well adapted to lead them to reflection. It was not till all these means of instruction had been long employed in vain; it was not till after repeated calls and warnings that the awful declaration in our text was made respecting them. It follows that, though all men are naturally without spiritual understanding, this declaration does not refer to all. It refers to those only who, like the Jews, have long enjoyed, but have abused or neglected means of grace and opportunities of acquiring religious knowledge. Of such and such only God here says, He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor. Let us consider, II. The terribleness of this threatening.

There is something terrible in its very sound. To hear the eternal, omnipotent Creator say respecting sinful, guilty, dependent creatures, I will show them no mercy, no favor, is enough to make the ears of every one that heareth to tingle. But terrible as is the sound of these words, their meaning is much more so. It includes every thing dreadful, every thing which man has reason to deprecate. It implies, as has already been observed, that God will deal with them according to the

rules of strict justice; that he will treat them as they deserve; and as sinners deserve nothing, he will grant them nothing. But more particularly, this threatening implies,

1. That God will either deny them the common blessings of his providence, or grant them those blessings in anger, and send a curse with them. His language to such characters is, If ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory to my name, I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yea, I have cursed them already, because ye laid it not to heart. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked. Cursed shalt thou be in thy basket and store; cursed shalt thou be in thy children; cursed when thou goest out, and when thou comest in. My hearers, it is a terrible thing to have the common blessings of providence given to us in anger, with a curse; for they will, in this case, be of no service to us; and we Shall be called to render a strict account of them another day. Scarcely any thing can be more dreadful than to have talents, or knowledge, or wealth, or influence bestowed on us, without a heart to improve them; for they will terribly aggravate our final condemnation. A sinner, poor, ignorant, and without influence, is much less to be pitied, than one who possesses wealth, learning, or power; for he will have much less to answer for in the great day of account. The threatening implies,

2. That God will either deprive sinners of their religious privileges, means, and opportunities, or withhold his blessing, and thus render them useless. Thus he dealt with the Jews. He still sent them messengers, and instructions, and warnings; but did not send a blessing with them. Of course, they were entirely ineffectual, and answered no other purpose than to harden them in sin, and increase their condemnation. He said to them, Hear ye, indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not. And he said this, because they had long refused to perceive and understand. In a similar manner he often treats similar characters at the present day. He still permits them to have the Bible in their hands, to hear the gospel, to enjoy the day and means of grace; but he permits this, not in mercy, but in anger; he withholds his blessing from these means, and in consequence they prove a savor of death unto death to those who possess them. This also is a most terrible evil. On this side of everlasting burnings, there can scarcely be a greater. Much less terrible would it be, to lose at once, and forever, religious privileges, means and opportunities, than to have them continued to us as a curse. This threatening implies,

3. That God will withhold from such characters the awakening, enlightening, and sanctifying influences of his Spirit. These influences are especially called his grace or favor. Of course he will withhold them from those to whom no favor is shown. And those from whom he withholds them will remain forever without understanding, without knowledge, without religion; and will, of course, perish in their sins. This is the evil which David deprecated so earnestly. 0, take not thy Holy Spirit from me. This God himself represents as a most terrible evil. Wo unto them, he says, when I forsake them. Wo, indeed! for, my hearers, a sinner had much better be in the regions of despair, than in this world, after the Spirit of God has finally forsaken him; because he will do nothing but treasure up wrath against the day of wrath; and the longer he lives, the more wrath will he accumulate. This threatening farther implies,

Lastly, that at the Judgment day God will condemn such characters to depart accursed into everlasting fire, and that he will grant them no mitigation of their miseries through eternity. There is no medium between mercy and condemnation. Those, therefore, on whom God has no mercy he must condemn. To shorten or mitigate their sufferings, would be a favor. But if he shows them no

favor their sufferings can neither be shortened nor mitigated. To use the awful language of inspiration,—they must drink forever and ever of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation. And now, my hearers, put together all that has been said of the import of this threatening, and say, whether it is more than the words fairly and necessarily imply. Say, too, whether any threatening can be more terrible; whether any combination of words can be more deeply fraught with horror and despair than these. He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor. Alas, if he who made them, has no mercy on them, who will, who can? And what can be more deplorable than the situation of a sinner against whom this threatening is gone out! But is this terrible threatening just? Can the sin of which these characters are guilty deserve such a doom as this? This leads us to show, as was proposed, III. That it is perfectly just. It is so,

1. Because the persons against whom this threatening is denounced never ask for mercy, never seek the favor of God. This is evident from their character. Being ignorant of God, of the sinfulness of their own hearts, and of the defiling power of sin, they feel not their need of mercy to pardon them, of grace to sanctify them, of God's favor to make them happy. Of course, they never ask or seek for these blessings. Not one among them ever said from his heart, God be merciful to me a sinner. And why should he give them what they never ask for; what they do not regard as worth seeking? We might as well say, that it is unjust for him not to give wealth to an indolent man, or learning to one who neglects study, as accuse him of injustice because he does not show mercy to those who never seek it. If he shows them no favor, he shows them as much as they ask for, as much as they deserve. He had said to them, If thou cry after knowledge, and lift up thy voice for understanding; if thou seek for it as for silver and search for it as for hid treasures; thou shalt then understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. But they did not think the blessing worth all this trouble. They did not choose to have it on these reasonable terms. They chose rather to remain without understanding, though they were warned that, in consequence, they would lose forever the favor of God. How then can they complain, when they have what they chose?

2. The justice of this threatening will appear still more evident if we consider, that these persons have long rejected and abused the offered mercy and grace of God. We have already seen that our text refers, not to every one who is destitute of spiritual understanding, but to those only who, like the Jews, have been long favored with the means of acquiring it; those to whom God has spoken, whom he has offered to teach, whom he has tenderly invited and entreated to accept of mercy, and not to receive his grace in vain. Now such characters must, of course, have often sinned against the mercy and grace of God. Year after year, he has followed them, saying, Turn ye at my reproof; and I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words to you. But they refused to turn. They set at nought all his counsels, they regarded none of his reproofs. They did not like to retain God in their knowledge, and practically said to him, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. How just is it then, that he should take them at their word; that he should never show them mercy, but give them up to walk in their own ways, and be filled with the fruit of their own devices! Mercy was offered to you, it was urged upon you; you were entreated to accept it, is a reply which will forever shut the mouth of all who perish under the threatening denounced in the passage.

3. This threatening is just because the characters to whom it refers must be guilty of many other aggravated offences. They must have been destitute of the fear of God; for to fear him is the

beginning of wisdom. They must have refused to renounce their sins; for to depart from evil is understanding. They must have loved darkness rather than light; for they rejected the latter and chose the former; and the reason was, their deeds were evil. They must have followed and imitated sinners; for this all do who are void of understanding. Finally, they must have disobeyed God's commands; for all who obey them have a good understanding. And who will venture to say, that men who disobey God's commands, who imitate sinners, whose deeds are evil, who love darkness rather than light, who refuse to renounce their sins, and who have no fear of God before their eyes, deserve that God should have mercy upon them, or show them any favor? If such characters can deserve mercy, who do not deserve it? If it is unjust to punish such characters, on whom can punishment be justly inflicted! Surely, if there are any on whom God ought not to have mercy, and to whom he ought to show no favor, they are such sinners as are described in our text. And now, my hearers, what use shall we make of this subject? You have heard that there is a class of sinners on whom God will not have mercy, and to whom he will show no favor. Does it not then become us to inquire, whether there are any of this class among ourselves? Painful as is the thought, I cannot but fear that there are. I fear, greatly fear, that there are not a few in this assembly, of whom their Maker has said, I will not have mercy upon them. I have two reasons for fearing this, and I will tell you what they are. In the first place, it is but too certain that there are many among us, of whom it may be said in the sense of the text, they have no understanding The proofs that many possess this character are too plain to be denied or overlooked. Many of you, my hearers, cannot but know that you possess it Many of you know that you are not influenced by the fear of God; and this is one proof that you have no understanding. Many of you know that you do not keep his commandments; this is another proof. Many of you know that you have never forsaken your sins; this is a third proof. Many of you know that you imitate the conduct of sinners this is a fourth proof. Many of you know that the words of Christ, the doctrines of the gospel, do not, in your view, appear plain or intelligible; this is a fifth proof. Many of you know that you do not possess that spiritual knowledge of God which is described in the Scriptures; this is a sixth proof. And many of you know that you do not see the sinfulness of your own hearts, and the defiling nature of sin; this is a seventh proof. These, taken together, compose the principal characteristics of those who, in the sense of our text, have no understanding. And all these characteristics are certainly found in many persons now before me. And while, like the Jews, you possess these characteristics, you have like them long been favored, in a high degree, with religious privileges, means, and opportunities.

I know of but few congregations, even in this highly favored land, that have enjoyed the means of grace, and of acquiring religious knowledge more amply than you have. You have had the Bible in your hands from your childhood. Its contents have been explained and urged upon you, Sabbath after Sabbath, and year after year. It has been the great aim of your minister to preach the gospel to you, in as plain and intelligible a manner as possible, and to hold up before every man his own character and situation in such a light that he could not, unless willfully blind, avoid seeing it. He has endeavored to present the truth to your minds, and consciences, and hearts, in every way which he thought calculated to awaken, convince, alarm and melt you. You have also, in repeated instances, been addressed by some of the most able, faithful, and impressive ministers in New England. You have had opportunities of hearing the gospel not only in season, but out of season; not only on the sabbath but on other days; not only in the house of God, but in your own houses. Meetings for religious inquiry have been established; you have been invited to attend them; and

those who felt unwilling to attend them have been often requested to visit their pastor at his own house, and converse with him in private. In short, the whole apparatus of religious means has been employed to make you wise unto salvation; and it is not perhaps too much to say, that the Jews themselves who are referred to in our text, were not warned more plainly or frequently than you have been. One thing at least is certain. They never heard of that Savior, and of that redeeming love which has been urged upon you again and again. And yet, as it respects many of you, all has proved in vain. Indeed, many of you have not diligently attended on these means. They have indeed attended public worship on the Sabbath, when no real or fancied difficulty prevented; for they had then nothing else to do. But all other opportunities of hearing the truth, have, by not a few, been entirely neglected. And now, unless a change for the better should soon be witnessed, our meetings for religious inquiry, and our weekly lecture must be given up, because so few think it worth their while to attend them. These facts prove conclusively, that the language of the text is no less applicable to many of this assembly, than it was to the Jews. They prove that there are many who do not seek after knowledge, who do not think it worth seeking for. Of course, they furnish one reason for fearing that God has said respecting them, he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor. A second reason which I have for fearing this is, that, with respect to many of you, God appears to be already executing this threatening. He does not indeed take away your religious privileges and means of grace; but what is far more dreadful, he withholds his blessing from them. It is evident as facts can make it, that he does not have mercy upon you, that he does not show you favor; for he does not awaken you, he does not convince you of sin, he does not convert you, he does not pardon you. Of course, the means of grace do you no good. The language of God's dealings with hundreds in this assembly is, and for years has been, Make the heart of this people fat, and shut their eyes, and make their ears dull of hearing; lest they should hear with their ears, and see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them. And if he should continue to withhold his grace and mercy in the same way, for a few years longer, all who have passed the meridian of life, and many who have not reached it, will be in their graves, will have died without mercy, and will perish forever without mercy. And does not this look very much as if God had said respecting the impenitent part of this assembly, I will not have mercy on them? Does it not look as if the decree had gone forth against them? Does it not afford reason to fear that Christ has wept over them, as he did over Jerusalem, after her day of grace was ended, saying, O that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace. But now they are hidden from thine eyes! My impenitent hearers, if Christ has said this of you, if God has in just displeasure determined to have no mercy upon you, your doom is as certain as if you were already shut up in the prison of despair, with an impassable gulf fixed between you and heaven. I do not assert that this is the case. I do not say that because God has not yet shown you mercy, he never will do it. But I do say, that there is reason, great reason to fear that such is the fact. And I do say, that if he determined not to have mercy upon you, and to show you no favor, this determination is perfectly just; for remember, I have often warned you to beware of grieving God's Holy Spirit, and turning away his love and mercy from you. Of no danger have I warned you more frequently, or more loudly than of this. I must then say, that if this danger has overtaken any of you, if the decree has gone out against you, it is most just. Were I certain that this is the case, I should scarcely think it worth while to address you again; but as it is possible that there are, at least, some among you, against whom the door of mercy is not yet shut, I would once more attempt to rouse them, hoping

that it may not be too late. If any yield to the attempt, it will prove that, with respect to them, it is not too late. 0 then, be persuaded to yield to me, to believe me, while I once more remind you of the terribleness of this threatening, of the dreadful situation of those, on whom God will have no mercy; and while in his name I once more say to you, Turn ye at my reproof. I will pour out my Spirit upon you. If you can think of this threatening without being alarmed; if you can hear this invitation without being moved, it will he one more convincing proof that you are indeed without understanding. And if God does not in mercy bless this warning, it will be one more awful indication that he is determined to have no mercy upon you, to show you no favor.

Tell me then, 0, tell me, I beseech you, does this warning affect you? With the anguished solicitude of a parent inquiring whether the means just employed for the relief of an apparently expiring child are successful, I ask, does this warning affect you? Does the still small voice of God within you second the voice of his word? Does he say, Sinner, sinner! why will you die? And is there any thing within you which can yet hear and feel? If there is, blessed, 0, blessed be a merciful God, that he has not yet in just anger shut up his tender mercies forever from you. Blessed be his name, that your consciences are not yet seared as with a hot iron, that you are not yet past feeling, that you are not yet given up to final hardness of heart. But if you are yet capable of feeling any thing, beware, 0, beware! It may be the last time that the Spirit of God will ever cause the truth to affect you. If you should lose your present impressions he may depart, never to return; and God may say, I will not have mercy upon you. 0 then, cherish these impressions, as the apple of your eye. Cherish them as you would cherish your own souls. Watch the spark of conviction within you, as you would watch the dying lamp of life. Make it immediately your great business to become wise unto salvation. Cry after knowledge. Lift up your voice for understanding. Seek for it as for silver. Search for it as for hid treasure. Above all, depart from evil, and turn to him who giveth wisdom liberally, and upbraideth not. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought, and let him turn unto the Lord. And are there any present to whom these directions will not apply, any who feel nothing? But why do I ask? If such there are, I can say nothing to them; I can do nothing for them. They are in the hands of God, and he must, and he will do with them, as seemeth good in his sight.

Chapter 3

S. A Dissuasive from ambition

A Dissuasive from ambition

"Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not; for behold I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord; but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey." Jeremiah 45:5. a preceding chapter, we are informed, that God directed Jeremiah to write in a book all the warnings and threatenings which he had previously uttered, that they might be read to his countrymen on a public occasion, in the temple. In compliance with this command, he employed Baruch, a young scribe, to write what he dictated; and as he was himself confined in prison, and of course unable to go to the temple, he sent Baruch, when the book was finished, to read it in the audience of the people, on a day of public fasting and prayer. The king was not present on this occasion, but he was soon informed of the transaction, sent for the book, caused it to be burned, and directed his officers to apprehend Baruch, probably with a view to put him to death. From this he was preserved by a special interposition of providence; but still the duty which he had performed, at the prophet's request, exposed him to much inconvenience, loss and suffering. He was obliged to conceal himself for a time, and of course to leave his business, to live in obscurity, unnoticed and unknown, and to lose many opportunities for acquiring property, and of rising in his profession. These losses and inconveniencies, though incurred in the service of God, appear to have deeply and painfully affected him. He had not yet learned, like the apostles, to rejoice that he was counted worthy to stuffer pain and shame for God's name. Though there is sufficient reason to believe that he was truly religious, yet he was young, and not established in religion; his faith was scarcely sufficient to support him under the trial, and he too nearly resembled the persons mentioned by our Saviour, who were offended when they found themselves exposed to trouble and persecution on account of the word. Indeed, he seems to have been naturally of an ambitious; aspiring disposition, and this disposition was not yet sufficiently subdued and humbled by divine grace. Hence God saw it necessary to reprove and admonish him by the mouth of the prophet. The message which he sent him is recorded in this chapter: Thus saith the Lord to thee, O Baruch! Thou didst say, woe is me, for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow. In my sighing I fainted, and find no rest. Now thus saith the Lord, behold that which I have built I will break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck tip; and seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not; for behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh ; but thy life will I give thee for a prey, in all places whither thou goest. My friends, we are all too much influenced by a covetous, ambitious and aspiring spirit. We are all naturally prone to seek great things for ourselves in this world; and even real Christians, while they are young in religion, and their faith, like that of Baruch, is weak, are often too much influenced by this propensity. Hence, when they are required to deny themselves, to make sacrifices and submit to losses and disappointments for Christ's sake; when they listen to some of the rules which he prescribes, they are sometimes almost ready to faint, like Baruch, and to say, if we must act in this manner, how can we pursue any worldly business advantageously, or even obtain subsistence for ourselves and families? To all such persons, to all who are indulging a covetous or aspiring temper, our text affords a necessary admonition. In it, God says to every

member of his church, and in effect to every individual present, Seekest thou great things for thyself in this world? seek them not. In discoursing on this passage I propose to show, I. When we may be said to seek great things for ourselves.

II. Why we should not seek them.

I. When may we be said to seek great things for ourselves? It is easy to answer this question in general terms. It is obvious to remark, that we seek great things for ourselves, when we indulge a grasping, ambitious, aspiring disposition; a disposition which is never contented or satisfied, which still cries give, give. But it is not easy to give a particular and definite answer to the question before us. The words, great and small, are relative terms; for in this world, nothing is either great or small but by comparison. What would be great to one man, might be small to another. What would be little to a king, would be great to a beggar. It is therefore difficult to give an answer to the question before us, which will accurately apply to all the various cases and situations that are to be found in society. We may however observe,

1. That men are guilty of seeking great things for themselves, when they seek a larger portion of worldly good than is necessary. But still the question returns, how much is necessary? If men were to answer this question, they would soon prove that few or none are guilty of violating the command in our text; for they all pretend that they seek no more than is necessary. But by this term they usually mean all that would be necessary to gratify their sinful inclinations and desires. The proud and covetous think that an independent fortune is necessary. The ambitious regard honor and power as necessary. The sensual and voluptuous consider the means of pampering their appetites as necessary. The vain think splendid habitations, furniture, dress and equipage necessary. But in order to determine what is necessary, we must appeal from appetite and passion to right reason; from misjudging men, to the infallible word of God. These judges will inform us, that to a creature situated as man is, those things only are necessary, which are necessary to the great end of our creation, the end of our existence. Now man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever; or, in other words, to obey God's will and receive his everlasting favor. More than this, no man needs; more than this no man ought to seek. Everything which does not assist us in performing our duty, in preparing for death and heaven, is needless. Much more is everything needless, which serves only to gratify our sinful propensities. Now neither riches, nor honor, nor power, nor the applause of men, is necessary to assist us in performing our duty, or in preparing for a happy eternity. They have no tendency to procure the favor of God or to assist us in seeking it. On the contrary, they often prove hindrances; for it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. All that we need, then, all that is really necessary, is such a daily supply as is requisite to the support of our bodies, and as may free us from the temptations which result from the pressure of poverty. Agreeably, our Saviour forbids us to lay up treasures on earth, or to be anxious for the morrow; and his apostles exhort us, having food and raiment, to be therewith content; and to make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lust. A further confirmation of this remark may be drawn from our Lord's prayer. He doubtless there teaches us to pray for everything necessary. And what is the language which he teaches us to utter, respecting the supply of our wants? Give us this day our daily bread. The man then, who cannot bring his desires within the compass of this prayer, the man who seeks more than Christ allows him to pray for, seeks great things for himself.

Similar remarks may be made with respect to honor and power. We are not allowed to wish for or seek a higher station than that which the providence of God allots us. On this point the apostle's language is very strong and explicit. In his day every servant was a slave. Yet he says, Art thou a slave? Care not for it; but if thou mayest be free, that is, if God in his providence gives thee an opportunity to regain thy liberty, in a lawful manner, use it rather; for, he adds, he who is called, being a slave, is the Lord's freeman, and he who is called being free, is the Lord's servant. The import of these and other similar precepts evidently is, that we ought to regard our station in life with holy indifference, as a matter of no consequence, and to make it our only concern to perform with fidelity the duties of that station, whatever it may be, since in the sight of God, all stand upon the same level; and he that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much. These precepts do not, however, forbid us to receive either wealth or power, or any other temporal blessing, when, without our seeking them, the providence of God bestows them upon us; for every creature of God is good and not to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. Indeed, we may safely consider and ought to consider his providence as determining what is and what is not necessary. What he gives, we may consider as necessary, and what he withholds we may be sure is unnecessary. Our duty is to desire no more than he gives, and in whatever state we are, therewith to be content; knowing both how to be abased and how to abound. But it is necessary to remark,

2. That we seek great things for ourselves in the sense of the text, when we seek them for ourselves only, or seek them merely with a view to self-gratification or self-aggrandizement. In this consists the very essence of the sin forbidden in our text. It is not unlawful for any man to seek great things, provided he does not seek them for himself. It is not unlawful to seek wealth in the use of proper means, if our object in seeking it is merely to increase our usefulness and our opportunities of doing good, by relieving the necessities of others, and contributing to promote the interests of religion; and if we really devote to these purposes all that portion of our acquisition which is not necessary to ourselves. So far, indeed, is it from being unlawful, that it is our duty to do this, to improve our talents to the utmost, and to do all the good in our power. Hence Paul commands us to labor, that we may have something to give to him that needeth. But to seek great things for others, is very different from seeking them for ourselves. The man who seeks anything for himself alone, violates the spirit of the command in our text, whether the objects of his pursuit be great or small. He shows that he is not actuated by that charity which seeketh not her own. He exposes himself to the charge which God brings against his ancient people: Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit to himself. He acts inconsistently with the character of a Christian, as described by St. Paul. None of us, says he, liveth to himself. Even Christ pleased not himself. We may add, that there is danger of seeking great things for ourselves, even when we fancy that we are seeking them for others. Covetousness and ambition may conceal themselves under the garb of benevolence, and we may flatter ourselves that we seek wealth or influence merely with a view to promote the happiness of others, when in fact we are seeking them for the sake of gratifying ourselves.

Let us now proceed to consider, II. Some of the reasons why we should not seek great things for ourselves. At the head of these reasons we might place the divine command. We might say, seek not great things for yourselves in the world, because God has forbidden it. He not only forbade Baruch to do it, but he forbids us all to do it. His word is full of commands, cautions, and warnings, all leveled against the pursuit of earthly things. Some of these commands and cautions we have

already had occasion to mention, and we shall still have occasion to mention others. We shall therefore only add here, that, since God forbids us to seek great things for ourselves, it is highly sinful to do it; and if it be sinful, it is dangerous; dangerous here, and destructive hereafter. Every consideration, then, which can be assigned as a reason why we should avoid sin, why the should obey God, is a reason why we should not seek great things for ourselves. But we wish to show you, not only that God forbids this, but why he forbids it; and thus convince you that it is not a cruel or arbitrary prohibition, but a most reasonable one.

1. We ought not to seek great things for ourselves, because it is the sure way to multiply our disappointments and sorrows. This it is easy to prove. It is evident from the past history, and from the present state of the world, that however eagerly You may seek great things, very few of you will obtain them. In the very nature of the case, few can obtain them. In the lottery of life there are few prizes, and many blanks. He, then, who seeks great things for himself, engages in a pursuit in which it is exceedingly probable he will be disappointed; and the more ardent are his desires, the more eager his pursuit, the more keen will be the sufferings which his disappointment will occasion. Now is it wise for any man to hazard his happiness, in a pursuit where there is so little probability of success, where hundreds fail, while one succeeds. But this is not all. The man whose pursuit is crowned with success, will be no less disappointed than his unsuccessful neighbor. After he has obtained great things, he will find himself as far from happiness, find his desires as unsatisfied, his mind as discontented, as before. His desires will increase with his success. Nay, they will increase much faster than his success. Objects which seemed great before they were obtained, will appear small after he obtains them; and he must still toil on, like a man who is endeavoring to fill a vessel which has no bottom, or who attempts to quench his thirst by drinking the briny waters of the ocean. And should the tide of success turn, should one who has acquired great things lose them, an event which very frequently occurs, how keen, how insupportable are the pangs of disappointment? Who, my friends, are the men that find life a burden too heavy to bear? who seek a momentary oblivion of their sorrows in the gulf of intemperance? who madly put an end to their lives by violence? Those who have sought great things for themselves, and been successful in the pursuit. My friends, I presume you seek great things for yourselves, only with the expectation of obtaining happiness. But what is happiness? who is the happy man? Is it not he who thinks he has enough; whose possessions are equal to his desires? There are, then, only two ways of obtaining happiness. One is to increase our possessions till they satisfy our desires. The other is to bring down our desires to our possessions. The first is evidently impossible. No man ever did satisfy his desires by increasing his possessions, nor can any man do it, for our desires are boundless. To attempt to satisfy them in this way, is like attempting to extinguish a fire by supplying it with fuel. The only way to be happy, then, is to bring down our desires to our possessions. This can be done, for it has been done. There has been at least one man who could truly say, I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. And if we wish to be happy, either here or hereafter, we must learn the same lesson.

If we cannot be contented and satisfied with the portion God allots us, we must be miserable, in whatever world or situation we may be placed. Witness our first parents. They possessed the whole world, possessed it when it was adorned with all its pristine glory and beauty. But they were not satisfied. They sought great things for themselves. They wished to be as gods, knowing good and evil; and by attempting to gratify the wish, they lost everything, and ruined themselves with all

their posterity. Witness, too, the fallen angels. They possessed more than the world. They possessed heaven. They were raised as high as creatures could be raised. But they were not satisfied. They wished to rise higher. They attempted it, and fell; fell into a gulf of misery which has no bottom, into a state of misery which has no end; fell from the highest state in which creatures can be placed, to the lowest depth of degradation to which creatures can sink. Thus will all perish who seek great things for themselves; for omnipotent truth has declared that everyone who exalteth himself shall be abased.

2. Another reason why we should not seek great things for ourselves, tray be drawn from the nature and situation of the world in which we live. We live in a changeable world, where nothing is stable, where nothing is certain; where everything is changing, or dissolving, or passing away; a world, which with all its works, is destined to be burned up, and from which we must soon be removed. And is such a world a suitable portion for immortal beings; a proper place in which to lay up treasures, or on which to rest our hopes? Might we not as easily employ our time and exertions in building upon a quicksand, or upon ice which the summer's sun will melt away? Again, the world in which we live is a sinful, and of course a dying world, which lies in wickedness, under its Maker's curse, on which the vials of his wrath are constantly poured out, and from which thousands are daily swept away to the retributions of eternity. We live in a prison, where rebels against heaven's King are awaiting their sentence; in a place of execution, where fire and sword, pestilence and famine, disease and death, have for ages been employed in executing the sentence of God's law upon transgressors; in a grave yard, where lie buried the many successive generations of sinners, upon whom the sentence has been executed.

We live, surrounded by the dying and the dead; we walk over the ashes of the departed; we build our habitations upon their graves; we strive to enrich ourselves with treasures which they have left behind; treasures for which many of them bartered their salvation, and which are, therefore, the price of blood, the blood of immortal souls. We live in a world in which multitudes of intelligent beings are daily commencing their existence, an existence which is never to end; in which still greater multitudes are constantly ripening for heaven or for hell; and from which thousands are daily going to one or the other of those endless abodes. And is such a world a proper place in which to seek great things for ourselves? Can the fires of avarice or ambition glow in the midst of so many things which are calculated to extinguish them? We sometimes read of wretches, who, when a city is wrapped in flames or overturned by an earthquake, rush among the blazing ruins, or the falling houses in search of plunder.

We read of others, who follow the march of armies, and hover around a field of battle, with a view to strip the bodies of the dying and the dead. We wonder at their insensibility; but alas! my friends, our conduct, while we seek great things for ourselves, in such a world as this, proves that we are equally insensible. We rush on in the mad pursuit of worldly objects, surrounded by dangers, diseases and death, with the earth trembling, and the grave ready to open under our feet. We follow in the rear of an immense army of our fellow creatures, who have all advanced to grapple with the king of terrors, and have all fallen in the unequal combat. We are hastening to encounter the same enemy, with an assurance of meeting the same fate; yet we eagerly seize the spoils which the dead have left scattered on the field of battle; we are ready to contend and quarrel for their possessions, and take no means to prepare for the contest in which we must soon engage with the last enemy, who will strip us of all we have so hardly and laboriously acquired. My

hearers, what folly, what madness, what inexcusable want of feeling, what an awful insensibility, does such conduct evince! What! can we find nothing better, nothing more necessary to do, in such a world as this, than seeking great things for ourselves? Have we no children, no friends, no acquaintances, who are in danger of perishing, whom our prayers, our example, our exertions might be instrumental of saving? What, O what, would leave been our fate and the fate of mankind, had our Saviour, had his apostles passed through the world, employed only in seeking great things for themselves?

Permit me to enforce these considerations by reminding you, that God himself mentions them, in his address to Baruch, as a reason why he should not seek great things for himself. Thus saith the Lord, I will break down what I have built up, and pluck up that which I have planted; for behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh. And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not. As if he had said, Dost thou, a member of a sinful race, an inhabitant of a guilty, ruined world, a world on which my judgments are about to descend; dost thou, thus situated, seek great things for thyself? Art thou thinking of pleasure, or wealth, or honor, while I am overthrowing and plucking up and destroying, and such multitudes are perishing around thee? Entertain such thoughts no more, but let it suffice thee if thou canst thyself escape.

3. Another reason why we should not seek great things for ourselves, may be found in our own character and situation. We are not only placed in a sinful, dying world, but we are ourselves sinful, dying, and accountable creatures. We are by nature and practice children of disobedience, and of course children of wrath. God is angry with us every day; the curse of his broken law rests upon us; and death, in a thousand forms which we can neither foresee nor resist, is constantly ready to arrest and hurry us to his tribunal, where a sentence awarding eternal death or everlasting life, will be pronounced upon each of us. We have, therefore, a great work to do, no less a work than securing the favor of God, and obtaining the salvation of our immortal souls, a work which demands our time, our attention, our utmost exertions. And can we, in such a situation, find leisure or inclination to seek great things for ourselves here? to seek them while death is at the door; while the Judge is at hand; while eternity draws near; while our souls. unprepared, are in momentary danger of sinking beyond the reach of hope or mercy? Shall we, instead of diligently preparing to give in our account to God, labor to increase our responsibility by increasing those possessions for which an account must be given? Alas! my friends, however small our possessions may appear to us now, we shall all think them large enough, and too large, when we are called to account for them at the tribunal of God. But perhaps some may reply, we hope that our preparation for death is made, that our sins are pardoned, that our salvation is secure? But are you sure that this is the case, sure that you are not deceived? If not, you have still a great work to do, a work, the performance of which requires all diligence; and that is, to make your calling and election sure. Will any one reply, they are sure, I know them to be so; I have a full assurance of salvation. And is this a reason why you should seek great things for yourselves? What! has a pardoned rebel, a rebel who deserves the deepest hell, a rebel rescued from that fate by a Redeemer’s blood, by sovereign grace, has he nothing to do but to seek great things for himself? nothing to do for the Saviour, who has bought him with a price? nothing to do for the honor of that God who has freely pardoned and made him an heir of eternal glory? Nay, have you not yet something to do to accomplish your own resolution? Are you not commanded to work it out with fear and trembling, to fight, to run, to endure to the end, to be faithful to death; Have you not also

something to do, much to do, to promote the salvation of others? Are there none perishing within your reach, whom you might, whom you ought, to attempt to save? And even if there were not, even if you had nothing to do for your Creator, your Redeemer, or your fellow creatures, could you find no better employment than seeking great things for yourselves here on earth? Does it become a child of God, an heir of heaven, an expectant of celestial, immortal glories, to grovel here in the dust, instead of looking upward, commencing his eternal song, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God? Are you so ambitious that you cannot be satisfied to live and reign forever at Christ's right hand, unless you can be honored and applauded here? Are you so avaricious, that you cannot be satisfied with immortal, incorruptible treasures, unless you can have amass of glittering dust in addition? Are your desires so unreasonable that you cannot be contented with sharing the inheritance of Christ, with possessing such a portion as the infinite, eternal God; is it not enough that he has pardoned you, saved you, rescued you from hell, raised you to heaven, given his Son to die for you, his Spirit to sanctify you, and himself to be your exceeding great reward? Will you ungratefully forget all these favors, and murmur, repine, or be discontented because he does not also give you great things in this world, things which he knew would prove injurious? Indeed, my friends, indeed, whether we are penitent or impenitent, pardoned or unpardoned, it by no means becomes us to seek these things. We have all something else, something of more importance to do, something which it will require the greatest diligence, our utmost exertions to accomplish.

4. Another reason why we should not seek great things for ourselves is, that seeking them is incompatible with the duties which we are required to perform; and of course incompatible with our best interests. It is not enough to say, that seeking them is not the end for which we were created, not the work which we are required to perform; for it is directly opposed to that end, it is inconsistent with the performance of that work. Man has but one soul, but one heart, but a certain limited portion of time, strength and energy. Of course, he is capable of a certain limited degree of exertion. He cannot then give his heart to God and to the world at the same time. To use our Saviour's language, he cannot serve two masters, cannot serve God and mammon. If he serves the latter, he must hate the former. In short, he who seeks great things for himself, is covetous; we are assured that every covetous man is an idolater, and that he has no part in the kingdom of Christ. And as an allowed, indulged desire of great things for ourselves, is utterly incompatible with religion, so the smallest desire for such things is highly injurious to our religious progress and enjoyment; for so much of his heart as any man gives to the world, so much he must withhold from God. So much of his time, strength and energy as are employed in forming worldly objects, must be subtracted from religious pursuits, from the performance of his duty. The more concerned he feels to lay up treasure on earth, the less concerned he must be to lay up treasure in heaven. The more he thinks of the body, the less attention he can pay to the soul. In a word, no man can pursue two objects with the same zeal, energy and success, as he can pursue one; least of all can he do this, when these objects are diametrically opposite to each other. Now in this case, the objects of pursuit are diametrically opposite, as opposite as light and darkness, as sin and holiness; for a disposition to desire, or seek great things for ourselves, is in every degree in which it can exist, sinful, since it proceeds from a sinful source.

What is it, my hearers, which prompts you to seek great things for yourselves? It must be either avarice, or ambition, or pride, or a wish for sensual gratification. Now these, as I need not inform you, are all sinful propensities, and by obtaining great things, these sinful propensities are gratified

and strengthened, and, of course, your religious progress is interrupted. Nor is this all. A desire for great things exposes us to innumerable temptations. Indeed, it is this desire which gives worldly objects all their power to tempt and entangle us. The man who does not desire great things, will feel no temptation to do wrong in order to obtain them, or to avoid doing right, through fear of losing them. But he who desires to do great things will be perpetually tempted to omit duty, and to commit sin. They that will be rich, says the apostle, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many hurtful and deceitful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. On this part of our subject it would be easy to enlarge, and to multiply reasons why we should not seek great things to ourselves. But, the undesigned length of the preceding remarks renders it necessary to omit them, and conclude with a brief improvement.

Permit me, then, to improve the subject by asking each of you, in the language of God to Baruch, Art thou seeking great things for thyself? You may perhaps reply, No, we seek but little, we seek for a competency. But are you not deceived? You may now fancy that a little more would satisfy you, but would not your desires increase with your possessions? The only way to arrive at the truth is to ascertain whether you are contented with what you have; for if you are not, you would still be discontented were all the treasures of the earth poured into your coffers. The man who seeks more than God sees it best to give, the man who is discontented with what God has given him, certainly seeks great things for himself. And is not this the character of some, of many present, of some even among the professed disciples of Christ? Are not some of you, notwithstanding the express prohibition and commands of your Master, seeking great things for yourselves? Are you not doing it knowingly and allowedly, almost without suspecting it to be sinful? Are you not in fact seeking as much as you can obtain, placing no limits to your desires, but rather gratifying them, and suffering them to increase? My hearers, it is time, high time, that our eyes were opened to the sinfulness and danger of this conduct. It is astonishing that we do not see it, or that seeing it, we are not alarmed. We should be alarmed were we guilty of murder, or theft, or perjury? Why then are we not alarmed at finding ourselves guilty of a sin which is expressly forbidden, and which is as inconsistent with the Christian character, as robbery or murder? A sin, which the law of God and the gospel of Christ unite to condemn? Do you never read such passages as these: Thou shalt not covet; labor not to be rich; labor not for the meat that perisheth; lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth; If any man will follow Christ, let him deny himself; They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts; love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. One would infer from our conduct, that these passages were no part of the Bible; but, my friends, they are a part, and a most important part of it, as we shall all one day be convinced, if we neglect them. Indeed, it is to the neglect of these passages that the declining state of religion among us, and all the evils which affect us, as a church, and as individuals, are to be ascribed; nor can religion flourish either in the church, or in our own hearts, any farther than the spirit of these passages prevails. O then, strive to imbibe their spirit. Guard against seeking great things for yourselves, as you would guard against any atrocious crime, as you would guard against an enemy which has injured more Christians, and destroyed more immortal souls than all other enemies.

S. A FESTIVAL KEPT TO THE LORD.

A FESTIVAL KEPT TO THE LORD. When ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord. — Leviticus 23:39.

If we review attentively the religious ordinances which God has appointed, we can scarcely fail to perceive, that he has usually passed by all the inventions of men, and adopted institutions which were exclusively his own; institutions which human wisdom would never have devised, and which, in her view, are too often little better than foolishness. In this, as in many other cases, his ways have not been like our ways, nor his thoughts like our thoughts. These remarks we may see verified in the appointment of circumcision, of sacrifices, of baptism, and of the Lord's supper. In some few instances however, God has condescended to pursue a different course. He has selected some significant action, or ceremony, by which men had been previously accustomed to express strong emotion; and by commanding them to make use of it as an expression of religious feeling, has invested it with the dignity and sacredness of a religious ordinance. An instance of this kind may be found in the appointment of religious fasting. Fasting is a natural expression, because it is a natural effect, of extreme sorrow; for the emotion, when felt in a very high degree, takes away the appetite for food, and renders the reception of it not only disagreeable, but almost impracticable. Hence, God prescribed religious fasting as a proper expression of godly sorrow for sin; and were we affected by our sins as we ought to be, we should feel constrained to fast much more frequently, and should fast much more acceptably, than we do. Another instance of the same kind may be found in the institution of religious feasts, or, to use a more proper term, festivals. From the earliest ages, of which any records remain, mankind have been accustomed to commemorate joyful events, and to express the joy and gratitude which such events excited, by the observance of anniversary festivals. As the all wise God well knew how difficult it would be to wean men from the observance of such festivals, and as they were capable of being rendered subservient to his own gracious designs, he saw fit under the ancient dispensation to give them a religious character, by directing his people to observe them in commemoration of the favors, which they had received from his hand, and as an expression of their gratitude for those favors. Of these divinely appointed festivals, several are mentioned in the Levitical law, but our only concern at present is with that which is prescribed in our text; When ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord.

We do not lead your attention to this command because we suppose it is still in force. It was a part not of the moral, but of the ceremonial law, which was designed to continue only till the coming of Christ, and it has long since been annulled, with the other precepts of that law, by the same authority which imposed it. There can scarcely be a doubt however, that it was this command which led the fathers of New England to establish the custom of annually observing, at the close of harvest, a day of thanksgiving and praise. But though they established this custom without any express command or warrant from God, the propriety of continuing it cannot well be questioned. To offer praise and thanksgiving to God, is a duty which we find frequently enjoined, not in the Old Testament only, but in the New. It is highly desirable that whole communities should sometimes

unite in the performance of this duty; and no season seems so proper for this purpose, as that which succeeds the gathering in of the fruits of the earth, the gifts of our heavenly benefactor. In support of this custom we may remark farther, that besides the festivals which God had established, the Jews were accustomed to observe several festivals of human appointment, such as the feast of dedication, and the feast of Purim; and that our Savior while on earth, sanctioned this custom by uniting with them in the observance of these festivals. We cannot doubt therefore, that were he now residing among us he would unite with us in observing this day, though it is a festival of human appointment. But whatever opinions any may entertain with respect to the propriety of observing this day, we presume all will agree, that if it be observed at all it ought to be observed in a proper manner; which we have reason to believe will be acceptable to God. If it is not observed in such a manner, the day will be much worse than lost. It will serve no other purpose than to increase our guilt, excite God's displeasure, and provoke him to express it by sending judgments upon us. He will regard it as he regarded the festivals of the Jews when they ceased to observe them in the manner which he had prescribed; and will in effect, say to us, as he did to them, Your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble to me, I am weary to bear them. What then, we may and ought to inquire, what is it to observe this day in a right and acceptable manner? The best answer, which I can give to this question, is furnished by our text. It is to keep or observe it, as a festival unto the Lord. The necessity of thus observing it may be inferred from the answer which God gave his ancient people, when they inquired whether they should continue to fast on certain days which had long been set apart for that purpose. When ye fasted, says he, did ye fast at all unto me, even unto me? And when ye ate and drank, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? As if he had said, Whether you have fasted, or feasted, ye have done it not unto me, but to please yourselves. Why then do you inquire of me whether you shall continue to observe days for these purposes? So long as you observe them for yourselves and not unto me, what is it to me, whether you do, or do not observe them? It is then most evident, that if we mean to observe this day in a manner which shall be acceptable to God, we must keep it as a festival unto him. But still the question returns, What is it to keep, or what is implied in keeping a festival unto God? To this question we may reply, in general terms, that to keep a festival unto God is to observe it with a view, not to please ourselves, but to please and honor him; to regard it as a day sacred to his special service; and to spend it in contemplating and praising his perfections, recollecting and thanking him for his favors, rejoicing before him in his existence, his character, his government, and his works, and thus giving him the glory which is due to his name. But the question before us demands on this occasion, a more particular and expanded answer; and such an answer we shall attempt to give it, not however altogether in a dry didactic form, nor by a long enumeration of particulars, but by exhibiting two views of the subject, from which we may learn every thing that it is necessary for us to know respecting it. We shall attempt,

I. To give you a view of the manner in which this festival should be observed by us, considered simply as God's intelligent creatures; and

II. Of the manner in which we should observe it, considered as sinful, guilty creatures, to whom his grace and mercy are offered through a Redeemer. That the first of these proposed views, may be placed before you in the clearest and most interesting light, let me request you to suppose, that our first parents, instead of falling as they did, almost immediately, from their holy and happy state, had continued in it, until they were surrounded by a numerous family like themselves, and that in

these circumstances they had set apart a day to be observed as a festival to their Creator and Benefactor. It is evident, that if we can conceive of the manner in which they would have observed such a day, we shall learn in what manner this day ought to be observed by us, considered simply as God's intelligent creatures; for as such our rule of duty is the same which was given to them: we are commanded, as they were, to love God with all our hearts, and as they were perfectly holy, they would render perfect obedience to this command, and, spend the day in a perfectly holy manner, as we should aim to spend this, and indeed every other day. Let us then endeavor to conceive of it. Let us suppose the morning of their appointed festival to have just dawned, and before they wake from their peaceful slumbers let us draw near and take a position favorable for observing their conduct, and becoming acquainted with their views and feelings. No sooner do they wake to a returning consciousness of existence, than a recollection of the Author, Preserver, and Sustainer of that existence, and of their numberless obligations to his goodness, rushes upon, and fully possesses their minds. No sooner do their eyes open, than they are raised to heaven with a look expressive, in the highest degree, of every holy, affectionate emotion. Each one perceives, with clear intuitive certainty, that he is indebted to God for every thing—that God is his life, his happiness, his all. These views fill his heart with adoring gratitude; gratitude, not like ours, a comparatively cold and half selfish emotion, but a gratitude pure, fervent and operative, which carries out the whole soul in a rapturous burst of thankfulness, and renewed self dedication to God. At the same times his various perfections, displayed in his works, are reflected to their view from every thing around them. Or, as the apostle expresses it, the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and godhead, are clearly seen by the things which he has made. The whole creation is to them like one vast mirror, which reflects the glory of God, as an unruffled lake reflects the image of the noonday sun. Not more instantaneously, not more powerfully, nor with such a cheering, animating influence, does the light of the sun pour itself upon their opening eyes, as the light of God's glory, shining in all his works, pours itself upon the eye of their mind, illuminating and warming, with its vivid celestial beams, every recess of the soul, and filling that little interior world with unclouded day. And while all the works of God thus reflect his glories to the eye, they seem to proclaim his praises to the ear of their mind. To them every object has a voice, and every voice, in language which they well understand, tells them something of the perfections of their Creator. The heavens declare to them his glory, and every leaf and every flower whispers his praise. In fine, to them every place is full of God, every object speaks of God; every thing shines with the glory of God; and as a recollection of his favors awakened their gratitude, so a view of his glories excites their reverence, their admiration, their love, and joy, and gradually raises their affections to such a height, that it becomes impossible not to express them. Their eyes, their countenances, have indeed already expressed them, and rendered even their silence eloquent, for while they were musing the fire of devotion burned within. But they can be silent no longer, and in strains no less pure, and little less sweet and powerful, than those of the angelic choirs, they begin to pour forth the emotions of their swelling, almost bursting hearts, and with humble, but rapturous thanksgivings and praises, acknowledge the favors and celebrate the perfections of their adorable Creator. And while they thus address to him their thanks, and their praises, they feel that they are addressing not an absent, but a present God. though invisible to their bodily eyes, he is not so to the eye of their minds; they perceive, they feel his presence; they feel that his all-pervading, all-enfolding Spirit pervades and embraces their souls, breathing into them love, and joy, and peace, unutterable, and wrapping them up, as it were, in himself. Thus each individual apart,

commences the observance of their festal day, and enjoys intimate, and sweet, and ennobling communion with the Father of spirits in solitary devotion. But man is a social being, and the social principle which God has implanted in his nature prompts him to wish for associates in his religious pleasures and pursuits. It is proper that he should wish for them, and if possible obtain them; for when a festival is to be kept unto the Lord, when thanksgiving and praise are to be offered, two are better than one. United flames rise higher towards heaven, impart more heat, and shine with brighter luster, than while they remained separated. If private, solitary devotion be the melody of religion, united devotions constitute its harmony; and without harmony the music is not perfect and complete. What, comparatively, would the songs of heaven be, were they sung by a single voice, even though it were the voice of an archangel? Let us then now contemplate the scattered members of this holy and happy community assembling from their solitary walks, and places of retirement, to rejoice, and praise, and give thanks together, and thus unite the flames and the incense of individual devotion in the blaze of one grand, combined sacrifice. Mark the feelings with which they approach and meet. Every eye sparkles with delight; every countenance beams with affection; there is but one heart, and one soul among them all, and that heart, and that soul is filled with holy gratitude and love, tempered by adoring admiration, reverence, and awe.

Fresh excitements to the increase of these emotions are furnished by their meeting. Each one sees in his rational, immortal fellow creatures, a nobler work of God, a brighter exhibition of his moral perfections, than the whole inanimate creation could afford. In each of them he sees that image of God, which consists in knowledge, and righteousness, and holiness; for in this image man was created, and we are supposing him not as yet to have lost it. And while each one contemplates this image of God in his fellow creatures, he is ready to exclaim, If these miniature images of God are so lovely, how infinitely worthy of love must the great original be? If there is so much to admire in the streams, what admiration does the fountain deserve? Nor is this all. In the various relations and ties, which bind them together, they see new proofs of all-wise benevolence, new reasons why they should love and thank him, who established these relations, and formed these ties. The husband and the wife meet with that perfect mutual affection which God enjoins, and a recollection of the happiness which has resulted from their union, leads them, with simultaneous emotion, to bless the Being who gave them to each other. Parents and children meet in the perfect exercise of holy, parental, and filial affection; and while the parents see in their children the gifts of God, and the children see in their parents those whom he appointed to be the protectors of their infancy, the instructors of their childhood, and the guide of their youth, they unite to bless him together.

Thus, instead of idolizing children and friends, or putting them in the place of God, they love and enjoy God in them, and make use of them to excite their gratitude, and lead their affections to him. Under the influence of these affections, the yet stammering child is taught the name of its Creator and Benefactor; while to the attentive ear of those who are a little farther advanced in life, the history of the creation and of all that God has done for his creatures, is recounted; his commands, and their obligations to obey them, are stated; the nature and design of the festival, which they are observing, are explained; and they are taught to perform their humble part in its appropriate services. In these services all now join; and 0, with what perfect union of heart! with what self annihilating humility,—with what seraphic purity and fervency of affection,—do they present their combined offering of thanksgiving and praise! Suffice it to say that the ear of Omniscience itself

can discern no shade of difference, between the language of their lips and that of their hearts, unless it be this, that their hearts feel more than their lips can express.

These sacred and delightful services being ended, they prepare to feast before their Benefactor; but this preparation is made, and the feast itself is participated with the same feelings which animated their devotions; for whether they eat, or drink, or whatever they do, they do all to the glory of God. On such an occasion they may, perhaps, place upon their board a greater variety than usual, of the fruits of Paradise; but if so, it is not so much with a view to gratify their appetites, as to exhibit more fully the various and ample provision which God has made for them; and thus, through the medium of their senses, to affect their hearts; for man has not yet begun to consume the bounty of heaven upon his lusts. He has not yet yielded himself a willing, but ignoble slave to his corporeal appetites; nor, we may add, has he yet learned, as too many of his posterity have since done, to sit down to the table of Providence, and rise from it refreshed, without acknowledging the hand that feeds him. No, the blessing of God is implored and his presence desired, as the crowning joy of their feast, without which even the fruits of Paradise would be insipid, and the society of Paradise uninteresting. And while they sit around his table, the viands which nourish their bodies, furnish their minds with new food for devotional feeling; for in every fruit before them they see the power, wisdom, and goodness of their Benefactor, embodied and made perceptible to their senses; they see that his goodness prompted him to give them that gratification, that his wisdom devised it, and that his power gave it existence. Thus while they feast upon the fruits of his bounty their souls feast upon the perfections which those fruits display. Thus God is seen and enjoyed in every thing, and every thing leads up their thoughts and affections to him, while he sits unseen in the midst of them, shedding abroad his love through all their hearts, and rejoicing with benevolent delight in the happiness which he at once imparts and witnesses. Meanwhile their conversation is such as the attending angels, who hover around, would not be ashamed to utter, nay such as God himself is well pleased to hear. The law of kindness is on all their lips, for the law of love is in all their hearts. But we can pursue this part of our subject no farther. This must suffice as a specimen of the manner, in which sinless creatures would keep a feast unto the Lord, indeed, of the manner in which all their days would be spent. And if so, may we not well exclaim, 0 sin, what hast thou done! What beauty, what glory, what happiness hast thou destroyed! How hast thou embittered our food, poisoned our cup, darkened the eye which once saw God in all his works; polluted and rendered insensible the heart, which once bore his image and was filled with his love, and by one fatal, accursed blow, murdered both the body and the soul of man! Who can wonder that God hates— who can refrain from hating—the destroyer of so much good, the cause of so much evil! Were it not for sin, we should observe this day in a manner as holy and as happy, as has now been described. We have the same powers and faculties, which were possessed by our first parents in Paradise. And if we may believe the declarations of scripture, or the testimony of good men, God’s glory still shines as brightly in his works, as it did then. There is nothing but our own sinfulness to prevent us from seeing it as clearly, as it was seen by our first parents, and from being affected by the sight as they were affected. But to return—If such is the manner, in which innocent creatures would keep a feast unto the Lord, then such is the manner in which we should aim to keep this annual festival. We should desire and aim to exercise the same feelings, to worship God with the same sincerity, fervency, and unity of affection, and to converse and partake of his bounty in the same manner. I do not say we shall perfectly succeed in such an attempt, but I do say that we ought to make it. He who does

not make it, he who does not desire and aim to serve God with his whole heart, and feel dissatisfied with himself in proportion as he comes short of it, is as far from Christian sincerity, as he is from sinless perfection. But though we all ought to be perfectly holy, it is but too evident that we are not so. We have all sinned; we still sin; we must all have perished in our sins, had not God graciously interposed to prevent it. He has revealed a new dispensation, a dispensation, in which grace and mercy are offered us through a Redeemer.

Through this Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, he has also revealed to us a new way of approaching him, of serving him acceptably, and of obtaining everlasting life. These all-important facts and truths connected with them, must by no means be forgotten or neglected by us, when keeping a feast unto the Lord. They must evidently modify, in a very great degree, the manner in which we observe it, and the views and feelings with which its services are performed. This remark we shall illustrate more fully. Having shown how we ought to keep this festival, considered simply as God's intelligent creatures, we shall now, as was proposed, II. Attempt to show how we should keep it, considered as sinful creatures, under a dispensation of mercy. In attempting this we shall pursue the same course, which has been pursued in the former part of the discourse. We will suppose that the holy and happy community, whose festival we have been contemplating, fall from their original state, and become sinners like ourselves. In other words, they transgress the law of God, the sanction of which is death. In consequence, sentence of death is immediately passed upon them, to be executed they know not when, but just when it shall please their offended judge. Meanwhile, they are banished from Paradise, excluded from the favor and presence of God, and from the tree of life which was the sacramental pledge of their immortality, and see a flaming sword blazing behind them, and turning every way, to prevent them from again entering their forfeited Eden. Nor is the change in their outward situation greater than that, which they find in their character and feelings. They have lost the image of God, they have lost all love to God, they no longer regard or address him with filial affection as a Father and a friend, but view him, so far as they view him at all, as an offended sovereign, whose law they have transgressed, and by whose law they are inexorably doomed to destruction.

Indeed, God seems almost to have disappeared from their view. Their intellectual eyes darkened by sin, no longer see his glory in all his works; he no longer seems to sit enthroned on the universe which he had made, nor do they, in the daily gifts of Providence, see proofs of his bounty or incitements to gratitude. The immense void which his disappearance has left in the heart, is filled by self love, and an inordinate, idolatrous attachment to creatures; and to the great idol self; and other subordinate idols, is transferred that homage and those affections, which were once rendered to God alone. In fine, they are become spiritually dead, dead to God, to goodness, and to the end for which they were created, dead in trespasses and sins. Still however, conscience retains a place in their breasts, and at times it will speak; but it speaks nothing except reproach, condemnation, and terror. The only words which it has heard from the mouth of God, are, Thou shalt surely die; and these therefore are the only words which it will repeat. And when roused by these words they look forward, it is without hope of mercy, it is to death and the blackness of darkness, to judgment and fiery indignation. Then they wish in vain, that they had never existed, they curse, at once, their existence and its author, and feel all those terrible, unaccountable emotions, which agitate with more than a tempest's fury, a heart at enmity towards God, whenever it is forced to contemplate its great enemy.

Now suppose that these creatures, in this sinful, guilty, wretched, despairing state, are placed under a dispensation, in which the grace and mercy of God are offered them through a Redeemer, and that just such a revelation is made to them, as has been made to us in the New Testament. Suppose farther, that after they are placed under the new dispensation they resolve to observe a religious festival. What would be necessary, what would be implied in their keeping it as a feast unto the Lord? I answer, the first thing necessary would evidently be a cordial reconciliation to God. Until such reconciliation took place, they could neither observe a religious festival, nor perform any other religious duty, in a right and acceptable manner. Indeed, they would have no disposition to do it, nor any of the feelings which it implies and demands. The feelings, proper to be exercised on a religious festival, are holy love, joy and gratitude. But they could exercise no love to God, unless they were previously reconciled to him, to his character, his government, and law. Nor could they exercise holy joy; for how could they rejoice in the existence, or in the perfections, or in the government of a being, whom they did not love? Nor could they sincerely offer thanksgiving and praise; for who can sincerely praise a being, or offer thanks to a being, whose character and conduct he dislikes? Can a self-justifying criminal, under sentence of death, rejoice and feast with proper feelings before the Judge who has condemned him; or a servant, under the eye of a master, whom he regards with mingled dread and aversion; or a rebel, in the presence of a sovereign, whose character and laws he dislikes, and whose power he dreads? Or could the prodigal son, had he been taken by force and placed at his father's table, while under the full influence of those feelings which led him to forsake his father's house, have enjoyed that situation, or relished the feast before him? But let the criminal be reconciled to his judge and receive pardon; let the servant love his master, and the rebel submit to his sovereign; let tht prodigal come to himself; and exercise right feelings towards his father, and the difficulty would in each case be removed, and love, and joy, and gratitude be felt. Cordial reconciliation to God then, is indispensably necessary to enable sinful creatures to keep a feast unto the Lord. But reconciliation to God necessarily involves hatred of sin, and self-condemnation, sorrow and shame on account of it. No sinner can feel cordially reconciled to God, until he sees that his character and all his proceedings are perfectly holy, and just and good; for if they are not so, we ought not to be reconciled to them. But among God's proceedings, is the sentence of condemnation which he has pronounced upon every sinner. This therefore, the sinner must see and feel to be right, or he will not be reconciled to it. Now if a sinner sees it to be right that God should condemn him, he will of course condemn himself. He will say, God has been right, and I have been wrong; and in view of the wrong which he has done, he will feel remorse, sorrow and shame, or, in one word, he will repent. Without unfeigned repentance then, no sinner can keep a feast to the Lord for every one who is impenitent is most certainly unreconciled to God. He justifies himself and thus condemns the Almighty. The exercise of faith in the Redeemer, through whom grace and mercy are offered, is also indispensably necessary to the right observance of a feast unto the Lord. The sinner who has just views of God and of himself; as in some degree every penitent sinner has, is unable to see how his own salvation can be reconciled with the holiness, justice, and truth of God. He feels himself to be a sinner; he hears God's jaw say, The soul that sinneth shall die; and he sees that God's holiness, justice, and truth, all demand the execution of this sentence. How then dare he hope for salvation? And unless he dare hope for it, how can he keep a feast unto the Lord? How can he pour out from a happy, grateful, exulting heart, accents of thanksgiving and praise? He will rather wish to fast, to weep and lament, and scarcely will he dare aslo his offended God to pardon

and save him, lest it should be asking him to sacrifice his perfections for the sake of a sinful worm of the dust. But show him the Redeemer, set before him his atonement and intercession, and let him exercise faith in them, and all his difficulties, doubts and fears are removed; he sees that God can be just, and yet justify and save every sinner who believes in Jesus; and now he can hope, and rejoice, and exult; now he feels indeed prepared to keep a feast unto the Lord; now he can cry, 0 Lord, I will praise thee, for though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me. Now he can feel and obey the exhortation, Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, for God now accepteth thy works. But these are not the only reasons, why the exercise of faith in the Redeemer is necessary, in the case of sinful creatures, to the acceptable observance of a religious festival. When God prescribes a way in which sinners shall approach him and present their services, they must on all occasions approach him in that way, and in no other; or instead of finding acceptance, they will only excite his displeasure. All the Jewish sacrifices, for instance, were to be offered, all their religious services performed, and all their festivals observed, with reference to the tabernacle or temple, where God manifested his gracious presence, and through the medium of those typical mediators, or priests, whom he had appointed. If any Jew presumed to disregard these injunctions, to worship God on a high place of his own creating, or to offer his sacrifice with his own hands, instead of applying to the priests, he drew upon himself a curse, instead of a blessing. Just so under the Christian dispensation, Christ is at once the true tabernacle, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and the only mediator between God and man—the only way by which sinful man can have access to God. I, says he, am the way, the truth and the life ~ no man cometh to the Father, but by me. And again —through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Hence an apostle exhorts us, whatever we do, in word or deed, to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. This being the case, we can neither keep a feast unto the Lord, nor offer thanks, nor perform any other religious duty acceptably, except in the name of Christ, or in the exercise of faith in his mediation. And now let us suppose the community, which we have already twice contemplated, first as perfectly holy, and then as sinful, guilty, and undone, to be a third time placed before us, reconciled to God, exercising repentance and faith in Christ, and engaged in keeping a religious festival, like that which we this day observe. They still feel, though in an imperfect degree, the same affection which we saw them exercise toward God in their original state; but these affections are, in a considerable degree at least, excited by different objects, and variously modified by the change which has taken place in their situation. They still feel grateful to God for their existence, for their faculties, and for the various temporal blessings which surround them; but they now view all these things as blessings which they had forfeited and lost, and which had been re-purchased for them by their Redeemer, and freely bestowed upon them as the gifts of his dying love. Hence they seem, as it were, to see his name on every blessing, and every blessing reminds them of him. They still, as formerly, see and admire God’s perfections as displayed in the works of creation: but their admiration and their praises are now principally excited by the far brighter, the eclipsing display which he has made of his moral perfections, in the cross of Christ, in the wonders of redemption.

If they still adore, and praise, and thank him, as the God of nature. they adore, and praise, and thank him, with incomparably more fervency, as the God of grace, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.. If they think of him with affection, as the God who made the world, they think of him with far warmer affection, as the God who so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son

to die for its redemption. Loud above all their other praises and thanksgivings may be heard the cry, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift! Thanks be unto God and the Lamb for redeeming love! This accords with God's own prediction, that under the new dispensation, his former works should be comparatively forgotten, and come no more into mind. And while their thanksgivings and praises are thus principally called forth by the blessings which are conferred, and the divine perfections which are displayed, in the work of redemption, Jesus Christ holds that prominent place in their affections, and in all their solitary and united devotions, which he evidently held in the affections and devotions of the apostles, and to which their writings teach us he is entitled. If they come to God, it is as dwelling in Christ; if they see his glory, it is as shining in the face of Christ; if they rejoice in God it is as manifesting himself in Christ; if they trust in God, it is through the merits of Christ; if they pray to God, it is in reliance on Christ; if they enjoy God, they enjoy him in Christ; if they offer praise and thanksgiving to God, it is in the name of Christ; if they are constrained to holy obedience, it is the love of Christ which constrains them; if they hope to persevere and obtain the victory, it is in dependence on Christ; if they say, we live, they add, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us; and when they anticipate most confidently the happiness of heaven, they rejoice to borrow its language, and cry, Now unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion forever, in fine, Christ is their wisdom, their strength, their righteousness, their life, and they cordially unite with an apostle in saying, Christ is all in all. Without him we can do nothing; but through him we can do all things. And while their religious views and feelings and services, are all thus modified by an habitual reference to Christ, they are still farther modified by a similar recollection of the sinful, guilty, wretched state, from which he rescued them, and by a view of the sins, which still cleave to them, and defile all their duties,-—the effects of these views and recollections, are penitence, contrition, and deep humiliation of soul, and by them all their religious feelings are pervaded and characterized. When they love their God and Redeemer, it is with a penitent love; when they rejoice in him, it is with a penitent joy; when they believe in him, it is with a penitent faith; when they obey him, it is with a penitent obedience; when they offer him thanksgivings and praises, penitence mingles with them her humble confessions and contrite sighs; and the place on earth, which they most covet, in which they most delight, is that of the woman who stood weeping at the feet of Christ, washing them with her tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head. Even while observing a joyful festival, tears, the fountain of which is supplied by godly sorrow for sin, and gratitude to the Redeemer; tears, which it is delightful to shed, are seen on the same countenances which glow with love and hope, and beam with holy, humble joy in God. And when they sit down to the table of Providence, to feast upon his bounty, the exercise of these emotions is not suspended. They feel there as pardoned sinners ought to feel, and as they would wish to feel at the table of Christ, for the table of Providence is become to them his table; they remember him there; they remember, that whenever their daily food was forfeited by sin, and the curse of heaven rested upon their basket and store, he redeemed the forfeiture, and turned the curse into a blessing. Hence they feast upon his bounty with feelings resembling those which we may suppose to have filled the bosoms of Joseph's brethren, when they ate and rejoiced before him. They had, you recollect, hated him, persecuted him, conspired his death, and sold him for a slave. But by the providence of God he was exalted to power, and had the satisfaction, not only of seeing them humbled at his feet, but of saving them and their families from death. After he had made himself known to them, assured them of his forgiveness, and showed them, that though they meant evil against him, God had overruled it for

good, he invited them to a feast, and richly loaded their table with provisions from his own. We may, in some measure, conceive what their feelings must have been on such an occasion. Though they feasted and rejoiced before their highly exalted, but generous, forgiving, and affectionate brother, yet feelings of sorrow and shame could not but mingle with their joy, and they must often have felt as if they wished to rise from their table, throw themselves at his feet, and once more ask his forgiveness. Well then may the redeemed sinner feel thus, while he feasts and rejoices before that much injured, exalted, and compassionate Savior, who is not ashamed to call him brother, and who has not only redeemed and forgiven him, but called him to share in all his possessions and glories. And while such emotions toward the Savior fill the heart, his name cannot be absent from the tongue. Husbands and wives will speak of him to each other; parents will speak of him to their children; his person, his character, his offices, and his works, will furnish the subject of their conversations, and instructions; and a realizing apprehension of his unseen presence, far from damping their joy, will only chastise and purify and exalt it.

Such then, my hearers, are the views and feelings, with which, considered as sinful creatures under the Christian dispensation, we ought to observe this sacred festival. And now allow me to ask, is this requiring anything unreasonable? Is it requiring one emotion for which the gospel of Christ does not furnish ample cause? Is it requiring any thing more than may he justly expected from creatures situated as we are, enjoying such distinguished blessings, and privileges, and indebted for them all to a Savior's dying love? Indeed, is it requiring any thing, which would not be, in the highest degree, conducive to your own happiness? Would not this day, if spent in such a manner, be the happiest day which you ever enjoyed; a day like one of the days of heaven, and affording a rich foretaste of its happiness? Why then should we not all spend what remains of it in this manner? Why not thus keep it as a feast to the Lord? Ah, my hearers, this question cannot be answered, at least not in a manner which will be satisfactory to God, nor even to an enlightened conscience. And why should any seek for an answer? Why should any one seek an excuse for deferring his own happiness? Suppose two persons, who have been long at variance should happen to meet today at one of your tables. Might they not become immediately reconciled, if they chose, and feast together in mutual love; and would not the happiness of the feast be heightened to each of them by the pleasure of reconciliation? Why then may you not all become immediately reconciled to your God, and begin to love that Savior who says. I love them that love me? Why may you not all repair to your respective habitations, and there feast before God with feelings resembling these? How can you find it in your hearts to leave his house, where he entreats you to be reconciled, return to the habitation which he has prepared for you, feast upon the provision which he has made for you, which a Savior purchased for you with his blood, look upon the children and friends whom he has given you, consider the ties with which he has bound them to you, and yet refuse to love him, and still persist in employing the powers and faculties, with which he has entrusted you, in opposing him! 0 do not, I entreat you, be so ungrateful to him, so cruel to yourselves. As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Chapter 5

S. ALL THINGS CREATED FOR CHRIST

ALL THINGS CREATED FOR CHRIST All things were created by him and for him.- Colossians 1:16 By whom were all these worlds and beings made? is probably the first question, which a view of the created universe would excite in a seriously inquisitive mind. For what purpose and with what view were they created? would no less probably be the second. There are two inspired passages, one in the Old Testament. and the other in the New, which contain a direct answer to both these questions. In the Old Testament we are told, that Jehovah hath made all things for himself yea, even the wicked for the day of evil: and in the New, that all things were created by Christ and for Christ. At first view these passages appear to differ, not only in language, but in sentiment. The former asserts that Jehovah made all things. The latter declares that all things were created by Christ. The former assures us that Jehovah made all things for himself; the latter that all things were created for Christ. To those however who believe that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Jesus of the New, these apparently different assertions will appear perfectly consistent. They will recollect and readily assent to the declaration of our Lord, He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; I and my Father are one: and will feel that the expression, Jehovah hath made all things for himself, is synonymous with the declaration in our text, All things were created by Christ and for him.In discoursing on this passage we shall endeavor to illustrate particularly the general assertion, that all things were created for Christ. That none may suspect us of asserting more than our text will warrant, it may be proper to quote the remaining part of the verse which contains it. "By him," says the apostle speaking of Christ, "were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him." From this passage it appears that there are invisible as well as visible creatures; things in heaven, as well as things on earth. But whether visible or invisible, whether in heaven or on earth, they were all created for Christ; all created to promote his glory and subserve his purposes. This I shall now attempt to illustrate in several particulars.

I. Heaven was created for Christ. That there is a place called heaven, where the presence of God is specially manifested, and which is in a peculiar sense, the habitation of his holiness and glory, is abundantly taught by the inspired writers. Some, it is true, have supposed that heaven is only a state ot happiness, and not a place; but the supposition may be easily shown to be groundless; for though God is every where, and though his presence would render any place a heaven to holy beings; yet the glorified body of Christ cannot be every where. A body, however purified and refined, must be in some place; and the place, where now exists the glorified body of our Redeemer, is heaven. Agreeably St. Paul informs us, that Christ has entered into heaven itself; that he is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places; and he elsewhere speaks of desiring to depart and he with Christ. Our Saviour himself, in his last prayer says, Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me, where I am, that they may behold my glory. In addition to these proofs we may observe, that the bodies of Enoch and Elijah must have been in some place, since their removal from this world, and that the glorified bodies of the saints, which

are to be raised at the last day, must be in some place after their resurrection. Heaven is therefore not only a state, but a place, as really a place as this world. And the same arguments which prove that there is such a place as heaven, prove that heaven was created on purpose for Christ. God, considered as a pure spirit, cannot be said to be in one place, any more than in another. "Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Nay more, the Psalmist says, "If I make my bed in hell, thou art there.' God therefore, considered as a spirit, had no occasion for a material heaven. Nor was there any need of such a place for the angels; for they also are spirits, and wherever they are, they behold the face of God, so that to them every place is heaven. But when God became incarnate in the person of Christ; when he became God manifest in the flesh, then a material heaven became necessary for the place of his residence; a place, to which his redeemed people might be brought, and where they might dwell with him and behold his glory. Agreeably Christ speaks of heaven as a kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world; and elsewhere he says to his disciples, I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself that where I am there ye may be also, It appears then, that if God had not taken our nature into union With himself in the person of Christ; and if Christ had not redeemed the bodies of his people from the grave by his own death, there would have been no occasion for a material heaven; and of course, none would have been created. It is not then for God simply considered, but for God manifest in the flesh, or in other words, for Jesus Christ, that heaven was originally formed. It was designed to be the royal city, the court, the palace, in which the King of Zion should dwell and reign with his redeemed people forever.

II. The angels were all created for Christ. When forming the great scheme of redemption, God was pleased to determine that he would employ the agency of created, but highly exalted spirits in carrying it on. With this view the angels were created. They were employed in worshipping Christ. When he brought the first begotten into the world he saith, let all the angels of God worship him. They are also employed by Christ in executing his purposes of love to his people. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation?" It would perhaps be impossible, to point out a single work ever performed by them, which was not in some way connected with the work of redemption by Christ. Hence they are called his angels. Jesus Christ, says St. John, sent his angel. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. Among these exalted spirits thus created to be the worshippers and servants of Christ, some were found who fell from their first estate. Of what particular sin they were guilty, we are not informed; but in some way or other, they refused to perform the duties required of them, and were in consequence cast down from heaven to hell. But though from angels they are transformed to devils, they are still subject to Christ; he holds them in a chain which they cannot break, and overrules for the advancemnent of his kingdom all their endeavors to destroy it. For instance, were it not for their temptations, Judas had probably never betrayed his master, nor the Jews crucified him. How much this event, which they designed should overthrow his kingdom, tended to advance it, or rather, how absolutely necessary it was to its advancement, you need not be told.

III. Hell was created for Christ. That hell is a place, as well as a state, is evident from the fact, that the bodies of the wicked, as well as their souls, are doomed to inhabit it. It will be apparent, in what respects this place was created for Christ, if we consider, that when he was appointed in the counsels of eternity to reign over his mediatorial kingdom, and to be the Judge of the world, it was

foreseen that he would have rebellions, as well as loyal subjects; and that for the restraint and punishment of the rebellious, a prison would be necessary. Hell was therefore created for a prison, in which the enemies of Christ and of the peace and happiness of the universe should be confined. Hence its fires are said to be prepared for the wicked. In a word, it was designed. that in Christ and in the scheme of redemption by him, a full exhibition should be made of all the glorious perfections of the divine character. And as heaven was created to serve as a theatre for the display of the glories of divine mercy, love and grace. so hell was created for the display of divine justice and wrath.

IV. This world was created for Christ. It was created, in the first place, for the display of his natural perfections; for the display of creative wisdom and power to angelic minds. Accordingly we are told, that when he laid the foundation of the earth, these sons of God sung his praises together and shouted for joy. It was created, in the second place, to serve as a stage on which he might display to all intelligent creatures his moral perfections, and especially on which he might display the glories of an incarnate God, and act the wonders of the great scheme of redemption. It was also created to be a province of his dominions, the place where his mediatorial kingdom should be set up, and where his chosen people should be prepared by his grace for admission into his kingdom above. When all have served for all these purposes, when Christ shall have done with it, the end of its creation will be accomplished, and then the earth will of course be destroyed. Then the visible heavens, being on fire, will be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and earth with the works thereof shall be burnt up, and its destruction, no less than its creation, will display the perfection of its Creator

V. The human race, and all the inferior inhabitants of the world, were created for Christ. They were created, in the first place, to show his ability to form different kinds and orders of beings. By forming the inferior animals he displayed his power to create material beings, while his manifold wisdom appeared in the various qualities bestowed on them, and in their fitness for the various uses and elements for which they were designed. In the creation of man he farther showed his power to create beings who were both material and spiritual. The union of a material body with a spiritual, immortal soul, is a work in some respects more wonderful than any of his previous works of creation, and displays in a new and striking manner, that power by which he was enabled to subdue all things to himself To form such a being as man of such materials as the dust of the earth, and to endue him with a living soul, which should bear the image and likeness of God, must have appeared to angels impossible; and when they saw such a work accomplished, it must have given them new and enlarged views of the unlimited power and wisdom of its Author.In the second place, the inhabitants of this world were created to be the subjects of Christ. It was intended that he should have a kingdom embracing all conceivable kinds or orders of created beings, from the highest archangel to the meanest insect, that he might have an opportunity of displaying his perfections in governing such a kingdom, in dispensing happiness suited to the capacities of the individuals of every kind, in adapting them all to their various uses and relations, and in causing all the parts of this complicated machine to work together for the accomplishment of his purposes, and in making them all the objects of his providential care. In the third place, the human race was created, that Christ might display his infinite condescension in assuming their nature. In order to display this condescension in the most clear and striking manner, it was necessary that he should assume the nature of the lowest class of rational beings,-a nature subject to many evils and

infirmities,-a nature, in which he might become visible, and act and speak in a visible manner. Had he taken the nature of angels into union with his own, it would have been a less wonderful act of condescension, nor could the act have been made equally apparent; for angels are spiritual beings, and the divine nature of Christ is spiritual, and the union of two beings purely spiritual could not be made to appear so evidently, as the union of a spiritual being with our nature which is partly material. We can conceive of God manifest in the flesh, much more clearly than of God manifest in an angel. We may farther observe, that a part of the designed display of Christ's condescension consisted in his becoming subject to hunger, thirst, weariness and pain, and in his dying, in the nature which he assumed. He was to appear in the likeness of frail, sinful flesh. But angels are subject to none of these infirmities. They can neither hunger, nor thirst, nor be weary, nor die. Christ could not therefore appear in the nature of a sinful angel as he could in the likeness of sinful flesh. Hence, in order to the full display of his condescension, it was necessary that rational beings should be created inferior to angels, or in other words, such beings as those who compose the human race.

In the fourth place, the human race was created that Christ might display all his perfections in their redemption. In this work is made the brightest and most wonderful display of those perfections which men or angels have ever seen. The glory of God appears most resplendent and full orbed in the face of Jesus Christ. Power, wisdom, goodness, justice, truth, love, mercy, grace and faithfulness, here shine with united lustre in full brilliancy, nor can we determine which appears most glorious or lovely. In God's other works, some drops of that overflowing fountain, some rays from that infinite sun, are seen; but in the work of redemption, in the glorious gospel of the blessed God, the whole Deity, the whole fulness of the Godhead, flows out in one boundless tide; a tide which will forever fill to the brim every holy mind, and in which all holy beings will bathe with rapturous delight through eternity. Accordingly we are told, that by the church is made known to principalities in heavenly places, the manifold wisdom of God; that in the work of redemption he made known the riches of his grace; that at the last day Christ shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Even the wicked, who refuse to submit to Christ, shall be made unwillingly to honor him; that the Lord hath made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. He now causes their wrath to praise him, and restrains the remainder. At the judgment day, they will all be compelled to bow to Jesus, and confess that he is Lord; and he will show his wrath and make his power known in their everlasting destruction. REFLECTIONS. 1. What exalted ideas is this subject suited to give us of the dignity and glory of Christ. The assertion, that all things were created by him, is sufficient to prove his divinity; for he who built all things, must be God. But when in addition to this, we are assured that all things were created for him, we have a proof of his divinity, which is if possible still more convincing; for supposing for a moment that God could and would employ a creature to perform the work of creation, can we suppose that he would permit that creature to create all things for himself, for his own pleasure and glory? Surely not. Gol has said, I am Jehovah, that is my name, and my glory I will not give to another. But if Christ be not God, all the divine glory is given to another. The glory of creating all things, of upholding all things, of governing all things, of redeeming and judging the world, is all given to Christ. Nay more, all things were created on purpose that the glory resulting from all might be given to Christ. If then Christ be not Jehovah, Jehovah's glory is all given to another, and nothing remains to himself. But view Christ as God manifest in the flesh and the difficulty vanishes. Then in honoring the Son, we honor the Father. Then we shall understand why all the inhabitants of

heaven are represented as ascribing joint glories to Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb. By him that sitteth on the throne, is meant the divine, and by the Lamb slain, the human nature of Christ. Both are inseparably united, and Christ's human nature is the temple in which Jehovah will dwell, and in which he will be worshipped by saints and angels through eternity.

2.From this subject we may learn, that, if we would view every object in its true light, and rightly estimate its nature and design, we must consider it with reference to Christ and his cross. To the cross of Christ all eternity has looked forward: to the cross of Christ all eternity will look back. The cross of Christ was, if I may so express it, the first object which existed in the divine mind; and with reference to this great object all other objects were created. With reference to the same object they are still preserved. With reference to the same object every event that takes place in heaven, earth and hell, is directed and overruled. Surely then, this object ought to engage our undivided attention. We ought to regard this world merely as a stage, on which the cross of Christ was to be erected, and the great drama of the crucifixion acted. We ought to regard all that it contains as only the scenes and draperies necessary for its exhibition. We ought to regard the celestial luminaries merely as lamps, by the light of which this stupendous spectacle may be beheld. We ought to view angels, men and devils as subordinate actors on the stage, and all the commotions and revolutions of the world as subservient to this one grand design. Separate any part of this creation, or any event that has ever taken place, from its relation to Christ, and it dwindles into insignificancy. No sufficient reason can be assigned for its existence, and it appears to have been formed in vain. But when viewed as connected with him, every thing becomes important; every thing then appears to be a part of one grand, systematic, harmonious whole; a whole worthy of Him that formed it. It was such a view of things, which led the apostle to exclaim, God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. My friends, if we view the cross of Christ in the same light in which it was viewed by the apostle, we shall soon find it producing similar effects upon ourselves, and shall experience the emotions and adopt the language of that distinguished saint.

3. From this subject, my Christian friends, you may learn what reason you have for gratitude and joy. You, as well as all other objects and beings, were created for Christ. You were created on purpose to promote his glory and execute his will. Nay more, you were created on purpose to be his servants, his friends, his members; you were created that he might redeem you by his blood, sanctify you by his grace, dwell in you by his spirit, form in you his image, raise you to heaven by his power, and show forth the unsearchable riches of his glory in you as vessels of mercy, through eternity. You were created that at the last day, Christ, your exalted Redeemer and Lord may be glorified in you as his work, and admired, as he will be, in all them that believe. You were created, that like so many planets, you may revolve around Christ the Sun of Righteousness, drink in light, and love, and glory, from his beams, and reflect those beams to the admiring eyes of fellow saints and angels forever and ever. Yes, these are the great and benevolent purposes for which you were created and destined; you were beloved with an everlasting love; and with loving kindness you were drawn to Christ, that these purposes might be fulfilled. And they shall be all fulfilled. They are the purposes of him with whom designs and actions are the same; who never changes, and who will not, cannot, be disappointed. 0 then, what a gift is the gift of existence, endless existence, given for such purposes as these! What reason have you to rejoice in such a gift, and to bless the free, great and glorious Giver! Can you find love for any thing else? Can you find affections for any

other object? Can you waste admiration on any thing besides? If you were thus created for Christ, ought not all your powers and faculties to be devoted to him? Ought not your whole soul to be engrossed and swallowed up by this infinitely worthy object? Ought you not always to remember that you are not your own, that you are bought with a price, that you are bound by every tie to glorify Christ in your bodies and in your spirits which are his? This indeed you have covenanted and vowed to do. Come then, with willing minds, and hearts broken with contrition, bursting with admiration, and glowing with love and zeal, and renew your covenant engagements afresh, at Christ's table. Come and see him, by whom and for whom all things were created, dying and dead for you. See his flesh freely offered as your food. See his blood no less freely presented to wash away your stains. Hear him, who is Lord and heir of all things, addressing you in the tenderest expressions of infinite, consolatory love, saying, "Come my sister, my spouse, to my table: eat, 0 friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, 0 beloved." Drink, and remember your sorrows no more. Drink, and remember the man of sorrows, who sorrowed and died that your sorrows might cease. Drink, and remember him, who is now preparing a mansion for you in heaven; who will soon come again and receive you to himself, and drink the fruit of the vine new with you in the kingdom of my Father forever. And while you remember this inestimable Friend, and listen to him thus addressing you, reply, "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly." And until he shall come, exclaim with united voices, "Now unto him, who hath loved, and created, and redeemed us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory, and honor, and dominion, forever and ever."

Chapter 6

S. AMIABLE INSTINCTS NOT HOLINESS.

AMIABLE INSTINCTS NOT HOLINESS. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.—1 Thessalonians 5:23. THIS prayer of the apostle for the universal sanctification of the Thessalonian Christians, leads us to notice a distinction in the natural constitution of man, which is not, perhaps, sufficiently attended to. He speaks, you will observe, not only of their body, and their spirit, but of their soul. The question is, what does he mean by this? The word soul, usually signifies the intellectual, immortal part of man, by which he is distinguished from the brutes. But this cannot be its meaning here, because he expressly mentions the spirit, or immortal part, in distinction from the soul, or as something different from it. What then does he mean by this term? If we turn our attention, for a moment, to irrational animals, we shall find a satisfactory answer to the question. We have no reason to believe that these animals possess an immortal soul, or what the apostle in our text calls a spirit. On the contrary, we have reason to believe, that they do not possess such a soul; for an inspired writer speaks of a difference between the spirit of a man, which goeth upward, and the spirit of a beast, which goeth downward to the earth. Yet animals have something, which may be called a soul, that is, something besides a body; for they can love and hate, they can be pleased or. made angry; they have various wonderful instincts, and they evidently possess memory. Now take away the intellectual, immortal part of man, or what is called in the text, his spirit, and he would be like one of these animals. He would still possess not only a body, but what may be called an animal soul; and it is, I conceive, this animal soul, which the apostle means in our text, and which he prays might be sanctified and preserved blameless. By praying that this might be the case, he evidently intimates, that it ought to be the case that the animal soul of man, as well as his body and immortal part, ought to be sanctified or made holy.

I have often explained the nature of sanctification, and its effects upon the appetites and members of the body. I propose, in the present discourse, to consider more particularly the sanctification of the animal soul of man, or that part of human nature, which does not, properly speaking, belong either to the body or to the mind, but which is distinct from both. In the prosecution of this design I shall naturally be led to show more fully, what belongs to the animal soul of man, and in what respects the animal feelings of those, who are sanctified, differ from the same feelings in those, who are not. The first thing, which I shall mention as belonging to the animal soul, is that mutual affection, which subsists between parents and their children. I consider this affection as belonging to the animal soul, because irrational animals evidently possess it. While their offspring are in a dependent state, and need their care, they display an affection for them, at least as strong, as was ever exhibited by human parents. They not only hazard, but often lose their own lives in defending their young. And their offspring no less evidently return their affection. We may add, that the sorrow which animals feel when deprived of their young, appears to be as deep, though by no means so lasting, as that which parents feel for the loss of their children. We have, therefore, I conceive, sufficient reason, to conclude that parental and filial love, as it naturally exists in mankind, is an affection, not of the immortal part or spirit, but of the animal soul, though it is

doubtless, in some measure, modified and often regulated by our rational soul. And hence we farther conclude, that these affections, while they remain unsanctified by the Spirit of God, or as they exist in men void of religion, have nothing in them of a religious nature, nothing of moral goodness or true holiness nothing, which God is under any obligation to accept or reward. No one supposes, that there is any moral goodness in the affection, which animals feel for their young. And the affection, which parents and children feel for each other, appears to be of the same nature. We do not naturally love our children, because God requires it; we do not love them with a view to please him; we do not love them because it is a duty; our affection for them seems to be a mere natural animal instinct, which is, in itself; neither holy nor sinful. But as it now exists in fallen man, it partakes largely of that universal depravity, which infects his whole nature. In various ways it becomes sinful itself; and leads us into other sins.

It becomes sinful, for instance, when it is inordinate. Our affection for any creature is inordinate and sinful, when we love that creature more than we love God; for he requires the first place in our affections, and forbids us to prefer any object to him. Agreeably, we find most awful punishments denounced upon Eli, because he preferred his sons to God. But all parents naturally love their children far more than they love God. Hence they take more pains to gratify them than they do to please God. Hence they are unwilling to part with them, when he calls, and often feel unreconciled and murmur, when he takes them away. Hence too, they are often so much engaged in acquiring wealth for their children, and in promoting their temporal advancement, that they neglect many of the most important duties which God requires them to perform. Now, when such are the effects of parental love, that love is evidently inordinate and sinful.

Again. Affection for our children becomes sinful, when it takes a wrong direction. Such a direction it takes, when it leads us to prefer their bodies to their souls; to seek their present, rather than their future happiness; to indulge their sinful propensities, rather than give them pain by restraining and correcting them. Yet such, in a considerable degree at least, are the invariable effects of parental love in those parents, who are not influenced by religion. Such parents show no more concern for the souls and eternal happiness of their offspring, than irrational animals. They neither pray for them, nor give them religious instruction, nor set before them a religious example. Surely no one, who believes the Bible, need be told, that such conduct is both highly irrational and exceedingly sinful.

Lastly. Parental affection is sinful, when it is not prompted by right motives. It ought to proceed from a regard to the appointment and will of God. We ought to look upon them from their birth, not as mere playthings—to love them, not as irrational animals do, but as rational and accountable creatures. We ought to love them for God’s sake, because they are his creatures, because he gave them to us to be educated for him, and trained up for heaven. In a word, we ought to love them with a holy love, and because he requires it. But after what has been said, it is almost needless to remark, that no parents naturally love their children in this manner. Of course, there is nothing morally good, and there is much that is morally wrong, in their parental affection. Hence it is evident, that the affection of the animal soul needs to be sanctified, or brought under the controlling influence of religion. It must be sanctified, or we cannot be universally holy. And from the preceding remarks it will be easy to learn in what this sanctification consists, and what will be its effects. It is sanctified, when it is prompted by right motives, when it takes a right direction, and when it is kept in due subordination to the will of God. When this is done, we shall love our children

as God's gifts, and for his sake. We shall prefer him to them. We shall feel ready to resign them, when he calls; and if he takes them away, our sorrow for their loss will have no mixture of repining or discontent. While they are spared to us, we shall make it our chief concern to educate them for God and heaven; their souls will receive a much greater share of our attention than their bodies; we shall be far more anxious for their eternal, than their temporal welfare; and to secure it, will be the principal object of all our exertions respecting them. Those, whose affection for their children is not thus regulated and directed, may be certain, that it is not yet sanctified, that it is sinful in the sight of God, and that they are very far from being such parents, as he approves. And yet they may feel very well satisfied with themselves; they may regard themselves as patterns of parental goodness, and even hope that God will reward them as such. Such is the blindness and deceitfulness of the human heart. The second affection of the animal soul, which I shall mention, is that pain, which is excited by seeing our fellow creatures in distress, and that instinctive desire, which we feel, to relieve them. This affection is called sympathy, pity, and compassion. I infer, that it belongs to the animal part of our nature, from the fact, that many species of irrational animals often appear to feel it in a very high degree; and from the equally well known fact, that it is usually felt most strongly by children at a very early age, before the developement of their intellectual powers, and while they can scarcely be considered as rational beings. And in persons farther advanced, it seems to be a merely animal instinct; for it is not guided by reason, and often operates partially and capriciously. Many persons, for instance, who are painfully affected by the sight of bodily suffering, seem to feel no compassion for the mental sufferings of their fellow creatures; and in others, who boast much of their sensibility, it seems to defeat the very end for which it was given, by rendering them unable to support the sight of keen distress, and impelling them to fly from their suffering friends, when they most need their assistance. Indeed, many plead this as an excuse for neglecting to visit the sick and necessitous, and for leaving their friends, when any painful surgical operation is to be performed. They urge that their sensibility is too exquisite, that their feelings are too easily affected, to allow them to witness such scenes, or to perform such duties. We may add, that the same persons, when provoked, are often cruel, and feel no pity for the sufferings of those, who have offended them.

What is still worse, they feel no compassion for the souls of men; no grief in view of the future miseries, to which sinners are exposed; nor will they make the smallest exertion to save them from these miseries. If a friend or relative is sick of a mortal disease and, unconcious of his danger, is flattering himself with hopes of a speedy recovery, they will not speak a word to undeceive him, and perhaps will not even allow others to do it, lest it should give him pain. Supremely selfish, even in their sensibility, they leave him to discover his danger, when too late, to die unprepared, rather than perform the painful duty of warning him, that death is approaching. How widely this pity or compassion, if it deserves the name, differs from that which glowed in the bosom of our Savior, no one, who has read the New Testament with attention, needs be informed. It is true, he pitied the corporeal sufferings which he witnessed, and was ever ready to relieve them; but it is equally true, that he felt and displayed incomparably more compassion for their perishing souls. It was to savethem, that he came from heaven. It was to save them, that he shed, not tears only, but blood. He bore their sins in his own body on the tree, and freely consented to be wounded for their transgressions, to be bruised for their iniquities, and to pour out his soul unto death, that they might live. His compassion evidently differed very widely from that blind instinct, that animal affection, which we dignify with the name. It was benevolence viewing misery, and willing to make

that misery its own, not merely by sympathizing with it, but by actually bearing it, that the miserable might escape. Nor was his sensibility blunted, as ours often is, by familiarity with scenes of suffering, or by the criminality of the sufferers. It is evident then, that our natural sympathy, amiable as it appears, necessary as it is, needs to be sanctified, and that until it is sanctified, it has nothing in it of moral goodness, or true benevolence. Before it can lay any just claim to these titles, it must be made to resemble the compassion of our Savior. It must cease to be capricious, partial, and selfish in its operations. It must make us willing to deny ourselves, and to suffer pain, inconvenience, and provocation, for the sake of alleviating the distresses of others. It must be excited by the sufferings of our enemies, as well as those of other men. Above all, it must be excited chiefly by the miseries, to which the souls of men are exposed; and enable us, when viewing our unconverted relatives, to say with Paul, I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. So far only, as we can truly say this, are our natural sensibility and sympathy sanctified. And if they are not thus sanctified, in some degree, at least, in vain shall we pretend to belong to the merciful, who shall obtain mercy of God, or claim any relation to our Savior; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if there is any thing in the spirit of Christ, by which he was peculiarly distinguished, it was compassion for the souls of men.

There are two other marks, by which we may be assisted in ascertaining how far our natural sympathies are sanctified. Merely natural sympathy usually declines, as men advance in years; so that, if they live to old age, it becomes almost extinct. But when it is sanctified, it not only continues, but increases in proportion to the christian's religious advancement. In this case it is truly beautiful to see the affectionate sensibility of youth united with the experience, firmness, and mature wisdom of age; to see the veteran disciple, who has learned to endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ, putting on bowels of mercies, tenderness and gentleness of mind, to see the same tree adorned at once with the blossoms of spring and the fruits of autumn. The second mark of sanctified sympathy, is a disposition to participate in the joys. as well as sorrows, of our fellow creatures. This the scriptures require. They command not only to weep with those who weep, but to rejoice with those who rejoice. This command we shall obey, so far as our natural affections are sanctified. We shall make the happiness of others our own. But merely natural affection will not lead to this. On the contrary, it will often lead us to envy those, who are more prosperous than ourselves, to repine at their prosperity, especially if they are our rivals, and to wish that some calamity may befall them. He, in whom this disposition is subdued; he, that can truly rejoice in the happiness of those who do not love him, may safely conclude that he has made advances in the work of sanctification.

Thirdly. What is commonly called the natural temper, or disposition, seems to belong chiefly to the animal soul. I say, chiefly, for some of the passions, which affect the temper, such as pride, ambition, avarice, envy, malice, and revenge, evidently belong to the spirit, or immortal part; for we are taught, that evil spirits, who have no animal soul, are subject to these passions. but setting these passions aside, there is something in the natural temper or disposition of men, which may be, and which indeed often is, called constitutional. In this respect different persons differ very widely, even from their birth. Some appear to be constitutionally timid, mild, gentle, quiet, affectionate, and yielding; while others are bold, boisterous, restless, irritable, and obstinate. In a word, some have naturally an amiable and others an unamiable temper. Now that this difference of

temper depends upon the animal soul, appears, to say the least, highly probable from the fact, that we find a similar difference among irrational animals, even among those of the same species. For instance, among the domestic animals, which are employed by man, there seems to be as great a diversity of natural temper, as is found among human beings. Some are quiet, mild, gentle, and tractable. Others, of the same species, are irritable, quarrelsome, and perverse. What renders it still more probable that the temper belongs to the animal soul, is the well known fact, that it seems to be much affected by the state of the health. Persons, who, while in good health, appear to be mild, affectionate, and contented, will often, when assailed by disease, become peevish, fretful, irritable and querulous. This is especially the case with children, who are less careful, than older persons, to conceal their feelings. Now every one will probably acknowledge that when the temper is naturally unamiable and bad, it needs to be sanctified. When persons of such a temper profess to have become christians, an amelioration of their temper is always expected. This is, perhaps, one of the first proofs of their sincerity, for which their acquaintance look; and if it is not found, their professions are naturally supposed to be insincere. On the contrary, when a great and obvious change for the better is witnessed in the temper of such persons, their sincerity is usually acknowledged, and religion is honored. This being the case, it is evidently of very great importance, that those professing christians, whose temper is naturally bad, should pay the strictest attention to this subject, and make it their chief concern to have their temper sanctified by divine grace. Until this is done, they can neither possess themselves, nor exhibit to others, satisfactory evidence of their sincerity, nor can they adorn the religion, which they profess. Indeed, they will not fail to dishonor it, and cannot be either useful, consistent, or happy. As persons, who have such a temper, are not infrequently bold, resolute, and unyielding, it is easy for them to be firm, zealous, and courageous in the cause of Christ, and they may easily mistake their constitutional courage for holy boldness and christian zeal. But let them beware of this mistake. Let them not conclude they have made much progress in the work of sanctification, until their zeal and boldness are guided by knowledge, tempered with gentleness and prompted by love; nor until they habitually possess and exercise a kind, affectionate, meek, humble, contented and quiet spirit. When this is done, they will resemble their Master, who united in himself the apparently inconsistent qualities of the lion and the lamb, the serpent and the dove,—and will be of all christians the most amiable, exemplary, and useful. But while all will allow, that a naturally bad temper needs to be thus sanctified, there are many who by no means suppose, that tempers naturally amiable equally need sanctification. But if we take the scriptures for our guide, a little reflection will convince us, that this is actually the case. The scripture teaches, that without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. But there is nothing of the nature of holiness in a naturally amiable temper. Holiness consists in conformity to the law of God. But persons, who possess the temper of which we are speaking, naturally pay no more regard to the law of God than others do. They are not gentle, kind, and affectionate, because God requires them to be, or because they wish to please him; for they often live without God in the world. They do not naturally love prayer, or the Bible, or the Savior, or any part of religion; but it is as difficult to draw their attention and affections to these subjects, as it would be if their tempers were unamiable. The young ruler, who asked our Savior what he should do to inherit eternal life, evidently possessed a naturally amiable disposition. Yet when Christ said to him, Take up thy cross and follow me, he was no more willing to obey, than were the scribes and Pharisees. Hence we find that when our Savior asserted the necessity of regeneration, repentance, and faith, he represented them as alike necessary to all,

and made no exception in favor of amiable characters. It is therefore evident, that in his view, such characters need sanctification no less than other men. Their natural affections must he christianized, if I may so express it, or baptized by the Holy Spirit, before they can possess any thing of the nature of true religion. Until this is done, they are no more christians, merely for possessing such affections, than an animal of a mild and tractable disposition is a christian. And besides this general radical defect of such characters, which consists in an entire want of true holiness. they are subject to many particular defects; defects which often attend them even after they become christians. They are often constitutionally timid, irresolute, and easily prevailed upon by solicitations, to do what they know, or at least suspect to be wrong. To these solicitations, they find it very difficult to say, No, with firmness, and to obey the precept, which says, My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Nor do they usually display much zeal and courage, in doing good, or in maintaining their Master's cause. Many of them also are constitutionally indolent: hence, if they become christians, they are often slothful christians. Like the sluggard mentioned by Solomon, they are too ready to say, There is a lion in the way; and the fear of man, a fear of giving offence, often entangles them in a snare. Often too, they forget or neglect the rule of being just before they are generous; and, prompted by natural temper, give away what is not theirs to give. If they donot become christians, these defects prevail in their character in a still greater degree, and often prove their ruin, both for this world and the next. A large proportion of those, who fall a prey to dissipation, gaming, intemperance, and debauchery, are of this class. They are, at first, led into these vices by the example and solicitations of their companions, which they have not sufficient strength of mind to resist and afterwards continue to practice them through habit.

If they escape this snare, and maintain a correct moral character, they are in danger of falling into other errors, hardly less fatal. As they are commonly much beloved and esteemed, their company is sought after, and they find themselves so pleasantly situated in this world, that they have little leisure or inclination to think of another. Besides, the good opinion of their fellow creatures, tempts them to think too highly of themselves, and to trust in their amiable temper and correct morals, while they neglect the Savior of sinners, the only name under heaven, by which any can be saved. Surely then, no one, who regards the scriptures, can doubt, whether such characters need to be sanctified by divine grace. And those of them, in whom this work is begun, need to go on unto perfection. They must judge of their progress towards perfection by the degree, in which they conquer those sins and errors, to which they have a constitutional propensity. If they are enabled to overcome indolence and timidity, and to be zealous, bold, and diligent in the cause of Christ; if they can resolutely resist temptation; if their natural mildness and gentleness are exalted into true benevolence; if they become as unwilling to offend God, as they naturally are to offend their fellow creatures; and if they become more and more sensible of their constitutional failings, and more solicitous to correct them— they have reason to hope, that the work of sanctification is rapidly advancing.

I have now mentioned the principal affections of the animal soul, and attempted to show that they need to be sanctified. It remains to make some improvement of the subject.

1. What has been said, may throw some light upon the doctrine of man's entire depravity, and remove some plausible objections, which are often urged against its truth. When we say, that men are entirely depraved, we mean, as I have often stated to you, that they are entirely destitute of holiness. They are as destitute of holiness, as a dead man is of life; and hence they are said by the

inspired writers to be dead in trespasses and sins. In reply, the adversaries of the doctrine refer us to parental and filial affection, to that sympathy or compassion, which seem natural to man; to the amiable tempers, which many seem to possess, and to the moral actions, which flow from these several sources. They suppose the existence of these things proves conclusively, that men are not entirely depraved. But it has been clearly shown, if I mistake not, that there is no holiness in any of these things; that we possess them in common with irrational animals that they are, in many respects, imperfect and sinful, and that they lead us into many sins. Now if this has been proved, it evidently follows, that the existence of these animal affections is no proof at all, that men are not entirely depraved. It has also been proved, indeed our text clearly proves, that these affections of the animal soul need to be sanctified, or made holy. But if they need to be made holy, it is evident, that they are not originally holy, but that they are, on the contrary, depraved, or sinful; for nothing, which is not sinful, needs to be made holy.

2. From this subject it appears, that those who are sanctified, and those who are not, differ very widely, even in those respects. in which they seem to be alike. For instance, both classes eat and drink; but he who is sanctified, eats and drinks to the glory of God, while the unconverted sinner eats and drinks to gratify himself. Both classes love their children. But in unsanctified persons, parental love is a merely animal affection. inordinate, wrongly directed, and not subordinate to the love of God. In those, who are sanctified, on the contrary, it is a holy affection rightly directed, regulated by God's law, and in subordination to his love. Both classes may pity and relieve the distressed. But the former are led to do this by a blind animal instinct, which is capricious, irregular, and partial in its operations; while the compassion of the latter is elevated and ennobled by divine grace, and resembles that, which glowed in the bosom of our Savior. Both classes may possess amiable tempers, and live correct moral lives. But the amiable tempers of the former, and the morality, which they sometimes produce, do not spring from religion; they are not influenced by religion; nor have they any reference either to God and his law, or to Christ and his gospel. The temper and morals of the latter, on the contrary, spring from religion in the heart; they are the effects of God's law written in the heart; their love to men flows wholly from love to God; their morality is true christian morality, and they are constrained by the love of Christ to imitate his example. In short the governing motives, the main-springs of action, in the sanctified and unsanctified man are totally different; and since God looks at motives, since, in his view, the character of every action is determined by its motive, it is evident, that the same actions which are good when performed by a good man, may be altogether wrong when performed by a sinner. The sanctified, and the unsanctified may apparently resemble each other in temper and conduct, and yet the latter may he justly punished, while the former are rewarded. Hence we see,

3. How greatly and fatally those are deceived, who found a hope of heaven on their naturally amiable tempers and moral lives. We have seen that these need to be sanctified, and that till they are so, they are imperfect and sinful. Those then, who found their hope on these things, found it on their sins aind imperfections. They found it on something, which needs pardon, and which cannot therefore merit reward. St. Paul tells us, that if any supposed they had something of this kind, in which they might safely trust, he had more. But, he adds, what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; and he proceeds to inform us that he counted all his supposed goodness and morality as mere filth, that he might win Christ. 0 then, let all who share in Paul's salvation, imitate in this respect the example of Paul.

4. This subject may assist us to understand that memorable declaration of Christ, From him that hath not shall be taken away even that, which he seemeth to have. We have seen that every thing, which appears to be naturally good and amiable in sinners, such as parental and filial affection, sympathy or compassion, and a sweet natural temper, belongs to the animal soul. Now this dies with the body. Nothing survives death, but the immortal spirit. Of course, at death, sinners, who have no grace, no real goodness, will lose all this apparent goodness, all those natural affections, which made them appear amiable here; and nothing will remain, but a spirit wholly given up to the power and rage of malignant passions. Thus from those, who have no grace, no real goodness or holiness, will be taken away all which they now appear to have. 0 then, be persuaded, ye, who now appear amiable, to seek, most earnestly to seek the sanctifying grace of God. This alone can render your apparent goodness real, and cause it to be permanent. This alone can stamp on your souls that image of God, which consisteth in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, and without which no man shall ever see the Lord. To conclude. Let me urge all, who profess to be the disciples of Christ, to aim at universal and complete sanctification, even to he sanctified throughout in spirit, in soul, and in body. Remember, that to aim at this, is your indispensable duty. Regard it to as your privilege. 0, how desirable it is, to be thus universally holy; to have the immortal spirit clean and white, the animal soul without spot, and the body rendered worthy of such an inhabitant. This you are taught to believe, will, at length, be your happy state in heaven. Will you not, then, strive to make as near approaches to it, as possible, on earth? but the present subject leads me to press upon you, more particularly, the sanctification of the animal soul, with its affections. This is one of the principal seats of depravity. Let it then he one of your chief objects to have it sanctified. Think it not sufficient to love your children, unless your affection for them be such as has been described. Think it not sufficient to be compassionate and sympathizing, unless your compassion resembles that of your Saviour. And be not satisfied with your temper, until you feel in full strength, that heaven-born charity which seeketh not her own.

Chapter 7

S. AN ASSEMBLY CONVOKED AGAINST SINNERS

AN ASSEMBLY CONVOKED AGAINST SINNERS "And I set a great assembly against them" Nehemiah 5:7 When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, with a commission from the Persian monarch, appointing him governor of Judea, after the return of the Jews from captivity, he found that many evils and abuses had crept in among them, which it required all his wisdom and firmness to rectify. But as he was a man whom nothing could daunt or discourage, he exerted himself vigorously to correct these evils, and succeeded. An account of the means which he employed on one occasion, for this purpose, we have in the chapter before us. After stating that he summoned the guilty persons before him, and reproved them for the evils to which they had been accessory, he adds, And I set a great assembly against them. He seems to have adopted this measure, partly, because the persons implicated were numerous and powerful, and it was necessary to show them that still greater numbers disapproved of their conduct; and partly, with a view to produce in them such a salutary shame and remorse, as might lead them to a voluntary renunciation of their criminal practices. The measure was successful. Although the criminals, relying on their numbers, wealth, and power, might have braved the displeasure of Nehemiah alone, they could not support the disapprobation of the numerous assembly he set against them; and therefore consented to renounce the gainful, but illegal practices, of which they had been guilty, and to make restitution to those whom they had injured. My hearers, I wish to adopt, with respect to the irreligious part of this assembly, a measure similar to that which was employed by the governor of Judea. I wish to show impenitent sinners, of every description, how great an assembly may be set against them; how numerous are the beings, who regard their conduct with most decided disapprobation. It is the more necessary to do this, because there is nothing on which sinners so much rely, nothing which so much encourages and strengthens them in their neglect of religion, as the greatness of their numbers. In this place, and indeed in every part of this revolted world, they have a great majority on their side. They are decidedly superior to the servants of God, not only in number, but in wealth, and power, and influence; so that were the great question, what is truth? to be decided by numbers, they could easily determine it in their own favor. Now among a race of beings so much influenced by custom, fashion, and example, as men are, the evils occasioned by this fact are prodigious. The very circumstance, that so large a majority of mankind are on the side of irreligion, tends powerfully to preserve a majority on that side: for a large proportion of the youth, in each successive generation, will enlist under the banner of the strongest party. The same circumstance operates most powerfully to weaken the force, and prevent the success of those means and arguments, which God employs for the conversion of sinners. When the man who neglects religion, looks around him, and sees wealth, rank, power and influence, all ranged on his side, he secretly says, I must be right, I must be safe; the evils with which I am threatened cannot be real; no danger can attend the path which so many pursue; the arguments which are employed to effect a change in my sentiments and conduct cannot be founded in truth, and are therefore unworthy my attention. If I fare as well as the great mass of my fellow creatures, I shall fare welt enough. This being the case, it is important to show sinners, that a great assembly may be set against them; an assembly, whose approbation is far more valuable, and whose example is far more

worthy of imitation; than that of all the multitudes whom they are following. In attempting to do this, however, I shall address those, only, who assent to the truth of the Scriptures, and who acknowledge arguments drawn from them to be valid. If we cannot show sinners of this description, a greater assembly collected against them, than they can collect on their side, we consent, that from this time, they shall follow the world wherever it leads them. Among those, my irreligious hearers, who are against you, we may mention,

1. The good men now in the world. By good men, I do not mean professors of religion; for many professors are on your side, and are perhaps more guilty than any of you. But by good men, I mean men really good, men whom God will acknowledge to be good. Now there is not one, no, not one such man among all the multitudes on whose numbers you rely. Look through the whole host of your associates, and you cannot find one good man. Even in Sodom, there was one. But in all the ranks of those who neglect religion, there is not one. All, all good men are against you. God has not a servant, Jesus Christ has not a friend on earth, who is not against you. Their example is against you, their testimony is against you. And although their number, in any particular place, may be small, yet were they collected from all parts of the world, they would probably form the most numerous assembly the world ever saw. And if thus collected, they would all, with one voice, testify against you and condemn your conduct. Yes, if all the goodness which the eye of God now sees scattered in different parts of the earth, were here present, it would set itself in direct opposition to the course you are pursuing. My irreligious hearers, to have such an assembly as this against you, is not a small thing. To belong to a company, in which not a single good man can be found, is far from being desirable, however large that company may be. But perhaps some will reply, we differ in our ideas of goodness, and of good men. There are many on our side, whom you will not acknowledge to be good men, but whom we consider as such, and in whom we may justly boast. I answer, it is of very little consequence whom I consider as good; for it is a small thing to be judged of men's judgment. But you will recollect, that I call those only good men whom the Bible, whom God pronounces to be good. And you surely will not pretend that any others have a claim to the title. Nor will you pretend that God regards as good any man who neglects religion.

I am willing, however, in this case, not to appeal to the Bible. I will meet you on broader ground, on ground where men of all religious denominations and opinions will consent to meet. I will take the due performance of one duty, the duty of prayer, as the characteristic of a good man. I mention this duty, because not only all denominations of Christians, but Jews, Mohammedans, Heathens, and even many infidels, acknowledge prayer to be a duty. And they all acknowledge that this duty ought to be performed sincerely; and that no man, who does not thus perform it, is a good man. Allow me then to set all the persons in the world, who do pray sincerely, against those who never pray at all, or pray only in an insincere, formal manner. Those of you who neglect prayer, will still have the majority on your side, but of whom is that majority composed? Among them all, there is not one to pray, either for himself, or for his companions; not one to implore the blessing of Heaven on your numerous host. From all that host, not one cry ascends to Heaven for mercy. All the prayer which ascends from the world, ascends from that great assembly which is set against you. My hearers, you must choose which side you please; but permit me to say, I would rather stand with only ten praying persons, against a prayerless world, than with a prayerless world, against ten men of prayer. Indeed, who, that believes the Bible, would not rather be with Noah, against an ungodly world, than with an ungodly world, against Noah? But all the good men who

are now on earth, form only a very small part of the assembly which may be collected against those of you who neglect religion.

I proceed to set against you,

2. All the good men who have ever lived in the world, and whose spirits, the spirits of just men made perfect, are now in heaven. These, it is obvious to remark, compose an assembly, far exceeding in number, all the good men who are now alive. In this assembly, stands righteous Abel, the first martyr; Enoch, who was translated, that he should not see death; Noah, who walked with God, when a world rose up in arms against him; Abraham, the friend of God and the father of the faithful; Israel, who as a prince, had power with God and with men, and prevailed; Moses, who chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Elijah, who ascended alive into heaven, together with a long list of other venerable names, of whom the world was not worthy. In this assembly we also see John the Baptist, than whom a greater was never born of woman; the twelve apostles, and other immediate disciples of our Lord; the almost countless host of the martyrs, who in the first three centuries sealed the truth with their blood; the reformers, who burst the iron bands of papal superstition; the pious fathers of New England, who forsook their country, and braved the perils of the ocean and the hardships of a savage wilderness, that they might have the liberty of serving God according to the dictates of their own consciences.

All these, and myriads more, composing an assembly which no man can number, I set against you. All the collected goodness, which for more than five thousand years has adorned the world, and saved it from destruction, I array against you. I invoke the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, and the martyrs; I invoke all the friends of God, and servants of Jesus Christ, now in heaven, to descend with their robes of light, their harps and crowns of gold, and repeat the testimony, which, while on earth, they bore against the sin of a God-denying world. I invoke the fathers of New England to appear, and rebuke the folly and impiety of their degenerate sons, who neglect the God of their fathers, and practically say of the Redeemer, in whom they trusted, We will not have this man to reign over us. And now, sinner, look at the heavenly host of God’s elect, purified from all earthly stains, made perfect in knowledge, in wisdom and holiness, and shining resplendent with the glories of the upper world, while with countenances full of celestial compassion, yet severe in grave rebuke, they array themselves against you, and reprove the madness of which you are guilty. Not one of them ascended to heaven from your ranks; not one of them, should he revisit the earth, would enter your ranks. No, while they resided here as expectants of eternity, they exchanged the broad crowded road, in which you are walking, for the narrow way which has led them to heaven; and by their example, and their writings, they, though dead, still speak, and bear testimony against all who follow your path. It appears therefore, that not only all the goodness, which now exists in the world, but all that ever has existed in it since its creation, is arrayed in direct opposition to you. In the same opposing assembly are found,

3. All the writers of the Old and New Testaments. We have indeed already mentioned them as good men, but we now speak of them as inspired men, and the fact of their inspiration is of such consequence as to entitle them to a separate notice. Indeed the authority of a single inspired man is sufficient to countervail the authority of the whole human race, for the authority of an inspired writer is, in effect, the authority of God himself. Look then sinner, at this venerable band, which,

though small in number, is more than equivalent to the more numerous host. See the eternal Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth, descending upon them, and teaching them what to say. Being taught by him they speak, and with one voice testify against you. With one voice they cry, Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him! With one voice they denounce indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil. To have this little band against you, is more dreadful than to face the indignation of a frowning world; for their words are the words of one, who has said, Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

4. Another part of the great assembly, which we array against you, is composed of the holy angels. Whether we consider the number, the character, or the intellectual rank of these pare, exalted intelligences, it will appear no small thing to have them arrayed against us. Their number is great. One inspired writer speaks of them, as an innumerable company. Another says, that they are ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. It is not improbable that they equal, or even exceed in number the human race. Their intellectual abilities and acquirements, are of the highest order. In comparison with the least of them, the wisest human philosopher is a child. Nor are they less distinguished by moral excellence; for their holiness is perfect, spotless. And they are all, sinner, arrayed against you. They have their supreme delight in executing the will of that God, whom you neglect and disobey. They veil their faces before him, whom you treat with irreverence. They ascribe wisdom and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing, to that Redeemer, whom you refuse to embrace, of whose invitations you make light. Yes, all the angels of God worship him, who was crucified on earth, and whom sinners do, in effect crucify afresh by their sins. How groundless, then, is the often repeated boast of worldly men, that talents, wisdom and knowledge are, almost exclusively, on their side. Against all their boasted philosophers, their learned infidels, their intellectual Goliaths, who defy the armies of the living God, we array the heavenly hosts, the cherubim, and the seraphim, the thrones and dominions, the principalities and the powers, of the upper world. We cannot think it a mark either of weakness or of ignorance, to imitate their example, —we cannot think it disgraceful to echo their ascriptions of praise to God and the Lamb, nor can we think it either wise or honorable, to neglect that gospel, whose mysteries such minds contemplate with eager and delighted attention. But why do we speak of good men, of the spirits of the just made perfect, or even of the holy angels, as arrayed in opposition to the course which sinners are pursuing? Why do we waste time in assembling creatures to support our cause? However holy or highly exalted they may be, they can give it no additional luster; it needs them not, for,

5. The Lord Jesus Christ, my irreligious hearers, is arrayed against you, and what can creatures add to the weight of his opposition? He is the leader of that numerous host, the Captain of salvation, the Lord of angels and men, the appointed Judge, who will pronounce an immutable sentence on both. He holds the keys of death, and of hell; he possesses all power in heaven and on earth, and were all creatures on our side, it could avail us nothing while he is against us. And, my impenitent hearers, he is against you; he sets his face against the course which you are pursuing; every doctrine which he promulgated, every precept which he enjoined, every threatening which he uttered, every action of his life, is against you. Even his death bears testimony to the sinfulness of your characters, to the guilt and danger of your situation; for how sinful, guilty, and dangerous must be the state of those, whose sin rendered his death necessary!

Every part of that religion which he revealed, cries, How can they escape who neglect so great salvation? And you, my impenitent hearers, are neglecting it. The neglectors of this salvation, are the very persons whom we address, and against whom we are collecting this great assembly. And all of this description, the Lord Jesus Christ meets full in their path, and says, Pursue this path no farther, on peril of your souls. He meets all the impenitent, and says, Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. He meets the unbelieving, and says, ye that believeth not, shall he damned. He meets all the unholy, and says, Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. He meets all the unregenerate, and exclaims, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye be born again, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. And if any of these characters shall continue till death in their present course, they will find him against them at the judgment day, prepared and disposed to execute upon them the sentence pronounced in his word.

Finally, my irreligious hearers, God the Father is against you. Yes, sinner, the infinite God, the ever-living, almighty, and every where present God, the high, and holy, and just, and unchangeable God, is against you. He who sitteth on the circle of the earth, and counts all its inhabitants as nothing and vanity; he who holds all creatures and all worlds as in the hollow of his hand; He in whom you live, and move, and have your being, even he has revealed himself in direct opposition to the course you are pursuing. Coming forth from the unapproachable light in which he dwells, arrayed in all the majesty, and terrors, and glory of self-existent divinity, he discloses himself to view, seated on the throne of the universe, with his immutable law issuing from his lips, and going forth to demand obedience from his creatures on pain of death. Casting a glance of severe and awful displeasure on the course which you are pursuing, with his own right hand he waves you back, and with his own authoritative voice of power, bids you turn, and no longer advance in opposition to your Sovereign. Let the potsherds, he exclaims, strive with the potsherds of the earth, but woe to him who striveth with his Maker. My hearers, while you neglect religion, you are striving with your Maker, and all the laws of his kingdom, all the perfections of his nature, all the dispensations of his providence, all the contents of his word, are against you. And now survey once more and collectively, the vast assembly which is arrayed against you, an assembly composed of all the good on earth, of all the spirits of the just in heaven, of all the holy angels, with God’s eternal Son, and the ever living Jehovah at their head? Before such an assembly, what are you? And whom will you array against it? You may indeed assemble all the wicked on earth; you may call for the departed spirits of all wicked men, who have gone to their own place; and you may add the spirits of disobedience; the apostate angels, to swell the throng; but these are all whom you can assemble. No holy angels, no good man, in heaven or earth, will join your unhallowed host, or countenance you in disobeying or neglecting the Sovereign whom they love.

Surely then, those of you who acknowledge the truth of the Scriptures, will no more boast of, or rely upon the number which swells your ranks. Indeed, methinks a view of those who are with you, can scarcely be more pleasing than a view of those who are against you. To see all evil beings on your side, is little less appalling, than to see all good beings on the opposite side. And remember that what you have now heard described, you will one day see. You will see all the different classes and beings, who have been mentioned, assembled at the judgment day. On one side, you will see all wicked men and wicked spirits; on the other, all good men, all holy angels, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the everlasting Father. And if you continue what you now are, you will see all the former arrayed on your side, and all the latter against you. And then, if not now, you will feel, that

there is a great assembly against you, and that to have such an assembly against you, is indeed an evil above all things to be deprecated.

I need not, my irreligious hearers, repeat remarks which I have often made respecting the pain which it gives me to address you in this manner. Nor need I again remind you, that my only object is to promote your happiness. The use which I wish to make of the subject is, to persuade you to leave the host to which you now belong, and to join the assembly which is arrayed against it. There is not an individual in the assembly referred to, who is not prepared to receive and welcome you with cordial affection. All the good on earth, would gladly embrace you as brethren; holy beings in heaven would rejoice over you, as they do over every sinner that repenteth. The Lord Jesus Christ is ready to receive you, and God the Father to forgive you, and adopt you as his children. All, all combine with one voice to cry, Come with us, and we will do you good. Do you reply, we would join you, were there not so many hypocrites in your number. My hearers, we are not inviting you to join us. We are inviting you to join the armies of the Lamb, the camp of God, to join an assembly composed of none but the truly good. Surely, in such an assembly, there are no hypocrites. All hypocrites belong to the host which we wish you to leave. They will, as inspiration assures us, have their portion with unbelievers, for unbelievers they in reality are. If you wish to be separate from them here, and hereafter, you must join those who worship God in spirit and in truth. Choose then, my hearers, choose your associates, and while choosing them, remember that you are choosing them for eternity. Remember too that all the goodness in the universe is on one side, and all the evil on the other. There is not a good man among those you are invited to leave. There is not an evil being among those you are invited to join. The subject is well calculated to encourage and animate those of you, who are truly religious. You see to how numerous, and how glorious an assembly you belong. When you look around upon the state of the world, you perhaps sometimes feel, like the prophet, as if you were almost alone. But if your eyes are opened to see the great assembly which has been described, you will see that there are more with you, than against you, more with you, than with your adversaries. You are come unto Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. And O, what an honor and privilege is it, to compose one of such an assembly as this! What an honor and privilege would it be, were the assembly much smaller than it is! And if it be an honor and privilege now, what will it be at the great day, in which all shall be assembled before the judgment seat of Christ! What happiness to hear him acknowledge you as his, to hear him say, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. You were not ashamed to acknowledge me in the midst of an ungodly world, and now I will not be ashamed of you. You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter ye, into the joy of your Lord. But remember, that if union to such an assembly be a great honor and privilege, it also imposes great obligations. What ought they to be, in temper and conduct, who profess to belong to such an assembly as this! How white, how unspotted ought to be their garments! How should their whole lives testify to whom they belong! And how great and how just will be the punishment of those false disciples, who, while they pretend to belong to this holy assembly, only disgrace it by their ungodly lives, and appear as spots and blemishes in the midst of it. Not long shall they be permitted thus to dishonor it; for he, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, will come to purify his church, and to cast into outer darkness those who have assumed his name only to profane it, and professed his religion only to dishonor it. Then he will say to his church, Rejoice, rejoice, for from

henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Then he will present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or imperfection, or any such thing; but perfectly holy and without blemish. What manner of persons then ought ye to be? As he who hath called us is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because he hath said, Be ye holy, for I am holy.

Chapter 8

S. AN UNJUST IMPUTATION REPELLED BY JEHOVAH.

AN UNJUST IMPUTATION REPELLED BY JEHOVAH. Have I been a wilderness to Israel? A land of darkness?- Jeremiah 2:31. To an ingenuous mind God never appears so irresistible, so overpowering, as when he addresses his creatures in the language of tender expostulation. He may speak in the loftiest accents of uncontrollable authority and almighty power; and such a mind, though awed, will too often hesitate to yield obedience. He may titter the language of severe rebuke, and terrible denunciation; his reproofs and threatenings may descend from heaven like a tempest of fire; but the heart, wrapped up in its own adamantine hardness, will brave the storm with sullen, unrelenting, and even apparently increasing obduracy. But when, laying aside the rightful claims of his authority, and the terrors of his wrath, God comes in the meek majesty of injured excellence, and unrequited kindness, to expostulate with his offending creatures, every heart, which has a particle of ingenuousness in its composition, relents, melts, and falls contrite at his feet, overcome by the omnipotence of love. Did all men possess such a disposition, he would seldom address them in any other language, and even now, destitute of it as they naturally are, he condescends occasionally to employ it. One instance of its use we have in our text, where, addressing his ancient people, God says, Have I been a wilderness to Israel? This language evidently intimates that they had regarded and treated him as such and at the same time indirectly asks, whether they had any good reasons for regarding and treating him in this manner? Had he indeed been no better to them than a wilderness, a land of darkness? A question, this, which it was much more easy for him to ask, than for Israel to answer. My hearers, we may, we should, consider our God and Redeemer, as still addressing, in similar language all who, while, like Israel, they are favored with his distinguishing blessings, like Israel treat him as if he had been to them only a wilderness, a land of darkness. Especially should we consider him as thus addressing those of his professing people, who have treated him in this manner. And are there none such among us? Should the symbols before us be transformed into the mangled body which they represent, and endowed with life and speech, should our crucified Redeemer appear standing upon that table, leaving the marks of the thorns, the scourge, and the cross; and look round upon this assembly with an omniscient eye, as he once looked upon Peter, would he find no professed disciples to whom he might justly say, Have I been a wilderness to you, a land of darkness? If not, why have you treated me as such? That every one may be able to answer these questions with respect to himself, it is necessary,

I. To show when professed Christians expose themselves to the charge which our text implies, or, in other words, when they treat their God and Redeemer as if he were to them a wilderness, a land of darkness. The mention of a wilderness, especially of a wilderness, as it appears at night, when darkness prevails, suggests to us ideas of dreariness, solitude and gloom; of a place, where there is nothing to cheer, to nourish, or shelter us, where numberless obstacles impede the wanderer’s progress, and through which is no discoverable path. In fine, we regard it as a place, which no one would choose to visit, unless impelled by necessity, and from which every one would wish to escape, as soon as circumstances should permit. And is it possible, perhaps some will ask, that

any man, who professes to be a disciple of Christ, can regard his God and Redeemer in this light? Yes, my hearers, it is possible. Every declining professor of religion, every one who serves God with reluctance, who does not find pleasure in his service, regards him precisely in this light, and treats him as if he were a wilderness, a land of darkness. When a professor becomes slack and remiss in waiting upon God, careless in walking with him, and negligent in seeking communion with him, does he not practically say, God is, to me, a wilderness? The path in which he requires me to walk is adorned with no flowers, it furnishes no fruits. When he enters his closet with reluctance, enters it merely because conscience with her scourge impels; when he reads the Scriptures without interest, when he repeats prayers without feeling, when the minutes spent in these duties seem long, and he is eager to leave his closet, that he may engage in more pleasing worldly pursuits, does he not say as plainly as feelings and actions can say, God is a wilderness; the place to which I retire for the purpose of worshipping him, is a place of darkness, a place which has no attractions? We read of Doeg the Edomite, that he was on a certain occasion at the tabernacle detained before the Lord. The expression is remarkable. He was detained before the Lord. This language forcibly intimates, that he was there reluctantly; that he thought the time long, and would have preferred to be in some other place. Now he evidently regarded the place where God was worshipped as men regard a wilderness; that is as a place which he would not choose to visit, unless impelled by necessity, and from which he would wish to escape as soon as possible. In the same manner does every one regard it, who in any place of worship, whether private, social, or public, feels as if he were detained there, and as if he would prefer some other situation or employment.

Still more loudly does the professing Christian declare that he regards his God and Redeemer as a wilderness, when he repairs, in search of happiness, to the scenes of worldly pleasure, or to the society of worldly-minded men. He then says to them in effect, the ways of wisdom are not ways of pleasantness; a religious life is a life of constraint and melancholy; I should die with hunger and thirst, did I not occasionally forsake the wilderness in which I am doomed to live, and refresh myself with the fruits on which you are feasting. Suppose, my hearers, that while Adam resided in paradise the world had been filled, as it now is, with sinful inhabitants. Had he, in these circumstances, frequently, or occasionally, forsaken the garden of God, and wandered out into the world to seek happiness, in the society, or in the pursuits, of sinful men, would not his conduct have seemed to say, Paradise is a wilderness, a land of darkness, in which happiness is not to be found. I am weary of the presence of God, which is there manifested, and am constrained to come to you, in search of pleasures which my place of residence does not afford! Just so, when the professed friends of God wander from him, and from the path of duty, in search of happiness, they practically say, He is a wilderness, a land of darkness, in which I find nothing pleasant, nothing to allure, nothing which satisfies my desires.

Having thus shewn when we treat God as if he were a wilderness, a land of darkness, permit me,

II. To apply to all, who have treated him in this manner, the pathetic, melting expostulation in our text. Let me ask them, whether they have indeed found their God and Redeemer no better than a dark and dreary and desolate wilderness? With a view to assist you in answering this question, let me, in the first place, remind you of the temporal blessings which you enjoy. Look at your comforts, your possessions, your children, your friends, your liberty, your security. Did you find all these blessings in a wilderness, or did they come to you out of a land of darkness? Some of you

have spent ten, some twenty, some forty, some sixty years, in the world. During all this time, you have had food to nourish you, garments to clothe you, and habitations to shelter you; and did you find all these things in a wilderness? If so, it must surely have been a most fruitful wilderness.

Let me in the second place, remind you of the religious privileges with which you have been favored. From your childhood you have had in your hands the Scriptures, the word of God, containing all things necessary to make you wise unto salvation, and have been taught to read them. From the same period, you have been permitted to enter the sanctuary of God, to present unto him your petitions, to listen to his instructions and invitations, to hear the gospel of salvation, and to see life and immortality brought to light. In fine, the full blaze of gospel day has shone around you. And did you find all this light in a land of darkness? Did you find the Bible, the sanctuary of God, and the gospel of salvation, in a wilderness? Surely, a wilderness, where such blessings are to be found, must be preferable to the most fertile spot on earth!

Thus far, the questions which we have asked are applicable to all alike. With those of you who are professors of religion, we may proceed further, and remind them of the spiritual blessings which they have, or profess to have, enjoyed. We may say to them, You have found the table of Christ spread for your refreshment. On that table Jesus Christ himself, his body, his blood, all the inestimable blessings which he dispenses, have been symbolically set before you, that you might eat, and drink, and live forever. When you entered the church of Christ, you professed to have found light to illuminate your minds, grace to sanctify your hearts, mercy to pardon all your sins, and divine consolations, which gave you joy and peace in believing. If you are what you profess to be, you really have found all these blessings. You have found that Christ's flesh is meat indeed, that his blood is drink indeed. You have enjoyed precious seasons of communion with him at his table, in his house, and in your closets. You have tasted the first fruits of the heavenly inheritance, celestial fruits, the food of angels, such as earth does not produce. And these fruits were the earnest, the pledge of better things to come, the proofs that God has adopted you as his children, and made you heirs of himself, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Look back, then, upon the years which have passed away, since you began to enjoy these blessings; review God's dealings with you, the favors which he has bestowed on you, during that period, and then say, what he has been to you. Will any of you say, can any of you say, He has been to me a wilderness, a land of darkness? Did you find all the inestimable blessings which have been mentioned in a wilderness? Was it a wilderness which produced the celestial fruits, on which you have feasted? Did a Savior, and salvation, and pardon, and peace, and everlasting life, come to you from a wilderness?

Once more. Has God been a wilderness, a land of darkness to this church, considered as a body? Look back, my brethren, and see what it was twenty years since. Consider how it has been preserved, blessed, increased, during the intervening period. Consider how much mercy, how much grace, how much divine interposition was daily necessary, to preserve it, and make it what it now is. Every day it has needed, and it has received, what no power on earth could give. 0 then, with how much propriety, with what irresistible force may God ask, Have I been a wilderness, a land of darkness to this branch of my church? From this enumeration of the blessings with which God has favored us, it must, I think, appear evident, that he has by no means been to us a wilderness, and that, if we have regarded and treated him as such, we have been guilty of great ingratitude, and injustice. And yet, notwithstanding all that has been said, there are probably some present, who feel as if, in one respect at least, God has been to them no better than a dark and

dreary wilderness.

We allude to those who, though they have professedly paid some attention to religious subjects, and have perhaps enrolled themselves among the visible followers of Christ, have found no happiness in religion. Such persons often say in their hearts, We have spent much the in religious pursuits, and have made many endeavors to find that rest and peace and consolation which Christ promises to his disciples, and of which many Christians talk so much. But all our endeavors have been in vain; and we must say, if we speak the truth, that our way has been like that of a man travelling through a wilderness, where he finds no path, no refreshment, but meets with thorns and briars and obstacles at every step. In reply to such complaints, we remark, that the persons who make them compose several different classes, and that the complaints of each of these classes are wholly unreasonable and without foundation. The first class which we shall mention, is composed of those who, to use the apostle's language, go about to establish their own righteousness, and do not submit to the righteousness of God. That such persons find no happiness in God, in religion, is not wonderful; for to God, and to religion, they are entire strangers. It is only by believing in Jesus Christ, that men are filled with joy and peace. But these persons never truly believed in Christ, never came to him for rest. Who then can wonder that they have not found it. They have indeed been wandering in a dark and thorny wilderness, but that wilderness is not God. The second class which we shall mention, is composed of the slothful. That they should find no happiness in religion, is not surprising; for inspiration declares, that the way of the slothful man is a hedge of thorns. He finds no path, and at every effort which he makes to press forward, he feels the thorns piercing his flesh. But his difficulties and sufferings are the consequences of his own slothfulness, and he ought not therefore to ascribe them to religion. Would he lay aside his slothfulness, he would soon experience the truth of the assertion, The way of the righteous is made plain. A third class of complainers is composed of such as an apostle calls double-minded men, who are unstable in all their ways. They are engaged in a vain attempt to reconcile what our Savior has declared to be irreconcilable, the service of God, and that of mammon. In making this attempt they wander from God, and lose themselves in a wilderness; and then inconsistently complain, that wisdom's ways are not paths of peace, that God is to them a land of darkness. But their complaints are as unreasonable as those of a man, who should bury himself in a dungeon, and then complain that the sun gave no light. In fine, all who pretend that God is a wilderness, a land of darkness, prove only that they know him not. In opposition to them we may array the testimony of all who have ever known him. We may exhibit the testimony of the inspired writers, and of good men in former ages, who declare that God is light, and that in him is no darkness at all; that he is the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift: that it is good to draw near to him; that it is not a vain thing to seek him; that in keeping his commandments there is great reward; that in his presence is fullness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures forever more. Indeed, if there is any light, any happiness on earth, if there is any in heaven, if there is any in the universe, it is, it must be in God alone. If he is a wilderness, all is a wilderness; if he is a land of darkness, there is no land of light, and not only man, but all intelligent creatures, must be bewildered in darkness and wretchedness forever.

Permit me now to improve the subject,

1. By applying it to the members of this church, and to all the professed disciples of Christ before me. Let me say to each of them, have you never treated your God and Redeemer as if he were a

wilderness, a land of darkness? Have you never been negligent and remiss in waiting upon him in your closets, in attending upon his worship, in reading his word? Have you never felt like Doeg the Edomite, when he was detained before the Lord? Have you never wandered from him and been slow to return? Have you never engaged in his service with reluctance, and with a disposition to leave it as soon as conscience would permit? If so, let me present to you, your God, your Redeemer, with the tender, affecting language of our text upon his lips. Hear him saying, Am I indeed a wilderness, a land of darkness, as your treatment of me would seem to imply? Have I been such to you? Have I deserved at your hands this neglect, this coldness and inconstancy of affection? Is there nothing in my character, nothing in all the blessings I have bestowed on you, that renders me worthy of different treatment? Surely, my brethren, no Christian's heart can resist this language.

Surely, every Christian's heart will reply, with shame and sorrow, No, Lord, thou hast not deserved this treatment at my hands. Thou hast never been to me a wilderness, nor a land of darkness. So far as I have walked with thee humbly and faithfully, I have found thee, not a wilderness, but a paradise, not a land of darkness, but a region of light. I have found that the light of thy countenance, lifted upon me, gives more joy than sinners feel when their corn and their wine increase. It is folly the most inexcusable, it is madness the most unaccountable, which leads me to forsake thee, and to treat thee with a neglect, and a coldness, which thou art infinitely far from deserving. My brethren, is this the real language of your hearts? If so, God's expostulation has produced its proper, its designed effects. It has broken your hearts, it has led you to repentance. Come, then, and receive a free pardon, through that Savior, whose table you are about to approach. Come, and hear your offended, but pardoning God, say to you, I heal all thy backslidings, I freely forgive thee all thy trespasses; go in peace, and sin no more. Go and receive pledges of pardon and peace at the table of my Son. And while you hear God thus addressing you, let your heart reply, 0 Lord, I will praise thee; for though thou wast angry, justly angry with me, yet thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me. Who is a God like unto thee, that forgivest iniquity, transgression and sin?

2. In the second place, let me apply this subject to impenitent sinners, especially to those who, though they are convinced that religion is important and even necessary, do not embrace it. To such persons let me say, You are guilty, in a far greater degree than those whom we have just been addressing, of treating God as if he were a wilderness, a land of darkness. You stand, with God on the one side, and the world on the other. When you look at the world, which is in reality a wilderness, it appears to you like a garden in which you love to walk, and whose flowery paths we cannot persuade you to quit. But when you turn to contemplate the service of God, a life of religion, it appears to you like a dark and dreary wilderness. On the borders of this wilderness you stand lingering, and though you are perhaps convinced that it contains in its bosom many valuable blessings, yet we cannot persuade you to enter it. Year after year you stand hesitating and lingering, often turning your eyes and your steps back to the world, which you are unwilling to leave. 0 then, how loudly do your feelings and your conduct say, God is a wilderness, a land of darkness. But can he indeed be so? Have good men in all ages been deceived? Are all the inhabitants of heaven deceived? Remember that, if there is any happiness in heaven, it consists in the service, the enjoyment of that very being whom you now regard as a wilderness. And if you continue to regard him as such in this world, you will regard him as such in the world to come. If

you can find no happiness in serving him here, you cannot be happy in his service hereafter.

Chapter 9

S. An early interest in the GODs mercy essential to a happy life

An early interest in the GODs mercy essential to a happy life "O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." Psalms 90:14 hearers, should all the youth in this assembly express sincerely their secret wishes and inclinations, it can scarcely be doubted, that many of them would say something like this; I should wish to live a long life, to be allowed to spend it in worldly pleasures and pursuits, and then, just before its termination, to be converted, and prepared for death. Such, indeed, it is evident, must be the wishes of every person, who, while he is convinced that religion is necessary, does not love it; for while he does not love religion, while he regards a religious life as a life of unhappiness, he will, of course, wish to defer the commencement of such a life, as long as he can, consistently with his own safety. My youthful hearers, am I wrong in supposing that such are your wishes? Am I wrong in supposing, that if it were submitted to your choice, whether your conversion should take place now, or at the close of life, many, if not most of you, would choose the latter? If such would be your choice, your feelings evidently differ widely from those by which the pious writer of our text was actuated. He exclaims, O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. By the mercy of God is here evidently intended, his pardoning mercy. But God’s pardoning mercy is extended, as the psalmist well knew, to none but the penitent, but those who have really commenced a religions life. And he knew that none can obtain such manifestations of this mercy as will satisfy them, except those who pursue a religious course with zeal and diligence. When he said, O satisfy us early with thy mercy, he did, therefore, in effect say, Incline us early to enter on a religious course of life, and to pursue it with such zeal and diligence, as shall afford us satisfactory evidence, that we are indeed the children of God, partakers of his mercy, and heirs of his salvation. The psalmist then, it appears, thought it highly desirable, that men should seek and obtain God’s mercy; or, in other words, commence a religious course, in early life, —as early as possible. The reason which he assigns for the opinion is particularly worthy of remark.

O satisfy us early with thy mercy; why? that we may be happy hereafter? No; but that we may live happily here; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. This language evidently and forcibly intimates, that if the young early seek and obtain God’s pardoning mercy, the way will be prepared for them to rejoice and be glad till their days. And it intimates with equal clearness, that, it they do not early seek and obtain mercy, joy and gladness cannot attend them. Or, to express the same sentiments in different language, he who in early youth commences and diligently pursues, a religious course, will be happy through life; but he who does not, at that period, commence a religions life, will not live happily, even though he should subsequently become religions. That these intimations are perfectly accordant with truth; that every man who wishes to rejoice and be glad all his days, must early seek and obtain God’s pardoning mercy, it is my present design to show. With this view I remark,

1. That a man may live, happily, that he may rejoice and be glad all his days, it is necessary that he should be early freed from all fears of death. That a man who is subject to such fears, who regards with dread an event which is constantly approaching, to which he is every moment

exposed, and from which it is impossible to escape, cannot be happy, it is needless to prove. But every man who has not sought and obtained God's pardoning mercy is, in a greater or less degree, subject to such fears. Nor is this any proof of weakness. It is perfectly reasonable that he should entertain such fears, that he should regard death as an evil greatly to be dreaded; for, to such a man, it must be the greatest of all evils, since it will separate him forever from everything which he values or loves. And the more prosperous he is, the more his honors, friends and possessions increase, the more reason he has to fear an event which will strip him of them all.

O death, exclaims an apocryphal writer, how terrible are the thoughts of thee to a man who is at ease in his possessions. Indeed, could we look into the hearts of men, we should probably find that nothing so much embitters life to them, as apprehensions of death. And how is a sinner, who has no interest in God's mercy, to free himself from such apprehensions? Will it be said, he may refuse to think of death? I answer, he cannot always banish this subject from his thoughts in a world like this, where so many things occur which are suited to remind him of it. Scarcely a day passes in which he does not meet with something which forces upon him a conviction, that he is mortal; that he is constantly approaching the grave, and liable every moment to fall into it. But from this cause of unhappiness, the man who early obtains satisfactory evidence that he is a subject of God's pardoning mercy, is entirely free. The Saviour on whom he relies came on purpose to deliver those, who, through fear of death, were all their life time subject to bondage. This deliverance he grants to all who have obtained mercy of the Lord, and enables them triumphantly to exclaim, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory, through Jesus Christ my Redeemer. And O, what a cause of unhappiness, what all oppressive load is removed from a man's mind, when he can adopt this language, when he ceases to regard death as an evil to be dreaded!

2. That a man may rejoice and be glad all his days, it is necessary that he should be freed in early life from a guilty conscience, and from apprehensions of God's displeasure. That a man whose conscience troubles him cannot be happy, no one who has a conscience needs be informed. And that apprehensions of God's displeasure and of its terrible consequences, must render men unhappy, is equally obvious. The man who cannot be happy when alone, whose own thoughts are unpleasant companions, who cannot look into his own breast without uneasiness, nor up to heaven without terror, nor toward the eternal world without apprehension, must surely be very far from deserving to be regarded as a happy man. If he ever enjoys anything like happiness, it can be then only when he forgets that he is an immortal being, and that there is a God to whom he is accountable. But these things no unpardoned sinner can always forget. The recollection of them will return at intervals to disturb his peace; and if he has received much religious instruction, it will return often. The understanding and conscience of such a man cannot but be at war with the temper which he indulges, and with the course which he pursues. And even when they are not actually reproaching him, and when no distinct apprehensions of an offended God, of judgment and eternity press upon his mind, he often feels that indescribable uneasiness, restlessness and dissatisfaction, which are the almost inseparable attendants of all who are not at peace with God. Agreeably, we read that the wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; that they travail with pain all their days; that a dreadful sound is in their ears, that they believe not that they shall return out of darkness. But from these causes of unhappiness the man who is early satisfied with God's pardoning mercy, is free. He knows the blessedness of the

man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sin is covered. He enjoys peace of conscience and peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He knows that heaven regards with an approving eye the course which he pursues; that God is his friend, heaven his destined home, and everlasting glory and felicity his reward. Hence he can be happy in solitude; nay, in solitude his happiest hours are spent.

He is not obliged to rush into company for the sake of escaping from his own thoughts. He is not obliged to walk with his face bent downward to the earth, lest he should catch a glimpse of that glorious sun which shines in heaven, and its brightness should pain his eye. No; he can look up to that sun, not only without pain, but with delight; for he rejoices with joy unspeakable, while contemplating its unsullied and unfading glories. Nor is he obliged carefully to confine his thoughts within the narrow circle around him, lest they should wander into the eternal world, and bring back cause of alarm. On the contrary, he sends them forward with pleasure to visit that world; he fixes on it the eye of delighted contemplation, and anticipates the hour when he shall be permitted to enter it, for he regards it as the place where the objects of his supreme affections reside, and where his happiness is to be rendered perfect and complete. In a word, all those invisible and eternal realities, every thought which gives pain to the guilty, unpardoned sinner, are to hint sources of happiness. And at the same time, he derives more pleasure from temporal blessings than they ever afford the sinner, because he tastes the goodness of God in them, and because his enjoyment of them is less embittered by fears that they will be taken away. Surely then the man who wishes to enjoy life, to rejoice and be glad all his days, should seek to be satisfied early with God's mercy.

3. To render a man happy during the whole progress of life, it is necessary that he should be early freed from care and anxiety, and especially from apprehensions of losing what he most loves. A feeling of safety, of security, is indispensably necessary to our happiness. But it is impossible that an unpardoned sinner should feel perfectly safe, or that he should be free from care, anxiety, and apprehension. He has no almighty friend, no father in heaven, on whom he can cast the burden of his cares. He cannot conceal from himself the fact, that he is every moment liable to lose all the objects which he values and loves, and he knows, that at death, if not before, he must be separated from them all. In fine, his treasure is laid up on earth, his habitation is built upon the ice, his friends are like himself, all frail, dying creatures; and he has nothing which he can with propriety call his own; nothing on which he can lay his hand and say, this object at least is safe. How then can he be free from anxiety and apprehension, and how while subject to these can he be happy? But from this cause of unhappiness the man who early obtains satisfactory evidence that he is interested in God's pardoning mercy is free. His treasure, his portion, his chief good, is laid up, not on earth but in heaven, and he knows that it is safe, that it cannot be lost. Nor has he any reason to be anxious respecting his temporal concerns, or his lot in life; for he knows that his portion is allotted, and all his concerns managed by unerring wisdom and goodness; that all things shall work together for his good, and that it is his privilege and his duty to be careful for nothing, but to cast all his cares on that heavenly Father who careth for him. Hence he can say, The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Although the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be in the vine; the labor of the olive should fail and the fields should yield no meat; the flocks should be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stall; yet I will joy in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. Nay, though

the earth should be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waves thereof should roar and be troubled, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, yet the Lord of hosts is with me, the God of Jacob is my refuge.

4. That a man may rejoice and be glad all his days, he must early learn, in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content. A discontented man is, of course, an unhappy man. But it is impossible that an unconverted sinner should be otherwise than discontented. To exhort him to be contented is the most idle thing imaginable. As well might we exhort a thirsty man not to feel thirst, while nothing is given him to satisfy it. The reason is obvious. While the soul is empty it cannot but feel uneasy, dissatisfied, discontented. But so long as it is without God, the only fountain of living waters, the only being who can fill the soul, it must be empty. It will crave something, and pine after something, which it cannot find. The situation of a man without God, as it respects happiness, is like that of a man without the sun, as it respects light. The latter may surround himself with lamps, and thus provide a supply of artificial light; but his lamps will often burn dimly, and will sometimes be extinguished; and even while they burn most brightly, their pale, sickly light will afford but a poor substitute for the pure, reviving, all-disclosing radiance of the sun; a substitute with which the eye could not long be satisfied.

Just so a man, who is without God in the world, may surround himself with friends and earthly possessions, and make the comfort which they afford a substitute for the consolation of God, and the enjoyment of his presence. But it is, at best, a miserable substitute, a substitute with which the soul cannot be contented. But far different is the situation of one who is satisfied early with God's mercy. What the sinner seeks in vain, he has found. The light which sheds its radiance on his path, is furnished, not by lamps, but by the sun, a sun which never sets. The water which quenches his spirit flows, not from broken cisterns, but from the inexhaustible fountain of living waters. Of this water, our Saviour says, he that drinketh of it shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up to everlasting life. Such a man has then the sources of contentment in his own bosom. He carries them with him wherever he goes; and when we recollect that, in addition to this, he has been favored by the mercy of God with a submissive temper, we need not be surprised to hear that he soon learns in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content.

Finally. That a man may rejoice and be glad all his days, it is absolutely necessary that he should early obtain the mastery of his appetites and passions, and be secured against the evils into which they would lead him. What these evils are, it is scarcely necessary to say, since they prevail but too extensively among us. Look around, and you will see on every side young men, whom appetites and passions are plunging into intemperance, sensuality, and every species of vicious excess, and thus ruining them not only for the future, but for the present world. You see them forming habits, whose chains it will be exceedingly difficult for them to break, and which, unless broken, will drag them away to destruction. And no young man can have any security that he shall not be left to form such habits, unless he obtains that security which is afforded by God's sanctifying grace and pardoning mercy; unless he early commits himself to that great and good Shepherd, who has engaged to preserve all his sheep. Until this is done, he is at the mercy of every gust of temptation, every sudden sally of appetite and passion.

It is in vain that, in his sober moments, he resolves not to yield to temptation. How little such resolutions, how little any human restraints avail to secure him, melancholy observation but too

clearly shows. How many promising young men have we seen who, while they remained under the parental roof, were moral, correct, and apparently fortified against temptation; but when they were removed from it, fell an easy prey to temptation, and sunk into the arms of vicious indulgence! And how many have we seen who, after passing safely through the dangerous period of youth, became the wretched victims of intemperance in manhood. Presume not then, young man, upon thine own strength. Where so many others have fallen, thou mayest fall. Against such a fall thou canst have no security, until thou obtainest the protection of God. Let him hold thee up, and then, and then only, wilt thou be safe. This safety is enjoyed by all who are satisfied early with his mercy.

They are taught and assisted by his grace to crucify their affections and lusts, to keep under appetite and passion and bring them into subjection. They have a powerful Saviour, a prevalent intercessor to pray for them, that their faith may not fail; they are within the protection of his encircling arm, and have often reason to say to him, When my foot slipped, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. In a word, though they may possibly be left occasionally to fall into some particular sins, for their humiliation and chastisement, they are infallibly secured against the formation of any vicious habits, for the power and truth of God are pledged, that no sin shall have dominion over them. On their perseverance in a virtuous course, their friends may, therefore, safely rely; and it may be confidently expected that, in domestic and social life, they will be happy, and rejoice and be glad all their days.

Here we might conclude our remarks; but there is one more view, and to Christians a very interesting view, of the subject which it is necessary to take. It is necessary to inquire, how far the happiness of the Christian, after his conversion, may be affected by the period when his conversion took place. In other words, will a man; who is satisfied early with God’s mercy, probably enjoy more uninterrupted religious happiness after his conversion, than a man who does not obtain mercy until a later period of life. It can scarcely, I conceive, be doubted that he will. A man who does not become religious, till the season of youth is passed away, must of course, spend all the early part of life in sin. And what will be the consequence? He will commit many sins, the recollection of which must be painful to him as long as he lives; he will lose much time and many precious opportunities of improvement, and of doing good, which he will afterwards regret; he will afford his sinful propensities an opportunity to become strong; and it will, of course, be more difficult to subdue them, and his future conflicts will be more severe. His imagination will be polluted, and the consequences will trouble hint as long as he lives.

He will, probably, in some degree, at least, be a tempter of others, and the recollection of this will be bitter as wormwood and gall. He can never leave the satisfaction of reflecting, that he gave God his first and earliest and best affections; that when the world was all fresh and gay and smiling around him, he cheerfully forsook all to follow Christ. On the contrary, it must pain him to reflect, that he did not forsake the world, till he had proved its emptiness; that he did not follow Christ, until experience taught him that there was nothing else worth following. We may add, that the man who is not converted until a late period, will more than probably, indulge in vices, or form habits, which will cause him much unhappiness through life. Nay more, it will not be at all strange, should he injure his health and undermine his constitution, and have nothing left to offer to God, but a diseased body, and an enfeebled mind. We find Job exclaiming,

Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the sins of my youth, that is, to feel their bitter consequences. David also prays, that God would not remember against him the sins of his youth; an intimation that he either suffered, or feared, some evil on account of them. But all the evils which have now been enumerated are avoided by the man who commences a religious life in early youth. He is guilty of no vicious indulgences, he forms no bad habits, his affections are less entangled, and his imagination less polluted, and his future life will not be embittered by the recollection that he has tempted others to sin; that he has irrecoverably lost his best opportunities for improvement; or that he has injured his health or his reputation by the practice of vice. As he enters the narrow path early, he will probably make great progress in holiness, lay up much treasure in heaven, and be rich in good works. And he, and he alone, can say in his old age, O Lord, thou hast been my hope from my youth; now, when I am old and gray-headed, forsake me not. Is it not then, most evident, that he who enters on a religious course in early life, will enjoy more happiness than one who commences such a course at a later period? And is it not equally evident that, if a man would be glad and rejoice all his days, he should become religious in early youth? An application of the subject to several different classes in this assembly, will conclude the discourse.

1. Let me apply it to those among the young, who are deferring the commencement of a religious life, because they suppose a late conversion to be more favorable to happiness. From the remarks which have been made, you may learn, my young friends, that you are laboring under a great mistake; that by delaying to seek and obtain mercy of the Lord, you are not only losing much present happiness, but exposing yourselves to many evils, and taking the most effectual way to render your whole future lives less happy. If you wish to rejoice and be glad all your days, you must, believe me, you must, commence a religious life without delay. If a man intended to cultivate a field, would it not be unwise to defer the commencement of his labors until the proper seed-time had passed away? If a man intended to become a scholar, would it not be unwise to spend his childhood and youth in idleness? Equally unwise is it for you to defer the commencement of a religious life till the season of youth is passed. It would be thus unwise, even could you be sure of being converted at any future period. But you cannot be sure of this. On the contrary, experience and observation combine with the Scriptures to teach us, that those who do not become religious in early life, will very probably never become religious at all. O, then, if you mean ever to hear God’s voice, hear it today, and do not by delay harden your hearts.

2. Are there any in this assembly who were converted and satisfied with God’s mercy in early life? If so, they may learn from this subject what cause they have for gratitude and joy. They who obtain mercy at any period of life have unspeakable cause for thankfulness. But none have so much reason for thankfulness as they who obtain it early. They can scarcely conceive how many evils and dangers and sufferings they have escaped by an early conversion. Let them then show their gratitude by improving diligently the long space which is afforded them to become rich in good works and make more than ordinary advances in religion. And let them consider how disgraceful it will be, if after spending a long life in the school of Christ, they should at last be found babes in knowledge and happiness.

3. From this subject those Christians who did not seek and obtain mercy in early life, may learn that they will have no reason to wonder or complain if they should continue to feel, as long as they live, some of the evil consequences of their early neglect of religion, and of their youthful follies

and sins. There are some evils of this kind which religion does not remove, and which it cannot be expected she should remove. Should a young man, while engaged in some vicious pursuit, lose a limb or an eye, and afterwards become religious, could it be expected that religion would restore the limb or the eye which he had lost? or would it be reasonable for him to complain on this account? And if a man wastes his childhood and youth in sin, and afterwards becomes a Christian, can he justly complain, though he should still suffer for his folly, though his sinful propensities and habits should give him more than ordinary trouble; or though he should make less progress and enjoy less happiness than he otherwise would? Certainly not. Let him ascribe all his sufferings to their true cause, let him trace them up to his early sins, and let him submissively say, The Lord exacts of me less than my iniquities deserve. I will bear the indignation of the Lord; because I have sinned against him.

Chapter 10

S. Anguish of parents at the perverseness of children

Anguish of parents at the perverseness of children

"And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and Wept; and as lie went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

2 Samuel 18:33 In the character of Absalom, his unnatural rebellion, and his untimely, but merited fate, you are all I presume acquainted. You doubtless recollect, that, being defeated in a battle which he fought, with a view to dethrone his father David, he was entangled in his flight among the boughs of an oak, and there, suspended between the heavens and the earth, was slain by his pursuers. In our text, we have an account of the manner in which his father was affected, by the tidings of his death. He was much moved, and retired to his chamber weeping, and exclaiming as he went, O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom I would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

It cannot I think be doubted, at least no pious parent will doubt, that the grief which David felt on this occasion, was caused principally, though not solely, by an apprehension that his son was unprepared for death, and that of course his soul was lost forever. He knew what had been his character and conduct; he knew that he was suddenly cut off in the midst of his sins, with little or no opportunity for repentance; and he knew, for he tells us in one of his psalms, that all the wicked, and all that forget God, shall be turned into hell. He could not, therefore, but greatly fear, or rather feel almost certain, that this was the portion of his son.

It is probable, also, that the anguish occasioned by this heartrending thought, was aggravated by the reflection, that in consequence of having neglected to restrain and correct his son, in early life, he had been indirectly the occasion of his ruin. Hence his bitter cries; hence especially his wish that he had died in his son’s stead. He was himself prepared for death; and, therefore, it would have been to him a comparatively trifling evil, and he hoped, that, had Absalom lived, he might have repented of his sins, and become prepared for death. Now, all such hopes were blasted at once, and forever. My hearers, there are two classes of persons in this assembly, to whom some reflections on the subject before its may be profitable. They may be so to the irreligious children of pious parents; and to pious parents themselves.

I. I would call to this subject the attention of every sinner present, who has a pious parent, or parents, still living. I wish to show such persons flow much anguish they occasion their parents, by neglecting to prepare for death. Of this anguish such persons think, because they know, very little. It is desirable that they should know more of it because this knowledge may lead them to serious reflection, and perhaps to repentance.

Permit me then to remind those of you whom I am addressing, that the hearts, or feelings of all truly pious persons are very much alike. Every Christian parent in David’s situation, would feel, in some measure, as David felt. Every Christian parent feels a similar concern for the souls, the

eternal interests of his children. Your parents feel this concern for you. Consequently, your remaining in an irreligious state occasions them much unhappiness; for it is not only over a dead child that such parents weep. No, they are distressed for you now, while you are in the full enjoyment of health. In the first place, they are distressed by apprehensions that you may be led astray by vicious companions, or become the slaves of some vicious habit, or embrace false and destructive sentiments respecting religion. They have cause to entertain such apprehensions. They have often seen the children of even pious parents fall a prey to these evils; they have seen those who in their youth were amiable, correct, and full of respect for religion, afterwards become enslaved by dissipation, intemperance, and infidelity; they know that your hearts resemble theirs, and that you are exposed to similar temptations. How can they then but be distressed for you? It will be in vain to attempt to relieve their distress by assuring them that you will never forsake the path of rectitude. They know too well, how little human resolutions and promises are worth. They have witnessed the failure of the strongest resolutions, and they have reason to fear that yours will be broken in a similar manner. They know that there is but one being who can hold you up; but one Shepherd who can keep you from wandering, and to this Shepherd they cannot persuade you to come. They have, therefore, no security that you will not become the vilest of the vile. This being the case, their anxiety must be as great as the affection which they feel for you, and as their desire to see you happy. Were these however the only dangers to which you are exposed; were you not immortal, accountable creatures, the distress which your parents feel for you would be comparatively small.

But, in the second place, they are much more distressed by fears that you will perish forever. They believe what God has said respecting the future state of those who die in their sins. They know the terrors of the Lord. They know that unless you repent, you will perish. They know that unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God. They know that God is able to destroy both soul and body in hell, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched; and that he will thus destroy you, should death come and find you unprepared. Knowing these things, and loving you as they do, how great must be their anguish! How must they feel when such reflections as these crowd into their minds: Perhaps this child, whom I have so often caressed and nourished, over whom I have so often wept, and for whom I have cared and labored so much, will continue an enemy of the God who made him; will live only to fill up the measure of his iniquities, and to treasure up wrath; then die unprepared, and be miserable forever. Hence they often think of you, and weep and pray for you, when you are quietly sleeping. Hence, the more careless and thoughtless you appear, the greater is their anxiety. Hence they earnestly look and wait for some appearances of religious sensibility, notice all such appearances with delight, and feel the most painful disappointment when they vanish. In short, could you know all the sorrows which your parents have suffered since your birth, you would find that a great part of them have been occasioned by anxiety for you, for your immortal interests; and that to the same cause is to be ascribed, a great part of their daily sorrows. You can in some measure conceive what would have been the feelings of Noah, when he saw the flood approaching, had one of his sons, in defiance of all warnings and entreaties, refused to believe its approach, and enter the ark. You can conceive how greatly it would have diminished the happiness which his own safety occasioned, to look from the windows of the ark, and see a child exposed to be swept away with an ungodly world. What then must be the feelings of your parents, how greatly must it diminish the joy which their own safety occasions, to see you out of Christ, of whom the ark was a type, and hourly exposed to the

wrath, which, as a deluge, will come upon the world of the ungodly; to see that all their warnings and entreaties cannot persuade you to fly from this wrath. The distress which you thus occasion them is further aggravated by the reflection, that if you perish, your doom will be peculiarly terrible. You have enjoyed peculiar privileges. You have been dedicated to God, you were early taught to know his will, you have often been entreated, admonished, and warned, you have enjoyed the benefits of religious example, and have been preserved from many temptations to which the children of irreligious parents are exposed. Now if notwithstanding all these privileges, you live and die without religion, how aggravated will be your guilt! —how terrible your condemnation! Yours will be the doom of one who knew his Lord's will and did it not, and who is therefore deservedly beaten with many stripes; and it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for you. All this, your parents well know, and they are sometimes almost afraid to address you on religious subjects, lest all their attempts to effect your salvation, should only serve, in consequence of your neglecting them, to aggravate your guilt and wretchedness. In the third place, if you persist in neglecting religion, the distress which your parents now feel, may be raised to the highest pitch, by seeing you die without hope. Then they will feel as David felt, and wish like him that they could have died for you. Conceive if you can, what his feelings were. He probably recollected the joy which was occasioned by his son's birth; the delight with which the fond parents contemplated his uncommon beauty; the pleasure which they felt, when, with tottering steps he first ventured to pass from one to the other, and which was renewed when he began to lisp their names; the deep interest with which they had watched his progress from infancy up to manhood, and the hopes which they had often indulged that he would prove a comfort to them, in their old age. And now what was the end of all these pleasures and hopes? That son, the son of his affections, his joys, his hopes, endeared to him by all these tender recollections, was dead; and, what was ten thousand times worse, had died in his sins. His mangled body lay buried under a heap of stones, and his soul—O where was his immortal soul? —what was it even then suffering ! But this reflection was too terrible. As often as the agonized father's thoughts attempted to follow his son into the world of spirits, they were met and driven back by horrors of which he shuddered to think, but which he could not banish from his mind. He felt that he should never meet his son again, never—never. They were not only separated, but separated forever. And O how did the father's heart sicken with anguish, while these thoughts swiftly passed and repassed through his mind! And can any of you think, with calmness, of wringing your parents' hearts with such anguish? Yet such anguish they would feel, should they see you die unprepared. To see you die would be a sore trial to them, even though you should die the death of the righteous. It would be a trial under which they would need strong consolation. But this would he nothing, I may say rather, it would be transport, compared with the misery of seeing you die the death of the wicked; of seeing you, like him, driven away in your wickedness. Will you then by continuing to neglect religion, prepare for that hour, the most painful hour which a parent's heart can know, this additional pang? Will you infuse new bitterness into that cup, which is of itself sufficiently bitter? Do you reply, perhaps my parents will escape this trial by dying before me. True; but should it be so, your neglect of religion will give additional sharpness to their dying pangs. Could they leave you safe in the love of a Heavenly Father, they might leave you without a tear. But to leave you in such a world as this without a protector, to leave you in the broad road to destruction, in that road which leads directly away from the heaven to which they are going; to leave you uncertain whether you will ever follow them to glory, —O this will be painful indeed. Some present have already

occasioned this pain to a dying parent. Yes, the last moments of that father, that mother, whom you still perhaps remember, at times with a sigh or a tear, were embittered by the thought that they left you without God in the world, and of course without hope. And O how much more would their last moments have been embittered, could they have foreseen that their dying counsels, prayers, and tears would produce no more effect upon you, and be so soon forgotten. Will you not from this time begin to cry, God of my parents, forgive me that I have neglected thee so long; forgive me that I have paid no more regard to the parting advice of those whom thou hast taken to thyself. But to return to those whose parents are still living. You have heard a little, and words can tell but little, of the distress which you occasion your parents by neglecting religion. And now permit me to ask, will you continue to occasion them this distress? Will you expose them to the additional anguish of seeing you die, or of dying and leaving you without hope? Is this the only return which they deserve from you for all that they have done and suffered for your good? Will you compel them, after they have spent the day in laboring for your support, to retire at night, sorrowful, and almost broken-hearted, and water their pillow with tears? Are any so hardened as to reply, we do not wish our parents thus to distress themselves on our account; we see no occasion for all this anxiety. True, you do not see it, and for this very reason they are the more anxious. And as long as they love you, they cannot cease to be anxious. To wish them not to feel distressed on your account, is to wish them not to love you. Or will any reply, we see nothing in our parents' conduct which leads us to believe that we occasion them so much unhappiness. Alas, they dare not tell you all their feelings, nor dare they speak to you on religious subjects as often as they wish, lest it should disgust and harden you. They are aware that you do not love such subjects, and that if they are pressed upon you too frequently, the effect may be hurtful, rather than salutary. Let me then beseech you to lay these things seriously to heart, and to rejoice your parents, to excite joy in heaven, and to save your own souls, by commencing immediately and sincerely a religious life. In pressing you to do this, I seem to myself to come armed with all the efficacy of a parent's numberless prayers. And O that the God at whose feet those prayers have been poured out, may render these considerations efficacious to your salvation, and save your parents from the anguish of seeing you die in despair, and from pouring forth fruitless wishes over your remains, that they had been permitted to die in your stead.

II. I proceed now, as was proposed, to press the subject upon the attention of pious parents; for such parents may learn from it many important truths. In the first place, you may learn from it that no parent, whose children are not all pious, can be certain that they will ever become so, or certain that he shall not be called to weep over some of them, wishing that he had died in their stead. Perhaps most religious parents, when distressed with apprehensions respecting the fate of their children, endeavor to quiet these apprehensions, by hoping that, sooner or later, they will become the subjects of conversion. And sometimes they seem to take it for granted that this will actually be the case. They know that many will perish, but none of their children are to be of that number. We readily allow that if parents are conscious of doing everything in their power to promote the salvation of their children; if they educate them, watch over them, pray for them, as they ought, they may, with propriety hope, though they cannot be certain, that they will be converted. But perhaps those parents are most ready to indulge such hopes, who have the least right to entertain them; those I mean, who are most negligent of the souls of their children, and whose religion is in a declining state. The hopes which such parents entertain respecting the future conversion of their children, are of precisely the same nature, with the hope that every impenitent sinner entertains

respecting himself. He hopes, though he has no reason for such a hope, that if conversion be necessary, he shall, sometime or other, be converted. And so these parents hope that their children will be converted, though like the sinner, they neglect their duty. But let such parents look at David, and learn that not only good men, but men eminently good, may be called to weep in anguish over a child who has died impenitent. And if this is not sufficient to convince them, let them look at the children of Eli, who were wicked to a proverb; at the sons of Samuel who walked not in his ways, and at the many other instances, mentioned in Scripture, of eminently pious parents whose children proved most abandoned characters. Surely, these instances, as well as daily observation, must convince all, that no parent can be certain that he shall not be called on to weep as David wept. From this subject, Christian parents may learn, in the second place, the fatal consequences of neglecting their duty to their children. David, though a great man, was guilty of this neglect. It is said of Adonijah, another of his sons, that his father had not at any time displeased him, saying, why hast thou done so? and there seems to be abundant reason to believe that he indulged his other children in the same injudicious and sinful manner. Doubtless he prayed for them, and gave them religious instruction, but he did not restrain and reprove them as he ought to have done. Hence the foul sins which stained his family. Hence the conduct and fate of Absalom. While he indulged, he ruined him, and prepared bitterness for himself. See pious Eli, scourged in an equally terrible manner for the same fault. His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not; and therefore God says, I will judge his house forever, nor shall the iniquity of his house be purged by sacrifice or burnt-offering. Christian parents, think often of these instances; for they stand as a pillar of salt, to warn you not to neglect the duty which you owe to your children. Yet as it respects many, they seem to stand and warn almost in vain. A neglect of parental duties, or an injudicious manner of performing them, are among the most prevalent and threatening evils which are to be found among us. There is perhaps no evil which threatens more danger to the cause of religion, or to the church of God, and I may add, to the prosperity of our country. Unless the hearts of children shall be soon turned to their parents, and the hearts of parents to their children, God will certainly come and smite the land with a curse. Do you ask, what is to be done? I answer, the root of the evil, I conceive, lies here. Christian parents do not pray sufficiently for wisdom and grace, to enable them to perform their duty. They pray indeed for these blessings, but they do not pray sufficiently. They feel that ministers ought to be men of prayer; but they do not consider that to educate a family is little if any less difficult, than to perform the duty of a minister. Nay, in some respects, it is more so; for many men have been useful ministers, and yet failed greatly as parents. Even David, though he has for centuries instructed the whole church of God by, his writings, failed, you perceive, in this respect. Parents, then, who would avoid this failure, must not only pray, but pray frequently and fervently, for wisdom and grace from on high, as well as for a blessing on their endeavors. If this is neglected, all the anxiety and distress which you may feel for your children will be vain, and you may see them perish. Can you bear the thought? Look at those of them who are yet infants or in the early part of childhood. See how they depend on you, how they cling to you, in how many engaging, endearing ways, they twine themselves around your hearts. And can you bear to think of their growing up to be vicious or abandoned, to fall a prey to dissipation, debauchery, and intemperance, to live without God, and die without hope, and to become fiends hereafter? In a word, can you bear to think of being in David’s situation, when he heard of Absalom’s death? If not, O awake seasonably, and exert yourselves diligently. Be assured that yon will find it much less difficult and painful to perform your

duty, than to bear the consequences of neglecting it. But perhaps religion is in a declining state in your own hearts, and therefore you have little faith or disposition to pray. And is it so? So you remember, it once was with David. He declined, at length he fell openly, and his fall was chastised by a declaration from Jehovah, that the sword should never depart from his house. In a similar manner, your religious declensions may be punished. You may be made to suffer in the persons of your children, and to feel that remorse which David felt, when in the ruin of his son, he saw the consequence of his own folly. Believe me, believe me, Christians, or rather, believe God, you cannot become negligent in religion, without suffering for it; and if the thoughts of your own sufferings are not sufficient to rouse you, O think of your children, and be roused.

I shall conclude with a word to those parents who feel no concern for the conversion or for the souls of their children. Permit me to ask such parents, why they are thus unconcerned? Our Saviour was distressed for the Jews and wept over them. Paul felt great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart, for his unconverted countrymen. The Psalmist could say, I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; rivers of waters ran down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law. Yet you do not feel for your own children, as they felt even for strangers. And does not this prove conclusively that you do not resemble the Saviour and his disciples, that you have no particle of the Spirit which glowed in their breasts? Yes, if anything can prove this, if anything can prove that you do not believe the Scriptures, it is your indifference respecting the spiritual, eternal interests of your children. While you feel thus unconcerned respecting their souls, it is evident that you cannot have learned the worth of your own, nor have taken any measures to secure its salvation. But surely, if children at anytime, or in any place, need the counsels, example and prayers of pious parents, they need them at such a time, and in such a town, as this. You see what multitudes of children are here growing up. You see what courses many of our youth pursue, what a pitch of wickedness many of them have already reached. Yet you cannot even pray that your children may be preserved from such courses, and the reason is, you have never learned to pray for yourselves. O, then, if you love your own souls, or the souls of your children, learn to pray, that you may go before them in the path to heaven, and perhaps they will follow.

Chapter 11

S. CHILDREN TO BE EDUCATED FOR GOD

CHILDREN TO BE EDUCATED FOR GOD "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." Exodus 2:9

These words were addressed by Pharaoh's daughter to the mother of Moses. Of the circumstances which occasioned them, it can scarcely be necessary to inform you. You need not be told, that, soon after the birth of this future leader of Israel, his parents were compelled by the cruelty of the Egyptian king to expose him in an ark of bulrushes, on the banks of the Nile. In this situation he was found by the daughter of Pharaoh; and so powerfully did his infantile cries excite her compassion, that she determined not only to rescue him from a watery grave, but to adopt and educate him as her own. His sister Miriam, who at a distance, had watched his fate unseen, now came forward like a person entirely unacquainted with the circumstances of his exposure, and on hearing of the princess' determination, offered to procure a Hebrew woman, to take the care of him, until he should be of sufficient age to appear at her father's court. This offer being accepted, she immediately went and called the child's mother, to whose care he was committed by the princess in the words of our text, —Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. In similar language, my friends, does God address parents. To every one, on whom he bestows the blessing of children, he says in his word and by the voice of his Providence, Take this child and educate it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. From this passage, therefore, we may take occasion to show, I. What is implied in educating children for God;

II. The reward which he gives to those who perform this duty aright.

I. The first thing implied in educating children for God, is a realizing, heart-felt conviction that they are his property, his children, rather than ours; and that he commits them for a time to our care, merely for the purpose of education, as we place children under the care of human instructors for the same purpose. However carefully we may educate children, yet we cannot be said to educate them for God, unless we feel that they are his; for if we feel that they were ours exclusively, we shalt and must educate them for ourselves and not for him. To know that they are his, is to feel a cordial operative conviction that he has a sovereign right to dispose of them as he pleases, and to take them from us whenever he thinks fit. That they are his, and that he possesses this right, is evident from innumerable passages in the inspired writings. We are there told that God is the former of our bodies, and the father of our spirits; that we are all his offspring, and that consequently we are not our own but his. We are also assured that, as the soul of the parent, so also the souls of the children are his; and God, once and again severely reproves and threatens the Jews, because they sacrificed his children in the fire, to Moloch. Yet plain and explicit as these passages are, how few parents appear to feel their force. How few appear to feel and act as if conscious that they and theirs were the absolute property of God; that they were merely the foster-parents of their children, and that, in all which they do for them, they are, or ought to be, acting for God. But it is evident that they must feel this before they can bring up their children for Him; for how can they educate their children for a being whose existence they do not realize,

whose right to them they do not acknowledge, and whose character they do not love?

Nearly connected with this is a second thing implied in educating children for God, —namely, a cordial and solemn dedication or surrender of them to him, to be his forever. We have already shown that they are his property and not ours; and by dedicating them to him, we mean nothing more than an explicit acknowledgment of this truth; or an acknowledgment that we consider them as entirely his; and that we unreservedly surrender them to him for time and eternity. This, my friends, is a reasonable service. The apostle beseeches Christians by the tender mercies of God, to present themselves as living sacrifices to him, holy and acceptable, and to glorify God in their bodies and spirits which are his. But the same considerations which render it right and reasonable that we should dedicate ourselves to God, render it equally right and reasonable, that to him we should also dedicate our children. If we refuse to give them to God, how can we be said to educate them for him? In the third place, if we would educate children for God, we must do all that we do for them from right motives. Almost the only motive which the Scriptures allow to be right, is a regard for the glory of God, and a disinterested desire to promote it; and they consider nothing as really done for God, which does not flow from this source. Without this, however exemplary we may be, we do but bring forth fruit to ourselves, and are no better than empty vines. We must, therefore, be governed by this motive in the education of our children, if we would educate them for God, and not for ourselves. In all our cares, labors and sufferings for them, a regard to the divine glory must be the main spring which moves us. If we act merely from parental affection, we act from no higher principle than the irrational animals around us, since many of them evidently appear to love their offspring no less ardently, and to be no less ready to encounter dangers, toils, and sufferings, to promote their happiness, than we are to promote the welfare of ours. But if parental affection can be sanctified by the grace of God, and parental duties hallowed by a wish to promote his glory, then we rise above the irrational world, to our proper station, and may be said to educate our children for God; and here, my friends, we may observe that true religion, when it prevails in the heart, sanctifies everything, renders even the most common actions of life acceptable to God, and gives them a dignity and importance which, of themselves, they by no means deserve. What, for instance, can be more common or trifling, than the daily reception of food for the support of the body? Yet even this may be done, and ought to be done, to the glory of God; and when this is the case, instead of a trifling, unimportant action, it becomes an important religious duty; Whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God. Thus the care and education of children, however trifling it may be thought by some, ought to be attended to from a regard to the divine glory; and when this is done, it becomes an important part of true religion. In the fourth place, if we would educate our children for God, we must educate them for his service. The three preceding particulars which we have mentioned, refer principally to ourselves and our motives; but this has more immediate relation to our children themselves. With a view to show with all possible clearness what we mean by educating our children for the service of God, permit me to make the following supposition. Suppose that any of you had a young and numerous family, for which you felt yourselves unable to provide. Suppose, farther, that some benevolent, rich and powerful monarch should condescendingly offer to support them and yourselves, during your lives, and at your death to adopt your children as his own, and raise them to the highest honors and employments in his kingdom, provided that they should be found on examination, any way qualified for his service. Suppose also, that he furnished you with the clearest and fullest instructions respecting the qualifications of every kind which he should require of them, and

offered you every necessary assistance, to enable you to instruct and qualify them aright.

Now it is evident, that if you should think proper to embrace his offers, you would educate your children entirely for his service; this would be your sole object respecting them; to this everything else would be made to give place, and you would feel, and endeavor to make them feel, that everything which did not tend, either directly or indirectly, to prepare them for the examination through which they must pass, was of no use or consequence to them, however important or pleasant it might be in itself. In order to qualify yourselves for the right instruction of your children, you would diligently study the directions given you, and ascertain as nearly as possible, the qualifications which would be necessary to prepare your children for the honors and employments designed for them. In the next place, as soon as your children were capable of understanding you, you would inform them of everything relative to their situation and prospects. You would tell them that you were poor, and unable to make provision for their future support; that you must soon die and leave them friendless, destitute and forlorn; and that they would then indispensably need some kind and powerful friend to provide for and protect them. When they began to feel their need of such a friend, you would proceed to tell them of the condescending offers which the king had made, to adopt and provide for them as his own; of the qualifications which his service required, and of the assistance which he was ready to give them in acquiring these qualifications.

You would tell them of his power, majesty, riches and goodness; of all the favors he had bestowed on you, of the great importance of securing his favor, and of the dangerous consequences of losing it. You would early begin to teach them the language of the country for which they were destined, and the laws, customs, and dispositions of its inhabitants; you would frequently remind them of the honors and employments before them, and of the folly of degrading themselves by frivolous pursuits, trifling amusements, and unworthy conduct; you would carefully guard against their associating with such companions as would tend to render their taste, their disposition, their conversation and deportment unsuitable to the exalted situation for which they were preparing. You would frequently seek for them the promised assistance of the king; warn them of the fatal effects of indolence and delay, and press then in every possible way, and by every motive which you could conceive of, to persevering diligence and active exertion. In a word, you would so conduct and converse with your children, as most clearly to show them that you considered their preparation for the examination through which they were to pass, as the great object of their lives, the one thing and the only thing really needful; and so to turn their thoughts, desires, words and actions into one channel, and direct them to this one end. You would be careful never to say or do anything, which should lead them to think of any other friend or protector than the one whom you had chosen for them; of any other kind of honor or happiness than that which would result from his favor; or of any disgrace or misery comparable to the loss of it. Such, in brief, is the manner in which you would probably conduct to the circumstances we have supposed. My friends, this supposition is not very far from the truth; and you may easily learn from it what is implied in educating your children for God. Like the parents mentioned above, you are in a spiritual sense poor, unable to provide for the happiness of your children in this world, and much more so in the next. God, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, condescendingly offers to adopt them into his own family, cause all things to work together for their good, and make them heirs of a heavenly inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, provided they are properly qualified to serve and enjoy him. He has also, in his Word, given you the fullest and clearest instruction,

respecting the qualifications, which he requires in his servants, and offers you the influence of his Spirit, to impart these qualifications to your children, and assist you in educating them aright. Now if you think proper to accept these offers, and educate your children for the service of God, or to be his servants, you will conduct in a manner very similar to that described above. In the first place, in order to qualify yourselves for instructing and preparing your children for God's service, you diligently study his Word, to ascertain what he requires of them, and frequently pray for the assistance of his Spirit, both for them and yourselves. In the next place, as soon as they arrive at a suitable age, which is much earlier than is generally supposed, you will begin to tell them of your own inability to preserve them from misery, and render them happy either in this world or the next; of their indispensable need of some other friend and protector, of the gracious offers and invitations of their heavenly Father, of the infinite importance of securing his favor, and the inconceivably dreadful consequences of incurring his displeasure. You will also early begin to teach them the language of heaven, the dispositions, employments and enjoyments of its inhabitants, and the qualifications which are necessary to prepare them for it.

You will tell them that God is able and willing to impart these qualifications to all who come to him in the name of Christ; that he has already conferred on them ten thousand favors; that he is the greatest, wisest, and best of beings, and that his Son Jesus Christ is the friend of children, and the Saviour of sinners. You will diligently caution them against all those sinful tempers and practices which are inconsistent with the favor of God, labor to form them to his image, and prevent them so far as possible, from associating with companions, who might poison their principles, corrupt their morals or weaken their sense of the infinite importance of religion. In a word, you will carefully guard against saying or doing anything which may, either directly or indirectly, lead them to consider religion as an object of secondary importance; on the contrary you will constantly labor to impress upon their minds a conviction, that you consider religion as the great business of life; the favor of God, as the only proper object of pursuit, and the enjoyment of him hereafter, as the only happiness; while everything else is comparatively of no consequence, however important it may otherwise be.

Such, my friends, in brief, is the manner in which we must educate children, if we would educate them for the service of God; and the reasonableness of this, we presume no one will deny. No one would think of qualifying a child for a physician, without giving him some knowledge of diseases and their remedies; or for a counsellor without putting him upon the study of the law; or for a divine, without making him acquainted with theology. Equally necessary is it, if we would educate children for God, thus to attempt to qualify them for his service. And this, we may farther observe, implies three things. It implies,

1. That we pay more attention to the soul than the body. We do not mean that the body is to be neglected; but the soul must be considered as the superior part, and the body merely as its servant. In this respect multitudes of parents fail. They are extremely attentive to the bodies of their children, their health, their beauty, the elegance of their form, and the gracefulness of their deportment; but seem entirely to forget that they have a soul, a mind, a heart, that deserves attention. If the slightest illness affects their children, they are alarmed; but they feel neither concern nor anxiety on account of the diseases of their minds. They would be unspeakably distressed should their children be distorted or deformed, and would use every possible means to correct or remove the deformity; but their minds may be deformed, and their tempers distorted by

a thousand evil passions, without giving them any disturbance. They would be extremely mortified to see their children awkward, rude and unpolished in their behavior to their fellow-creatures; but seem to think it of no consequence with how much indecent rudeness and impiety, they treat their Creator. But surely this is not educating children for God. If mankind indeed were mere animals, devoid of reason, such a mode of education would be proper for them; but surely there ought to be some difference between the education of rational and irrational beings.

2. Educating children for the service of God implies, that we pay more attention to the heart or disposition, than to the mind. You will not surely suspect me of thinking that the mind, or, in other words, our rational faculties, should be neglected; or that the cultivation of it is not of very great importance. We only mean to assert that it is of far less importance than the cultivation of the heart. This, few, if any, will deny; for it is evident that, though our minds should be cultivated in the highest possible degree, and stored with every kind of human literature and science; yet if our hearts are neglected, if our passions, appetites and dispositions continue depraved, we can neither feel nor communicate happiness; but shall only be wretched ourselves, and occasion unhappiness to others, even in this world, much more in the world to come. It is notorious that many of the individuals, whose agency has been productive of the greatest mischief both in the moral and political world, were persons whose mental powers had been carefully cultivated, while their tempers and dispositions were neglected. On the contrary, the most ignorant person, if his heart be right, will be happy himself, both here and hereafter; and may be the means of communicating much happiness and doing much good to others; though not so much, me allow, as he might accomplish with an educated mind. It is therefore evident, that although both are important, yet the cultivation of the heart is more so than that of the understanding. It is highly desirable that our children should possess both the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove; but if they cannot have both, the latter is certainly to be preferred. But this many parents appear to forget. They are sufficiently attentive to the minds of their children, and spare no pains or expense, to give them the best education in their power to bestow. Every kind of knowledge, and every accomplishment, whether useful or not, which is fashionable, must be acquired by them. But meanwhile their hearts and dispositions are, in a great measure, or entirely, neglected. No means are employed to teach them the most important of all sciences, the knowledge of themselves, of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ, whom to know aright is life eternal. On the contrary, they are suffered to grow up, almost as perfect strangers to the very first principles of the oracles of God, as if there were no such book, or as if they were inhabitants of a heathen country. Surely, my brethren, these things ought not so to be. This cannot be educating children for God.

3. Educating children for the service of God implies, that we educate them for eternity, rather than for time; for a future world, rather than for this. You need not be told, my friends, that a different education is necessary to prepare us for different situations. For instance, if a parent designs one of his children for the navy, another for the counting house, a third for the bar, and a fourth for the desk, he will give them in some respects a different education; an education suited to their respective destined employments. So he who educates his children for this world, will, in many respects, educate them very differently from one who educates them for the next. The first will confine his views to the present life, and be anxious to teach his children only those things which are necessary to qualify them for acquiring riches, or honors, or applauses here. But the other will

extend his views to eternity, and be principally, though not entirely concerned, to give his children that knowledge which will be useful to them beyond the grave. Here, again, multitudes fail. How few parents, my friends, educate their children in such a manner as would lead a stranger to conclude that they believed in God, or a future state; that they viewed their children as immortal beings, in a state of probation for eternity, and candidates for everlasting happiness or misery. He would see many anxious for the success of their children here, rising early, and late taking rest, and eating the bread of carefulness, to promote their temporal welfare; while no anxiety is manifested respecting the destiny of their undying souls.

Thus, my friends, have we endeavored to give you a concise view of what is implied in educating children for God. Let it be observed, in addition, that all this must be done in such a manner, as to convince your children, that you are sincere, that you are in earnest, that the promotion of their spiritual and eternal welfare is the great, the absorbing concern of your souls. We proceed now, as was proposed,

II. To consider the reward which God usually bestows on those who thus educate their children for him. Though God is the Creator and sovereign Lord of all things, and might therefore, with the most perfect justice, have required us to obey all his commands without any compensation, yet he has been graciously pleased to attach a reward to the performance of every duty, and of this among the rest. This reward consists,

1. In the pleasure which attends every attempt to educate children for God. However strong parental affection may be, it is rarely, if ever, sufficient to render the various cares, anxieties, and duties which attend a numerous family, delightful or even pleasant. There is reason to believe, that, in many instances, these cares and troubles are productive of fretfulness, impatience, and discontent; and not only embitter the lives, but sour the tempers of parents. Even Christian parents, who do not recollect that they are, or ought to be, educating their children for God, are prone to murmur at the frequent interruption which they meet with in the hours set apart for devotion, and the little time which the cares of their families allow them, for reading, meditation and prayer. But did they realize that they are encountering all these cares and troubles for God, that they are educating his children, and that whatever they do or suffer for then, if performed from right motives, will be considered and rewarded as done for him, how greatly would it lessen their sorrows, and alleviate the cares and perplexities attending a family. How easy would it be to spend wearisome days, and sleepless nights, for their children, could they feel that they are acting and suffering for God; and that he looks on, and approves their conduct. This alone, were there no other, would be a sufficient reward to the Christian for bringing up his children for God.

2. Another part of the reward which God bestows on those who educate their children for him, is the happiness which they enjoy, when they see their labors crowned with success. This happiness will usually, if not always, be enjoyed by those who educate their children in the manner above described, and seek with proper earnestness and perseverance, the blessing of God to render their exertions effectual. I am warranted to make this assertion by the authority of Scripture. We are there expressly assured, that if we train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old, he will not depart from it. In addition to this, God’s language to every believing parent, to every child of Abraham is, I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee. These passages are abundantly sufficient to warrant a belief, that God will save, at least, some of the seed of every believer, who,

like Abraham, teaches and commands his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord; for were it true, that God does not promise to be a God to all the children of such parents, yet he does promise that he will be a God to some of them; and we dare challenge any person to produce a single instance, in which all the offspring of believing parents who educate their children for God, in the manner above described, died without giving evidence of hopeful piety.

We know, indeed, that many children of parents undoubtedly pious, far from imitating their example, have been notoriously wicked; but we know also that many parents, really pious, do not educate their children, by any means as they ought. We know also that all the means and endeavors which parents can use, will avail nothing, without the sovereign grace of God; but we likewise know that God usually works by means, and converts those children whose parents labor and pray most earnestly for their conversion. The labors of ministers for their people are no more effectual, without the grace of God, than those of parents for their children; yet St. Paul assures Timothy, that if he took heed to himself and to his doctrine, and continued in them, he should in so doing, both save himself, and them that heard him. Why then may we not with equal reason conclude, that if parents take heed to themselves, to their conduct, and the doctrines of Christ, and continue in them, they shall save, not only themselves, but their children; We cannot at present insist any longer on this part of our subject; but we are, I think; sufficiently warranted to conclude, that God will bestow on every parent who educates children for him, the pleasure of seeing, at least some of them, walking in the truth. My friends, what a reward is this! How must it relieve the anxiety of a parent's heart, how soothing, how delightful must it be, to see his children safe in the arms of the great Shepherd, happy in the enjoyment of God's love; and to feel assured that all things shall work together for their good, and that they are heirs of a heavenly inheritance. What music can be more sweet, more ravishing to a parent's ear, than the accents of a beloved and affectionate child exulting in hope of the glory of God, and gratefully declaring that to the prayers, labors and pious example of his parents, he is indebted, under God, for all his present happiness and future hopes. How must it alleviate the pangs of separation, when death arrives, to know that we leave our children under the care of an infinitely good, wise, and powerful being, who will do for them all that they need to have done, and watch over them with more than parental tenderness; to know too that they will soon follow us to the mansions of eternal rest. Or if they are called to go before us, how easy must it be to part with them, when we know that they are going to be with Christ, which is far better, and that we shall soon be reunited to them in his presence to part no more. And hereafter, when we meet them in the abodes of the blessed, when we hear them praising God, for giving them such parents, when we lead them on to the throne of God and the Lamb, saying, Behold, here are we and the children whom thou hast given us; and to hear him greet us with, Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord; —what will be our feelings? how inconceivable our happiness! how great the reward of educating children for God! And even should our endeavors fail of success, still we shall not lose our reward; still the Judge will own and approve us, before the assembled universe, and call us to enter into his joy; for in his kingdom, rewards are ever proportioned, not to our success, but to our zeal and faithfulness. From what has been said, we infer,

1. That the number of those who educate their children for God is small, very small indeed. This, my friends, is too evident to require proof; for if it be true that a child trained up in the way he should go, will not depart from it when he is old; how few have been thus trained; how few walk in

the way they should go, the strait and narrow way to life! And on the contrary how many walk in the way they should not go; the broad way that leadeth to destruction! What multitudes of parents and children go on together, hand in hand, to eternal ruin, without once pausing to inquire or reflect, whither they are going. My friends, of all the melancholy, heart-rending spectacles, which this lost world affords, this is perhaps the worst; and of all the sins which exist among us, none is more prevalent or destroys more immortal souls, than the neglect of educating children for God. It involves the souls both of parents and children in one common ruin. Nor is any sin more destructive to a nation, or detrimental to the peace of society. How call it be expected that children, who were never governed or restrained while young, should prove friends of good order, or useful members of society when old? My friends, this subject calls loudly for our attention, as citizens, as parents, as Christians; and if we have any love either for our country, our children, our God, or ourselves, we shall learn to give it that attention which it deserves.

2. Permit me to improve this subject by asking every parent present, for whom are you educating your children? We ask not this question, as having authority to call you to an account; we ask it not with a view to pry into the state of your families; we ask it not to condemn you; but we ask it merely with a view to call your attention to the subject, and to lead conscience to give an answer. Say then, my friends, for whom are you educating your children; for God, or for his enemies? Do you consider your children as a sacred gift; entrusted to you only for a short period, and which the Donor expects to be employed in his service, and returned to him more valuable than when it was bestowed? Do you recognize God's right to dispose of them according to his good pleasure, and to take them from you whenever he shall see best? Have you sincerely and solemnly surrendered them to God, and dedicated them to his service? Are you governed by a supreme regard to the glory of God, in all your efforts for their improvement, and in all the labors, cares and sufferings, which you undergo on their account? Do you educate them for the service of the King of kings, daily laboring to convince them of the infinite importance of securing his favor, and of avoiding his displeasure; conducting every part of their education with ultimate reference to this end, endeavoring to cultivate all those tempers and dispositions which are agreeable to his will, and to prepare them, as far as in your power, for the employments of heaven? Do you study the directions which God has given you in his word, and frequently implore the assistance of his Holy Spirit, in performing your arduous and responsible duties? Do you pay more attention to the souls than to the bodies of your children? Do their spiritual maladies occasion you more distress than any infirmities of body, and are you more pained by observing in them wrong tempers and sinful passions, than by seeing them awkward and unpolished in their intercourse with society? Not only so, do you esteem the education of the heart more important than that of the mind, and labor more earnestly to cherish correct moral feelings and suitable affections than to impart intellectual acquirements? In a word, do your children see in your daily deportment, in your conversation, in your very looks, that all your aims and wishes respecting them, are centered in the one great wish for their conversion; that in comparison with this, you regard no other object as of any importance, and that you would be content to see them poor, despised, and contemned in this world, if they may but secure eternal riches and an unfading crown in that which is to come? If you are not at least attempting to do all this, you are not educating your children for God.

If any feel concerned that they have hitherto neglected this great and important duty, we would improve the subject,

3. By urging them immediately to give it that attention which it merits. Consider the reasonableness of this duty. You are the natural guides, friends, and protectors of your children. They look to you for direction in their yet untrodden path. They are necessarily dependent on others for all the light which can be made to shine on their future course; and their unsuspecting feet will follow wherever you lead the way. How cruel in you to lead them wrong, knowing, as you do, the tremendous and irreparable consequences of such guidance! This duty may be urged on the ground of justice. You have been instrumental of conveying to your children a depraved nature; and are bound by every principle of justice to do all in your power to eradicate that depravity, and to oppose to its tendencies all the counteracting influences, with which the precepts, the threatenings, the promises, and the Spirit of God supply you; and to add to all the weight of your uniform example and daily prayer. And let the reward, which God promises to those who educate their children for him, stimulate you to maintain over them a steady government and salutary discipline; to give them line upon line, and precept upon precept; to talk of their obligations, their duties, and their prospects, when you sit in the house, when you walk by the way, when you rest and when you rise, and on all suitable occasions, —till they shall be taken from under your care, or you removed from them, to enjoy the immediate instruction of the Great Father of our spirits.

Chapter 12

S. CHIRSTS JOY IN THE CHURCH BEFORE HIS INCARNATION

CHIRSTS JOY IN THE CHURCH BEFORE HIS INCARNATION "Rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men" Proverbs 8:31 This chapter contains an authoritative and affectionate address to mankind, uttered by a speaker who is called Wisdom. It is evident from the language of this speaker, and from the description which he gives of himself, that he is a real, and not an allegorical personage: "I love them," he says, "that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me; but pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was. When Jehovah prepared the heavens I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the abyss; when he established the clouds above; when he appointed the foundations of the earth; then was I by him as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." No attentive reader of the New Testament need be reminded how strikingly this language corresponds with what is revealed respecting the Word, who was in the beginning with God; who is in the bosom of the Father; of whom the Father said, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, and who was made flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Expositors are therefore doubtless right in saying, as they generally have done, that it is the eternal Word, or the divine nature of Christ, who speaks in this chapter, in the character of Wisdom. In the passage selected for our text, this divine personage gives us an interesting account of his feelings and employments previous to his appearance in the flesh: I was continually rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men. This, my hearers, is a very remarkable passage. Our Saviour, the eternal Word, informs us, that, as soon as the world was made, the habitable parts of it, or the parts inhabited by men, became the scene and subject of his rejoicing; and that his delights (the expression is emphatical, denoting his chief delight) were with the sons of men. But had he not a heaven in which he might rejoice? Had he not myriads of holy angels in whose society and praises he might delight? He had; and yet it appears that he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, rather than in heaven; that his chief delights were with men, rather than angels.

This, surely, is not a little surprising; and what renders it more so, is, that he knew the world in which he thus rejoiced would he wet with his tears, and stained with his blood. He knew that the fallen race in which he thus delighted, were enemies to his Father and to himself; and that they would requite his love with the basest ingratitude; put him to a cruel and ignominious death, and persecute his friends with fire and sword. Why then should he rejoice in our earth, and delight in its human inhabitants? It could not be simply because he created them, for he also created heaven and the angelic spirits. It could not be on account of man’s intellectual worth and dignity; for in those respects the angels are greatly our superiors. Still less can we ascribe it to any moral excellence possessed by men; for, as has already been observed, they are fallen, sinful creatures. We must, therefore, look elsewhere for the reasons of the feelings and conduct here described; and we shall find them in the plan of redemption. In the world, that plan was to be executed, and

men were the objects of it.

This, generally speaking, was the reason why the eternal Word rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and why his chief delights were with the sons of men. To be more particular, He rejoiced in the world, rather than in heaven,

I. Because it was destined to be the place in which he should perform the most wonderful of his works, obtain the greatest victory, make the most glorious display of his moral perfections, especially of his love, which is the essence of them all; and in the most signal manner glorify his Father. All this he was to do, all this he since has done, in effecting the work of redemption.

We know but little of the work which he has performed in heaven. We know still less of what he may have done in the numberless worlds which appear around us. But we may venture to assert that, whatever he may have done in heaven, or in other parts of the universe, he has never performed any work so great, so wonderful, so glorious to the Father and himself, and so productive of happiness, as the work of redemption.

We are warranted to make this assertion by the declaration of Jehovah, who represents the work of redeeming love, as, of all his works, the most wonderful. We are warranted to make it by the fact that the blessed angels, who must be supposed to know what works he has performed, regard this as the most glorious of all his works, as the work into which they especially desire to look, and which is the most worthy of their admiration.

It is the work which in a peculiar manner calls forth the praises of heaven. It is the performance of this work which, in the view of the inhabitants of heaven, renders the Lamb who was slain peculiarly worthy to receive blessing, and glory, and honor, and power.

Well, then, might our divine Redeemer rejoice in the world where the greatest of his works was to be performed. He had from eternity rejoiced in the plan of it, and in contemplating its execution. Still more, were it possible, would he rejoice to see the world which was to be the scene of its performance, start from nothing into existence; to see preparation then making for the great work, and to mark the several parts of the earth in which the principal events connected with it would take place.

II. Our divine Redeemer rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, because they were the destined residence of his then future church. Christ loved the church, says an apostle, and gave himself for it. He gave himself for it because he loved it; loved it before it had a being. He calls the things which are not, we are told, as though they were. He could love the church before it was created, no less easily then than he can love it now. Agreeably, he says to it, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, that is with a love that has existed from eternity; therefore with loving kindness will I gather thee. In consequence of this everlasting love to his church, he rejoiced in the world which was to be its residence, while preparing for heaven, rejoiced to visit it, as we are pleased to visit the habitations of our children or friends. For this reason he rejoiced in all the habitable parts of the earth; for they are all destined to be filled with his disciples. Every where churches are to be established. And to his omniscient eye, which saw the end from the beginning, every habitable spot on earth was made to appear interesting by some event connected with his church, of which it was to be the scene. As he walked invisibly through the world, immediately after its creation, he would say: Here the first martyr will seal the cause of truth with his blood. From this

spot, Enoch, and from that, Elijah, shall be translated to heaven. Here Abraham shall pitch his tent, and build his altar, and rejoice in my gracious visits. There I will conduct my people through the wilderness; on that mount I will appear, to give them my law; at its foot, I will meet my servant Moses, and converse with him, face to face, as a man talketh with his friend. And while he thus marked the future scenes of all the great events in the history of his church, innumerable other places would be rendered pleasing to him by the foresight of less important, indeed, but still highly interesting events. Here, he might say, some trembling penitent will begin to find relief in prayer. There, I will first reveal myself to some broken-hearted sinner, and listen to the joyful praises and thanksgivings which he will in consequence pour forth. On this spot, one of my ministering servants shall preach my gospel with power and success; and on that, a temple shall rise, where many shall be taught to know and love me; where a numerous church shall be trained up for heaven, where I will often meet and commune with them at my table. In this part of the world, also, though destined to remain long uninhabited, and destitute of the gospel, he rejoiced. He saw all the temples which now adorn our land, all the churches which he here established. Nor did this house of God, or this church escape his notice. He knew of whom it would be said, this man was born to glory there. He saw this day, saw you, my Christian friends, listening to these truths, and meeting around his table; entered every spot where you or any of his people would reside; where habitations would be erected, in which prayer would be offered up in his name. He not only saw all his churches that now exist, but all that will exist hereafter. He saw the Ethiopian stretch out his hands to God, and the isles waiting for his law. He saw the Jews coming in with the fullness of the Gentiles; he saw the whole earth filled with the glory of God, as the waters fill the sea. All this he saw, for he enabled his prophets to predict it. And while he saw this, he heard all the prayers and praises which would be uttered by his people, in all ages and parts of the world, so that the whole earth, immediately after its creation, while all was solitary and still, resounded to his ear with praises, thanksgivings, and songs of joy. Is it then strange, that, seeing and hearing this, he should rejoice in the habitable parts of the earth, even more than in heaven; in heaven, which, if I may venture to say it, would appear comparatively empty, till his beloved people were brought in to share it with him.

III. While our divine Redeemer thus rejoiced in our world, rather than in heaven, his chief delights and pleasures were with men, rather than with angels. They were so,

1. Because he intended, in the fullness of time, to assume our nature, and become himself a man. He is called the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world; because before the world was created, it was determined and foreseen that he should be slain. For the same reason, he may be said to have been a man, before the foundation of the world; because it was determined that he should become so; that he should be made flesh and dwell among us. In consequence of this, he felt, if I may so express it, related to man; felt that he was their brother, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, —feelings which he could not, with equal reason, exercise towards angels. A heathen writer represents one as saying, I am a man, and therefore cannot but feel interested in any thing which relates to man.

2. To great numbers of our race the divine Redeemer was destined to become still more nearly related. They had even then been given to him by his Father, and were appointed to compose his church, to be united to him in the most intimate and indissoluble of relations; for the church is styled his body, a body of which he was the constituted head, of which his Spirit is the animating

soul. Hence the apostle, speaking of Christ, says, we are members of Christ's body, of his flesh and of his bones; and he loves and cherishes the church, even as a man loveth and cherisheth his own flesh. The union between Christ and his church is to be eternal. Its members are destined to share heaven with him, to live and reign with him for ever and ever. All this he knew from the beginning. He knew also that his church would, in process of time, return his love; that all its members would love and praise him through eternity, as their deliverer from everlasting death, and the source of all their felicity. Hence he felt himself drawn to them by a most powerful attraction, and hence his chief delights were with the race from which his church was to be selected, and among which some of its members were in all ages to be found.

3. Another reason why his chief delights were with the sons of men, may be found in the disposition which prompted him to say, It is more blessed to give than to receive. In heaven, he could receive the praises of angels, but on earth he could give gifts to men. He could here exercise pardoning mercy, and dispense spiritual blessings to his people. This he began to do at least as early as the time of Abel, and he continued to do it until the period of his resurrection. During all that time he was delightedly employed in instructing, protecting, and blessing the church which he was afterwards to purchase with his blood; and in making preparation for his visible appearance on earth. It was the Spirit of Christ, as St. Peter informs us, which inspired Noah to preach to the inhabitants of the old world, and the prophets to foretell his own incarnation, death and resurrection. From a comparison between different parts of the Scriptures, it appears that it was he who appeared to the patriarchs who commissioned Moses, who led Israel through the wilderness, who dwelt in the Jewish temple, who said of Zion, This is my rest forever, here will I dwell, because I have desired it. We need not wonder, then, that one who feels more happiness in giving than in receiving, should delight in visiting the sons of men, whom he could thus pardon and bless, and save, rather than in dwelling with angels, who needed no pardon or salvation; or that he should rejoice more over one sinner that repenteth, than over many of the inhabitants of heaven who needed no repentance. It would be easy to enlarge on these and various other considerations of a similar nature; but leaving you to do this in your private meditation, I proceed to make some improvement of the subject.

And, first: How ungrateful and inexcusable does the treatment which Christ has received from men appear, when viewed in the light of this subject. He chose our world in preference to all the worlds around us, to be the scene of the most glorious of his works, and our race to be the subjects of it. No sooner was the earth formed, than he rejoiced in it, and chose to dwell in it rather than in heaven. No sooner were men created than he made it his supreme delight to visit and bless them, preferring their society to that of the holy angels. When part of the angels sinned and fell, he did not assume their nature, or offer himself a sacrifice for their salvation. He took not on him, says the apostle, the nature of angels, but he took upon him the seed of Abraham. Yet when, after the lapse of four thousand years, this friend of man, this divine philanthropist assumed our nature, and visited the world which he had loved, in human flesh, how was he treated? He was in the world, and the world was made by him, but it acknowledged him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. Poverty, contempt, the crown of thorns, and the cross, were all which he received from the world in which he had so long rejoiced, from the ungrateful race in whom he had so long delighted. And we, my friends, though we condemn his murderers, treat him little better. We disbelieve him, disobey him, slight him, refuse to comply with his invitations, neglect his

offered mercy and grace, and grieve him in a thousand different ways. Even in the house of his friends he is often wounded and crucified afresh. Surely those of our race who finally reject such a Saviour, will be as much distinguished by the severity of their punishment, as they have been by the greatness of their privileges and mercies.

Again: Did our Saviour, before his incarnation, rejoice in the habitable parts of our earth, and delight in visiting and blessing the sons of men? Then we may be certain that he still does so; for he is, yesterday, today, and forever, the same. Still he prefers earth to heaven; still his chief delights are with the sons of men; and while, as man, he intercedes for them in heaven, he still, as God, visits our world, to meet with and bless his people; for his language is, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them to bless them. I will come to every one that loves me and take up my abode with him. I am he that walketh in the midst of the churches. And while he thus addresses his people, he says to sinners, Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. My hearers, shall we not all return, and love and serve this condescending, long tried, and unalterable friend; who has for so many ages rejoiced, who still rejoices in our world, and delights in doing us good? Shall we any more grieve and offend him by our neglect, or by indulging those sins which caused his death? Shall not we, my Christian friends, who expect to meet him at his table, yield ourselves wholly up to him without reserve, subdued by his all-conquering love, and constrained by his grace to live henceforth, not unto ourselves, but to him who has so long loved its, who died for us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood! Surely, if he rejoices in our world the whole world ought to rejoice in him; if his delights are with the sons of men, surely the sons of men ought all to place their happiness in being with him.

Lastly: How great, how inconceivable will be our Saviour’s happiness, after the final consummation of all things! Then the plan for which our world was formed, will be completed. Then every member of his church, for the sake of which he loved and visited our race, will have been brought home to heaven, to be with him where he is; and if he loved and rejoiced and delighted in them before they knew and loved him, how will he love and rejoice in them, when he sees them surrounding his throne, perfectly resembling himself, in body and soul, loving him with unutterable love, contemplating him with ineffable delight, and praising him as their deliverer from sin, and death, and hell, as the author of all their everlasting glory and felicity. Then, O blessed, animating thought! then he will be amply rewarded for all his sufferings, and for all his love to our ruined race. Then his people shall cease to grieve and offend him; then they will no longer degrade him by weak, confused, inadequate conceptions of his person, character and work, for then they shall see as they are seen, and know as they are known. Then the whole church shall be presented to him a glorious church, without spot, or blemish, or imperfection, and shall be as a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and as a royal diadem in the hand of our God. Then, O Zion, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. Then thy sun shall no more go down, nor thy moon withdraw itself; but the Lord shall be thy everlasting light, and thy God thy glory; and the days of thy mourning, and of thy Saviour’s sufferings shall be ended.

S. CHRIST A KING

CHRIST A KING

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power; for he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet" 1 Corinthians 15:24-25

Nothing can more powerfully tend to give us just and exalted conceptions of Christ, than a due consideration of the various names, titles and characters by which he is described in the word of God. These names and titles, which are more than two hundred in number, include every thing which is great or glorious, amiable or excellent in the estimation of mankind. It would not be easy, neither is it necessary on the present occasion, to enumerate them all, but we wish to direct your attention particularly to one of them, viz., that of Ruler or King. By this title he is very frequently described in both the Old and New Testament? Under this character it was predicted that he would make his appearance in the world, many years before his incarnation. Unto us, says the prophet, a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called the Prince or King of Peace. A similar prediction was uttered by Gabriel, to the virgin Mary, respecting him, previous to his birth. The Lord God, says he, shall give unto him the throne of his Father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Numerous predictions to the same purpose may be found scattered throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms of David, and the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel. In perfect conformity with these predictions, we find our Saviour, while on earth, using the language and exercising the authority of a king. I appoint unto you a kingdom, says he to his twelve disciples, even as my Father has appointed a kingdom unto me. Similar language he used when arraigned at the tribunal of Pilate, though he knew that death would be the consequence. My kingdom, says he, is not of this world. Then said Pilate, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest I am a king; to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world. The same truth was taught by the apostles after his resurrection and ascension to heaven. They represent him as being seated on the right hand of the throne of God, upholding all things by the word of his power; acting as head over all things to his church. To the same purpose are the words of our text: He must reign, till all enemies are put under his feet: and then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, after he shall have put down all other rule, authority and power. This is confessedly an important and instructive, but at the same time a very difficult passage. In attempting to explain it, we shall aim to avoid being wise above what is written. Our design is, to describe, so far as the Scriptures enable us, the nature, origin, progress, and termination of that kingdom, which Christ is here represented as delivering up to the Father.

I. With respect to the nature of this kingdom, we may observe, that it is not a temporal or earthly kingdom! Here lay the grand mistake of the Jews.

1. The prophecies of the Old Testament had taught them, that the promised Messiah was to be a king; and as they could form no conception of a spiritual kingdom, they fondly imagined that he

would make his appearance on earth as an earthly monarch, and not only deliver them from the Roman yoke, but reduce the whole world under their authority. Even his own disciples fell into the mistake, and continued in it till after his resurrection; for at that period we find them saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? It was not till the Holy Spirit, who was to guide them into all truth, had been poured out upon them on the day of Pentecost, that they began to form more correct opinions respecting the kingdom, which their Master came to establish. They then learned that his kingdom was to be erected in the hearts of men; that it consisted in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and that he was enabled to be a king and a Saviour, that he might give repentance and remission of sins to his people, and deliver them, not from temporal, but spiritual bondage. The kingdom which Christ is here represented as delivering up to his Father, is not that which he originally possessed as God. You need not be told, that he is God and man in one person, and that as God he is equal with the Father, and shares in that eternal, underived and uncontrollable authority, which he exercises over all the works of his hands. In this respect, he and his Father are one, and possess the same kingdom; and this kingdom he neither will nor can resign, though he may for a time suspend the exercise of his divine authority.

What then is the kingdom, which Christ is here said to deliver up to his Father.

I answer, it is the Mediatorial kingdom, or kingdom of grace, that kingdom which, he holds as God and man united, and which he received from his Father in consequence of his undertaking the office of Mediator. That we may form clearer ideas of the nature of this kingdom, we must consider, as was proposed,

2. Its origin and design. We are told by the apostle that in the beginning, that is, before the world was formed, or the plan of redemption laid, the Word was with God, and that the Word was God. The Word then dwelt in the bosom of the Father, and shared with him the throne of the universe. As the apostle expresses it, he was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God. God was then all in all. The names of Father, Son, and Spirit were unknown, though that mysterious distinction, on which these names are founded, then existed in the divine nature. There was no Mediator between God and his creatures; for all creatures were then holy, and consequently needed no mediator to interpose between them and God: Sinners only need a mediator. Holy beings may approach God in their own names and plead for themselves. But when man sinned, and the plan of redemption was formed, a mediator became necessary. This office the Word took upon himself, and was in consequence made flesh. The Father created a human soul, which the Word took into union with himself, and thus became the Son of God. In union with this soul, he entered into a human body, and thus became the Son of man.

Thus, though he was originally equal with God, and was God, yet he humbled himself and became of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was found in the likeness. of sinful flesh. These and other similar expressions seem to imply that, when the Word undertook the office of Mediator, he suspended for a time the exercise of his divine perfections, laid aside his equality with the Father, and emptied himself of all that infinite fullness which he originally possessed, and engaged to act as the Father’s servant, and to do nothing but by his power and authority. In a word, he condescended to put himself into that state from which Adam fell, a state of trial and probation, to stand like him as the head and representative of his people, and to do every thing which was necessary to accomplish the salvation, and secure the honor of the law they had

broken. He engaged to know nothing which tile Father did not reveal to him, to work no miracles which the Father did not direct him to perform; to have no will of his own, and to make it his meat and drink to do his Father's will and finish his work. A suitable consideration of these things, which are all implied in Christ's humbling and emptying himself, will enable us to understand those passages in which Christ speaks of himself as inferior to the Father, as being the Father's servant, as doing nothing of himself, and as not knowing the day nor the hour of judgment; for though as God he was equal with the Father, yet as Mediator he was his inferior, and could do nothing without him. A proper attention to these observations will also enable us to answer those objections against our Saviour's divinity, which are drawn from his having the Spirit of God given to him. We read that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, that he giveth the Spirit not by measure unto him, and that it pleased the Father that in hint all fullness should dwell. Hence it may be asked, if Christ be God, why did he need the assistance of the Holy Spirit? Or how could God give it to him? or how could it be owing to the pleasure of the Father, that all fullness dwelt in him? But if we consider that Christ did, as it were, lay aside his own divinity, and empty himself of his own infinite fullness, we still see that he needed to be filled with the fullness of the Father, and to have the Holy Spirit to assist him; and if we consider that he acted as the Father's servant, we shall see the propriety of his praying to him, and receiving from him power to work miracles, to lay down his life and to take it again.

Farther, if we consider that his human nature was in a state of probation, as Adam was, we shall see why he was tempted, why he is said to have been made perfect through sufferings, and to have learned obedience by the things that he suffered. Had he fallen in time of trial, as Adam did, his people never could have been saved, and his human nature must have perished. But it did not fail. He overcame the tempter; persevered even to the end, and finally became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. As a reward of his sufferings, obedience, and death, the Father gave him that mediatorial kingdom which is mentioned in our text. This kingdom includes all the creatures with which we are acquainted in heaven, earth or hell; for we are told that God hath put all things under him; that all power is committed to him in heaven and earth, that he is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and that for this cause he died and rose, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living. Hence, the apostle informs us, that because he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, God hath highly exalted him, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly place, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come; and hath put all things beneath his feet, and given him to be head over all things to his church. In a word, God has resigned the whole government of the universe into his hands for a season, and given him authority to execute judgment, so that now the Father judgeth no man, having committed all judgment unto the Son. This unlimited power and authority God has bestowed upon his Son, in order to qualify him for executing the great office of Mediator between him and his rebellious creatures; and to enable hint to deliver those out of the snare of the devil, who are led captive at his will; to cast out the strong man armed from his palace in the heart, and save even to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. The laws of this extensive kingdom are recorded in the gospel. The subjects of it may be divided into two grand classes, those who are obedient, and those who are rebellious. The former class is composed of good men and angels; the latter, of wicked men and devils. The former serve Christ willingly and cheerfully. He rules them with the golden sceptre of love; his law is written in their hearts; they esteem his yoke easy and his burden light, and habitually execute his will. All the

bright armies of heaven, angels and archangels, who excel in strength, are his servants, and go forth at his command, as messengers of love to minister unto the heirs of salvation, or as messengers of wrath to execute vengeance on his enemies. Nor are his obedient subjects to be found only in heaven. In this rebellious world also the standard of the cross, the banner of his love, is erected, and thousands and millions who were once his enemies, have been brought willing captives to his feet, have joyfully acknowledged him as their Master and Lord, and sworn allegiance to him as the Captain of their salvation. Nor is his authority less absolute over the second class of his subjects, who still persist in their rebellion. In vain do they say, We will not have this man to reign over us. He rules them with a rod of iron, causes even their wrath to praise him, and makes them the involuntary instruments of carrying on his great designs. He holds all the infernal spirits in a chain, governs the conquerors, monarchs and great ones of the earth, and in all things wherein they did proudly, is still above them. None are too small to escape his notice, none are too great to be controlled by his power. In vain do the people rage; in vain do the kings and rulers of the earth take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree, the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel. But this leads its to consider,

3. The progress of Messiah's mediatorial kingdom. By the progress of this kingdom, we do not mean the increase of Messiah's power; for, as we have just seen, this is already unlimited and universal; but we mean the spread of the gospel, and the increase of the number of Christ's obedient subjects. In this respect, the progress of his kingdom has hitherto been comparatively small; for though thousands and millions have submitted to his arms, yet many more millions are still in arms against him. Satan still apparently reigns as the prince and god of this ruined world. Darkness still covers the earth, and gross darkness the people; and by far the greater part of our race are still the wretched captives of idolatry, vice and superstition. But it shall not always, it shall not long be thus, the promise of him who cannot lie assures us, that it shall not. His word abounds with the most explicit and animating predictions of the future spread and approaching glories of Messiah's reign. The stone, which the king of Babylon saw in his dream, cut out of a mountain without hands, shall spread and fill the earth. In the days of these kings, that is, of the Roman emperors, says the prophet Daniel, in expounding this dream, shall the God of heaven set rip a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; it shall never be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. The fulfillment of these predictions the same prophet elsewhere describes.

I saw in the night visions, says he, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds, and came to the Ancient of days, and there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. In addition to this, the prophecies of Isaiah and the minor prophets are filled with predictions of the same import. We are there assured, that in the last days the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established upon the top of the mountains, and all nations shall flow unto it; that the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth; that Ethiopia shall

stretch out her hands unto God, and that the Jews shall be brought in with the fullness of the Gentiles. It is however needless to insist on these predictions, for our text assures us, that Christ shall reign till all enemies are put under his feet; and we are elsewhere informed, that Jehovah has sworn by himself, that every knee shall bow to Jesus, and every tongue confess that he is Lord. In vain will any strive to prevent the fulfillment of this declaration. Those who refuse to confess him cheerfully, shall be compelled to do it reluctantly; those who will not bend shall break; for God has declared, that he will overturn, overturn, and overturn, till he shall come whose right it is, and the dominion shall be given to him, and that all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Nor will it be long, ere these predictions are fulfilled. Already is the banner of the cross unfurled. Already are the soldiers of Christ going forth to subdue the nations, with weapons which are mighty to the pulling down of strong holds. Already does a voice begin to be heard throughout the world, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Already has Christ ascended the chariot of his salvation, and is riding forth, conquering and to conquer, arrayed in meekness and truth, and righteousness, while God overturns, overturns, and overturns, the nations which oppose him, and dashes them in pieces against each other, like a potter's vessel. Already is the cry heard from Asia and Africa, Come over and help us; and soon will Ethiopia stretch out her hands to God, and the isles of the Southern ocean wait for his law.

Soon will the cry be heard, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. He who sits on the throne is exclaiming, Behold, I create all things new; I create new heavens and a new earth. Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong arm, his reward is with him, and his work before him. Prepare ye then the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. But what tongue can describe the happiness which is approaching? who can paint the glories of Messiah's reign? In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth. His name shall endure as long as the sun, and men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor learn war any more. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together. Thus that paradisiacal state, which was destroyed by the first Adam, shall be restored by the Second; and love, peace, and happiness, which sin had banished from the world, shall again return, under the mild reign of him who is emphatically styled the Prince of Peace. Who, in view of these glorious prospects, can avoid exclaiming, O long expected day begin;

Dawn on this world of death and sin!

Come the great day, the glorious hour, &c.

We proceed now, as was proposed, to consider,

4. The termination of Christ's mediatorial kingdom. How long this kingdom will continue on earth, before its termination arrives, is uncertain. We are indeed informed, in the Scriptures, that he shall reign on earth with his people for a thousand years but in prophetic language, a day is put for a year; and if we thus understand this prediction, the duration of his reign will be three hundred and

sixty-five thousand years. In favor of this supposition writers have assigned various reasons. But whether they are right or not, in their conjecture, it is neither possible nor necessary to determine. It is however evident, that after the expiration of this period, the powers of darkness will make one more violent effort to destroy the kingdom of Christ on earth; that a great apostasy will take place, and that the church will appear to be in imminent danger. But then will be seen the sign of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. The day of judgment will break suddenly upon the world, the righteous go into heaven, and the wicked into hell. The transactions of the judgment will be the last act of Messiah's mediatorial reign. All his enemies will then be put under him. Death itself will be destroyed, or as the apostle expresses it, will be cast into the lake of fire, together with the fearful, the unbelieving, the abominable, and whatsoever loveth and maketh a lie.

Then will a mediator between God and man no longer be needed. He will not be needed for wicked men and devils; for the day of grace will then be past, and they will have no more offers of salvation, no more opportunities of approaching unto God. Nor will God's people any longer need a mediator; for they will be then perfectly holy; they will have no more sins to be forgiven, no more favors to ask, but will themselves be kings and priests to God, and live and reign with Christ forever. Then, therefore, will the end come. Then will Christ deliver up his mediatorial kingdom to his Father, together with his delegated power and authority, and reassume his own proper eternal divinity, together with that infinite fullness which he had laid aside. If it be asked, how this representation agrees with the twenty-eighth verse, where we are told, that then shall the Son also be subject to him that did put all things under him; I answer, in the language of Scripture, things are often said to be, when they manifestly appear to be. Thus it is said in one place, that the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. But we know that the Lord alone is as much exalted now, as he can be at any future day. The meaning, therefore, must be, that in that day the Lord alone will more manifestly appear to be exalted, than he does at present. So in this case, when it is said, Then the Son also shall be subject unto him, that did put all things under him, it implies, that Christ will then evidently appear to have been subject to his Father during the whole continuance of his mediatorial kingdom, and to have acted merely as the Father's servant. Then God will be all in all; that is, he will then cease to govern his creatures by a mediator, or any other delegated power, and will therefore appear more clearly, than he does at present, to be all in all. In conclusion: What an animating, encouraging subject is this to those of you, my friends, who have chosen Christ for your Lord and Master, and become the willing subjects of his kingdom! Do you ask, how shall we know this to be our character? I ask, in return, do you love Christ's laws? Are you reconciled to his government? Are his friends your friends? Are his enemies your enemies? Are you waiting and praying for the universal spread of his kingdom? If so, you are his willing subjects; and we may venture to say to you, your Lord reigneth, and he shall reign till all his enemies and all your enemies are put under his feet. Because he lives and reigns, you shall live and reign also. He is for you; who then can be against you? Come then, and renew your oath of allegiance at his table. Engage with fresh vigor and courage in your Christian warfare. Deny, mortify, crucify your sins. Labor to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Labor also to bring others into his kingdom. Do all in your power to fulfil the great law of his kingdom. Go preach the gospel to every creature. Fervently pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth laborers into his harvest. But be not content with prayers. Contribute cheerfully to the Lord of your substance. Other kings impose taxes on their subjects. But the tribute which he requires, is a freewill offering. Hasten then to pay this tribute; and while you are feasting on the rich fruits, which his bounty has

provided, remember those who are perishing for want of the bread of life. To those of you who refuse to submit to Christ, this is an awful and alarming subject. You are the enemies of a being, whose enemies must be destroyed. You are contending with omnipotence. You're practically saying, that he shall not reign over you, who is appointed by God to reign overall. But it is not too late to repent. You are still at liberty to choose whether you will have the King of kings for an enemy or a friend; whether you will serve him voluntarily or by constraint. One way or the other you must serve him. God has sworn by himself, that you shall. Is it not then better to serve him willingly, and be rewarded, than to serve reluctantly and be destroyed? Do any of you say, we are willing to serve him? We are willing, sincerely willing to take him as our Lord and Master? Then show your sincerity by serving him. Treat him as subjects ought to treat their king. Treat him as you wish your children to treat you, and all will be well. But if you refuse or neglect to do this; if you persist in habitually disregarding the least of his commands, you practically say, We will not have this man to reign over us.

S. CHRIST A MAN OF SORROWS

CHRIST A MAN OF SORROWS

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a Lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth" Isaiah 53:3-7 In this chapter, my friends, we have a prophetic description of the character, life and sufferings of our Saviour. So full, so particular, and so clear is this description, so exactly does it correspond with the events which it foretells, that it seems to be a history rather than a prophecy; and had we not the most satisfactory evidence of its being penned some hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, we should be tempted to suspect that it was forged after his death, and that the writer only related the circumstances which he pretended to foretell. In that portion of this remarkable prophecy which has been read as our text, there are several particulars deserving of attention. A few remarks upon each of these particulars will compose the present discourse.

I. It is here predicted, that Christ should be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. That this prediction was literally fulfilled, no one, who has ever read the history of his sufferings, need be told. It may, however, be necessary here to correct a mistake, which has deprived this man of sorrows of much of that sympathy, which his unexampled sufferings would otherwise have excited. It has been supposed by many, that his sufferings were rather apparent than real; or at least, that his abundant consolations, and his knowledge of the happy consequences which would result from his death, rendered his sorrows comparatively light, and almost converted them to joys. But never was supposition more erroneous. Jesus Christ was as truly a man, as either of us, and, as man, he was as really susceptible of grief, as keenly alive to pain and reproach, and as much averse from shame and suffering, as any of the descendants of Adam. As to divine consolations and supports, they were at all times bestowed on him in a very sparing manner, and in the season of his greatest extremity entirely withheld; and though a knowledge of the happy consequences, which would result from his sufferings, rendered him willing to endure them, it did not, in the smallest degree, take off their edge, or render him insensible to pain. No, his sufferings, instead of being less, were incomparably greater than they appeared to be. No finite mind can conceive of their extent; nor was any of the human race ever so well entitled to the appellation of the Man of Sorrows, as the man Christ Jesus. His sufferings began with his birth, and ended but with his life. In the first place, it must have been exceedingly painful to such a person as Christ, to live in a world like this. He was perfectly holy, harmless, and undefiled. Of course, he could not look on sin, but with the deepest abhorrence. It is that abominable thing which his soul hates. Yet during the whole period of his residence on earth, he was continually surrounded by it, and his feelings were

every moment tortured with the hateful sight of human depravity. How much sorrow the sight occasioned him, we may in some measure learn from the bitter complaints which similar causes extorted from David, Jeremiah, and other ancient saints. They describe, in the most striking and pathetic language, the sufferings which they experienced from the prevalency of wickedness around them, and often wished for death to relieve them from their sufferings. But the sufferings of Christ from this cause were incomparably greater than theirs. He was far more holy than they, his hatred of sin incomparably more intense, and the sight of it proportionally more painful. In consequence of his power of searching the heart, he saw unspeakably more sin in the world, than any mere man could discover. We can discover sin only when it displays itself in words and actions. But he saw all the hidden wickedness of the heart, the depths of that fountain of iniquity; from which all the bitter streams of vice and misery flow. Every man that approached him was transparent to his eye. In his best friends he saw more sin than we can discover in the most abandoned reprobates. He saw also, in a far clearer light than we can do, the dreadful consequences of sin, the interminable miseries to which it is conducting the sinner; and his feelings of compassion were not blunted by that selfish insensibility which enables us to bear with composure the sight of human distress. On the contrary, he was all sympathy, compassion, and love.

He loved others as himself, and therefore felt for the sufferings of others as for his own. If Paul could say, who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? much more might Christ. In this, as well as in a still more important sense, he took upon himself our griefs; and bore our sorrows. As he died for all, so he felt and wept for the sufferings of all. The temporal and eternal calamities of the whole human race, and of every individual among them, all seemed to be collected and laid upon him. He saw at one view the whole mighty aggregate of human guilt and human wretchedness; and his boundless benevolence and compassion made it by sympathy all his own. It has been said by philosophers, that if any man could see all the misery which is daily felt in the world, he would never smile again. We need not wonder then that Christ, who saw and felt it all, never smiled, though he often wept. We may add, that the perfect contrast between the heavens which he had left, and the world into which he came, rendered a residence in the latter peculiarly painful to his feelings. In heaven he had seen nothing but holiness and happiness and love. In this world, on the contrary, he saw little but wickedness and hatred and misery, in ten thousand forms. In heaven he was crowned with glory and honor and majesty, and surrounded by throngs of admiring, adoring angels. On earth, he found himself plunged in poverty, wretchedness and contempt, and surrounded by malignant, implacable enemies. My friends, think of a prince, educated with care and tenderness in his father’s court, where he heard nothing but sounds of pleasure and praise, and saw nothing but scenes of honor and magnificence, sent unattended to labor as a slave in a rebellious province, where himself and his father were hated and despised; think of a person of the most delicate and refined taste, going from the bosom of his family and the magnificent abodes of a polished city, to spend his life in the filthy huts of the most degraded and barbarous savages, and compelled daily to witness the disgusting scenes of cruelty and brutality which are there exhibited; think of a man endowed with the tenderest sensibility, compelled to live on a field of battle, among the corpses of the dead and the groans of the dying, or shut up for years in a madhouse with wretched maniacs, where nothing was to be heard but the burst of infuriated passions, the wild laugh of madness and the shrieks and ravings of despair. Think of these instances, and you will have some conception, though but a faint one, of the scenes which

this world presented to our Saviour, of the contrast between it and the heaven he left, of the sorrows which embittered every moment of his earthly existence, and of the love which induced him voluntarily to submit to such sorrows.

Another circumstance which contributed to render our Saviour a man of sorrows, and his life a life of grief, was the reception he met with from those whom he came to save. Had they received him with that gratitude and respect which he deserved, and permitted him to rescue them from their miseries, it would have been some alleviation of his sorrows. But even this alleviation was in a great measure denied him. Some few, indeed, received him with affection and respect, though even they often grieved him by their unkindness and unbelief; but by far the greater part of his countrymen he was treated with the utmost cruelty and contempt. Many of them would not allow him even to remove their bodily diseases, and still greater numbers were unwilling that he should save them from their sins. Now to a noble, ingenuous mind, nothing is so cutting, so torturing as such conduct. To see himself despised, slandered and persecuted with implacable malice, by the very beings whom he was laboring to save; to see all his endeavors to save them, frustrated by their own incorrigible folly and wickedness; to see them by rejecting him filling up to the brim their cup of criminality and wrath, and sinking into eternal perdition within reach of his vainly-offered hand, —to see this, must have been distressing indeed. Yet this Christ saw. Thus he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; and how deeply it affected him, we may infer from the fact, that though his own sufferings never wrung from him a tear, he once and again wept in the bitterness of his soul over rebellious Jerusalem, exclaiming, O that thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes!

Another circumstance that threw a shade of gloom and melancholy over our Saviour's life, was his clear view, and constant anticipation of the dreadful agonies in which it was to terminate. He was not ignorant, as we happily are, of the miseries which were before him. He could not hope, as we do, when wretched to day, to be happier tomorrow. Every night, when he lay down to rest, the scourge, the crown of thorns, and the cross, were present to his mind; and on these dreadful objects he every morning opened his eyes, and every morning saw them nearer than before. Every day was to him like the day of his death, of such a death too, as no one ever suffered before or since. How deeply the prospect affected him, is evident from his own language: I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!

Such, my friends, are the circumstances which prove that our Saviour was, during life, a man of sorrows. Of the sorrows of his death we shall say nothing. The bitter agonies of that never-to-be-forgotten hour, the torturing scourge, the lacerating nails, and the racking cross we shall pass in silence. Nor shall we now bring into view the tenfold horrors which overwhelmed his soul, rendering it exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. These we have often attempted to describe to you, though here description must always fail. Enough has been said to show the justice of that exclamation which the prophet utters in the person of Christ: Behold and see, all ye that pass by, if there be any sorrow like my sorrow. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. I looked for some to pity, but there was none; for comforters, but I found none.

2. We have in this prophetic passage an account of our Saviour's conduct under the pressure of these sorrows. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

Never was language more descriptive of the most perfect meekness and patience; never was prediction more fully justified by the event than in the case before us. Christ was indeed led as a lamb to the slaughter. Silent, meek and unrepining, he stood before his butchers, at once innocent and patient as a lamb. No murmurs, no complaints, no angry recriminations escaped from his lips. If they were opened, it was but to express the most perfect submission to his Father's will, and to breathe out prayers for his murderers. Yes, even at that dreadful moment, when they were nailing him to the cross, when nature, whose voice will at such a time be heard, was shuddering and convulsed in the prospect of a speedy and violent death; when his soul was tortured by the assaults of malignant fiends, and his Father's face hidden from his view; even then he possessed his soul in patience to such a degree, as to be able to pray for his murderers. My friends, we must attempt to bring the scene more fully to your view.

Come with us, a moment, to Calvary. See the meek sufferer, standing with hands fast bound in the midst of his enemies; sinking under the weight of his cross, and lacerated in every part by the thorny rods with which he had been scourged. See the savage, ferocious soldiers seizing with rude violence, his sacred body, forcing it down upon the cross, wresting and extending his limbs, and with remorseless cruelty forcing through his hands and feet the ragged spikes which were to fasten him on it. See the Jewish priests and rulers watching with looks of malicious pleasure the horrid scene, and attempting to increase his sufferings by scoffs and blasphemies. Now contemplate attentively the countenance of the wonderful sufferer, which seems like heaven opening in the midst of hell, and tell me what it expressed. You see it indeed full of anguish, but it expresses nothing like impatience, resentment or revenge. On the contrary, it beams with pity, benevolence and forgiveness. It perfectly corresponds with the prayer, which, raising his mild, imploring eye to heaven, he pours forth to God: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do! Christian, look at your Master, and learn how to suffer. Sinner, look at your Saviour, and learn to admire, to imitate, and to forgive. But why, it may be naturally asked, why is this patient innocent sufferer thus afflicted? Why, in his life, in his death, is he thus emphatically a man of sorrows? To this question our text returns an answer, and an answer which ought to sink deep into our hearts; for in it we are all most deeply interested: He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; by his stripes we are healed.

We all like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Here, my friends, we see the true cause of our Saviour's unparalleled sufferings. He was cut off, says the prophet, but not for himself. He knew no sin, but he was made sin, made a curse for us. We have all strayed from the path of duty. Yes, you and I, and all our race, have forsaken the God that made us, and chosen the path that leads to hell. God's violated law condemned us to die. Justice demanded the execution of the sentence. There was apparently no remedy. It is true that God, as our Creator and Father, was sufficiently inclined to spare us; but truth and justice forbade him to do it, unless a suitable atonement could be found. There was but one individual in the universe who could make such an atonement, and that being, prompted by infinite compassion, offered himself for this purpose. The Father, with equal love, accepted the offer. To carry it into effect, the Son assumed our nature, and appeared on earth; and the bitter cup, which the divine law condemned us to drink, was put into his hand, and he drank it to the last drop. We were condemned to live a life of sorrow and pain, and therefore he lived such a life. We were condemned to shame and everlasting contempt; and therefore he hid

not his face from shame and spitting. We were condemned to die under the curse; and therefore he died the accursed death of the cross: We were condemned to lose the favor and endure the wrath of God; and therefore Christ was forsaken by his Father in the agonies of death. We were condemned to perish without mercy; and therefore Christ had no mercy, no pity shown him in his last moments. We were condemned to remain under the power of death, till by satisfying divine justice we could restore ourselves to life; and therefore Christ remained in the grave till he had made full satisfaction, and then resumed the life he had laid down. Thus he bore our sins, or, what is the same, the punishment of our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead unto sin, might live unto God.

Lastly, our text describes the manner in which Christ was treated, when he thus came as a man of sorrows to atone for our sins. He is despised and rejected of men. We hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. How literally this prediction was fulfilled, we have already seen. Yet who but an inspired prophet would have predicted that such would be the reception of such a person, coming from heaven on such a design? We should naturally expect that he would be received with the most lively emotions and demonstrations of grateful joy, by the beings whom he came to save. Even after we were told that, instead of thus receiving, they rejected and condemned him, we should have expected that when they saw his lamb-like patience and meekness, and heard him praying for his murderers, they would have relented and spared him. And when this could not prevail, we should have hoped that the miracles which attended his crucifixion, and especially his resurrection from the dead, would convince them of their error, and cause them to relent. But none of these things, nor all of them united, could conquer the inveterate malice of his enemies. Living and dying, rising and reigning, he was still despised and rejected of men. Neither his miracles, nor his sorrows, nor his meekness, nor his patience, could shield him from hatred and contempt. But what was his crime? What had he done?

I answer, he was good; he dared to speak the truth; he reproved men for their sins, he testified to the world that its deeds were evil; above all, he bore the image of God, of that God whom sinners hate. These were crimes never to be forgiven; crimes, for which nothing but his blood could atone; crimes, which in their view rendered him unworthy of that commiseration which men usually feel for the vilest malefactors when in the agonies of death. Nor were those who treated him in this manner, worse than the rest of mankind. As in water, face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man. The truth of this assertion is abundantly proved by the manner in which all succeeding generations have treated Christ. He has always been despised and rejected of men; and he is so still. It is true, he has long since ascended to heaven, and therefore cannot be the immediate object of their attacks. But his gospel and his servants are still in the world; and the manner in which they are treated, is sufficient evidence, that the feelings of the natural heart toward Christ are not materially different from those of the Jews. His servants are hated, ridiculed and despised, and his gospel is rejected, and his institutions slighted. Wait but a few moments, my friends, and you will see many of this assembly treating him in this manner. You will see the passages leading from this house thronged, like the broad road, with persons who are crowding away from Christ, disobeying his dying command, refusing to commemorate his death; and thus proving that the Saviour is still, as formerly, despised and rejected of men, that the language of their hearts still is, we will not have this man to reign over us. I am aware that many will be displeased with this interpretation of their conduct; but, my friends, it is impossible to interpret it in any other way. Every

man, who voluntarily neglects to confess Christ before men, and to commemorate his dying love, must say, either that he does not choose to do it, or that he is not prepared to do it.

Now if a man says, I do not choose to confess Christ, he certainly rejects him. If he does not choose to remember Christ, he certainly chooses to forget him. If he is unwilling to bind himself to live such a life, as a profession of religion requires, he certainly loves sin better than he does his Saviour. On the other hand, if any one shall say, I wish to come to the table of Christ, but am not prepared, he expressly avows himself an enemy of Christ, for all his friends are fully prepared to approach his table; and those who are not his friends are his enemies ; for Christ has said, He that is not with me is against me. For a man to say, I am not prepared to come to Christ's table, is the same as to say, I do not repent of sin, I do not believe in or love Christ; I am not willing to live a prayerful, watchful, religious life. Nor are those who come to Christ's table without obeying his commands, less guilty of rejecting Christ. We find in the parable of the marriage, that he who came in without a wedding garment was excluded, as well as those who refused to come. To sum up all in a word, it is certain that all who do not receive the instructions of Christ with the temper of a little child, reject him, as a prophet. All who do not trust in his merits alone for salvation reject him as a Saviour; and all who do not habitually and sincerely obey his commands, reject him as a king. This being the case, the conduct of multitudes among us fully justifies us in asserting, that Christ is still despised and rejected of men.

APPLICATION

1. Was Christ a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? Then, my Christian friends, we need not be surprised or offended, if we are often called to drink of the cup of sorrows; if we find the world a vale of tears. This is one of the ways in which we must be conformed to our glorious Head. Indeed, his example has sanctified grief, and almost made it pleasant to mourn. One would think, that Christians could scarcely wish to go rejoicing through a world which their Master passed through mourning. The path in which we follow him is bedewed with his tears and stained with his blood. It is true, that from the ground thus watered and fertilized many rich flowers and fruits of paradise spring up to refresh us, in which we may and ought to rejoice. But still our joy should be softened and sanctified by godly sorrow. When we are partaking of the banquet which his love has spread for us, we should never forget how dearly it was purchased.

"There's not a gift his hand bestows,

But cost his heart a groan." The joy, the honor, the glory through eternity shall be ours; but the sorrows, the sufferings, the agonies which purchased them were all his own.

2. Was Christ wounded for our transgressions; were the iniquities of all his people laid upon him; then surely, my Christian friends, our iniquities shall never be laid upon us. He has borne and carried them away. He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Away then with all guilty unbelieving fears; and come, washed in the blood and clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and feast with him at his table. Come and see how your salvation was effected; come and look at the fountain whence your present, your eternal happiness flows. In this ordinance you see Christ wounded, bruised, and put to grief for your sins. You see him groaning, sinking, dying under your guilt, under that curse which you deserved to have borne. Come then, sympathize with your sorrowing Master in his sufferings. Come and look at this great sight, till sin

appears above all things hateful, till Christ appears most precious and lovely, till your hearts are broken with sorrow for sin, and the love of Christ constrains you to feel and live to him who died for you. And while you look, lest you should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, remember that he who is here set before you crucified as the Lamb of God, is now at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high; and hear him saying, Fear not. I am the first and the last: A word to those who are now about to depart, or as the prophet expresses it in our text, to hide their faces from Christ. You have heard, my friends, of the sufferings of Christ. You now see him set forth crucified before you in the symbols of his body and blood. And have you no concern in these sufferings? Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Nothing to you, that the Son of God has appeared on earth as a man of sorrows, and suffered and died for the sins of the world? Yes, my friends, it is something, it is much to you. Whether you are interested in the benefits of his death or not, you are in some measure the occasion of it. He was wounded for your transgressions, he was bruised for your iniquities; and if you will now come and believe in him, you shall all by his stripes be healed. Will you view his sufferings unmoved? Will you persist in despising and rejecting him, and render his sufferings for you of no avail? Will you become accomplices with the betrayers and murderers of Christ, and by continuing to reject him, crucify to yourselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame?

O be not so cruel to Christ, so cruel to yourselves. Listen to us, while in the name and as the messenger of this man of sorrows, we attempt to plead his cause, and persuade you to receive him. See him for your sakes dragged as a lamb to the slaughter. Hear him praying for his murderers, and for you who neglect him, Father, forgive them. Hear him saying, O sinner, did I suffer all this for thee, and is this the return you make? Do ye thus requite your Lord, your Saviour, O foolish people and unwise? O for your own sakes, for my sake, for the sake of all my sorrows and agonies, I beseech you not to destroy yourselves. My friends, do not your hearts begin to relent! Can you resist the pleadings of this man of sorrows? Do not your sins begin to appear hateful? Do you not wish that you had confessed him ere this, and that you could now come and weep before him at his table? Do not your hearts begin to say, Lord it is enough. I will reject thee no longer. My hard heart has stood out against thine anger, but it cannot resist thy sorrows and thy love. If it is not too late, if thou canst receive such an ungrateful wretch, take me; for from henceforth I am wholly thine.

Chapter 15

S. CHRIST AND HIS HARBINGER COMPARED AND DISTINGUISHED.

CHRIST AND HIS HARBINGER COMPARED AND DISTINGUISHED.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I; whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire; whose fan is in his hand and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.—Matthew 3:11-12

THESE words were uttered by John the Baptist with reference to Christ. On many accounts they richly deserve our attention. John was raised up, commissioned, and sent to be the harbinger of the Messiah. He Came, as we are told by the apostle, to bear witness of Christ the true light, that through him all rnen might believe, he was the morning star which preceded and indicated the approach of the Sun of righteousness. In the language of the prophet who foretold his birth, he was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the Way of the Lord make straight in the desert a highway for our God, In a word, as it was in those days customary for monarchs to he preceded by a herald, who proclaimed their titles, their approach, and the object of their coming, so Christ the Prince of' Peace. the King of kings, and the Lord of lords was preceded by John the Baptist, as a herald, who announced his approach, and turned the attention of them that heard him from himself to his divine Master. This being the case, the testimony which he bore in favor of Christ is fully entitled to belief, and well deserves our attention. This testimony is principally contained in the passage before us. Let us then attentively consider the import of the passage, that we may learn from it what we are to believe respecting Christ. The great object of John the Baptist, as it will be of all who preach Christ, appears to have been, to give his hearers high and exalted conceptions of the transcendent worth and dignity of his Master. With this view he describes in the most energetic language Christ's superiority, he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. To unloose a person's shoes or sandals and bear them after him, was considered by the Jews as the most servile and degrading of all menial employments, and fit only for the meanest slaves. Yet John considered the performance even of this service for Christ, as an honor of which he was utterly unworthy. If we would feel the full force of this language and learn what conception it should lead us to form of Christ, we must recollect by whom it was uttered. It was the language of no common person. It was uttered by one who was by birth one of the chief priests, an order of men who sustained a high rank in the estimation of the Jews. It was uttered by one whose appearance in the world had been repeatedly predicted for some hundreds of years, whose conception was foretold by an angel and accompanied by miracles; who was born contrary to the common course of nature; who was filled with the Holy Ghost from the moment of his birth, who was favored with the gift of prophecy, after that blessing had been withheld from the world almost four hundred years; who was admired, followed, and applauded, in an unexampled degree, by all classes of men from the least to the greatest, and who by many was thought to be the promised Messiah himself. To say all in a word, it was uttered by one of whom the Son of God, the faithful and true witness has said, he is a prophet, yea I say unto you, and more than a prophet; for among them that are born of women there has not risen a

greater than John the Baptist. Yet even this illustrious personage, so favored, so honored, so distinguished, publicly declared himself, in the presence of his followers and admirers, not worthy to perform the most servile and degrading office for Christ. What then must he have thought of Christ? Did he view him only as a man, as some others have done? To have used such language respecting any man, would have been the grossest flattery; and surely he who boldly dared reprove the tyrannical Herod in his own court, would never have stooped to use flattering words respecting a fellow creature. Is it not then evident, or at least highly probable, that he must have regarded Christ as divine? The prophet who foretold his birth represents him as saying, Prepare ye the way of the Lord ; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Another prophet represents him as going before the face of the Lord to prepare his way. Now if these predictions were fulfilled, it is evident that John must have considered Christ, whose harbinger he was, and whose way he came to prepare, as the Lord God who was to come as a shepherd with a strong hand, whose reward was with him and his work before him. On this supposition alone can we rationally account for the manner in which he here speaks of Christ. With a view to convince the people still farther of his inferiority to Christ, he next proceeded to show them how far the baptism administered by Christ would exceed his own. I indeed baptize with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Though the church of God had been favored, from its first establishment in the world, with the influences of the divine Spirit, yet under the Old Testament dispensation these influences were communicated, comparatively speaking, but in a small degree. Even after the coming of Christ, but previous to his death, we are told that the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified; and our Savior himself represents the gift of the Spirit as inseparably connected with his ascension to heaven; If I go not away, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, will not come; but if I depart, I will send him to you. Even the Old Testament prophets were inspired to predict this truth. Addressing Christ, as if he had already come, the psalmist says, Thou hast ascended up on high, thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. This prediction the apostle expressly applies to Christ, and teaches us that it was fulfilled at his ascension. It was also foretold by the prophet Isaiah that Christ should sprinkle many nations. This must refer, chiefly at least to his baptizing them with the Holy

Ghost, of which John speaks in our text for Christ personally baptized none with water. All these predictions were literally fulfilled at the day of Pentecost, when there came from heaven a sound as of a mighty rushing wind, which filled the place where the disciples were assembled, and there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, which sat upon each of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. another Similar instance of time fulfillment of these predictions was witnessed by St. Peter while preaching to Cornelius and his friends. The Holy Ghost, we are told, fell on all who heard him, and he remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. From the account of the baptism administered by our Savior, it is easy to see how far it was superior to the baptism of John. John baptized with water those who professed repentance for Sin; but the baptism of the Holy Ghost produced in those to whom it was administered, repentance and faith and all the other fruits of the Spirit. John’s baptism could only put away the filth of the flesh; but Christ’s baptism by purifying the conscience from dead works, produced the answer of a good conscience toward God. He was the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, and whose blood cleanses from all sin. John’s baptism could be applied to the body only; it could not reach the soul nor change the character of

those who received it. But the baptism of the Spirit converted and purified the soul, and they who received it were washed and justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God, however vile and abandoned they had been before. In a word, John could at most confer only the sign; but Christ gave the thing signified in his baptism, a baptism with which John, like all others of our fallen race, needed to be baptized as he himself ingenuously confessed. Hence it is easy to see how much this testimony of John tended to exalt our Savior in the opinion of his hearers. It was as if he had said to them,

He who comes after me can cleanse the soul as easily as I can the body, he can confer the thing signified as easily as I can confer the sign; he can pour out the Holy Spirit upon you as easily as I can apply water. This expression, like the former, intimates with sufficient clearness that the Baptist believed the Christ to be God; for who but God can pour out upon men the Spirit of God? Who but he that possesses the Spirit can baptize sinners with the Spirit? As a farther confirmation of this truth, permit me to call your attention to another passage, which has not received the attention which it deserves. We are told by St. John that Jesus after his resurrection breathed upon his disciples, saying, Receive ye the Holy Spirit. That we may perceive the full force and meaning of this significant action, it is necessary to recollect that, in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, the same word signifies spirit and breath. Now if Christ could breathe the Spirit of God into the souls of his disciples, or, in other words, if the breath or spirit of Christ be the breath or spirit of God, then beyond all controversy Christ must be God; and by the action and the words which accompanied it, he most forcibly intimated that he was so.

Still farther to enlarge his hearers' conception of the infinite superiority of Christ above himself; the Baptist proceeds to state the character which Christ should sustain, and the works which he would perform; Whose fan is in his hand and he shall thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. In these words there is an evident allusion to a prediction of the prophet Malachi, which foretells the coming both of Christ and of John his harbinger. Jehovah is there represented as saying, Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and Jehovah whom ye seek shall come suddenly into his temple; even the angel of the covenant whom ye delight in. But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth? For he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. In a similar manner the Baptist here represents him as purifying the church, which he compares to a threshing floor, the true members of which are as wheat and the false as chaff. When he calls the church Christ's floor, he plainly intimates that while he was himself only a servant in the church, Christ is the head of the church; and when he represents him as separating the wheat from the chaff and consigning the former to the garner and the latter to the fire, he evidently teaches us that he is the Judge of quick and dead, who will reward every one according to his works, and who is able with unerring certainty to distinguish characters, and search the heart. As if he had said to his hearers, You may easily deceive me by false pretences, and by professing a repentance which you do not feel, may induce me to baptize you. But you cannot thus deceive him who comes after me. He will discern with infinite ease your true characters, and will purify, the floor of his church from all the chaff which I may ignorantly bring. Think not therefore that my baptism can avail any thing, unless you are baptized by him with the Holy Ghost as with a purifying fire. Such, my friends, in brief; is the import

of the testimony borne by John the Baptist in favor of Christ; and we know that this testimony is true, because he was raised up, commissioned and inspired by the Holy Ghost, on purpose that he might bear testimony. To this testimony I have drawn your attention principally for the sake of many important reflections which it suggests, some of which it is now proposed to consider.

1. From this subject we may learn who are, and who are not the real preachers of the gospel, the true ministers of Jesus Christ. You need not be told that among those who claim this title great differences prevail. Some preach one thing, and some another; and it is of infinite importance, of no less importance than your everlasting happiness, that you should be able to ascertain who are right; who are the true guides whom God hath appointed to conduct you to heaven. By attending carefully to the conduct and character of John the Baptist, you may learn how to do this. We know that he was divinely commissioned and taught; for we are told that he was a man sent from God; that he was a prophet and more than a prophet. We may therefore conclude that all, who are sent of God to preach the gospel, will resemble John in their preaching. And what did he preach? I answer, he preached repentance toward God. I, indeed, says he, baptize you with water unto repentance. In those days, says the evangelist, came John the Baptist preaching and saying, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. This he preached to all classes and characters alike. He also taught his hearers to manifest their repentance by a corresponding life: Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance; for the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. But while he inculcated repentance, he taught his hearers not to trust to their penitence, nor to baptism, nor to any outward privileges for salvation, but to Christ alone. To exalt Christ and turn the attention of sinners to him, seems to have been the great object which he always kept in view. Especially was he careful to teach his disciples that he could not himself save them. All who came to him he sent to Christ. He seems to have considered himself only as a waymark, whose business it was to stand with extended finger and point to the Savior, crying, Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. He told the people that they should believe on him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. In all his preaching still he held up Christ to view as all in all, and like St. Paul testified to all his hearers of every description, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. That they might know how repentance and faith were to be obtained, he taught them the necessity of divine influence, of being baptized with the Holy Ghost as a purifying fire; and informed them that Christ alone could baptize them in this manner; that without this they would be no better than chaff, and as such would be burnt up with unquenchable fire. Thus he made Christ the whole subject matter of his preaching, and represented him as the beginning and ending, the author and finisher of our faith.

Thus then will all preach who, like John, are sent of God. They will determine to know and to make known nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, and will teach all men to honor the Son even as they honor the Father. They will not seek their own glory but the glory of Christ. They will strive to draw disciples not to themselves but to him, and will feel no apprehension of exalting or teaching others to exalt him too highly. Nor will they fail to insist much on the necessity of divine influences, of being baptized with the Holy Ghost, saying with our Savior, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God. In the second place, all true ministers of the gospel will imitate John in their temper and conduct; especially in his humility. Highly honored and distinguished as he was, you see how meanly he speaks of himself in comparison with Christ.

He felt his need, as a sinner, of being baptized with his baptism. He felt unworthy to stoop down and loose the lachet of his shoes, a plain intimation of his readiness to cast himself and all that he possessed at his Savior's feet. Similar will be the temper of all who truly preach the gospel. They will learn of their Master to be meek and lowly in heart; and though, in consequence of his removal from this world, they cannot perform menial services for himself in person, yet they will be ready, in imitation of him who washed his disciples' feet, to perform the meanest and most laborious offices of kindness for the lowest of his followers. Such, my friends, will be the mode of preaching, such the temper and conduct of the true ministers of Christ. When you find such you may safely follow them, for they are the followers of John, of the apostles, and of Christ; and those who refuse to follow such guides would have refused to follow Christ and his apostles, had they lived in their day.

2. From this subject you may learn, not the characters of Christ's ministers only, but your own. That you may learn this, permit me to ask, what think ye of Christ? and what are your feelings toward him? What John thought and felt respecting him, you have already heard; and that his thoughts and feelings respecting him were such as they ought to be, we cannot doubt, since he was filled with the Holy Ghost even from his birth. Say then, my hearers, do your thoughts and feelings on this subject resemble his? That you are in any respect, unless it be in religious privileges, superior to the harbinger of Christ, you surely will not pretend. If then John felt unworthy to perform the meanest offices for Christ; if he thought, that to stoop down and loosen the Savior's shoe-latchet, when he appeared in the form of a servant, was an honor which he did not deserve; much more may we think and feel the same, now he is exalted to heaven in the form of God. Do you think and feel thus? That some of you do, I doubt not. You love, like Mary, to sit at Christ's feet and hear his word; or like the woman, who had been a sinner, to lie at his feet and wash them with the tears of unfeigned repentance, and feel unworthy even of this privilege.

You feel that much has been forgiven you, and therefore you love much. Happy souls! you have chosen the good part, and it shall not be taken from you. But are there not many present, who do not feel thus? Your conduct, my hearers, compels us to fear that this is the case. It proves that you are ashamed of Christ and of his words, ashamed to confess him before men. Many of you would, I fear, be ashamed to have your acquaintance suspect that you worship him in your closets; and many are evidently afraid or ashamed to worship him in your families. But why is this? You are sufficiently fond of what you consider as honorable. If then you felt as did the Baptist, if you thought it would be an unmerited honor to perform the most servile offices for Christ, you would certainly feel it a much greater honor to be allowed to address him in prayer, to be enrolled among his followers and friends, and to commune with him at his table. God forbid, you would exclaim, that I should glory save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ. But since you disclaim this cause of glorying, since you refuse to accept the honors which Christ offers, we must conclude that your views and feelings respecting the Savior are dissimilar to those of John the Baptist, or in other words, that they are entirely wrong.

3. Did Christ come to baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire? Then surely, my friends, it becomes you all to inquire whether you have ever been baptized by him in this manner. The importance of this inquiry will fully appear, if you consider our Savior's words to St. Peter, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me; i. e. If thou art not baptized with my baptism, the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and sprinkled with the blood of sprinkling, which cleanses from all sin, thou hast no share in the blessings which I bestow. Say then, my friends, has the Savior baptized you in this

manner? Have the influences of the Holy Spirit, like a penetrating, purifying fire, melted your once stony hearts, purified them from the dross of sin, caused them to glow with love to God and man, and prepared them to receive the impress of your Savior's image? Has the Spirit of truth taught you to know the truth? Has the Spirit of adoption taught you to cry, Abba Father, with the feelings of a child? Has the Spirit of grace and supplication, who, we are told, helps the infirmities of Christ's people in prayer, taught you to pray? Are you led by the Spirit of God as, we are told, all the children of God are? Do you find in yourselves those dispositions which compose the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, long suffering, meekness, goodness, faith, and temperance? If so, you have indeed been baptized with the Holy Ghost as with fire. Christ has washed you, and you have a share in all his blessings. But if not, you have no part nor lot in the matter. You have not the Spirit of Christ, and therefore, as the apostle asserts, you are none of his. You have received the grace of God in vain, and Christ has profited you nothing. Whether in the church of Christ or not, you are no better than chaff; and as such you will, unless speedy repentance and faith prevent, be burnt up with unquenchable fire.

4. From this subject, my Christian friends, we may learn how to estimate the favors which we receive from our Savior's condescending love. John, than whom a greater was never born of woman, thought it would be too great an honor for him to perform the most menial service for Christ. What then ought we to think of being admitted to his church and table; of being called, not his servants, but his friends; of enjoying communion with him as members of his body, and of sharing as fellow heirs with him in the heavenly inheritance! My friends, did we realize, like John, the infinite dignity of him who confers on us these favors, we should be continually in a transport of gratitude and praise; and the love of Christ would constrain us, as it did the apostle, to live not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us. To conclude, is Christ's fan in his hand, is he determined thoroughly to purge his floor, and to burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire? Alas! then, for those who are at ease in Zion; for those false professors who are empty, and light, and worthless as chaff it is true that for a time, the chaff is of use. It serves to shelter, protect, and ripen the grain, while it remains in the field. But a separating time must come; the chaff is not for the garner, where it would be worse than useless. So wicked men and false professors may, for a time, be useful to the church in various ways, while it remains in the field of this world. But in heaven they will be of no use. To heaven, therefore, they shall never come. Their doom, their portion is unquenchable fire. My friends, I cannot without trembling think of the day, when this separation is to take place, when this church and congregation will be visited with their final reward. I tremble to think how many of you I shall miss in heaven, should I ever arrive there. How many whom I have heard singing the songs of Zion in this house, I shall never hear there; how many with whom I have here sat down at Christ's table, I shall look for in vain at his table above. Then not one hypocrite, not one particle of chaff will be left in this church, or in that part of this assembly which will be blessed with a place at God's right hand. This numerous assembly now resembles a fair and flourishing field; but when death cuts us down, when the wheat and chaff are separated, when the last tempest arises to drive the latter into the fire, how much will your numbers be diminished, how many of my flock shall I lose forever!

Chapter 16

S. CHRIST REJECTS NONE WHO COME UNTO HIM.

CHRIST REJECTS NONE WHO COME UNTO HIM.

Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out—John 6:37.

I NEED not tell you, my friends, that these are the words of Christ for who but he would or could utter such words? Who but the compassionate Friend of sinners, the Shepherd, who came to seek and to save that which was lost, would say this? And who but he, in whom all fullness dwells, could say it? Who besides has compassion enough, and room enough, to receive and entertain all who will come to him without exception? But he has both. He can venture to say, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; for he knows that there is in himself room for any, room for all; and that the waters of life, which flow from him, can never be exhausted. And he can also venture to say, Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out; for he knows the worst who can come, and that his grace is sufficient for the worst. But why did he say this? Why give us such invitations and assurances? Because he knew they would be necessary. Because he knew that awakened and convinced sinners would be so much discouraged by their own ignorance, weakness, guilt, and unworthiness, as to need the most gracious and explicit assurances of his readiness to receive them. He knew that, if he made one exception, if he intimated that any one who came to him might be rejected, every convinced sinner would think himself to be that one, and would not dare to approach him. He was therefore pleased to express his invitations in the most general and encouraging terms which language could afford, exclaiming, Whosoever will, let him come, and him that cometh I will in no wise cast out. He had also a farther object in view. He intended to leave those who refused to come without excuse. He intended that, if sinners would perish, their destruction should evidently appear to be owing to themselves and not to him. He intended that no man, who heard the gospel, should have any cause to pretend that he was not invited to share in its benefits. He therefore made his invitations as general and comprehensive as possible, so as to exclude none who did not exclude themselves. And the same reason, which rendered it necessary that Christ should give us such invitations and assurances, make it necessary that his ministers should call your attention to them. This I shall now attempt to do. And I tell you frankly, my friends, what is my intention. It is to persuade you all, if possible, to come to Christ; and, if you will not, to leave you entirely without excuse in refusing to come. With this view I shall endeavor to show,

1. What is meant by coming to Christ. Since Christ is now in heaven, whither our bodies cannot at present ascend, it is evident that by this expression cannot be meant a bodily approach to him. Agreeably, the apostle says, Say not in thy heart, who shall ascend into heaven, to bring down Christ from above; or who shall descend into the deep, to bring up Christ from the dead; for the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart. It appears then that coming to Christ is an act, not of the body, but of the mind or heart, so that you may come to him without moving out of your places. When we come to a human friend who calls us, there are two actions performed. The first is an act of the soul, by which we choose or determine to come to that friend. The second is an act of the body, by which we execute the previous determination of the mind. But in coming to

Christ there is only one act, an act of the soul; and this act consists in choosing and determining to forsake every thing else, and to comply with his invitations by repairing to him. In other words, coming to Christ is an act of choice, an act by which the soul freely chooses him in preference to every thing beside. Are there any who do not understand this? I will endeavor to be more plain. Suppose that, while your attention is occupied by various interesting objects, you see the dearest friend you have on earth, approaching at a little distance. Your hearts immediately drop the objects which had previously engaged their attention; and, if I may so express it, spring forward to meet and welcome your friend before he arrives. So when persons come to Christ, their hearts leave the objects with which they had been occupied, fly to him with affectionate desire, and cling to him as the supreme object of their confidence and love. They see that he is just such a Savior as they need; they are sweetly, but powerfully drawn to him by the attractions of his moral glory and beauty, and feel bound to him by bonds which they have no wish to break. Hence coming to Christ is elsewhere called trusting in him, receiving him, believing in him, and loving him. But it is necessary to observe farther, that all who thus come to Christ come to him in his official character, as the appointed Savior, and only Savior of sinners. They do not come to gratify their curiosity, or to quiet their consciences, but to be saved by him from sin and from its consequences. Of course, they come to him as sinners, feeling that they are so, that they are dead in sins, and justly exposed to everlasting wrath. Hence, coming to Christ is called fleeing from the wrath to come, and fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel. Those who thus come to Christ as a Savior apply to him or receive him in all those characters which he sustains in consequence of being a Savior. They come to him, for instance, as a prophet or instructor, to be taught. Of course they feel that they need to be taught; that they are spiritually blind and ignorant, and that there is none who teacheth like him. Like Mary they sit at his feet and hear his word with the temper of little children; they wait upon him for farther communications of divine wisdom and knowledge, and consider his words as a sufficient proof of whatever he may assert. Hence, in the same passage in which he invites the weary and heavy laden to come to him, he also says to them, Learn of me and ye shall find rest. Hence also, those who come to him are called his disciples, that is, his scholars or pupils.

Those who come to Christ come to him also as a priest. A priest is one who, to use the language of the apostle, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin; and at the same time to plead for those whose sacrifices he offers, that their sins may be pardoned, and their persons and services accepted. In other words, he is appointed to make an atonement for sin, and to intercede for sinners. Christ, as our high priest, does both. By once offering up himself as a sacrifice he has made atonement for sin; and he ever lives to intercede for all who come to God by him. Those then who come to him in his character of a priest, come as sinners, as those, who feel that they need an atonement which they are unable to make, that they are unworthy to approach a holy God, and that they need an advocate or intercessor to plead for them in the court of heaven, to present their petitions at the throne of grace, and to render their persons and their services acceptable to God. Hence they apply to Christ, believing that he is both able and willing to do all this for them.

Again; all who come to Christ come to him as a King. In this character he sits on the throne of his mediatorial kingdom, giving laws to his subjects, protecting and defending them, and subduing their enemies under their feet. Hence he requires all who come to him to take upon themselves his

yoke; or, in other words, to submit cordially and cheerfully to his government. With this requisition all who really come to him readily comply. They joyfully give him the throne of their hearts, submit with delight to his law of love, follow him as their prince and captain, and confide in his power and grace to deliver them from the spiritual enemies by which they are enslaved and which they feel utterly unable to subdue. It appears then that coming to Christ, is a voluntary act of the soul, by which it freely chooses Christ, in preference to all other objects, and applies to him feeling ignorant, sinful, guilty, weak and helpless, to be taught, saved, and ruled by him alone.

We now proceed to show,

II. That those who thus come to Christ he will in no wise cast out. The terms, in no wise, are exceedingly strong and comprehensive. There is no case, character, or situation, to which they will not apply. But general expressions affect us much less, than those which are addressed to our own particular case. Let us then mention more particularly the cases which the general declaration includes.

1. We may consider our Savior as declaring that none who come to him shall be excluded on account of their age. On the one hand, none shall be excluded because they are too young. It was foretold of him that, when he should come as a shepherd, he should gather the lambs with his arms and carry them in his bosom. Agreeably to this prediction, he not only noticed the children who, in the temple, cried, Hosanna to the Son of David; but he took up young children in his arms and blessed them, and said expressly, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not. Surely then, he will cast out none because they are young. Hear this, ye children; hear it, little children. Jesus Christ says you may come to him, and that he will not cast you out, if you do come. Many as young as you have come to him, and he never cast out one of them. Come then, my children, to Christ, and cry, Hosanna to the Son of David. On the other hand, none who come to him shall be excluded because they are too old. It is true that there are peculiar difficulties attending the salvation of aged sinners, and that few of them probably are saved. But these difficulties are in themselves, not in Christ. They arise solely from their unwillingness to come. Those who come, though at the eleventh hour, are never rejected. In the second place, we may consider Christ as here declaring that none, who come to him, shall be cast out on account of their situation in life. None shall be excluded because they are poor and despised of men; for Christ gathereth the outcasts of Israel; his gospel is proclaimed particularly to the poor; and God has chosen the poor, who are rich in faith, to be heirs of his kingdom. Nor shall honors or riches exclude their possessors from the Savior, if they do not prevent them from coming to him; for though not many mighty or noble are called, yet some are, and though hard, it is not impossible for a rich man to be saved. In the third place, we may understand Christ as declaring that none, who come to him, shall be cast out, on account of their ignorance and slowness to learn. He is one who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way. While he hides himself from the wise and prudent he delights to reveal himself to babes in wisdom and knowledge. His first disciples were exceedingly foolish and slow of heart to understand his instructions. Yet he did not therefore reject them. Nor can ignorance present any obstacle to him who possesses all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; who can give eyes to the blind, and hearing to the deaf. Indeed, it is the blind whom he especial1y promises to guide and instruct. Other instructors may dismiss those who have no capacity to receive instruction; but this Divine Teacher can impart a capacity, and give an understanding heart. In the fourth place this declaration warrants us to

assert that none, who come to Christ, shall be cast out on account of the number, magnitude, or aggravation of their sins. It is a doubt of this truth, which more than any thing else, discourages those, who are burdened with conscious guilt, from coming to the Savior for relief. They acknowledge that he is just such a Savior as they need; but their sins are so great that he will not be their Savior. They allow that his invitations and promises are as encouraging as possible; but doubt whether these invitations and promises are intended for them. It is therefore necessary to insist more particularly on the fact, that none, who come to Christ, will be excluded on account either of their past sins, or their present unworthiness. Permit me then to ask, do not the words, in no wise, include every conceivable case that can ever occur? I need not tell you that it is the same as if our Savior had said, I will on no account, on no pretence, for no cause whatever, cast out any one that comes to me. Now is there an individual in this house, who can with the least shadow of propriety pretend, that these expressions do not include him; that there is any thing in his case, to which this assurance does not extend? Is it not evident that, should our Savior exclude any one an account of the number or magnitude of his sins, the declaration in our text would, from that moment, be proved false? And would he utter such a declaration with a view to falsify it? He was under no obligation to utter it. He could have no inducement to do so, unless he intended to fulfil it. He knew what mankind were; he knew what length many of them would go in sin. Nay more, he foresaw all your sins; he knew that there would be such sinners as you are, and that you would hear of this declaration. Yet this knowledge did not deter him from making it. What then shall prevent him from fulfilling it? He is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, nay the Truth itself, and he has declared that, though heaven and earth pass away, his word shall not pass away; no, not one jot or tittle of it, till all be fulfilled. Sooner then will the earth sink under your feet; sooner shall the heavens be wrapped together as a scroll and pass away, than you or any other sinner, who comes to Christ, will be excluded. And even if he were not truth, if he had no regard to his own word, his concern for his reputation would secure you a favorable reception. You need not be told, that it is disgraceful to a person to undertake a work which he is not able to accomplish. Our Savior himself has taught us this truth. He advises those, who think of professing religion, to sit down first and count the cost, and not act like a man who should begin a work which he was unable to finish. And would he, think you, act contrary to his own advice? Would he undertake any work without counting the cost? But he has undertaken to save all that come to him. In the sight of all the holy angels he has pledged himself to do it. He has not only undertaken this work, but he has commenced it. He has laid the foundation of salvation to his church deep in his own blood; he has begun to raise the superstructure; and now, should he in any one instance fail, it would, with reverence be it spoken, be an eternal disgrace to his character,—a disgrace which all his creatures would witness. Nay more, it would bring a blot on the untarnished character of Jehovah, for he provided this Savior; he provided him on purpose for this work; and, should it be found that he has provided an insufficient Savior, one who was deficient either in power, in compassion, or in patience, his reputation for wisdom wonld suffer; and he would stand chargeable with providing inadequate means for the accomplishment of his purposes. And in fact, my friends, you charge him with this, whenever you plead the greatness of your guilt as a reason for doubting whether Christ be willing to receive you. But for this charge there is no foundation. It will be seen, to God’s eternal glory, that he laid help on one that was mighty to save, able to save even to the uttermost. Surely then, you have all the evidence that can be given or desired, that, if you come to Christ, he will never cast you out. But perhaps you will say, there must be some exceptions made to this

assertion; for we are told that there is a sin unto death, a sin against the Holy Ghost, for which there is no forgiveness, either in this world or in the next. Those, therefore, who have committed this sin, Christ will not receive. Say rather, that those who have committed this sin will never come to Christ. Say rather, that there is no repentance, and, therefore, no forgiveness for it. Would they repent, would they come to Christ, even they might be pardoned. But the difficulty, and the only difficulty, is, that they will not. By committing this sin, they grieve away forever the Spirit of God, and of course, see no need of Christ, as a Savior, feel no desire for his salvation, and therefore will never come to him. Not withstanding all that is said of the unpardonable sin, it still remains an eternal truth, that no one who comes to Christ, shall on any account be cast out.

III. What does this assertion imply? It is evident that more is implied than is expressed. I scarcely need tell you that it implies, not only that Christ will not exclude any, but that he will receive all that come to him; receive them into his arms, his heart, his church, his heaven; that he will do all that for them which he came to do for those who trust in him; that he will enlighten their minds, sanctify their hearts, wash away their sins, and save them with an everlasting salvation. This he will do for you, for every one of you, if you will come to him.

Permit me then to apply the subject by pressing every one present, who has not already embraced the Savior, to come to him without delay. As the mouth of God, and in my Master's name, I invite every one of you to do this. Our Creator, our God has made a great feast, a marriage feast for his Son; a feast for the entertainment of sinners; a feast in which all his inexhaustible stores, all the celestial dainties which infinite wisdom could devise, which Almighty power could create, are set forth. To this feast you are now invited. No tickets of admission are necessary. The Master of the feast stands at the door to receive you, declaring that not one, who comes, shall be cast out; and as his servant, sent forth for this very purpose, sent especially to you, I now invite you to come. I invite you, children; for there is a place for you. Leave your toys and follies then, and come to Christ. I invite you who are young; for your presence is especially desired. Leave your sinful amusements and companions then, and come to the Savior. I invite you who are in the meridian of life. To you, 0 men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Particularly do I invite you, who are parents, to come and bring your children with you to the Savior's feast.

I invite you, who are aged, to come and receive from Christ a crown of glory, which your gray hairs will be, if you are found in the way of righteousness. I invite you to come, ye poor, and Christ will make you rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom. I invite you to come who are rich, and bring your wealth to Christ, and he will give you durable riches and righteousness. I invite you, who are ignorant, to come and Christ will impart to you his treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I invite you, who possess human learning to come, and Christ will baptize your knowledge, and teach you to employ it in the most advantageous manner. I invite you who are afflicted to come, for my God is the God of all consolation, and my Master can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities. I invite you, who feel yourselves to be the greatest of sinners, to come; for you will find many there, whose sins once equaled your own, now washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. I invite you, who have long despised, and who still despise this invitation, to come; for Christ's language is, Hearken to me, ye stouthearted, and far from righteousness. And if there be any one in this assembly, who thinks himself overlooked; if there be one who has not yet felt that this invitation is addressed to him, I now present it to that person, particularly, and invite him to come. And now, my friends, I have done. My directions were to invite to the Savior's marriage feast as many as I

should find. I have accordingly invited all and each of you. I take you to record, as witnesses against each other, that you have all received the invitation. I take each of your consciences to record, as witness against yourselves, that you have been invited, and as a witness for me, that I have discharged my commission. If then any of you do not come, you cannot ascribe it to the want of an invitation. If any of you perish, it will be, not because Christ did not offer to save you; nor because you did not hear the offer, but solely because you would not accept it. You are, therefore, left without excuse. I am aware, however, that you will fancy you have an excuse. You will pretend that you wish to come, but are unable. My friends, I know nothing of that. I am not directed to answer such objections. I have nothing to do with them. My business is simply to preach to you the gospel; to proclaim to you the glad tidings; to invite you to Christ, and to assure you, in his name, that, if you come, you shall most certainly be received. If you say that you cannot come; if you can make God believe it; if you dare go to the judgment seat with this excuse, and venture your eternal interests on its being accepted as sufficient, it is well. But before you determine on this course, permit me to remind you, that God's sentiments, as revealed in his word, differ very widely from yours, with respect to this excuse. He evidently considers your unwillingness, or inability, or whatever you choose to call it, to come to Christ, as your greatest sin. He, once and again, denounces upon you the most dreadful punishments for this very thing. He declares, not only that all who do not believe in Christ shall be condemned, but that they are condemned already. What you consider as your best excuse, he considers as your greatest sin. Beware then, my friends, how you make this excuse. If you are determined on making an excuse, say any thing rather than this.

I find in the Bible but one person who made this excuse; but one who attempted to justify himself by pretending that he was unable to do what his master required. And what answer did he receive? Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked and slothful servant. My friends, if any of you venture to make a similar excuse, be assured you will meet with a similar reply. Nor will any excuse be more successful; for Christ has taught us, that those who attempt to excuse themselves, as well as those who directly refuse to come, shall never taste of his supper.

Instead, therefore, of seeking for excuses, which will only prove your destruction, let me persuade you rather to comply with Christ's invitations. With this view permit me to call your attention to the moral sublimity, the grandeur, the magnificence, which characterize them. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. Whosoever will, let him come, and him that cometh I will in no wise cast out. And who is he that dares utter such language as this? Who dares thus stand in the midst of the world, of such a world as this, a thirsty, perishing world, and invite all, all its dying inhabitants without exception, to come to him and drink the waters of life and salvation? Can he have room sufficient for such an innumerable multitude? Has he not reason to fear that his treasures will be exhausted? Does he know what he says? Yes, my friends, he does know what he says; and he may well say it, for in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He has enough and more than enough, for ten thousand such worlds as this. And, my hearers, this is saying much; for reflect a moment how much is necessary to supply the wants of a single immortal soul, through time and through eternity.

I think how many souls there are, have been, and shall be, in the world. Think of the innumerable criminals, criminals of the most abandoned kind, of the murderers, the robbers, the conquerors, the blasphemers, the adulterers, the harlots, the impious, hardened wretches who neither fear

God nor regard man, that have been, and still are, to be found among mankind. What an ocean of mercy is necessary to wash away their sins, to make the deep crimson white as snow. What an omnipotence of grace is requisite to fit such wretches for admission into a heaven of spotless purity, and make them holy as God. Yet all such Christ invites, all such he is able to save, all such he would save, would they come to him. Who then can describe, who can conceive the ten thousandth part of that grace and mercy which must be in Christ; or of the love which renders him thus willing to scatter that grace and mercy round him upon the worthless and undeserving. Is there not something inexpressibly grand, sublime and affecting in the idea of a being whose fullness enables him, whose generosity prompts to throw wide open the door of his heart, and invite a dying world to enter in and drink and be satisfied, and live forever;—of a being from whom flows light, holiness, and happiness sufficient to fill to overflowing all that come to him, be their numbers ever so many, their sins and wants and miseries ever so great; of a being, of whose fullness myriads of immortal beings may drink through a whole eternity without exhausting, or even diminishing it in the smallest degree. But perhaps, forgetting what has been said in a former part of this discourse, you will say, this fountain is fenced round with a barrier which we cannot pass. This being, who possesses such a fullness in himself, must from his very nature be so great, so glorious, so awful, that we cannot approach him, must be placed on a height which is to us inaccessible. But this conclusion, though apparently natural, is not just; for all this fullness dwells in a man. Yes, it is the Son of man, who thus brings all heaven down to earth. It is the Son of man, who thus has power on earth to forgive sins and to save sinners. Nor is it a man, like other men, tinctured with pride, or selfishness, or insensibility. No; it is a man all meekness and lowliness and gentleness and condescension; a man who is not ashamed to call us brethren; a man all made up of invitations, compassion and love; a man, whose every action, thought, and feeling coinbines with his lips to cry, Come unto me, all ye that are laboring and heavy laden, and I will give you rest; a man, who finds more pleasure in saving sinners, than they find in receiving salvation; and who uttered the very feelings of his heart, when he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Nor does he, while saying this, display a generosity which costs him nothing. Were this the case, we might the less wonder at the unbounded riches of his liberality. But it is not. The blessings which he offers and dispenses, inestimable as they are, cost him their full value. They cost thirty-three years labor of him, who could create a world in six days. Nay more, they cost him his life. He paid the dreadful price in tears and groans and blood, in agonies unutterable.

There is not a single blessing he offers you, O sinner, which did not cost him a pang. He purchased the privilege of offering you those very blessings which you have a thousand times rejected at the price of all that he possessed. Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor. That he might offer you a mansion in heaven, he consented for years to be destitute of a place, where to lay his head. That he might wash you from those sins which made you unfit for heaven, he poured out his blood to the last drop. That you might be delivered from shame and everlasting contempt, he hid not his sacred face from shame and spitting. That you might escape the wrath of God, he bore it in his own person, though he fainted, sunk, and expired under the weight. That you, a malefactor, might live forever, the Lord of life and glory died as a malefactor on the cross. And now he offers you, without money and without price, all that cost him so dear.

He even beseeches you as a favor to accept it, and will consider the joy arising from your acceptance and salvation as a sufficient recompense for all that he suffered in procuring it. Yet this

is the being whom you complain that you cannot love. This the friend, to whom you think it hard to be grateful. 0, astonishingly blinding, besetting, stupefying influence of sin! He, who has only to show his face to fill all heaven with rapture, and pour a flood of glory, light and joy through the new Jerusalem, cannot by all his bounties bribe, nor by all his entreaties induce you to love him; though heaven is the reward of loving, and hell the punishment of rejecting him. And can you indeed be content to remain ignorant of such a being, to remain a stranger, nay, an enemy to him forever? Can you consent to retain and cherish a heart, which feels no affection, no gratitude for such a benefactor as this? My friends, I would as soon possess the heart of a murderer, of a traitor, nay of a fiend, as a heart which turns cold and insensible from a crucified Redeemer—from bleeding, dying love—from the perfection of moral beauty and excellence.

Chapter 17

S. CHRIST, GODS BEST GIFT TO MAN

CHRIST, GODS BEST GIFT TO MAN "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" 2 Corinthians 9:15

Perhaps there is nothing which would more powerfully tend to convince us how little we resemble the primitive Christians, than a comparison of our views and feelings respecting the gospel of Christ, with those which they express in their writings. While we naturally discover in it nothing wonderful or excellent, listen to it with indifference, treat it with neglect, and perhaps consider it as little better than foolishness; they can scarcely mention or allude to it without feeling the strongest emotions, and breaking forth into the most rapturous expressions of gratitude, admiration, wonder and love. They style it the glorious gospel of the blessed God, speak of it as the most wonderful of all his wondrous works, and represent it as containing things unutterable and unsearchable, things into which even angels desire to look. An example of the glowing and energetic language which they were accustomed to employ in speaking of the subject, we have in our text; in which the apostle, reflecting on the goodness of God in giving his Son to die for us, exclaims in the fullness of his heart, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift! My friends, in obedience to long established custom, and to the voice of our civil rulers, we have this day assembled to give thanks to God. Perhaps some are ready to say, For what shall we thank him? Our fathers, who established this custom, had reason to praise him, for they were favored with peace and prosperity. We too had formerly reason to praise him, for we once enjoyed the same blessings. But those days are past. Peace and prosperity are gone. We are involved in a war, of which we cannot foresee the termination. Our country is torn in pieces by political dissensions, and contending parties seem almost prepared to imbrue their hands in each other’s blood. Our private sufferings and embarrassments are also great. Our commerce is destroyed, our business interrupted, our property, acquired in better days, taken from us; our families look to us for bread, which we shall soon be unable to give them; the prospect before us is dark and cheerless, and we fear that these days are but the beginning of sorrows. For what, then, should we thank God, or how attune our voices to joy and praise?

I answer, were our situation more deplorable than it really is, were we stripped of every earthly blessing, we should still have cause for joy and thankfulness; still have reason to praise God. We ought to rejoice that the Lord reigns, and we ought to praise him that we are not treated as we deserve, that we are not in the mansions of despair, that we are yet prisoners of hope. Above all, we ought to praise him for the unspeakable gift of his Son, and we shall do it if we possess the smallest portion of the apostle’s temper. His situation was, in a temporal view, incomparably worse than that of any person in this assembly. Speaking of himself and his fellow disciples, he says, Even to the present hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and buffeted, and reviled and persecuted. We are made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things, unto this day. Yet in this distressed, oppressed condition, destitute of all the good things of life, and liable every day to lose life itself, he could still cry, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. Nay, more; while he lay in the gloomy dungeon of Philippi, his body torn with scourges, and his feet fast in the

stocks, we find him still thanking God for the gospel of his Son, and causing his prison, even at midnight, to resound with his songs of joy and praise. And can we then, with justice, pretend that we have no reason to be thankful? Ought not we, as well as the apostle, to bless God for the gospel of Christ? Is it not to us, as it was to him, the gospel of salvation? Let us then banish from our minds every ungrateful feeling, every murmuring thought, and unitedly cry with the apostle, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. That you may be induced to do this, I shall attempt to show, That Jesus Christ is the Gift of God to men: a Gift which may be justly called unspeakable: a Gift for which we should thank him with the most lively gratitude.

I. Jesus Christ is the Gift of God to men.

It can scarcely be necessary to remind you that a gift, or present, is something valuable freely offered to persons who have no claim to it, without receiving anything in return, and without any expectation that it will be restored. It must be something valuable; for a thing of no value cannot properly be considered as a gift. It must be offered freely, or voluntarily; for if we are obliged to offer it, it is merely the discharge of all obligation. It must be offered to persons who have no claim to it; for to those who can justly deserve it, it is not a gift, but only their due. If they claim it as a recompense for some injury which we have done them, it is restitution. If they claim it in return for services which they have performed, or favors which they have bestowed, it is a debt. It must be offered without expecting anything in return; for if we expect something equally valuable in return, it is an exchange; if we expect some lawful service to be performed, it is wages; if we expect anything unlawful, it is a bribe. Finally, it must be offered without any expectation that it will be restored to us; for otherwise it is a loan, and not a gift.

Now a moment's reflection will convince us that, in all these respects, Jesus Christ is, strictly speaking, a gift of God to man. Christ is something valuable; for, as we shall soon attempt to show, his worth is unspeakable. He is offered to us freely, or voluntarily; for God was under no kind of obligation to make us such an offer. He is offered to persons who have no claim to such a favor, for we can justly claim nothing at the hand of God but destruction. We cannot claim the offer of Christ as a recompense for injuries received from God, for he has never injured us, but has done us good and not evil all the days of our lives. Neither can we claim it in return for services performed, or favors bestowed—for we have never done any thing for God, or bestowed the smallest favor upon him. On the contrary, we have done him all the injury in our power. Nor does God offer his Son with the expectation of receiving any thing in return, for we and all that we possess are already his; and if we were not, we could give him nothing; for even if we are righteous, what do we give him, or what receiveth he at our hands? When we have done all in our power, we are but unprofitable servants, and have done no more than it was our duty to do. Nor, finally, does God offer us his Son with any intention of resuming the gift; for, says the apostle, the gifts of God are without repentance, that is, irrevocable; he offers us his Son to be ours forever. Jesus Christ is, therefore, in the most strict and proper sense of the term, the gift, the free, unmerited gift of God to men.

I am not ignorant, however, that some deny this. I am aware that it is thought and urged by some, that God was under obligations to provide a Saviour for mankind, and that it would have been cruel and unjust for him to create beings who he knew would fall, had he not previously intended to give his Son for their redemption, or to open a way for their restoration, by some other means.

These persons then pretend, that the law of God, which requires perfect obedience, on pain of death, is much too strict and severe, for such weak, fallen creatures, as we are; that it is unreasonable and unjust to require perfection of us, or to punish us for falling short of it; and that God, finding he had enacted a law too severe, was obliged to send his Son to bear its curse, deliver us from its authority, and introduce a milder law, which should allow us to sin a little, provided we would not sin much.

It is true, indeed, that few are to be found, who dare openly and directly avow such sentiments; but, they are the sentiments of every unrenewed heart; all men naturally consider the gospel as a kind of remedy for the too great severity of the law; and Hence it is, in their view, little better than foolishness. And if this view of the gospel were correct, it would indeed be foolishness in the extreme; and God would no longer deserve our admiration, reverence, gratitude, or love. It would then appear that God was the offending, and we the injured party; that Christ died, not to make satisfaction for our transgression against God, but for God's too great severity to us; that he is offered to us not as a free, unmerited gift, but as a recompense for the injuries we have received from our Maker, in his suffering us to fall, and threatening to punish us for our sins. Farewell, then, all the glory and grace of the gospel. Farewell, all ascriptions of praise to God, for his goodness, mercy and love. The wondrous plan of redeeming love, the unspeakable gift of God's eternal Son, dwindles down to the mere payment of a debt, a satisfaction for injury. But is this indeed the glorious gospel of the blessed God? Is this that mystery, into which angels desire to look; is this the wonderful scheme which filled the breasts of the apostles with admiration, love and gratitude; and in which they professed to discover such heights and depths, such unutterable and unsearchable things? No, my friends, this is not the gospel; these are not the good tidings of great joy which angels delighted to bring from heaven. God's offer of his Son to guilty men is not the payment of a debt, or a recompense for injuries done them. No, it is a gift, a free, unmerited gift, an unspeakable gift, the worth of which we can neither describe nor conceive. God was under no obligation to provide a Saviour for our ruined race. He provided none for the fallen angels, nor was he any more obliged to provide one for us. With the most perfect justice, and without the smallest impeachment of his goodness, he might have left us all to perish; and peopled the earth and filled heaven, with a new and holy race of beings. Agreeably, the Scriptures every where represent the plan of salvation as entirely of grace, free, sovereign, wondrous grace, from its commencement to its termination. They tell us, that Jesus Christ is the gift of God; that he freely delivered him up for us all; that when we were his enemies Christ died for us; and that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish. Here is nothing said of the payment of a debt, or of recompense for injury. Nor do the blessed spirits of the just made perfect in heaven, view their salvation as flowing from anything but the most astonishing love and grace. Not unto us, they cry, not unto us, but to thy name give glory. Blessing and glory and honor and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever.

If, therefore, the apostles on earth or saints in heaven, or the Holy Spirit himself, knew anything of the plan of salvation, Jesus Christ is in every respect the free gift of God to man. And why was such a gift necessary? Because we are children of ignorance, and needed a Divine teacher; because we are children of disobedience, and need a Divine sanctifier; because we are children of wrath, and need a Divine redeemer, to make an atonement for our sins. We have insisted the longer on this part of our subject, because until we are fully convinced that Christ is such a gift, we

cannot prize the gospel as we ought, nor truly thank God for this or any other blessing.

II. I proceed to show, that this gift may be justly styled unspeakable. With this view we observe,

1. That the love which led God to bestow such a gift upon us, must have been unspeakably great. This our Saviour, when speaking of it, plainly intimates. Though he spoke as never man spake, yet even he could not describe it except by its effects. God, says he, so loved the world that he gave leis only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He does not say, God loved the world fervently, greatly, immeasurably; for none of these expressions were sufficient to show the extent of his love. Nor does he say, God so loved the world that he preserves, supports, and fills it with his blessings; for these proofs of his goodness, though great, are comparatively nothing. But he says, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son; thus intimating that his love could not be described, and leaving us to judge of its greatness by its effects. And, judging by this rule, how great must his love have been!

Say, ye who are parents, how must you love a person, before you could freely consent, for his sake, to give up an only son; to a cruel and ignominious death? But as high as the heavens are above the earth, as far as God excels his creatures, so far does his love for his Son surpass that which the most affectionate parent feels for his offspring. We are told that God is love, and we find that he can even love his enemies, so as to load them with favors; for he causes his sun to shine, and his showers to descend on the evil and unthankful. If then he can thus love his enemies, how infinitely must he love his innocent, holy, only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of his Father, and always does those things that please him! And how must he love the world, since, for its redemption, he gave up this beloved Son to such agonies as Christ endured. But in vain do we attempt to give you any idea of this love. We sink under the weight of our subject. We cannot describe what is indescribable. We can only say, with the apostle, What manner of love is this? Well may it be called an unspeakable love!

2. The gift of Jesus Christ may be justly called unspeakable, because his worth and excellence are unspeakably great. He is the pearl of great, of inestimable price. He is not only precious, but preciousness itself. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom, and knowledge, and grace; so that as the apostle informs us, his riches are unsearchable! Nay more, in him dwells all fullness, even all the fullness of the Godhead. In giving us Christ, therefore, God has given us himself and all that he possesses; and hence, those who receive this gift, are said to be filled with the fullness of God. Had God given us a thousand angels to guard and attend us, or ten thousand worlds for our portion, it would have been comparatively nothing. It would have been nothing for him to give, for he could have created them with a single word. It would have been nothing for us to receive; for what are worlds, or angels, in comparison with the Creator of all worlds, and the Lord of angels. Nor is this all. In giving us Christ, God gave us all the other blessings which we enjoy. We are told, that every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights. We are also taught, that all these gifts come in and through Christ; so that he may be justly called, not only a gift, but the gift of God, that is, the gift which includes all others. If the earth is full of the riches of God’s goodness, if its inhabitants are preserved, fed, and clothed; if God gives them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with peace and gladness, if they derive any pleasure from children, friends and social intercourse, if they are permitted to hope for still greater blessings beyond the grave, —in a word, if any happiness is or has been enjoyed on earth, more

than in hell, it was all given by God, when he gave us Christ to be the Saviour of the world. In this sense it is, that Christ is said to be the Saviour of all men, including those who do not believe. He pleads for them as the dresser of the vineyard did for the barren fig tree, that it might not be immediately cut down as a cumberer of the ground. Thus he saves them from instantly suffering the agonies of death and the pains of hell. He saves them from many of the present effects and consequences of sin; he gives them to enjoy the day and means of grace, keeps back the curse which is every moment ready to blast them, and loads them with innumerable temporal and spiritual favors. Since then Christ is inestimably precious in himself, and since in him are included all the other gifts which God has ever bestowed on our race, he may be justly called an unspeakable gift.

3. Unspeakable as is the intrinsic value of Christ, he is, if possible, still more unspeakably valuable to us. You need not be told, that the value of a gift to the person who receives it, depends much on his circumstances. A sum of money may be a valuable present to any one; but to a man on the point of being dragged to prison for debt, it is much more so. Medicine, or food may be valuable in itself; but when given to a man ready to perish with sickness or hunger, its value is very greatly increased. So Christ is unspeakably precious in himself, and had God given him to the angels as their portion, it would have justly been called an unspeakable gift. But how unspeakably more valuable is such a gift to us, who were on the point of perishing forever. Would you know the worth of the gift to creatures in our situation? Go and contemplate the fallen angels in the mansions of despair. See them enveloped in the blackness of darkness, bound in eternal chains, reserved unto the judgment of the great day, and expecting nothing but an eternity of unutterable, and constantly increasing wretchedness, beyond it. Would the gift of an almighty Saviour, to redeem them from this situation, be to them unspeakably precious?

If so, Christ is an unspeakably precious gift to us; for what they are suffering was our just doom, a doom which would have been inevitable, were it not for the gift of Christ. A wretched and hopeless life, a still more wretched and despairing death, and an inconceivably more wretched eternity, were all that we could expect; for, being children of disobedience, we were children of wrath; the fire prepared for the devil and his angels burnt to devour us; the broken law of God had pronounced the sentence of our everlasting condemnation, and nothing but the gift of such a Saviour as Christ, could have prevented our suffering it; for the word of truth declares, that he who believeth not the Son of God is condemned already; that he shall never see life, and that the wrath of God abideth on him. But from this curse Christ has redeemed those who receive God’s offered gift, by being made a curse for them, and they are delivered from wrath through him. Well then may the gift of such a Saviour to creatures in our situation, be called an unspeakable gift.

Lastly, the gift of Christ may be justly called an unspeakable gift, on account of the spiritual blessings which are enjoyed by those who receive him. We have already observed, that even those who reject him are favored for his sake, with many temporal mercies; but these are nothing compared with spiritual and eternal blessings which he imparts to those who thankfully accept the unspeakable gift of God. He gives them the pardon of all their sins, and accepts them as if they had never sinned. He brings them out of darkness and ignorance into his marvelous light, and imparts to them that knowledge of God and himself which is eternal life. He instamps the holy image of God on their souls, and makes them partakers of a divine nature. He delivers them from sin and guilt, from fear and anxiety, and thus prepares them to enjoy peace of conscience, and

favor with God. He withholds from them no good thing, and causes all things, without exception, to work together for their good.

He gives them exceeding great and precious promises, and provides for them strong consolation, to support them under the evils of life. He suffers them to fear no evil, in their last hours, and enables them to sing the song of victory over death and the grave. He receives and welcomes their departing spirits in the eternal world, raises their bodies incorruptible, glorious and immortal; acquits, acknowledges and rewards them, at the judgment day, and presents them, perfect in knowledge, in holiness and happiness, before the throne of his Father, with whom they shall live and reign forever and ever. In one word, he makes them heirs of God, and consequently heirs of all things; exerts to the utmost all the infinite perfections of the Godhead, to perfect, perpetuate and increase their happiness. And, my friends, what could he do more? What could any being do more? What can creatures desire more? Should they employ their minds, through eternity, they would be unable to wish for, or conceive of any thing which the gift of Christ does not include. Who then can deny that it may be justly called an unspeakable gift; since it raises those who accept it from the lowest depth of wretchedness to which a creature can sink, to the highest pitch of glory and felicity which creatures can reach?

III. This is a gift for which we ought to thank God with the most lively gratitude.

But, my friends, is it necessary to prove this? Is it not already evident? The principal circumstances which render a gift deserving of thankfulness, are the motives which occasion it, its intrinsic value, its being adapted to our circumstances, and the benefits which we derive from it. But we have already shown that the love which induced God to offer us the gift of Christ, his own intrinsic value, our perishing need of such a Saviour, and the benefits which he bestows on those who accept him, are alike unspeakably great. It therefore necessarily follows, that our gratitude to God for this gift should be unspeakable. The gratitude of just men made perfect is so. Never have they been able, never will they be able, to express all the gratitude which they feel to God, for the gift of his Son. It is an inexhaustible fountain which flows, and ever will flow, in ceaseless praises and thanksgivings, throughout eternity. If then we possess any thing of the temper of heaven, if we hope ever to join in the employments of heaven, if we, in the smallest degree, resemble the apostle, we shall unitedly join with him in exclaiming, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift! We shall partake of the food which God this day provides for our refreshment, with feelings in some measure similar to those with which the spirits of the just feast on the bread and water of life, at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven, and our whole future lives will be one continued day of thanksgiving to God.

If any still feel unconvinced, that we ought to thank God for the gift of his Son, we would ask them whether God can do anything for which his creatures ought to thank him. Can he bestow upon them any favor which shall entitle him to their gratitude? If so, he has done it already, in giving us his Son; for he can do nothing greater for any creature, he call give us nothing more precious than this. In giving us Christ, he has given us himself, and all that he possesses, so that he may now justly say to us, Unthankful, obstinate creatures! what shall I do to excite your gratitude; how shall I purchase that place in your affections, which ought to be mine, without purchase? I had but one Son; him I have freely given for your redemption; and now I have nothing more to offer. To purchase your gratitude and love, I have made myself poor; I have given you all I possessed, and

if this is not sufficient, I can only come to you as a suppliant, and beseech you, for my sake, for my Son’s sake, for your own sakes, to be reconciled to your heavenly Father, and accept with thankfulness my offered grace. Such is, in effect, the language of your gracious, condescending God; yet, astonishing to tell, there are hearts so hard as to be unaffected with this language, so stubbornly ungrateful as to refuse to thank him for the unspeakable gift. My friends, are not some of your hearts of this description? Are there not some among you who have, through life, requited God evil for good? Are there not some present, who never sincerely thanked God for the gift of his Son, and who would feel more joy and gratitude for the gift of a few thousands of pounds, than they have ever felt while hearing the good news of a Saviour? If there be any present of this description, let me entreat them to consider what they have done, what they are now doing. How hateful, how inexcusable, must such ingratitude appear in the sight of God! How widely do you differ from him who uttered the words of our text, and from all holy beings! How impossible is it for you, with such a temper, to join in the praises of heaven, or derive any advantage from the gift of Christ. The gift is indeed offered to all, but it will benefit none but those who thankfully receive it. Be persuaded then, this day, to receive it with thankfulness, and let the goodness of God lead you to repentance. While you feast on the bounties of Providence, remember that they were purchased by the blood of Christ. Should you do this, this will indeed be a thanksgiving day, the beginning of an eternal thanksgiving in heaven.

Chapter 18

S. CHRIST, THE SAVIOUR OF THE LOST

CHRIST, THE SAVIOUR OF THE LOST "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" Luke 19:10

There cannot, my friends, be a more striking and satisfactory proof of our stupid insensibility to religious truth, than the indifference with which we naturally view the gospel of Christ. Among all the wonderful things which God has presented to the contemplation of his creatures, none are so well suited to excite our deepest interest and attention, as those which this gospel reveals. We see that God, who is wise in counsel, and wonderful in working, constantly employed for four thousand years in making preparations for Christ's appearance on earth. We see many holy and divinely inspired prophets raised up in different ages, to predict his incarnation. We see a person, born contrary to the common course of nature, employed as a harbinger to prepare his way. We see an angel sent from heaven to his intended virgin mother, to announce his approaching birth. We see a multitude of the heavenly host, sent to reveal the accomplishment of this event, and hear them shouting, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men. We see a miraculous star appearing in the East, to announce the same event to distant sages, and guide them to the feet of the new-born infant. Finally, we see the heavens to his intended opened over his head, the Spirit of God descending like a dove to rest upon it, and at the same time hear the voice of the omnipotent, eternal Father of the universe; exclaiming, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. By comparing the predictions of his birth, with other parts of revelation, we find that the child thus born, the son thus given and ushered into our world, is in fact the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace, God manifest in flesh, God overall, blessed forever, by whom and for whom all things were made, and in whom all things consist. And what is the end and design of all these wonders? For what purpose is all this preparation made? Why do we thus see heaven opened, its inhabitants descending, and behold God dwelling in flesh, living, suffering, and dying as a man? To these questions, our text furnishes the only satisfactory answer. It teaches us, that all this was done for our salvation. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. In meditating on this passage, we are naturally led to inquire,

I. What it is that is here spoken of as lost? It can scarcely be necessary to say, that it is the human race. Mankind are invariably represented by the inspired writers, as morally depraved, ruined and lost; and they are here spoken of as one, because they are all alike in the same lost condition, in consequence of their descent from the same parents. In Adam all die. As descendants from him, all are lost. In the first place, they are lost to God. He is our Creator, our Shepherd; and we, as the Psalmist expresses it, are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. But, to use the language of the prophet, we have all gone astray like lost sheep, and have turned every one to his own way. Like the prodigal son in our Saviour's affecting parable, we have forsaken our Father's house, and wandered from him into a far country. These, and other passages which represent us as being at a distance from God, are to be understood, however, not in a natural but moral sense; for in a natural sense, it is impossible for any creature to depart from God, since in him we live, move, and have our being, and cannot go from his Spirit, or fly from his presence. But while we are

thus constantly surrounded by God, we are far from him in a moral sense. To use the expressive language of Scripture, He is not in all our thoughts; we live without him in the world; we have lost his moral image, and he is become to us an absent and unknown God, so that it is necessary, as the apostle expresses it, that the sons of men should seek after the Lord, if peradventure they may feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. Should a man by any means be deprived of sight, he might be said to be lost to the sun, though this luminary would still shine around him, warm him with its beams, and produce the fruits which preserved his life. But he would have lost all views of its brightness, and of those objects which it discovers to others; its light would no longer guide him, nor enable him to discern the dangers which might be in his path. In a similar manner are men lost, with respect to God. Though his glory shines around them, and his power preserves their lives and gives them all the blessings they enjoy, yet they realize not his presence; they are blind to his perfections; they see not his glory in his works; they hear not his voice in his word; they are not guided by his light, they discern not the objects which he reveals. In a word, the Father of lights, the great sun of the universe, has no existence in their apprehensions. And when they look up to heaven, all is dark and the eternal throne appears empty. When they contemplate the visible creation, they see only a fair but lifeless body; for of God, the animating, guiding soul, who fills, upholds, and directs every part, they perceive nothing. Even when they look into the volume of his word, it is to them only a dead letter, and they find there nothing of God, though he lives and speaks in every line. Having thus lost the knowledge of the true God, they turn of course to some created idol, and transfer to it that affection, confidence, and dependence, which belongs to him. Forsaking the fountain of living waters, they have hewed out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water. Thus they are lost to God, as this world would be lost to the sun, should it fly off into the regions of eternal frost and darkness. In the second place, being thus lost to God, mankind are of course lost to holiness. In forsaking him, they forsake the path of duty and become sinners. In forsaking him, they forsake also the author of all holiness in the hearts of creatures. Turn a mirror from the sun, and it ceases at once; to reflect his image. Place it in darkness, and it emits not a gleam of light. So when a creature turns from God, he loses at once his holy image. Forsaking the fountain of good, he becomes wholly destitute of goodness. Should the most perfect created spirit in heaven wander from God, he would cease to be holy; he would become wholly depraved. He would be a devil. Agreeably, the Scriptures invariably represent mankind as by nature entirely destitute of holiness; as alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts; in a word, as dead in trespasses and sins, and of course as devoid of holiness as a dead man is of life. In consequence of being thus lost to God and holiness, mankind are consequently lost to happiness. God is the fountain of felicity, the only source of real happiness to intelligent creatures. In his presence only is fullness of joy: at his right hand alone, are pleasures forevermore. His favor is life, and his loving kindness is far better than life. He is the proper element of the soul, as the ocean is the element of its inhabitants, and as well might the inhabitants of the ocean, be happy in the burning sands of Arabia, as man can be happy in a state of absence from God. As the prodigal, who wandered from his father’s house, soon experienced the miseries of famine, and found that the husks on which he fed, could not satisfy his hunger, so mankind, in their absence from God suffer a famine of happiness; they constantly hunger and thirst after satisfying pleasures, but find nothing of a satisfying nature. They often imagine indeed that they have found happiness, but painful experience soon undeceives them, and thus the miseries of perpetual disappointment are

added to those of constant hunger and thirst. Their situation, to borrow the language of the prophet, is like that of a hungry man who dreameth, and behold he eateth, but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or like that of a thirsty man, who dreameth, and behold he drinketh, but he awaketh and behold he is faint.

Thus do men often dream that they have found some real good, something that will satisfy the soul, and as often awake to the pains of disappointment and unsatisfied desires. In addition to this negative unhappiness, the sinful feelings, passions, and pursuits of men bring upon them many positive miseries. Instead of living together in love, as a band of brothers, as they would do, had they not wandered from God and holiness, they are almost constantly engaged in wars, strifes, and contentions, which not only disturb personal, domestic, and social happiness, but often spread desolation, wretchedness, and death over whole provinces and kingdoms at once. In short, sin has turned almost every man's hand against his brother, and even in the best regulated society, the petty jars and quarrels of families, the clashing of opposite interests, the contentions of differing political parties, and the slanderous reports, whispers and insinuations which are publicly or privately circulated, greatly disturb its peace, and leave little of happiness but the name.

These however are only the natural consequences of sin. If in addition to these, we consider its penal consequences, we shall be still more fully convinced that men are lost to happiness. By the penal consequences of sin, we mean those present and, future miseries which the justice of a holy God has attached to its commission. Among these miseries maybe mentioned those guilty fears and reproaches of conscience, which, in a greater or less degree, all sinners experience. If you will look into your own breasts, my friends, and consider how much you suffer from fears of death, apprehensions of God's anger, and self-reproach; if you reflect how often these things haunt you in secret, and how often they render you unhappy in society even, when an aching heart is concealed by a smiling countenance, you will feel convinced, that if other men are like you, they must feel much more unhappiness than they appear to feel, or than they are willing to confess. And, my friends, other sinful men are like you, and the mental sufferings which agitate your breasts, are a faithful counterpart to those which they experience; and never do these sufferings cease, till the sinner becomes holy, or his conscience is seared, and he is given up of God. In the next place, among the penal consequences of sin, may be reckoned death, with all the diseases, pains, and sufferings which precede it, and the heart-rending anguish which it often occasions, when it deprives us of our children and friends. By sin, death entered into the world, and it passes upon all men, because all have sinned. Were there nothing else to render sinful men unhappy, the certainty of death would alone be sufficient to do it; for the more happy they were in other respects, the more would their happiness be disturbed by a dread of that awful hour which must put an end to it; and if their happiness depended on the enjoyment of friends, the uncertainty of their life would furnish new cause for anxiety and alarm. But these things, though sufficient to render men strangers to happiness, are not all the penal consequences of sin. On the contrary, they are but the beginning of sorrows, for the wages of sin is death, including not the death of the body only, but the death, the eternal death of the soul. By the broken law of God, all sinners are doomed to be cast into the lake of fire, which, says an inspired writer, is the second death; there to sink deeper and deeper through eternity in the abyss of wretchedness and despair, lost, forever lost, to God, to holiness; to happiness and hope.

Consider now the brief view which we have taken of the situation of sinful man. See him at first created in the image of his Maker, perfectly holy and upright, a stranger to pain, sorrow, sickness and death, enjoying perfect peace of conscience, and power with God, breathing nothing but love to him and his creatures, constantly employed with delight in his service, tasting the purest felicity in communion with him, and perpetually approaching nearer and nearer to that heaven which was his destined, eternal home. See the same creature, now deprived of the image and favor of God, wholly sinful and depraved, the slave of ungovernable passions and insatiable appetites and desires, a prey to guilty fear and remorse; exposed to sorrow, sickness and death in ten thousand forms; living for a while without God and without hope in the world, wholly neglecting the great end for which he was created, wandering farther and farther from the path of duty and happiness, with nothing before him but a fearful looking for judgment, which will doom him to depart accursed into everlasting fire. Consider these things, and then say, is not this creature lost. Yet such is the natural situation of mankind; such would have been the inevitable, irreversible doom of all, had not the Son of God visited our world. To seek and to save this lost creature was the design on which he came; and this is the II. General topic to be considered in this discourse. In treating it, I remark,

1. The Son of man came to seek the creatures thus lost. In this passage, our Saviour probably alludes to his character of a shepherd, and to a parable uttered by him not long before, in which he compares himself to a man going into the wilderness in search of a lost sheep. You need not be told, that this animal, when lost, never of itself returns to its shepherd, but rambles farther and farther from his fold, and even often flies from him as an enemy, when he comes to seek and conduct it home. Thus it is with lost man. Having once forsaken God, he has neither the disposition to return, nor the ability to discover the path which leads back to him. It is the natural tendency of sin, under whose influence he is, to carry him still farther from God, to take away all disposition to seek him, and to render him perfectly ignorant of the way in which he may be found. It leads the sinner to say to God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. It is therefore evident, that if these lost creatures are ever brought back to God, it will not be by their own exertions. God must seek them, or they will never seek him, and consequently will never find him.

It is therefore necessary, that a guide should be sent from heaven to seek them and point out the way of return. Should this world, which now revolves round the sun, wander from it so far as to lose sight of its beams, it is evident that it could never again find its way back to the sun. It could hold up no light by which to discover this luminary; for the sun can be seen only by its own rays, and if the world should once lose sight of these rays, and be lost in the regions of eternal night, there would be nothing to guide it back, nothing to direct its course toward the sun. Then the only way to secure its return, would be for a ray of light proceeding from the sun to follow the lost planet through all its wanderings, and thus point out the way to the luminary from which itself emanated. Such is the situation of mankind with respect to God, the sun of the universe. They have wandered from him so far, that they have lost sight of his beams, all knowledge of his character and of the way to find him.

Now Christ considered as the Son of man, is a ray of light from this Sun, sent to find and guide us back to God. This, we are told is the brightness, the effulgence, the shining forth of his Father’s glory, the true light which enlighteneth every man who cometh into the world. To find lost man, he undertook a long and toilsome journey; even a journey from heaven to earth, and at his return to

heaven, he pointed out the way, and commanded, invited, and encouraged man to follow. Nor was it only to the men who then lived on earth, that he thus pointed out the way to God, heaven, and happiness. No, he left infallible directions recorded in his word; he sent his blessed Spirit to supply his place on earth as a teacher and guide, and appointed under-shepherds to go forth under his directions, to seek and find lost sinners, and conduct them to his feet. By his Spirit, his ministers, and his word, he is still seeking them, and is often found of them who sought him not, and made manifest to them that asked not after him; and whenever you read the word of God, whenever you hear it preached, and above all, when you feel something within, silently urging you to comply with it, you then hear the voice of Christ, and have a fresh proof that he is still seeking those who are lost; and when by any of these things you are convinced of your sinfulness, guilt and danger, and of your need of such a Saviour and guide as Christ, it is a proof that he has found you, and is calling you to follow him in the path which leads to heaven.

2. The Son of man came to save that which was lost. He seeks in order to save, and if he did not save, it would be in vain for him to seek; for as we have already observed, men are not only ignorant of the way to God, but unwilling to follow it when pointed out to them. In addition to this, they are held in captivity by the prince of darkness, who will not suffer them to return; they are defiled by innumerable sins, which render them unfit for the presence of God and heaven; and by their apostasy, they have violated his holy law, whose demands they must satisfy, and whose curse, like a flaming sword turning every way, bars all access to the mercy seat. From all these things therefore, from all the natural and final consequences of sin, they must be saved, or they can never return to God; and to save them from these things, was the grand object for which Christ came into the world; for, it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners; and with this declaration his name, Jesus a Saviour, perfectly agrees. In conformity with these, and other similar declarations of Scripture, Christ has accomplished a complete salvation for all who will humbly and thankfully accept it; and for his sake God has promised that all his chosen people shall be willing thus to accept it, in the day of his power. The way into heaven, the holiest of all, is now laid open; every bar which once closed it, is removed; a flood of light shines around us, to discover it to our view. The blood of Christ has taken away those mountains of guilt which once interposed between us and God, and cleanses penitent believers from all sin; his Spirit sanctifies our polluted natures, and delivers us from the slavery of the world, the flesh, and the devil; prepares us for admission to heaven, and guides, supports, and comforts us in our journey thither, through this vale of tears. In a word, the empire of Satan is subdued, the power of sin is destroyed, the sting of death is taken away; the bars of the grave are broken; life and immortality are brought to light; the flaming sword is quenched, God is reconciled; the eternal doors of heaven are thrown open, that which was lost is saved, the world is redeemed, and man is happy and free; happy that is, if he knows his own happiness and embraces the Saviour and the salvation thus freely offered; otherwise lost, more fatally, hopelessly lost, than ever. I close with a few reflections.

1. From our subject we infer that the word of God is of all books the most interesting, and would be so, even if we had no personal concern with its contents. Other books, even the most interesting, contain only accounts of human wars, terrestrial enterprises, and expeditions for the conquest or deliverance of nations, and the struggles of the oppressed for liberty, or of the daring exploits, and perilous achievements, and hairbreadth escapes of the falsely brave. But the Bible, independently

of many other most interesting subjects, gives us an account of a war between good and evil, between God and the powers of darkness; of an expedition undertaken for the deliverance of a ruined, lost, enslaved world, an expedition planned in heaven; devised in the remote ages of eternity, and finally accomplished in the most successful manner by the eternal Son of God. In this war, we behold sin and Satan, and death and hell, with all the power of earth, marshaled on one side; and on the other, the seed of the woman, the Son of man, going forth unarmed and alone to certain victory, and not less certain death; to victory which could be obtained only by his death; but which was completed by his triumphant resurrection and ascension to heaven. As the prize contended for in this warfare, we see millions of immortal souls, the least of which is of far more value than this world, with the worlds around it; souls whom the Son of man is seeking to raise to heaven, while his foes wish only to sink them deep in hell. Such is the war which the word of God describes, such the combatants, such the spoils of victory. How much more interesting this, than all that human histories relate. How still more interesting when we recollect that we were the cause of this war, the prize for which such combatants contended. Why then do we peruse this volume with so little interest? One reason only can be assigned. We do not believe it.

2. How glorious, how amiable, how interesting does the Captain of our salvation appear in the light of our subject! You would contemplate with eager interest and admiration, a monarch who, reigning in perfect peace and prosperity over a country extensive as his wishes, should go forth and jeopardize his life in the high places of the field, merely with the benevolent purpose of delivering an enslaved people from oppression. You would follow him to the field of battle, tremble at his danger, sympathize with him if wounded, rejoice in his success, recount with pleasure his victories, and follow his triumphant return with praise. All this, and more than this, has taken place in our day with respect to a now living monarch in Europe. Thus has he been admired and praised by thousands. Why then do so few admire, praise, and love the Son of God. He was great and glorious, and happy in heaven to the utmost extent of his wishes, yet he cheerfully left it all to seek and to save a lost world, a world which was ruined, lost by ungratefully forsaking and rebelling against himself. Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor.

Though he was in the form of God, and equal with God, yet for our sakes he made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and suffered himself to be despised, rejected, spit upon, buffeted, and finally crucified by his own creatures, when with infinite ease he could have avoided it all. In a word, to redeem us from the curse of the law we had broken, he consented to be made a curse for us. Why then, we repeat the question, why is he so little admired, praised and beloved by those whom he died to save? Why do so few comparatively commemorate his dying love? Why is he not extolled as much above all other deliverers, as he really is above them? The same answer must be again returned; it is because men do not believe. To believe that he has actually done this, and not to love, admire, and extol him above all beings, is impossible. The apostle believed it, and we know to what efforts and sacrifices it impelled him. What then shall we say, my professing friends, we who profess to believe that he actually has done this. what shall we say, or rather what will be said of us, if we do not supremely love, admire, and praise the Saviour? May it not, must it not in that case, be said of us, that our faith is vain, since it does not produce love, and that, notwithstanding our profession, we are yet in our sins?

Lastly, did Christ come into our world to seek and to save lost sinners? Then it becomes us all most carefully to inquire, whether he has found and saved us. That he has found us, is evident, for

the voice of his gospel, the voice of this great Shepherd, even now sounds in our ears. But has he saved us? Have we felt constrained to obey his call? Surely, if he has saved us, if we have been made new creatures; if we have passed from death unto life, we cannot but know something of it. Say then, have you found Christ? The pearl of great price, have you found it? And as you answer these questions, remember how much is implied in being lost, and how ample the provision for your deliverance, since the Son of man is come to seek and to save you.

S. CHRISTS ASCENSION

CHRISTS ASCENSION

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said: Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" Acts 1:9-11

There are four events in the life of our Saviour, which are peculiarly interesting to all his real disciples. They are his birth, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension to heaven. It is to this last event that our attention is now called. The description given of it in St. Luke's gospel contains some additional particulars, which, though not mentioned in the passage before us, we shall notice in the prosecution of this discourse. We are there informed, that he lifted up his hands and blessed his disciples, and that while he blessed them he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. In meditating on this event, so interesting to all true Christians, and so suitable to the circumstances in which we meet, let us consider,

I. The ascension itself. That we may look at this scene aright, it is desirable to view it as it appeared to his disciples. In order to this, we must, by the aid of a lively imagination, and a strong faith, place ourselves as it were, in their circles, and look at it through their eyes. Finding them assembled in Jerusalem, their Master, for the last time, calls them to follow him. They obey, and he leads them out of the city, to the mount of olives. There, standing on an eminence, where they could all see him, he gives them his last instructions and his parting promises. Then lifting up his hands, he pronounces upon them a blessing, and while he pronounces it, they see him rise from the earth, self-moved, self-supported, and begin to ascend. Reclining as on the bosom of the air, he rises higher and higher, with a gentle, gradual motion, his countenance beaming compassion and love, still fixed on his disciples, and his hands extended still scattering blessings on them as he ascended. Now he rises above the groves by which they were surrounded; now he mounts to the middle region of the air; now he reaches the clouds, and still they see him. But there a cloudy vehicle receives him, conceals him from their eyes, and rises with him. With eager eyes they still follow the ascending cloud, as it mounts toward the skies, lessening to their sight, till it becomes only a small speck, and at length wholly disappears, far away in the ethereal regions. But though their eyes could follow him no farther, we need not stop here. Borrowing the glass of revelation we may see him still ascending, reaching, and entering the wide, unfolded gates of heaven, sitting down at the right hand of the throne of God, far above all principalities and powers and might and dominion, and every name which is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come; and there receiving the sceptre of universal empire, and exercising all power in heaven and on earth. Assisted by revelation, faith may also see the employments in which our ascended Saviour is engaged. She may see him appearing in the presence of the Father, as the Advocate of his people, and continuing to make intercession for all that come unto God by him. She may see him

entering with his own blood into the heavenly temple and there presenting a full atonement for the sins of all who believe in him. She may see him receiving gifts for men, and sending down those gifts to the successive generations of mankind. Finally, she may see him fulfilling his dying declaration to his disciples: In my Father's house are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you.

Such were the purposes for which Christ ascended to heaven, such the employment in which he is now engaged, and in which those of us who are heirs of salvation shall find him engaged when we enter the mansions above. But leaving for the present the contemplation of these objects, let us return and consider,

II. The manner in which his disciples were affected by this event. We may well suppose that on such an occasion, they would feel strange and various emotions. Their surprise and wonder would be raised to the utmost by so strange and unexpected a spectacle; their faith in the divine mission of their Master must have been greatly strengthened. They could not but rejoice to see him thus honored and exalted; yet their joy must have been mingled with sorrow, when they saw one whom they so much loved, whom they had followed so long, and on whom they entirely depended, suddenly taken from them, and leaving them alone in a world like this. Under the influence of these and other powerful emotions, they stood gazing upwards, with their eyes fixed on that part of the sky where they last saw him, as if they were determined never to withdraw them, as if, after witnessing such a spectacle, there was nothing below the skies worthy of notice. Indeed, every thing earthly must have appeared very small and contemptible, to those who had just witnessed such a sight. A vision of Christ thus entering into his glory, stained all human glory, and they probably could not refrain from earnestly desiring to follow him to that happy world whither they had seen him ascend. But this they could not as yet be permitted to do. He had told them that they could not follow him then, but that they should follow him afterward. Before that time could arrive, they had many important duties to perform; and to these duties it was necessary that their attention should now be directed. Accordingly their ascended Master, who still saw them, though they saw not him, took measures for this purpose. While they were still gazing intently upon the heavens, their number was suddenly increased by two persons who in form, countenance, and language; appeared to be men, but whose white and shining apparel declared them to be angels. But this leads us to consider,

III. The message delivered to them by these heavenly messengers. Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye here gazing up into heaven? This language seems intended to convey a gentle reproof. It was as if the angels had said, Have you not other employment assigned you by that Master whom you earnestly follow with your eyes? Have you forgotten the commission and instructions which he gave you before his ascension? Have you forgotten that you are his witnesses, and that you are to proclaim to all nations what you have heard and seen? The time of inactive contemplation is passed, and the hour for action is arrived. Besides, you are henceforth to walk not by sight, but by faith. Though you have known Christ after the flesh, yet in this manner you will know him no more. You are now to endure as seeing him who is invisible, to be guided, animated and supported by that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. That something like this was the import of their address, seems probable from what follows. This same Jesus whom ye have seen go into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven; shall come, as he informed you, in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory

to judge the world. This was, in fact, reminding them that it must henceforth be their great business, not to stand gazing after their ascended Master, but to prepare themselves, and warn others to prepare, for his coming to judgment. Let us now attend,

IV. To the conduct of the disciples after witnessing this event, and hearing this angelic message. In the first place, they worshipped him. We do not read that they worshipped the angels. Bright and glorious as these spirits were, they knew that it would be vain and idolatrous to worship them; nor would the angels have permitted it; for when John, some years after this, fell down at the feet of an angel, he rebuked him, saying, See thou do it not. But though they could not worship angels, they worshipped their ascended Master; for they believed that though they could no longer see him, he still saw them; nor did any voice from heaven, nor did the angels themselves charge them with idolatry, or forbid them to worship him. Indeed, who could, who can blame them for worshipping one whom they had just seen ascending by his own power from earth to heaven? In the second place, they spent much of their time in the public worship of Jehovah. They were daily, St. Luke informs us, in the temple, praising and blessing God. This was while they waited for the effusion of the Holy Spirit from on high. Their Master had commanded them to wait at Jerusalem, until he should send down upon them this promised blessing, and they punctually obeyed his commands. In the third place, while they spent much time in public worship, they spent still more time in private, social prayer. We are informed that, as soon as they returned from the Mount of Olives, all assembled in an upper room, and there continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. This earnestness and union in prayer seems to have been occasioned by what they had just seen. And well might what they had seen produce such an effect. They had seen their Master, whom they knew to be most powerful, generous, and kind, and who had said, whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it, go alive into heaven. They knew, therefore, that they had in heaven a most powerful and affectionate Advocate to procure an answer to their prayers; they did, as it were, still see his hand extended to dispense blessings, and still hear him say, Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. No wonder, then, that after returning from such a sight, they were fervent, constant, and united in prayer. No wonder that they persevered in such prayer for many days successively, until the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit descended on them like a rushing, mighty wind, and they experienced the truth of their Master's parting words, It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not sway, the Comforter will not come; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

Having thus briefly considered our Saviour's ascension with its attending circumstances and effects, let us next inquire what we may learn from it.

First: We may perhaps learn from it whether we do, or do not really believe the Scriptures. In order to ascertain this, let me ask each of you whether you really believe that the events which we have been considering actually occurred? do you really believe, that a person who appeared to be only a man, but who called himself the Son of God, was seen alive for forty days successively, after he had been put to death as a malefactor? that at the expiration of this time, he was seen in open day; by a competent number of witnesses, to rise from the earth, and without any visible effort or means of support, to ascend till he reached the region of clouds; and that there a cloud received him and concealed him from the eyes of beholders? Do you really believe that while these beholders were still gazing after him, two angels appeared to them in a human form and said, This same Jesus, whom ye have seen go into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven? Do you believe that these events actually took place in the world which we

inhabit, and that they were seen by human beings like ourselves? If you do not believe this, if it appears to you more like a tale, a fiction, or a dream, than a reality, you do not believe the Bible. Or if it appears to you like an event which took place in some other world than this, or among a different race of beings from ourselves, you do not believe the Bible. But perhaps you will say, we do believe that all these things actually took place in our world. Then surely you regard them as most interesting and important events; you read the book which contains them, and other wonderful facts, with deep interest, and you are affected by its contents, as you are affected by other important truths which you really believe. If not, you do not believe the Scriptures, whatever you may profess. Your understandings, perhaps, assent to these truths, but in your hearts you do not believe them. These remarks, however; are too general. We must be more particular, and our text enables us to be so, for we may learn from it,

Secondly: In what manner those who really believe in Christ's ascension to heaven, and its attending circumstances, will be affected by it. It is, I presume, universally acknowledged, that facts and events which we really believe, affect us in nearly the same manner, though not in the same degree, as if we saw them. For instance, if we really believe that a parent or child, a husband or any other dear friend, has died in a distant place, it will affect us almost, though not, perhaps, quite so much, as if we actually saw him die. If, then, we really believe the events which have been described, we shall be affected in some measure as if we had seen them. How they were affected, you have just heard. They worshipped Christ. If, then, we actually believe that he ascended to heaven, there to reign till his second coming, we shall worship Him, that is, we shall address to him prayers and thanksgivings. They spent much time in the temple blessing and praising God. If we believe what the gospel relates of Jesus Christ, we shall do the same; for surely we cannot refrain from often praising God for providing such an Advocate and Intercessor for us, in heaven.

Again: Those who witnessed our Saviour's ascension, were excited to fervent, united, and persevering prayer. And surely, if we really believe that Jesus Christ has actually ascended into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for all who call on his name, to obtain blessings for them, and to prepare a place for their reception when they leave this world, we shall be led to call on his name with frequency and fervency, and to unite with his praying people. Such are some of the effects which will result from a real belief of the events which have been described. If, then, these effects are not produced upon you, my hearers, it will prove that you do not believe the volume in which they are recorded. And if you, my professing hearers, who are assembled to commemorate the Lord Jesus Christ, have faith in present lively exercise, you will be affected in some measure as you would have been had you witnessed the events which have been described. They will be presented to your minds and hearts in the vivid colors of truth and reality; this house will appear to you like the Mount of Olives, and you will almost see the Saviour, the symbols of whose body and blood are before you, rise from that table as from the grave, and re-ascend his native heaven. God grant you all faith to see this. You will then go from this house, saying to yourselves and to each other, we have seen strange things today. But this is not all. If you believe that two angels really appeared to the disciples, and foretold the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, then, of course, you must believe that he certainly will come, come as he declared, to judge the world; for those heavenly messengers would not assert a falsehood. And if it was a most wonderful and surprising thing to see him ascend alone to heaven in the form

of a man, what a sight it will be to see him descending from heaven in the form of God, shining resplendent in all his Father's glories, and surrounded by thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand angels and arch angels, while at his summons all the dead arise and stand before him in judgment. This will be a spectacle indeed, such a spectacle as the world never saw. But if the Bible is true, we shall all actually see this spectacle, for its language is, Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him. And if you believe the Bible, then you believe that you will see it, believe that you will be actors in it, believe that you, as individuals, will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and receive your doom from his lips. And do you believe this? Are you living as if you believed it? If you do believe it, you are surely making it your great, your chief concern to be prepared for Christ's second coming, prepared to meet your Judge in peace. And is this your great concern? Are you living like accountable creatures, who expect to be tried by the Word of God, and to be rewarded according to your works? If not, where is your faith, and what is your belief in the Bible? Nothing but a dream, nothing but a cold, barren faith, which being without works is dead. And if God has clearly revealed truths which are thus calculated to affect you, and the only reason why they do not affect you, is that you do not believe them, then surely you are without excuse. To conclude: subjects like those we have been considering, may be of admirable service to every Christian, if he knows how to use them aright. You are all aware, my brethren, that this world is your great enemy, that worldly-mindedness is in some form or other your besetting sin. You are also aware that this world has many scenes and objects which to our misjudging minds appear splendid, many which appear imposing, many which appear attractive and interesting. By these scenes and objects your passions are often excited, your affections entangled, your minds thrown into a feverish state, which is exceedingly unfriendly to progress in religion. The great question is, how shall the pernicious influence of these worldly scenes and objects be counteracted? I answer, the world to come, the unseen, spiritual and eternal world, has scenes incomparably more grand, more imposing, more interesting than any which this world can exhibit. All that is wanting then, is to bring them clearly before the mind.

Let 'it be a part of your daily employment to do this. Enter your closet, open the Scriptures, and fix on some one of the many interesting objects which they reveal; the translation of Elijah for instance, or our Saviour's transfiguration, or his death, or his resurrection, or his ascension to heaven, or his second coming. Fix the eye of your mind attentively on the object selected; spread it before you with all its attending circumstances; call in the aid of imagination, or that power which forms images of absent, or invisible things; pray for faith, and continue to meditate, if possible, till you obtain some clear, realizing apprehension of the scene before you, or till your hearts are suitably affected by it. Then when the mind is filled and the heart occupied by such an object, you may, relying on the divine protection, venture out into the world, and all its wealth, its pomp and its pleasures will appear contemptible indeed, compared with the scenes which you have been contemplating. In this way, and in this alone, can you maintain a successful combat with the world, and finally obtain a decided victory over it; for until your minds are preoccupied by spiritual objects, the world will find them empty and rush in upon them like a flood. Let me beseech those of you who have not already done it, to make trial of this method during the month on which you have now entered. Be not discouraged, should your first attempts prove unsuccessful; but persevere, and instead of faintly remembering Christ at his table only, you will remember him almost constantly; you will feel in some measure as the apostles did, when they returned from witnessing his ascension; and fortified by the powers of the world to come, you will be enabled to tread the

present world under your feet.

Chapter 20

S. CHRISTS LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

CHRISTS LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

"Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" Ephesians 5:25-27 In his epistles to the Corinthians, St. Paul informs us that he determined to know or make known, nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. Did he then intend so to confine himself to the doctrines of the cross, as to say nothing, in his preaching, of moral duties? By no means. All his epistles prove that he did not. But he intended to illustrate and enforce moral duties in an evangelical manner, by motives and illustrations derived from the cross of Christ. A striking instance of this we have in the context, in which he explains and inculcates the duties of husbands and wives. We should be ready, at first view, to imagine that these duties have nothing to do with the doctrines of the gospel, and that they must be enforced by considerations derived from some other quarter. But the Apostle shows us that this would be a mistake. By alluding to the union between Christ and his church, he illustrates and enforces the duties of the married state in the most clear and striking manner possible. Wives, says he, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord: for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church. Therefore, as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be subject to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Thus, you see, that even while inculcating the duties resulting from the married state, the Apostle still adhered to his determination to preach nothing but Christ and him crucified. In the passage thus introduced we have four things which deserve our attention I. The object of Christ’s love; the CHURCH.

II. The proof of his love; he gave himself for it.

III. The design of his love; that he might sanctify, cleanse and present it to himself a glorious and spotless church.

IV. The means by which he effects this; the washing of water and the word. A few reflections on these several particulars, will compose the following discourse.

I. Let us consider the object of Christ’s love; the church. By the church here, you are doubtless sensible is not meant any particular church, as the church at Rome, at Corinth or Ephesus, but the church universal. You are also probably aware that the church universal which Christ loved, and for which he died, does not include all the members of his visible church, who are united to him by an external profession; for the Scriptures clearly teach, and melancholy experience incontestibly proves, that many of these are insincere, and either willfully deceive others, or are deceived themselves. It is therefore the real, invisible church which is here intended, including all who ever

have believed, or who ever will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with a true and living faith; all, in a word, who were given to him by his Father in the covenant of redemption. In this covenant God promised his Son, that if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he should have a seed, and a people to serve him, and that this people should be made willing to serve him in the day of his power. Of these persons Christ speaks, when he says, all that the Father hath given me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out. To these also he refers in his last prayer: I have manifested thy name to them which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were and thou gavest them me. I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine. Neither pray I for these alone, but for all them also, who shall believe on me through their word. From these passages it appears, that the church, which was given to Christ, the church which he loves and for which he prays, includes all who did then believe, and all who should afterwards believe on him to the end of time. If any doubt this, and allege that Christ loves and prays for none till they actually become members of his visible church, we would refer them to the tenth chapter of John. We there find Christ saying, I am the good Shepherd, and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, who are not of this fold. Them also I must bring; and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; or in other words, one church and one head.

Here Christ evidently speaks of some of his sheep, who had not yet been brought into his fold, or visible church; and at the same time predicts that they shall be brought in, in due time. He does not therefore love persons, because they are members of his church; but they become members of his church, because he first loved them as given to him by his Father. Agreeably we find him saying to his disciples, Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you. And again he says to them, As the Father hath loved me, even so have I loved you. But he elsewhere tells us, that his Father loved him before the foundation of the world. If then he loves his disciples, even as the Father loves him, he must have loved them before the foundation of the world; and he may justly say to all his real disciples, as he does to his ancient church, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee. And as this love of God to his Son is sincere, ardent, constant and unchangeable, such must be the love of Christ to his church. This leads us to consider, as was proposed,

II. The proof of Christ’s love to his church; He gave himself for it. Observe what he gave; not merely his time, not his exertions, not his perfections, but himself, his whole self, without the least reserve. Such was the greatness, the intensity of his love for his church, that he devoted to it his body, his soul, his blood, his very life, to be disposed of as its welfare required, Observe too, to what he gave himself. He gave himself up to disgrace and ignominy. Though he was in the form of God and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, yet he humbled and made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and suffered himself to be despised and rejected of men. He gave himself up to the most abject poverty: Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich. He gave himself up to sorrow, suffering, shame and reproach. All they that see me, says he, laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, he trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness.

I looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheek to them that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting. Behold and see, all ye that pass by, if there be any sorrow like my sorrow. He was indeed a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He gave himself up into the hands of his bitterest and most implacable enemies. This is above all things disagreeable and hateful to nature. Few things can be conceived of more abhorrent to our feelings, than to be delivered into the power of raging, insulting, blood-thirsty foes, who will exhaust all the arts of cruelty in tormenting us, and mock our dying agonies with scoffs, revilings, and the exclamations of savage triumph. What, my friends, could induce you to throw yourselves into a dark and loathsome pit, filled with deadly serpents, scorpions, and other poisonous and disgusting reptiles, all brandishing their envenomed stings, and eager to devour you? Yet this world, into which the Son of God voluntarily descended for our sakes, was far more hateful, dreadful, and loathsome to his holy nature, than such a pit would be to us; and the poisonous rage of serpents and scorpions, is far inferior in malignity and in the sufferings which it can inflict, to that rancorous enmity which exists in the hearts of sinners, to which Christ gave himself up. Nor was this all. He also gave himself up to the powers of darkness, who harassed and tormented his mind, incomparably worse than men could his body. The prince of this world, said he, cometh. He saw him approaching; approaching to fill his soul with unutterable anguish, and fulfil the prediction that he should bruise Christ's heel, that is his human nature. We see in the case of Job what the powers of darkness can do, and how unspeakably they can torture and distract the soul, even while controlled by divine power. What then must Christ have suffered from them, when they were permitted without restraint, to exert all their rage and cruelty to destroy him, if possible; and if not, to increase to the utmost his wretchedness. Yet to this Christ gave himself up for his church. But the proofs of his love do not end here. He also gave himself up to the wrath of God; to the curse of his broken law. He surrendered himself up as a sinner into the hands of incensed justice; and while he thus stood in the sinner's place. God treated him as if he had been a sinner. He hid his face from him; set the terrors of his wrath in array against him, made him the mark of those arrows, the poison of which drinks up the spirits, and plunged the flaming sword deep in his inmost soul. In this, the very essence of his sufferings consisted. All that men and devils could do, he bore without a groan. But when the weight of divine wrath crushed him down, when his Father's face was hidden from his view; and he beheld him only in the character of an awful, holy, avenging God, as a consuming fire to sinful creatures, then his anguish could no longer be concealed, but burst forth in that heart-rending exclamation, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!

Such were the sufferings which Christ endured for the sake of his church; such the proofs of love which he has given it. And what proofs can be conceived of, more strong or satisfactory? We think it a proof of love to perform acts of kindness to others, when we can do it without much personal suffering or inconvenience. Should we redeem a friend from slavery at the expense of our whole fortune, we should expect that his gratitude for such a proof of affection, would cease but with his life. And should we sacrifice our life to preserve his, it would be acknowledged by all that we had given the strongest possible evidence of our love; for greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend. Yet all this would be nothing, and less than nothing in comparison with what Christ has done for his church; with what he has done, not for friends, but for rebels and enemies. Well then may he commend the greatness of his love, in that while we were enemies, he died for us,-died such a death as no one ever suffered or can suffer. I am

aware, however, that we are prone to evade these proofs of his love, by imagining that pain,, shame, and death, were not so terrible to Christ, as they are to us. But this is a gross mistake. He had the same natural aversion to these evils, the same unwillingness to suffer them, which we have; and nothing but love, the most ardent and intense, could have conquered this unwillingness, and led him, patient and resigned as a lamb, to the slaughter. We proceed now to consider,

III. His design in thus giving himself for his church. It was to sanctify, cleanse, and present it to himself a glorious and spotless church, without the least moral defilement.

You need not be told that love naturally desires the society of the object beloved. Since then Christ loves his church, he cannot but desire that it should be with him where he is; and agreeably, we find him in his last prayer soliciting this favor of his Father. But before his church can reside with him in heaven, it is necessary that it should be prepared for those holy mansions; for we are told that nothing which defileth can enter there, and every member of his church is originally defiled by the pollutions of sin. He himself compares it, in its natural state, to a naked, polluted, helpless infant, cast out to perish in its blood. Such was the state in which he foresaw his church, when it first became the object of his love; and from this state, it was the design of his sufferings and death to raise it. It is styled his body, his members, and he intends that this body shall be like the head, perfectly holy, harmless, and undefiled. It is also styled his bride, his consort, his spouse; and he intends that his bride shall be made worthy of such a husband. Every member of his church must therefore be perfectly freed from all corporeal weaknesses and infirmities; from all spiritual blemishes and imperfections. Their bodies must be changed, and made like unto his glorious body, and their spirits rendered perfect, even as their Father in heaven is perfect. The work by which this glorious transformation is to be effected, is already begun in the hearts of all who believe, and will in due time be fully accomplished. And the same work will commence, and be carried on to perfection in the hearts of all who shall believe on him hereafter. And when his mystical body is complete, when every member of it is brought into his church, then the Lord of the world will come. Then Christ will appear in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The bodies of his people will be raised incorruptible and immortal, and be caught up by angels to meet their Lord in the air; where the whole multitude of the redeemed will be presented to him as a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, and perfectly prepared to accompany their Redeemer to heaven, and there live and reign with him forever and ever. Then will the design for which he gave himself up to poverty, pain, shame and death, be fully accomplished, and he will see the glorious fruits of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. This leads us to consider, as was proposed,

IV. The means by which Christ accomplishes this great work. The apostle in our text mentions two, the washing of water, and the word. What is here called the washing of water, is in another passage styled the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. That the influences of the Holy Spirit are very frequently compared to water, you need not be told; and the reason of this comparison is, that as water cleanses the body from pollution, so the Holy Spirit purifies the soul from the defilement of sin. By the washing of water, iii our text, is therefore intended the purifying influences of the Holy Spirit, by which every real member of the church of Christ is renewed in the spirit of his mind, and sanctified or cleansed from moral pollution. Agreeably the apostle writes to the members of the Corinthian church, Ye are washed, ye are justified ye are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

These sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit Christ procured for his church, by his sufferings and death. When he ascended on high, leading captivity captive, he received gifts for men, and of these gifts the Holy Spirit was the principal. This gift he is constantly pouring out upon his church in showers of divine grace, to sanctify and cleanse it, agreeably to his promise in the thirty-sixth chapter of Ezekiel: Then wili I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. The instrumental means by which this great work is effected, is the word of God. His church are sanctified and cleansed faith the Spirit, but by the word; for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. This word is the grand instrument by which the Spirit of God awakens the future members of Christ's church, from spiritual slumber, convinces them of their naturally sinful and miserable condition, and creates them anew, or regenerates them to a new life. Hence they are said to be born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. The work of sanctification, thus begun by the instrumentality of the word, is carried on to perfection by means of the same word; agreeably to our Saviour's petition to his Father, Sanctify them through thy truth. The subject we have been considering is full of consolation to the church of Christ; but we cannot partake of this consolation, unless we have a well-grounded hope that we are real members of his church. We may be members of his visible church, and yet have no connection with his real church: and some present may be members of his real church whose doubts respecting their own character have hitherto prevented them from uniting with his visible church. Let its then improve this subject,

1. For self-examination, that we may ascertain whether we truly belong to the church of Christ or not. You have already been reminded, that Christ gave himself for his church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it from all pollution. If, then, you are real members of his church, he has already begun this glorious work in your hearts. He has awakened you from your slumbers, convinced you that you are guilty, miserable sinners, wholly polluted by the defilements of sin, entirely unfit to enter heaven, and justly exposed to everlasting condemnation, without any possibility of escaping it by your own merits. He has also renewed you in the spirit of your' minds, caused you to hate, loathe, and repent of your sins, to embrace him as your only Saviour by a living faith, and to long, and pray, and strive after universal holiness. In one word, he has made you new creatures; for if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Now if this great change has been effected in your hearts, you are real members of the church of Christ, whether you belong to his visible church or not; and if you do not, you may, and you ought to unite yourself to it without delay; for Christ loves and has given himself for you. Hence,

2. Those who have reason to hope that they belong to the real church of Christ, may improve this subject for their encouragement and consolation. To all such it does indeed afford abundant cause for rejoicing. You may each one of you say, with confidence, Christ loves me. Yes, the Son of God, the Creator of the world, the brightness of his Father's glory, the chief among ten thousand in whom dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily, condescends to love me, a poor sinful worm of the dust; loves me better than I love my parents, better than I love my children, better than I love brother or sister or friend; nay, better than I love myself; loves me with a love stronger than death and lasting as eternity. He not only loves me, but has given himself for me; has died that I may live; live forever with him in heaven. And is not this cause of rejoicing? If the most amiable and excellent of the human race would become your friend and companion, would you not rejoice?

If this most amiable and excellent friend was also a powerful monarch, able to defend, enrich, and load you with honors, would you not rejoice still more. How then ought the Christian to rejoice in the love of Him who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, who is the perfection of uncreated excellence, glory, and beauty; whose love knows no bounds, no interruption, intermission or end; who possesses unerring wisdom to guide, and omnipotent power to defend them. Surely, my Christian hearers, if you will not rejoice in the love of such a friend, you can rejoice in nothing. Well may the apostle call upon yon to rejoice in the Lord, to rejoice in the Lord always, to rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. What if you are poor? In possessing such a Friend, you possess all things. What if you have no other friends! Is not such a Friend enough to satisfy you? Is he not worthy of all your affection, and will he not more than return it? Rejoice then in your eternal, almighty, unchangeable Friend, and begin now to sing the song of the redeemed, exclaiming, Now unto him that was slain, that loved us, and gave himself for us, and redeemed us to God by his blood, be ascribed riches, and honor and glory, and power and blessing.

3. While you thus rejoice in Christ's love, endeavor to return it. Strive to love with your whole hearts him who first loved you. Give your whole selves to him who has already given himself for you. Remember that you are no longer your own, for you are bought with a price. Glorify him then in your souls and bodies which are his; and let his love constrain you to live for him who died for you. Surely, if his love does not constrain you thus to live, it must be because you do not realize it. Surely, you cannot refuse to love and live to him, who is so infinitely lovely, and who loves you with such an intense and unalterable affection, notwithstanding all your unworthiness, His language to you is, as my Father hath loved me, even so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. I have not called you servants, but friends, and then are ye my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. O then, love, love and praise with all your powers this infinitely gracious, condescending and affectionate friend, who declares that though mothers should forget and cease to love their infants, he will not forget or cease to love his church. Let our love to him be equally unchanging. Though parents should forget their children, and children cease to love their parents; though the titles of brother and sister, husband and wife, should cease to excite affection; though every other tie should be dissolved, and all other love banished from the earth, yet never let the church cease given himself for it.

4. While you have this friend, be careful to trust in his love, to confide in him unreservedly without the least anxiety, doubt or suspicion. You well know that nothing grieves us more than the jealousies and suspicions of our friends, that we do not love them. Beware then that you do not grieve this best of friends, by indulging them. He surely has a right to be believed, when he professes to love his people, since he has already given them such strong and infallible proofs of his affection. His promises and assurances come to us sealed with his own life-blood; and if he loved us and gave himself for us while we were yet enemies, how shall he not also with himself freely give us all things. We appeal to yourselves, would he who has freely given you his blood, his life; he who has suffered so much for your sakes; would he deny you more wealth, more friends, more temporal comforts, if he saw that they would prove really beneficial! Would he ever afflict you, if it were not absolutely to love him who has loved and necessary for your good? To die for you, cost him much; to give you mere temporal blessings would cost him nothing. Since then he has done the former, can he be unwilling to do the latter? If his love has led him to do that which was most difficult, will it not lead him to do what is most easy? And has he not promised that he

will withhold from you no good thing? that he will cause all things to work together for your good? that he will never leave you nor forsake you? Why then, oh ye of little faith, why do ye doubt? Why do you distress yourselves and grieve him by needless anxieties respecting what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, or how you shall be carried through the trials and difficulties which are before you in your way to heaven? Banish, I beseech you, all your groundless fears and anxieties. Cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you; and while you love and praise him for all that is past, so trust him for all that is to come.

5. Did Christ give himself for the church with a view to render it perfectly holy, without any blemish or imperfection? How strong then are our obligations, and how great our encouragement, to aim at universal holiness. What, oh Christian, do you above all things desire? Is it not to be holy as Christ is holy, and to be with him where he is? And does not he ardently desire the same? Did he not give himself for you for this very purpose, that he might sanctify, cleanse, and present you to himself, perfectly glorious and holy? And will he fail of accomplishing his purpose? No; as certainly as Christ has died, so certainly shall every real member of his church, every one who truly hates and mourns for sin, be presented to him at last, freed from every spot and blemish. Arise, then, ye who are weak, wounded, and desponding, and renew the conflict with sin. While endeavoring to subdue it, you are fighting the battles of Christ; you are engaged in a cause which is dear to him; you are contending with his enemies, as well as yours; he has determined that they must and shall be conquered. Fight then courageously a short time longer, and the victory shall be certainly yours. The object of Christ's death must not, shall not, cannot be frustrated; but every member of his real church shall be made perfectly like him, and see him as he is. Soon will the blessed day arrive, when he will present to himself the whole church of his redeemed, as a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. In this number you will then be found, and sit down with him forever at his marriage supper in heaven. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, comfort and encourage one another in your Christian warfare with these words.

Lastly, Does Christ thus love his church? How desirable then is it, my impenitent hearers, that you should become members of it, and thus share in his love. Mistake me not, however. We wish not to induce you to make a hypocritical profession; for this would not render you members of his church. But we wish you to unite yourselves to his real church; to join yourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. Till you do this, you have no right to hope for a share in the blessings which Christ has purchased; but having done this, you shall finally become members of the church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and be partakers of the glory that shall be there revealed.

S. CHRISTS PRIESTLY OFFICE

CHRISTS PRIESTLY OFFICE

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum; We have such au High Priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer" Hebrews 8:1-3 As apostle informs us, that the Levitical law, with its tabernacle, its priesthood, its altars, and its sacrifices, was a shadow of good things to come; but that the body, or substance of which they were a shadow, was Christ. In other words, they resembled Christ, just as a shadow resembles the body which projects it. They exhibited a kind of outline of his person, character, offices and work. This truth is stated and illustrated at considerable length in the preceding chapters. In our text the apostle gives a brief summary of his statements respecting it: Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary; and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is necessary that this man have somewhat also to offer. That we may understand the import of this passage; it is necessary to recollect, that the three principal things under the Mosaic dispensation. were the tabernacle, the priests, and the sacrifices. On these every thing else depended. Take away these and nothing valuable was left. Now in our text the apostle intimates, that each of these three things was a type of Christ; or that he is to his people, under the Christian dispensation, what the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrifices were to the Jews. He is our tabernacle, our high priest, and our atoning sacrifice. Each of these assertions we propose to illustrate.

1. Jesus Christ is the Christian’s tabernacle, or he is to his people, what the tabernacle was to the Jews. The true tabernacle, of which the apostle here speaks, and which he informs us the Lord pitched, and not man, was the body, or human nature of Christ. The Jewish tabernacle, was pitched by men. But the body of Christ was prepared by God. He says himself to his Father, A body hast thou prepared me. And he said to the Jews, during his residence on earth; Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again. But, adds the inspired penman, he spoke of the temple of his body. Now the temple, as you are doubtless aware, was of the same nature, and designed to answer the same purposes as the tabernacle, and differed from it only in being more permanent and substantial. Calling his body the temple, was therefore the same as calling it the tabernacle. By calling his body, the true tabernacle, the apostle intimates that the Jewish tabernacle was not the true one, but only a shadow or type of it. That he gives it this appellation with perfect propriety, a moment’s reflection will convince us. The Jewish tabernacle was the only place on earth where God dwelt in a peculiar manner; the only place where he was accessible; the only place where he could be found; the only place where he could be approached on a mercy-seat; the only place where he answered the inquiries of his worshippers; the only place where offerings could be acceptably presented him. Hence the pious Jews, whenever they prayed,

turned their faces towards the tabernacle, and afterwards towards the temple; and they addressed their, prayers to Jehovah, as to him that dwelt between the cherubim, that is the cherubim which overshadowed the mercy-seat in the most holy place.

Now in all these respects the tabernacle was a type of Christ. In all these respects, his body or human nature is the true tabernacle. In him alone God dwells: for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. God can be found, he can be approached acceptably, nowhere else; for through Jesus Christ, says an apostle, we have access to the Father, and in him alone are we accepted. As the tabernacle was the appointed meeting-place between God and the Jews, so Jesus Christ is the appointed meeting-place between God and sinners now. As the mercy-seat was in the tabernacle, so, an apostle informs us, Christ is set forth or exhibited as a mercy-seat through faith in his blood. They, and they only who come to God in Christ, will find him on a mercy-seat, or, in other words, find him ready to show mercy.

There is salvation, says an apostle, and of course there is mercy, in no other. And as from the tabernacle, God communicated his will, so he now communicates it through Jesus Christ. He is the only true light. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and through him alone are they dispensed to mortals. As the Jews, when they prayed, turned their faces towards the tabernacle, so we are directed to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, looking to him by faith; and as Jehovah was then addressed, as one who dwelt between the Cherubim, so he is now to be addressed as the God who dwells in Christ. In fine, the substance of the gospel is, that God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. Well then may Jesus Christ, or his human nature, be called the true tabernacle.

2. Jesus Christ is the Christian's High Priest; or he is all that to his people which the Levitical priests were to the Jews. This is repeated again and again in the epistle before us. Now the office of the Jewish high priest is thus described by the apostle: Every high priest is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sin. Accordingly we find that this service was assigned exclusively to the Jewish priests. They were, in an inferior sense, a kind of mediator between God and his worshippers. They only were allowed to approach him, and to offer up sacrifices. No other man, however holy or highly exalted, not even the most pious of the Jewish kings, was allowed to offer his own sacrifice, or to enter the sanctuary. Uzziah, in other respects a most exemplary monarch, was struck with leprosy, for only attempting to do it. Especially was it the work of the high priest to make an atonement for the sins of the nation once in a year, by offering up a sacrifice and carrying the blood into the most holy place, and there sprinkling it before God. And not only the sin offerings, but all other offerings, were to be made by the priest alone. If one who had received any providential mercies brought a thank-offering to God, he was on no pretence allowed to present it himself, but the priest received it at his hand, carried it into the sanctuary and there presented it before the mercy-seat; to him who dwelt upon it. In all these respects, the Jewish priests were most strikingly types of Christ, and he is, as the apostle styles him, the great High Priest of our profession. He is the one great Mediator between God and sinful men, and there is no access to God, either for our persons, our services, or our prayers, but through him, nor can they be accepted unless offered up by him. I, says he, am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me. Hence an apostle informs us, that the spiritual sacrifices which Christians offer up, are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ; and another apostle exhorts us, whatever we do, in word, or deed, to do all in the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ, giving thanks to the Father by him. It is also his work and prerogative alone to make atonement for sin. The Jewish high priest made a typical atonement for the sins of the Jews only; but Christ, says an apostle, is a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. And as the Jewish high priest, after offering a sacrifice for atonement, went into the most holy place, in behalf of the nation, and as their representative, so Christ, as the apostle informs us, has entered, not into holy places made with hands, but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for his people. And as at the hour of prayer the Jewish high priest offered up incense in the sanctuary, while the people stood praying without, that their prayers, and the smoke of the incense, might ascend together, so St. John in vision, saw Christ as the great angel of the New Covenant, offering up the prayers of all saints with much incense. It is owing to his merits and intercession alone, that the prayers of his people are accepted and answered; and he ever liveth to make intercession for them. The word "such" in our text refers to a previous description of what was necessary to qualify one for the office or work of our high priest. Such a high priest, says the apostle in the context, became us, or was necessary for us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. And such a high priest we have, one who is perfectly holy in heart, harmless in his conduct, and undefiled or unspotted by the pollutions of the world, and who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty on high. It appears, then, that every service which the Levitical priests typically performed for the Jews, Jesus Christ really performs for his people. Well then may he be styled and regarded as our great High Priest.

3. Jesus Christ is the true sacrifice of which the Jewish sacrifices were only types. This is intimated in that clause of our text which says, it was necessary that he also should have somewhat to offer. What he had to offer, what he did offer, we are informed in the context, as well as in many other places. He offered up himself, his body his blood, his life. He was, says an apostle, sacrificed, or offered up as a sacrifice, for us. On the nature and design of the Levitical sacrifices, and the benefits which the Jews derived from them, we have often dwelt, and with them you are, we presume, acquainted. You are aware, that as the apostle remarks, all things were under the law purified with blood, the blood of the sacrifices, and that without shedding of blood, there was no remission of sin. If an Israelite was betrayed into any sin in consequence of which his life was forfeited to the divine law, he was permitted to bring a lamb as a substitute to die in his stead; and if he brought it in the exercise of repentance and faith, to be offered up by the priests, it was accepted, he was forgiven, and his life spared. And it was by carrying the blood of the sacrifice into the holy place, and then sprinkling it before God, that atonement was invariably made for the sins of the nation. These sacrifices were however only typical; they had no efficacy in themselves to atone for sin.

They owed all their efficacy to their reference or relation to the great, meritorious, and efficacious sacrifice which was made by Christ, when he offered up himself on the cross. By this offering, he made a real, and not a typical atonement for sin. In consequence of this offering, every penitent believer, is freely and fully forgiven. He is justified by the blood of the Lord Jesus. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. And as the blood of the sacrifice was presented and sprinkled before God in the most holy place, so Christ, says the apostle, not with the blood of bulls and of goats, but with his own blood, entered in once into the holy place, or into heaven, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Hence in allusion to the Jewish sacrifices, his blood is called the blood of sprinkling. Thus it appears that Jesus Christ is the true tabernacle, the true priest, and the true

sacrifice of which the Jewish tabernacle, priests, and sacrifices were only types, and that as such he procures for his people really all those blessings which these institutions procured in a typical manner only for the Jews.

I shall now proceed to make some improvement of these interesting and instructive truths.

1. From these truths, those who are tempted to despise or ridicule the Jewish rites and ceremonies, or to regard them as unworthy of divine appointment, may learn their error. Many, there is reason to fear, are guilty of this irreverence, and even some serious persons consider the whole Levitical law, as a very uninteresting portion of the Scriptures. But if any think it such it is owing solely to their own ignorance. The fact is, that this part of the Scriptures is full of Christ; and if properly understood, will assist greatly in obtaining a right understanding of his gospel, and of the way of salvation by him. Of this no one can doubt, who attends to the use which St. Paul makes of it in this epistle. And permit me here to beseech you all, my hearers, for your own sakes, not to despise any part of Scripture, because you do not understand it, or perceive its use. Surely reverence, humility, modesty, require us rather to suspect ourselves, than to censure the all-wise God. An apostle mentions some persons, who like natural brute beasts, made only to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of things which they understand not, that they shall utterly perish in their own corruption. If we would avoid their doom, let us beware how we imitate their conduct.

2. This subject furnishes one proof of the divine origin, and consequently, truth of the Scriptures, and it shows us how exactly the Old Testament and the New correspond. The Old Testament teaches by types and shadows, what the New more clearly reveals; yet the men who wrote them, lived many centuries apart. Must not the writers of the Old Testament then have been inspired? Could they ever have thought of devising such a complicated system of rites and ceremonies; a system too, which should so exactly shadow forth the character, offices and works of a Saviour, who was not to make his appearance in the world till many ages after their death? It is impossible. He who can believe that they could do this, or that such a coincidence is the result of accident, may believe any thing.

3. Since God took care under the former dispensation, to shadow forth, in so many ways, the dwelling of the Godhead in Jesus Christ, his priesthood, sacrifice, atonement, and intercession, we have reason to believe that he regards these truths as fundamentally important. Nor is it strange that he thus regards them; for they compose the sum, the substance, the essence of the gospel. Take them away, and the gospel is gone. Take them away, and we have no way of access to God, no place in which we can find God, no pardon, no salvation. In a word, as the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrifices, were all important in the old dispensation, so is Christ whom they represent, in the new. Those then who reject his divinity, atonement and intercession, who deny that he offered up himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, reject the true gospel and give its another, which is a gospel in name only. This however many do. Some do it speculatively. A still greater number do it practically. As many of the Jews neglected the tabernacle, the priesthood and the sacrifices, which God had appointed, and built high places where they officiated as their own priests, and offered up their own sacrifices, so many nominal Christians neglect the priesthood, atonement, and intercession of Jesus Christ, come to God relying on their own merits, offer up their prayers in their own names, and hope to be saved by their own works and services.

They justify themselves in their course by saying, so long as we worship and pray to the true God, it cannot be of much consequence in what manner we worship him. But the Jews might have said the same, respecting their high places. They might have said, we do not, like many of our countrymen, forsake the true God to follow idols. We still worship Jehovah alone, and offer our sacrifices to him, and we hope to be accepted, though we do not go up to the tabernacle and offer our sacrifices through the priest. But such hopes would have been groundless, such incense would not have been accepted. God would still have rejected and been displeased with their services, and the same may be said of the hopes, the incense, and the services of those who, instead of coming to God, relying on his merits, and presenting their prayers and services in his name, come in their own names, and rely on their own merits. A curse, and not a blessing will be their reward.

4. The subject is full of instruction and consolation to the real disciples of Christ, and to all who are willing to accept of him as their Saviour. Let such persons consider, in the first place, what encouragement and consolation the tabernacle was suited to give the Jews. They might say to themselves, since God has caused it to be raised among us for his special residence, since he dwells in it on a mercy-seat, since he has told us where we may always find him, and since he is there ready to dispense pardon, instruction and favor, he must be willing that we should approach him, he must be willing to receive us, to hear our prayers, and to accept our offerings. We will therefore go to him with confidence. So we may say, since God dwells in our nature, in the man Christ Jesus; since he dwells there as a God of mercy and grace, and as a prayer-hearing God; since through him he dispenses pardon and light and strength and salvation, and since he has done all this on purpose to encourage us to come to him, we will come, we will trust in him; we will seek God in Jesus Christ, and neither expect to find, nor seek to find him, any where else.

Again, consider what encouragement and consolation the Jews might derive from the priesthood. They might say, we are too sinful, too much polluted, to approach a holy God with acceptance; but we are not therefore wholly shut out from him. Be has appointed an order of men, to act as mediators between himself and us, to take our offerings and present them before him, and to burn incense in our behalf. Surely then, he is willing to admit us to some intercourse and communion with himself; he must be willing to accept our offerings, though worthless in themselves, when presented by his own appointed priest; we will therefore come, we will offer him our gifts and sacrifices, we will confidently hope for acceptance. Especially what an encouragement was it to there, at the hour of prayer, to see the priest enter the sanctuary by God’s appointment to burn incense, while they stood praying without, and to see the cloud of smoke ascending upward from the golden altar. They might then say, though we are not permitted to enter the sanctuary ourselves, there is one appointed to enter it on our behalf, and to burn incense for us. The smoke of that incense offered by his own appointment, God has declared to be of a sweet savor, and our prayers ascending with it to heaven, shall find acceptance and obtain answers of peace. So we may say, though we are sinners, children of disobedience, children of wrath; though we have wandered far from God, and our moral pollution renders us unfit to approach him, or pray to him, yet we are not excluded from him forever. He has provided a great High Priest and Mediator for us, in the person of his own Son, whom he always hears, who is infinitely worthy, and who is ever ready to receive and present to the Father, our petitions and requests. Though we are not, as yet, permitted to enter heaven, he has entered it on our behalf, as our forerunner and representative;

and while we stand praying without, he intercedes for us within, and causes our prayers and services to come up with acceptance, perfumed as with a cloud of incense. Even at this moment we have an advocate, a powerful, prevailing advocate of God's own appointment, pleading for us at the right hand of his throne. Surely then, we may hope for acceptance through him; we will therefore pray, will hope confidently for an answer of peace. God never would, at such an expense, have provided such a high priest for us, had he not been willing and desirous that we should thus approach him.

Further, consider what comfort and encouragement a believing Jew might derive from the divine institution of sacrifices. Without such an institution, when he had once sinned, he would have felt he was undone forever. He would have said, my life is forfeited, my blood is demanded by the law which I have violated, and I can never redeem the forfeiture; nor can I hope that a holy, just, and true God will remit it. There is no hope, no escape for me. I must perish. But by appointing sacrifices, God did as it were say, No, sinner, there is hope; you need not perish, I have provided a remedy; bring a lamb without spot to be offered by my priests as a sacrifice, and I will accept it. Its life shall go for thy life, its blood for thy blood, and thou shalt be free. Just so, were it not for the atoning sacrifice of Christ, we as sinners could have no ground of hope, and a sinner convinced of his sin would entertain no hope, but sink down in utter despair. He would say, the language of God's law is, the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

I have sinned, I must die, I cannot hope that a holy, just, and true God will sacrifice his justice and holiness, give up the honor of his law and violate his word, for the sake of saving me, a miserable sinner. How can I dare ask him to do it? How can he hear me if I do? And even should I obey him hereafter, my life will still be forfeited for my past disobedience. There is no remedy, no way of escape. Hell must be my portion, there is nothing before me but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. But in the gospel of Christ, God does as it were say to such a sinner, No, sinner, thou needest not perish. Thou needest not go down to the pit, for I have found a ransom. My Son has offered up himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He has borne the curse of the law, and died, the just for the unjust, to make atonement for their sins. And now if, with penitence and faith, thou wilt trust in him, thou shalt be pardoned and saved for his sake. Surely this is gospel, this is good news indeed for sinners; and as such, every one who has proper views of God, of his law, and of his own sinfulness, will consider it.

Finally: How precious should the Lord Jesus Christ be, in our estimation! He is the tabernacle in which God dwells, the only place where we can find him. He is the Mediator, through whom alone we can come to God, the High Priest, who alone can present our prayers and services with acceptance; the atoning sacrifice, through which alone our sins can be forgiven. Surely then, he ought to be precious to us. To those of you who believe, he is precious. In your system of religion, in your hopes, he is all in all. But even you do not praise him by any means as you ought. Even you know not the thousandth part of his worth, his excellence. O seek and pray for more knowledge of him. Like Paul, count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. And while you come around this table, look up and see what a high priest, what an advocate you have to plead your cause in heaven. See that very Saviour, the symbols of whose body and blood you are about to receive, seated on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high, where he ever liveth to make intercession for his people. Is he worthy? then all who trust in him will be so regarded. Is he accepted? then the persons and services of all who believe in him

are accepted. Will the Father hear him? then he will hear all who pray in his name. O then, Christian, bless God for Jesus Christ, and take courage; and since we have a great High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God, who is passed into the heavens, let us hold fast our profession, without wavering, and come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Chapter 22

S. CHRISTS SPECIAL TENDERNESS TOWARDS PENITENT DISCIPLES.

CHRISTS SPECIAL TENDERNESS TOWARDS PENITENT DISCIPLES.

Go your way, tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. - Mark 16:7.

THESE words were spoken by an extraordinary messenger, in a most interesting place, on a memorable occasion. They were spoken by aN angel, in the sepulchre of Christ, just after his resurrection. They were addressed to a company of women who, with a strange mixture of love to Christ, and disbehef, or forgetfulness of his prediction that he should rise from the dead, had come to embalm his remains. But instead of a dead Savior, they found in his tomb an angel, who soon removed the fears, which his appearance occasioned by saying, Fear not, for I know that ye seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, he is risen. Go, tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

It must be recollected, that this angel was a messenger of Christ, and that from him he had doubtless received the message. A question naturally suggests itself, why our Lord, in giving him this message, directed him to make this particular mention of Peter. The angel had said, Go tell his disciples; and did not the general term include Peter? Was not he one of the disciples? He was; but he was, at this time, a fallen disciple. Three days before, he had denied his Master in the most shameful and criminal manner. And as he had then disowned his Master, he might well fear; he probably did fear, that his Master would disown him; and no longer consider or treat him as a disciple. But though Peter had fallen, he had also repented of his fall. No sooner was his sin committed, than, melted by a look from his much injured Master, he went out and wept bitterly. And by making an early visit to his Master’s tomb on the morning of the third day, he showed that he still loved him; that his fall was the effect of sudden and powerful temptation, rather than of deliberate wickedness. But though penitent, he could not be certain of pardon; and had the message in our text been addressed to the disciples only, he would probably have doubted, whether he might consider it as including himself. Such doubts, however, his kind and forgiving Master took care to banish by directing his messenger to mention Peter particularly by name; and to inform him that his Master was ready to admit him into his presence, and fulfil the promise which he had made before his death. My hearers, our blessed Savior is, yesterday, to-day, and forever, the same. He is governed by principles and measures which are, like himself, unchangeable; and we may therefore conclude that, as he has acted once, he will always act in similar circumstances. If he formerly had a special regard for fallen disciples, who had been overtaken in a fault, and who, though truly penitent, were doubtful whether he would forgive them, he has the same regard for such characters still; and if he then directed his messenger, to remind them of his promises in a particular manner, he still directs his ministers to do the same. His instructions are, Comfort ye, comfort ye, my mourning people; strengthen the weak hands, and say to them who are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not, your God will save you. In discoursing further on this subject, I propose

to show why Christ has such a special regard to his mourning, penitent disciples, who, in consequence of their sins, doubt whether he will acknowledge or forgive them.

I. That Christ should pay a special regard, and send particular invitations, to persons of this description, is perfectly agreeable to his character. It is so, whether we view him as man, or as God, or as God and man united in the person of the Mediator. It is agreeable to his character considered as a man. Viewed in this light he possesses all the innocent dispositions and characteristics of our nature. Now I need not inform you, that men are disposed, almost perhaps without exception, to regard with peculiar favor, and to treat with special kindness those who appear humble, modest and diffident. Were you about to invite a number of persons to visit you; and were there one among them, who you had reason to believe would, in consequence of diffidence or conscious unworthiness, be scarcely persuaded to think himself welcome, you would send that person a peculiarly pressing invitation, and treat him on his arrival with perhaps more than ordinary kindness. In a similar manner you would treat an offending but penitent child, who, broken hearted on account of his fault, could scarcely think it possible that you would ever again love him as you had formerly done. Now this disposition our Savior, viewed as man, possesses in the highest degree; and this alone, were there no other reason, would induce him to treat mourning, penitent offenders with peculiar kindness. Nor is this mode of conduct less agreeable to his character considered as God. As such he says, I dwell with him who is of a humble and contrite heart, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. To this man will I look, even to him that is of a contrite spirit and that trembleth at my word. Though the Lord be high, he hath respect unto the lowly, and giveth grace unto the humble.

Still more agreeable, if possible, is this mode of proceeding to the character of Christ, viewed as God and Man united in the person of the Mediator. In this character he combines all the disposition of man and all the readiness of God to treat with peculiar kindness the mourning penitent. In this character he said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; and he is sufficiently disposed to fulfil his own declaration. This too is the character in which it was said of him, The bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench; expressions, in which a weak, a penitent sinner, borne down with a weight of conscious guilt, is figuratively but very beautifully and strikingly described. This leads us to observe,

II. That to regard mourning, desponding penitents with peculiar favor perfectly corresponds with the offices which Christ sustains, and with the object for which he came into the world. He came to proclaim glad tidings to the meek, to comfort all that mourn, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness. He came as a shepherd to bring back those who had been driven away, to bind up those who are bruised, and to heal those who are sick; in a word, he came to seek and to save the lost, those who without him feel lost and undone. He must therefore, in accomplishing the object for which he came, comfort all who mourn for sin and regard them with peculiar kindness. With such characters indeed his business principally is; for whom should the physician visit, but the sick; and whom should he visit first and most frequently, for whom should he feel most tenderly concerned, but those whose moral diseases are most painful, who view themselves as sick unto death?

III. A third reason why our Savior treats such characters with peculiar tenderness is, that they are prepared to receive forgiveness and consolation in a proper manner. He pities all. He is ready and disposed to impart his blessings to all. But he can impart his blessings only in a certain way, in a way consistent with the glory of God, and the honor of his law. Now in this way he can bestow pardon and consolation on those only, who truly repent and mourn for sin. Were he to pardon and save the impenitent, who feel no sorrow for sin, who scarcely perceive that they are sinners, who still persist in pursuing a sinful course, and even justify themselves in it, he would dishonor his Father, prostrate his authority and law, and become in effect the patron of rebels, the minister of sin. In fact, he cannot pardon such characters; for they will not accept of pardon; they feel no need of it. Nor can he impart to them spiritual consolation; for they have no spiritual troubles to be removed.

However much disposed you might be, my hearers, to pardon and befriend one who had injured you, yet if he refused to acknowledge that he had done you any injury; if he rejected every offer of pardon, if he still persisted in his injurious conduct, you evidently could not force him to receive your forgiveness; nor could you compel him to be your friend. How then can Christ pardon those who will not accept of pardon how comfort those who are not distressed? Or, to allude to the case mentioned in our text, what would it have availed to send Peter the message under consideration, to inform him that Christ was ready to meet him in Galilee, if he had felt no love to Christ, no sorrow for having offended him, no wish to see him? As little would it now avail, to offer pardon and salvation through Christ, or to send messages and invitations of mercy to those who do not mourn for sin, nor even feel that they are sinners. But when a man feels that this is his character. When he cordially acknowledges that he has violated the divine law, and the precepts of the gospel, and that in consequence he deserves God’s everlasting displeasure; when, like Peter, he weeps bitterly over his offences, and is ready to fear that one so vile and unworthy as himself can never be pardoned, or received as a disciple, then he is prepared to receive pardon and consolation in a proper manner; then Christ can impart to him these blessings; then he will receive them with humble, admiring gratitude; and, like pardoned Peter, will consecrate the remainder of his life to the service of his kind, condescending Savior, loving much, because much has been forgiven.

IV. Another reason why Christ treats persons whose character and situation resemble those of Peter with peculiar kindness, is, that they peculiarly need such treatment. St. Paul, after directing the Corinthian church to restore an offending, but penitent brother, adds as a reason why they should do it speedily, lest he be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Of this there is always danger in the case of persons whose situation resembles that of Peter. Their case will admit of no delay. Their doubts and anxieties must be speedily removed, or despondency, if not complete despair, will be the consequence. Had Christ, after his resurrection treated Peter with harshness, or even with neglect, he might like Judas, have destroyed himself in sullen despair. And while it is thus necessary that such persons should be speedily comforted, it is by no means easy to comfort them. They seem to themselves so vile, so utterly undeserving of pardon, so worthy of everlasting punishment, that no general promises, no common invitations, are sufficient to remove their guilty fears, and give them confidence and peace. Messages of kindness, addressed to Christ’s disciples at large, afford them no consolation; for they doubt whether they are his disciples. Christ must therefore send them a particular assurance of pardon; he must address them as it were by

name, and with an aspect of peculiar graciousness, before they will believe his readiness to receive and forgive them. All this our wise and compassionate Redeemer well knows; and he acts accordingly; displaying his kindness most clearly to those who feel most unworthy of it; and most speedily to those who immediately need it.

Lastly. Christ regards mourning penitents with peculiar favor, because he is himself the author of their repentance. He is exalted, we are told, as a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins to his people. Whenever they repent, it is because he has given them repentance. He had given it to Peter. He had given him a look which broke his heart, and caused him to go out and weep bitterly. In a similar manner he has looked at all who mourn for sin with godly sorrow. He has fulfilled to them the promise which says, I will pour upon my people the spirit of grace and supplication, and they shall look on me whom they have pierced, and mourn, as one that mourneth for a first-born. Having thus begun a good work in them, he must finish it. Having given them repentance, he must give them pardon; for when he bestows the former, it is on purpose to prepare them for the latter.

Such, my hearers, are some of the principal reasons why Christ regards mourning, penitent sinners with peculiar favor, and treats them with peculiar kindness. A brief improvement of the subject will now conclude the discourse.

1. If all men possessed the character of Peter; if all, like him, saw and lamented their sins, how inexpressibly delightful would be the employment of the ministers of Christ Then our message would indeed be glad tidings; we should have nothing to do but to proclaim glad tidings to all. No more should we be constrained to perform the painful duty of setting your sins before you, and of proclaiming the terrors of the Lord; no more accusations, no more threatenings, no mention of wrath to come, would you then hear from our lips. We might sit as messengers of peace in our Savior's forsaken tomb, and say to all, Peace be unto you; be not afraid,—ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, and ye shall soon see him in heaven. 0, it would be too much; happiness too great, too transporting, thus to proclaim pardon and salvation to all, and to see all joyfully receive these blessings; to address precious promises to every one by name, and to know that every one hears and believes these promises; to pour the water of life into the lips of the dying and of the dead, and see them start up to life and holy activity; to see tears of repentance mingled with smiles of heaven-descended joy, and hear the expressions of doubt, and fear, and anxiety, exchanged for the rapturous accents of wonder, and thankfulness, and peace, and love. And why may we not see and hear all this?

Why may we not always proclaim only glad tidings, and see them produce universal gladness? Why must our pained lips still give utterance to messages of divine wrath; and speak of a death without hope; of a judgment without mercy; of a hell without end; of a despairing eternity? Only, I answer, only because you will not all repent of and mourn for sin. Only do this, and you will never more hear of your sins, except as having been fully pardoned; of death, except as a messenger, who is to convey you to heaven; nor of the judgment day, except as of the day which is to witness your open acknowledgment by the Judge as his friend; nor of hell, except as a place, the danger of which you have forever escaped; nor of eternity, except as it measures the duration of your happiness. 0 then, my hearers, why will you not all repent of sin, all mourn for sin, all renounce your sins? Will it not most terribly aggravate your remorse, and your wretchedness in the future

world, to reflect, that the pardon of your sins, the special regard and favor of Christ, and everlasting happiness might once have been secured, by renouncing and mourning for your sins; sins which only serve to render you unhappy even in the present life! Do any reply, we know not what are the sins which we must renounce, or for which we must mourn? We have not, like Peter, denied Christ, and need not, therefore, repent as he did. Alas, my hearers, we have all denied Christ. I have done it; you have done it. He considers all as denying him, who do not confess him before men.

He considers all, who do verbally confess him, as denying him, when they do not act agreeably to their professions. In one, or in both of these ways, we have all denied him, and crucified him afresh. We have denied him in a manner even more criminal than that of which Peter was guilty. He denied him on a sudden surprise, when he saw him in the hands of his enemies, when to confess relation to him was to incur contempt, abuse, punishment, perhaps death itself. We have no dangers of this kind to tempt us to deny Christ, our Savior; nor have we denied him once only, or on a sudden surprisal, but we have denied him deliberately, repeatedly; have persisted in our denial of him for years. Even now many of you are about to go from this table, and thus to say, by your conduct, I am not a servant of Christ; I do not acknowledge him as my Master; I do not wish to remember him. And you, my friends, who will remain and approach his table,—have not you formerly done this? and are not some of you still in various ways denying, offending, and grieving him, when you profess to come, in a manner no less criminal than the conduct of Peter? Now these are the sins which you are required to mourn over and confess. For these sins every one has reason to mourn apart. And will you, can you, do you mourn for these sins? Are any of you looking to him, whom you have pierced by your neglect, unkindness, and ingratitude; looking to him on the cross, where lifted up he draws the hearts of sinners to himself? Do you there see him as it were looking at you with a reproving, expostulating, yet mild and forgiving look, and hear him saying, Did I suffer all this for thee, 0 sinner'! and is this thy return? Dost thou not know thy Savior? Dost thou deny him who dies here for thee? and wilt thou, by persisting in thy denial, compel me to deny thee hereafter before my Father and the holy angels? My hearers, if this dying love leads any of you to repentance; if any of you are, like Peter, seeking a place where to weep; if your past treatment of the Savior appears most ungrateful, cruel, and monstrous; if in consequence you feel worthy of his everlasting displeasure; then, in his name I say, peace be unto you; your sins are forgiven, be not afraid. Are there any whose guilt seems to them so great, who feel so unworthy, that they cannot be satisfied with general assurances of pardon, cannot yet believe that Christ acknowledges and loves them as his disciples? To such Christ directs us to speak as it were by name, to say to each of them, Christ loves thee, and gave himself for thee. He was delivered for thy sins, and raised again for thy justification. Come, see the place, where thy Lord, thy surety lay. See, he is released; thy surety is discharged, a sufficient proof that the debt is paid, that thy creditor is satisfied. Christ is gone before thee into heaven, to appear for thee in the presence of God, as thy advocate and representative. There shalt thou see him, as he has said. There shalt thou be like him, there shalt thou behold his glory forever and ever. My professing friends, what encouragement does this subject afford all penitent, yet doubting, trembling characters to approach the table of our Lord. If any of you cannot take this encouragement, it is because you are not in a penitent frame. Remember the message in our text was sent, not to Peter falling, but to Peter mourning. Remember then from whence you are fallen, and repent, and this message shall be your consolation.

Chapter 23

S. CHRISTS VICTORY OVER SATAN

CHRISTS VICTORY OVER SATAN

"When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" Luke 11:21-22 For this purpose, says St. John, was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. In conformity with this gracious design, we find that he no sooner made his appearance on earth, than he began to cast out Satan, from his strong holds in the bodies of men, by healing those who were possessed, oppressed and vexed with devils; thus exhibiting a glorious and convincing proof of his power and willingness to save those, whose souls were enslaved by these powers of darkness. The Scribes and Pharisees, however, unable to deny the reality of these miracles, and unwilling to allow his divine authority, blasphemously pretended that he cast out devils by a power derived from Beelzebub; the prince of the devils. In answer to this, our blessed Saviour replies, that every kingdom divided against itself is quickly brought to desolation; and that, therefore, if Satan be divided against himself; if he thus cast out himself as they pretended, his kingdom could not stand, but must soon fall and have an end. Having thus answered these groundless and impious pretences, he proceeds in our text to spiritualize the subject, by employing it to illustrate the necessity, nature, and design of that deliverance and redemption, which it was the great object of his mission to accomplish. In this passage he gives us to understand, that the soul of every unconverted sinner is a palace, of which Satan, as a strong man armed, keeps an entire and peaceable possession; and that when sinners are convinced and converted, Christ, who alone is stronger than this strong man, strips him of his armor, casts him out and divides his spoils. To illustrate these particulars, and notice the instruction which they afford, is the design of the following discourse. In the prosecution of this design we would observe, That the human soul may be justly compared to a palace; for it is a most beautiful, noble and magnificent edifice; an edifice formed of imperishable materials; an edifice fearfully, admirably, wonderfully made. It is a house not made with hands, a building of God, the master-piece of the all-wise and all-powerful Architect, who formed and adorned it for his own use. It is sufficiently capacious to contain not only the whole creation, but even the Creator himself; for it was especially designed to be the earthly residence of that high and holy One, who fills immensity and inhabits eternity. Even now, debased, disfigured and polluted as it is by sin, it beam the evident marks of original grandeur and beauty; and, as the poet observes of Beelzebub, is majestic though in ruins. Of this magnificent and stately structure, thus originally built and adorned for the habitation of God, Satan now, as a strong man armed, keeps possession. This proposition contains three particulars which deserve our attention: First, we may observe, that of every unrenewed soul, Satan keeps perfect and entire possession. Secondly, he keeps possession as a strong man. Thirdly, he keeps possession as a strong man armed.

I. Of every unconverted soul, Satan keeps perfect and entire possession. This is a truth which, however mortifying it may be to our pride, is too plainly taught in the word of God, to be denied by any who acknowledge the divine authority of this sacred volume. We are there told, that all who

live according to the common course of this world, live according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now worketh in the children of disobedience. Hence it appears, that, as God by his Spirit works in Christians both to will and to do, according to his own good pleasure, so Satan, the father of lies, works powerfully and effectually in the hearts of impenitent sinners; causing them to listen to his suggestions, comply with his temptations, and fulfil his designs. Our blessed Saviour also told the Jews, that they were of their father, the devil, and that the lusts of their father they would do; and to this he adds, that he who committeth sin, is the servant or slave of sin. When Christ called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles, he gave him a commission to turn them from the power of Satan to God; which evidently proves that in their natural state, they were subject to the power of this arch deceiver and apostate; and that from this power they must be delivered, before they could receive an inheritance among them that are sanctified. St. Paul himself informs us, that all who oppose the truth are entangled in the snares of Satan, and are led captive by him at his will; and that it is he who blinds the minds of all who believe not, lest the glorious light of the gospel should shine in upon them. From other passages we learn, that it was he who put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ, and tempted Ananias and Sapphira to commit the crime which cost them their lives. In short, so absolute and universal is his control over sinful men, that he is often, both by our Saviour and his apostles, styled the prince, the ruler, and the god of this world.

And, my friends, even if the word of God had been silent on this subject, would not reason and experience have led us to adopt this conclusion? Is it not evident that a large proportion of mankind, conduct as if they were the willing subjects of the father of lies? Are not his laws, which enjoin it upon us to hate our enemies, to revenge insults, to envy rivals, to love the world, to please ourselves, to slander others, to fulfil the desires of the flesh and the mind, to forget our Maker, neglect his word, transgress his commands and reject his Son; incomparably more regarded, more obeyed, than the law of God, which commands us to love our Creator, to do to others as we wish them to do to us, to love him supremely, to forgive and pray for our enemies, to deny ourselves, to renounce the world, take up the cross and follow Christ? Should this foe of God and man publish a revelation of his own mind and will, issue his orders, and promulgate his decrees to mankind, would he not urge them to live just as they now do? Would he not tell the young to put off the thought of death, to neglect religion, to conform to the world, to give themselves up without restraint to the pursuit of frivolous pleasures and amusements, serving divers lusts and vanities? Would he not charge the middle aged to seek first the good things of this life, instead of the kingdom of God and his righteousness; to lay up treasures on earth and not in heaven; to rise early, sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness; and put off religion to old age? Would he not command all ages and ranks in society to spend the Sabbath in idleness; in reading foolish, frivolous or pernicious books; in transacting, or at least thinking of their worldly business; in unprofitable visits or useless conversation; instead of employing it in attending to the great things which concern their everlasting peace? Would he not charge them when in the house of God, to let their thoughts wander after vanities, to neglect or forget the truth which is proclaimed, or to apply it to their neighbors instead of themselves? Would he not enjoin it upon them to neglect the word of God, and to trust in their own righteousness; or assure them, as he did our first parents, that though they transgress and eat forbidden fruit, yet they shall not surely die? Would he not especially charge those who begin to think seriously of religion, to dismiss all such melancholy and superstitious fancies, and either to give themselves no concern respecting eternity, or at least

defer it to a more convenient season? In a word, would he not direct mankind to love themselves supremely, to do their own pleasure, obey their own inclinations, seek their own exaltation profit and honor, and, without regarding what God has said, to cast off his fear and restrain prayer before him, walking in the way of their own hearts, and according to the sight of their own eyes? Yes, my friends, these are the secret wishes of Satan, these would be his commands, should he publish a code of laws; and hence it is but too evident that mankind obey him, that he is the god of this world, and keeps entire possession of every unconverted soul. But,

II. Of such souls he keeps possession as a strong man. This will appear evident if we consider that he can neither be restrained, subdued, or driven out by any created power. 1st. By created power he cannot be restrained or subdued. In the story of the man among the tombs, who was possessed by an evil spirit, we are told that he was often bound with chains and fetters, yet he easily broke all these bonds, so that no man could tame or subdue him. So it is with those of whose souls Satan keeps possession; they can be bound or restrained by no laws or regulations, human or divine. Their language concerning the Son of God is, We will not have this man to reign over us. Let us break his bands asunder and cast away his cords from us. In vain does God present to their breasts the curse of the law, like a flaming sword; they rush upon its sharp point and are sure to perish. In vain does he place before them the fire that never shall be quenched; they throw themselves headlong into its devouring flames. In vain does he endeavor to bind them with the bands of gratitude and the cords of love; they break them, as Samson broke the cords of the Philistines, with which he was bound. In vain does he endeavor to restrain them by the warnings of conscience, and the remonstrances of his Spirit; they regard them no more than the spider's web. If divine restraints are thus insufficient, it cannot be expected that human laws will avail. Though by the aid of prisons, scourges and gibbets, external crimes may be partially prevented, yet where is the lawgiver to be found, who has been able to restrain wandering thoughts, to keep down the secret workings of envy, pride, selfishness and revenge; or even to chain up a false and slanderous tongue? And as neither divine nor human laws can restrain or subdue the strong man, who reigns in the sinner's breast, so neither call the sinner himself effect this, by any exertions of his own. It is true, indeed, he could do this if he would; but alas he has no will to do it, for his will is entirely on the side of Satan, who has bound it in fetters, too strong to be broken. He is not only a captive, but a willing captive. He is pleased with his slavery, and fancies there is music in the rattling of his chains. Like the Jews, he is ready to say, I was never in bondage; and, like them, he has no wish to be free; so that he alone who says to the roaring billows, Thus far shall ye come and no farther, is able to restrain the rage and malice of Satan, and lay his hand on the strong corruptions of the human heart.

III. If no created power can bind or restrain the strong man who reigns in the sinner's heart, much less can this power prevail to cast him out. This the ministers of Christ too often find by painful experience. They, call upon sinners in the name of the Lord, to turn from their evil ways and live; but the god of this world, the strong man armed, blinds their eyes, stops their ears. and hardens their hearts, so that they call in vain. Like our Saviour's disciples when he was upon the mount, they charge this dumb and deaf spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to come out; but he ridicules their authority, and laughs at their efforts. In vain do they employ threatenings and promises, commands and entreaties, arguments and motives, prayers and tears. The strong man still keeps possession, notwithstanding their most vigorous efforts. Without divine assistance, Paul

and Apollos may labor in vain, and spend their strength for naught. Still less can the moralist or the philosopher force him from his palace. They may declaim eloquently and copiously on the beauty and fitness of virtue, and the deformity of vice; but it is like attempting to charm the deaf adder, who will not hear, or regard the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely.

Even the sinner himself cannot cast out this powerful tyrant, who has obtained such complete dominion over him. True indeed, as we observed before, he is so well pleased with his bondage, that he seldom wishes for or seeks deliverance. But at times, conscience alarms him by her reproaches; he finds that the ways of transgressors are hard; he dreads what the end of these things will be; and therefore forms some weak resolutions, and makes some faint efforts, to root out the tyrant of his breast, and recover his liberty. But if these efforts are made in his own strength, they are always in vain; and, like all ineffectual efforts to throw off the yoke of oppression, they only render it more grievous and difficult to break. Even if the evil spirit appears to be cast out for a time, and an external reformation takes place, he soon returns, bringing with him seven other spirits, still more wicked; so that the latter end of such a man is worse than the first. With the utmost propriety, therefore, may Satan, who thus keeps possession of the sinner's heart, be represented as a strong man. But,

IV. He keeps possession, not only as a strong man, but as a strong man armed. He has his armor, both offensive and defensive; and with this he defends and fortifies his palace in the soul, and attempts to make it strong against the Captain of our salvation. This armor is directly the reverse of that Christian armor which St. Paul describes, in his Epistle to the Ephesians. Instead of being girded with the girdle of truth, he girds the sinner with the girdle of error, falsehood and deceit. Instead of the breastplate of Christ's righteousness, he furnishes him with a breastplate of his own fancied righteousness, goodness and morality. Instead of the shield of faith, which the Christian possesses, the sinner has the shield of unbelief; and with this he defends himself against the threatenings and curses of the law, and all the arrows of conviction, which are aimed at him by the ministers of Christ. Instead of having on for a helmet the hope of salvation, by faith in the Saviour's blood, Satan furnishes his subjects with a false hope of obtaining salvation at last, let them live as they please; and instead of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, he teaches them to wield the sword of a tongue set on fire of hell, and furnishes them with a magazine of cavils, sneers, excuses and objections, with which they attack religion and defend themselves. He also builds for them many refuges of lies, in which, as in a strong castle, they fondly hope to shelter themselves from the wrath of God.

Having thus shown that the unrenewed soul is a palace, of which Satan, as a strong man armed, keeps possession, we proceed to observe,

V. That while he thus keeps possession, his goods, or in other words, his subjects, are at peace. Not, however, that impenitent sinners now enjoy, or ever will enjoy true peace of mind; for there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. No, they are constantly and anxiously seeking rest, and vainly inquiring, who will show us any good? and their repeated disappointments, cares and perplexities, together with their unruly appetites, passions and desires, render their minds like the troubled sea which cannot rest. But the peace which the subjects of Satan enjoy, consists in these two particulars:

(1.) They are seldom if ever much alarmed respecting their own salvation. Like madmen, who fancy themselves kings and emperors, the sinner thinks that he is rich and increased in goods, and has need of nothing; and does not in the least suspect that he is poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. He has a good opinion of himself, suspects no danger, thinks little of death or eternity; or if he does, fancies that he is already prepared, and that there is no cause of anxiety or alarm. True he may, occasionally, notwithstanding his armor, be slightly wounded by the arrows of conviction, or he may hear the curses and terrors of the law proclaimed by God's ministers, when they lift up their voices as a trumpet, to warn him of his transgressions; but he listens to them as to the noise of distant thunder, which, though it rolls over the heads of others, threatens no danger to himself, and is quickly forgotten amid the hurry and bustle of worldly pursuits.

(2.) The sinner enjoys peace, because there is nothing in his soul to take the part of God against Satan, and thus produce intestine war and commotion. All his powers and faculties are leagued against God, on the side of sin, unless we except his conscience, and this soon becomes seared and stupefied; so that its voice is seldom heard. There is consequently in the sinner's breast none of that inward warfare which the Christian feels, no lusting of the flesh against the spirit, and of the spirit against the flesh. In this respect all is calm and peaceful within, but, alas, it is the calmness and peace of spiritual death. His understanding, his will, his affections and imagination are all chained up in spiritual bondage, darkness and death. The foe of God and man reigns supreme and uncontrolled on the throne of his heart; all his mental and corporeal faculties are so many instruments of unrighteousness, to displease and dishonor his Maker; yet he is careless and secure, suspects no danger, and, while hardening himself against God, hopes to prosper. Such is the deplorable situation of every unawakened, impenitent sinner; and such it ever will be, unless Christ, who is stronger than the strong man armed, by the power of his Spirit and grace, comes upon him, overcomes him, takes from him his armor, and divides his spoils. In the description here given of the great and glorious victory which Christ obtains over the god of this world, when he casts him out from the soul of which he has taken possession, we may notice, in the first place, that he comes upon him unawares. Never does the sinner begin to seek Christ, unless Christ begins to seek the sinner; for we are assured there are none who ever seek after God. But when our blessed Saviour comes with the godlike design of delivering the captive from the hand of the mighty, he girds on his sword, and rides forth prosperously in his chariot of salvation, arrayed in meekness, truth and righteousness; and in a moment when the sinner perhaps least expects or wishes it, he suddenly feels the arrows of conviction sharp in his heart. Then his false peace is at an end. Conscience no longer sleeps; he no longer hears as though he heard not; the blind eyes begin to open, the stony heart begins to melt. The weapons of Christ's ministers, which are not carnal but spiritual, then become mighty, through God, to cast down all his high thoughts and imaginations, and he for the first time finds himself a poor, miserable, helpless captive, a wretched, self-condemned sinner; and all within is remorse, anxiety and alarm.

Again: In farther carrying on this glorious work, the Captain of our salvation takes from the strong man armed all the armor in which he trusted. He strips the sinner of the breastplate of self-righteousness, causes the shield of unbelief to fall from his hand, takes away the false hopes of salvation which composed his helmet, quenches the fiery sword of an inflamed tongue, scatters all his magazines of cavils, excuses and objections, and beats down the refuges of lies in which he trusted.

Once more: Satan being thus baffled and disarmed, the triumphant conqueror proceeds to divide his spoils. The soul, which was once his palace, is transformed into the habitation of Christ, and a meet temple for the Holy Spirit of God. All his mental and corporeal faculties are now transformed into instruments of righteousness, to serve and glorify God. His time, his talents, his property, himself and all that he has, are consecrated to the work of obedience and praise. This is the work, and these the spoils of the conqueror. My friends, what a glorious change is here! That soul, which was once the palace, the castle and strong hold of Satan, the den of every unclean and hateful lust, is now the temple of God, and filled with the graces of his Spirit. The wretched slaves of sin, chained up in spiritual darkness and death, ignorant of their danger, pleased with their situation, and not even wishing to be delivered, are now brought into the glorious light and liberty, and adopted as the children of God. The distracted sinner, who, like the man possessed among the tombs, once madly endeavored to wound and eternally destroy his own soul, by his vices, now sits as a humble disciple at the feet of Jesus, clothed with his righteousness, adorned with his graces, and in his right mind. Surely none but God alone can produce a change as happy and glorious as this. Surely there may well be joy in heaven to behold it.

Permit me now, by way of improvement, to remind you, my Christian friends, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, of the time when Satan, as a strong man armed, kept possession of your hearts, and led you captive at his will, while you were at peace and feared no danger. Remember how you were then pleased and satisfied with your bondage; how you loved darkness; how long you resisted and grieved the Spirit of God; how you were wont to say to him who came to accomplish your deliverance, What have we to do with thee? Remember these things and then consider what you owe to Him who has done such great things for you.

Remember these things, and then consider how you ought to pity and pray for those miserable captives who are yet in that deplorable bondage, exposed to endless perdition, and yet are at peace and satisfied with their condition. Remember these things, and let the remembrance increase your humility, inflame your love, and animate your soul, and cause you to be as active, cheerful, diligent, and persevering in the service of God, as you formerly were in the service of Satan. From those who have been brought out of darkness and slavery. into the glorious liberty of the children of God, we would next turn to those who are still in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. You are perhaps ready, my friends, to pity, if not despise the Christian, on account of the restraints and obligations under which he is laid by his belief; but in reality, he has infinitely more reason to pity and weep over you. The service of the Christian is perfect liberty; for Christ’s commandments are not grievous, but his yoke is easy and his burden light. His service also is honorable, and will receive a rich reward; for he serves the King of kings and Lord of lords; who will give him a crown of glory and eternal life. But you, who boast of your liberty, are enslaved in worse than Egyptian bondage. You serve and obey the father of lies; you live just as he would have you, and he doubtless exults, with diabolical joy and triumph, to see his miserable victims, whom he leads captive at his will, proud and pleased with their chains, and running thoughtless and secure the broad road to ruin. But his service, which you thus love is not only base and dishonorable, but ruinous and destructive; for the wages he bestows is eternal death. Yet by his diabolical art he has so blinded your minds, that you believe not. You think there is no danger; the gospel is hid from you, as it is from those who are lost; and unless the blessed Redeemer, who is stronger than the strong man armed, should see fit in infinite mercy, to come and open your eyes,

and turn you from the power of Satan to God, you will continue careless and secure, conformed to the world, and pursuing its pleasures, riches and honors, till you open your eyes too late in eternity. From this state, my friends, we cannot deliver you. We cannot even convince you that you are in such a state, and probably many of you have heard the present discourse, without the smallest suspicion that it is a description of your own character and situation. But this false peace and security, instead of proving that you are safe, only proves more clearly your danger. It proves that the strong man armed is not disturbed in his possession, but that he keeps you in peace. Another thing which clearly proves this, is, that even now you are using the armor of the god of this world, to defend yourselves against the truth which we are delivering. Some of you are putting on as a defense, the breastplate of self-righteousness, and pretending that you cannot possibly be so bad as is now represented. Others are holding up the shield of unbelief to defend themselves against the terrors of the law, and resolving that they will not believe their situation to be such as has now been, described, or that the word of God is literally and strictly true. Others again are putting on the helmet of a false hope of salvation, though they continue in sin; while some, perhaps, are ready to bring forward the magazine of cavils, objections and excuses with which the father of lies furnishes them.

But, my friends, if any of you are trusting to this armor, you are trusting to the armor of Satan; and though it may defend you from the arrows of conviction now, yet it will not defend you, hereafter, against those bolts of divine indignation, which will fall, like blasting lightnings, on the head of the guilty. There will be no unbelief in hell, for even the devils believe and tremble. Instead then of uniting with the foe of God and mail to destroy your own souls, by madly hardening yourselves against God, and contending with the Almighty, let me entreat you instantly to throw down the weapons of your rebellion, and cry earnestly to Him who is able to save; to deliver you from the strong man armed, who now keeps possession of your souls. This he is ever willing and ready to do; for it was the great object of his coming on earth, as he himself declares The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, and to set at liberty them that are bruised. Awake then to a sense of your situation; no longer indulge that false peace which will prove your destruction; but awake; arise; make a struggle for liberty now, or expect to remain forever the slaves of Satan, prisoners in the regions of despair, under chains of everlasting darkness. Trust not however to your own struggles, but apply to Him who alone is able to overcome the god of this world. Look to Him for help, and you will not be disappointed, for his grace is sufficient for you. And you, my Christian friends, if you have relatives who are possessed by a dumb spirit, so that they will not pray, or a deaf spirit, so that they will not hear, or who have been long bound as it were in fetters of brass, by the powers of darkness, bring them to Jesus. Cry unto him like the woman of Canaan, Lord Jesus have mercy and heat my friends, who are ensnared, enslaved and vexed by an evil spirit; and though he appear to heed you not, to treat you unkindly, or to give you no answer, yet be not discouraged. Continue to plead, and hope all things from his infinite compassion.

S. CHRISTs Mission and Return

CHRISTs Mission and Return

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: Again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." John 16:28. words, uttered by our Saviour during his residence on earth, appear to have given his disciples greater satisfaction than these. He had just before said to them, A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go unto the Father. This declaration they did not understand; and, though desirous to ask an explanation, were either afraid or ashamed to confess their ignorance. Our Saviour however perceived what was passing in their minds, gave them unasked the desired explanation, and ended by saying, I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples answered, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now we are sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee; by this we believe that thou earnest forth from God. They believed this truth indeed before; but their faith was so much increased by this conversation, that it appeared to them as if they then believed for the first time, and as if their former belief was scarcely deserving of the name.

It must indeed be acknowledged by all, as the disciples remarked, that our Lord here speaks plainly. No one can pretend that there is anything figurative or hyperbolical; that there is any proverb or dark saying in the words, I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. Here everything is plain, simple, intelligible. Let us, then, attend to their import. They will not, perhaps, teach us any new truths; but they may possibly cause us, as they did the disciples, to believe more firmly, truths which were known before.

First. We learn from this passage, that our Saviour existed in a most exalted and happy state before his appearance on earth. He was then with the Father; or as another passage expresses it, in the bosom of the Father. The same truth is elsewhere taught with at least equal clearness. In the first verse of this book we are told, that he was in the beginning with God. And in the prayer which immediately follows this chapter, he says, Father, I come to thee; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. Unless we suppose that he could utter falsehood, even in an address to heaven, we must then believe that he not only existed with the Father, but that he possessed glory with the Father before the world was made. And what was he then? He was not a man; for he became man, when he was born into our world. He was not an angel; for an apostle asserts, and brings many arguments to prove, that he was not. Unto which of the angels, he asks, did God ever say, as he did to Christ, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. But if he was not a man, not an angel, what was he? Let inspiration answer. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Nor did he cease to be God, when he became man. No, he was God manifest in the flesh, God over all blessed forever. But this leads us to remark,

Secondly. Our Saviour teaches us in these words, that from this preexistent, exalted, happy state in the bosom of the Father, he came into our world. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world. This truth also is, in other places, largely insisted on both by himself and his apostles. In several passages he says, expressly, I came down from heaven. Being in the form of God, says an apostle, he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, his own creatures, his own world, but his own received him not.

Thirdly. Our Saviour here teaches us that, when he left this world, he went back to his Father, or to heaven from whence he came. The truth of this declaration, so far as human eyes could see it, his disciples afterwards saw. They saw him ascend up visibly toward heaven, till a cloud received him out of their sight. And what they could not see, the Spirit of God revealed to them. He assured them that their Master had entered into heaven, and was seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come. The view which has been taken of the import of our text, brief as it is, opens a wide field for serious and instructive meditation. Indeed it is connected more or less intimately with every fact and doctrine of Christianity. To some of the reflections which it most naturally suggests, your attention is now requested.

1. It is obvious to remark, that the events mentioned in this passage are, both in themselves and in their consequences, by far the most remarkable which have occurred in our world since its creation. Indeed the creation of the world itself was an event far less wonderful. That a being possessed of infinite wisdom, power and goodness, should create a world, or many worlds, is nothing very wonderful or surprising. But that, after he had created it, and after its inhabitants had revolted from him, he should visit it, —visit it in a human form, in the likeness of sinful flesh; that he should enter it, not as the Ancient of days, but as an infant; live in it, not as its Sovereign and Proprietor, but as a servant, a dependant on the bounty of his own creatures; and above all, that he should die in it, die in it as a malefactor, on a cross, between two thieves; that this earth should not only have been pressed by its Creator’s footsteps, but wet with his tears, and stained with his blood; these are wonders indeed, wonders which would be utterly incredible, had not God himself revealed them; wonders which will still be regarded as incredible by all, who forget that God is wonderful in working, and that as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts. No wonder that angels should desire to look into these things. No wonder that they left heaven in multitudes to visit our world when their Creator and their Lord lay an infant in a manger. No wonder that raptures and ecstasies unfelt before swelled their bosoms, and called for new songs to express them. The wonder is, that man, stupid, insensible man, should be no more affected by this event; that he should regard it without interest, and almost fall asleep while he hears it described. It is not thus, when events comparatively trifling solicit his attention. Let the king of Great Britain visit his Irish and Scottish dominions, and the world rings with it. Let the President of these States come among us, and every house pours out its inmates to welcome or to gaze. Let a comet blaze athwart the sky, and thousands of sleepless eyes are open to watch the ethereal stranger. But let the Creator, the

Eternal Sovereign of the universe, by whom and for whom all things were made, come in the most interesting form, to visit this rebellious province of his dominions, and how few are found who even trouble themselves to ask whence he comes, or what is his object; how much fewer to give him the welcome which he had a right to expect! My hearers, how strange is this: and how strange it is, that we cannot see and blush at our own stupidity. Why is this event, which will cause the name of our world to resound through the whole created universe of God, and to be had in everlasting remembrance, regarded with such indifference? This world itself will soon with all its works be burnt up. Its place in the heavens will know it no more. Not even a wreck will remain to remind future orbs that here once rolled, the planet called Earth; and its very existence would at length fade away from the memories of all, except its former inhabitants! but the fact mentioned in our text, will preserve its name from oblivion, and through eternal ages it will be remembered as the world which its Creator visited, and for which he died. And for similar reasons its inhabitants, the posterity of Adam, will be objects of intense interest and curiosity to holy beings through interminable ages. Show me a man, show me one of that race for which my Creator died: show me one of those whom he redeemed by his blood, will, we may suppose, be one of the first exclamations of all who, through the ages of eternity, shall from various parts of Jehovah's dominions enter heaven; and when they wish to see what sin can do; when they wish to behold it in its most dreadful effects, in its blackest forms, they will turn and contemplate, with shuddering wonder, those who perished in consequence of neglecting this great salvation, and receiving this unparalleled grace of God in vain.

These, they will exclaim, were some of the inhabitants of that highly favored world. And how could the inhabitants of such a world perish? How could they resist such love, such mercy, such a bright display of all the divine perfections, as was exhibited to them! How could they break through so many sacred obligations, resist the influence of so many most powerful motives, and win their way to hell over the body of a crucified Saviour! of such a Saviour too as died for them? My hearers, if, as our great Teacher assures us, much will be required of those to whom much is given, it seems certain that the responsibility, the sinfulness and the guilt of those who perish after hearing of what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for them, will be greater than those of any other creatures! for surely, without intending to limit God we may venture to say, that he never will, that he never can do more for any race of beings than he has for ours. But it is not sufficient simply to contemplate this great event, wonderful as it is. We must look also at the motives which prompted it. Indeed when we see the Creator leaving his native heaven, the bosom of his Father, descending into our world, assuming, and suffering in our nature, we are naturally led to ask, what motive impelled him? what object could in his view be of sufficient importance to induce such humiliation, such suffering as this? It must have been a great object, a powerful motive, which could have induced him to visit our world, even had he come in the form of God. But how much greater must have been the object, how much more powerful the motive, which induced him to visit it in the form of a servant, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to die as a malefactor. What could induce him to exchange heaven for earth, the bosom of his Father for the body of an infant, the celestial throne for a manger and a cross, the adoration of angels for the scoffs and insults of men?

It evidently could be no personal object, no selfish motive, no motive such as those, by which we are naturally actuated. It could not be to gain any thing for himself; for he already possessed all things, and he knew that, by coming into our world, he must sustain a temporary loss of almost

everything dear to him. It must then have been for others, and not for himself, that he came. And it was for others, it was for us. He came to be the light of the world. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to save his people from their sins. He came to redeem them from the curse of a violated law, by bearing it in their stead.

He came to die, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us back to a forsaken God. In a word, he came to rescue immortal souls, beings capable of containing inconceivable happiness or misery, from moral blindness, and sin, and guilt, and death, and hell; and to open a way by which they might ascend to the heaven from which he came, but whose gates their sins had forever barred against them. Such was the object for which the Creator did and suffered all this. And, O, how puerile, how trifling do the grandest objects of human pursuit, and the most splendid human enterprises appear, when compared with this! All succeeding ages have combined to admire and extol Columbus, embarking to seek, over a pathless ocean, a then undiscovered quarter of the globe. But what was this in comparison with our Saviour's descent from heaven into the grave to seek a lost, to bring back a wandering, to save a ruined, self-ruined world? This was indeed an enterprise for a God. But still the question returns, if this was the object, what was the motive? Why did he wish to save such a world? He needed it not. He could have made a thousand worlds at less expense. And he had every reason to abhor and renounce our race, both on account of what they had done, and on account of the manner in which he foresaw they would treat himself. My hearers, there was but one motive, but one principle in his breast, sufficiently strong to prompt him to this; and that principle was, love, pure disinterested love. And now I have mentioned its name, many of you will not understand me. You cannot conceive of such love, because you never felt it. According to a trite and homely, but just remark, you judge of others by yourselves. When you hear of missionaries leaving their native country, and going to spend their days among the heathen; among savages, far from all the enjoyments and conveniences of civilized life, some of you can scarcely believe that they are prompted by love; love to the souls of men whom they never saw. Many of you probably suspect, that they are secretly actuated by some more selfish motive.

How then can you expand your narrow views sufficiently to grasp, to comprehend that immeasurable love which Jesus Christ displayed in his mission from heaven! The Christian, in whose breast a spark of the same celestial fire has been kindled, can conceive something of it; but those who are destitute of this love, as all impenitent sinners are, form no conception of it, and hear of the love of Christ, and of all its astonishing effects with a kind of stupid amazement, or with perfect indifference. But, my hearers, whatever any of you may think of it, all the love which was ever felt on earth, and all that was ever felt by angels, could it be collected into one bosom, would be as nothing compared with the love which Christ displayed, and would leave that bosom cold in comparison with the fervor which glowed in his breast. His love was a love like the deluge of Noah, such a love as we might expect could be displayed, when the windows of heaven were unstopped, the fountains of its great deeps broken up, and all its treasured stores of love poured down at once upon us. To think of such love is like trying to think of existence which has no beginning, or of power which makes something of nothing. Tongue cannot describe it, finite minds cannot conceive it, angels faint under it, and those who know most of it can only say with inspiration, that it passeth knowledge.

2. The appearance of such a person as Jesus Christ in our world, gives us an appalling view of the moral state and danger of its inhabitants. If it was necessary that such a being should come from heaven to save us, our situation must be deplorable indeed. How dark for instance, how black, must have been that night of ignorance which nothing less than the descent of the Sun of Righteousness from his celestial sphere could illuminate. How strong must have been those bands of sin, which none but all Almighty deliverer could break. How incalculably great must have been that guilt, for which nothing but such a sacrifice could atone. In a word, how incurable, how desperate must have been the spiritual maladies of our race, when such a physician was necessary to heal them, and whenever he could find no remedy sufficiently efficacious but his own blood! Well may we say, with an apostle, that if one, if such an one, died for men, then were men dead. My hearers, it is not those passages which speak of the blindness of the human mind, the desperate wickedness of the human heart, and the vast amount of human sinfulness and human guilt, that give me the most appalling views of our situation. No, it is the means which were thought necessary by infinite wisdom to save us from that situation. I know that God would not leave heaven for a slight cause.

I know that the Creator would not be born, and suffer, and die, unless some most tremendous exigency demanded it. And when I am told that the situation of man was so hopeless, so deplorable, as to render such means necessary for his deliverance, then, then I view our situation as terrible indeed. I see the dreadfulness of our fate in the means employed to rescue us from it. My hearers, you would in other cases, reason in a similar manner. Were either of you sick, and should your friends at a vast expense send to a great distance for a most skilful physician, you would conclude at once, that they considered your disease as exceedingly dangerous; your fears would be excited, and you would readily submit to every means which might possibly effect a cure. Why then, when you see, not a prophet, not an angel, but the eternal Son of God, the Creator, Upholder, and Governor of the world, sent from heaven to cure you, will you not reason and act in a similar manner? Why not say, if my own merits, if a man, if an angel could have saved me, Jesus Christ would never have come forth from his Father into this world to do it. Why not believe that there is none other name given under heaven among men, whereby you can be saved. And why not receive thankfully, and at once, this great Physician, and submit to the means of cure which he prescribes? Remember that if you neglect to do this, you will, you must be left in that awful situation, and exposed to that tremendous doom from which Jesus Christ came to save sinners. Remember, that that doom will be awfully aggravated by your neglect of such a Saviour. Remember that, if you reject him, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. Today, then, if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts. That you may be induced to do this, permit me to remind you,

3. Of the certainty which attends every truth revealed to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. You sometimes say, at least in your hearts, no man has ever returned from the other world to give us any information of what awaits us there, or even to assure us of its existence. We cannot then be certain that there is another world, or a day of judgment, or a heaven, or a hell. If indeed one would rise from the dead, and assure us that he had seen and known all these things, we might believe. But, my hearers, something far more satisfactory than this has been done. Not a man merely, but the Son of God, our Creator, our future Judge, has come from the other world to this, on purpose to reveal it to us, to bring life and immortality to light. He came directly from the bosom of his

Father, and is therefore, intimately acquainted with all his counsels and designs. He came from that very heaven which he revealed to us; and lest we should refuse to give him credit, he by his miracles fixed the broad seal of heaven to his doctrines. Lest even this should be insufficient, the eternal Father, by an audible voice from heaven exclaimed, This is my beloved Son: Hear ye him; that is, yield full credit to all which he reveals; yield implicit obedience to all his commands. And how much better, how much more satisfactory is this, than would be the report of some fallible mortal, returning from the other world, who might be deceived himself, or willfully deceive us. My hearers, if you will not yield to this evidence, if you will not believe the Lord Jesus Christ who came from heaven, and is returned to heaven, most certainly you would not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. You must however do as you please; but for us, I speak in the name of all his real disciples, until you can show us a better, a more infallible Teacher, we must and will follow him. Nor are we ashamed to avow our faith. No; we exult and glory in it.

We triumph while we point to the strong foundations of our belief, and build upon them our eternal hopes. We can look up and say, to our ascended Saviour, Lord, we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ the Son of the living God. And we know experimentally the truth of the apostle's assertion, He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; a witness, which cannot deceive him. Tell us not then of the vain opinions, the endless conjectures of ignorant, fallible, short-sighted men, groping in midnight darkness. Tell us not of conjectures, when we have certainty. Everything which Christ has revealed respecting the other world, is fixed, established, certain. It is no longer a matter of doubt or dispute. We rely upon it, as if we had ourselves visited the other world, and seen all which he reveals. We venture our all upon it. We renounce things which we have seen for things which we have not seen; and while we believe, we find our Saviour's declaration verified, I am come a light into the world, that he who believeth in me should not walk in darkness but have the light of life. Hence too, we firmly believe that he will again visit our world as its Judge, that to them who look and wait for him he will appear the second time without sin unto salvation. He has assured us that he will, and we can rely confidently upon his word. Nor is it, even humanly speaking, one half so improbable that he will come the second time, as it was that he would come the first. It appears far less astonishing that he should come as God to judge the world, than that he should come as man to die for the world. And being assured that he did come once, we feel assured that he will come again. Meanwhile in obedience to his commands, we will, by eating of this bread and drinking of this cup, assist in showing forth his death till he shall come.

4. How real, how accessible, and how near to us, my Christian friends, does heaven appear, viewed in the light of this subject. When we hear our Saviour, our Head speak of coming from heaven into this world, and returning from this world to heaven, it is like hearing a friend speak of going to Europe and returning home. We have as much reason to regard heaven as a reality, as we have to regard Europe as a reality; nay we have more, for surely our Saviour's testimony is more satisfactory, more infallible, than that of all the men who ever returned from Europe. And as our Saviour returned to heaven, he is now in heaven, he appears there for us, as our Advocate; our representative, our forerunner. Whither the head is gone, all the members must in due time follow. I will, he said, in his dying prayer, —Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am, that they may behold my glory. Yes, he wills it, and it shall be done. Soon will your disembodied spirits, freed from all imperfection, follow your ascended Head and Lord, to

mansions above, mansions which he is even now preparing for you; and there shall you be forever with the Lord. Comfort and encourage one another then with these words. Place your affections, not on things below, but on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; and live in such a manner that you may be always able to say with an old disciple, My Head is in heaven, my heart is in heaven, and ere long I shall myself be there. To conclude: Gladly, most gladly, my impenitent hearers, would I say something to render this subject profitable to you; for the subject of the last Sabbath, the never dying worm, and the unquenchable fire, are still before me. I see a vast and most expensive apparatus of means employed to open a way for your escape from that fate. I see heaven opening, your Creator descending, angels attending him down, and all their enraptured hosts exclaiming, Mortals, we bring you glad tidings of great joy; unto you is born a Saviour. I see this Saviour living, teaching, working miracles, dying on the cross; reascending to heaven. I see his heralds sent out to proclaim these facts, to offer peace and pardon and salvation to dying men. I turn with anxious eagerness to you, to see how you are affected by all this; and alas, I find you scarcely affected at all. I find you paying no regard to all these wonders, taking no pains to secure this great salvation; but eager in the pursuit of trifles, and pursuing that very course, which, your future Judge has most explicitly declared, will terminate in everlasting woe. My hearers, do you believe there ever was such a person as Jesus Christ? Do you believe that, standing in the midst of his disciples, he said, he came forth from the Father and am come into the world, and again I leave the world and go to the Father. If you believe this, you must believe that everything which he said, was infallibly true, and will infallibly be accomplished. You must believe that he is now at the right hand of God, that he is speaking to you in his word, and that, if they escaped not who refused to hear him when he spake on earth, much more will you not escape, if you turn away from him speaking from heaven. But why do I ask whether you believe these things? The conduct of many among you declares, with ten thousand voices, that you do not believe them, or that, if you have any faith in them, it is only that cold speculative faith, which being without works is dead. Did you believe them, nothing on earth, nothing that you ever heard or saw, would appear so interesting, so affecting. Then, instead of seeing you crowding away from the table of Christ, we should see you, with deep interest in your countenances and strong affection in your hearts, coming around it to commemorate a crucified and ascended Saviour. But as it is, we can only say to you, He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

S. Character affected by intercourse

Character affected by intercourse "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Proverbs 13:20 have often reminded you that the terms wisdom and folly, wise and foolish, have a very different signification in the writings of Solomon, from that which they bear in the works of uninspired men. By wisdom, he means something of which the fear of the Lord is the prime constituent; for he says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments. By wisdom, then, he means religion; for religion begins with the fear of God. Of course, by the wise, he intends those who are religious; those who, to use the language of an apostle, are wise unto salvation. By folly, on the contrary, he means sin; and, by the foolish, those who love and practice it; or, in other words, impenitent sinners, who are destitute of the fear of God with which wisdom begins. The import of our text then is this, He that walks with religious men will become religious; but a companion of sinners shall be destroyed. These two assertions I now propose to consider separately, with a view to illustrate their meaning, and convince you of their truth.

I. He that walks with religious men will become religious. The term walk, as used, by the inspired writers, always signifies a continued course of conduct, or a manner of living, in which men persevere till it becomes habitual. Thus the phrase, Enoch walked with God, evidently signifies that he lived in a religious manner. He did not repair to God occasionally, when want or affliction or fear of death impelled; he did not merely take a few steps in that path in which God condescends to walk with men, and then forsake it; but he pursued that path habitually and perseveringly; he lived with God, in contradistinction from those who live without him in the world. So the phrase, to walk in the way of God’s commandments, evidently signifies, to pursue a course of holy obedience, without turning aside to the right hand or to the left. To walk with religious men, then, is not merely to mingle occasionally in their society, or to unite with them in performing some of the more public ditties of religion; but it is to make them habitually our chosen companions and friends, and, in subordination to God, our guides.

It is not, for instance, walking with religious men to go with them to places of public worship; for David says of Ahithophel, who died as a fool dieth, We walked to the house of God in company. Nor is it walking with religious men to converse with them occasionally on religious subjects; for David says of the same Ahithophel, We took sweet counsel together: that is, we had conversation pleasant to me, and, as I then thought, to him, respecting subjects of a religious nature. It is not walking with religious men to reside with them, to live in a pious family; and to attend with its members at the family altar; for a person may do this reluctantly, and his chosen associates, the companions of his pleasure, may be of a very different character. Nor does uniting with religious men in promoting some of the great objects which the Christian world is now pursuing, necessarily prove that we walk with them; for we may be led to do this by wrong motives, as well as by those which are right. But to walk with religious men is to choose them for our associates, our fellow travelers in the journey of life; and this implies an agreement with them in our views and objects of pursuit. Can two walk together, says the prophet, except they be agreed? A question which plainly

implies that they cannot. In order that two persons may walk together, they must be agreed, first; respecting the place to which they will go; for if one wishes to go to one place, and the other to a different place, they cannot be companions. In the second place, they must agree in opinion respecting the way which leads to that place; for if they disagree in this they will soon separate. In these two particulars, then, all who would walk with religious characters must agree.

Now the place to which every religious person, is travelling is heaven. Every such person, the Scriptures inform us, is a pilgrim and stranger on earth, seeking another and better country, that is a heavenly. Of course, all who would walk with them must make heaven the object of their pursuit, the place which they aim to reach.

Again; in the opinion of every truly religious person, the only way to heaven is Jesus Christ; for I, says he, am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me. All those who walk with religious persons must agree with them in assenting to this truth. I do not mean that they must immediately and cordially embrace it, for they would then themselves be religious; but they must have such a conviction that there is a heaven, and that an interest in Jesus Christ is necessary to obtain it, as will draw them away from sinful society and sinful pleasure, and induce them to associate with Christians, to unite with them in attending diligently all the means of grace, and to listen with interest to religious conversation; they must, in short, have such a conviction of the truth and reality and importance of religion as to adopt the resolution and the language of Ruth: Entreat us not to leave you, nor to return from following after you, for where you go, we will go, where you dwell we will dwell; your people shall be our people, and your God our God, nor shall any thing part us. Nor is it sufficient to adhere to this resolution for a short time only, for every Person, who becomes the subject of serious impressions, forms such a resolution, and adheres to it so long as these impressions remain. During this period he loses all relish for worldly pleasures, and for conversation of a worldly nature, and can enjoy no society but that of Christians. But in too many cases this state of mind is of short duration. Their serious impressions are effaced, their desire for earthly and sinful objects revives, they forsake religious pursuits, and religious society, and return snore eagerly perhaps than ever, to their former courses, their former associates. Such persons cannot be said to walk with religious characters, in the sense of our text; they do at most but take a few steps with them, and, instead of adhering to the resolution of Ruth, imitate the conduct of Orpah, who after a short struggle between her convictions and her inclinations, went back to her country and to her idols. But those, who instead of thus drawing back to perdition persevere to the end of life in the course which has been described, really walk with religious persons, and will themselves become religious. There are several circumstances and considerations which, taken collectively, prove the truth of this assertion, though no one of them taken separately would be sufficient to prove it. In the first place, the simple fact, that a person chooses to associate with religious characters, in religious pursuits, proves that he is already the subject of serious impressions; that his understanding is convinced of the reality and importance of religion: that his conscience is awakened, and that, to use the language of inspiration, the Spirit of God is striving with hint; for it is most certain that, unless this is the case, no person will ever forsake his sinful pleasures and pursuits, and his sinful companions for the society of Christians. All his natural feelings and inclinations render him averse to their society, and prevent his finding pleasure in religious pursuits: while, at the same time, they urge him to pursue worldly objects, and give him a relish for the company of worldly associates. He is also aware that, should he forsake

his worldly companions for the society of Christians, he will expose himself to their contempt and become the subject of their ridicule. What then is to induce him to act contrary to his natural feelings and inclinations, and to exchange society which he loves, and in which he finds pleasure, for that which is disagreeable, and to expose himself to ridicule and contempt? It is most evident that nothing can do this but the power of an awakened conscience, of strong conviction produced by the Spirit of God. He then, who begins to walk with religious persons, is already the subject of religious impressions, the Spirit of God is operating upon his mind, and this affords some reason to hope that he will become really religious. At least his situation is much more hopeful than that of a person who feels no religious concern. In the second place, he who walks with religious persons, will see and hear many things which powerfully tend to increase and perpetuate those serious impressions of which he is already the subject; while, at the same time, he will be withdrawn from the operation of many of those causes by which such impressions are effaced. There is nothing which tends more powerfully to obliterate these impressions, than the society, the conversation, and example of the world. These causes have destroyed more, who once were not far from the kingdom of God, than perhaps all other causes united. Indeed it is, humanly speaking, impossible that any serious impressions should remain long upon a mind, which is exposed to the full malignant influence of these causes. But he who walks with religious persons, is very much withdrawn from this fatal influence. Not only so, but he is brought under a different and salutary influence.

He moves in a circle where God and the Redeemer, and the soul, and salvation, and heaven, are regarded as objects of supreme importance; and where the world, with all which it contains, is considered as comparatively worthless. He moves in a circle where he sees religion exemplified, where it is presented to him not as a cold abstraction, or as a lifeless form, but living, breathing, and acting, in the person of its disciples. He sees the salutary and happy effects which it produces; he sees that it does not, as he once thought, render its votaries gloomy or morose or misanthropic, but that its fruits are love and joy and peace. In addition, he hears much conversation on religious subjects, much that is calculated to instruct him, to warn him, and to increase his conviction of sin; and his desire to become truly religious. Besides he is almost daily brought under the operation of some of the means which God employs to produce and increase conviction, and to effect conversion. It is therefore, to say the least, highly probable that he will become truly religious. In the third place, as the term walk signifies a continued course of conduct, it is evident that one, who walks with religious men, must be the subject of serious impressions for many years Successively. We have already seen that no one will begin to walk with religious persons, till he becomes the subject of serious impressions. Equally evident is it, that no one will continue to walk with them after his serious impressions are effaced. He then who does continue to walk with them through life, must be the subject of serious impressions through life. But no one, it is presumed, ever heard of an instance in which a person, who was the subject of serious impressions through life, did not become religious. It is true persons may be seriously affected, occasionally, and perhaps for years together, and at different seasons, may associate mach with religious characters, without becoming religious; but such persons cannot be said to walk with good men in the sense of the text; for their religious impressions are often effaced for a considerable time, and long intervals of carelessness succeed, during which they forsake in a great measure religious pursuits, and religious society. But it is believed that no instance can be found, of a person who continued through life to walk with religious characters, and yet never become religious. We readily allow,

indeed, that such a thing is possible; there is nothing in the nature of things to prevent it. God could, if he pleased, produce convictions of sin, and apprehension of future punishment which should last through life, and yet never be followed by conversion. But this is not his method. His method is, to give up those who obstinately resist his grace, to hardness of heart and to blindness of mind, and thus leave them to walk in their own ways, and to be filled with the fruit of their own devices. Hence the serious impressions of those who finally perish are usually of short continuance; or if they continue long, it is with many interruptions. Nothing but real grace, but genuine religion, will enable a man to endure to the end. He then who continues to walk with religious men to the end of his life will become religious. Indeed he must have become so before many years, perhaps before many months had been spent in such a course.

II. Let us now consider the second assertion contained in our teat, A companion of sinners shall be destroyed. By a companion of sinners is evidently meant, one who chooses for his associates persons regardless of religion. It does not render us companions of sinners to reside with them, to transact business with them., or to visit and converse with them for the purpose of performing kind offices, or of promoting their eternal interests. But if we select them as our intimate associates; if we choose to spend our leisure hours in their company; if we find pleasure in their society, and prefer it to that of religious persons; then we are certainly their companions in the sense of the text, and shall perish with them. The truth of this assertion will appear evident from the following considerations viewed collectively, In the first place, it is certain that he, who is in this sense a companion of sinners, is the subject of no religious impressions, that he has few if any serious thoughts. The very fact, that he chooses such persons for his associates and companions, proves that he resembles them; that his views and feelings respecting religion correspond with theirs, and that their conversation is agreeable to his taste. Referring to such characters, our Saviour says, They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth or listeneth to them. Hence it appears that they whose conversation is of a worldly nature, and they, who listen with pleasure to such conversation, are alike of the world. Besides, we have already seen that as soon as any person becomes the subject of serious impressions, he wishes to associate with serious characters. Such persons only will converse with him on that subject which lies nearest his heart, and which therefore is most interesting; from such persons alone can he obtain that information which he desires; and they alone can understand and sympathize in his feelings. To speak on worldly subjects to such a person, will be like singing songs to a heavy heart. How can he, who is burdened with a load of guilt, and feels that his soul is in danger; that his eternal interests are at stake—find pleasure in conversing on subjects comparatively worthless and trifling? It is impossible. Nothing then can be more certain than the fact, that he, who selects irreligious persons for his companions, and finds pleasure in their society, is not the subject of any serious impressions. He exactly resembles those with whom he associates, and is like them pursuing the broad and crowded road which leads to destruction. In the second place, he who chooses for his companions, persons regardless of religion, takes the most effectual way to prevent any serious impressions from being ever made on his mind. Experience and observation unite to prove, that the human mind, as is said of the chameleon, takes the complexion of those with whom it associates, and that the force of example, especially of bad example, is almost irresistible. There is in human nature a principle of association, in consequence of which we can scarcely avoid becoming, in some degree at least, conformed to those with whom we associate on intimate and friendly terms. The operation of this principle is powerfully assisted, and its effects

increased, by that desire to please which is natural to man. Hence he, who selects persons regardless of religion as his companions, will become more and more like them; he will imitate their example; he will become thoroughly imbued with their spirit; and receive their principles and maxims as the perfection of wisdom.

He will see them treat religion with indifference and neglect; he will hear them speak of it, if they speak of it at all, with levity, if not with contempt; he will find that they consider attention to it as quite unnecessary, and regard those who are the subjects of serious impressions as weak and deluded. Now it is evident that nothing can tend more powerfully than this to prevent him from ever becoming the subject of such impressions. It is evident that, by mingling in such society, he will become hardened against the truth, and fortified against every argument, motive, and consideration of a religious nature which can be presented to his mind. He will come to the house of God, not with any desire to receive instruction, but merely to spend an idle hour in vain thoughts, or in unprofitable gazing, or in listening for something to which he may plausibly object, or turn into ridicule; and while divine truth drops around him like the rain, and distils as the dew, there will be, if I may so express it, an umbrella spread over his head which will suffer no salutary drop to fall upon him; or in the language of Scripture, there will be a veil upon his heart, through which the light of divine truth cannot penetrate. It is therefore evident, not only that such a person has no serious impressions, but that there is very little reason to hope he will ever be the subject of them. In the third place, he who selects persons regardless of religion for his associates, takes the most effectual way to banish those serious thoughts which will occasionally rise in the minds even of the most careless. God employs various means to excite such thoughts. An attack of disease, the death of a companion, or an awakening sermon, often occasions them. Now if a person in whose mind such thoughts arise, would entertain them willingly, cherish them, commune with his own heart and seek the society of religious persons, the consequences might be most happy and lasting. But if he associates with persons regardless of religion, his serious thoughts will almost infallibly be banished. Suppose, for instance, that a person, who comes careless and thoughtless to the house of God, finds his attention arrested, his understanding convinced, his conscience awakened by the truths which he hears. While listening to these truths, he probably forms a kind of vague, undefined resolution, that he will pay more attention to religious subjects than he has dote. But he leaves the house of God, and almost unavoidably falls in with some of his irreligious companions, He soon finds that the truths, to which he has been listening with interest, have not affected them in the same manner. If he ventures to hint, that the sermon was convincing, or the subject of it important, his remarks are received with the most frigid indifference, or with a look of surprise mingled with contempt. He is therefore obliged to repress his serious thoughts, and such thoughts when repressed soon leave us. Besides, he must make an effort to enter into conversation, or his companions will suspect him of being serious, —a suspicion which he cannot bear to have them entertain. The subject of conversation will, of course, be of a worldly nature; it will excite worldly thoughts, and thus his serious thoughts will be banished, so that, before he quits his companions and returns home, the effect of the truth which he has heard is entirely obliterated. I dare appeal to many of you, my hearers, for the truth of these remarks. Many of you cannot deny that you have been religiously affected by the truth which you have heard in this house; nor can you deny that, when you were thus affected, the society, conversation and example of your irreligious companions, banished your serious thoughts and lulled you to sleep again in the lap of sinful security. Thus it will always be, while you choose such companions. You may be a thousand

times roused, and a thousand times may resolve that you will be more attentive to religion; but so long as you are a companion of sinners, your serious thoughts will be banished and all your resolutions broken.

Finally, he, who associates with persons regardless of religion, will inevitably form confirmed habits of feeling, thinking and acting, which will operate most powerfully to prevent him from ever becoming religious, and thus effect his destruction. The language of inspiration is, Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? then may those, who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well. But by associating with irreligious companions, men soon become accustomed to do evil. They acquire confirmed habits of neglecting religion, of delaying preparation for death, and of banishing serious thoughts. They also become more blindly devoted to the world, more fond of the society, conversation, and pursuits of those with whom they associate, and of course more enslaved by their influence and example. Thus, to use the language of Scripture, their bands are made strong, so strong that they will probably never break them. Nor is this all, there are among us few men, at least few young men, totally regardless of religion, whose morals are perfectly pure; few, who are not addicted to some species of vice. One is profane, another is intemperate, a third is debauched, and a fourth is not strictly honest.

These sins may, at first, disgust a young man, whose morals are as yet uncontaminated; but if he continues to associate with those who are guilty of them, his disgust will infallibly, though gradually, subside. He will first tolerate these vices, for the sake of those who practice them; then he will learn to give them soft, extenuating names; next he will be taught that it is a proof of spirit and genius in a young man, to plunge into some excesses; finally he will take the plunge, and be entangled in a whirlpool, from which there is little reason to hope he will ever escape. What thousands and what millions of once promising youth have been ruined in this manner! Multitudes of our race have died in consequence of taking the plague, the yellow fever, the small pox, from the diseased: bin far greater multitudes have been ruined, both for this world and for the next, by taking the infection of vice from vicious companions. From the preceding remarks, it appears that he, who associates with persons regardless of religion, has no present religious impressions; that he takes the most effectual way to prevent such impressions from being made on his mind, and to efface them when they are made; and that he is continually forming habits most unfavorable to religion, and thus bringing himself into a state in which he can no more learn to do well, than an Ethiopian can change his skin, or a leopard his spots; of course, he will die without religion, and the doom of all who die without religion, is destruction. The companion of sinners then will be destroyed. It remains to make some improvement of the subject.

1. From this subject we may learn what course we are pursuing, and what will be our fate if we continue in our present course till the end of life. We cannot but know who are our chosen companions and associates; with whom we love to converse, and in whose society we find most pleasure. We cannot but know whether they consist of persons apparently religious, or of those who pay no regard to religion. Say then, my hearers, who are your associates? Are you walking with religious characters, or are you companions of sinners? I ask this question, not only of those out of the church, but of those who are in it; for, strange as it may appear, there are many in the church of Christ, who are companions of sinners. They are united to the church only by the external tie of a profession; they do not walk with it; their hearts are not with it, but with the world.

They feel most at home in worldly society; in such society they find most pleasure. In worldly conversation they engage with most interest; worldly objects they pursue with most ardor. Now such persons, notwithstanding their profession, are companions of sinners in the sense of our text. Say then, my hearers, what are you? Are you with Christ or against him'? Can you truly say to God, in the language of the psalmist, I am a companion of them that fear thee, and that keep thy precepts? Are such characters your chosen associates, in whose company you find most pleasure, with whom you love to spend your leisure hour? Then you either are religious, or if you continue to pursue this course through life, will become so. But if you are a companion of those who pay no regard to religion, you are certainly irreligious, and if you pursue this course, destruction, everlasting destruction, will be your portion.

2. Let me beseech all present, and especially the young, to be guided by this subject in making choice of their associates. Remember that you are immortal beings, choosing companions for eternity. Remember, that if you choose to associate with persons regardless of religion now, you must associate with them forever. You must be partners with them in their destruction. Remember too, that when you meet them in the other world, you will find them stripped of every quality which now renders their society pleasing. For from him which hath not, shall betaken away even that which he seemeth to have. Theta those who are now your tempters shall be your tormentors, and feel a diabolical gratification in adding to your wretchedness. On the other hand, if you walk with good men, you shall have them for your companions through eternity; and not as they are now, stained by many imperfections, but perfect in every intellectual and moral excellence. Nor is this all. You shall also enjoy the society of angels, of your Redeemer, of your God.

O then, be companions of them that fear God. Shun the society of every one who is addicted to any vice, as you would shun a man infected with the plague; for if you associate with such a person, there is almost a moral certainty that his vices will become yours. Still more earnestly would I press an attention to this subject on those who are the subjects of serious impressions, or who have any serious thoughts. Do you wish to have such thoughts forever banished, such impressions effaced from your mind? do you wish to live without religion, to die without hope; and to perish forever? Then choose for your companions persons who are regardless of religion. On the other hand, do you wish that your serious thoughts should continue, that your serious impressions should become deep and lasting, and that they should end in conversion? do you wish to live religiously, to die triumphantly, to be happy eternally? Then shun irreligious society and walk with good men. Choose them for your companions, listen to their instructions, request their prayers, imitate their example, attend with them on all the means of grace, converse with them freely respecting your religious concerns. Pursue this course without interruption, and the issue will be happy.

Finally; permit me, in the name of all God's people, to address to each of you the invitation which Moses gave to Hobab; We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.

S. Character of Daniel

Character of Daniel "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved." (Daniel 10:11). of the great excellences of Scripture is, that it points out to us the path of duty, not only by precept, but by example. Not to mention the perfect pattern of a holy life, which it sets before us in the character and conduct of Christ, it presents to our view men of like passions with ourselves, in almost every possible variety of situation; and while it urges us, by the most powerful motives, to become followers of those who, by faith and patience, now inherit the promises, it clearly describes the way which led them to glory; and teaches us, by their example, in what manner to discharge the duties, support the trials, and overcome the temptations, of our probationary state. Of those whose characters are thus recorded for our imitation, few, if any, will be found superior to Daniel. His life as described in Scripture, appears to be without blemish. He is almost the only eminent saint there mentioned, of whom no fault is recorded. Nor was his character for goodness merely of the negative kind. Even during his life, he was placed by Jehovah himself, in the same rank with Job and Noah; men eminent in their day for faith and piety. In addition to this infallible testimony in his favor, we find him, once and again, addressed by an angel, as a man peculiarly dear to God. O man greatly beloved, says he, fear not; peace be unto thee; be strong, yea, be strong: for I am come to give thee skill and understanding, for thou art greatly beloved. The same title is given him in our text, by one who appears to have been the Son of God. I looked, says the prophet, and behold a man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold. His body also was like the beryl; and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in color to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright; for to thee am I sent. My friends, nothing is more indispensably necessary to the welfare of all creatures, than the favor of their Creator. To be greatly beloved of God is the highest honor and happiness, to which we can possibly attain, either in this world or the next. Hence it becomes a matter of infinite importance for us to know how this privilege is to be obtained. This knowledge we may easily acquire, from an attentive consideration of the life and conduct of Daniel. We know from infallible testimony that he was greatly beloved; and have therefore every reason to conclude that all who resemble him will enjoy the love and favor of God. Let us then carefully examine his character, and ascertain, if possible, why he was so greatly beloved by his Creator. The first thing in his character which deserves our attention, is his early piety. Like Josiah, though he was very young when carried captive to Babylon, yet even then he appears from his conduct to have been eminently pious. He must therefore, like Josiah, have begun at a very tender age, to seek after the Lord God of his fathers. At a period of life, when most young persons are wholly engrossed by follies and trifles, and know nothing of spiritual and divine things, he was well acquainted with the law of God; and, though a child in years, was a man in knowledge and understanding. This remembrance of his Creator in the days of his youth, when mankind generally forget him, was doubtless one among other things, which gave him so distinguished a place in the divine favor; for God’s language to his creatures is, I love them that love me.

Another trait in the character of Daniel, deserving our attention, is the caution, zeal and resolution which he displayed, in keeping himself unspotted from the world. This, the apostle James informs us, is an essential part of pure and undefiled religion; and for this, Daniel was highly distinguished. When carried to Babylon, he, with a few companions, children in whom was no blemish, but who were well-favored, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and possessing ability to stand in the king's presence, was selected from the other captives, and taken into the royal palace; that they might acquire the learning and language of the Chaldeans. In this situation, the king appointed them a daily provision of his own meat, and of the wine which he drank; so nourishing them for three years, that, at the end thereof, they might stand before the king. But Daniel purposed in his heart, that he would not defile himself with the king's meat. Various reasons might induce him to adopt this resolution. He might do it from love of country, and his fellow captives, with a view to show his sorrow for their calamities.

He could say with Nehemiah, why should not my countenance be sad; why should I indulge my appetite in feasting when the city and place of my father's sepulchres lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. For a Jew to be joyful when his nation was thus smarting under the judgments of heaven, was not only unsuitable and improper, but highly displeasing to God: for we find in the prophet Amos, a wo denounced against those who eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the stall, and drink wine in bowls, in a time of public calamity, but are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph. A regard to his country, and to this threatening, might possibly have some influence in producing Daniel's resolution not to defile himself with the king's meat. But it was, more probably, from a principle of obedience to the divine law. You need not be told, that, by the law, the Jews were strictly forbidden to eat certain animals, which were used for food among the heathen; and that all kinds of food which had been previously offered in sacrifice to idols, were considered by them as unclean. Had Daniel shared in the king's provision, he would have been under the necessity of eating, not only meats which had been offered to idols, but meats which were absolutely forbidden by the law of Moses.

He, therefore, resolved not to defile himself by partaking of it; but to live only on herbs and water. If we consider the circumstances of his situation, my friends, we shall find reason to admire the firmness, zeal, and tenderness of conscience, displayed in this resolution. In age, he was but a chill. The royal delicacies which he was invited, and even commanded to partake of, would doubtless have been highly gratifying to his appetite; and he might easily have invented many plausible excuses for enjoying them. He might have pleaded that lie was a captive, and under obligation to obey those into whose power Providence had thrown him. He might have pleaded that by refusing to partake of the king's meat, he should bring upon himself much ridicule and reproach, and perhaps expose himself to severe punishments. He might have pleaded that the Jewish ceremonial law was not intended to be binding in a foreign country; and that since he was among the Chaldeans, he was under the necessity of complying with their manners and customs. With much less plausible excuses than these, do young persons, in general, satisfy themselves for complying with the sinful customs and manners of the world. But Daniel, notwithstanding his tender age, had sufficient firmness of mind to reject them. Be the consequence what it might, he was determined to maintain his integrity, and to preserve himself unspotted in the midst of a

luxurious court, and ensnaring examples. Thus he early began to deny ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and to live soberly and temperately, presenting his body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This conduct doubtless had a tendency to secure the divine favor, and to render him a man greatly beloved by his Creator. It proved that he was not ashamed of his religion, his country, or his God; and that like Moses, he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. A third remarkable trait in the character of Daniel, is the holy indifference and contempt with which he looked down on worldly honor, wealth and applause. We have already seen how little he valued, even in his youth, those worldly, sensual pleasures, by which the young are so often fascinated and ensnared. As little did he value wealth and honor. Though he was of royal descent, and though he had, from his infancy, beers educated in courts where religion was neglected, God dishonored, and the world idolized as the one thing needful; and though he possessed, in the court of Babylon, every possible. opportunity and advantage, for acquiring riches and honors, yet he seems to have overcome all these temptations, and to have considered all these ensnaring objects, for which millions barter their souls, as trifles unworthy of his pursuit. It is true, he obtained both riches and honors; but it is no less true that he never sought them. They came to him unasked and undesired.

He evidently appears to have preferred a calm, retired, humble station, to all that kings and courts could give. Witness the manner in which he treated the monarchs under whose government he lived. Instead of flattering them, as did others, and as he would have done, had he desired to secure their favor, he never failed to reprove them for their sins, when a favorable opportunity was offered him. Hear with what holy boldness he reproved the proud Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful monarch on earth. Break off thy sins, says he, by righteousness; and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. This was strange language to the ears of a prince, who was accustomed to hear nothing but the most extravagant praises and flatteries and who was never addressed by his subjects without their prostrating themselves before him. With the same holy zeal and fortitude did he reprove the impious Belshazzar. When he offered to clothe Daniel in scarlet robes; adorn his neck with a chain of gold, and make him the third ruler in the kingdom, he replied with a holy contempt for these glittering trifles, let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another. Thou, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all that befell thy father, for his pride; but thou hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven, and the God in whose hands thy breath is, thou hast not glorified. This, my friends, is not the language of a man of the world, who wished for the riches and honors which kings bestow on their favorites? No; it is the independent language of a man crucified to the world, and regardless of what that world could bestow. This trait in his character was indispensably necessary to render him beloved by his Maker; for we are expressly assured that the love and friendship of the world are enmity with God.

Another part of Daniel’s character which we are called to notice, is his exemplary piety and devotion. He was emphatically a man of prayer. Though he lived in the midst of the tumult, noise, and confusion of a court, and during a great part of his life, had almost the sole direction of the counsels and offices of a powerful nation, which must necessarily involve him in an ocean of business, cares, and perplexities; yet he daily found much more time for secret prayer, than many Christians can find at the present day, who have nothing but their own private concerns to engage their attention. He never pleaded, as an excuse for neglecting this duty, that his body was too

much wearied, and his mind too much perplexed by constant care and fatigue, to perform it. No; whatever obstacles might oppose it, or however loudly necessary business might demand his attention, he prayed to God regularly three times in a day; and he would much sooner have thought of neglecting his daily food, and sleep, than of omitting these accustomed devotional exercises. He lived, in this respect, like a man who knew that his soul needed daily refreshment, as well as his body; and who felt that, without God, he could do nothing. Praying was not with him, an idle form, a heartless ceremony, or a duty performed merely to quiet his conscience. No; it was his joy and delight; it was the very life of his soul; and with almost as much ease, might the sun he turned from his course, as he from his daily approaches to the throne of grace. Even the commands of the king, and the certainty of being cast into the den of lions, could not, for one moment, deter him from the performance of this duty. My friends, do you love prayer thus fervently and sincerely? How often, think you, should you approach the throne of grace, if your way to it lay through a den of lions? But to return. In addition to the prayers which Daniel offered up; three times in a day, he frequently set apart seasons for more especial attention to this duty. He set his face, as he expresses it, to seek the Lord God by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes; and in the performance of these duties, he sometimes spent the greater part of every day for weeks together. Since God loves those who love him, we cannot wonder that a man whose fervent love for his Maker led him so frequently and constantly to the mercy seat, should be greatly beloved in return.

Another trait in the character of this eminent saint, was his strong faith; and confidence in God. That he possessed such a faith is evident from the frequency and fervency of his prayers; since none truly pray, but those whose faith is strong and lively. That his faith was of this character is further evident, from his conduct, and from the testimony of Scripture. It was this which enabled him, without shrinking, to enter the lion’s den, and which preserved him there unhurt. He was taken up out of the den, we are told, and no manner of hurt was found upon him; why? —because, says the inspired penman, he believed in his God. This, this alone preserved him. Like Moses, he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith, be could realize God’s presence, and his ability to shut the lions’ mouths. It was in consequence of possessing such a faith as this, that Abraham was called the friend of God. My friends, is your faith of this kind? Does it produce effects similar to these? Does it support and comfort you in dangers, trials, and temptations? It will do so, if it be genuine. But if it is not, if it is mere natural, speculative belief, it will have little effect. It will not overcome the world, it will not lead you to encounter perils and difficulties, for the sake of Christ; it will not enable you to see him who is invisible. It is without fruits; it is dead.

Again; profound humility, and a consequent disposition to give the glory to God, is another remarkable trait in the character of Daniel. This appears in his confessions and praises. Notwithstanding his eminent piety, we find him saying, O Lord, we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled by departing from thy precepts, and thy judgments. He seems to be at a loss for expressions sufficiently strong to describe the greatness of his sins, and heaps words together, in order, if possible, to show the deep sense which he entertained of his guilt and unworthiness. In the exercise of the same humble temper, we find him renouncing all pretensions to any worthiness or righteousness of his own; and depending entirely on the sovereign mercy of God. He might have trusted to his own prayers and merits, with as much propriety as any man that ever existed; but instead of this, we find him saying, O Lord,

unto thee belongeth righteousness, but unto us confusion of face: we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. The same humble temper is strikingly expressed in his language to Nebuchadnezzar, when he revealed to him his dream with its interpretation. Instead of taking to himself the glory of this interpretation, he says, There is a God in heaven, who revealeth secrets; but as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for the sake of any wisdom that I have more than others. Here, my friends, you see the genuine language of humility. He was afraid that the king would suppose, either that he had discovered this secret by his own wisdom, or that it was revealed to him for the sake of his own superior goodness; and that thus, God would lose the glory of his own work. With a view to prevent this, and to lead the king to give the glory to God, he modestly disclaims all praise, and refers it to him to whom it was due. He who thus humbles himself shall be exalted. The last trait in the character of Daniel, which I shall mention, is, that his religion was habitual, uniform, consistent, and lasting. He was always the same. In childhood, in youth, in manhood, and in age; he inflexibly followed the path of duty, and steadfastly adhered to the God of his fathers. Nothing could seduce, nothing could drive him from his course, or induce him to deviate from it, for one moment, in the smallest possible degree. Of this, his conduct, when his enemies conspired to ruin him, affords a striking and satisfactory proof. When he knew that the decree, condemning any one who should pray to God for thirty days, to be cast into the den of lions, was irrevocably passed, he went into his house and prayed to God, as usual, three times a day; his windows being open towards Jerusalem. Yet how many plausible excuses might he have made, for conducting differently; and how many would he have made, had he resembled some professing Christians of the present day. He might have pleaded that his life was of great consequence to his countrymen; that it was in his power to do much good, in his then elevated station; that he was bound to obey the king his master; that it was his duty to preserve his own life; and that it would do no harm to anyone, on such an occasion, to abstain from prayer for thirty days. At least, he might have urged that it would be justifiable, in such circumstances, to shut his windows, and pray in private; and thus disappoint the wicked designs of his enemies. These excuses,—any one but a real Christian would have made, and considered himself justified in omitting prayer entirely, or at least performing it in secret. But Daniel was really religious, and therefore could not be deceived by these plausible excuses. He knew that he was watched. He knew that if he neglected to pray with his windows open, as usual, his enemies would assert that he had omitted that duty. He knew that, in this case, it would be said, See, Daniel, notwithstanding his pretended firmness and piety, can, like others, make his religion bend to his interest. He prefers his life to his duty. He cannot trust in his God to save him. His God, therefore, can be no better than the gods of the nations; and his religion is no better than ours. Thus God would be dishonored, the Chaldeans would be prejudiced against the true religion, and a glorious opportunity of suffering for Jehovah, would be lost forever. These reasons did not allow Daniel to hesitate a moment respecting what he ought to do; and for him to know what he ought to do, and to do it, were the same. He never troubled himself about consequences. He only asked, what is duty? When he once saw the path of duty, he would follow it though hell should open her mouth in his way. This, the whole tenor of his conduct proves; and a similar course must be pursued by all who wish to be, like him, beloved by their Maker.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. From this subject we may learn, my friends, how religion dignifies, and ennobles our nature, when it is entertained in its power and purity. How noble, how dignified, how sublime, does the character of Daniel appear! That you may see this in its true light, bring him forward; and compare him with the nobles, princes, and great ones of Babylon. See them indulging in sensual pleasures, proud of their wealth and birth, panting for riches, honor, and applause, seeking these transitory trifles by every possible means, neglecting immortal honors and glories; and meanly envying and hating that excellence, which they could not reach. See Daniel, on the contrary, calm, firm, and self-collected; with an eye fixed on God and heaven, despising the trifles which they pursued, aiming at the glory of his Maker, and the happiness of his fellow creatures, and following with unconquerable, undeviating resolution, the path of duty. While they groveled on the earth, his head, and his heart were in heaven; —while their minds were darkened by the clouds of ignorance and prejudice, and their breasts convulsed by the storms of ambition, avarice, envy, and revenge; his exalted soul dwelt in regions of eternal day, far above the clouds of mental ignorance, and the storms of contending passions. That you may, still more clearly, discern the superiority of his character, compare him with the kings whom he served. See Belshazzar, making a great feast, to a thousand of his lords; and surrounded by every thing, which could dazzle or delight the senses.

See Nebuchadnezzar, walking in the midst of his palace, reflecting with self-complacency, on the nations he had subdued; and proudly exclaiming, 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? Then turn your eyes to the prophet. See him, with that heroic boldness, which nothing but true piety can give, reproving the pride of one of these kings, and the impious extravagance of the other; see him, in defiance of threats, and impending danger, bending his knees to the only being whom he feared; see him, with unshaken calmness and serenity, sitting in the midst of ravenous lions, who, like lambs, crouch at his feet;—and then say which was the more dignified character, he, or the proud kings of Babylon. Nay more, say which possessed the more enviable titles and honors; he or they? They were styled princes, on earth. But he, as a prince, had power with God and prevailed. They were honored, admired, and applauded by their fellow worms; but he was greatly beloved by his God. Who would not be Daniel in the lion’s den, rather than Belshazzar, at his feast, or Nebuchadnezzar on his golden throne? O how evidently does it, in this instance, appear, that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor. Such being the superior excellence of Daniel’s character, permit us farther to improve the subject, by inquiring,

2. Do you, my friends, possess a similar character? This, all must allow to be an important question; since if we do not resemble Daniel, we are not, like him, beloved of God. Say then, does your temper, your conduct resemble his? Did piety like his distinguish your early years? Have you kept yourselves unspotted from the world, when temptations to sensual indulgence were peculiarly plausible and urgent? Have riches as little attraction for you as they had for him? Is your piety habitual, the same in all circumstances; and are you equally fervent and persevering in prayer? Have you the same strong faith, and equally triumphant in the darkest times; and do you manifest the same deep humility, and unmoved firmness and resolution?

Lastly, permit me to improve this subject, by urging all present to imitate the conduct of Daniel. To induce you to this, consider what an unspeakable honor and privilege it is, to be greatly beloved of God. It is the highest honor and happiness to which a creature can arrive. It includes everything, which creatures can possibly desire; for, if God love us, then all things are ours, all things must

work together for our good, and nothing can do us any real injury; for, says the Apostle, if God be for us, who can be against us? O then, if you love life, if you love happiness, if you love yourselves, be persuaded to copy the example of Daniel. Let those of you who are young, begin early, like him, to seek after the Lord God of your fathers, and remember your Creator in the days of your youth. Begin from this day to cry unto him, My father, thou art the guide of my youth. Let those who have lost this precious season, remember that it is not yet too late, and strive to redeem the time which they have wasted, by double watchfulness, zeal and diligence. Above all, let those who profess to be the people of God, consider their peculiar obligations, to imitate this ancient worthy. Would to God, my professing friends, you could be prevailed upon to feel the force of these obligations. Would to God, that every member of this church were a Daniel, in weanedness from the world, in humility, in resolution, in faith, and in prayer. How would religion then revive and flourish among us. How would gainsayers be confounded. How would our hearts be encouraged, and God be glorified. How would your own souls rejoice. My Christian friends, why will not each of you be a Daniel? Are there no motives, no considerations, which will rouse you to exertion? Is there nothing in your natures, on which we can operate; no spark of holy ambition, of sacred zeal, which can be blown up into a flame! O that we could breathe a divine, celestial ardor, into your souls, and fire you with inextinguishable, insatiable desires after growth in grace. O that we could persuade you to pursue religion, with that patient, zealous, habitual, unwearied diligence, and resolution, with which you pursue the things of this world. Then should we see our wishes realized; then would this church be as a crown of glory, in the hand of the Lord, and as a royal diadem, in the hands of our God: then would there not only be some, but many, among us, to whom angels might say, Fear not, but be strong, O ye, who are greatly beloved of your God.

Chapter 27

S. DEMONSTRATION OF CHRISTS LOVE.

DEMONSTRATION OF CHRIST'S LOVE.

Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!—John 11:36. THIS exclamation was uttered at the tomb of Lazarus. It was occasioned by the tears which our Savior there shed. The unbeheving Jews, who, in consequence of the pointed manner in which he warned, reproved and threatened them, seem to have regarded him as unfeeling and morose, were surprised at seeing him exhibit such marks of sympathizing affection; and exclaimed with wonder, Behold how he loved him! The use which I propose to make of this passage, has probably, already occurred to you. If the affection which Christ felt for Lazarus, and which was manifested by his tears only, appeared surprisingly great to the Jews; how great, how surprising, should the love which he has manifested for us appear in our eyes! If the Jews exclaimed, Behold how he loved Lazarus! merely because they saw him weeping at his tomb, with how much reason may we exclaim, Behold how he loved us! When we behold him in Bethlehem, in Gethsemane, and on Calvary! Indeed, an apostle tells us, that the love of Christ passeth knowledge; and at the same the intimates that it is exceedingly important to know as much of it as is possible, and that, in proportion as we know it, we shall he filled with the fullness of God. Let us then, before we approach the table of our Lord, spend a few moments in meditating upon his unsearchable, unconquerable love.

I need not inform you that love, like every other affection of the heart, is in its own nature invisible to every eye but that of omniscience. We cannot look into the heart, and see it glowing there. We can discern it only in the effects which it produces, in the external signs which constitute its language, and which manifest its existence. We see it as it exists, not in the fountain, but in the streams; and from the copiousness of the streams, we infer the fullness of the fountain. Where the genuine effects of love are most abundantly displayed, there, we conclude, love exists in the highest degree. it is by this rule that we are to estimate the greatness of our Savior's love. Let us then inquire what are the genuine effects, the external indications of love, and how far they appear in the conduct of our Redeemer.

1. One of the effects and indications of love, is a readiness to submit to privations and inconveniences for the sake of assisting or reheving the person beloved. It is by the degree in which our friends exhibit this effect of love, that we estimate the strength of their affection for us. The greater the inconveniences and privations, to which they are willing to submit for our sakes, so much the greater do we suppose their love for us to be. We infer that parents love their children, because we see them willing to make laborious exertions, and to deny themselves many comforts, for the sake of giving them an education, and of providing for their future wants. Should a servant readily consent, without the prospect of reward, to accompany his banished master into exile among savage nations, or in frozen inhospitable climes, we should consider his conduct as indicating a very high degree of disinterested affection. Should a person sell himself for a slave, in order to redeem his friend from slavery, we should form still more exalted ideas of the strength of his friendship. Now what proofs of this kind has our Savior exhibited of the greatness of his love for

us! The scriptures fully answer this question; yet in consequence of our situation, and our ignorance of heaven, we can understand their answer but very imperfectly. They tell us that, when he was rich, he for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich. They tell us that, when he was in the form of God, he humbled and emptied himself and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. They tell us that he had a glory with his Father before the world was; that he laid aside this glory and made himself of no reputation. In a word, they inform us that he left heaven, and lived a life of labor, poverty and contempt on earth. It appears from this account, then, that he submitted to be deprived for many years, of the glory, the society, and the felicity of heaven, of glory and felicity too great for us to conceive of; and that he voluntarily exchanged all this for the lowest state on earth, and cheerfully endured all the inconveniences, privations and wants, attendant on such a state. All this he submitted to because he loved us.

Now were I speaking to angels or to persons who had seen heaven, who know what it is, who know what glory and felicity our Savior enjoyed there, who know how widely it differs from earth, and how exquisitely painful it must be for one so holy, so averse to sin, as he was, to live in this sinful world, to witness the sins of its inhabitants, and to endure the contradiction of sinners; I say, were I speaking to persons who know all this, they would need nothing more to convince them, that our Savior's love was inconceivably great; nothing more to make them exclaim, Behold how he loved us! But, alas! I speak to those who know none of these things; or, at least, who know them but very imperfectly. Indeed I speak of what I know almost nothing myself. Little, however, as we know or conceive of what our Savior renounced, and of what he submitted to, for our sakes, does it not appear from the preceding remarks, that the love, which drew him down from heaven to earth, must have been without a parallel great? Is it not obvious that the love, which should lead a monarch to renounce his throne, a servant to follow his master into exile, or a man to sell himself into slavery for the redemption of his friend, would be weak in comparison with the love which Christ displayed for our sinful race, when he exchanged heaven for earth to save them?

2. Another effect and indication of love is a willingness to suffer pain for the beloved object. Other things being equal, we consider that love as the greatest which induces a willingness to suffer the greatest degree of pain. And this is just reasoning; for self-love makes us unwilling to suffer. Of course, when we are willing to suffer for the sake of another, it proves that we love him as we love ourselves; nay, that our love for him is sufficiently strong to counteract the influence of self-love. Let us then inquire what Christ's love for us led him to suffer for our sakes. But here we labor under the same difficulty which has been already mentioned; a difficulty arising from our ignorance. We know but little even of the bodily sufferings which he endured for our salvation. We know indeed that he was scourged till the naked bones appeared through his mangled flesh; that he was buffeted, or beaten upon the face; that his temples were pierced with thorns; that he was fastened to the cross by nails driven through his hands and feet, and that, with his whole weight thus suspended, he hung for six hours, bleeding, parched with thirst, and agonizing in the pangs of death. But though we know these facts, we know but little of his bodily sufferings. It is one thing to read or hear of what he suffered, and quite another thing to form a just conception of it. By what effort either of our understandings or of our imaginations are we to conceive of tortures which we never felt, to conceive of the pangs of crucifixion, to conceive of the agonies inflicted by hanging with the whole weight of the body suspended on nails driven through the hands and feet,—parts of

the frame which are, perhaps above others, endowed with the most exquisite sensibility. One stroke of the scourge, one thorn piercing our temples, one of the many repeated blows by which the nails were urged home, would probably give us more lively ideas of what our Savior suffered than all our efforts can excite. And yet the tortures which his body endured were but a part, and incomparably the smaller part of his sufferings. They wrung from him no groan, no expression of anguish. But his mental sufferings did more. They wrung from him not only groans, but great drops of blood. Before he was arrested, and while his body was free from pain he was, we are told, in an agony; he exclaimed, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death; and his sweat was as great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Is it asked, what occasioned this mental agony?

I answer, it was the curse of the law which, we are told, he bore for us. It was the hand of his Father, the hand of omnipotence which, as the prophet informs us, bruised him and put him to grief. The burden of man's guilt which he bore, the weight of divine wrath which we deserved, was what crushed him down. He drank the cup which we were doomed to drink, that cup into which, an apostle tells us, was poured the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God. It was of this he said, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. It was the agonies occasioned by drinking this cup which made him cry out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Now if we cannot conceive the full extent of his bodily sufferings, how much less can we conceive of the nameless anguish of his soul? Who, on this side everlasting burnings, can conceive what it is to drink the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God, poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation. Yet under the united pressure of all these inconceivable corporeal and mental agonies, he consented to die, and it was love, love for us, which induced him to consent. Well then may we exclaim, while standing by his cross, Behold how he loved us!

He himself says, Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend. And the apostle, pursuing the same thought, intimates it to be possible that for a good man some would even dare to die. This greatest, strongest proof of love, our Savior has given by dying for us. And this proof was, in his case, peculiarly strong. Should we consent to die for a friend, we should only anticipate a death winch we must sooner or later suffer, because we are mortal. But Christ was immortal. He was under no necessity of ever tasting the pangs of death. No man, says he, taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. While we then, in dying for a friend, only give up a life which we must soon part with, he gave up for us a life which he might have retained forever. And not only so, but gave it up in the most painful manner possible, forsaken by his friends, insulted and mocked by his enemies, and agonizing under a complication of the most excruciating corporeal and mental tortures. Yet he had the same natural aversion to suffering which we feel. How great then must have been the strength of his love for us. Since it could so far prevail over his love for himself, as to make him willing to bear all this for our sakes. Would either of you, were you able to do it, endure equal sufferings for the dearest object of your affections on earth! If any one replies, Yes, while the scourge, the thorns and the cross are out of sight, yet I cannot but suspect that when they came near, when he began to feel them, and above all, when the bitter cup of divine wrath was put to his lips, his courage and his love would fail. But our Savior's love for us,—blessed be his name,—did not fail. It was stronger than death.

3. Another proof and measure of love may be found in the number and value of the gifts which it bestows on the object beloved. We naturally conclude that a person, who, without any other motive than disinterested affection, gives us great and valuable gifts, loves us much; and the more

numerous and costly his gifts are, so much the greater do we think his love to be. Tried by this, as by all other rules, our Savior's love for us will be found beyond all comparison great. His gifts cannot be numbered, nor can their value be computed. He gives us himself, and all that he possesses. He gives us the pardon of numberless sins, every one of which deserved death. He gives us divine light to illuminate our minds, divine grace to purify our hearts, and divine consolations to comfort us in our afflictions. Nay more, he gives us heaven, gives us everlasting life, felicity and glory; gives us kingdoms, crowns, and thrones compared with which, the sceptre of the most powerful earthly monarch is a worthless bauble. Nor does he give what cost him nothing.

No, he paid the full price of all that he gives us; and if we estimate the value of his gifts by the price they cost him, we shall be convinced that they are inestimable. It would have cost him infinitely less to give each of us a world, or many worlds; for to create a world, costs him but a word; but to purchase the gifts which he bestows on us cost him his blood, his life; cost him all the agonies which I have vainly attempted to describe. If then we measure his love by the gifts he bestows on us, we shall see that it is boundless, and we can only cry, what manner of love is this? Let no one reply, Where are the gifts of which you tell us We have them not. I answer, Christ offers them freely to all of you, to each of you, even to the meanest and the worst; nay more, he urges and entreats you to accept of them. If you refuse or neglect to accept them, the fault is not his. The gift is not less real, nor the less a proof of his love, because we do not choose to accept it. All who do accept his offers find that they are not empty words. They enter on the immediate enjoyment of many of his gifts, and receive an earnest which secures to them the final possession of all, so that they may say, Christ has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God, and we shall live and reign with him forever and ever.

Lastly. Love may be measured by the provocations it overlooks, and by the degree of patience with which it bears unkindness and ingratitude. Of all the trials to which love can be exposed, this is the most severe. To love those who are kind, affectionate, and grateful for our love, to adhere to them in adversity, to suffer for them, and load them with favors, is comparatively easy; nor does it require a very high degree of affection to do this. But to persevere in doing good to the ungrateful and perverse, who are jealous and suspicious, and who render us evil for good; to bear with the most unreasonable and cruel provocations, continually repeated; to forgive again, and again, and again, and still find new acts of forgiveness called for; to see our very kindness turned against us, and yet to continue to be kind—this is indeed the victory, the triumph of love, strong, unconquerable love. Among all the effects of parental love, its strength is so clearly displayed in nothing as the manner in which it leads parents to bear with the multiplied follies, the ingratitude and disobedience of undutiful children. But in this, as in all other respects, the love which Christ has displayed for our race, rises far above a father's or a mother's love. For more than four thousand years before his coming, our race were employed, with very few exceptions, in disobeying and offending him. When he came, instead of being received by mankind as their friend and benefactor, he was hated, slandered, ridiculed, and persecuted with the utmost virulence and malignity. In a similar manner he has been treated by mankind ever since. Even his professed disciples often requite his love with the most cruel distrust, unkindness, and ingratitude. They show little concern for his honor. They are slow to believe, slow to learn, and quick to forget what he has taught them. Every day, and almost every hour, he has reason to say to them, 0 ye of little faith! Do ye thus requite my love, 0 ungrateful and unwise! All this he foresaw, when he

consented to die for us; but the current of his love was too deep and strong to be checked or diverted from its course. And notwithstanding the innumerable slights and provocations which he has received, and is daily receiving, it still flows as deep and strong as ever. Sabbath after Sabbath, we make light of his invitations, and treat him with indifference and neglect; but he overlooks it all, and comes again with offers of mercy, again to be slighted.

Year after year he stands knocking at the door of our hearts; and, though he finds them closed against him, waits and knocks still. Generation after generation of our ungrateful race, live and die rejecting him; yet his love does not become cold, and he still visits a thankless world with messages of mercy and offers of salvation. He endured, says an apostle, and he still endures, the contradiction of sinners against himself. Now was there ever love like this, love so perseveringly, I had almost said, obstinately, kind? Love which could glow with undiminished fervor for so many centuries, with nothing amiable to excite it; no grateful returns to feed it, but, on the contrary, numberless provocations to extinguish it. Had not his love for our race been infinitely stronger than any thing which is called love among men, it would have wholly ceased some thousands of years since, and he would have desisted from making attempts to bless and save us. Well then may we lift up our hands in wonder and exclaim, Behold how he loves us! Well may we say of such love as this, many waters cannot quench it, neither can floods drown it.

We have now briefly noticed the principal ways in which love makes itself visible, and by which we may estimate its strength. From what has been said, it appears, I conceive, evident, that in all these ways, in submitting to privation, in enduring sufferings, in bestowing gifts, and in bearing with unkindness, ingratitude, and perverseness, our Savior has displayed a love for mankind which has no parallel, a love which is infinitely far from being equalled by any thing which the world has ever seen. In attempting to lead your minds to this conclusion, I have made no appeal to your passions. I have simply stated facts, and left them to speak for themselves. I am however ashamed to offer this to you as a description of our Savior's love for us. I feel, most painfully, that I have done no manner of justice to the subject. Had I the tongue of an angel, I could not do justice to it. God himself, speaking by the mouth of his inspired messengers, could only say that it is unsearchable, that it passeth knowledge. It is a theme which will employ the praises of saints and angels through a whole eternity. How then can a weak mortal set it before you in the space of a few minutes and in the compass of a few pages? I say not this to excuse the wretched manner in which the subject has been treated. But I am jealous for my Master's honor. I fear that this miserably imperfect attempt to display the greatness of his love, will only serve to lower it in your estimation. God forbid that this should be the case. Let me beseech you not to judge of his love by what has now been said of it. Rather go and learn it from the bible; and unite with me in the apostle's prayer, that the God of light, the Father of glory, would give us all, the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of his Son, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, that we may be enabled to comprehend what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. A few inferences will conclude the discourse.

1. Is the love of Christ for us so immeasurably great? Then surely we ought to return it. Our love to him ought to bear some proportion to his love for us. If his love for us is incomparably greater than that of any of our earthly friends, then we ought to love him more than we love any of our earthly friends. If he has done and suffered more for us than any earthly benefactor would or could do, we ought to feel more grateful to him than to any earthly benefactor. Ingratitude to him must be, of all

ingratitude, the most base and inexcusable. A refusal to love him must involve more criminality than a refusal to love the nearest and kindest relative on earth. It is needless to prove these assertions. They bring with them their own evidence. They must come home with irresistible conviction to the bosom of every man who believes what is related of our Savior in the New Testament. There is something in our breasts which tells us, that such love deserves a return of affection, that such benefits justly claim our gratitude. The most savage nations on earth need no arguments to convince them that parental love ought to be returned, no motive to induce them to detest the character of an ungrateful, undutiful child. But every reason which can be assigned why a child should love and be grateful to his parents, may be urged with far greater force to prove, that the increase of love and gratitude to our Redeemer is an indispensable duty, and that the neglect of this duty is in the highest degree criminal and base. Would not the Jews have thought it strange, would not you think it strange, had Lazarus, after his resurrection, manifested no affection for the friend who wept over his grave, and raised him from the dead? But, 0, how small were these favors, these proofs of love to Lazarus, in comparison with the favors, the proofs of love which the Savior has shown to us.

2. Let me further improve the subject by urging all who have hitherto neglected the Savior to return his love without longer delay. Are not your understandings convinced, do not your consciences testify that you ought to do this? And can your hearts then stand out in opposition, not only to the Savior's love, but to your own understandings and consciences? If they can you must surely cease to talk of the goodness of your hearts. You must surely cease to flatter yourselves that you are capable of real gratitude or affection, or that you possess any real sensibility; for where is the goodness, the gratitude, or the sensibility of that heart which can see what Christ has done and felt for it, without returning his affection? If then you would prove that you are not totally devoid of all these qualities, begin this day to return his love; or at least to reproach and condemn yourselves for having so long neglected to do it. And let all who feel consciously sinful and guilty, and who are deterred by conscious guilt and unworthiness from approaching the Savior, take encouragement from the wonderful love which be has displayed for our race, and approach him with full confidence and without the smallest delay. Trembling sinner, how can you fear to approach such love as this? What can you have to fear in approaching one, whose love for you has already led him to the cross? Will he, can he, who voluntarily suffered all this for your salvation, hurt you, or frown upon you when you come to him for mercy? 0, then come to Christ. Whosoever will, let him come. But whether I am, or am not successful, while pleading the Savior's cause with sinners, surely I cannot, my professing friends, be unsuccessful while I plead it with you. You profess to know something of his love. You know that all heaven wonders and is astonished while it sees what its Lord has done for you. And will not you then wonder and adore? Can you doubt the reality or the strength of that love which has been so strangely displayed? Can you any more distrust the Savior's love, because he sometimes afflicts you? Do you not perceive that he would much rather afflict himself, than afflict you, were not affliction necessary? Would he not rather wound the apple of his eye, than wound you, did not your own happiness require it? Most evidently he would; for all that he could suffer in your stead he has cheerfully suffered; and he would have cheerfully suffered all your afflictions, would it have answered the same purpose to you—it would have been adding one drop more to the bitter cup. He never afflicted you to shield himself. Whenever the question was, shall I suffer this, or shall my people suffer it? Shall I drink this cup, or shall my people drink it? he never hesitated a moment to take it all upon himself. And he would with equal cheerfulness

suffer all your afflictions for you, and allow you to live in uninterrupted peace and prosperity, did not your own good require that you should sometimes suffer in your own persons. And he still sympathizes with you in all that you necessarily suffer. His word teaches you that, in all your afflictions, he is afflicted, and he assures his people that whosoever touches them touches the apple of his eye. How can you doubt whether he who says this, he who gave himself, his life, his blood for you, will deny you any thing which he sees to be really necessary to your happiness whether he would hesitate to give you a world or many worlds, if your happiness would be increased by the gift? How can you doubt that he would as soon cut off his right hand, as take away from you a partner, a child, a relative, or give you the smallest pain, unless he saw it to be necessary? 0, then, what reason have we for sorrow, shame, and self-reproach, if we have even been tempted by affliction, to doubt his love: and still more, if we have been led by it to murmur or repine! Let us, then, never more be guilty of this conduct. Let us not stab to the heart our already deeply wounded Savior, by distrusting that love of which he has given us such infallible proofs; or murmuring at those afflictions which he sends in love, and for our good. Let us rather say with the apostle, the love of Christ constraineth us, to live not to ourselves, but to him who died for us.

S. Duty of the present to the coming generation

Duty of the present to the coming generation "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts." Psalms 145:4 bringing into existence angels and men, —the only orders of intelligent creatures with which we are acquainted, —the all-wise Creator saw fit to adopt two very different methods of proceeding. The angels, we have reason to believe, were all created at the same time, and in the full maturity of their intellectual powers. But men are brought into existence successively; and a small part only of the whole race inhabit this world at the same period. One generation gives birth to another; and then passes off the stage of life, to give place to its descendants. From the mode which God has thus adopted of bringing mankind into existence in successive generations, many most important consequences result. Of these consequences one is, that they all originally possess the same moral nature; for it seems to be an established law, and universal so far as this world is concerned, that every thing which is productive shall produce its own likeness. Again; in the mode of bringing mankind into existence, all the natural relations which subsist among them have their origin. No similar relations, it is evident, can subsist among angelic beings. Among them the titles of parent, child, brother, and other names expressive of relationship, are not known. Once more; from the mode of bringing mankind into existence, which God has adopted, result most of the social and relative duties which he requires them to perform. Of these duties one of the most important is described in our text. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. This passage may be understood either as a prediction, or as a command. On the present occasion I shall consider it as a command. Viewed in this light, it prescribes a most important duty to each of the successive generations of mankind; of course, to the present generation, as well as to those which shall follow it. To show in what the duty consists, and to state some reasons why it should be performed, is my design in the present discourse. With this view I remark, that the duty here enjoined consists of two parts. The first is, to declare, or make known the works of God to succeeding generations, and especially, to that generation which immediately follows us. In other words, it is to inform them what God has done, and what he is now doing. This, it is obvious, embraces a wide field of instruction; for the works of God are both numerous and various.

1. They include his works of creation. These, therefore, we must make known to the generation which follows us. We must declare to them the fact, that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, with all which they contain; that, when nothing existed besides himself, —worlds, angels, men and animals came into being at his command. They include,

2. His works of providence. These, therefore, must be made known to the succeeding generation. They must be taught that, in a mysterious, but most powerful and efficacious manner. God preserves and governs everything which he has made; that all events, from the greatest to the most minute, are under his control; and that what men call the laws of nature are only fixed modes of operation which he has adopted. Their attention must be particularly directed to those great dispensations of providence which respect our whole race; to those which are recorded in the Scriptures; to those of which their country has been the scene or the object; and to those which

more immediately affect themselves. In short, they must be taught to see God's hand in everything, to view him as the source of all temporal blessings, and the great agent who worketh all in all.

3. God's works include the work of redemption, considered as a whole, together with all those gracious dispensations which are parts of it. This is the great work of works, —the work with reference to which all God's other works are performed. In this work every individual of every generation is deeply interested; and, therefore, this work especially should be made known to all. To make known this work, is to make known all that God has ever done for the salvation of our ruined race, so far as he has revealed it to us. It includes all the preparations which have been made for the coming of Christ; his coming itself, the work which he performed and the sufferings which he endured while on earth, and what he has done since he ascended to heaven. It includes also the revelation which God has given us in the Scriptures; for this is one of his works, though men were employed in effecting it. They wrote, but he dictated. They held the pen, but he moved it. Such are the works of God which one generation should make known to another; and a very little reflection will convince us that, in making known all these works, the whole system of religious truth and duty will be made known; for there is no doctrine, no precept of Christianity, which is not either founded upon some of God's works, or intimately connected with them. But how, it may be asked, are these works of God to be communicated by one generation to another? I answer, —they are to be communicated, generally speaking, just as a knowledge of other things is communicated by one generation to another. Observation teaches us, that all the knowledge of temporal things which one generation possesses, is usually imparted to the next. This is done in various ways. Parents teach their children, if they are able; and if not, they employ other persons to teach them those things which are necessary to qualify them for active life. Colleges, academies, and schools are founded, and their support provided for, either by the civil powers, or by the munificence of private individuals, on purpose to impart instruction to the rising generation. A great part of the knowledge which every generation possesses is also recorded in books, and thus transmitted to posterity. And we may add, that much useful knowledge is every day imparted casually in conversation, in carrying on the common business of life. Now in all these ways one generation ought to communicate to another a knowledge of the works of God. Parents who possess this knowledge, —and every parent ought to possess it, —must impart it to their children. All who are employed in the instruction of youth should impart it to their pupils. A competent number of well-qualified religious teachers should be provided. Seminaries, if necessary, should be founded and supported for the education of such teachers. All who are qualified to instruct mankind by their writings, should communicate religious knowledge through the medium of the press; and those who are not thus qualified, should embrace every opportunity of imparting it in conversation. In one or another of these various ways, all the religious knowledge which is possessed by one generation must be transmitted to the generation which follows it. This constitutes the first part of the duty enjoined in the text. The second part is, for one generation to praise God's works to another. While they communicate a knowledge of his works they must speak highly of them. While they tell what he has done, they must add, he has done all things well. When they describe his works of creation, they must extol the wisdom, power and goodness which are displayed in them. While they communicate a knowledge of his works of providence, they must applaud them as infinitely wise, holy, just, and good. And while they exhibit the wonders of redemption, and God's works of grace to the following generation, they must accompany the

exhibition with those glowing expressions of admiration, gratitude, love and joy, which this grand display of all God's perfections ought to call forth from those, for whose benefit it was made, and whose everlasting happiness it is designed to promote. In short, the high praises of God must be sedulously poured into the ears of the rising generation; all the praise which has come down to us from former generations, or which has resounded from heaven to earth, must be echoed back to them; they trust never hear him spoken of, but in just, that is, most exalted terms. They must be convinced that we regard him with the utmost admiration, reverence, gratitude, and love; and be made, if possible, to feel that among the gods there is none like Jehovah, nor any works like his works.

Such is the duty which every generation of mankind is commanded to perform with respect to the generation which immediately follows it. Should it be thought by any, that the passage under consideration does not enjoin this duty; that it is simply a prediction and not a command—other passages can be easily adduced, in which the duty is explicitly enjoined. The church of God is represented as saying, We will not hide what our fathers have told us, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works which he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, and declare them to their children. In this passage the duty of transmitting the knowledge and the praises of God's works from one generation to another, is surely prescribed and enjoined as clearly as language can do it.

Having shown in what the duty consists, I proceed, as was proposed, II. To state some reasons which should induce us to perform it.

1. One reason may be found in the natural relations which exist between the present and the next generation. These relations are intimate and endearing. The next generation will owe its existence to the present. They will be our descendants, our children. Even those of us who are related to none of them as parents, will be related to them in some other way. In short, there is probably not one individual present, who will have none that are related to him in the next generation. Now in consequence of the relations which exist between this generation and the next, we are its natural guardians, instructors, and guides. To us the education of their bodies, their minds, and their hearts, are entrusted. They have a natural right to look to us for instruction, and to expect that we should teach them everything which it is necessary for them to know. And is it not necessary that they should know their Creator, their God, the being on whom they depend? Is it not necessary that they should know the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, whom to know is eternal life? Is it not necessary that they should have that knowledge which makes men wise unto salvation?

Again: the rising generation look to us for instruction respecting the real value of objects. In regard to these they are liable to be deceived. They cannot readily distinguish between appearances and reality, between food and poison. They need, and they have a claim to, the benefit of our knowledge and experience. They expect that we will speak to them in high terms of that which is most valuable; that we shall teach them to admire what is most admirable, and to pursue what is most worthy of pursuit. And is there any thing more admirable than the works and perfections of God; any thing more valuable, or more worthy of pursuit, than his favor? We ought then to praise him in their hearing; to speak of him in the highest terms; and to show them by our conduct that

our praises are sincere. If we fail to do this, we sin against the relations which we sustain. If he who provides not for his own, especially for those of his own household, is worse than an infidel; what shall be said of him, who communicates to his own children, no knowledge of God, and teaches them neither by precept nor by example to praise him!

2. Another reason for the performance of this duty may be found in the fact, that each of the successive generations of mankind is the natural and rightful heir of the generation which preceded it. This is the appointment of God, the sovereign proprietor of all things. He has granted to each generation of mankind a life-estate only in their temporal possessions; and when the period, for which this grant was made, terminates, their possessions must go to the next generation. The present generation, for instance, can hold their lands, houses, goods, and privileges during life only; and when they pass off the stage, all these things will become the property of the next generation. Since then that generation are, by God's appointment, our natural and rightful heirs; since they will inherit all our other possessions, —it seems right and proper that they should inherit our knowledge of God and of his works. And since we cannot bequeath this knowledge by a will or testament, as we can our other possessions; since all which we do not communicate, while living, will be buried with us and lost forever; it seems necessary that we should impart it while life continues; and also make suitable provision for its preservation and increase.

Everyone who believes the Scriptures, and indeed everyone who believes that men are accountable, will acknowledge that it would be cruel to transmit our temporal possessions to posterity, and yet withhold from them that religious knowledge, which alone can teach them how to use these possessions, and prevent them from becoming a snare and a curse, as they certainly will, if not employed in a right manner. Would not he be thought greatly deficient, either in prudence or in affection, who should bequeath to his children a magazine of gunpowder, or a quantity of virulent poison, and yet leave them in ignorance how to use it in such a manner as would be safe to themselves and others? My hearers, to bequeath a large portion of wealth, or of worldly knowledge, or of any other temporal possession to posterity, without imparting to them a knowledge of God, and of their duty, and their accountability, is worse than to bequeath them poison without cautioning them how they use it. How many have we seen ruined, both for this world and the next, in consequence of inheriting from their parents a large estate, without being taught how to use it, or to know that they must account for it! On the other hand, he who bequeaths posterity the knowledge and the praises of God, bequeaths a rich inheritance, even should he leave them nothing else.

3. The obligation to perform this duty will appear still more evident, if we recollect that for the religious knowledge and the means of acquiring it, which we possess, we are indebted, under God, to preceding generations. From them we received the Bible, that grand, inexhaustible depository of religious truth. From them we have received numberless other volumes, designed to explain and enforce its contents. From them we receive all the oral religious instruction which was imparted to us in our early years. To them we are indebted for our religious institutions, for a large proportion of our religious teachers, and for most of the colleges and other seminaries in which men are educated for the teacher's office. And all these blessings they imparted to us, on purpose that we might transmit them to posterity. It was their design, as it is the will of God, that we should do this. Our religious knowledge and privileges may, therefore, be considered as a kind of entailed

estate; or an estate which we have no right to alienate, and which we are under obligation to transmit, unimpaired, to posterity. And can any of yon wish, or even consent, to disregard these obligations? Can you consent that the life-giving streams of that knowledge which makes men wise unto salvation, and which have flowed down from former generations to the present, should here stop, and proceed no further? Can you consent that at the last day, these streams should be traced down to us, and there be found to have disappeared, like a river lost among sands? Can you consent that your descendants should perish for thirst, and through eternity curse you as the cause? Shall they have reason to say, religious knowledge was transmitted and increased until it reached our fathers, but with them it was lost? Let those especially, who were blessed with pious parents, and with early religious instruction, think of these questions. Let them recollect, that they have incurred a debt, which they can discharge only by communicating to the next generation the instruction which they have received from the last. And let all my hearers remember, that there is no country on the face of the globe, in which these remarks should have such weight, as in New England. In no country are the present generation so deeply indebted to their ancestors as in this. O, what a birthright, what an inheritance did the fathers of New England bequeath to their posterity! Their knowledge of God, and their disposition to praise him have long since carried them to heaven; but they have left these blessings to us, that we may be taught and persuaded to follow them. And shall we disappoint their hopes and frustrate their endeavors? Most men are unwilling that an estate which has been for ages in their family shall go out of it. Shall we not then be unwilling that the religion of our fathers, and the blessings connected with it, should go out of the family? Shall we not, instead of selling our birthright, like profane Esau, say with Naboth, God forbid that I should part with the inheritance of my fathers! God forbid that I should fail to transmit to posterity the rich legacy which has descended to me.

4. A still more powerful reason why we should perform this duty, may be found in the fact, that we transmit to our posterity a corrupt and depraved nature, which, unless its influence is counteracted by religion, will render them miserable here and hereafter. It is in vain to deny or conceal the fact. The Scriptures assert it in the plainest terms, and universal observation and experience confirm the assertion. Every generation of mankind is an exact counterpart of the generation which preceded it; and exhibits the same moral image, the same sinful propensities, the same disposition to neglect and disobey God. Man was, indeed, first planted a noble vine; but he fell, and in consequence of his fall, men are now the degenerate plants of a strange vine. Nor are the human form and the human countenance more certainly transmitted by them to their posterity, than is a depraved and corrupt nature. Those of you who are parents, and who know anything of your own hearts, see in your children an exact moral resemblance of yourselves. You are at no loss to determine whence they derive those sinful passions and propensities which they exhibit; you see, full blown in your own hearts, all those evils, the seeds of which you discover in them.

Thus from one generation to another the poisonous streams flow down, diffusing moral contagion and death, and threatening to engulf the whole race in remediless sinfulness, wretchedness, and despair. It is no part of my present design to prove the justice of that constitution, which establishes a connection between the moral nature of parents and that of their offspring. That constitution is one of God’s works, one of those works which we are required not only to make known, but to praise. Of course, it must be just. But it is more to my present purpose to call your attention to the means which God has graciously appointed for the remedy and prevention of

those evils, under which the successive generations of mankind have so long groaned. These means are a faithful performance of the duty enjoined in our text. And we have reason to believe, that if this duty were faithfully and universally attended to, it would be sufficient. Let all the individuals of any one generation acquire the knowledge of God, and exercise those feelings towards his character and his works, which are expressed in praise; and then let them communicate this knowledge and express these feelings to all the individuals of the next generation; and the tide of corruption which now overflows the world would, in a great measure at least, be stopped. I do not mean that any generation, even if every member of it were pious, could convert the next; but I believe, and the Scriptures war rant the belief, that if one generation should faithfully perform its duty, God would bless its exertions and answer its prayers, by rendering the next generation almost universally pious. And then that generation, in its turn, would perform the same duty to the next, with similar success; and thus the knowledge and praises of God would flow down from generation to generation, and fill the earth, even as the waters fill the seas.

If any doubt this, let me request them to suppose that all the present inhabitants of this town should become judicious, well-informed, and zealous Christians; that they should all exemplify Christianity in their temper and conduct; that every practice and amusement inconsistent with pure religion should be banished; that they should all take as much pains to educate children for the other world, as they do to educate them for this; that children should never hear God or his works mentioned, but with admiration, gratitude, and love, and be taught from infancy that religion is the one thing needful; I say, suppose this to be the case, and can you doubt that all, or nearly all, the next generation in this town would become Christians; and in their turn act the same part to the generation which should follow them? If so, how much more probable is it, that similar consequences would follow, should all the inhabitants of this country, or of the world do the same? If any still doubt, let them think of such passages as these: Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

I know him, says God of Abraham, —that he will command his children and his household after him. And what will be the consequence? They shall keep the way of the Lord. Such language more than intimates, that, if one generation should perform its duty to the next, the next generation would be pious. In the millennium it will be so. Men will then be born, as they are now, with a corrupt nature; but the effects of it will, through the blessing of God, be prevented by the pious education which they will receive, and the pious examples which will be everywhere set before them. They will see that all who are older and wiser than themselves do know, and love and praise God, and value his favor more than life; and the same proneness to imitate others, which now leads them astray, will then lead them to seek the good and right way. And now, parents, let me beseech you to think seriously of this. You have imparted to your children your own corrupt nature. That unwillingness to retain God in your knowledge, that aversion to his service, that dislike of religion, that strong propensity to pursue this world and neglect the other, which, you cannot but be conscious, exist in yourselves, you have transmitted to them. And in consequence of these evils which they have derived from you, they will perish forever, unless these evils be counteracted. But God has in mercy put into your hands means to counteract them. Make known to them his works and his will. Pour into their ears his praises. Let them see, that you think of nothing, care for nothing, fear nothing, and love nothing, as you do him. Let them see that you care, comparatively, very little what their situation is in this world, provided they receive a Christian’s portion in the

world to come. Do this, and add fervent persevering prayer; end the corrupt nature which they have derived from you shall be changed by God's grace, a new heart and a right spirit shall be given them, and they shall be thus prepared to perform the same good office for their children, which you have performed for them. Should it be thought by any, that though the remarks which have been made prove the propriety and necessity of communicating to the next generation a knowledge of God's works, —they do not prove it to be necessary that we should praise him in their hearing; I answer, the former without the latter will be of little, if any, avail. It will answer very little purpose to communicate knowledge of any object to the rising generation, unless they see that we highly prize the object itself, and consider a knowledge of it as exceedingly valuable. It must be evident to every person of observation, that children and youth, in forming their estimate of different objects, are guided almost entirely by the opinions of those who precede them in the journey of life. A child, left to itself, would prefer the smallest coin to a bank note, and a piece of painted glass to the most valuable diamond. And how does he learn to judge more correctly? Simply by observing how objects are valued by those who are older and wiser than himself. In this way, young persons, and even children, soon learn what we think most valuable. And however diligently we may impart to them a knowledge of God and his works, if we do not appear to think highly of him, to love his character, to admire his works, and to prefer him to every other object, —our instructions will have but very little effect. But if they hear us frequently speak of him in the glowing language of gratitude, love, and praised if they see that we consider him as all in all; that we regard it as detestable and base to neglect him; and that the language of our conduct is, Whom have we in heaven but thee, and what is there on earth that we desire besides thee? —they will, in all probability, be insensibly led to adopt, not only our opinions respecting him, but our feelings towards him. The just, but trite remark, that if we would speak to the heart, we must speak from the heart, is especially true with respect to children and youth. Perhaps one reason why many parents, who are careful to give their children religious instruction, see very little good effect result from their labors, is they do not with sufficient frequency and fervency speak to them in praise of God; do not appear to overflow with those emotions which praise expresses; but merely speak of him in a dry, cold, and formal manner. But to say nothing of parental efforts, how great, probably, would be the effect upon the rising generation, were they accustomed from their childhood to hear our rulers, our legislators, our judges, our officers, our wise, our learned and wealthy men, all speak of God and of his works in the highest terms, and utter his praises with emotion! if they never heard his name profaned or religion treated with disrespect! How would such examples tend to subdue their sinful prejudices, and tear down their opposition to the truth! To speak God's praises to the rising generation is then, if possible, even more important than to impart to them a knowledge of his works. Both, however, are necessary, and should never be separated.

It would be easy to enlarge on this subject, and to multiply reasons in favor of the duty before us, to an indefinite extent; but the undesigned length of the preceding remarks, renders it necessary to close with a brief improvement.

1. Is it the duty of the present generation to communicate a knowledge of God's works, and to proclaim his praises to the generation which will succeed us? Then it is incumbent on all to qualify themselves for the performance of this duty. It is incumbent on all to acquire a competent portion of religious knowledge, and to exercise those devotional feelings, which are expressed in praise. The man who does not know God, and who cannot cordially praise his character and his works, is

totally unqualified to discharge one of the most important duties, which his Maker requires of him and which he is placed in this world to perform. He is qualified neither to live usefully nor to die happily. My hearers, is not this the character of some of you? Are there not some before me, who know too little of God and his works, to impart a knowledge of either to the rising generation? Are there not a still greater number, who cannot cordially praise the works of God—nay, who are dissatisfied with many of his works, who complain of his law, neglect his gospel, and murmur at the dispensations of his providence? And how can such persons declare God's praises to the next generation? Or what can they teach it, but to neglect him, disobey him, and complain of him? Surely, no such person ought to be a parent, or an instructor of youth. Surely no such person is fit to educate immortal souls.

2. Is it the duty of one generation to declare and praise God's works to another? Then it becomes us all to inquire how far we have performed this duty to the generation which is to succeed us. Let me then ask every one who has reached the age of manhood, —what have you done to impart religious knowledge to the minds, and call forth the praises of God from the hearts, of the rising generation? There are, I know, many present who can reply, We have done something for the promotion of these objects. There are parents who have, in some measure at least, performed this duty to their children. There are some present who have imparted religious instruction to their apprentices, servants, and dependants: —some who have voluntarily labored in our Sabbath schools, to impart this knowledge to children with whom they are not naturally connected, and to call forth from their lips the high praises of God; and some who have contributed to diffuse this knowledge to the ends of the earth. But is there one present, who can truly say, I have done all that was in my power? I have done everything which I was able to do for the rising generation in my own country, and in other parts of the world; for, be it remembered, the rising generation in other countries, in pagan, Jewish, and Mahomedan lands, have claims upon us, commensurate with our ability. In this, as in other respects, charity begins at home, but it must not end there. And is there one parent present, who can truly say, I have done everything which I could do for the religious education of my own children? And are there not many, who have done comparatively nothing for any part of the rising generation, even for the instruction of their own families in religious truths? Are there not some present who, if they were to die this day, would leave behind them no mind upon which they had made the least salutary impression—the slightest proof, that they knew and praised God themselves, or that they had ever taught others to do it? Nay more—are there not some who, as far as they have taught anything to the rising generation, have taught them to neglect religion, to dishonor God, perhaps to take his name in vain? My hearers, let me beseech you to think seriously of these questions and of the subjects which led to them. If there be any who have performed no part of the duty enjoined in our text, let them immediately begin to perform it. Let those who have already done something, be excited to do more. Let it be remembered, that there is probably not now in New England one half the religion, in proportion to the number of inhabitants, that there was a century and a half since. If our posterity are not to become pagans or infidels, not only something, but much must be done.

3. Is it the duty of this generation to make known God's works and proclaim his praises to the next? Then it is the duty of the rising generation to receive with eagerness the religious instruction which is afforded them, and to drink in the praises of God. Remember, my young friends, we shall soon pass off the stage, and you will take our places. Then a new generation will spring up, whom

it will be your duty to instruct. Now is the time to qualify yourselves for the performance of that duty. Now then acquire a knowledge of God and of his works. Now learn to love, admire, and praise him, that you may teach those who will come after you to do the same. Do this; and after you have, like ancient worthies, served God and your generation, you will rest from your labors, your works will follow yon, and future generations shall rise tip and call you blessed.

Finally. What a happy, glorious world will this be, when our text, considered as a command, shall be universally obeyed; considered as a prediction, shall be universally fulfilled! Whether we obey it or not, this will one day be the case. Then one generation will eagerly transmit the knowledge and praises of God to the next; while that generation will, with alacrity, receive and hand them down to their descendants. Then all shall know God from the eldest to the youngest, from the least to the greatest. Then those things which are an abomination in the sight of God, shall no longer be highly esteemed among men; and the applauses which have been lavished, and the encomiums which have been bestowed upon heroes and conquers, shall be transferred to the faithful soldiers and martyrs of Jesus Christ; while every knee shall bow to him, and every tongue shall confess him Lord to the glory of the Father. Then everyday will be a day of thanksgiving; all nations, tongues, and languages shall join in one universal chorus of praise. Princes and subjects, young men and maidens, old men and children, shall conspire to swell the song. In one immense cloud of incense the grateful offering shall ascend the skies. Heaven shall hear with wonder and delight its own songs sting on earth; and God, the all good and almighty Father of the universe, bending from his eternal throne, shall accept the worship, smile with ineffable benignity and complacency on the worshippers, and shed down upon them, with unsparing hand, his richest blessings. Then death will indeed lose his sting, and cease to be the king of terrors. Easy and pleasant will be the passage from earth to heaven; and those which die will only pass from a world, filled with the glory and the high praises of God, to contemplate brighter glories, and join in louder praises in the world above. This is no poetic fiction, no sick man’s dream, but sober truth. Let us all, then, exert ourselves to hasten this glorious consummation. It may not greet our own, or our children’s eyes; but our children’s children may witness it.

Chapter 29

S. EQUALITY OF MEN WITH ANGELS.

EQUALITY OF MEN WITH ANGELS. For they are equal unto the angels.—Luke 20:36.

EYE, says an apostle, hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things, which God hath prepared for them that love him. With this assertion the language of many other inspired passages well corresponds. They inform us, that the faithful servants of God shall shine as the stars, and as the brightness of the firmament, forever and ever; that they shall shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father; that, when Christ shall appear, they shall be like him, and that they shall not only live with him, but reign with him, through endless ages. To mention but one passage more —our Savior informs us that those, who are counted worthy to inherit the future eternal world, shall be equal to the angels. If we consider what is elsewhere revealed respecting these celestial spirits, and how much is implied in being equal to them, we shall probably be of opinion that this assertion is as well suited to give us exalted conceptions of the future state of the righteous, as any passage in the inspired volume. Nor is it less suited to give us just views of the worth of the soul, and of the importance of every thing which is connected with its salvation; especially of the importance of the ministerial office, the design of which is to prepare men for that state. It is however supposed by some expositors, that the word here rendered equal, rather signifies likeness, and that the import of the passage is, they shall be like the angels. But perhaps this alteration would not, if adopted, materially affect the import of the passage. At least, it will not materially affect the remarks which I propose to make upon it. In making these remarks, it will be my object to show, I. That men are capable of being made equal to the angels; and, II. That, in the future world, good men will be made equal to them.

1. Men are capable of being made equal to the angels. This is an assertion, which it may, at first view, seem needless to prove. Who, it may be asked, can doubt, that he who gave angels their existence and all their powers, can, if he pleases, transform men into angels. But no one will ask this question who duly considers the import of the proposition before us. This proposition relates, not to God’s ability, but to man’s capacity. There cannot be the smallest doubt, that God is able to transform, not only men, but even insects, into angels. But a man, thus transformed, would, it is obvious, cease to human, and become one of a totally distinct order of beings. But the question before us is, whether men can be made equal to the angels, without ceasing to be men; whether they possess faculties which if expanded to the utmost extent of which their nature is capable, would render them equal to the angels. What we assert is, that men do possess such faculties; and this assertion we shall now attempt to prove. That man is capable of equaling the angels in the duration of their existence, may be very easily shown. Originally, he was, like them, immortal. And he would still have possessed immortality had he not become a sinner; for by sin death entered into the world. But what man once possessed, he must still be capable of possessing. If he was originally immortal, he may again become so.

These remarks relate, it is obvious, to the whole man, considered as composed of body and soul; for the soul, separately considered, has never ceased to be immortal. Like the angels, it is of a

nature purely spiritual; and though it may, if God pleases, be annihilated, it cannot, properly speaking, die; for death implies a dissolution of parts; but a spirit has no parts, and is therefore incapable of dissolution.

Equally easy is it to show, that man is capable of being made equal to the angels in moral excellence. The moral excellence of creatures, whether human or angelic, consists in their conformity to the law of God. In other words, it consists in holiness. Every being, who is perfectly holy, possesses the perfection of moral excellence. But man is capable of being made perfectly holy, as holy as an angel. God requires him to be perfectly holy; and he would require of him nothing of which his nature is incapable. Originally he was perfectly holy; for God made man upright, in his own image, and this image consisted, as inspiration informs us, in righteousness and true holiness. Man is then capable of being made equal to the angels in moral excellence.

Man is also capable of being raised to an intellectual equality with the angels, or being made equal to them in wisdom and knowledge. The image of God in which he was created, included knowledge, as well as righteousness and true holiness. And while he retained this image, while he stood crowned by his Maker's hand with glory and honor, and invested with the dominion of the world, in which he dwelt, he was, as inspiration informs us, but little lower than the angels. The inferiority here intended, must, it is acknowledged, have been an intellectual inferiority; for we have already seen, that with respect to the duration of his existence, and in moral excellence, man was originally not even a little lower than the angels. But this small intellectual inferiority, on the part of man, may be satisfactorily accounted for, without supposing that his intellectual faculties are essentially inferior to those of angels; or that his mind is incapable of expanding to the full dimensions of angelic intelligence.

It may be accounted for by difference of situation, and of advantages for intellectual improvement. Man was placed on the earth, which is God's footstool. But angels were placed in heaven which is his throne, his palace, and the peculiar habitation of his holiness and glory. They were thus enabled to approach much nearer, than could earth-born man, to the great Father of lights; and their minds were, in consequence, illuminated with far more than a double portion of that divine, alldisclosing radiance, which diffuses itself around him. While man was compelled to drink from the streams, they could repair at once to the fountain. Nor must it be forgotten, that man was encumbered with a body, which demanded daily supplies of food; while angels, free from all these encumbrances, and upborne on wings which never tire, were able to maintain an uninterrupted and unceasing flight. Who then will wonder, that man, thus situated, thus encumbered, should be a little lower than the angels in the intellectual scale? But free him, as he will hereafter be freed, from all the weights and fetters with which a gross material body encumbers his immortal mind; place him, as the good will hereafter be placed, in heaven, fast by the throne of an irradiating God; let him, instead of seeing all things as through a glass darkly, behold his Creator face to face; and who will undertake to prove, who will venture to assert, that he will remain even a little lower than the angels; that he will not, in wisdom and intelligence, soar to an equal height with them? Such an assertion, if made, must be entirely without support; for we know we can conceive of no intellectual faculties possessed by angels, which are not possessed by man; we neither know, nor can conceive of any assignable limits, either to the advancement of the human mind in knowledge, or to the possible expansion of its faculties. So far as we know, or can conceive, it is capable of every thing, of which any created mind can be capable. If the mind of an infant can expand, during the

lapse of a few years, to the dimensions of a Newton's mind, notwithstanding all the unfavorable circumstances in which it is here placed, why may it not, during an eternal residence in heaven, with the omniscient, all wise God for its teacher, expand so far as to embrace any finite circle whatever? Who can place his finger on any assignable spot, and say, Thus far can it go and no farther? We seem, then, to have sufficient reason for believing, that man is capable of being raised to an intellectual equality with the angels.

Little, if any, less reason have we to believe, that he is capable of being made equal to them in power. It has been often remarked, that knowledge is power; and observation must convince every one that it is so. Man's advances in knowledge have ever been accompanied by a proportionate increase of power. A knowledge of metals gave him power to subdue the earth. A knowledge of astronomy, and of the properties of the magnet, gave him power to traverse the ocean, and convert it from a separating barrier, into a connecting link between distant parts of the world. Another step in the progress of knowledge gave birth to the balloon, and thus furnished man with the power to ascend into the air. A multitude of equally well known facts might be mentioned, to show, that human knowledge amid human power advance with corresponding and equal pace. But we have already seen, that man is capable of being made equal to the angels in knowledge. It should seem then to follow, that he is capable of being made their equal in power; and that, when he shall know every thing which angels know, he will be able to do every thing which angels can do.

Again, man is capable of being raised to an equality with the angels in glory, honor, and felicity. The glory of a creature must consist principally in the intellectual and moral excellencies, with which he is endued; and we have already seen, that in these respects man is capable of being made equal to the angels. The dignity and honor of any creature must consist in the station which he is appointed to fill, in the offices which he is employed to sustain, and in the services which he is commissioned to perform. And since man is capable of being made equal to the angels in wisdom, and knowledge, and power, he may be rendered capable of filling any station, which angels ever filled; of performing any service which angels ever performed; of coming as near the eternal throne, as angels ever came. Hence too, it follows, that every source of happiness, which is opened to angels, may be opened to man; that his capacity for receiving and containing may be made equal to theirs, and that his opportunity for enjoying happiness, or, in other words, the duration of his existence, may be, like that of angels, without end.

Having thus attempted to show that man is capable of being made equal to the angels in immortality, in moral excellence. in intellectual qualities, and in power, honor, glory, and felicity, we proceed to show, II. That in the future world, good men shall be made equal to them in each of these particulars. The fact, that men are capable of being made equal to the angels, goes far to prove the truth of this proposition; for it is not the manner of the all wise Creator to endow his creatures with capacities, that are never to be filled; or with faculties, that are never to be called into action. And since he has formed man with a capacity of being made equal to the angels, it is, to say the least, highly probable, that the good will hereafter be raised to this equality. This conclusion the scriptures abundantly confirm. That good men will be made equal to the angels in the duration of their existence is proved by the numerous passages in which eternal life is promised to the righteous. Equally full and satisfactory is the proof, which the scriptures afford, that they shall be made equal to the angels in moral excellence; that the process of sanctification which

is already begun in their hearts shall be carried to completeness and perfection. The souls of the righteous, which have already entered into the eternal world, are called the spirits of just men made perfect; and the perfection, to which they have attained, must include perfection in holiness. We are also assured, that Jesus Christ will finally present his whole church to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but holy, and without blemish. Little, if any, less satisfactory are the proofs, with which the scriptures furnish us, that the righteous shall be made equal to angels in wisdom and knowledge. They assure us, that they shall see God as he is; that they shall see him face to face; that they shall see as they are seen, and know even as they are known. Language cannot furnish expressions stronger than these. What more can be said of angel, or archangel, than that he knows, even as he is known. And if the righteous are to be made equal to angels in wisdom and knowledge, it will follow, from remarks which have already been made, that they must equal them in power. We are informed, that their bodies, though sown in weakness, will be raised in power; and this fact seems to furnish some reason for believing that the powers of their minds will be proportionally increased. From the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration, it seems evident, that they possessed power of various kinds, of which we are destitute. They had power to descend from the mansions of the blessed, and to return, and also, as it should seem, to render themselves visible or invisible, at their pleasure. Indeed it is certain, that in some respects at least, the powers of the righteous must be greatly increased, or they would be unable to sustain that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and honor, and felicity, which is reserved for them in the future world. The scriptures fully warrant the assertion, that in each of these particulars they will be made equal, if not superior, to the angels. In the vision of the heavenly world, with which St. John was favored, he saw the representatives of the church placed immediately before the eternal throne, while the angels, placed at a greater distance, formed a circle around them. Should it be contended, that we can infer nothing from a vision, we will waive this passage, and remark, that they inform us, that Christ's faithful servants shall sit and reign with him upon his throne, an honor, in which it is no where intimated that any of the angels shall share.

Indeed, the disciples of Christ are in a peculiar sense his members, and as such they will largely share in all the honors, and dignities, and glories, of their exalted Head. It is, doubtless, in virtue of this free, intimate, and peculiar relation to him, that they will, as an apostle assures us, judge the world, and even judge angels. Speaking of the righteous as vessels of mercy, whom God is preparing for glory, the same apostle remarks that in them God designs to show forth the riches of his glory. But has he not, it may be asked, already done this? Did he not show forth the riches of his glory, when he formed the angels? It should seem from the apostle's remark that he did not. This however he means to do, and men are the objects which he has chosen for that purpose. Yes, in adorning, and honoring, and blessing redeemed sinners of the human race, Jehovah means to put forth his strength, to show what he can do, what glorious beings he can form, when he chooses to display all the riches of his glory. Who then can doubt, that in glory, honor, and felicity, good men will be made, at least, equal to the angels?

There is a dreadful counterpart to this truth, which, though not mentioned in our text, must be briefly noticed. Every argument, which proves that good men are capable of being made equal to the holy angels, may justly be considered as proving, with equal clearness, that wicked men are capable of equaling the fallen angels, who kept not their first estate. The same powers, which, if

exerted in one direction, will raise an object high, will, if exerted in an opposite direction, sink it proportionally low. And the terribly expressive language, in which inspiration describes the final doom of the wicked, —the assertion, that they shall share the punishment prepared for the devil and his angels, fully warrants the belief, that in the future world sinners, who die impenitent, will, in moral depravity, guilt and wretchedness, sink to a dreadful equality with apostate spirits. The subject, to which we have led your attention is connected with so many interesting truths, that it is by no means easy to select those, which are most deserving of particular notice. Indeed, every religious truth, and every thing which is connected with man, assumes, when viewed in the light of this subject, an aspect of overwhelming interest and importance. Can any religious truth be seen, as it is, unless it be viewed in this light? How inestimable, for instance, does the worth of the human soul appear; how clearly is it seen to exceed that of the whole world, when we view it as endued with a capacity of being made equal to the angels! How momentous an event occurs, when such a soul is born into the world! When an immortal being commences a flight through endless duration; a flight, which will raise him high to an equality with angels, or plunge him low among malignant demons and fiends! Think of this, ye parents! ye, to whom is committed the care of giving to this flight its earliest direction, and on whom it much depends, under God, what its termination shall be. How grand, let me farther remark, how Godlike, how every way worthy of himself, does the object of our Savior's interposition in behalf of ruined man appear, when viewed in the light of this subject! In this light, how clearly is his gospel seen to be glad tidings.

What moral glory and sublimity surround his cross, when we contemplate him as voluntarily suspended there for the purpose of raising such a creature as man, from the depravity, degradation, and wretchedness of apostate spirits, to an equality with the angels in God's presence! And how evident does it appear, that the reward which raised them to such a height, must be conferred on them, from respect rather to their Savior's merits, than to their own? We know, that the holy angels have served God with perfect love, and zeal, and fidelity, for at least five thousand years. But all, which the best individual of our race has done, is to serve God, in a very imperfect manner, during part of a comparatively short life. Some, who have already entered heaven, spent a large portion of their lives in sinning against him, became his servants but a short time before death. And can it be made to appear fit, or proper, or even just, that men should receive, in return for such scanty and imperfect services, not only the pardon of their sins, but a reward equal, or superior to that, which will be conferred on the angels? Certainly not, if the rewards, which the righteous will receive, are bestowed from regard to their own merits alone. But when we recollect, what revelation teaches, that the righteous are the members of Jesus Christ, and that, as such, he is made unto them righteousness; that they are appointed to share the rewards which he has merited, all difficulty vanishes. We perceive, at once, that no reward can equal the merits of the Son of God, and that it may be perfectly fit and proper to raise even the most unworthy of his members, for his sake, to an angel's seat in heaven. But it becomes necessary to waive a further consideration of this, as well as of many other important topics connected with our subject, and proceed to such an application of it as the occasion demands. To the pastor elect * this subject, viewed in its connection with the transactions of the day, can scarcely fail to be deeply interesting. The care of your own soul, my dear brother, of working out your own salvation, of preparing yourself for an angel's seat, has hitherto constituted the principal part of your duty. This alone is a work so great, that no man ever yet accomplished it without Almighty aid. But you are now to have a still more difficult task assigned you, to engage in a still

greater and more important work. In addition to the care of your own soul, the care of many other souls is to be laid upon you. For each of them our Divine Master has shed blood of inestimable price. Each of them is of more value than the world which it inhabits. Each of them is capable of being made equal to an angel. Whether they shall be raised to this equality, will depend in a very considerable degree, upon the manner in which you shall perform the work assigned you. If it be true, that the minister, who suitably takes heed to himself, and to his doctrine, shall both save himself and them that hear him, it must also be true, that he, who neglects this duty, will destroy, not himself only, but his hearers. The thought is appalling, overwhelming. Indeed, the ministerial office, if seen in all its effects, and consequences, and responsibilities, would crush an angel. But if the work is great, so is the assistance which our Master offers; and so is the reward which he promises to all who obtain mercy to be faithful. This reward not a few of our race have secured already. From this very spot, where you will take the vows of God upon you, and where you will stand to fulfil those vows, the soul of your predecessor ascended, (Rev. Harvey Loomis, to whom reference is here made, died suddenly in his pulpit) as we have reason to hope, to an angel's seat. From this very spot, a band of those celestial beings, who minister to the heirs of salvation, and convey them home to heaven when Jesus commands, exultingly bore away the disembodied spirit to be their companion and their equal above. From this place then, my brother, look up, and contemplate the throne, which he now fills, and the crown, which he now wears. Such a throne, such a crown, awaits every faithful servant of Jesus Christ. May you, my dear brother, be enabled to maintain this character, and secure this reward. May you be enabled, as successive years roll away, to take a higher and higher flight toward heaven, and find your beloved people accompanying you in your flight; and may you and they together learn, in the regions above, all that is implied in being made equal to the angels. This church and religious society, while they accept our cordial and thankful congratulation on the pleasing prospect before them, and on the healing of that wound which was so suddenly inflicted, and so powerfully felt, will permit us to applaud the concern, which they have manifested, for the resettlement of the gospel ministry among them, and for the zeal and unanimity which have so speedily led to a result so desirable. The concern, which you have felt for the attainment of this object, is, by no means, a causeless or unreasonable concern. If we have souls which render us capable of being made equal to the angels, and if these souls are liable to be lost, the care of them should evidently be the grand business of life; and every thing, which tends to promote their salvation, should be ranked among the most indispensable necessaries of life. That the stated preaching of the gospel does tend to promote their salvation, that in ordinary cases, they will not be saved without it, will be denied by none, who believe the contents of that volume which assures us, that faith cometh by hearing. More necessary then, than food, or raiment, or shelter, is the stated preaching of the gospel of Christ.

Allow me however, to remind you, that the enjoyment of this means of grace, though ordinarily necessary to man's salvation, will by no means secure his salvation. Nay more, if it be not properly improved, it will but accelerate and aggravate his ruin. If it prove not a savor of life unto life, it must prove a savor of death unto death. Those, whom it does not raise to an equality with the angels, it will sink to an abyss proportionally deep. You stand then, my brethren, midway on an eminence, the summit of which is wrapped in the dazzling glories of heaven, while its base lies deep in the regions of despair, shrouded in the darkness of eternal night. The great object of your minister, the work for which God has sent him among you, is, to persuade you to ascend this eminence. Your

own hearts, and numberless temptations, will, on the other hand, endeavor to draw you down, and plunge you in the gulf which lies at its base. 0, then, listen not to these evil counselors, but listen to your pastor, to your consciences, and to your God. Waiting on him you shall renew your strength, mount up as on eagles' wings, and at length sit down with angels in the kingdom of heaven.

Though fearful of wearying the patience of my auditors, I must beg them to indulge me in addressing, at greater length than is usual on such occasions, an assembly, which I cannot hope ever to address again. To those of them who are the disciples of Jesus Christ, our subject is full, not only of consolation, but of warning, of reproof, and of the most powerful motives to zeal and diligence, and untiring perseverance in performing the duties, to which their profession calls them. That you may feel the force of these motives, my brethren, consider what is the language of your profession, what you say to the world, when you approach the table of your Lord, or perform any other act which indicates that you consider yourselves as the disciples of Jesus Christ. On every such occasion, you do in effect say. I profess to be one of those, to whom all the promises of the gospel are made; one of those, who are styled children and heirs of God. As one of this number, I expect soon to be called to mingle with the angels, and to be made, in every respect, their equal. When I shall be exalted to this state, is uncertain, it may be tomorrow. It may be the next hour, for there is but a step between me and death, and, consequently, but a step between me and an angel's seat. Such, 0 professed disciples of Christ, is the lofty, and, as it must appear to the world, assuming language of your profession. And can you utter such language, will shame allow you to utter it, without attempting to live in a corresponding manner! If you do indeed look for such things, what manner of persons ought you to be, in all holy conversation and godliness! How far ought you to live above the world! How dead should you be to all earthly objects and pursuits!

What spirituality of temper, what heavenly mindedness, should you feel and exhibit! What can be more obvious, more undeniable, than the conclusion, that if you hope to be made equal to the angels hereafter you ought to imitate, so far as is practicable, angels now. That you may be induced to imitate them, and to climb with greater diligence and alacrity the steep ascent before you, let me persuade you to fix your eyes upon its summit. A dense impenetrable cloud appears, indeed, to conceal it from mortal eyes; but inspiration speaks, and the cloud is dissipated; faith presents her glass, and the sun-bright summit is seen. On him who sits enthroned upon it, you cannot indeed gaze. His glories, though you shall see them unveiled hereafter, are too insufferably dazzling for mortal eyes to sustain. But contemplate the resplendent forms, which float around him in an atmosphere of pure celestial light. See their bodies, resembling sunbeams seven times refined. See their countenances beaming with intelligence, purity, benevolence and felicity.

Through their transparent bodies look in, and contemplate the souls which inhabit them, expanded to the full dimensions of angelic minds, bearing the perfect image of their God, and reflecting his glories, as the polished mirror reflects the glories of the noonday sun. This, 0 Christian, is what thou shalt hereafter be. These dazzling forms were once sinful dust and ashes, like thyself. But grace, free, rich, sovereign, almighty grace, has made them what they now are. It has washed and justified, and sanctified, and brought them to glory. And to the same glory, 0 Christian, it is bringing thee. And canst thou then sleep, canst thou slumber, canst thou be slothful, canst thou complain of the difficulties which attend, of the obstacles which oppose, thy ascent to such glory and felicity as this'? 0 let gratitude, let duty, let shame, if nothing else, forbid. Lift up, ye embryo angels, lift up the heads which hang down, and let the drooping spirit revive. Read, hear, meditate with prayer, deny

yourselves, mortify sin but a little longer, and you shall mount up, not on eagles', but on angels' wings, and know what is meant by being made equal to resplendent intelligences. To impenitent sinners this subject, taken in connection with other parts of revelation, is a subject of most solemn and awful import. They too possess faculties, which render them capable of being mnade equal to the angels; but these faculties will only serve, if they remain impenitent and unholy, to sink them down to a dreadful equality with the fallen angels, the spirits of disobedience, for whom the fires of hell are prepared, amid to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness and etermial despair. They, indeed, are destined, like the righteous, to immortality; but not, if they remain as they now are, to a happy immortality. No, the language of our Judge is, They that have done good, shall come forth to the resurrection of life, but they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment. My careless, irreligious hearers, think a moment, I beseech you, upon the terribleness of their fate. 0, think how terrible it will be, to have the vast capacity of your immortal souls filled, to the very brim, with wretchedness; to see, that when you might have been raised to an equality with the holy angels you have sunk yourselves, by your own folly, to a dreadful equality with evil spirits, in character, in malignity, misery, and despair. Yet this must be your fate, unless you repent, and work the works of God, by believing on him whom he hath sent. God himself has said it, who cannot lie, and who will never change. And are these things so'? Is it true, that before a century shall have passed away all the souls, who now fill this house, will be angels or demons, and fixed forever in heaven or hell? Yes, my hearers, it is true. It is as certain, as that there is a God; as certain, as that we are here. 0, then, in what language can we describe, how can we adequately conceive of the folly, the madness, of sinners, of those who neglect the great salvation. In less than a century, and, with respect to most of them, in much less than half that time, the question, which of the two opposite states shall be theirs, is to be decided. Yes, my immortal hearers, in a few years will be forever decided the question, whether your vast and almost boundless capacities, shall be filled with happiness, or with misery; whether the noble faculties, which God has given you, shall blossom and expand in heaven, or be scorched and withered in hell; in a word, whether you shall brighten into angels, or blacken into fiends. And while this question is in suspense; a question, which might convulse the thrones of heaven, and throw the universe into agonies of anxiety, how are you, who are most nearly concerned in it, employed'? In some childish, worldly scheme of temporal aggrandizement; or in laboring to amass wealth, which you can possess but for an hour, or, perhaps, in a round of frivolous amusements and dissipation. Yes,—let earth blush, let heaven weep to hear it,—these, these, are the employments, in which immortal beings choose to spend their hours of salvation, to pass away the time, till the great question is decided. Well may inspiration declare, as it does, that the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and that madness is in their hearts while they live. And well may we exclaim, in the language of inspiration, 0, that they were wise, that they understood their latter end. My dying, yet immortal hearers! Will none of you be wise'? Will none of you suffer me, or rather suffer the guiding Spirit of God, to take you by the hand, and lead you to that mount, on the summit of which an angel's crown, and a Savior's throne, await all who overcome the difficulties of the ascent'? 0, look once more, before you turn away and renounce them forever,—look once more at these inestimable rewards. Look too at Him, who dispenses them. Hear him offering you the aid of his own wisdom to guide you, and of his own power to strengthen you, while contending for the prize. Hear him repeating all the gracious melting invitations, which he addresses to sinners in the volume of his word. Hear him saying, Sinner, trust in me, and I will

raise thee to an equality with angels; but neglect me, and thou wilt plunge thyself down to a level with despairing fiends.

Preached in Bangor at the ordination of Rev. S. L. Pomroy.

Chapter 30

S. FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER AND WITH THE SON

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER AND WITH THE SON "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." 1 John 1:3

Great, my friends, as is the difference, between the church militant on earth, and that of the Church triumphant in heaven, the employments and enjoyments of their respective members nearly resemble each other, differing not in kind, but only in degree. Is it true that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived the glorious things, which God has prepared, in the world to come, for those who love him? It is also true, that even in this world, he reveals those things by his Spirit to believers. Do the saints above sing a news song, saying, Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive blessing, and glory, and honor, and power; for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood? The saints on earth unite with them in heart and voice to sing the same song, though in feebler strains. Do the blessed inhabitants of heaven rejoice over every sinner that repenteth? Christians on earth, according to their measure of grace, do the same. Do the spirits of just men made perfect resemble God, behold him face to face, and see him as he is? So just men on earth bear the image of God, behold him in his word and works, and endure as seeing him who is invisible. Do Christ's members above reside with him, behold his glory and rejoice in his presence? His members on earth enjoy his presence, when they assemble in his name, and though with their senses they perceive him not, yet contemplating him with the eye of faith, they rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory. In a word, do the saints above enjoy a most intimate fellowship or communion with God and his Son? Saints on earth enjoy fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. To animate and assist his fellow disciples in seeking and enjoying this glorious privilege, was, we are told, the object of St. John in writing this epistle: The things which we have seen and heard, says he, declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. To prove that all true Christians enjoy a kind of fellowship or communion with God in Christ, to which other men are total strangers, and to show the nature of this communion, and in what it consists, is the object of the following discourse.

I. All true Christians enjoy a kind of fellowship or communion with God and Christ, to which mankind are, in their natural state, total strangers.

Though I doubt not, that there are many here present, who from their own happy experience have learned the truth of this assertion, yet there are probably still more who will ridicule and deny it. Those who are entirely unacquainted with experimental religion, and who deny the power of godliness, while they possess the form of it, will and must consider all pretences to communion with God as the effects of superstition and enthusiasm, the dreams and reveries of weak and deluded minds. When the profane scoffer, the cold hearted infidel, the formal hypocrite, and the self righteous moralist, hear the Christian conversing on these subjects, they are ever ready to exclaim, with a mixture of indignation and contempt, Thou art beside thyself; too much false religion has made thee mad! With the utmost justice and propriety, however, may the Christian

deny the charge; for he is not mad, nor enthusiastic, nor superstitious; but speaks the words of truth and soberness. That communion with God, of which he speaks, and which constitutes his supreme felicity, is no fancied delusion, no enthusiastic dream, but a blessed reality; it is heaven begun in the soul, and is enjoyed in a greater or less degree by all without exception, who will ever be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. This is evident from innumerable passages in the word of God. The high and holy One, who inhabits eternity, condescends, as he himself informs us, to dwell with those who are of a humble and contrite spirit, to revive the heart of the contrite ones. I will not leave you comfortless, said our blessed Saviour to his disciples, I will come unto you; yet a little while and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me, and ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Abide in me, and I in you; for, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him. He that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world? Jesus answered, if a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. Here you see, that in a spiritual sense every true

Christian dwells in Christ, and Christ in him, and that he manifests or reveals himself to those who love him in such a manner, as he does not to the rest of the world; and that both he and the Father take up their abode in the hearts of all his true disciples. To the same purpose the apostle says, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Know ye not, says he to the Corinthians, that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? Ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. Because ye are children, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father; and the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God. All true believers are also represented as having already received the earnest and first fruits of the heavenly inheritance, as rejoicing in Christ with joy unspeakable and full of glory, as walking in the light of God’s countenance, as beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and as enjoying the communion of the Holy Ghost. The inspired writers invariably use the strongest expressions which language affords, when they would show the intimate union which subsists between Christ and his church. He is the Shepherd, and they the sheep; he is the vine, and they are the branches; he is the Head, and they are his members; he is the soul, and they are the body. It would be easy to multiply passages to the same purpose, but surely, if there be any meaning in words, enough has been said to show that there is a most intimate union and communion between God and Christ and all real Christians, of which mankind, in their natural state, can form no conception. I proceed, II. To show what this communion implies and in what it consists. The original word, which is here rendered fellowship, and which is elsewhere rendered communion, signifies that reciprocal intercourse, or communion, which subsists between beings who are partakers of the same nature, whose moral characters are similar, and who mutually know and esteem each other. It is an observation no less just, than common, that like rejoices in like, and where there is no likeness, there can be no communion. Thus, for instance, there can be no communion between the inhabitants of the water and those of the air; for what is life to the one, is death to the other. There can be no communion, in the proper sense of the term, between mankind and the brutal world, because the former are endowed with reason, and the latter are not. It is the same in a less general sense, with respect to men of different ages, characters, and situations in life. The old cannot enjoy communion with the young in the pleasures of youth, nor

the philosopher with the ignorant savage, in the pursuits of the chase. The blind can enjoy no fellowship with those who see, in the beauties of vision, nor the deaf, with those who hear, in the harmony of sounds. Unless persons resemble each other, therefore, in a greater or less degree, there can be no mutual communication of joys and sorrows between them; they cannot enter into each other's views and feelings, clearly understand each other's language, enjoy each other's society, or form an intimate, happy, and lasting union. But, on the other hand, when persons meet who resemble each other in temper, character, age, and situation, who love and hate the same things, and pursue and avoid the same objects, they readily unite, like drops of dew when brought into contact, and appear to compose but one soul in different bodies. Similitude, similarity of nature, of character and pursuits, must therefore be the basis of all true fellowship or communion. Hence it appears, that no creatures can enjoy communion with God and his Son, but those, who are partakers of his divine nature, who resemble him in their moral character, and who love, hate and pursue those things which are respectively the objects of his love, hatred, and pursuit. But in none of these particulars are mankind qualified to enjoy communion with God, while in their natural, sinful state. Once indeed, they were like God; but, at the fall, they lost his Spirit which originally dwelt in them; they lost his image and likeness, in which they were created; they lost all regard for his law, which was once written in their hearts; and became enemies to him by wicked works. Instead of pursuing his glory, they now regard only their own selfish interests; they have no desire to enjoy communion with him, nor any conception of what it implies; they do not even seek after God, but the language of their hearts is, Depart from us, for we desire not a knowledge of thy ways. In a word, their feelings, inclinations and pursuits, are diametrically opposite to the laws and character of a holy God. Now it is too evident to require proof, that such beings cannot enjoy communion with God and Christ, for, what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? or what communion hath light with darkness? or what concord math Christ with Belial? As well might fire and frost form an alliance; as well might heaven and hell meet and mingle, as unrenewed sinners have communion with a holy God. But very different is the case, with respect to the true disciples of Christ. They are reconciled to God through the blood of his Son; they are renewed in the spirit of their mind, and have become new creatures. The law of God is written anew on their hearts, the lost image of God is in some measure restored to their souls, the Spirit of God returns to dwell in them, and thus again they become partakers of the divine nature. They are adopted into the number of God's children, and, according to the measure of grace given them, become holy as he is holy. They love what he loves, hate what he hates, and pursue what he pursues. Thus their natures and characters are made in some measure to resemble his, and a foundation is laid for the restoration of that ennobling, purifying, enrapturing communion, which constitutes the supreme felicity of all true believers, both in this world, and in that which is to come. This communion consists in a mutual giving and receiving, which is constantly maintained between God and the renewed soul; and which is carried on through the medium of the Lord Jesus Christ; who being Head over all things to his church, and uniting God and man in one person, is admirably qualified to discharge the office of mediator between God and his people. This is he, of whom Jacob's ladder was a type. By him all temporal and spiritual blessings descend from heaven to his people, and through him, all their prayers, and praises, and thanksgivings, come up for a memorial before God, being perfumed with the incense of his precious blood. In him all fullness dwells, and of this fullness all his friends receive, and grace for grace. As the sun is continually pouring forth a flood of light, and heat, and sweet attractive influences, on the planets, which harmoniously revolve

around him, rejoice in his beams, and by reflection, return them again to their source, so the Sun of Righteousness, whose riches of grace and glory are unsearchable, and inexhaustible, is continually pouring forth enlightening, purifying, and life-giving influences, into the souls of believers, while they revolve around him, receive and rejoice in his beams, and return them back to him in grateful ascriptions of thanks giving and praise. He gives himself, and all that he has to his people, engaging to be their God, their father, their friend and protector, and their exceeding great reward; and promising to love them, keep and guide them, even unto death; to watch over them as the apple of his eye, to gather them with his arm, and carry them in his bosom; to cause all things both in time and eternity to work together for their everlasting good. His people, on the other hand, humbly, gratefully and joyfully receive him, as their God and portion, and in return, give up themselves and all that they have to him, without reserve, as his people, engaging to love him, trust in him, worship him, to spend and be spent in promoting his cause, honor, and interest in the world. Various; and almost innumerable are the ways in which this communion with God is enjoyed by his people. We shall only mention some of the principal.

1. Christians enjoy communion with God in the works of creation. They contemplate the universe as a temple in which the most High sits enthroned; as a body, of which God is in a certain sense the soul; and as we love the bodies of our friends for the sake of the souls which inhabit them, as we are peculiarly pleased with the works of our friends; for the sake of the hands which formed them, so Christians are ineffably pleased and delighted with the great work of creation, because it was formed and is filled by their Father and their God. Being possessed of that faith which is the evidence of things not seen, and which brings invisible things to the mind with all the force of realities, they hear and see God on every side, and enjoy him in all the works of his hands. They see his power, wisdom and goodness, embodied and personified in the beauties and glories of creation, and feel that it is he, who "Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze."

They can

" Look abroad through nature, to the range

Of planets, suns, and adamantine spheres,

Wheeling, unshaken, through the void immense," and triumphantly exclaim, ‘Our Father made and preserves them all.’ In the sun they see an emblem of Christ, the Sun of righteousness; in the rainbow they behold a token of God’s covenant love; in the showers and dews of heaven, they see an emblem of the refreshing influences of divine grace. In short, from the sun in the heavens, to the plant which rejoices in its influence, or the insect which is gladdened by its beams, there is nothing which is not full of instruction and consolation to the people of God; nothing which does not lead them to remember, love, and adore him. Even in the midst of conflicting elements, while the fair face of creation is deformed by storms and tempests, they can joyfully sing;

"The God who rules on high,

And thunders when be please,

Who rides upon the stormy sky,

And manages the seas;

This awful sod is ours, &c."

2. The Christian enjoys communion with God in all the dispensations of his providence. He not only acknowledges, but feels and rejoices, that the Lord reigns, that all events are at his disposal, and that not a hair can fall from his head, or a sparrow to the ground, without him. He does not rest in second causes, nor ascribe the events which befall him to lack and chance, as mankind are naturally prone to do; but refers them at once to the great First Cause, and last end of all things. With the eye of faith, he looks up and beholds his God, his Father, and his friend, seated on the throne of the universe, working all things according to the counsel of his own will, and causing them to work together for his own glory and the good of hi, people. If he is chastised, he looks not at the rod, but at the hand that holds it, knows that in faithfulness and mercy he is afflicted, and that though his afflictions for the present are not joyous, they shall, in the end, produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and work out for him an eternal weight of glory. When he is favored with peace and prosperity, and his cup is made to overflow with blessings, he rests not in the streams, but follows them up to the fountain of goodness, from which they flow; and every temporal mercy which he receives, is rendered doubly sweet by the consideration that it comes from his Father’s hand, and is a new proof of his Father’s love. Thus he enjoys communion with God, in all the common mercies and events of life; and his heart, like a fertile field, which the Lord has blessed, brings forth in return fruit to the glory of God and eternal life, while its grateful language is, What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?

3. The Christian enjoys communion with God in his word, read and preached. To the sinner the word of God is a sealed hook. He may read, and he may hear, but he cannot understand it; for its contents are in a great measure foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned, and he has no spiritual faculties to discern them. He understands no more of the Bible, than a man born blind would understand of an elaborate treatise on light and colors; for the god of this world has blinded his eyes, and he is justly left under the power of this spiritual blindness, because he will not sincerely seek for the enlightening influences of the divine Spirit, nor embrace Christ as a prophet to instruct him. From those who thus proudly trust to their own wisdom, God hides the great truths of his gospel, and reveals them to those, who, like babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby, and receive them with the meekness and docility of children. To such Christ opens the book and looses the seals. He also takes away the veil from their hearts, and opens their eyes, that they may behold wondrous things out of his law; and thus enables them to receive his word, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God. In this word he speaks to their very souls with the most astonishing majesty, authority, clearness, and energy; displays to their view the inexhaustible treasures of wisdom, and knowledge which it contains, leads them to the unfailing streams of joy and consolation which flow from his gracious promises, sets before them the glories and beauties of his own character and the wondrous plan of redeeming love. By his Spirit he applies it in such a manner to their hearts and consciences, as their several wants and circumstances may require; and thus comforts, animates, reproves, instructs, and counsels them, no less powerfully and effectually, than if he spoke to them by a voice from heaven. He causes it to become bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, cordials to the faint, medicines to the sick, oil and wine to the wounded, consolations to the distressed, strength to the weak, rest to the weary, and armor both offensive and defensive, to the Christian warrior, and light to those who sit in darkness. In short,

the Christian finds in the word of God something suited to every want, sorrow, and temptation, and therefore like David, he esteems it more than gold, yea than much fine gold, and considers it as sweeter to his taste than honey, or the honey comb.

Again, Christians enjoy communion with God and his Son in the public exercises of religious worship. Christ has said, that where only two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them; and this assurance his people find, by blessed experience, is still fulfilled. He meets with his people on these occasions to bless them, moves on their hearts by his Spirit, and thus causes them to burn with a holy flame of affection and desire; manifests himself unto them as he dues not unto the world, and enables them, though they perceive him not with their bodily senses, so to contemplate him with the eye of faith, as to realize his presence with them, and to rejoice in him, with joy unspeakable and fall of glory. He also dwells in them all as one soul in different bodies, and thus draws and unites them together in the bond of peace and charity, and enables them to exercise that holy love for the brethren, that blessed union and oneness of spirit, which they ought ever to feel as members of the same body. Then they, in some measure find that petition of our Saviour answered, which he offered up in his last prayer: I pray that all who may believe on me, may be one; as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in its; I in them, and they in me, that they may be made perfect in one. Thus they enjoy, at the same time, communion with each other, with their Saviour and their God.

Lastly, Christians enjoy communion with God and Christ, in the exercise of private meditation, prayer and praise. As children, they have liberty of access to God at all times; and their prayers cannot fail of an answer, because Christ ever liveth at the right hand of God to spread out their cause and make intercession for them. In his name they may come to God with snore freedom and confidence than they could come to any earthly friend, and pour forth all their sorrows into his bosom, spread all their difficulties, perplexities, trials, and temptations before him, and cast all their cares upon him, knowing that he careth for them. Wherever they are, or however employed; whether they are at home or abroad, in the house or by the way, in society or in solitude, in sickness or in health; in prosperity or adversity, they may still feel that God is with them; still enjoy the most delightful meditations on his character and perfections; still be employed in raising their hearts to him in prayer and praise. To assist and encourage them in the performance of these duties, God is sometimes pleased to pour out upon them a spirit of grace and supplications, to assist their infirmities, and make intercession for them with groanings which cannot be uttered. He sets forth Christ crucified before them, enables them with the eye of faith to look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn, and he in bitterness for their sins; to lie at the feet of their offended, but compassionate and long suffering Saviour, and wash them with the tears of sincere contrition and repentance, while they loathe and abhor themselves for their pride, coldness, selfishness, and ingratitude, and repent as in dust and ashes.

Lest, however, they should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, God is pleased, at other times, to revive and strengthen their fainting spirits with the cordials of his love. He sends down the spirit of adoption into their hearts, whereby they are enabled to cry, Abba, Father; and to feel all those filial affections of love, joy, trust, hope, reverence, and dependence, which it is at once their duty and their happiness to exercise toward God. By the operation of the same Spirit, he shines into their minds, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, opens and applies to them his exceeding great and precious promises, makes them to

know the great love wherewith he has loved them, and reveals to them those unutterable, inconceivable, and unheard of things which he has prepared for those who love him. He also shines in upon their souls with the pure, dazzling, melting, overpowering beams of celestial mercy, grace, and love, displays to their enraptured view the glories and beauties of him, who is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, and gives them to know the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths, of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Thus he gives them as great foretastes of heaven, as their feeble natures can support, fills their souls to the very brim with all the fullness of God, and makes them understand that peace of God which passes all. understanding. On the other hand, the happy Christian in these bright, enraptured moments, while he is thus basking in the beams of celestial light and splendor; forgets the world, forgets himself, forgets his existence, and is wholly absorbed in the ravishing, the ecstatic contemplation of untreated loveliness, glory, and beauty. He contemplates, he wonders, he admires, he loves, he adores. His whole soul goes forth in one intense flame of gratitude, admiration, love, and desire; and he longs to plunge himself into the boundless ocean of perfection, which opens to his view, and to be wholly swallowed up and lost in God. With an energy and activity unknown before, he roams and ranges through this ocean of perfection and glory, of power and wisdom, of truth and justice, of light and love, where he can find neither a bottom nor a shore. His soul dilates itself beyond its ordinary capacity, and expands to receive the flood of happiness which overwhelms it. All its desires for earthly happiness are dried up, and it no longer inquires, Who will show me any good? The scanty, thirst-producing streams of worldly delight, only increase the feverish desires of the soul; the noisy, tumultuous transports, and fancied raptures of the enthusiast, the visionary, and fanatic, which proceed merely from the fervor of the passions and affections, soon die away, and leave no fruit behind; but the tide of joy which flows in upon the Christian, when he thus enjoys communion with God, is as full, as constant, as unfathomable, as the source from whence it flows. No language can do justice to his feelings, for his happiness is unutterable; but with an emphasis, a meaning, an expression, which God only could excite, and which none but God can comprehend, he exclaims, in broken accents, My Father, my God! whom have I in heaven but thee, and what can a miserable worm of the dust desire beside thee?

Thus, my friends, have I endeavored to describe the nature of that communion with God, which, in a greater or less degree, every true Christian enjoys. But how weak, how cold, how imperfect the description, haw wretchedly inadequate is earthly language, to give a just representation of heavenly things! But you, my Christian friends, who have tasted the happiness of communion with God, you know what we would say, could language be found; and to your own experience we must refer you for clearer ideas on this interesting subject. Your own hearts must supply the deficiency.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. To some of you, my friends, I doubt not that the preceding observations must appear enthusiastic, foolish, and absurd. Nor is this matter of wonder or surprise; for the things of the Spirit have long been foolishness to natural men, and ever will be, till they are enlightened and taught of God. And unless you have been thus taught and enlightened, unless you have tasted, in some degree at least, the happiness of communion with God and his Son Jesus Christ, you are still strangers to true religion, still unprepared to be admitted into the heavenly mansions. In communion with God, most of the happiness of heaven will consist, and unless you are capable of

enjoying this happiness here, you must be incapable of enjoying it hereafter. You may have a name to live, but you are really dead: you have the form of godliness, but you can know nothing of the power of it, until you experimentally learn what it is to have fellowship with those whose fellowship is with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ.

2. However foolish or enthusiastic the idea of such a kind of communion with God, as has now been described, may appear to some in this assembly, yet there are others who know, yea infallibly know, that it is a blessed reality; and that it affords such a happiness as the world cannot give nor take away. To such we can say, Happy, yea, thrice happy is your lot. If you really enjoy communion with God, though but in the smallest degree, your names are written in heaven; a harp, a crown, and a mansion are prepared for you, and though at present, your communion with God is frequently interrupted by clouds and darkness, yet the time is fast approaching, when you shall behold with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, and be perfectly transformed into the same glorious image, and enjoy an indissoluble union, a most perfect, intimate, and uninterrupted fellowship with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. Seeing then you look for such things, give all diligence to maintain a daily and hourly intercourse with the heavenly world. Let your thoughts, your affections, and your conversation, be in heaven; draw near to God, and he will draw nigh to you, and cause his face to shine upon you, that you may be saved.

Like Moses, live much upon the mount with God in prayer; and then like him, you will cause your light to shine before others, and adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour. We naturally copy the manners, learn the language, and imitate the example, of those with whom we associate, and if we have our fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, we shall gradually become conformed to their image, and the world will lose its power, offering its temptations, and spreading its snares in vain, for those who have been renewed in the spirit of their mind. Consider then, my friends, the infinite, astonishing condescension of Jehovah; consider what manner of love he has bestowed upon you, that you should be called the sons of God, and be admitted to friendship and communion with him; and let this incite you to make every possible exertion to glorify him by bringing forth fruit unto God. And let not those who are hungering and thirsting after communion with God, but who enjoy it only imperfectly or interruptedly, suddenly conclude that they know nothing of religion. The path of the just is as the rising light, faint and almost indistinguishable at first, but gradually advancing to the perfect day. Christ will not despise the day of small things. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Be of good courage therefore, wait on the Lord, and he shall strengthen thine heart.

Finally, whatever our character and pursuits may have hitherto been, let us all, from this moment, resolve to make God our chief good, and seek communion with him as our only happiness. Without this there is indeed no happiness, either in this world, or that which is to come. Without this, man is no better than the brutes that perish; for it is this alone which dignifies, exalts, and purifies his nature. This is the happiness for which he was made. This is the happiness which was prepared for him. O then, seek this happiness, and no longer exhibit the preposterous sight of rational, immortal beings cleaving to ashes, earth, and dust; chasing eagerly bubbles which elude their pursuit, and burst ere they can grasp them, while they neglect heavenly and divine things, and leave their never dying souls to perish.

Chapter 31

S. FRAUD EXPOSED AND CONDEMNED.

FRAUD EXPOSED AND CONDEMNED.

It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth. — Proverbs 20:14.

IT is impossible to peruse the scriptures attentively, without finding in almost every page, the most convincing proofs, that since the fall human nature has ever been the same; that the men of former ages strikingly resembled, in character and conduct, the present inhabitants of the world. How exactly, for instance, does the remark of the wise man in our text correspond with what is still daily witnessed in the commercial intercourse between man and man. He is here describing the means which were in his day employed by a dishonest buyer to procure the articles which he wished to purchase, for less than their real worth. He represents him as with this view, exaggerating their defects, and pretending that they are worthless. It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; the article you would sell me is of an inferior quality; the price you put upon it is too high; even if it is worth so much to others, it is not worth so much to me, as I have no particular use for it, and do not care to purchase it. But when he has gone his way, when he has by these means obtained an article for less than its value, then he boasteth; boasts of his skill and success in making a bargain; or at least secretly exults in it, if he dares not speak of it openly; and perhaps despises the man, of whom he has thus gained an advantage. My hearers, I need not inform you, that the man who would be really religious, must be influenced by religion in every part of his conduct; and on all occasions, during the week, as well as on the Sabbath; in his intercourse with man, as well as in his approaches to God. Nor need I remind you, that no man can be a disciple of Christ, who does not yield to the authority of Christ; whose heart, and hand, and tongue, are not governed by the laws of Christ. Now, if you consider a moment, how many of this congregation are constantly employed in pecuniary transactions; how frequently almost every man is called to engage in them; how large a portion of your time they occupy; how many opportunities you have of doing wrong, and how constantly, how powerfully, you are tempted by your own self-love, the selfishness of others, and the example of the world, to deviate from the path of rectitude, you will feel convinced, that to conduct your worldly business in a perfectly fair and upright manner, in such a manner as God prescribes, is a most important and difficult part of true religion; and that it is indispensably necessary to turn your attention frequently and seriously to this subject. It is a conviction of this truth, which has induced me to address you on the passage before us. And I wish it to be distinctly understood that I am preaching not to one, nor to a few, but to all. It is nothing, which I have seen, nothing which I have heard respecting the conduct of individuals, that has induced me to address you on this subject; but it is a conviction, that it is a most important subject, a subject in which all are interested, and which is intimately connected with the honor of religion, with your own salvation. In discoursing upon this subject, I shall not confine my remarks to the particular case mentioned in the text, the case of a buyer, but shall extend them to pecuniary transactions of every kind; whether they are carried on between buyers and sellers, or masters and servants, or employers and those whom they employ. It will not, however, be expected, that I

should discuss every difficult question which may be asked, or give particular directions respecting every perplexing case which may occur; since to do this in a single discourse would be impossible. I shall therefore, pursue the method which God has adopted in his word. He there gives us general rules, which may be applied to every particular case that can occur; rules sufficient for the direction of every one, who sincerely wishes to know and perform his duty. I shall, in the first place, mention some of these general rules which God has given us for this purpose; and then show more particularly, what these rules require, and when we are guilty of violating, or neglecting them. The first general rule which I shall mention, is that which requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves. This rule is indeed applicable, not only to all our pecuniary transactions, but to all our intercourse with our fellow creatures; so that a man who should observe it, would need no other rule to direct him on all occasions. As our whole duty, with respect to God, is virtually included in loving him with all our hearts, so our whole duty with respect to men may be summed up in loving them as we love ourselves. Agreeably, the apostle observes, that love worketh no ill to our neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law; for the commands, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet, are all contained in this one word, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Nearly of same import, and equally applicable to every case which can occur, is our Savior's rule, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. This rule is the more deserving of our attention, because it is one of the sayings, which Christ had just uttered, when he said, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, is like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.

Another general rule, connected with this subject, is that which forbids us to covet any part of our neighbor's possessions. The command is express and comprehensive. Thou shalt not covet any thing that is thy neighbor's. To covet, literally signifies, to desire. This command does not, however, forbid us to desire the property of another on fair and equitable terms. It does not forbid us to desire what our neighbor wishes to part with, provided we are willing to give him a suitable equivalent in return. But it forbids every desire to increase our property at our neighbor's expense. It forbids us to wish that any thing should be taken from his possessions and added to our own. Of course, it forbids the employment of any means to increase our property by diminishing the property of our neighbor.

Again. We are frequently and expressly commanded strictly to observe in all our transactions, the rules of justice, truth, and sincerity; to deal justly; to defraud no one, to deceive no one, to speak every man truth to his neighbor. God's language is, Ye shall not deal falsely or deceitfully. Just balances, just weights, and just measures, shall ye have. lf ye sell aught to your neighbor, or buy aught at your neighbor's hand, ye shall not injure one another. Ye shall not oppress the hireling in his wages. Give to your servants that which is just and equal. Render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom. To sum up all in a word, we are informed that this is the will of God, that no man should overreach or defraud another in any matter; for, said the apostle, the Lord is the avenger of all such. This leads me to observe,

Lastly. That we are directed, in all our transactions, to remember, that the eye of God is upon us, and that he is a witness between us and our fellow creatures, when no other witness is present. Such are the principal rules, which God has given us for the regulation of our conduct in all our pecuniary transactions; rules, which are amply sufficient for our direction, in every case which can

possibly occur.

II. Let us now proceed, as was proposed, to apply these rules more particularly, and show what they require, what they forbid, and when they are violated. And,

1. Let us consider what these rules require of us as subjects, or members of civil society. And here we may observe, that they evidently require us strictly to observe the laws of our country with respect to the public revenue, to contribute that proportion of our property to the general and state governments, which those laws require; and to use no artifices or evasions, with a view to avoid paying that proportion. Our Savior, when asked by the Jews whether it were right to pay tribute to Caesar, the Roman Emperor, replied, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Now if he required them to pay tribute to a foreign power, by whom they had been conquered, so long as they remained the subjects of that power, much more would he enjoin it upon us to pay tribute to a government of our own forming, to rulers of our own choosing. Agreeably we are expressly commanded to pay tribute and custom to those, to whom tribute and custom are due; to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lords sake. The justice, and propriety of these commands, is obvious. There is an implied contract, or agreement between a government and its subjects, by which the subjects engage to give a portion of their property in exchange for the blessings of protection, security, and social order. So long as they enjoy these blessings, they receive a valuable consideration for the sums which they contribute, or in other words, for the taxes which they pay for the support of government. It is also evident, that the man who possesses a large share of wealth, derives greater advantages from the laws of the land, and from the protection afforded by civil authority, than the man who possesses little or nothing. Or, to place the subject in a little different light,—civil governments insure to their subjects the protection of their rights and property from injustice and violence; of course, they have a right to demand a premium for this insurance. This premium ought to be greater or less, in proportion to the property thus insured; in other words, every man is bound in justice to contribute to the support of law and government, in proportion to his property. This is as just a debt as any other which can be named. The man who by artifice or deceit avoids contributing in proportion to his property, is guilty of injustice and dishonesty. He not only defrauds the government, but does in effect defraud his fellow citizens; for if he contributes less than his proportion, others must contribute more to make up the deficiency. These remarks apply with equal force to those who introduce foreign goods into the country, without paying those duties which the laws require. This practice is contrary to the plain, express commands of God; it is contrary to the rules of justice and honesty; it involves deceit and artifice, and it is well if perjury be not added to the list, if the name of God and the solemnities of an oath are not impiously employed to conceal the fraud.

I am constrained to add, that it is little less criminal knowingly to purchase from the wharf, any merchandise, thus illegally introduced; for we thus become partakers in other men's sins, and we tempt them to repeat those sins, since it is evident that none would import merchandise in this unlawful manner, if none could be found to purchase it. It is vain to plead, as an excuse for these things, that government may waste, or misemploy the sums, which are put into their hands. We might as well refuse to pay a just debt, on pretence that our creditor would make an improper use of the money if it were paid. Equally vain is every other excuse, which can be assigned. No man, who means to do to others, as he wishes that others should do to him; no man, who means to obey God; no man, who is influenced by the fear of God, or who feels that the eye of God is upon

him, can be guilty of the practices here mentioned. Permit me, before I dismiss this part of my subject, to express a hope, that no one will endeavor to give these remarks a political bearing, or suspect that they are aimed particularly at any individual. They are made merely with a view to discharge an important official duty. It is my duty, as a minister of Christ, to warn you, to guard you against every thing which God forbids, against every thing which may endanger your immortal interests. Hence, though fully aware that this is a delicate subject, I did not dare to waive it. In the second place, let us consider the application of the rules above mentioned to the common pecuniary transactions of life. It is evident, that with respect to these transactions, they forbid every wish, much more, every attempt to defraud, or deceive our neighbor. They render it highly criminal for the seller to take the smallest advantage of the ignorance, inexperience, or simplicity of his customers; or to conceal any defect, which he may have discovered in the articles, of which he wishes to dispose. They render it equally criminal for the buyer to wish, or attempt to take any advantage of the seller, either by exaggerating the defects of his merchandise, or by falsely pretending that he does not wish to purchase. They render it highly criminal for any one to contract debts, when he has no sufficient reason to believe that he shall be able to discharge them; nor to persuade another to become responsible for his debts, when he has reason to suspect that his sponsor will in consequence suffer loss. In a word, they require us to put ourselves in the place of our neighbor, to be as unwilling to defraud him, as to be defrauded ourselves; to be as careful of his property and interest, as of our own; to think no more of enriching ourselves at his expense, than we should think of robbing our left hand with our right. They require us in all our transactions, to conduct as we should do, if our fellow creatures could see our hearts; for though they cannot see them, yet God can, and does see them; he is both witness and judge between us and our neighbor in every transaction, and surely his eye ought to be as effectual in regulating our conduct, as would the eye of our fellow creatures, could they, like him, search the heart. With every man, who is governed by the rule above mentioned, this will be the case. In his most secret transactions, he will conduct as if all his views, feelings, and conduct, were to be laid before the public eye. Indeed, he will be more afraid of injuring his neighbor, than of being injured himself; for in the latter case, he only suffers wrong, but in the former case he would do wrong, and he dreads sin more than suffering.

We might now proceed to show what these rules require of us, with respect to those who are employed in our service; but after the remarks which have been already made, this is perhaps needless. I would only observe, that these rules evidently forbid us to take any advantage of the necessities, or imprudence of those whom we employ, and require us to give them a prompt and adequate compensation for their services, and that on the other hand, they make it the duty of all who are employed, to be as faithful to the interests of their employers as to their own, and to avoid defrauding them of any portion of their time, by idleness, or of their property by negligence, as they would avoid theft or robbery.

Having thus shown what the rules of God’s word require of us, with respect to our pecuniary transactions, let us, in the next place, apply these rules to our past conduct, that we may ascertain how far we have observed, and in what instances we have disregarded them. With this view, permit me to ask each of you, whether in conducting the business of life, you have been invariably governed by these rules? Have you, in every instance, dealt with others, as you wish that others should deal with you? Have you always acted as under the eye of God, acted as you would have

done, had your hearts been laid open to your neighbor's view? Have you never practiced any deception, artifice, or evasion, in buying or selling, never taken any advantage of the ignorance, the inexperience or the necessities of others? Have you always contributed to the support of government that proportion of your property, which the laws required? Have your servants, or those whom you employed, never had any reason to complain of you? Have those of you who have been employed by others, always been strictly faithful to the interests of your employers? Is there no pecuniary transaction of your lives, which you would feel unwilling to have publicly known with all its circumstances; no one which men would condemn were it known to them? In a word, are you prepared to go to the bar of the all-seeing and heart-searching God, and there be tried by the rules mentioned above? My friends, to that bar you must shortly go, and by these rules you must be tried. To this test every transaction of your lives must be brought; for God will bring every secret thing into judgment. And my friends, if your own hearts condemn you, much more will God condemn you; for he is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. He will judge without partiality, favor, or affection. He will make none of those allowances and excuses for us, which self-love leads us to make for ourselves; nor will he allow the validity of any excuse which we can offer. Then, we are told, every one who hath done wrong, shall receive punishment for the wrong done, without any respect of person.

Indeed, we are taught that God takes special cognizance of those wrongs, which are done by artifice, fraud and deceit, and which human laws cannot prevent or discover. We are told, that the Lord is the avenger of all who are overreached, or defrauded in any matter, and that he will plead their cause and spoil those who oppress them. And he forbids us to take revenge of those, who have injured us, for this very reason, that he will himself execute vengeance. Recompense to no man evil for evil; for vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. This vengeance he often begins to execute in the present life, by depriving the guilty of that property, which they have iniquitously obtained. This he often threatens to do in his word, this he often actually does in his providences. This being the case, it surely becomes every one, who is conscious of having violated the rules of God, in his pecuniary transactions, to inquire seriously what he must do. This inquiry the scriptures will readily answer. They inform such a man, that his first step must be, to repent, to repent unfeignedly before God, for repentance must always precede forgiveness. No sin can be pardoned until it is repented of. The blood of Christ can wash out no stain of guilt, on which the tear of penitence has not fallen. In the next place, he must bring forth fruits meet for repentance. In other words, he must make restitution to every one whom he has injured, or defrauded, so far as he can recollect who they are— this is indispensable. There is no repentance, and of course no forgiveness, without it. How can a man repent of iniquity, who still retains the wages of iniquity? It is impossible. If he feels any sorrow, it is occasioned, not by hatred of his sin, but by fear of the consequences. Restitution then must be made, or the offender must perish. If thou bring thy gift to the altar, says our Savior, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, that is, any reason to complain of thee, go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. The altar was then the place, to which the worshippers of God brought their thank-offerings, gifts, and sacrifices for sin. Christ, we are told, is now our altar, and to this altar we must bring our prayers, our praises, our services. But he plainly intimates, that he will accept no gift of us, receive no thanks from us, listen to none of our prayers, so long as we neglect to make satisfaction to those whom we have injured. And in vain shall we attempt to atone for neglecting this duty, by performing others, by contributing to the promotion of religious objects,

or by liberality to the poor; for God has said, I hate robbery for burnt offering; that is, I hate, I will not receive an offering, which was unjustly acquired. There is then, no way but to make restitution, and this every real Christian will make to the utmost of his ability. Agreeably, we hear Zaccheus, the publican, saying, as soon as he became a Christian, if I have wronged any man, I will restore him four-fold. I am aware that this is a most disagreeable duty. Nothing can be harder, or more painful to our proud hearts. But it will be far easier to perform it, than to suffer the consequences of neglecting it. If it is not performed, our souls must perish, as sure as the word of God is true; and in consequence of indulging a false shame, we shall be overwhelmed with shame and everlasting contempt. Even as it respects our interest in this world only, we had better, far better, put a blazing fire-brand into the midst of our possessions, than retain among them the smallest particle of gain, which was not fairly obtained; for it will bring the curse of God upon us and upon all the works of our hands. And now, my hearers, I have discharged a most disagreeable, but as I view it, a most necessary part of ministerial duty. I have led your attention to a subject which it is exceedingly difficult to discuss in the pulpit, and which, for that reason, is seldom brought to view. I have shown you, in what manner God requires you to regulate your pecuniary transactions. I have shown you what is the duty of those, who have disregarded these requirements. And now I request you not to apply these remarks to others, but to take them home to yourselves. It is well for him who can say with truth, 1 have always obeyed in this respect the rules of God’s word. Such an one, if he can be found, may cast the first stone at his offending neighbor. To conclude. While we apply these rules to our past conduct, let us not forget that they must regulate our future transactions, if we mean to be the real subjects of Christ. They are, my professing friends, the laws of his kingdom, the laws which you have covenanted to obey. And I dare pledge ourselves to the world in your name, that no breach of these laws shall be tolerated in this church, and that no one, who can be proved to be guilty of disregarding them, shall remain a member of it.

Chapter 32

S. GOD HEARD IN THE STILL SMALL VOICE.

GOD HEARD IN THE STILL SMALL VOICE. And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entering in of the cave: and, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, what dost thou here Elijah? —1 Kings 19:12-13. IN that part of Elijah's history, which is immediately connected with this passage, we have a striking exemplification of the great truth, that a good man, when God is with him, can do all things, and exhibit almost superhuman excellence; but that the same person, when God withdraws his secret influence, becomes weak like another man, and can do nothing. In the preceding chapter we see this prophet, unguarded and unassisted by any human power, fearlessly meeting an enraged monarch surrounded by his guards, reproving him for his sins, standing alone in the midst of thousands who thirsted for his blood, putting to death four hundred false prophets before the eyes of their idolatrous sovereign and protector, and with a voice, like the voice of omnipotence, calling down, first fire, and then water from heaven.

Thus he could act while God, by his secret influence, inspired him with faith and courage and zeal. But in this chapter we see the same prophet flying with trembling haste from the threatened vengeance of a woman, not venturing to think himself safe till he had fled a day's journey into the wilderness, and in a transport of peevishness and impatience wishing for death. Thus he acted when God, to humble him and show him his own weakness, left him to himself. The unbelief and pusillanimity which he exhibited on this occasion, deserved reproof and in our text we have an account of the manner in which God reproved him. While he lay trembling and dispirited in a cave of Mount Horeb, he began to perceive the tokens of an approaching Deity. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind, an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake, a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice to him which said, What dost thou here Elijah? My hearers, the manner in which God manifested himself to his prophet on this occasion, resembles, in many respects, the manner in which he now manifests himself to men, when he comes to reprove them for their sins, and thus prepare the way for their conversion and salvation. To trace this resemblance, is my design in the present discourse.

1. When God comes to reprove men for their sins, he usually manifests himself to them, or addresses them, not by his works, either of creation or providence, but by a still small voice. Thus it was in the instance before us. A tempestuous wind, an earthquake, and a fire were perceived by the prophet; but God was in neither of them. It is, however, necessary to explain this assertion, to show in what sense it is said that God was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. It is certain that, in one sense, he was in each of them; for he is every where, working all in all. They were all

the effect of his power; they were all proofs of his presence, and in all of them some of his natural perfections might be seen. But in another sense he was in none of them. He was in none of them as a reprover or instructor. He spoke from none of them. Neither the wind, the earthquake, nor the fire, said any thing to the prophet respecting his situation, his errors, or his duty. They might all have passed by, and left him as they found him, uninstructed, unreproved. In none of them did he find God, in none of them did he hear his voice.

They were rather the precursors, the heralds of the approaching Deity, than the Deity himself. And like heralds they proclaimed, though without a voice, the greatness, the majesty, and the power of him whose heralds they were. Or, like the trumpets which announce the approach of a monarch, they served to excite expectation, and awaken attention. But it was in the still small voice alone, that God manifested his presence to the prophet, as a reprover and instructor. In a similar manner does he still manifest himself to men when he comes to reprove and instruct them. His works continually pass before them, and in one sense he is in all his works. He shines upon us in the sun, he breathes upon us in the air, he supports us in the earth, he stands up before us in every thing which he has made, in every change and event produced by his providence. But in another sense, in the sense of our text, he is in none of these things. He is not in them in such a sense that men perceive his presence. He is not in them in such a sense that men find him there, or hear him speak to them. In a word, he is not in them as an instructor or reprover. For instance, the luminaries of heaven have a thousand times apparently passed over the face of the sky before your eyes; but with respect to you, God was not in them. You saw him not in the sun, you saw him not in the moon, in the stars.

Again, you have all known something of the force of the winds; you have felt your habitations tremble before the fury of the blast. And not a few of you have witnessed more terrible proofs of its power on the ocean. You have seen the billows raised into mountains, and lashed into foam. You have felt the laboring vessel reel under you, while tossed by a tempest which seemed sufficient to rend the mountains, and break in pieces the rocks; and you have seen the tempest become a calm. But as it respected you, God was not in the wind, nor in the calm which succeeded. You saw his hand, you heard his voice in neither. If you then heard him in any thing, it was in a still small voice within you. Further, the globe which we inhabit, though not this particular part of it, has often been convulsed by the most terrible and desolating earthquakes.

Even some parts of New England have been agitated in a degree sufficient to excite distressing apprehensions. But have the nations thus visited found God in the earthquake? Did our fathers find him there as an instructor and reprover? Far from it. Never have the survivors been reformed by such events. The earthquakes in New England did, indeed, occasion a kind of religious panic. A writer, who was then one of the ministers of Boston, informs us, that immediately after the great earthquake as it was called, a great number of his flock came and expressed a wish to unite themselves with the church. But on conversing with them he could find no evidence of improvement in their religious views or feelings, no convictions of their own sinfulness; nothing, in short, but a kind of superstitious fear, occasioned by a belief that the end of the world was at hand. All their replies proved that they had not found God in the earthquake.

Again, you have often heard the thunder bursting over your heads, and seen the fires of heaven flashing thick and dreadful around you. And more than once, or twice, or thrice, you have seen this

town assailed by devouring flames, and in danger of a wide-wasting conflagration. But the succeeding conduct of our citizens sufficiently proves that they did not find God in the fire. If he was there to scourge us, he was not there to instruct us, or convince us of our sins. And the same remark may be applied to numberless other places which have suffered in a far greater degree than this town by the ravages of fire. Once more, you have all, in a greater or less degree, been afflicted by the dispensations of God's providence. Some of you have lost property; some of you children and friends; some of you have been visited by dangerous diseases, which brought death near; but in none of these afflictions did you find God. You saw not his hand, you heard not his voice. It was a chance that happened to you. I would not however be understood to mean, that the works of God and the dispensations of his providence are never made the occasion or means of leading men to serious reflection; for observation proves that they very often are so. Afflictions have led thousands to think of their ways; and, in consequence, they have turned their feet into God's testimonies. Still it is true that afflictions alone never produce this effect. So far as they produce any effect, it is not in a direct, but an indirect manner. As the tempest, the earthquake, and the fire roused the prophet, and prepared him to attend to what God would say to him; so the works and dispensations of providence are used to rouse thoughtless sinners, and awaken their attention to the still small voice of Jehovah. But they communicate no specific instruction or reproof. They do not tell the sinner in what respect he has done wrong, nor what it is to do right. They may amaze him, they may frighten him, they may plunge him into distress and despondency. But they leave him there. After they have done their utmost, the sinner is still left without God in the world, and without knowledge of the way in which God may be found. The same may be said of other means. Ministers may give voice and utterance to the Bible which is the word of God. Like James and John they may be sons of thunder to impenitent sinners. They may pour forth a tempest of impassioned, eloquent declamation.

They may proclaim all the terrors of the Lord; represent the earth as quaking and trembling under the footsteps of Jehovah; flash around them the lightnings of Sinai; borrow, as it were, the trump of the archangel, and summon the living and the dead to the bar of God; kindle before their hearers the conflagration of the last day and the fires of eternity, and show them the Judge descending, the heavens departing as a scroll, the elements melting, the earth with its works consuming, and all nature struggling in the agonies of dissolution ;—and still God may not be there; his voice may not be heard either in the tempest, the earthquake, or the fire; and if so, the preacher will have labored but in vain; his hearers, though they may for the moment be affected, will receive no permanent salutary impressions. Nothing effectual can be done unless God be there, unless he speaks with his still small voice. By this still, small voice we mean the voice of God's Spirit; the voice which speaks not only to man, but in man; the voice, which, in stillness and silence, whispers to the ear of the soul, and presses upon the conscience those great eternal truths, a knowledge and belief of which is connected with salvation. This voice almost every sinner sometimes hears. Most of you, my friends, have heard it. Some of you have heard it in this house, seconding the efforts of your minister, urging home upon you the truths which he exhibited, and enforcing his endeavors to convince you of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Some of you have heard it in the still and solitary hours of night while musing by your firesides, or lying awake upon your beds. There it has spoken to you, reminding you of the truths which you had formerly heard or read; and of the sins which you had forgotten; it has whispered, You are an accountable creature; the eye of God is upon you; he has noticed all your sins, he will bring you into judgment; you must repent or

perish. Thus, while you alone could hear it, has the still silent voice admonished, warned, reproved and instructed you; and while you heard it God was there; there, as he was not in the tempest, the earthquake, or the fire; and you felt the truth of the apostle's assertion, God is not far from every one of us. Or perhaps you were constrained to say with the patriarch, Surely God is in this place and I knew it not. Such is the still small voice with which God speaks, probably to all sinners, certainly to all whom he convinces of sin, and brings to a knowledge of himself. We remark,

II. That when God speaks to men with this voice, he speaks to them personally, or does, as it were, call them by name. This he did in the case before us. He addressed the prophet by his name, Elijah. When he speaks to men in a general way only, by his written word, or by the voice of his ministers, he does not address them in this personal manner. He addresses characters and classes, not individuals. When this is the case no man hears for himself; no man feels that he is particularly addressed. Hence large congregations often sit and hear a message from God, while perhaps not a single individual among them feels that the message is addressed to himself, or that he has any personal concern in it. But it is not so when God speaks with his still small voice. Every one, to whom God thus speaks, whether he be alone, or in the midst of a large assembly, feels that he is spoken to, that he is called, as it were, by name. The message comes home to him, and says, as Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Hence, while multitudes are around him, he sits as if he were alone. At him alone the preacher seems to aim. On him alone his eye seems to be fixed. To him alone every word seems to come. Absorbed in the truths thus presented, in reflecting on his own conduct, guilt, and danger, and on the character and commands of God, he is almost unconscious of the presence of his fellow worshippers; his attention is chained to the subject by bonds which he cannot break, and sentence after sentence, truth after truth, falls upon his ear, and is impressed on his conscience with a weight, an energy, and an efficacy, which omnipotence alone can give. And when God thus speaks to the whole or the greatest part of an assembly at once, as he sometimes does, when he comes to revive his work extensively, these effects are experienced, and these appearances exhibited by all. No scene, on this side the bar of God, can be more awfully, overpoweringly solemn, than the scene which such an assembly exhibits. Then the Father of spirits is present to the spirits he has made; present to each of them, and speaking to each. Each one feels that the eye of God is upon him, that the voice of God is speaking to him. Each one therefore, though surrounded by numbers, mourns solitary and apart. The powers of the world to come are felt. Eternity, with all its crushing realities, opens to view, and descends upon the mind. The final sentence, though uttered by human lips, comes with scarcely less weight, than if pronounced by the Judge himself. All countenances gather blackness, and a stillness, solemn, profound, and awful, pervades the place, interrupted only by a stifled sob, or a half repressed sigh. My hearers, such scenes have been witnessed. Within a very few years they have been witnessed in hundreds of places. Nor need we wonder that the still small voice of God should produce such effects. Look at Elijah. While a tempestuous wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before his eyes; while the earth quaked under his feet, and consuming fires blazed around him, he stood with uncovered face, undismayed, unmoved. But no sooner was the still small voice heard, than he covered his face, and put himself in the posture of reverent, waiting attention. Look at Moses. When he saw miraculous tokens of God's presence in a burning, but unconsumed bush, he felt little other emotion than curiosity. But when a still small voice addressed him from that bush, he hid his face and was afraid. Look at Saul. When at midday a light suddenly shone around him, exceeding the brightness of the sun, it only surprised him. But when he heard a voice saying to

him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? he trembled, he was confounded, he submitted. So at the present day, thousands who have witnessed tempests, and earthquakes, and fire; who have passed through floods of affliction, and who have been brought by sickness to the very gates of death, have returned from all these scenes unaffected, unmoved. Yet afterwards the same persons have, by the still small voice of God, not only been deeply impressed but permanently transformed. Is not my word, saith Jehovah, as a fire, and a hammer, which breaketh the rock in pieces? We remark,

III. That, when God speaks to men in this still small voice, he usually begins by turning their attention upon themselves, their conduct, and situation. He said to the prophet, What dost thou here, Elijah? a question which was most admirably adapted to convince, reprove, and humble him. It was as if God had said to him, Is this the proper place for thee, a prophet, a reprover, a reformer? Is this thy proper, thine appointed sphere of action? Are the people here whom I sent thee to warn? If not, why didst thou come here? what motive brought thee here? what art thou doing here? Similar questions in effect does God propose to men when he first speaks to them with his still small voice. Calling each one, as it were, by name, he says to him, What art thou doing in the world in which I have placed thee? what hast thou done? in what pursuits hast thou employed the time and the powers which I have given thee? And to these questions he constrains conscience to give a true, though reluctant answer. He makes her the sinner's accuser, makes her accuse him to his face, of his numberless sins of omission and commission, of the misspent, of faculties misemployed, of privileges misimproved, and mercies abused. At the same time he refutes all the sinner's objections and arguments; shows him, as he did Elijah, the fallacy of his excuses; strips him of all his vain pleas, and lays him speechless and self-condemned at the footstool of sovereign mercy. 0 what a long train of self-accusing thoughts and reflections is put in motion by the short questions, What art thou doing? what hast thou done? when they are pressed upon a sinner's conscience by the still small voice of God. And it is obvious to remark, that an attention to these questions is the first thing necessary to a careless sinner. Until he considers what he has been doing in the world, he will see nothing of his sinfulness, guilt and danger; he will not know of what to repent, he will not feel his need of a Savior. Hence our Divine Teacher informs us that, when the Spirit of God comes, he will reprove the world of sin; that is, he will make men see what they have been doing, he will show them what they ought to have done, and thus convince them how widely their temper and conduct have differed from the rule of rectitude, the will of their Maker. And when they are brought to repentance, the same still small voice will whisper to them assurances of pardon and peace; for the Lord will speak peace to his people and his servants, and his Spirit shall witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God. A few reflections and inferences will conclude the discourse.

1. We may learn from this subject, my Christian friends, to expect the conversion of sinners, not from any means or instruments however apparently powerful, but from the Spirit of God alone. I am indeed aware that your understandings are already perfectly convinced of this truth; but our feelings do not always correspond with it. We are sometimes ready to think that, if God would work miracles or send some extraordinary calamity, sinners would be converted, or at least convinced of their sins. But at such times we forget that God is not in the whirlwind, the earthquake, and the fire; that he usually speaks in a still small voice. At other times, after hearing a sermon which has appeared to them remarkably solemn and impressive, Christians will say, Certainly this sermon

cannot fail of producing some salutary effects. But they forget that, unless the still small voice of God has also spoken, no salutary effect will follow. Whenever the work is done, it is effected not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. Let us then, above all things, desire and pray, that the Spirit and the still small voice of God may accompany the preaching of the gospel. This will prove far more efficacious than tempest, and earthquakes, and fire; and without this, not only all the apostles but all the angels, would preach in vain.

2. If the truth of the proceeding remarks be allowed, it will follow, that what we call conversion and the other effects produced by the preaching of the gospel are not a mere excitement of the passions or animal feelings. Some seem to suppose that this is the case, and that those whom we call converts have been merely terrified or agitated by addresses to their passions. But were this the case, the tempest, the earthquake and the fire would be the most effectual means of producing conversion, and the preacher, who could most eloquently and powerfully address the passions of his audience, would always be the most successful preacher. But this is by no means the fact. A plain simple exhibition of the truth by men of very moderate abilities and attainments has, in hundreds of instances, produced far greater effects, than the most impassioned and eloquent appeals which ever issued from mortal lips. The fact is, that when persons are converted, they are converted not because their passions have been addressed, not because they have been agitated or terrified, but because the still small voice of God has spoken to them, spoken within them, and taught them what they have been doing, what they are doing, and what they ought to have done.

It is this alone which has given to the preachers of the gospel all the success which they have ever met with. It was this which made the preaching of the apostles successful. They went forth and preached every where that men should repent, the Lord working with them. It was this which rendered the preaching of their immediate disciples successful. They spoke the word, and the hand of the Lord was with them, and much people were turned to the Lord. And St. Paul declares that though he planted and Apollos watered the churches, it was God alone who gave the increase. Conversion then is, and always has been the work of God. It is not a delusion, a fancy, or an effect of human eloquence; but a necessary prerequisite to admission into heaven, and our Savior’s declaration, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of God, is still as true as it is solemn and interesting. To conclude. Permit me now, my hearers, in God’s name to press upon each of you the question in our text. In doing this I would not, if I could, surround you with tempests, and earthquakes, and fires; for God would not be in them. Nor would I, were it in my power, pour forth a torrent of impassioned eloquence and tumultuously agitate your passions. On the contrary, I wish you to be cool, calm, collected, and self-possessed. I wish the voice of passion and every other voice to be hushed within you that the still small voice of God may speak and be heard. And nothing but a faint hope that he will speak, at least to some present, encourages me to address you. Hoping and praying that, while I address his question to your ears, his own still small voice may address it to each of your hearts, I ask every individual present in his name, What dost thou here? What art thou doing, mortal and accountable creature, in the world wherever I have placed thee? Art thou performing the duty I have assigned thee? Art thou faithfully serving and glorifying me thy Creator? Art thou working out the salvation of thine immortal soul with fear and trembling? Or art thou living, hast thou lived only to gratify or enrich or exalt thyself, while me, the God in whose hand thy breath is. and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified, art not glorifying? Again: what dost thou, mortal, accountable

creature, here in this house of thy God? Hast thou come here to worship me in spirit and in truth; to confess thy sins and obtain pardon; to offer supplication and thanksgiving and praise to me, and to learn thy duty with a determination to perform it? Or hast thou come, thou canst scarcely tell why, come to provoke me by formal and heartless services, to assume the posture of devotion, but to offer no prayer, to sit and hear my words, but do them not, and to cover wandering thoughts and an insensible heart with a serious countenance? My hearers, the questions of your God and your Judge are before you. If you have heard my voice alone propose them, they will pass unheeded and soon be forgotten. But if the still small voice of God has pressed them upon your consciences, they cannot pass unheeded; they will be remembered, and they will be followed by effects which neither tempest, nor earthquake, nor fire could produce.

Chapter 33

S. GODS SPECIAL PRESENCE DISTINGUISHES HIS OWN PEOPLE.

GODS SPECIAL PRESENCE DISTINGUISHES HIS OWN PEOPLE.

If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here, that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.— Exodus 33:15-16.

You doubtless recollect, my hearers, that the Israelites, while encamped in the wilderness at the foot of Mount Sinai, made and worshipped a golden calf. This sin would have been punished by their immediate and total destruction, had not the earnest intercession of Moses prevailed to obtain a pardon. But though, at his request, God forebore to destroy the offenders, he saw it necessary to manifest his displeasure, by withdrawing from them his sensible and gracious presence, and by commanding the tabernacle, which was its symbol, to be removed and pitched without the camp. At the same time, he intimated that he should no longer continue to go with them, as he had done; but should commit them to the guidance and protection of an angel. This intimation was not, however, expressed in such a manner, as to forbid all hope that it might be reversed; and therefore Moses felt encouraged to plead, that God would graciously condescend to accompany them as he had done. If thy presence, said he, go not with us, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here, that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? So shall we be separated from all people that are upon the face of the earth. That we may perceive the pertinency and force of this plea, we must recollect, that God had expressed a determination to make the Israelites a peculiar people unto himself, and, as such, to separate them and keep them separate from all other nations. Now this, Moses pleads, could not he effected, unless they continued to be favored with the manifested and gracious presence of their God. So long as they were favored with this blessing, it would separate them effectually from all other people; but should it be withdrawn, there would be nothing left to mark them out as the peculiar people of God; they would soon become like the other nations of the earth, and cease to be separated from them. My hearers, the truth taught in this passage is one, in which we are all deeply interested, and with which it is highly important that we should all be acquainted. The Scriptures inform us, that the design, with which Christ gave himself for us, was, to purify unto himself a peculiar people; a people who should be different, and separate from, all other men. They teach us, that he requires all, who would be his disciples, to come out from among unbelievers and be separate, and that all who are his real disciples comply with this requisition. They inform us, that his disciples are not of the world, even as he is not of the world; and that, if any man be in Christ, in other words, if he be a real Christian, he is a new creature. He has new dispositions, new views, new feelings, new desires, and new objects of pursuit; in one word, a new character;—a character essentially different from that which he originally possessed, and from that of all other men. Thus a broad and well defined line of distinction is drawn between the true disciples of Christ, and the rest of mankind, analogous to that line which separated the Israelites from the heathen nations around them.

Christ has redeemed them from their spiritual enemies, as God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, and he is leading them through this world to heaven, as God led the Israelites through the wilderness to the promised land, which was a type of the rest that remains for his people. And as he gave a promise to his ancient people, that his presence should go with them, so he has given his church many promises, that his manifested and gracious presence shall attend all the real disciples of Christ during their pilgrimage through this world. One of these promises, out of many which might be quoted, it may be proper to notice more particularly. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, says our Savior, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered, If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. Hence it appears, that the Father and the Son come to every man who loves Christ and keeps his words; that is, to every real Christian, and dwell with him, and manifest themselves to him, as they do not to the world. Now the great truth to which we wish to lead your attention is this; nothing but this promised presence of God with his people can effectually separate them from other men; or, in other words, nothing else can preserve that broad line of distinction which separates real Christians from the unbelieving world. With a view to illustrate and establish this truth I shall attempt to show,

I. That the promised presence of God with his people, will, so long as they are favored with it, produce a wide difference and separation between them and all other men; and, II. That in proportion as his presence is withdrawn from them, this difference and separation will diminish.

I. The promised presence of God with his people will, so long as they are favored with it, produce a wide difference and separation between them and all other men. The remarks which I shall first make to prove the truth of this assertion may perhaps appear to some improper, and out of place; for they will relate, not so much to the peculiar presence of God with his people, as to the effects which a real belief of his universal presence must produce upon the mind of every one who entertains such a belief. That we may clearly perceive what these effects would be, let us take two persons as nearly alike in all respects, as is possible, who, in consequence of the similarity which exists between them, have become intimate and almost inseparable. Let us suppose that they both entertain that general, speculative, inoperative belief of the existence and universal presence of God, which is entertained probably by all who live in Christian lands. Now let us farther suppose, that to the mind of one of these persons, the constant presence of God, begins to appear like a reality. Suppose that he begins to believe it with that kind of faith which the Scriptures describe,— a faith which is the evidence of things not seen, and which causes its possessors to feel and act as if they saw him who is invisible.

It is evident that a great change would immediately take place in this person’s views and feelings. As soon as the existence and constant presence of such a being as Jehovah began to appear like realities, he could not fail to regard them as the most interesting and important of all realities. The objects which had previously engrossed his attention would sink into insignificance, when compared with the great and glorious object thus presented to his mind. The beings whose enmity he had feared, and whose friendship he had courted, would seem unworthy of regard compared with the infinite Being of beings, to whom they are indebted for their existence. In a word, all created objects would lose their value when the great Creator appeared, as stars disappear when

the sun arises; and the mind would turn from them to contemplate him, as a child turns from its toys and amusements, when some more interesting object is presented to its view. This contemplation of God, as an ever present reality, would excite new reflections, feelings, and inquiries. Of these inquiries one of the first would be this, What have I to hope, or to fear, from this omnipotent, omnipresent Being, whose all-seeing eye constantly watches my conduct, and reads my heart? Does he regard me with approbation or with displeasure? The answers which the Scriptures give to these inquiries would soon convince him that God regards his character and conduct with decided disapprobation, and displeasure. Then the man's inquiry would be, How shall I avert the displeasure and secure the favor of this Almighty Being, who is ever with me, and on whom my happiness depends?

Now, let us farther suppose that, while the mind of one of these persons was occupied and engrossed by these new reflections, feelings, and inquiries, the other should remain as he was, without God in the world. without any realizing apprehension of his existence and presence. Would these two persons continue to be, as they had been, intimate and inseparable? Evidently not. Their views and feelings would no longer correspond. One would be thinking of the Creator, the other of creatures; one of this world, the other of the next; one of acquiring temporal objects, the other of averting the displeasure and securing the favor of God. And, as out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak, each of them would wish to converse respecting the objects which occupied his mind. The man who entertained new views of God's constant presence, regarding these views as highly important, would naturally feel a strong desire to impart them to his friend. His friend, on the other hand, would regard these views as unnecessary, perhaps as the effect of weakness, and wish to divert his attention from them. Thus, with respect to each other, they would be placed as it were in two different worlds. The society of each would gradually become less pleasing to the other; each would seek society more agreeable to his taste; and, though they might still regard each other with esteem and even with affection, a separation would he effected between them. It is evident, then, unless I am greatly deceived, that a realizing apprehension of the existence and constant presence of God, must produce a wide difference, and ultimately a separation, not always local indeed, but moral, between those who entertain such an apprehension, and those who do not. But it may be easily made to appear still more evident, that such a difference and separation must be effected, when the Father and the Son come, agreeably to our Savior's promise, to reside in a man's heart, and favor him with the manifestations of their gracious presence. The occurrence of such an event, the entrance of such guests, into the heart must, it is obvious, be attended or followed by a great change in a man's views, feelings, and character. He then becomes, to use the expressive language of Scripture, a temple of the living God. Of those who are thus favored God himself says, I will dwell in them and walk with them, and they shall be my people and I will be their God. Now let but a man of taste come to occupy a house and garden, which had been long forsaken and neglected, and an alteration for the better will soon be perceived in them. Much more may we expect that a similar alteration will be effected in the soul, where the wonder-working God comes to reside in it, attended by all his enlightening and purifying and transforming energies. He is the Father of lights, the Sun of righteousness, and wherever he comes to dwell, he brings with him, and diffuses around him, a portion of his own celestial radiance. He causes the soul which he inhabits to see the light of the knowledge of his own glory in the face of Jesus Christ. The view, which is thus given to the soul, of God's ineffable glory and beauty, enables it to perceive the justice of his claims to the supreme love and undivided

homage of all his intelligent creatures, and the infinite criminality of disregarding these claims. To withhold love, to disobey, to sin against, such a Being, now appears an exceedingly great evil. Thus, in the light of God's holiness and glory, the blackness and unspeakable malignity of sin are clearly seen, and the soul begins to perceive that it well deserves the terrible punishment which is denounced upon sinners in the word of God. At the same time, this divine light shines upon the man's past life, and enables him to see that it has been one continued course of sin and rebellion against God; it shines upon all the external, moral and religious duties, which he has ever attempted to perform, and shows him their insincerity, pollution, and worthlessness it shines into all the hidden recesses of his heart, and discloses to him ten thousand lurking abominations, the existence of which he had never even suspected. In this respect the effects, produced by the entrance of God into the soul, resemble those which would result from admitting the light of the sun into a dark room, filled with every kind of filth and pollution. In fine, to every man in whom God takes up his residence he imparts, in a greater or less degree, his own views.

Now God's views of almost every object differ widely, as I need not inform you, from those of men. He himself says, My thoughts are not your thoughts; you judge according to the outward appearance, but my judgment is according to truth; the things which are highly esteemed among men are, in my sight, an abomination. Now if the views of God differ thus widely from those of men, and if he imparts his own views to every person whom he favors with his gracious presence, then it follows that the new views, with which such a person is favored must differ widely from those of all other men. And so far as he is influenced by these views, he will pursue a path different from that in which other men walk, and will of course be separated from them, for how can two walk together unless they be agreed? He will look at things unseen and eternal; but they look at things seen and temporal. He will wish and aim to walk with God; but they live without God in the world. He will seek and follow the narrow way to life; but they are following the broad road to destruction; and as these paths lead in opposite directions, those who follow one, must be separated from those who walk in the other. Nor is this all. When God comes to dwell in the soul, he imparts to it a portion, not only of his own views, but of his own feelings. He not only illuminates the understanding with his own light, but, as an apostle expresses it, sheds abroad his love in the heart. Now consider a moment, my hearers, what a change must be produced in a selfish, sinful, polluted heart, a heart which inspiration declares to be full of evil and madness, deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, when that God, who is an infinitely pure, holy, and benevolent Spirit, and who hates sin with intense abhorrence, comes to reside in it. Can you suppose that he will dwell there in peace with those idols which he forbids us to worship, those sins which he abhors,—with his worst enemies? As well may we suppose that he would have allowed all the idols of the heathen to be set up and worshipped in his temple at Jerusalem. As well may we suppose that our Savior did not scourge out the buyers and sellers from the same temple when he entered it. As well may we suppose that Dagon did not fall before the ark of God, the symbol of Jehovah's presence, when it was brought into his temple. The Lord, we are assured, is a jealous God. He will not endure a rival. Behold, says a prophet, the Lord shall come into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence. Much more may we suppose that, when he comes into the human heart, and makes it his temple, its former idols, its beloved sins, its domineering lusts, will be moved and overthrown, and a great moral purification be effected. Agreeably, an apostle informs us that, when God visited the Gentiles to take out from among them a people to his name, he purified the hearts of those who were thus taken; and, in passages too numerous to

mention, he is represented as sanctifying all in whom he dwells, as teaching and disposing them to hate, repent of and mortify their sinful propensities, to love and cultivate holiness, to be spiritually and heavenly minded, to be no longer conformed to this world, but to feel and live as pilgrims and strangers on earth, and to produce the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, meekness, temperance, and faith. In fine, he renews the soul after his own image in knowledge and true holiness; and thus, to use the language of inspiration, makes the man a new creature, a partaker of the divine nature. And must not this mighty change, produce a great difference, a wide moral separation between those who are the subjects of it, and all other men? Most evidently it must. And this difference and separation will be in exact proportion to the degree in which God manifests his gracious presence to the soul, and exerts upon it his sanctifying energies. Witness, for instance, the effects which a clear manifestation of God's presence produced upon Job: I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.

I now proceed to show, as was proposed,

II. That, in proportion as God withdraws the manifestations of his presence from his people, this difference and separation between them and other men will diminish. Before exhibiting proofs of this truth, it may be proper to remark, that God never entirely withdraws his gracious presence from those who have once been favored with it. The promises which he has given them, the covenant which he has made with them, forbid this. His language to each of them is, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. And respecting all his people he says, I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will never turn away from them. But though these and many other similar promises render it certain that God's presence shall never be wholly withdrawn from his people; yet it is equally certain that he often suspends its sensible manifestations and effects, and, in the language of Scripture, hides himself from them. This is evident from the complaints of his people, recorded in the Scriptures. Job, David, and many others, complain that God had forsaken them, and hid himself from them; that he stood afar off, and that they could not find him; and they earnestly beseech him to return, to lift upon them the light of his countenance, and make them glad with his presence. This language all real Christians understand; but it cannot easily be rendered intelligible to those who have never enjoyed God's presence, and who cannot therefore conceive how it is manifested. The following. supposition may, perhaps, enable them to form some conception of its meaning.

Let us suppose, for a moment, that the sun was an intelligent being, and that by an act of his will he could withhold his enlightening and warming beams from one man, while he continued to shine upon others. It is evident that the man who was thus deprived of light and warmth, would soon complain of darkness and cold, and that he would earnestly desire to be again favored with those enlivening, cheering beams, which were so necessary to his happiness. And when the sun began once more to shine upon such a man, it might be said, figuratively speaking, to lift upon him the light of its countenance. Now God is the Sun of the soul. And he can shine into it, and render it luminous and happy. When he favors it with his presence and exerts upon it his influence, it is enlivened, and enlightened, and made to glow with love, and hope, and joy, and gratitude. But when he withdraws and suspends his influences, spiritual darkness and coldness are the consequence. Then it is night, it is winter with the soul. In proportion as he thus withdraws from his people, they cease to view him as a present reality. And in proportion as they cease to regard him

as a present reality, they cease to have those views, and to exercise those affections, which constitute the grand essential difference between them and other men. Nor is this all. As holy affections decline, sinful affections revive. As the Creator sinks out of sight, creatures begin again to be regarded with an idolatrous attachment, just as the stars which are invisible, during the day, appear and sparkle when the sun is set. Hence the Christian becomes more and more worldly-minded, more and more conformed to the world, and, of course, the difference and separation, which existed between him and other men while he was favored with the presence of God, is less and less apparent, until at length he becomes, like Sampson after the Spirit of God had withdrawn from him, weak as any other man; nor will any thing raise him from this wretched state until he is again favored with the presence of God. It is then the peculiar presence of God with his people, and nothing else, which produces and maintains a difference and separation between them and other men. This truth St. Paul felt when he said, I can do all things through Christ strengthening me. I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God.

It remains only to make a suitable improvement of the subject. With this view, permit me, in the first place, to say to each individual in this assembly, Do you know experimentally the difference between the presence and the absence of God? If not, it is most certain that you never enjoyed his peculiar presence; and, of course, that you are not one of his people; for to be insensible of the difference between day and night, is not a more certain proof of physical or natural blindness, than it is of spiritual blindness, to be ignorant of the difference between the presence and the absence of God, the Sun of righteousness. If any one replies, I am not ignorant of this difference, for I trust that I have enjoyed the peculiar presence of God, I trust that the Father and the Son have taken up their residence in my heart;—let me ask that person farther, Has such a change been effected in your views and feelings as the entrance of such guests into your heart, might be expected to produce? Have you been led to see that the description, which inspiration gives of the human heart, is literally just and true with respect to your own heart? and have you, in consequence, been led, as was Job, to abhor yourself, and repent in dust and ashes? If not, be assured that your heart has never been God’s residence.

Again. Have your views of God and of Jesus Christ been transforming? An apostle, speaking of himself and other Christians, says, We all, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory. Are you thus transformed more and more into the image of the Lord? If not, he has never dwelt in your heart; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ; if any man does not resemble Christ he is none of his.

Once more. Has what you call the presence of God led you to walk with God? Has it thus produced a moral difference and separation between you and the unbelieving world? Has it constrained you to obey the call which says, Come ye out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters? If it has not, in some degree at least, produced these effects, be assured that what you call the presence of God is nothing but a delusion. It is an insult to the Father of lights, the High and Holy One, to pretend that you are his temple, that he dwells within you, unless you prove the justice of your pretensions by a corresponding temper and life. What! shall a man pretend to be the temple of the living God, the thrice Holy One of Israel, while his conduct

evidently proves that his heart is filled with idols, and resembles a cage of unclean and hateful birds?

2. Let me improve this subject, by inquiring whether this church now enjoys the peculiar presence of God, as it once appeared to do? And yet why should I ask? It is, alas, but too evident that whatever exceptions we may make in favor of some individuals, this church, considered as a body, does not enjoy the peculiar presence of God, as it once apparently did. He seems to have withdrawn from us, at least for a time; and, if I may so express it, to have committed us, as he threatened to do his ancient people, to the care of an angel. Do any ask for proofs of this assertion? Where, I ask in reply, is the broad line of distinction which once separated between this church and an unbelieving world? Is it not become like a mere mathematical line? Nay, is it not, in many parts of it, become imperceptible? Should any of you come as strangers into the town could you determine, simply by observing men's daily conduct, who do, and who do not profess to belong to the church of Christ? In some, in a very considerable number of cases, you might doubtless see a real difference between professors and other men, but in too many cases, no such difference could be discovered. And yet if God's people are a peculiar people, a people chosen out of the world, a people in whom he dwells, a wide difference ought ever to be seen between them and others. An apostle, writing to Christians, says, Ye are our epistle, known and read of all men. God himself says of his people, They shall be known among the nations; all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed. In fine, the children of God ought to carry, and while they enjoy his presence, they will carry, their Father's name written as it were in their foreheads, where all may read it. Now if this is not the case with us, if we are become like the world around us, it is certain that God has, in a degree at least, if not entirely, withdrawn his peculiar and gracious presence from this church. And if he has withdrawn it, it is on account of our sins; for on no other account does he ever withdraw himself from a church. His own language is, I will go and return to my place, until they acknowledge their offence and seek my face. And this language, while it states the reasons of his absence informs us how long it will continue, and what we must do to procure his return. We must acknowledge, with unfeigned contrition, the sins which provoked him to forsake us, and with sincerity, earnestness, and perseverance seek his presence. As yet we have not done this. We have not been suitably affected by the loss of God's presence. We have been less affected by it than were the idolatrous Israelites them-selves. We are informed in the context that, when they heard of God's determination to withdraw from them, and commit them to the guidance of an angel, they mourned, and none of them put on their usual ornaments. And shall we, who call ourselves Christians, be less affected by the loss of God's presence, than were these perverse, stiff-necked idolaters?

Rather let us imitate Moses who pleaded importunately for this blessing and would take no denial. Let us all, as one man, cry with him, Lord let thy presence go with us; so shall it be known that we have found favor in thy sight; so shall thy church be separated as a people from the surrounding world, and adorn the doctrine of God her Savior in all things. My brethren, unless we do this, unless we once more obtain God's gracious presence in the midst of us, our state will become worse and worse; we shall become more and more conformed to a sinful world; iniquities, offences, and divisions will abound, till God shall come in anger to scourge us, and perhaps remove our candlestick out of its place. Our all, yes our all is at stake. O then, be persuaded to

know in this your day the things which belong to the peace of this church, before they are hidden from your eyes. And let those of its members who are still favored with the presence of God, beware lest they lose it. Let them prize it above all other blessings, and walk circumspectly and humbly with their God; remembering that he is a jealous God, who will not hear a rival; and a holy God, who will not tolerate sin even in his own people. To conclude. It is possible there may be some individuals in this assembly who, in consequence of not attending to the subject, have never been aware that such a blessing as the sensible, gracious presence of God may be enjoyed on earth. Let me beseech such persons, if any such there are present, to examine the Scriptures carefully, with special reference to this subject. Let them consider impartially the promises which have been quoted in this discourse, and the many inspired passages in which God's people are represented as either rejoicing in his presence, or mourning its loss. Let them remember that the High and Holy One, who inhabits eternity, has said, I dwell in the hearts of the humble and contrite. Should they be convinced after a careful examination, that such a blessing is attainable, that it is enjoyed by all real Christians, and that no man can dwell with God hereafter, unless God dwells in him here, they will surely need no additional inducement to seek it; for what can be so desirable, so honorable, as to enjoy the indwelling presence of the King of kings; as to be the temples of the living God; as to have our minds enlightened by the Father of lights, and our hearts filled with holy love by the God of holiness and love!

S. GODS WAYS ABOVE MENS

GOD’S WAYS ABOVE MEN’S For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.- Isaiah 55:8-9 IN the preceding verses God commands and invites sinners to repent and embrace his offers of mercy. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." He was however aware, that the natural unbelief, the guilty fears and narrow views of sinners, would lead them to distrust these promises, and to turn the unspeakable good which they offer into an argument against their truth. He therefore proceeds in our text, to caution them against judging of him by themselves, and measuring his thoughts and ways by their own dark, confused and limited conceptions. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." To illustrate the truth of this declaration, and to notice some particular instances in which it is strikingly manifest, is my present design.

1. God’s ways and thoughts must be far above ours, because in situation and office he is exalted far above us. God is in heaven; and we upon earth. We occupy the footstool, and he the throne. As the Creator and Preserver, he is of course, the rightful Governor of the universe. All worlds, creatures and events are subject to his control, and he is under a blessed necessity of overruling and conducting all things in such a manner, as to promote, in the highest possible degree, his own glory and the universal good. In forming and executing his purposes therefore, he must take into view not only the present, but past and future circumstances and events; not the concerns of a single individual only, but those of the whole race of beings in heaven, earth, and all the worlds around us. Now consider a moment, the extent and duration of Jehovah’s kingdom. Think of the innumerable armies of heaven; the perhaps scarcely less numerous hosts of hell; the multitudes of the human race, who have existed, who now exist; and will hereafter exist on earth before the end of time. Then raise your eyes to the numerous suns and worlds around us. Borrow the telescope of the astronomer, and penetrating far into unfathomable recesses of the ethereal regions, see new suns, new worlds still rising into view. Consider that all we can discover is perhaps but a speck, a single sand on the shore, in comparison with what remains undiscovered; that all these innumerable worlds are probably inhabited by immortal beings, and that God’s plan of government for this boundless empire must embrace eternity;-consider these things, and then say whether God’s purposes, thoughts, and ways, must not necessarily be high above ours, as the heavens are above the earth, or as his sphere of action exceeds ours. Must not the thoughts and ways of a powerful earthly monarch be far above those of one of his subjects, who is employed in manufacturing a pin, or cultivating a few acres of ground? Can such a subject be competent to judge of his sovereign’s designs, or even to comprehend them? How far then must the thoughts

and ways of the eternal monarch of heaven, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, exceed ours; and how little able are we to judge of them, farther than the revelation which he has been pleased to give, enables us.

2. God's thoughts and ways must be infinitely above ours, because his nature and perfections raise him infinitely above us. He is a self-existent, independent, all-sufficient, infinite, eternal, pure, and perfect intelligence. We are dependent, finite, imperfect, frail, dying creatures, fettered by gross, heavy bodies, and exposed to the influence of innumerable infirmities, temptations and prejudices, which bias and blind our reason. But more particularly, God is infinitely superior to us in wisdom. He is the all-wise God. Even the foolishness of God, says the apostle, is wiser than men; and the angels, who are far above us in wisdom, are in comparison with him, chargeable with folly. He must therefore, be able to devise a thousand plans and expedients, and to bring good out of evil in numberless ways, of which we never could have conceived, and of which we are by no means competent to judge, even after they are revealed to us. If the ways and thoughts of a wise man are above those of a fool, how much more must the ways and. thoughts of the all-wise God exceed ours.

Again. God is infinitely superior to us in knowledge. We are of yesterday and know nothing; our foundation is in the dust. We have little real knowledge of present objects and events; and of the future we are entirely ignorant, except so far as God has been pleased to reveal it. But God perfectly knows all things. He has a perfect knowledge of the properties and qualities of all creatures; for he made them what they are, and upholds them. He knows everything that is now taking place in the universe; for he is everywhere present. He knows every thing that ever has occurred, or that ever will occur; for we are told that he sees the end from the beginning; that he calls things that are not as though they were; and that known unto God are all his works from the beginning. At a single glance he looks through eternity and immensity, and takes into view at once, the whole circle of existence. That this perfect knowledge must cause his thoughts and ways to be infinitely above ours, it is needless to remark. Are not the thoughts and ways of man above those of the brute? Are not the thoughts and ways of the parent above the comprehension of his new born infant? Do not our own change, as we increase in wisdom and knowledge? How far then, must the thoughts and ways of the omniscient, infallible God, exceed those of ignorant, short-sighted and fallible men. Farther. God is infinitely above us in power. We are weak and frail to a proverb; and our plans, ways, enterprises, must conform to the weakness of our powers. But God is all-powerful; with him nothing is impossible. He can do numberless things, of which we can form no conception; and he can do what he does in an inconceivable variety of ways. This consideration alone, were there nothing else, would prove that his thoughts and ways are far above ours.

Again. God is eternal and unchangeable, while we are but of yesterday, and die perhaps tomorrow, and are continually changing, as our situation and circumstances change. Surely the thoughts and ways of such creatures cannot be suitable or proper for a being, who had no beginning, who cannot change, but is yesterday, today, and forever, the same.

Once more. God is perfectly benevolent and holy; but, we are entirely selfish and sinful. We love sin, that abominable thing which his soul hates. We care for nothing but our own private interest; while his concern is for the interest of the universe. Hence his thoughts, his 'affections, his maxims

and pursuits, must be entirely different from ours. Do not the thoughts and ways of angels differ from those of devils? Do not even the thoughts and ways of good men differ widely from those of the 'wicked? How infinitely then must a perfectly holy God differ from us, polluted worms, who are dead in trespasses and sins! If man at his best estate, and even angeJs themselves, are incompetent to comprehend God's thoughts and ways, because he is infinitely superior to them in wisdom, and knowledge, and power; how unable must we be, since sin has blinded our understanding, hardened our hearts, defiled the whole man, debased all our faculties, and exposed us to innumerable temptations, prejudices and mistakes, which lead us to hate and shun the pure light of divine truth; to delude and deceive ourselves, and to form erroneous opinions respecting almost every thing around us; to call evil good, and good evil; to put sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet; shadows for realities, and realities for shadows; darkness for light, and light for darkness. The pleasures, ways and pursuits of an oyster, enclosed in its shell, at the bottom of the sea, do not by any means differ so. widely from those of the eagle that soars to the clouds and basks in the beams of the sun, as do the thoughts and ways-of sinners from those of the infinitely benevolent and holy Monarch of the universe.

Having thus shown that the thoughts and ways of God must far surpass ours, I proceed, as was proposed, II. To exhibit particularly, some instances in which this difference most strikingly appears.

1. In permitting the introduction and continued existence of natural and moral evil, God's ways and thoughts are very different from ours. Why he should permit angels or men to fall, we cannot tell. That he did permit them to fall, is certain; because had he thought proper, he could doubtless have prevented their apostasy. It is also certain that he still permits the existence of natural and moral evil; because if he chose, all things considered, to banish it from the universe, he could easily do it. But if we had been consulted, we should have decided that it was best that sin and its consequences should never enter the world; or if they must enter, that they should be immediately banished. In this particular therefore, God's thoughts and ways are evidently not like ours.

2. In appointing Adam to be the covenant head and representative of the human race, so that if he stood his posterity should stand, and if he fell, his posterity should fall, God did not act as we probably should have done. That he has done this, is evident from fact for we find that sin and its consequences do descend to every individual of the species; and we are told, that in Adam all die. But we should have thought it best to have no such constitution; but to have had the condition of every individual independent of that of every other. This method God did adopt with angels; and why he thought fit to adopt a different method with respect to us, he has not seen fit to inform us, and we cannot tell. It is however evident that in this particular, God's thoughts and ways are above ours. The same may be said,

3. Of the difference he has made between our race and the fallen angels. For them no way of salvation was provided. To them no space for repentance, no day of grace, no offers of mercy were given; but their punishment immediately followed their offence. We, on the contrary, have space for repentance. and are favored with the offers of salvation, and the means of grace. Christ took not hold of angels, says the apostle; but he took hold of the seed of Abraham. But we should have thought no difference ought to be made; or, if either angels or men were to be left, that they should be saved rather than we; because they are of a higher rank in the scale of being. But God

thought otherwise; and the only reason we can assign is. that so it seemed good in his sight.

4. In devising a way of salvation, and in providing a Savior, God’s thoughts and ways are very different from ours, and far, very far, above them. We should have thought, that if God intended to save sinners, he would bring them to repentance and save them at once; or at least, after suffering them to endure for a season, the bitter consequences of their own folly and disobedience. We never should have thought of providing for them a Redeemer; still less should we have thought of proposing, that God’s only Son, the Creator and Preserver of all things, should undertake this office; and least of all should we have expected, that he would for this purpose think it necessary to become man. If we had been informed that this was necessary, and it had been left for us to fix the time and manner of his appearing, we should have concluded that he ought to come soon after the fall; to be born of illustrious parents; to make his appearance on earth in all the splendor, pomp and glory imaginable; to overcome all opposition by a display of irresistible power; to ride through the world in triumph, conquering and to conquer. Such were the expectations of the Jews; and such most probably would have been ours. But never should we have thought of his being born of a virgin in abject circumstances; born in a stable, cradled in a manger, living for many years as a humble artificer; wandering, despised and rejected of men, without a place to lay his head, and finally arraigned, tried, condemned and crucified as a vile malefactor,. that he might thus expiate our sins, and by his death, give life to the world. Had we been forewarned of these things, we should have considered them as too foolish, incredible and absurd to obtain the smallest credit and instead of thinking them cunningly devised, should have thought them very clumsily contrived fables, unworthy of the least notice or regard. And thus in fact they have appeared, and do still appear, to the wise men of this world; for says the apostle, the cross of Christ is foolishness to them that perish. When the self-righteous Jews and vain-glorious Gentiles were told that one who had been crncified as a malefactor, was the Son of God, the Creator of the world, the only Savior of men, that his blood cleanses from all sin, and that without an interest in his merits they must perish forever-they could find no language sufficiently strong to express their contempt and indignation; and the aid of the stake, the rack, and the cross, was called in to express what language could not. Yet this was the way which God thought proper to choose, and all things which appear in the view of men so ridiculous, irrational and absurd, are in his view, infinitely proper, wise and amiable; and display far more wisdom than all the works of creation, wonderful as they are. Surely then, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways and thoughts higher than ours.

5. God’s thoughts and ways differ widely from ours in his choice of means and instruments for propagating the religion of Christ. We should have thought that a religion, whose author had been crucified as a malefactor; a religion, which instead of favoring and flattering the ruling passions, prejudices and propensities of men, directly opposed them all, and which was therefore exceedingly hateful to them, -would have needed the assistance of angels, or at least, of the most powerful monarchs, the most enlightened sages, the most splendid natural and acquired abilities, to procure it success. But instead of such instruments, which we should have chosen, God saw fit to employ a handful of ignorant fishermen to effect this purpose, and even forbade them to use any human artifices to procure them success; but charged them to rely entirely on the effect of a faithful, simple, unadorned statement of the great truths of Christianity. Hence the language of the apostle, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the weak

things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things that are despised hath God chosen; yea, and things that are not to bring to nought things which are, that no flesh should glory in his presence. For when, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

6. A wide difference between God's thoughts and ways, and our own, appears, when we consider the manner in which he dispenses the benefits which Christ has purchased, and the character and situation of those whom he chooses to make wise unto salvation. We should expect that if such a Savior were provided, all would be saved; and that if for any reasons, this were impossible, the most noble, wise, rich and learned, or at least, the most moral and amiable would always be called. But this we see is not the case. It is evident from scripture, if any thing can be, that all will not be saved, and it is also evident from observation, so far as we can see; for we find that multitudes appear to live and die without any spiritual knowledge of the Savior, or preparation for heaven. We also find, both from scripture and observation, that it is not always the most wealthy, wise, or learned, nor even the most moral and amiable, who are called to embrace the gospel. Christ told the moral, but self-righteous Pharisees, that the publicans and harlots would go into the kingdom of God before them. Hath not God, says St. James, chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom? Ministers and private Christians very often find reason to acknowledge that God's thoughts and ways are not like theirs; for he rarely converts such, as they think the most probable subjects of conversion; and while they are watching such persons, and daily hoping and expecting to see them embrace the truth, others, of whom perhaps they never thought, start up and seize the prize.

7. God's thoughts respecting the way in which men become partakers of the salvation of the Gospel, differ widely from ours. We all naturally suppose, that men are to be saved by their good works; by obeying the law; by subduing their sins; by alms and prayers. But the gospel teaches us, that men are to be saved, not by working, but by believing; that we are saved by grace, through faith; and that to him that worketh not, but believeth on him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness. This truth men neither love nor understand, and even after they are awakened and convinced of sin, it is one of the most difficult things imaginable to convince them that their pretended good works are no better than sins; and that if they ever obtain salvation, it must be by simply believing in the Son of God. In scarcely any thing do God's thoughts and ways differ so widely from ours, as in this great doctrine of salvation through grace-of justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ.

Lastly. God's thoughts and ways are not as ours respecting the best methods of dealing with his people, and carrying on the work of grace in their souls after it is begun. When God delivered his people from Egyptian bondage, if he had led them by the nearest and most direct way to Canaan, they might have reached it in a very few days; and had they been consulted, they would probably have thought the nearest way the best. But God thought otherwise. So when God converts his people from sin to holiness, he could, if he pleased, render them perfectly holy at once; and they are often ready to imagine, that this would be much the better way, both for his glory and their own good. But instead of adopting this method, he grants them, at first, but small degrees of grace, and increases it in a very slow and gradual manner. He leads them round for many years, through a wilderness beset with temptations, trials and sufferings, with a view to humble them, prove them, and show them all that is in their hearts. By the discoveries which they make of their own

weakness, ignorance and propensity to sin, their pride is humbled; their self-confidence destroyed; their patience, meekness and candor are increased; the Savior, and his method of salvation rendered more precious, and all ground for boasting forever excluded. All these happy effects, however, are produced in a way which they would never have thought of; and it is a long time before they can be made to understand God's method of proceeding, so that they are often ready to say with Jacob, "All these things are against me!" when in fact, every thing is working together for their good. Even when God answers their prayers, he very often does it in ways and by means, which they did not expect; and as often as they attempt to mark out a path for him in their own minds, so often they find themselves disappointed, and are constrained to confess, that his ways are not like theirs. Often too, when they contemplate their own unworthiness, their stupidity, their obstinacy, their inconsistencies, their propensity to backslide, to grieve their Savior and requite him evil for good, notwithstanding the innumerable pardons and mercies they have received, - are they constrained to use the same language, and to cry, Lord, why am I saved? why are such favors heaped on a wretch so unworthy? Surely, this is not the manner of men- to adopt rebels and traitors, as children, and heap such honors and blessings upon them. What manner of love is this that we should be called the sons of God! Who is a God like unto thee, that forgivest iniquity, transgression and sin, and overcomest evil with good? If thy ways were not high above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth, we must have perished forever!

INFERENCES. -1. If God's ways and thoughts differ thus widely from ours, then it is no reasonable objection against the truth of any doctrine, or the propriety of any dispensation, that it is above our comprehension, and appears strange and mysterious to us. On the contrary we should have reason to doubt the truth of the scriptures, and to suspect that they are not the word of God, if they did not contain many things which appear mysterious, and which we cannot fully comprehend. In this case they would want one great proof of having proceeded from him, whose thoughts and ways must be infinitely above ours. Yet, my friends, all the objections which men make against the truth of revelation, or against any of its doctrines, are founded on the supposition, that God's ways and thoughts must be precisely like ours; and that if any thing appears unreasonable or mysterious to us, it certainly is so, and therefore cannot proceed from God.

2. If God's thoughts and ways are thus high above ours, it must be abominable pride, impiety, folly and presumption in us to censure them even in thought. Yet how often men do this! How often do they, at least in their hearts, find fault with God's word, murmur at his dispensations, repine under afflictions, feel dissatisfied with his manner of governing the world, quarrel with his sovereignty in the bestowing of favors, and thus in effect say, that God is either unwise, unkind, or unjust, and that they could conduct things in a better manner! My friends, if this is not horribly impious and presumptuous, if it does not discover the most abominable pride, what does? For an illiterate peasant to censure the conduct of his prince, with the reasons of which he is utterly unacquainted; for a child of a week old to condemn the proceedings of his parent, would be nothing to this. We are told1 that if any man judgeth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him. What folly and shame is it then to us to attempt to judge of God's conduct, when we know only so small a part of his ways, and know even this part but very imperfectly. An ancient writer tells us of a man, who having a house for sale, carried a brick to market to exhibit as a specimen. You may perhaps smile at his folly in supposing that any purchaser would or could judge of a whole house, which he never saw, by so small a part of it. But are not we guilty of much greater folly in attempting to form

an opinion of God's conduct from that little part of it, which we are able to discover? In order to form a correct opinion of it we ought to have a correct view of the whole; we ought to see the whole extent and duration of God's kingdom; to be equal to him in wisdom, knowledge, power, and goodness; in one word, we ought to be God ourselves; for none but God is capable of judging accurately of the conduct of God. Hence, whenever we attempt to judge of it, we do in effect, set ourselves up as Gods, knowing good and evil. Well therefore may God reply to our vain, proud and impious objections, Who is this, that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man, and I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou, when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.. Hast thou an arm like God? or caust thou thunder with a voice like him? Wilt thou disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous? And while God may thus with propriety address each of us, it becomes us to reply with Job, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther. I have uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

3. From this subject we infer the reasonableness of faith. The very essence of faith consists in a humble, docile, childlike temper, which disposes us to embrace without objecting or disputing, every thing which God reveals; and to believe that all his words and dispensations are, even though we cannot see how, perfectly right. Christians are often ridiculed for exercising this implicit faith in God, and believing what they cannot fully comprehend. But we appeal to every one present, whether in so doing, they do not act reasonably.. If God's ways and thoughts are thus high above ours, ought we not implicitly to believe all his declarations; to believe that all he says and does is perfectly right? Is it not reasonable for children thus to believe their parents? for a sick man to trust in a skilful physician? for a passenger unacquainted with navigation, to trust to the master of the vessel? for a blind man to follow his guide? If so, thou it is certainly much more reasonable for such ignorant, short-sighted, fallible creatures, as we are, to submit and trust implicitly to an infinitely wise, good, and infallible Being; and when any of his words or works appear wrong, to ascribe it to our own ignorance, blindness, or prejudice, rather than to suppose that there is any thing wrong in him. Is it not more likely that we should be wrong or mistaken, than that God should be! If so, we ought to praise him, when his conduct appears wise and right, and to impute it to ourselves when it does not, and to believe and to submit to him implicitly in all things. This is not only reasonable, but absolutely necessary to our happiness; for if God's thoughts and ways differ thus widely from ours, we must either believe that he is right and we wrong, or else feel unreconciled and dissatisfied. But if we feel unreconciled and dissatisfied we must be unhappy; for we cannot help ourselves. God will do as he pleases, whether we are pleased or not. On the contrary, if we exercise faith and submission to his will, and believe that all is right; that even when clouds and darkness are round about him, justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne, then we shall be peaceful and happy. He will guide us by his counsel, and afterwards receive us to glory. Then the cloud will be scattered; we shall see all things clearly, and understand the meaning of those truths, and the reason of those dispensations, which have appeared most mysterious and perplexing; for God's language to every sincere believer is, What 1 do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

Chapter 35

S. GODs Praises sung HIS works Forgotten

GODs Praises sung HIS works Forgotten "They sang his praise; they soon forgot his works." Psalms 106:12-13. was said of that generation of the Israelites, which came out of Egypt. The chapter which contains the portion of their history here alluded to, begins with rapturous expressions of gratitude, and ends with the murmurs of discontent; both uttered by the same lips, within the short space of three days. Their expressions of gratitude were called forth by that wonderful display of the divine perfections, which delivered them from the host of Pharaoh, and destroyed their enemies. Their murmurs were excited by a comparatively trifling inconvenience, which in a few hours was removed. Of persons, whose thanksgivings were so quickly, and so easily changed to murmurings, it might well be said; —though they sang God's praises, they soon forgat his works.

Unhappily, the Israelites are by no means the only persons, of whom this may, with truth, be said. Their conduct, as here described, affords a striking exemplification of that spurious gratitude, which often bursts forth in a sudden flash, when dreaded evils are averted, or unexpected favors bestowed; but expires with the occasion that gave it birth; a gratitude resembling the joy excited in an infant's breast by the gift of some glittering toy, which is received with rapture; and pleases for an hour; but when the charm of novelty vanishes, is thrown aside with indifference; and the hand that bestowed it is forgotten. Springing from no higher principle than gratified self love, it is neither acceptable to God, nor productive of obedience to his laws; nor does it in any respect really resemble that holy, heaven born affection, whose language it often borrows, and whose name it assumes. It may be called, distinctively, the gratitude of sinners; who, as they love those that love them, will of course be grateful to those that are kind to them; grateful even to God when they view him as kind. When excited by any signal display of his goodness, wisdom, and power, it is often, as in the case before us, accompanied by other emotions of the same character; by wonder, admiration, joy, and love, which assist to swell the song of praise, but die on the lips that pour it forth. Such is the gratitude, such the emotions with which man too often receives the blessings, and contemplates the works of his Creator. Such evidently was the gratitude of the Israelites; and such, I fear must be added, is much of the gratitude, which, as a community, and as individuals, we have expressed on our annual seasons of public thanksgiving. A person unacquainted with human nature, who should witness for the first time some striking exhibition of national gratitude, would not, indeed, suspect this to be its character. Such a person, while listening to the rapturous ascriptions of praise poured forth by the Israelites on the shore of the Red Sea, would have little expected to hear them, within three days, impiously murmuring against that God, whose goodness they had so recently experienced, and so loudly acknowledged. And as little, perhaps, would such a person be prepared to anticipate the scenes, which usually attend, and follow our days of public thanksgiving. The day itself, in its approach and commencement, would present to his mind an appearance, in no small degree imposing, affecting, and even morally sublime. When he read the proclamation of our chief magistrate, enumerating the many public and private blessings for which we are indebted to the unmerited bounty of God; and calling upon men of all classes and

denominations, to set apart a season, for the express purpose of thankfully, and publicly acknowledging his goodness; —when he saw the appointed day on its arrival ushered in with the solemn stillness of the Sabbath: and the usually thronged places of business empty; when he beheld the crowd, which, professedly, enter God's gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise; when his "mind's eye," glancing rapidly over the State, saw its temples filled, and its inhabitants every where engaged in a public act of praise; when he listened to the sacred songs which burst from every consecrated edifice, expressing nothing but thankfulness, and admiration, and joy; —would he not exclaim, —surely this is a grateful people!

Here, if no where else, the exhortation of the Psalmist is literally complied with. Here, rulers and subjects; legislators and judges; young men and maidens; old men and children; all unite to praise the name of the Lord. Here, at least, his showers of blessing do not descend upon a barren soil; but his goodness is suitably felt, acknowledged, and returned. It leads men to look with an eye of penitence upon the past. It will constrain them to cheerful and constant obedience in future. The public sacrifice of thanksgiving in the sanctuary will be succeeded by more private, but not less acceptable offerings, from each family altar; from every house praise will be heard, and incense ascend; and the tide of gratitude, which has flowed deep, and full, and strong, in the temples of God, will now, divided into many streams, glide silent and unseen through every heart; refreshing the roots of each moral and Christian virtue; and clothing with new verdure the face of society.

Such would, probably, be the expectations of a person unacquainted with human nature, on witnessing, for the first time, the solemnities of a public thanksgiving. How greatly then would he be disappointed and surprised, to find none of his expectations realized; to see thousands going from the house of God to indulge in gluttony and excess; rising from a still loaded table without even the form of an acknowledgement to Him, on whose bounty they had feasted; and closing a day consecrated to holy gratitude, in sensual pleasure, and sinful mirth? How greatly would he be surprised on the following day to find, that every appearance of thankfulness, and even of regard to our Benefactor had vanished; —to hear the language of impatience, discontent, and perhaps of profaneness, from lips which had just been employed in uttering the high praises of God; and to see the tide of national depravity, after a momentary ebb, flowing again in all its accustomed channels, with all its former strength! Would he not exclaim; —might he not with truth exclaim; This people sing God's praise; but they soon forget his works? But without, at present, farther insisting on our national inconsistency, ingratitude, and forgetfulness of God; evils, which though we play lament, we cannot remove; I shall proceed to mention some instances, in which the works and perfections of Jehovah engage our attention; excite our natural affections; and, perhaps, call forth expressions of praise; but produce no salutary effects upon our temper or conduct; and are soon forgotten. Of these instances the first, which I shall notice, is furnished by the works of creation; or, as they are often, though not very properly called, the works of nature. In so impressive a manner do these works present themselves to our senses; so much of variety, and beauty, and sublimity do they exhibit; such power, and wisdom, and goodness do they display; that perhaps no man, certainly no man who possesses the smallest share of sensibility, taste, or mental cultivation, can, at all times, view them without emotion; without feelings of awe, or wonder, or admiration, or delight. While contemplating the moon walking in her brightness, or the sun shining in his strength; the heavens; the work of God's fingers, or the bed of ocean hollowed by his hand; the wonders of greatness and distance brought near by the telescope, or the no less astonishing wonders of

littleness revealed by the microscope; who has not felt emotions allied, apparently at least, to religion; has not felt almost persuaded to become religious; has not felt constrained to exclaim, —Marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; in wisdom hast thou made them all! Who has seen the face of heaven gather blackness; the clouds rising and rolling on in mountain over mountain: the lightning's flash, quickly and more quickly repeated, illuminating them with a sudden glare; the storm sweeping the land, and rousing ocean to fury; while the barriers placed by omnipotence repel its rage, and say, —Hitherto shalt thou come and no farther; without feeling, that God is, fearful in praises, and terrible out of his holy places; that, He hath his way in the whirlwind and the storm; and the clouds are the dust of his feet. And in the morning. of the day; in the spring of the year; when God seems to repeat his work of creation, and, in the language of the Psalmist, renews the face of the earth; when his unseen, but swiftly moving pencil repairs the ravages of winter; restores to faded nature the colors, the bloom, the freshness of youth; and adorns with unrivalled tints the forest and the field: —when all is mildness and serenity; when the whole landscape smiles, and happy warblers give it a thousand tongues; making every grove resound with the expressions of their joy; who has not felt his breast swell with emotions which resembled, and which he, perhaps, fondly called, love and gratitude to the Creator, admiration of his works, and delight in his perfections? But alas, how transient, how unproductive of salutary effects, have all these emotions proved? Appetite and passion, though hushed for a moment, soon renewed their importunities; the glitter of wealth, and distinction, and power, eclipsed, in our view, the glories of Jehovah; we stink from that heaven toward which we seemed rising, to plunge afresh into the vortex of earthly pleasures and pursuits; we neglected and disobeyed Him, whom we had been ready to adore; and continued to live without God, in a world which we had just seen to be full of his glory. The rays of that glory, darting upon our minds, enkindled indeed a sudden flame; and the flame thus kindled flashed up toward heaven, but sunk and expired with the flash. Thus we sang God's praise; but soon forgat his works. Our emotions were of precisely the same nature with those, which are excited by some grand display of human powers; and, like them, they produced no reformation of conduct; no amelioration of the heart. A second instance of a similar nature is afforded by the manner, in which men are often affected by God's works of providence. In these works his perfections are so constantly, and often so clearly displayed; our dependence on them is at all times so real, and sometimes, so apparent; and they bear, in many cases, so directly and evidently upon our dearest temporal interests, that even the most insensible cannot, always, regard them with indifference. Here nations and individuals stand on precisely the same level. Both are equally, that is entirely, dependent on the providence of God; and both are occasionally constrained to feel and acknowledge their dependence. But the feeling is usually transient; and the acknowledgement is forgotten almost as soon as it is made. How often have we seen Christian nations, when scourged by war, pestilence, or famine; and when the help of man was evidently vain, addressing public and united supplications to heaven for relief: And as often have we seen them, after relief was obtained, singing with apparent thankfulness, Te Deum laudamus, —Thee O God we praise; and then proceeding without delay to repeat those sins, the punishment of which had just been removed.

If there is a solitary instance to which this remark does not apply, it is afforded by our fathers; the fathers of New England. How often they were placed in circumstances of distress and danger, from which God alone could deliver them; and how often, in answer to their supplications, he granted them deliverance, you need not be informed. Well may we exclaim, with the posterity of

Abraham, —Our fathers trusted in thee, O God; they trusted in thee: and thou didst deliver them. And while they trusted in God for deliverance, they were truly grateful for its accomplishment. They did not forget the mighty works of the Lord, but taught them diligently to their children; and endeavored to have them preserved in everlasting remembrance. Witness their establishment of the custom, in compliance with which we are now assembled for thanksgiving in this house of prayer. But if our fathers furnish an exception to the remarks, which have been made respecting the ingratitude of nations; it is evident that their descendants do not. Though we have equal reason with them, to be grateful for the kind interpositions of providence in their favor; since to those interpositions we are indebted, for all our civil and religious privileges; yet how entirely, almost, are they forgotten? How seldom is the annual celebration of our independence marked, by any acknowledgement of God's goodness; any direct reference to his providential interposition; anything which indicates a grateful recollection of his past favors. True, he is, sometimes, on these occasions addressed in prayer; and his praise is perhaps sung; but it is too evident that his works are soon, very soon, forgotten? Do not those days, as they pass in review before Him, to whom we owe our independence, appear stained with more, and fouler pollutions, than, perhaps, any other day of the year'? And does not the cry of our national sins, at all times loud, then come up before him, with peculiar urgency? This, my hearers, is something worse than forgetting God's works. It is selecting the anniversary of that day, on which he gave us one of the greatest temporal blessings which a nation can receive, to be employed in offending him with more than ordinary diligence. It is turning a day, which ought to be observed, if observed at all, as a festival of grateful recollection, into a season of idleness, intemperance, profaneness, and every species of excess. But once more passing by evils, which no efforts of an individual can remedy, let us turn, for farther illustrations of this subject, to our families, and to ourselves. On reviewing our personal and domestic history we shall all find too many instances, in which, though we may have sung God's praises, we have forgotten his works. Say, ye, who go down to the sea in ships, and behold the wonders of God in the deep; did you never there experience the wonders of his mercy? Have none of you been reduced to extremities which caused you to say, all hope that we should be saved was taken away? And did no conviction of your dependence on him, who holds the winds in his lands, then pervade your minds? Did no wish that he would interpose for your deliverance arise in your breasts; a wish which assumed the form of a prayer; or which would have assumed that form, had not guilty fears, and want of confidence prevented? And when God mercifully granted what you, perhaps, dared not ask, did nothing like an emotion of gratitude; nothing like a half formed resolution to devote your lives to Him, from whom you had twice received them, mingle with the joys of unexpected deliverance? Has that emotion proved lasting? Has that resolution been fulfilled? If not, you must be classed with those, who sing God's praises, but forget his works. But it is not on the sea alone, that the preserving mercy of God is needed, and experienced. Many of my hearers have been brought, by casualty or disease, to the gates of the grave. Have none of you in that situation looked for help to Him, who dispenses life and death? And when the voice of his providence said respecting you, —Deliver him from going down to the pit, —when yon felt health and strength gradually returning to your enfeebled frame; —when, on first leaving the chamber of sickness, you delightedly gazed on the face of nature smiling with new charms, and eagerly inhaled the refreshing, invigorating breeze; —what were your emotions? Did no expressions of thankfulness to the Great Physician escape from your lips? Did you make no promises that you would serve him more faithfully? And have you not violated those promises? Have you not

forgotten his works? And ye, whose friends were thus unexpectedly restored to you; ye, who have sat, day after day, by the sick bed of a child or relative, in the gloomy post of observation, and seen it grow darker every hour; while you hoped against hope, and felt hope struggle with despair; ye too, who have feared, and had hourly increasing reason to fear, that the perils of the sea had proved fatal to a husband, a father, a son or a brother; who have known the protracted agonies of suspense, —the sickness of heart which hope deferred occasions; —what record of your feelings and conduct in those trying hours has memory preserved? Did you not alternately weep and pray; arid pray and weep? Did you not cry in your hearts, if not with your lips, O, if God will hear me but this once; —if he will grant me this one favor; my whole life shall show my gratitude. He did grant it. The child, the friend, whom you had, in imagination, followed to the grave, or seen buried in the deep, was given back to your arms; and in the first transports of joy excited by this scarcely hoped for gift, the Giver was not forgotten. With grateful admiration you acknowledged his goodness; perhaps returned him public thanks, and called upon others to unite with you in his praises. But soon, though not immediately, you forgot his works. The favor you had received caused you to forget them, The restored object of your affections was before you. You felt happy in his presence. You no longer needed the special interposition of God. You had no particular favor to ask; no pressing sorrow or want to drive you to his mercy-seat; and he was therefore neglected and forgotten. Nor is it only when children are given to us a second time, and restored to us, as it were, from the dead, that we sing God’s praises. Permit me to remind those of you who are parents, of your feelings, when you first became entitled to that appellation; —of your previous anxiety; —of your vows made in secret; —of the tears of joy which fell fast upon the unconscious object of your desire and affection, when first placed in your arms. And did nothing like gratitude mingle with that joy? Did the father feel that he owed nothing to God, for a wife preserved, and a child bestowed? Did the mother feel unindebted to Him who spared her to enjoy the pleasures, and perform the duties, resulting from that relation? If the debt of gratitude was then felt and acknowledged, has it not long since been forgotten, and its payment indefinitely postponed? On this part of our subject it would be easy to enlarge. But sufficient has been said to convince all, who are accessible to conviction, that it may justly be said of us, with reference to God’s providential dispensations, —they sang his praise; they soon forgot his works. In a similar manner are men often affected by God’s works of grace; or those works whose design and tendency it is, to promote the spiritual and eternal interests of man. These works most clearly display, not only the natural, but the moral perfections of Jehovah. Here his character shines, full-orbed and complete. Here, all the fullness of the Godhead, all the insufferable splendors of Deity, burst at once upon our "aching sight." Here the manifold perfections of Jehovah; holiness and goodness, justice and mercy, truth and grace, majesty and condescension, hatred of sin and compassion for sinners, are harmoniously blended, like the many colored rays of solar light, in one pure blaze of dazzling whiteness. Here, everything that is suited to arrest the attention, to enlighten and convince the understanding, to seize the imagination, or to melt the heart, is made to bear upon us with an energy which it would seem impossible to resist. That an exhibition of these wonders should make, at least, a temporary impression upon our minds, is no more than might naturally be expected. When the glorious glad tidings of the blessed God are proclaimed in our ears; when the riches of his mercy, the treasures of his grace, the fullness of his condescension, compassion, and love, are poured out before us, from a heart which has felt their influence, by lips which have been touched as with a live coal from the altar of God; when, with a pencil clipped in the vivid colors which inspiration affords, he is

drawn in the attitude of an affectionate father, grieved at once by the sins, and the miseries of his children: beseeching them in the kindest language of entreaty to return; and giving them a Saviour in the Son of his love; when the beauties, the glories, and the sufferings of that Saviour are portrayed by one who has sat it the foot of the cross; and seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; when, with a countenance full of invitation, compassion, and love, this divine friend of sinners stands and woos them to himself, assuring all who will come, of a kind reception, and freely offering rewards, such as eye has not seen, nor ear heard; — when these rewards are displayed; when the immortal glories of an opening heaven are made to shine around us; when the echo of its triumphant songs vibrates upon our ears; when kingdoms, crowns and thrones, eternal as their bestower are presented to our view; it is almost impossible, that even our obdurate hearts should be always unaffected, or retain their characteristic insensibility. For a moment they seem to be melted. We feel, and are ready to acknowledge, that God is good; that the Saviour is kind; that his love ought to be returned; that heaven is desirable. Like a class of hearers described by our great teacher, we receive the word with joy; a joy not unmingled with something which resembles gratitude; and we sing, or feel as if we could with pleasure sing, God's praises. But we leave his house; the emotions there excited, subside; like the earth, when partially softened by a wintry sun, our hearts soon regain their icy hardness; the wonders of divine grace are forgotten; and God has reason to say in sorrow and in displeasure, —Your goodness is as the morning cloud; and as the early dew it goeth away. But some of those whom I address have been more deeply affected by God's work of grace. For this you were prepared by previously passing through a state of religious anxiety. Conscience was roused to perform the long neglected duties of her office; and her reproaches you could neither silence nor endure. Your sins were set in order before your eyes; the curses of God's violated law thundered in your ears; destruction from the Almighty was a terror to you; His arrows, the poison of which drinketh up the spirit, pierced your souls; and despair and death seemed to be your portion. How ardently did you then desire relief; what promises, what protestations, what vows did you make? At length, your desires seemed to be granted. relief was by some means obtained, and rapture succeeded to despair. A persuasion that God had pardoned you, and that he would make you forever happy, raised your affections to their highest pitch. You felt as if you were in a new world. Then everything seemed, in your view, to be praising God; then you thought it pleasant to praise him; and your language was, —I will sing unto the Lord so long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have any being. For a time, this seemed to be the language, not of your lips only, but of your conduct. Gradually, however, though not immediately, you forgot God's works; your gratitude languished and expired; its half ripened fruit withered upon the stalk, and insensibility or discontent have usurped its place. Your history, there is reason to fear, will resemble that of the Israelites; like them you passed the red sea; like them, you triumphantly sang God's praises on its shores; like them, you said, —All that the Lord bath spoken we will do, and be obedient; like them, professedly following God, you entered the wilderness; but unbelief arrested your progress, as it did theirs; and like them, you will, probably, die in your sins, and never reach the promised land; never, indeed, unless a recollection of your ingratitude and unfaithfulness should lead to repentance. On some of my hearers, however, God's works of grace have made, I trust, a more lasting impression. Your religion, my brethren, has not withered and died, like that which has no root; but have you not too much cause to apply to yourselves the language of our text? Remember, the kindness of your youth; the love of your espousals; the joys, the grateful joys which attended and followed your conversion. Where are

they now? Where is your first love? Remember, too, how often your conversion has, in effect, been repeated; how often you have, in consequence, renewed your vows and thanksgivings; and, in weeping admiration have exclaimed, who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by transgression? Recollect, also, the numberless temporal and spiritual mercies, mercies new every moment, which have at different times excited your gratitude, and which you fondly hoped would render it lasting. But has it proved so? Have not some days, whose morning hours witnessed your expressions of thankfulness, heard from your lips before night, the language of peevishness and discontent? When you have ardently desired the salvation of a child, a relation, a friend; when with supplications and tears you have asked this favor of Him who hears prayer; and he has at length given you reason to believe, that your request was granted; has your gratitude always corresponded with your obligations? Might it not rather have been said of you, He rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up? But I need not press you farther with these inquiries; for you will readily acknowledge that, however often you may have sung God praises, you have ever been prone to forget his works.

It might now be useful to consider the causes to which it is owing, that our religious emotions so often prove transient; and are so soon succeeded by forgetfulness of God. But this would lead us into a wide field, which time will not allow us, at present, to explore. I shall only observe, that men are willing to offer God praises and thanksgivings, because it is an offering which costs them nothing; and because, while it seems to shield them from the charge of ingratitude, it involves the renunciation of no favorite sin; the performance of no disagreeable duty; the practice of no self-denial. But they are not willing to make those constant returns for God’s goodness, which he deserves and requires, because this is, in their estimation, an expensive offering; because it implies sacrifices, which they are not disposed to make, and an attention to duties; which they dislike to perform. The preceding remarks can scarcely fail to excite many painful reflections in every serious mind which acknowledges their truth. On human nature, they look with a most unfavorable aspect. They show us that while it is constantly and strongly prone to evil, it is, with respect to goodness, unstable as water, which receives and loses impressions with equal facility. They chew us that ingratitude to God ever has been, and that it still is, one of its distinguishing features. The hatefulness of this feature is acknowledged by all. "Call a man ungrateful," says one writer, "and you can call hint nothing worse." "Ingratitude," says another, "is a vice so odious that the man was never yet found who would confess himself to be guilty of it." But ungrateful, man must be called, while truth is allowed to speak; of ingratitude, the most base and inexcusable, he must acknowledge himself to be guilty if he would prove that he is not profoundly ignorant of his own character.

Another painful reflection, naturally suggested by the preceding remarks is, that little as there appears to be of religion in the world, there is much less in reality than in appearance. In men who possess some real goodness, a single grain of gold gilds a large surface of baser materials; while in other men, varnish and tinsel supply the place of the gold. Much of the religion, even of good men, consists of merely animal emotions and natural affections, baptized by a Christian name; and all the religion of other men, if we except external forms, is of the same character. This, there is reason to fear, is the character of our national religion, if we can be said to have any. As a nation, we treat Jehovah very much as heathen nations treat their gods; only with less apparent respect and veneration. We compliment him, as they do their gods, with the name and attributes of

Divinity. We publicly implore his aid, as they do that of their idols, when evils oppress, or dangers threaten us. When relief is obtained, we, like them, have public seasons of thanksgiving, and offerings of praise; and our festivals, like theirs, are marked by sensual indulgencies; and followed by no reformation of national sins.

What then are we to think of our annual seasons of thanksgiving? In what light, must we suppose they are regarded by Him whose judgment is according to truth? Must he not, in view of everything by which they are attended and followed, regard them as a mere empty form; as the copy of a heathen festival; or, at best, as only a repetition of the insincere praises of Israel? Must he not regard them as au earthly monarch would regard a book, inscribed to him on the title page, and preceded by a preface filled with flattery; but containing, on every following page, a gross libel on his character and government? Like such a book, this day is dedicated to God. Like such a preface, it is filled with his praise; while every other day of the year, like every other page of the book, speaks a language most offensive to his ear. Mistake me not, however. I would be far from insinuating or entertaining a wish, that this custom, established by our pious fathers, should be discontinued. I only wish that its original character may be restored; that it may become the preface to a whole volume of praise; that the stream of gratitude, which seems to burst forth so copiously on this day, may continue to flow, though more silently, through the year. Especially do I wish that the gratitude of this state may thus flow perennially; that her annual festivals of thanksgiving may resemble, in their character and consequences, those of our fathers. This festival she now, for the first time, observes, as an Independent State. Her voice now, for the first time, joins in sacred chorus with the voices of her sister states, and helps to swell the annual song of praise. And is it not highly desirable, —must it not appear so to every one who prays for her peace and prosperity, that now, when her voice is first heard in heaven; it should utter nothing but the sincere language of truth, and unaffected devotion; that now, when the incense of her united praises first ascends in a separate cloud before the throne of the Eternal, the flange on her altars should not be kindled with unhallowed fire? Shall we, on this most interesting occasion, give Him, whom we worship, reason to say of us; —This people lie unto me with their mouths, and flatter me with their tongues; for their hearts are not right with me, neither are they steadfast in my covenant? God, in mercy, forbid! God in mercy forgive those, if such there are, who constrain him to say this of them; who pollute, with heartless praises, the first public thank offering of this State: Of pardoning mercy, in its fullest extent, all who on this, or indeed on any other occasion, offer such praises to God, will stand in no common need. To utter the praises of Jehovah, to offer Him thanks, is, my brethren, however lightly we may now think of it, a most solemn and important act; an act which will be followed by consequences awfully interesting. By uttering his praises we acknowledge that he deserves them, that he is supremely worthy of all those affections, of which praise is the language, the proper expression. By giving him thanks, we acknowledge that he has been kind to us; and that we are under obligations to regard and treat him as our benefactor. Should we then refuse or neglect to place our affections on him; should our future conduct be inconsistent with our praises and thanksgivings, they will rise in judgment against us at the day of retribution. They will prove that we are acquainted with the character and works of God; that we had experienced and known his loving kindness; that we had been made sensible of our duties and obligations. It will thus be made to appear evident, that we refused to love and serve a Being whose glories shone around its so brightly, —whose favors descended upon us so profusely that we could neither avoid perceiving, nor refrain from acknowledging them. Of course, no plea of

ignorance can be urged in our behalf. We shall be left without excuse. We shall be condemned out of our own mouths.

If we would avoid this fate, our future conduct must correspond with our present services; our gratitude must be practical, and our praises unceasing. And ought they not to be so? If the perfections and works of God ever deserve our praises, do they not always deserve them? Is he not, yesterday, today, and forever, the same? If his favors deserve any return, do they not deserve a constant return? Are they not new every morning; and can we hope to discharge, in one day, a debt which we have, during the whole year, been contracting, acid which hourly increases? Should the thankfulness, which our fellow-citizens this day express; prove to be of the spurious, transient kind described above, they will be peculiarly inexcusable; for the dispensations of providence, as they respect our political interests, are admirably suited to excite, not a momentary burst, but a continual flow of grateful affection. God's mercies have descended upon us, not in a sudden torrent, but in a gentle and constant shower. If we have not, like some other nations, been recently freed from the pressure of overwhelming evils, it is because that from all such evils, we have, for many years, been graciously preserved. But this circumstance rather increases than diminishes our obligations to the great Disposer of events. The mariner who finds the sea tempestuous; who is often in imminent danger of shipwreck; and who, after despairing of life, is brought in safety to the desired haven, may feel, and ought to feel, strong emotions of thankfulness. But has he more real cause for gratitude, than one whose voyage is uninterruptedly pleasant and prosperous; and who experiences no striking interpositions of providence in his favor, because none were necessary? Such, in a degree unexampled in this age of storms and convulsions, has been our political voyage; a circumstance which surely calls for gratitude, as uninterrupted as our prosperity. Permit me to add that whatever difference of opinion may have existed, respecting the expediency of our separation from the parent state; no one will deny, that, since this event has taken place, we are under great obligations to Him, whose watchful care prevented the evils which might have ensued; and rendered the dreaded shock of separation so gentle, that it was scarcely felt. In fine, who have cause for continual thankfulness, if we have not? From what nation of the earth may God justly expect a constant tribute of gratitude or praise, if not from this. Go through the world, my hearers; visit every nation; compare its situation with our own; and on your return you will be constrained to cry: —He hath not dealt so with any people; Surely the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage. Go, and urge other nations to praise God; and, if they know what you enjoy, they wilt reply; —"Give us your lot, and our praises shall be unceasing." Shall our expressions of gratitude cease then, with this day; cease even before its close; cease as soon as we leave the sanctuary? Shall all God's wondrous works be so soon forgotten, and this, like our former days of thanksgiving, only close one year of sin, and begin another? Shall we write our history, or constrain God to write it, in the words of our text; and make the character of the perverse, ungrateful Israelites, who justly perished in their sins, forever our own? Rather let this day witness your assumption of another, an opposite character. Rather let the thanksgivings of this day never end, till they are swallowed up in the praises of eternity. Not only now say, but through life continue to say; —Unto thee, O Lord, do we give thanks. Unto thee do we give thanks; for that thy name is near, thy wondrous works declare.

NOTE. This Sermon was preached at the Annual Thanksgiving in 1820, —the year, in which was consummated the separation Of Maine from Massachusetts.

Chapter 36

S. HOW LITTLE CHILDREN ARE PREVENTED FROM COMING TO CHRIST

HOW LITTLE CHILDREN ARE PREVENTED FROM COMING TO CHRIST

"But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God." Matthew 10:14 In the passage of which these words are a part, we have a beautiful instance of the fulfillment of an ancient prediction respecting Christ, that he should gather the lambs of his flock with his arms, and carry them in his bosom. It appears from the context that some persons, probably believing parents who had felt the efficacy of this blessing themselves, and who were anxious that their infant offspring should enjoy the same privilege, brought to him young children that he might touch them; or, as it is expressed by another Evangelist, that he might lay his hands on them and pray. His disciples, who probably thought these children too young to derive any advantage from Christ, and were apprehensive that he would be interrupted and wearied with their applications, rebuked those who brought them. But our merciful Saviour, more compassionate and less concerned for his own comfort than his disciples, soon gave them to understand, that they mast on no account discourage any, however young, from approaching him. When Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. My friends, we here see a very unusual sight. We see the meek and lowly Jesus, not only displeased but much displeased; displeased too, not with his opposers or enemies, but with his own disciples. And what had they done to excite his displeasure? Had they been guilty of neglect, unkindness, or a criminal disregard to his comfort or convenience? No; had this been the case, he would have passed it over in silence, or have been the first to make an excuse for their conduct. But they discouraged little children from approaching him; and this was an offence which he could not suffer to pass unreproved. Since Christ is yesterday, today, and forever, the same, we may conclude that he still entertains similar feelings towards all who imitate the conduct of his disciples in this respect. From our text, therefore, we may fairly deduce the following proposition.

Christ is much displeased with all who, in any way prevent or discourage little children from approaching him. With a view to illustrate and establish this proposition, I shall endeavor to show who are guilty of preventing or discouraging little children from coming to Christ; and why Christ is displeased with such persons.

I. Who are guilty of preventing or discouraging children from coming to Christ?

I answer: Persons may be guilty of this sin either directly or indirectly. All are indirectly guilty of it,

1. Who do not come to Christ themselves, and publicly profess obedience to his authority. Man, my friends, is an imitative being. In children the propensity to imitate others is peculiarly strong. They come into the world ignorant and helpless, and naturally look to others for guidance, example, and instruction. Their young and tender minds are ready to receive any impression, and

take their complexion in a great degree from surrounding objects. What is done by those who are older, and who ought to be wiser than themselves, they are ready to conclude must be right. Instinctively grasping the first hand that is held out to them, they suffer themselves to be led along without knowing or asking whither they are to go. Did they, during their early years, see all around them flocking to Christ and yielding unreserved obedience to his commands; were they accustomed from infancy to hear his name frequently mentioned with reverence and affection, and his character described as the perfection of excellence and loveliness; they would, probably in most instances, be led by their imitative propensities under the guidance of the divine Spirit to give him the first place in their hearts, and choose him as their best friend. But alas! how different is the scene which the world presents to their view.

They see the great mass of those around them, neglecting and disobeying the Saviour of sinners; they seldom hear his name or that of their heavenly Father mentioned, but in a way of profanation; they see the broad road, of sinful conformity with the world, crowded with travelers eager in the pursuit of pleasure, wealth and honor; everything, which they see and hear, in short, tends to corrupt their unsuspecting minds, which are of themselves but too prone to choose and follow the downward path. Supposing that what is so generally neglected can not be of much importance, and that, if they are no worse than those around them, their condition is safe, they eagerly plunge into the tumultuous current, and are rapidly swept away to perdition, with the careless multitude whose example they follow, unless divine grace, with resistless arm, snatches them from the gulf to which they are hastening, conveys them to the bosom of Christ, and plants their feet on the Rock of ages.

Such, my friends, are the pernicious effects of bad example on the youthful mind. Now every person, who does not come to Christ and publicly profess obedience to his authority, and conduct in a suitable manner, helps to increase the number and strengthen the force of evil example. He pours the stream of his influence into the fatal torrent which is sweeping away the rising generation into the gulf of eternal ruin. He stands as a way-mark at the entrance of life, to direct infant travelers into the path of ruin. Nor can any one excuse himself by pretending that his example has no influence. There is not, I venture to assert, a person in this assembly whose example does not, in a degree at least, influence the present conduct and future destiny of some young immortal; and if his example be not such as it ought to be, he indirectly prevents children from coming to Christ, and is answerable for all the consequences of his conduct. And if he be a parent, these observations apply to him with ten-fold force. The influence of his example on the minds of his children will be almost omnipotent; we clearly see that nothing short of Omnipotence can prevent it from causing their destruction. A chain in the hand of a demon would not more irresistibly drag them to ruin than the example of an irreligious parent; for to his parents more than to all others, does a child look for direction. During the first years of life, while his character is forming, and most lasting impressions made, he considers their sayings as oracles, their word as law, and their opinions as the dictates of unerring wisdom, and their conduct as the pattern he is to imitate.

How powerfully then must the example of those parents, who neglect to come to Christ themselves, tend to prevent or discourage their children from approaching him: not to mention that by refusing to devote themselves to Christ, they put it out of their power to dedicate their children to him, and thus deprive them of all the blessings which would result from such a dedication made in the exercise of faith.

2. If those, who do not come to Christ, whose example is only negatively bad, are guilty of the sin mentioned in our text, much more are those guilty whose example is positively bad. In this class are included all who profess wrong principles, or openly indulge in vicious practices. The open infidel who denies or calls in question the divine authority of revelation; the conceited infidel who ridicules or explains away the most important doctrines; the scoffer or profane swearer who familiarizes the infant ear to the language of impiety, and teaches the untutored tongue to utter it; the Sabbath breaker who tramples on the barrier with which God has encircled the sacred day; the liar or slanderer who by his example leads the young to trifle with truth and with the reputation of their fellow creatures; the slave to intemperance and sensuality who seduces them into the paths of dissipation and excess, are all, I will not say indirectly, but directly preventing the young from coming to Christ. Every such character does much to bar up the way of life, is a stumbling block over which many will stumble, and fall to rise no more. And if he be one whose talents, wealth, learning, rank, or vivacity of manner gives him extensive influence in society, the pernicious effects of his example will be incalculable. Under his deadly shade no plants of purity will flourish, no flowers of virtue bloom. He breathes around contagion, pestilence and death, and while he sinks into the abyss of vice and infidelity, the whirlpool which he forms, will engulf everything that comes within the sphere of its action. But if he be a parent what shall we say? If there be a sight on earth at which humanity must shudder, over which angels might weep, it is the sight of a young, a numerous family following with unsuspecting confidence a ruthless fiend, in the shape of a parent, who extends the hand of a guide only to lead them far from him who would gather them in his arms and carry them in his bosom; and betrays the helpless lambs to that roaring lion who goes about seeking whom he may devour.

3. Those are indirectly guilty of preventing their children from coming to Christ, who employ no means to bring them to him, who are careful to educate them for this world but not for the next. That children are prone to imbibe the opinions and imitate the conduct of others, especially of their parents, has already been observed. Especially do they learn from them to estimate the value of different objects. What others neglect or despise, they consider as worthless; what others highly prize they esteem as valuable. Hence if those who have the charge of their education treated them as they ought, if they appeared more solicitous for their souls than their bodies, for their spiritual and eternal, than their temporal interests; if they frequently mentioned Christ to them, as the pearl of great price, and spake of an interest in his favor as the one thing needful, compared with which every thing else is worthless, it is highly probable that, by the blessing of God, they might be early led to prize Christ in some measure as he deserves, and to feel unsafe and uneasy till an interest in his favor was obtained. Agreeably, the Scriptures assure its that, if we train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it. But if children perceive that their parents and others, who are entrusted with their education, are more solicitous to educate them for this world than for the next; more anxious for their present than their future welfare; more desirous to see them prosperous than pious; and more concerned for the health of their bodies than the salvation of their souls, they will inevitably be led to conclude that religion is of little consequence; that to come to Christ is needless; and that to obtain learning, riches, honor and applause, are the great objects for which men were created. All parents therefore who thus educate their children for this world and not for the next, take the most effectual means to prevent them from coming to Christ, and to cultivate that worldly-mindedness which is directly opposed to the love of God. And, my friends, how great is the number who do this. How many even among the professed people of

God are guilty in this respect. If it be true that a child, brought up in the right way, will never forsake it, few indeed are educated as they ought to be; for you need not be told that small is the number who follow the right way to the end of life. My friends, did you take one half the pains, or display one half the concern to educate your children for God that you do for the world, you would most probably see them walking in the truth, and avoid the guilt which you now contract, of preventing their coming to Christ.

Under this branch of my subject I may observe, that if parents feel unwilling or unable to instruct their children themselves, they ought at least to countenance and assist those who are willing to do it. Yet many will not even do this. Most gladly, my friends, would we do all in our power to bring these lambs of the flock to Christ, and store their minds with religions truth, would you give us an opportunity of doing it. That many do this we acknowledge with thankfulness and pleasure. But we are compelled to add, that many do not. No one can suppose that more than half the children of this society, who are of a suitable age, have at any time attended on those catachetical instructions which are communicated in this place after divine service. Yet a very slight exertion of parental authority would secure their attendance.

If this exertion is withheld, what must your children think? They see you sparing no pains or expense to give them that knowledge which is necessary for them in this world. They know that you require their attendance at school, and pay masters for instructing them. Yet when they have an opportunity of acquiring religious knowledge without expense, you do not require them to improve it. Must they not suppose that you view religious knowledge as a thing of no consequence; and religion itself as something which you do not wish them to acquire? And does not this negligence powerfully tend to prevent them from coming to Christ? We would however indulge the hope, that when the return of a milder season shall permit us to resume our labors with the rising generation, we shall find that this negligence proceeded rather from inattention to the subject, than from a wish to deprive your children of religious instruction.

4. If those, who neglect to give their children a religious education, are guilty of indirectly preventing them from coming to Christ, much more so are they who give them an education which is positively bad, and which tends to foster and strengthen the evil propensities of their nature; propensities which must be eradicated before they can embrace the Saviour. Yet such an education there is reason to fear that not a few parents give their children, though probably without intending it. How often, for instance, do parents encourage a spirit of revenge on their infant children by teaching them to strike any inanimate object which may have accidentally hurt them. How often do they speak of dress, ornaments, or personal beauty, in a way which is calculated to render children proud and vain of these frivolous and perishing distinctions! How often do they, by praise injudiciously bestowed, foster a spirit of envy and false ambition, and encourage that emulation which the apostle expressly mentions among the works of the flesh. How often do they humor and indulge them in such a manner as is calculated to make them peevish and discontented through life, and to render their wills unmanageably stubborn and perverse. These are but a few of the evil propensities which the education, received by many children, tends to strengthen and increase. Yet these propensities, are diametrically opposed to the religion of Christ, and tend to prevent children from embracing it. All therefore who foster and encourage them must be considered as guilty of the fault we have been describing.

Still more forcibly do these observations apply to such as endeavor to discourage their children from attending to religion, lest it should render them melancholy or singular; or who speak of its friends and institutions, in their presence, with disrespect or contempt. Children begin to listen to conversation and to receive impressions from it, at a much earlier age than is commonly supposed; and their first impressions are not only most easily made, but are generally most deep and lasting. Almost every seed, which is then sown in the mind, will take root and produce fruit in abundance through life and often through eternity. There have been many well authenticated instances in which the recollection, in after life, of some word or sentence, dropped by a pious parent, has proved the means of bringing persons, first to reflection, and finally to Christ; and hence we may conclude that at the judgment day, when the secrets of all hearts are laid open, it will appear that a jest, a sneer, or sarcastic observation, respecting the friends or institutions of religion, uttered in the presence of children, and recollected by them at some future day, has, in many instances, been the means of prejudicing them against it, and leading them far from Christ, from heaven and happiness. The heathen philosophers had a maxim which was, "Great is the reverence due to children." The import and design of this maxim, as understood by them, was, that great care and attention should be shown in guarding against everything in our conduct and conversation, which tended to corrupt the infant or youthful mind. But if the heathen, who knew nothing of the worth or immortality of the soul, felt the necessity of adopting this maxim, how much more deeply should it be felt by us, to whom life and immortality are brought to light, and who are taught to know the unspeakable worth of the soul by the price which Christ paid for its redemption.

Having thus attempted to show who are guilty of preventing children from coming to Christ, I proceed to show, as was proposed, II. Why Christ is displeased. with such persons.

1. Christ is displeased with such as prevent children from approaching him, because in doing it they display a temper which he greatly dislikes, and which is diametrically opposite to his own. The temper of Christ is emphatically a temper of love for the souls of men and of compassion for sinners. Of the existence and strength of this temper he has given the strongest and most unequivocal proofs. His object in coming into our world, the object of all his labors, of his sufferings and death, was to seek and to save those who are lost. But it is a long established maxim, that like rejoices in like. Christ, therefore, cannot but be pleased with those who discover a temper similar to his own; and unite their exertions with his in promoting the salvation of sinners. And on the contrary, he cannot but be displeased with such as possess a temper directly the reverse of his own, and exhibit no love or compassion for perishing immortal beings; no desire to bring them to the knowledge of him, who alone can give them salvation. Still more must he be displeased with those who discourage or prevent any from approaching him; for this is the very temper of evil spirits whose whole desire and employment it is, to seduce men into the paths of sin, and prevent them from coming to the knowledge of Christ.

2. Christ is displeased with those who prevent or endeavor to discourage children from coming to him, because in so doing they oppose his will; and so far as they are able, frustrate his grand design, a design in which he feels most deeply interested. It is his will that not one of these little ones should perish. It is his will that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. It is his will that all men should be fellow workers with him in bringing about this great, and to him, most desirable event. To oppose the accomplishment of this event, therefore, is opposing his will. It is touching him on the most tender point. It is like touching the very apple of his eye. He

can bear anything better than this. When his disciples manifested the most inexcusable unbelief, he gently rebuked them. When they ungratefully slept instead of watching with him in his last agonies, he made an excuse for them. When Peter once and again denied that he knew him, he turned and brought him to repentance by a look. But when these very disciples discouraged parents from bringing to him their children he was much displeased. Nay more, when Peter endeavored to dissuade him from dying for sinners, he turned and said to him, get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence to me. These instances plainly show how deeply the heart of Christ is engaged and interested in the great work of saving sinners; and why nothing displeases him so much, as attempts to oppose or hinder its accomplishment.

3. Christ is angry with those who prevent children from approaching him, because it tends to rob him of a part of his reward. This reward principally consists in the pleasure of saving sinners. He participates largely in the joy which is felt in heaven when a sinner repents; and is especially pleased to see the young seek after him; to hear children crying, Hosanna to the Son of David. No praises are more sweet to him than those which grace produces from the lips of babes. Whenever he hears and sees such things, he sees of the travail of his soul; he sees the fruit of his sufferings, and is satisfied. But those, who prevent or discourage children from approaching him, deprive him of this pleasure, rob him of a part of his reward, and of course excite his displeasure.

4. Christ is displeased with those who are guilty of this conduct, because it evinces a disregard and contempt of those blessings which he died to purchase. Those who discourage others from approaching him, cannot of course believe in him themselves, and the language of their conduct is, an interest in Christ is of no consequence to us, or our children. Temporal prosperity and the favor of the world are much more important; and if our children can but succeed here, we care not what becomes of them hereafter. That Christ is displeased with those who thus disbelieve him, is evident from his conduct while here on earth. We are informed that he looked round about upon his unbelieving hearers, with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts. As he is yesterday, today, and forever, the same, he must still feel similar emotions, and is doubtless now looking round with a mixture of grief and anger on those, in this assembly, who do not cordially believe in him themselves, and feel anxious that the rising generation should embrace him.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. This subject may be improved for the purpose of self-examination. For this purpose permit me to ask, my hearers, whether any of you are guilty, either directly or indirectly, by your example, conduct or conversation, of discouraging children from coming to Christ, or of preventing others from bringing them to him. To assist you in answering this question, permit me to remind you, that in this, as in other respects, he that is not with Christ is against him. Your example must be either positively good, or positively bad; and everyone, who does not encourage children in coming to Christ, is guilty of indirectly preventing it; and his negligence leads them to suppose that to come is of no consequence. They will generally be more influenced by your example than by the precepts of Christ; and if your example is not good, if you do not enter the way of life yourselves, and invite them to follow, you do in effect prevent them from entering it. To illustrate these remarks, permit me to mention a story, Mr. Baxter relates, of a shepherd driving his flock over a high and narrow bridge, built across a torrent. The foremost of the flock, terrified by some accidental occurrence, leaped over the bridge into the flood below; the others, not seeing the danger into which their

leaders had fallen, and supposing they might safely follow them, leaped after them, one by one, till all were destroyed. In a similar manner, I suppose, generations of mankind perish. We have all, says the prophet; gone astray like sheep, and turned every one to his own way. The end of this way is destruction. Into this destruction all past sinners, who died impenitent, have already fallen. But we see not the gulf into which they have plunged; and, like the foolish sheep, pursue with headlong impetuosity the same road. Our children, supposing that they may safely follow, where we lead the way, rush after us, and find too late we have guided them to their ruin: while their children in turn; unless grace prevent, will follow them in like manner to perdition. Thus like a river whose waters are successively swallowed up in the ocean, one generation of men after another, is led on blindfold by the influence of example, and plunged into the gulf which has no bottom. Need anything more be said to show the infinite importance of setting a good example before our children, and leading them after us in the path of life.

2. From this subject parents and others, to whom the care of young immortals is entrusted, may learn the awful responsibility which rests upon them. Were the guidance and direction of one, two, or more worlds entrusted to you, my friends, would you not feel that yours was a most important and awfully responsible situation? My friends, if you are parents, something infinitely more important than worlds is committed to your care. You have the charge of immortal souls; souls, which our Saviour has taught us are each of them worth more than whole worlds. This charge is committed to you, that you may bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And God considers you as answerable for the performance of this duty, and in some measure for the salvation of your children. At least he will consider you as answerable, for their destruction, should they perish, unless you do all in your power to prevent it. If you doubt this, hear what he says to his ministers, Son of man I have made thee a watchman hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, he shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hand. But, my friends, parents are at least as much appointed by God to be watchmen over their children, as ministers are to be watchmen over their people. Therefore if parents prove unfaithful; the blood of their children will be required at their hands.

If any still doubt, let them hear what God says to his ancient people, who permitted and by example taught their children to worship idols. Thou hast taken, says he, my sons and my daughters whom thou hast borne unto me, and hast sacrificed them unto idols; and is this a small matter, that thou hast slain my children? Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the poor innocents; I have not found it by secret search, but upon them all. My friends, how much reason have many parents to cry, Deliver us from blood guiltiness. How dreadfully is our whole land stained and polluted by their blood, and how loudly does it call for vengeance! I am more and more persuaded, that neglecting the religious education of children is one of the most crying sins of which we are guilty as a people. If any doubt this, let him recollect the passage already quoted, Train up a child in the way he should go, and he will not depart from it. My friends, these are the words of God, of the God of truth. Look round and see how few are walking in the right way; hence learn how few have been brought up in the way they should go. Are there any of your children who do not walk in the way they should go?

It must be because they have not been properly educated, and the, blessing of God not sufficiently prayed for. And it is perhaps impossible for anyone, who is not a real consistent Christian, to

educate children properly. None but such can truly dedicate their children to God. None but such can sincerely pray for, or obtain from Christ that wisdom and grace, which are necessary to bring them up for God; and none but such can expect a blessing to follow their exertions. You can readily see that an unbelieving, impenitent man is not qualified to be a minister of Christ, to guide immortal souls to heaven. How then can an impenitent, unbelieving parent bring up his children as he ought, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? My friends, what a powerful motive does this afford to induce you to become the real disciples of Christ. Not only your own salvation, but very probably that of your children, depends upon it. If then you love them, if you love yourselves, if you would not sink under the weight of their blood, and hear them cursing you forever, as the authors of their ruin, be persuaded without delay to come to Christ, to bring them with you, to bind yourselves and them to him in an everlasting covenant.

Chapter 37

S. HOW TO PROLONG THE GRACIOUS VISITS OF CHRIST.

HOW TO PROLONG THE GRACIOUS VISITS OF CHRIST. And when it was day he departed, and went into a desert place; and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. — Luke 4:42. OUR blessed Savior, while on earth, met with a very different reception in different places. In one place we see all the inhabitants uniting in a request that he would depart out of their coasts. In another, they were so much provoked by his doctrine, that they thrust him out of their city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which it stood, with a design to cast him down headlong. Here, on the contrary, we see multitudes seeking him, and using every means in their power to prevent or retard his departure. The place where his presence was thus earnestly desired, was Capernaum. The inhabitants of this city heard him preach, and they were astonished at his doctrine. They saw him cast out a devil and were all amazed, and said one to another, What a word is this? Determined to improve the opportunity, which his presence afforded, they pressed upon him to hear the word of God, and brought to him all their sick to be healed. Having spent the day and the evening in these labors of love, our Savior rose early the next morning, and departed into a desert place, partly for the purpose of prayer, and partly, perhaps, to see whether they would follow him and request his longer stay. This temporary withdrawal only rendered them the more desirous of his presence. They sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. My friends, the Savior is still, though invisibly, present in our world. Wherever his ministers are, there he is; for he has promised to be with them always, even to the end of the world. Wherever his people assemble in his name, there he is; for he has promised to be in the midst of them on such occasions. Sometimes, but not always, he chooses to manifest his presence by the production of visible effects. When this is the case, a revival of religion ensues. The spiritually sick are healed, and the spiritually dead raised to life. But it is often the case that, at such seasons, he seems to withdraw for a time, to see whether his presence is desired, whether his absence will be mourned, whether his people will be excited to greater diligence in seeking him. When this is the case, we may learn from our text what duty requires of us. We must seek him diligently, and, if possible, find him, and constrain him not to depart from us. In discoursing farther on this passage, I shall endeavor to show,

I. What means should be employed by a society that is favored with the gracious visits of Christ, to prolong their continuance, and prevent his departure; and, II. To state some of the reasons which should induce us to employ these means.

I. What means should be employed to prolong the gracious visits of Christ? I answer, generally, we must endeavor to render his continuance with us agreeable to himself; and to avoid or banish from among us every thing which tends to render it otherwise. When we wish to induce an earthly friend to reside with us as long as possible, we naturally endeavor to render his residence with us agreeable; for no person will voluntarily continue long in a disagreeable place, or in unpleasant society. It is the same with respect to Christ. We must make his visits pleasant, or they will be few and of short continuance. Now nothing is so pleasant to him as holiness; nothing is so hateful to him as sin. Sin then, must be renounced and mortified, and holiness loved and practiced, if we

would induce him to stay long with us. But more particularly; if we would prolong our Savior's gracious visits, either to ourselves, to our habitations, or to the place in which we reside, we must show him that we greatly desire, and highly value his presence. No person will consent to stay long with those, by whom his presence is not desired. Least of all will those consent to this, who are sensible of their own worth, and who know that there are other places, where they would be more welcome. Now our blessed Savior is perfectly sensible of his own worth. He knows that his favor is life, and his loving kindness better than life; and that, in comparison with himself every thing is worthless. He knows that, great and powerful as he is, he can confer no favor upon a church or upon individuals more valuable than his gracious presence. He, therefore, justly expects that we should prize it accordingly, and consider every thing else as nothing in comparison with this. His language is, He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, yea, his own life, more than me, is not worthy of me. If, therefore, he perceives that we love and desire any object whatever more than his presence, he will consider us unworthy of it and depart. Agreeably, we find him saying, respecting his ancient people, when they seemed to prefer other objects to himself, I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge the offence and seek my face. The fact is, that, when we prefer any object to Christ, we make an idol of that object, and set up that idol in his presence. And can we expect that he will continue long with those who prefer an idol before him? Would he, while on earth, have gone into an idolatrous temple, and continued there, patiently witnessing his own disgrace, and choosing such a place as his residence? Certainly not; nor will he now long continue in a heart, in a house, or in a place, where he sees any idol preferred before him. The psalmist could say, If I forget thee, 0 Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Similar must be our feelings with respect to Christ, if we would enjoy his presence. We must prefer it above our chief joy; and be able to exclaim with David, There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me. Nor is it enough to feel these desires. We must express them to him in prayer; or they will be like the fruitless wishes of the sluggard, who desireth and hath nothing. Prayer is the offering up of our desires to God; and he will not seem to know our desires, much less gratify them, unless they are expressed and offered up to him in his appointed way. The more he seems to depart from us, the more earnestly must we follow him with our prayers and supplications, saying, with Jacob, We will not let thee go, except thou bless us; and, like the persons mentioned in our text, staying him that he may not forsake us.

2. With prayer we must unite penitence. Especially must we repent of those sins, which have been the probable cause of his beginning to withdraw. This is indispensably necessary; for we are told, that the Lord is near to them that have a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Without this, even prayer will not avail, as is evident from the case of Joshua, when his army was repulsed before Ai. Perplexed, grieved, and astonished at this unexpected repulse, which seemed so inconsistent with what God's promises taught him to expect, the Jewish captain rent his clothes, and, with the elders of Israel, put dust upon his head, and lay prostrate before God in earnest prayer, during the whole day. But God gave him to understand that sin was the cause of this disaster; that no prayers could avail without repentance and reformation. And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou on thy face? Israel hath sinned, and hath transgressed my covenant; therefore they could not stand before their enemies, because they were accursed; neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Now sin is

the accursed thing, which always provokes Christ to depart from those who entertain it; and no entreaties will prevent his departure, unless this accursed thing be repented of and renounced. Nay more, without this, he will not only withdraw his gracious presence, but will come out against us in anger; for his language to those who begin to decline from the way of truth is, I will come and fight against thee with the word of my mouth, except thou repent.

3. If we would prevent the Savior from depriving us of his gracious visits, we must receive them with profound humility, and a deep sense of our unworthiness of such a favor. His visits are always designed to humble us; and so long as they produce this effect, he will continue them; for the High and Holy One, who inhabits eternity, dwells also with him who is of a humble and contrite heart. But if we begin to grow proud of his favors; if we imagine that he blesses us with his presence, on account of any worthiness or excellence of our own; if we begin to look down with contempt on others, who are less favored, he will quickly withdraw, and leave us to shame; for while he gives grace to the humble, he sets himself against the proud to abase them. A striking instance of this we have in the story of Hezekiah. He had enjoyed many favors, had been delivered from the Assyrian army, miraculously raised from sickness, and made instrumental of a great revival of religion. But, we are told, that Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; but his heart was lifted up, therefore there was wrath upon Judah and Jerusalem.

4. If we would prevent the Savior from leaving us, we must assign sufficient reasons why he should prolong his stay. He always does what is right and reasonable. No entreaties can induce him to act in an unreasonable manner; for he is not like weak-minded man who can often be persuaded to act contrary to his judgment. But if we can assign any sufficient reasons for his continuance with us, he will infallibly prolong it, while those reasons continue to operate. We ought therefore, as Job expresses it, to fill our months with arguments, when we come to plead that he would not forsake us. The glory of his Father, the honor of his great name, the welfare of his people, the prosperity of his cause, are each of them reasons of sufficient weight to influence his conduct; and while either of these reasons requires his stay, we may be sure that he will not leave us.

5. If we would prevent Christ from leaving us, we must furnish him with employments, and with such kind of employments as are suited to his character. Every intelligent being has some ruling passion, and every such being will choose to reside where that passion can be most easily and effectually gratified. For instance, the ruling passion of a miser is the love of wealth; and therefore, he will ever choose to reside where he can most easily acquire it. Now the ruling passion of our Savior, is the love of doing good. My meat, says he, is to do the will of my Father and to finish his work. And again he says, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Agreeably, we find that, when on earth he went about doing good, and, where he found opportunities of doing the most good, there he always made the longest stay; nor do we find that, in a single instance, he left any place until he had done all the good they would allow him to do, and had healed all who either came or were brought to him for that purpose. If in any place he did not do many mighty works, it was because of their unbelief. It is the same still. Where he finds opportunities of doing the greatest good, there he ever best loves to stay.

If then we would prolong his gracious visits, we must furnish him with opportunities of doing good, and keep him constantly employed in this blessed work. We must bring to him ourselves, our

children, our friends and acquaintances, to be pardoned, instructed, sanctified, and saved. We must not leave him without employment for a single day; and if he begins to withdraw, we must lay the sick, the dying, and the dead across his path: for nothing will stop his departure, like such an obstacle as this. Omnipotent as he is, he cannot step over a perishing soul, laid by faith, across his way. As unbelief can paralyze his arm, so faith can constrain him to work; and with gentle, but irresistible force, arrest his progress, even when he has began to withdraw.

Such in brief, are the means which must be employed by those who wish to prevent the Savior's departure. I proceed to notice, as was proposed, II. Some of the reasons which should induce us to employ these means.

1. We ought to employ these means because a neglect of them will infallibly grieve and offend our Redeemer. Every being who is capable of feeling affection, wishes to have his attention returned; to have his favors received with thankfulness, to have his presence desired, to be beloved by those whom he loves and on the contrary, every one feels grieved and offended, when those whom he has loved, and loaded with benefits treats him with ingratitude and neglect, and manifest no desire for his presence. Now Christ has loved his people with an infinite and everlasting love; he has given them most convincing proofs of his affection; he has bestowed upon them blessings unspeakably valuable, and purchased at an infinite expense; he rejoices in the prospect of enjoying their society forever in those mansions which he has prepared for their residence; and, therefore, he wishes them to desire and rejoice in his presence with them on earth; he wishes them to prefer it to every other object; and he therefore is, he must be grieved and displeased, when he sees that this is not the case; when he sees them neglect those means which have a tendency to prolong his gracious visits. And say, my hearers, shall we willingly grieve and offend this best of friends? Has he not suffered enough from us already? Did we not grieve him sufficiently by our impenitence, our unbelief, and hardness of heart, before our conversion? Is it not enough that he is despised and neglected by an unbelieving world? Shall we, his professed disciples, unite with them to treat him with neglect? When he says to us, Will ye also go away, or compel me by your coldness and indifference to forsake you? Shall we not reply, as with one voice, No, Lord, we will not leave thee, nor willingly suffer any thing to compel thee to leave us!

2. The blessed effects which result from the gracious visits of Christ, furnish another reason why we should employ all proper means, and make every possible exertion to induce him to prolong them. Consider a moment, my friends, what Christ is, what, he possesses, and what he does; and you will be convinced, at once, that nothing can be so beneficial, so desirable to any individual, place, or society, as his gracious presence. He is the brightness of the Father's glory. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; his riches are unsearchable; he possesses all power in heaven and on earth; power to forgive sins; power to heal the spiritually sick, and raise the spiritually dead; power to open and shut the gates of heaven; power to bring good out of evil, and transform afflictions to blessings; power to bestow every temporal and spiritual good. He is also fully disposed to exert this power; and, wherever he is, he must exert it, for he is too benevolent to be idle. His arm of everlasting strength is unceasingly prompted to beneficent exertion by a heart overflowing with boundless love. Say then, my friends, what blessing can be comparable to the gracious presence of such a being as this? It is indeed every blessing in one. It is an unspeakable gift. It is life, and light, and joy, and salvation.

It is heaven, with all its treasures, poured out upon us at once in a boundless flood; for it is the presence of the Savior which constitutes heaven. And the effects which it produces are such as might naturally be expected from such a source. It fills the hearts of believers with joy and peace, their minds with knowledge, their life with praise and thanksgiving, and their hands with every good work. It sweetens every temporal blessing; it gives power and efficacy to all the means of grace; it promotes the cause of God and religion; it builds up and beautifies the church of Christ. To say all in a word, it produces the salvation of immortal souls. But here the powers of language fail. No tongue can tell, no finite mind can conceive what is done, when only one immortal soul is rescued from eternal death, and made an heir of everlasting life. It is a truth, capable of mathematical demonstration, that the salvation of one such soul is of incomparably greater consequence, than the temporal happiness of the whole race of man. To say every thing that can be said, it is an event that causes joy in heaven, where there is fullness of joy; an event in which God, and Christ, and angels rejoice. But the gracious presence of Christ never fails to produce and to multiply this event; to bring, not one only, but many, to repentance and salvation. Surely, then, we ought to employ every possible means to secure the presence of a being whose presence produces such effects as these.

3. Another reason which should induce us to employ these means, may be found in the evils which result from the Savior's departure. These evils are in full proportion to the benefits which result from his presence. They respect, in the first place, the church of Christ. He is constituted head over all things to his church; and therefore the effects, which a church experiences on his departure from it, are similar to those which would result to a human body from the loss of its head. For instance, the head is the seat of intelligence, the palace, the presence-chamber of the soul, where she holds her court, and from whence she issues forth her counsels and commands to the members of the body. Take away the head, and the tongue loses its eloquence, the right hand its cunning, and the feet their director. It is the same in the body of which Christ is the head. It has no wisdom, nor knowledge, nor intelligence without him. Its members know not what to do; they have, in a spiritual sense, neither eyes, nor ears, without their head and, therefore, infallibly wander, and stumble, and fall. We have no sufficiency of ourselves.

Again. The head is the bond of union. Take away the head from a human body, and the members soon separate and moulder into dust. So Christ is the only bond of union to his members. While he remains with them, they are firmly united; but when he departs, the connecting tie is broken; jealousies, dissensions, and divisions arise; the church becomes like a rope of sand; its members are easily separated and split into parties, and every one's heart, and hand, and tongue, is turned against his brother.

Farther. The head is necessary to the growth of the body. Without the head, the body can receive no nourishment, and consequently no strength; its growth is immediately suspended. It is the same with the body of Christ His presence always causes its increase both in numbers and in graces. But when he departs, its growth ceases. Spiritual nourishment is no longer received, and the whole body declines.

Once more. The head is the seat of life and sensation. Take away the head, and death ensues. The body becomes insensible, as the clod of earth from which it was formed. It is the same with the church. Take away Christ, its head, its life, and it dies. Nothing remains, but a lifeless,

insensible., putrefying carcass, fit only to produce and become food for worms. Well therefore might the Savior say to his disciples, Without me ye can do nothing; for as the body without the spirit is dead, so the church without Christ is also dead; and nothing but his return can restore it to life. Without his presence too, impenitent sinners must remain impenitent, and of course, inevitably perish; for if the living sicken and die, when he departs, it is evident that, without him, the dead will not arise to life. The means of grace may be employed, but they will have no effect; or rather, they will produce effects the most fatal. They will become a savor of death unto death. Ministers may still labor, but it will be in vain; for, without Christ, Paul may plant, and Apollos water to no purpose.

Sinners will die, one after another, and fall into the hands of that God who is a consuming fire; while their posterity will grow up, ignorant and vicious, to walk in the steps of their sinful parents, and finally share their fate. To say all in a word, the situation of a place, which the Savior has finally forsaken, is such as the situation of the world would have been, if a Savior had never been provided; or rather, it is worse; since they will have to answer for the unbelief which compelled him to depart. Endeavor, my friends, to conceive, if you can, what would be the situation of our world without the sun. Every thing would speedily die; frost and darkness would seal up the earth, and nothing but sterility, and death, and eternal night, and endless winter would remain. Similar effects would result in the moral world from the final departure of Christ; for he is the Sun of Righteousness. There is no spiritual light, or warmth, or life, or fertility without him; every heart, every habitation, every place of which he takes his final leave, is given up to night without day; to a winter without a spring; and nothing remains for such, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment. The harvest being past, the summer ended, they will not, they cannot be saved. Now since such are the consequences of Christ's final departure, and since, whenever he departs, we know not that he will again return, ought we not, when we are favored with his gracious presence, to employ every possible means to induce him to continue it?

4. The conduct of impenitent sinners affords another reason why we should do this. They are continually doing every thing in their power to provoke the Savior to leave the place where they reside. Every day, and especially every Sabbath, they do in effect by their unbelief, by their neglect of his gracious invitations, and their other sins, put the Savior from them; and like the Gadarenes, urge him to depart. As often as he sees them in his house, he is constrained to look on them with grief, on account of the hardness of their hearts. Now since the enemies of Christ are thus constantly provoking him to leave us, it is evident that his friends ought to be proportionably diligent in endeavoring to prevent it, lest when he sees many wishing for his absence, and few or none earnestly desirous of his presence, he should withdraw, no more to return. And now, my Christian friends, can any thing more be necessary to induce you to imitate the conduct of those mentioned in our text? We have as much reason to believe that the Savior has been with us, as if we had seen him. The works which he has done among us, bear witness of him. We have also reason to hope that he is still with us; or, at least, that he has only begun to withdraw, that he may see whether we suitably prize his presence; whether we will follow him and urge his longer stay. And can any who profess to love him be idle or unconcerned at such a time as this? Is it necessary to urge those who know the blessed effects of his presence better than we can describe them, to exert themselves for the purpose of preventing his departure? Will you not strive to banish from your hearts, from your houses, from the church, every thing which may provoke him to leave us? If he has not departed, we shall find him at his table. Let us then seek him there, and beseech him,

and stay him, if possible, that he may not depart from us. I need not tell you that we have great and unusual encouragement to do this. I need not tell you, that the present is a day of grace, of universal grace and bounty. It is confidently believed that never before, in the same space of time, were so many persons converted in this country, as within the last two years. Thousands, and perhaps ten thousands have been added to the church of Christ; and the number is rapidly augmenting. I have been informed by good authority that in one village in New England every person above the age of fifteen has become hopefully pious. My friends, what Christ has done in other places he may do for us. His hand is not shortened. Nothing but our iniquities can provoke him to leave us. We are not straitened in him, but in ourselves.

I am unwilling to dismiss this subject without saying something to my impenitent hearers; but what can I say to them? You do not realize the Savior's presence. You do not feel your need of the blessings he offers; you do not desire his presence; you rather wish for, than dread his absence. You will not accept his invitations, nor seek an interest in his favor. Even now you are about to depart from his table; and thus, in effect, you entreat him to depart from you. But pause, and reflect a moment. To what are the present religious appearances owing? What is it that excites hundreds and thousands, in all parts of our country, to turn their attention to religion? You can see no cause, but there must be a cause, and a powerful one, to produce such effects. And can you prove that God is not the cause? Do not effects which we witness strikingly correspond with our Savior's description of the operation of his Spirit? The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth? So is every one who is born of the Spirit. Now, my friends, you hear the sound of this heavenly wind; you see its effects upon others; but feel little or nothing of them yourselves. And is it not important that you should feel them? If they are really the effects of God's Spirit, and if they are necessary to your salvation, it undoubtedly is so. And, my friends, can any of you prove that they are not? You must prove this; you must prove that all Christians are deceived, that there is no such thing as experimental religion, that all which is said of spiritual illumination is a delusion, or become the subjects of them yourselves; or, dreadful alternative! take your place with the unclean, and the abominable, in that lake which burneth with fire!

Chapter 38

S. Holiness to the LORD

Holiness to the LORD

"In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, holiness unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall he like the howls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of Hosts; and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein; and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of Hosts." Zechariah 14:20-21. need not be told, my friends, that the prophets and apostles often speak of a glorious day, which is to dawn upon the church in the latter ages of the world. Respecting this glorious day two things are predicted in the chapter before us. In the first place, we are told that the true religion shall then universally prevail. In that day the Lord shall be king over all the earth; and there shall be one Lord and his name one. In the second place, it is predicted that Christians shall make much greater attainments in religion, and that its sanctifying influence shall pervade all the common concerns and employments of life: In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar; yea, every vessel in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of Hosts; and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them and seethe therein. To show more particularly what these prophetic expressions imply, and what will be the state of the world when they are fulfilled, is my present design.

1. These expressions imply that, when the day here predicted arrives, all the common business, employments and actions of men shall be performed with as much seriousness and devotion to God, as the most pious Christians now feel when engaged in the most solemn duties of religion. Upon the very bells, or as the word sometimes signifies, upon the harness of the horses, and upon all the vessels which are employed for domestic purposes, shall be inscribed holiness to the Lord. In this passage a part is by a common figure of speech put for the whole. A great part of the common business of life is carried on by the help of those domesticated animals which God has appointed to be the servants of man. They are our companions and assistants in almost all our labors. We employ them in cultivating the ground, in carrying home its produce, in the removal of all heavy bodies, in the erection of our habitations, in conveying us from place to place, and for various other purposes which it is needless to particularize; nor do we infrequently make use of them for purposes of relaxation and amusement. And while the labors of men abroad are principally carried on by the assistance of these animals, the female sex at home are no less occupied with the various utensils which the ingenuity of man has contrived for the convenience of civilized domestic life. By the bells of the horses, therefore, is here meant, all the business of life in which men are engaged abroad; and by the cups or vessels, all the employments which occupy the female sex at home. Upon all these, upon all the daily employments of both sexes shall be inscribed holiness to the Lord. That we may understand the import of this expression, it is necessary to recollect that, when the Jewish high priest was engaged in the duties of his sacred office, and especially when he went into the Holy of holies to burn incense, he was commanded to wear upon his forehead a mitre with the words, Holiness to the Lord, engraven upon it in letters of

gold. By this inscription both the high priest himself, and all who read it, were forcibly reminded, that the God whom he served was a holy God, and that holiness becomes his house, his service, and his worshippers forever. If he ever felt serious and devout, it would be when he wore this inscription upon his forehead. But in the day of which we are speaking, this inscription shall be upon the harness of the horses, and upon the utensils employed in domestic life; that is, as we have already observed, upon all the daily business, and employments of both sexes. We are not, however, to suppose that the letters which compose these words are actually to be written there. The meaning of this prediction evidently is, that, while persons are engaged in all the common business and concerns of life, whether at home or abroad, whether in the house or by the way, they shall feel as serious, as devout, as much engaged in the service of God, as did the Jewish high priest, when he wore that sacred inscription upon his forehead. The merchant at his desk, the mechanic in his shop, the mariner in his vessel, the husbandman in his field, the traveler on his journey, and the female at home, shall have such a constant realizing sense of the presence and perfections of God, and such love, confidence, and reverence in exercise towards him, as will lead them to do everything in a holy manner and with a view to his glory. Everything will then be sanctified by the word of God and prayer. Religion will then not be confined, as it too often is now, to the closet and the house of God; but she will walk abroad, pervading every place with her blessed influence, and cheering happy man in all his employments with her heavenly smiles and heart enlivening consolations. Men will then labor as Adam did in paradise, where labor was rest, and employment, and pleasure. Friends and acquaintances will then meet, as Christians now meet, to serve and praise God; every meeting will be a religious meeting; men will then speak of the things of God, as the Jews were commanded to do, in the house and by the way, when they sit down and when they rise up, and conversation on earth will be like the converse of saints and angels in heaven.

Then there will be no idle or profane language, no evil speaking or slander heard; for the law of love will be in the heart, and, of course, the law of kindness will dwell on the lips. Then too, the press, as well as the tongue, will be sanctified. As men will learn war, so the press will tell of war, no more; but periodical publications will then spread abroad the politics, the laws, and the triumphs of the Redeemer’s kingdom. Books will no longer contain poison for the soul, or fuel for hateful passions; but be streams flowing from the fountains of life and truth. Then too, all the domestic relations will be sanctified. Husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, masters and servants, will then love one another out of a pure heart fervently, as members of the same body, and fellow heirs of the same heaven. The heart which says to God, our Father in heaven, will of course consider men as brethren upon earth.

Man will then never meet an enemy in man, but a friend, and, what is more, a Christian friend. But time forbids us to enlarge. Suffice it to say, that all the common affairs of life will then be performed better than the most sacred religious duties now are. Thus everything will be turned to gold. Some faint traces of such a state of things, faint however indeed, we find in the better ages of the Jewish commonwealth. For instance, when Boaz visited his reapers in the field, we find him saying to them, The Lord be with you; while they replied to him, The Lord bless thee. Such will be the language universally heard in the day of which we are speaking; and however nauseous and disgusting such expressions may seem, when considered as the cant of formality and hypocrisy, which speaks without feeling, they appear very different, viewed as the real language of the heart.

Some such expressions are in common use among ourselves, though the real meaning is unknown, or forgotten, by thousands who adopt them. The term Adieu, for instance, signifies, I commend you to God; and even the common expression, Good bye, is an abbreviation or corruption of the pious wish, God be with you. We mention these instances merely to show how the influence of religion will pervade even the common forms and ceremonies of society, in the day of which we are speaking.

2. In that day, every house, every shop, and the whole world itself, will be a house of God, a temple consecrated to his praise. A temple is a place consecrated and devoted to God for religious purposes. But in that day every house will be such a place; every man will be a priest in his house, to offer up spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, and to teach his children and domestics the right knowledge of God; and every domestic employment will be attended to, with such devotional feelings and exercises as are now felt by pious Christians in the house of God. Wherever smoke ascends to heaven from the habitations of men, there the incense of prayer and praise will ascend with it, as the prayers of the Jews ascended with the smoke of their burnt offerings. In that day, every building erected for the purpose of labor or merchandise will be such a place; for every man will consecrate his labors and his gains to God, and present himself as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, to be employed in his work. Then every vessel will be such a place, in which those that see God's works in the deep shall praise him for the greatness of his power; in which prayers and thanksgivings will take the place of those oaths and curses by which they are now but too often profaned. Then the whole earth shall be such a place; for it shall be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the seas; and neither the sun by day, nor the moon and stars by night, when they look down upon the earth, shall behold any thing transacted on its surface which is not done to God's glory, which is not a duty of religion. Then all the race of men will unite with the inanimate creation, in celebrating, the high praises of God, making sweet melody in their hearts unto the Lord.

3. Every day will then be like a Sabbath. This day is now separated from the days of labor, for devotional purposes, and the more solemn performance of religious duties. But when every house shall become a temple, when everything shall be done in a devotional manner, when all our daily actions shall be performed with more love and zeal than our religious duties are now; then, it is evident, every day will be like a Sabbath and much more holy, than our best Sabbaths are now. All our time will then be given to God, and a continual Sabbath on earth will be at once an earnest, and a preparation for an eternal Sabbath in heaven.

4. In that day, every common meal will be what the Lord's supper is now. This is evidently implied in an expression of the prophet in our text. After informing us, that every vessel in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness to the Lord, he adds, and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein. You need not to be told that, under the Jewish dispensation, all the vessels and utensils employed in sacrificing to God, were solemnly consecrated to this service, and considered as holy; and if any man presumed to use either common fire, or any other vessels, in offering sacrifice to God, he was instantly struck dead for his presumption. But it is foretold that, in the day of which we are speaking, men shall take the common vessels which are employed for domestic purposes, and use them for sacrifice; and this intimates, that all these vessels shall then be as holy as the vessels of the sanctuary which had been solemnly consecrated to the service of God; or, to use language more suited to the dispensation under which we live, every vessel shall

be like the sacramental vessels, and every table like the Lord's table. Now when this shall be the case, when every day shall be like a Sabbath, when every house shall be like a temple, when every man shall be like a minister in his own house, and all the domestic utensils holy, then, of course, every common meal will be like the Lord's supper. Persons will then partake of every refreshment with as much gratitude and love to Christ, and with as feeling a remembrance of his dying love, as the most pious Christians now feel at his table; and when persons invite each other to a feast, it will be like the solemn meeting of a church to commemorate their Saviour's death. In a word, whether men eat, or drink, or whatever they do, they will then do all to the glory of God, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Though every place and every employment will then be holy, and every day like a Sabbath, yet the distinction which now prevails between the house of God and other places, and between the Sabbath and other days, will still be kept up. This is plainly intimated in another part of our text, where we are told, that the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Though all the vessels of the sanctuary were holy, yet some of them were considered as much more so than others. The bowls before the altar, for instance, which were employed to contain the holy incense, or to receive the blood of sacrifices, were considered as more holy than the pots or jars which received the ashes and other substances which were to be carried away, because they were put to a more sacred use. The meaning of this expression, then, evidently is, that those things which are now considered as holy shall, in the day of which we are speaking, be much more so. The Sabbath shall be far more strictly observed; the worship of God performed in a much more solemn manner; the temple of God frequented with far greater seriousness and devotion, than is at present the case; and this the difference between the house of God and other places, between the Sabbath and other days, and between the worship of God, and other employments, will still be as great, as it is now. The influence of religion will be felt in every place, and in every employment; but it will still be felt most powerfully, as it is now, at those times and in those places, which are especially set apart for devotional purposes.

Lastly; when this day arrives, there will be no insincere worshippers found in God's house, no hypocritical professors in his church; for our text assures us, that there shall no more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord. The hypocritical Jews were called Canaanites, because, like those idolaters, they worshipped false gods, though they professed to worship none but the true. When therefore it is said, There shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord, the meaning is, that there shall be no formal, insincere worshippers in the house or church of God. Then the whole congregation shall compose the church, and the church shall include none but the real disciples of Christ. Agreeably, we find the prophet Isaiah thus addressing the church by the name of Jerusalem, Rejoice, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for from henceforth there shall no more come into thee, the uncircumcised and the unclean.

Thus, my friends, have I considered the expressions which compose our text, and endeavored to show what they imply. I am aware, that the picture which has been drawn will appear to many of you visionary and exaggerated, and you will say, at once, that it can never be realized. And yet my friends, we have said nothing more than the word of God commands, nothing more than every professor of Christianity is commanded to seek, nothing more than he promises to aim at. We are commanded, and Christians promise, to strive to be holy, as God is holy, to do everything in word and deed in the name of the Lord Jesus, and whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, to do

all to the glory of God. They are commanded to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things; to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long; to pray without ceasing; to set the Lord ever before them; and even servants are expressly required to do whatever they do heartily, as unto the Lord and not unto men, knowing that they serve the Lord Christ.

And, my friends, the influence of religion naturally leads to all this, and nothing more is necessary to produce just such a state of things as we have described, than a proper degree of faith in the word of God. If all men had that faith, God and Christ and heaven and hell would, at all times, be realities to their minds; and, of course, affect them as such realities ought to do. Men would then see God everywhere, in all his works; they would see from what Christ has redeemed them; and of course, their reverence, and gratitude, and love would be always in fervent and living exercise. I believe no person will doubt that, if all men were such Christians as St. Paul was, a great part, if not all that has now been said, would be witnessed among us. And it becomes us to remember that God can give all men as much grace as he gave Paul; and he has said that he will bring all this to pass; and therefore he will. Is any thing too hard for God? Hath he said, and shall he not do it?

APPLICATION.

1. From this subject, my Christian friends, we may learn our great and innumerable deficiencies, and how wretchedly we live, in comparison with the manner in which we ought to live. If it is the natural tendency of religion to produce such a state of things as has now been described, then it is evident that the best of us scarcely yet know what religion is. And who of you will say, that this is not the natural tendency of religion? Did not Christ give himself for us, that he might redeem us unto himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works? Does not the Bible tell us that Christians are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, to show forth his praise? And will you pretend that the motives set before us in the Bible ought not to produce such effects as have now been described? The dying love of Christ, the deliverance from eternal misery, everlasting happiness, not to mention the great increase of happiness such a life would produce in the present world. Surely these motives are sufficient, if we did but feel their force, to lead us to live as has now been described. And will any of you then complain, because we think the church are but little engaged? Will you wonder at us and blame us, because we think it necessary to urge you to be more zealously affected in the pursuit of religion? You may indeed justly blame us for not living more in this manner ourselves, and say, Physician, heal thyself. My friends, permit us, while we confess our innumerable deficiencies publicly to declare unto you, that we intend, by the grace of God, to make at least an effort to come nearer the standard which we have now described. You may do what you please, but, as for me and for my house, we will endeavor thus to serve the Lord. And who is willing to unite with us in making a similar attempt? Who of you will endeavor to spend every day, as a Sabbath, and perform every act to the glory of God? Remember that we have now great encouragement to do this. A good work, a blessed change has evidently begun. Time was when magazines, newspapers, and works of fiction were, to say the least, far from being religious. in their tendency. But now upon many of them Holiness to the Lord is inscribed. But perhaps some who would willingly engage in this attempt, have been so much discouraged, and led to entertain so many doubts of their state, by what has been said, that they have no courage to attempt anything.

2. We may learn from this subject whether we have any religion or not. Should we rejoice in such a state of things as has now been described? If we should, we are Christians, for no unholy heart could be happy in such a world as this would be, did religion thus universally prevail. I doubt not that many in this assembly have felt, while listening to this discourse, that such a state of things, as we have described, would be a most melancholy state to them; they have felt something like gloom overspread their minds at the very thought of it; and not for the world would they see it realized, unless their own feelings should be altered in a corresponding manner. All, therefore, who would heartily rejoice to see religion thus generally prevail; all who feel that such a state of society is just what they would desire to render them happy; all who are wishing and praying for its arrival, are certainly Christians, and have every encouragement to press forward to perfection.

Lastly; from this subject we may learn what pleasures, pursuits, and employments are really lawful and pleasing to God. Every kind of amusement which would prevail, every object of pursuit that would be followed, every kind of employment which would afford a man subsistence in such a state of society as we have described, is lawful and consistent with religion. But if there be any pleasures, pursuits, or employments, which such a universal prevalence of religion would banish from society, it is certain that they are inconsistent with religion, and therefore that they cannot be pleasing in the sight of God. It is also morally certain that, everything, which religion would banish, directly tends, by its prevalence, to banish, or at least to oppose religion. Let us then be careful to pursue and indulge in nothing, which is inconsistent with the universal spread of Christianity; and while we do this we shall certainly be in the way to heaven, and shall bring down heaven to dwell with us on earth.

S. JEHOVAH, A KING.

JEHOVAH, A KING.

I am a great King, saith the Lord of Hosts.—Malachi 1:14. WHEN God would inform his creatures what he is, he must employ language suited to their capacities; language, which they can understand. What he is himself indeed, or what constitutes his essence, no language can describe; and therefore even he cannot inform us. He can only say, I am what I am. But what he is to his creatures, and what relations he sustains with respect to them, may without difficulty be stated in language sufficiently intelligible. We all understand the import of the titles, father, master, and sovereign or king; and know something of the relations which these titles involve. With a view to inform us what he is to his creatures, God assumes by turns each of these titles, and represents himself as sustaining each of these relations. Sometimes he styles himself a father, sometimes a master, and sometimes, as in the passage before us, a king. I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts.

Jehovah is a great king. This is evidently the truth taught in our text. And it is a most important truth, a truth richly fraught with instruction. My design is to illustrate briefly this truth, and then to state, at considerable length, some of the important consequences which result from it.

I. Jehovah is a king. A king, you are sensible, is the political head, or supreme ruler of a kingdom. Of kings, writers on the subject of royalty usually mention two kinds,—kings by right, and kings in fact. A king by right, is one who has a right to the throne, though he may not possess it. A king in fact, is one who actually possesses the throne, though he may have no right to it. But he alone, in whom both the right and the possession are united, can justly be considered as, in all respects, a king. Such a king, in the fullest and most extensive sense of the term, is Jehovah. In the first place, he is a king in fact. His kingdom is the whole created universe, and of this kingdom he is in actual and full possession. He is its sole and absolute sovereign; he has no partners, no counselors, but governs every thing according to the counsel of his own will; doing his pleasure in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; nor can any one stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou? In passages far too numerous to mention particularly, the inspired writers represent him as exercising the most complete and uncontrollable authority over all his creatures, and ruling, with the same unlimited power, the kingdoms of nature, of providence, and of grace. If any deny that Jehovah thus governs the universe, they must suppose that it is governed by chance, that is, by nothing; for chance is only another word for nothing. But to suppose that the universe is governed by nothing is no less absurd than to suppose that it was created by nothing; and none but the fool, who says in his heart there is no God, will suppose either the one or the other. In the second place, Jehovah is a king by right. He is not only the actual, but the rightful sovereign of the universe. He has the best of all possible titles to his kingdom; for he formed it of nothing and constantly upholds every part of it. Nor can a single individual of the human race deny, with the least shadow of truth or propriety, that Jehovah is his rightful sovereign. It has ever been allowed, that, with some few immaterial exceptions, all who are born in the dominions of any

monarch, are his rightful subjects, at least so long as they continue to reside in them. But all men were born in the dominions of Jehovah, for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And they all reside in his dominions; nor can they possibly leave them; for his empire is, in the most unqualified sense, universal. Ascend into heaven, or make your bed in hell; fly to the East or to the West, to the planets, or to the fixed stars; still you are in the dominions of Jehovah no less than while you remain on the earth. Men cannot then cease to be his subjects, without ceasing to exist. It appears therefore, that he is, in every sense of the word, a king. And besides a kingdom and subjects, he possesses all the insignia of royalty. He has a throne; for heaven is his throne, and earth his footstool. He has a crown; for he is crowned with glory and honor and immortality. He has royal robes; for he is clothed with light and majesty as with a garment. Properly speaking indeed, he alone is a king, for earthly monarchs are no less accountable to him than are their meanest subjects. By him kings reign and princes decree justice; he is King of kings and Lord of lords. Even the thrones and dominions, the principalities and powers, in heavenly places, are but his ministering servants, who with humble reference and alacrity execute his will. But this leads us to remark,

II. That Jehovah is a great King. He is so indeed in every conceivable, every possible respect; for, great is the Lord, and his greatness is unsearchable. Every thing that can with propriety be considered as constituting regal greatness, he possesses in a degree which places him at an immeasurable distance from all comparison, all competition. Do men, for instance, take the measure of a monarch's greatness from the extent of his dominions, and the number of his subjects? And what monarch can in this respect be compared with Jehovah? The extent of his dominions has never yet been measured, except by his own infinite mind; nor by any other mind have his subjects been numbered. We talk of great and mighty kingdoms on earth; but the whole earth is a mere speck in his empire, and all its inhabitants as nothing before him. Are the duration and stability of his empire considered as entering into the composition of a monarch's greatness? God is the King eternal. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

Earthly kingdoms rise and fall, as bubbles rise and burst on the surface of the troubled ocean; but his kingdom is a kingdom which cannot be moved, and like himself it has no end. He not only lives, but reigns, forever and ever. Do magnificent works and splendid enterprises render a monarch great? Among the gods, 0 Lord, there is none like thee, neither are there any works like thy works. Or, in fine, does the true greatness of a monarch consist in his intellectual and moral qualifications for the station which he fills? It is needless to remark that Jehovah possesses, in an infinite degree, all the intellectual and moral qualities which are necessary for a sovereign; for the sovereign of an empire immeasurable in extent and duration. Unlike earthly princes, he is constantly present in all parts of his dominions, extensive as they are; the past, the present and the future are alike under his eye, and he is as accessible to the least as to the greatest of his subjects. Indeed all the wisdom, goodness, justice and fortitude which either rulers or their subjects ever possessed, were derived from him; for he is the father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift. All the intellectual and moral excellence in the universe is but a drop from this ocean; but a ray from this sun. And now let mortals bring forward their monarchs, their conquerors, their heroes, their great ones, in whom they boast, and whose praises they are proud to sing; and compare them, if they dare, with the King mentioned in our text. Compare them, did I say? I recall the word. It is an insult to Jehovah to speak of comparing anything with him. But

what are they in his presence? Mere puppets, shadows, nothings. Well might an apostle say, He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord. Well might the psalmist exclaim, It is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in princes.

Having thus attempted to illustrate the assertion that Jehovah is a great King, I shall proceed to state some of the important consequences which result from the fact that he is so.

1. If God is a king, he is under obligations to make laws for his subjects. It will not, I presume, be denied that when he assumes any office he binds himself to perform all the duties of that office. Now it is the first and most indispensable duty of an absolute sovereign to make laws for his subjects. It is as much his duty to make laws, as it is their duty to obey them when made. Justice, benevolence, regard to the welfare of his kingdom, all require of him the performance of this duty. Indeed it seems impossible that an absolute sovereign should not make laws in some form or other; for as an intelligent being he must have a will; if he has a will he cannot but express it, and the expressions of an absolute sovereign's will are laws. We are therefore, I conceive, warranted to assert that God could not avoid making laws for his creatures without ceasing to be their king. But he could not cease to be their king without renouncing all connection with them; and he could not renounce all connection with them, without their ceasing to exist. So long therefore, as creatures continue to exist, it seems absolutely necessary in the very nature of things, that God, as their Creator and Sovereign should make laws for the regulation of their conduct. In no intelligible sense can he be a king; no intelligible meaning can we assign to the assertion in our text, unless he has actually made such laws.

2. If Jehovah is a king, he is under obligations, not only to make laws for his subjects, but to make the wisest and best laws possible. This, I presume, will not be denied. All will allow that a legislator ought to make the best laws in his power; not such laws as will please the violent or the fraudulent, but such as will most effectually secure the rights and promote the welfare of his obedient subjects. Such laws then, Jehovah, as the Sovereign and supreme Legislator of the universe, was bound to make for his rational creatures. It was incumbent on him to consult not the private wishes and inclinations of individuals but the great interests of his whole kingdom. If he saw that these interests would be best secured by a law, commanding all his intelligent subjects to be perfectly holy; to love their Creator with all their hearts, and their fellow creatures as themselves, it was incumbent on him to make such a law. Such a law he has made, a law which all his obedient subjects declare to be holy and just and good; and with which none but the rebellious and wicked are dissatisfied.

3. If Jehovah is the great Sovereign of the universe, he was under obligations, not only to make such a law, but to annex some penalty to every violation of it. A law without a penalty annexed, is not a law; or, at least, it can in no respect answer the purpose of a law. Of this every person may be convinced in a moment, by endeavoring to conceive of a law without a penalty. I make a law, says a legislator, to this effect. But what, his subjects ask, will be the consequence if we transgress this law? 'Will any punishment be inflicted on us? None at all, is the reply. It must be obvious to every one that this would be a law in name only. It would be no more than counsel or advice. If then it was incumbent on God to make laws for his creatures, it was no less incumbent on him to annex a punishment to every violation of those laws. Hence also it became necessary that he should provide a proper place for the infliction of this punishment, a prison in which the

transgressors of this law might be confined, and thus prevented from doing further mischief. Such a prison, we are informed he has provided; its name is hell; no one who believes that God is a king can, consistently, entertain doubts of its existence; for who ever heard of a king that had no prison in his dominions?

4. If Jehovah, as the Sovereign of the universe, was bound to make laws for his creatures, and to annex a punishment to their violation, he is also bound to enforce those laws, and to inflict the threatened punishment on all who transgress them. Every consideration which proves that it is incumbent on him to make laws, equally proves that it is incumbent on him to enforce them, and of course to punish transgressors; for it is obvious that a law not enforced becomes a mere nullity, and that a threatened punishment not inflicted is an empty sound. But it is the duty of a sovereign not to suffer salutary laws to become a nullity. It is as much his duty to enforce them, as it was to make them. He must not bear the sword in vain, but be a terror to evil doers. Inspiration declares, He who justifieth the wicked and he who condemneth the just are both an abomination to the Lord. Hence it appears that to justify the wicked, or to exempt them from merited punishment, is in the sight of God, no less an act of injustice than to condemn the innocent. That it ought to be thus considered is obvious. Justice in a sovereign ruler consists in treating his subjects according to their deserts. He may therefore be guilty of injustice by treating them better than they deserve, as well as by treating them worse than they deserve. But God cannot act unjustly.— he cannot do that himself which he would regard as an abomination if done by an earthly monarch. He must then, as the sovereign of the universe, punish those who transgress his great law of love, and shut them up in the prison which he has prepared for that purpose; nor would he be either a just or a good king should he act otherwise. A proper attention to this truth will show us the fallacy of the most plausible objections which are urged by sinners against the scriptural doctrine of future punishment. They profess to regard God as a father only, and hence infer that since men are his children he will suffer none of them to be finally miserable. But it must be remembered that if he is a father, he is also a king; and that as such he is under obligations to enforce the laws of his kingdom; and to punish, even though he may do it with reluctance, all who transgress them. When the king and father meet in one person, the feelings of the father must give way to the duties of the king. The page of history records at least one instance in which a father was called to sit in judgment on his own sons accused of conspiring against the state. The charge was fully proved. lt became the duty of their father, as judge, to pronounce the sentence of the law. It was death, a painful and shameful death. He pronounced the sentence. He saw it executed; and all succeeding ages have applauded the inflexible regard to justice which enabled him to sacrifice parental affection to the public good. And shall man be more just than Gods? Shall that justice which was applauded in a human magistrate be stigmatized as cruelty, when displayed by the eternal sovereign of the universe?

5. From the fact that God is a king, taken in connection with the preceding remarks, we may learn the necessity of an atonement for sin. By an atonement we mean something which shall maintain the authority of God’s law, secure the great interests of his kingdom and answer all the ends of government, no less effectually than the infliction of merited punishment upon transgressors. If there is any truth in the remarks which have been made, it undeniably follows, that without such an atonement God cannot consistently with justice or with his obligations as a sovereign, pardon a single offender. Agreeably an apostle informs us that God hath set forth Jesus Christ to be a

propitiation through faith in his blood, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus; language, which most evidently intimates that were it not for this merciful provision, God could not be just in justifying or pardoning transgressors. And we may add, language which intimates with equal clearness, that notwithstanding this merciful provision he can justly pardon none who do not believe.

6. If Jehovah is a king, sin is treason and rebellion, and every impenitent sinner is a traitor and a rebel. These epithets have, I am aware, a harsh and unpleasant sound; and I should think it improper, or at least inexpedient to employ them, did not the language of inspiration warrant their use. But in many passages of the inspired volume, sin is styled rebellion, and the words sinner and rebel are used as convertible terms. A moment's reflection will satisfy us that this language is perfectly just and proper. A rebel is one who disobeys and resists the authority of his rightful sovereign. Of this every impenitent sinner is guilty. He disobeys the great Sovereign of the universe. He neither loves God with all his heart, nor his neighbor as himself. By refusing to repent he practically justifies his disobedience, and in effect denies that Jehovah is his sovereign. He must then be regarded as guilty of rebellion. Equally obvious is it that he incurs the guilt of treason. Every snbjcct is guilty of this offence who entertains and cherishes the known enemies of his prince. Now sin is the great enemy of Jehovah considered as a king. It directly tends to subvert his government. It strikes at the very foundations of his throne. Could it universally prevail, it would not leave him one loyal subject in the universe. This enemy to the King of kings every impenitent sinner entertains and cherishes in his heart. He is then guilty of treason against his sovereign. And it must be remembered that the criminality of treason and rebellion against God as far exceeds that of the same offences against earthly rulers, as he is superior to them. If these crimes when committed against earthly rulers are justly punishable with death, the same crimes committed against the great Sovereign of the universe must surely deserve eternal death, the punishment denounced by his law upon transgressors. We may here add, that if every impenitent sinner is a rebel, every Christian is a pardoned rebel. He was once a sinner, an impenitent sinner, deeply involved in the guilt of rebellion against Jehovah. But repentance and remission of sins have been freely given him through that Savior in whom he believes. He ought then ever to feel and act in a corresponding manner. You can easily conceive how a rebel ought to feel, who, after, his head was laid upon the block, had received a free pardon from his injured sovereign. You can conceive how penitent, how humble, how grateful. how entirely devoted to his prince's service he ever after ought to be. Much more then may such a temper and such conduct be expected of those whom God has pardoned.

While they rejoice in what they are, they should never forget what they were. They should never forget that they were once rebels against the greatest and best of sovereigns, and that by his rich mercy and grace alone they have been rescued from everlasting burnings. Hence they should walk softly before God all their days in deep humility of soul; and while they approach him with confidence as a father, remember that he is also a great and glorious king, who must be worshipped with reverence and godly fear. It was for the purpose of enforcing this duty that he revealed himself as a king in the passage before us. The impious and covetous Jews, though expressly commanded to offer in sacrifice such animals only as were free from blemish, insulted him by bringing to his altar the lame and the blind. This insult he deeply resented, and he assigns his regal character as a reason why he would punish those who opposed it. Cursed be the

deceiver who voweth and offereth to the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great king, and my name is dreadful, saith the Lord of Hosts. My Christian friends, how often do we, in consequence of the coldness, irreverence, and formality with which we approach the altar of God, offer him a corrupt thing! When he looks upon his worshipping assemblies, how often does he find reason to say as he said formerly, It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Permit me to express a hope that he will never find reason to say this of the solemn meetings which may be held in this house of prayer. Permit me to charge you, by his awful majesty, and to beseech you, by his tender mercies, never to forget what he is, and what you are, when you approach his throne of grace, and to remember that God is greatly to be feared in the assemblies of his saints; and to be had in reverence by all that are about him. A practical remembrance of his truth is indispensable to your religious interests; for it cannot be expected that God will visit a temple where he is treated with irreverence, and unless he favors you with his gracious visits, it will be in vain that his word is sent to you.

Omitting many other important inferences which might be drawn from this fruitful subject, I remark,

Lastly, If Jehovah is a king it seems requisite that he should have ambassadors. It is necessary that his will should be communicated to his subjects. It is necessary that his revolted subjects should be called upon to return to their allegiance. If a way has been opened in which they may escape the punishment which his law denounces upon transgressors, and regain his forfeited favor, it is necessary that way should be pointed out. For these purposes it seems desirable and proper that ambassadors should be employed. Agreeably. we are informed that God has seen fit to employ them. His inspired messengers the prophets and apostles, were ambassadors extraordinary. They had a commission and instructions with the broad seal of heaven affixed to them. Now then, said one of them, we are ambassadors for Christ. In an inferior sense, the ordinary ministers of the gospel are also his ambassadors, for the same passage which informs us that he gave prophets and apostles for the work of the ministry, informs us also that he gave pastors and teachers for the same important work. It is not indeed usual for earthly monarchs to send ambassadors to rebellious subjects, except when they are unable to reduce them to subjection by force. This however, the King of kings condescends to do. Though he is able with infinite ease to tread all his rebellious subjects in the dust, and even to dash them in pieces as a potter’s vessel, he chooses rather to send them messages of mercy, to propose to them terms of peace. Nay, more, he beseeches them to accept of those terms. As though God did beseech you by us, says an apostle, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.

APPLICATION. You have heard, my fellow mortals, that God is a King. You have heard his own awful voice announcing the fact. You have listened to an imperfect description of his greatness. You have been reminded that you are all his subjects. Turn then, subjects of Jehovah, and contemplate your Sovereign. See him coming forth from that unapproachable light, in which he dwells, and disclosing his ineffable glories to your view, embodied in his works of creation, of providence, and of grace. See him seated on a throne of glory high and lifted up, while celestial thrones and dominions, principalities and powers veil their faces and bow in humble adoration before the thrice holy Lord of hosts. See his almighty arm, in which dwells everlasting strength, swaying the scepter of uncontrolled dominion over all creatures and all worlds; while from his lips goes forth his eternal, immutable law, demanding perfect obedience from the whole intelligent universe. But hark! He speaks, he proclaims his name. 0 earth, earth, earth, listen to the voice of thy Creator and thy King. Let the universe keep silence, while he says, I am what I am. I am

Jehovah, Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; but will by no means clear the guilty.

Mortals, you have seen, you have heard. Say then, is this your king? In fact and by right he most certainly is so. Whether you acknowledge him or not, he is so. But is he the sovereign of your choice, the monarch of your affection? This, this, my hearers, is the question; your answer to which determines your character and your destiny; for most sinful is the man, and most miserable is the man, who, while necessitated to be forever a subject of Jehovah, says in his heart, I will not have this being to reign over me; who cannot comply with the command which says, The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice. In order to answer the great question, you must ascertain whether you yield a cheerful obedience to his commands; for they only are his loyal, his willing subjects who cheerfully obey him. Know ye not, says an apostle, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey? Say then, my hearers, do you thus obey him? Do you love him supremely? Have you repented of all your past transgressions of his law, and cordially embraced the gospel of his Son? Are you seeking first his kingdom and righteousness, and living a life of devotedness to his service, of self-denial, watchfulness and prayer? If so, you are his loyal subjects; nay more, his children, the children of a king, of the King of heaven; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ of his everlasting kingdom; and you shall not only live with him, but reign with him forever.

Let the Christian then rejoice in his sovereign; let the children of Zion be joyful in their king. Nor let them fear that their joy will ever know a termination; for the Lord shall reign king forever, even thy God, 0 Zion, throughout all generations. But if Jehovah is not the chosen monarch of your affections; if his law is not written in your hearts; if you are not yielding a cordial obedience to its requirements; then you are not his loyal, willing subjects; you are still involved in the guilt of treason and rebellion against the King of kings; and unless you speedily submit and become reconciled to his government, he will be constrained to consider and to treat you as enemies. It will avail nothing to call in question his right to be your sovereign. You were all born in his dominions; you still reside in them, and in them you must forever continue to reside. It will avail nothing to think of resistance. He is almighty. It will avail nothing to think of flight or concealment. He is every where present, and he sees all things. It will avail nothing to make excuses for disobedience. He perfectly knows their fallacy. It will avail nothing to offer him pretended homage: He demands, and he reads the heart. Your only refuge, your only safety lies in submission, cordial, unreserved submission. To this, as his messengers, we now call and invite you. In his name, and as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Chapter 40

S. JOY IN HEAVEN OVER REPENTING SINNERS

JOY IN HEAVEN OVER REPENTING SINNERS NOTE. This sermon was preached before the Maine Missionary Society, June, 1812.

"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth." Luke 15:10

Though eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him, yet, for our encouragement and consolation, he has revealed theta to us by his Spirit in his word. He there sets open before us the door of heaven, and invites faith to enter in, survey her future inheritance, and contemplate the joys and employments of those happy beings, to a participation of whose felicity she is conducting us. Let us, my hearers, comply with this invitation. Let us look in at the open door, which the condescending goodness of our God has set before us; feast our eyes with a view of untreated glories, and refresh our ears with the hallelujahs of the heavenly host.

If we have that faith which is the evidence of things not seen, and which enables its possessors to endure as seeing Him who is invisible, we shall see the eternal King bending forward on his awful throne, and contemplating some object in this lower world with looks of ineffable complacency and delight. We shall see the Son of God, standing with open arms and a countenance full of invitation, compassion and love; —we shall see all heaven in a transport of joy, and hear its high courts resounding with the songs and praises of its blessed inhabitants. Is it asked, what occasions their joy? A sinner, perhaps some sinner in this assembly, has just repented. This is the object which God contemplates with complacency and delight; for to this man, says he, will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word. This is he, whom the Son of God opens his arms to receive; for, whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. This is what fills heaven with new joy, and calls forth from angelic lips their loudest songs of praise; for he who came down from heaven has assured us that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. This declaration of our Saviour, naturally leads us to inquire who rejoice, and why they rejoice on such an occasion.

I. Who rejoice? In answer to this inquiry, I observe, 1. That God the Father rejoices over every sinner that repenteth. That the infinite and ever blessed Jehovah, before whom all nations are as nothing and vanity, should rejoice in the repentance of a sinful worm of the dust, appears at first view, strange, and almost incredible. But however strange or incredible it may appear, it is evident, both from his declarations and his conduct, that such is the fact.

It is evident from his declarations. His word informs us, that when he saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was evil continually, it repented him that he had made man, and it grieved him at the heart. But if he was grieved at man’s apostasy, he cannot but rejoice when any of our apostate race repent, and return to him and happiness. Agreeably, we find him most solemnly declaring, that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live. After foretelling, by

the mouth of his prophets, the repentance and return of his ancient people, who had forsaken him to worship idols, he says, —Then shalt thou be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God; for the Lord delighteth in thee and thy land shall be married; and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. For behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and my people a joy, and I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in my people. Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all thine heart, O daughter of Jerusalem, for the Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing. These striking declarations, addressed by Jehovah to his ancient people, are equally applicable to penitent sinners in every age, and undeniably prove that he rejoices in their conversion. That he does so is farther evident from his actions. To glorify his grace in the salvation of sinners, has apparently been the great object of all his dispensations, from the fall of man till the present day. It would be easy to show, that for this purpose the world has been preserved, and the race of men continued. For this purpose the various revolutions, wars and commotions which stain the page of history have been overruled. But these are trifles. For this purpose God gave up his only begotten Son, and sent down the Holy Spirit from heaven; and for the same purpose he is still sending forth his ambassadors to beseech sinners in Christ's stead to be reconciled to himself. That he rejoices when they comply with the terms of reconciliation, is evident from the manner in which he receives them, as represented to us in the parable of the prodigal son. No sooner does he perceive them returning from the service and ways of sin, than he hastens to meet and welcome them; clothes them with the robe of his Son's righteousness; puts upon them the ring of his everlasting covenant; causes their feet to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; fasts them with the bread and water of life, and calls upon all the inhabitants of heaven to rejoice with him, because his lost children are found.

2. The Son of God rejoices over every sinner that repenteth. Were it necessary to prove the truth of this assertion, we might remind you, that whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. We might remind you, that in the history of our Saviour we read of his rejoicing but once; and his joy was then excited by reflections on the sovereign grace of his Father in bringing sinners to repentance, and in hiding the great truths of the gospel from the wise and prudent, while he revealed them to babes. But it is not necessary to prove the truth of this assertion. It is not necessary to prove, that the friend of man, the compassionate Jesus, rejoices when sinners repent. His whole life was one continued proof of this. Is it possible that he who toiled, prayed, suffered and died for sinful men, should not rejoice in their conversion? Must not he who, once and again, wept at the sight of their miseries, and cheerfully poured out his blood for their salvation, even while they were his enemies, be almost ready to shed tears of joy over them, when by repentance they become his friends? Yes, he must rejoice, and he does rejoice over them with joy unspeakable; a joy which he only can feel, and of which he alone can conceive. This was a principal part of the joy set before him, for the sake of which he endured the cross and despised the shame; and it probably constitutes no inconsiderable part of the happiness which he now enjoys in heaven. Though there is no reason to doubt that the Holy Spirit participates in the joy of the Father and the Son, yet as the Scriptures are silent respecting it we shall only add, 3. That the blessed angels rejoice over every sinner that repenteth. That these benevolent spirits take an interest in our affairs, and feel tenderly concerned for our welfare, is evident from various parts of revelation. When they came to bring the glad tidings of our Saviour's birth, they joyfully

ascribed glory to God in the highest, that there was peace on earth and good will to men. They are also represented as styling themselves our brethren and fellow servants; as having a charge over God's people to keep them in all their ways, and as going forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation. From these and other passages we might have justly inferred, even if our Saviour had not assured us of the fact, that these happy beings rejoice over every sinner who repenteth.

II. Why do the inhabitants of heaven rejoice over repenting sinners? So far as this inquiry respects the motives of Jehovah's conduct, it becomes us to answer it with reverence and humility, lest we should darken counsel by words without knowledge. It is however certain, that God does not rejoice in the repentance of sinners, because it can add any thing to his essential happiness or glory; for he is already infinitely glorious and, happy, and so would continue though all the men on earth, and all the angels in heaven should madly rush into hell. Is it any profit to the Almighty that thou art righteous, or is it any gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect? No, our goodness extendeth not to him, and when we have done all, we are but unprofitable servants. Why then does God rejoice when we repent? He rejoices,

1. Because his eternal purposes of grace, and his engagements to his Son, are then fulfilled. We learn from the Scriptures, that all who repent, were chosen by him in Christ Jesus before the world began, and given to him as his people in the covenant of redemption. We also learn, that he has said to his Son, Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power. He therefore rejoices to see them repent, as we rejoice when our promises are fulfilled, and our favorite purposes accomplished.

2. God rejoices when sinners repent, because bringing them to repentance is his own work. It is a consequence of the gift of his Son, and is effected by the power of his Spirit. The Scriptures inform us, that he rejoices in all his works, and with reason does he rejoice in them; for they are all very good. But if he rejoices in his other works, much more may he rejoice in this, since it is of all his works the greatest, the most glorious, and the most worthy of himself. In this work the image of Satan is effaced, and the image of God restored to an immortal soul. In this work, a child of wrath is transformed into an heir of glory. In this work, a smoking brand is plucked from eternal fires, and planted among the stars in the firmament of heaven, there to shine with increasing lustre forever and ever. And is not this a work worthy of God, a work in which God may with propriety rejoice?

3. God rejoices in the repentance of sinners, because it affords him an opportunity to exercise mercy and show his love to Christ, by pardoning them for his sake. Christ is his beloved Son in whom he is ever well pleased. He loves him as he loves himself, with an infinite love; a love which is as inconceivable by us, as his creative power and eternal duration. He loves him not only on account of the near relation and inseparable union which subsists between them, but for the perfect holiness and excellence of his character, and especially for the infinite benevolence which he displayed in undertaking and accomplishing the great work of man's redemption. As it is the nature of love to manifest itself in acts of kindness toward the beloved object, God cannot but wish to display his love for Christ, and to show all intelligent beings how perfectly he is pleased with his character and conduct, as Mediator. The inexhaustible fountain of love to Christ, which fills his heart, is constantly seeking new channels in which it may flow out and display itself to creatures. As David asked, Is there yet alive any of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake? so we may conceive of God as asking, Is there yet any penitent sinner, to whom

I may show kindness for the sake of Christ? And when such a sinner is found, God cannot but be pleased, because it affords him an opportunity to display his love for Christ, by bestowing pardon from respect to his atonement and intercession. The Scriptures also inform us, that the Lord delighteth in mercy. He must therefore be gratified when he has an opportunity to exercise it. But such an opportunity none but penitent sinners afford him; for those who continue impenitent, will not ask for mercy; they will not even accept it when offered; they almost consider the offer itself as an insult. When told that God is willing to forgive them for the sake of Christ, they practically reply, what have we done that needs forgiving? We have injured no one. We are not like others, extortioners, adulterers or unjust. We can be saved without forgiveness through Christ. Insult us not then with offers of pardon, as if we were criminals, but carry them to sinners, to profligates, who have need of mercy. It is needless to remark, that God cannot consistently forgive sinners while they possess this self-justifying temper. But when they exchange this temper for a contrite heart, and begin to cry; God be merciful to us sinners, he can with propriety gratify himself, and manifest his love to Christ, by exercising toward them that mercy which he delights to display.

4. God rejoices when sinners repent; because it gratifies hint to see them escape from the tyranny, and from the consequences of sin. God is light; perfect holiness. God is love; pure benevolence. His holiness and his benevolence both prompt him to rejoice, when sinners escape from sin. Sin is that abominable thing which he hates. He hates it as an evil or malignant, and as a bitter, or destructive thing. It is indeed both. It is the plague, the leprosy, the death of intelligent creatures. It infects and poisons all their faculties; plunges them into the lowest depths of guilt and wretchedness, and pollutes them with a stain, which all the waters of the ocean cannot wash away, which all the fires of hell cannot remove; from which nothing can cleanse them, but the blood of Christ. Such is the malignity of its nature, that could it gain admittance into the celestial regions, it would instantly transform angels to devils, and turn heaven into hell. That this is no exaggerated representation, sin melancholy experience but too clearly evinces. Already has sin transformed angels to devils; already has it converted this world from a paradise to a prison; from a habitation of immortals, to an Aceldama and a Golgotha, a place of skulls and a field of blood. Already has it poisoned not only our bodies, but our souls; it has brought death into the world and all our woe, and, "in one hour,

Spoil’d six days’ labor of a God:’

Even now it stalks through our subjugated world with gigantic strides, spreading ruin and wretchedness around in ten thousand forms. Strife and discord, war and bloodshed, famine and pestilence, pain and sickness follow in its train; while death mounted on his pale horse, with the grave and hell follow in the rear. Such are the miseries which sin has introduced into this once happy world; such the evils which attend its progress here, notwithstanding the various restraints which are employed to check its career. Would we see these evils consummated; and learn the full extent of that wretchedness which sin lands to produce, we must follow it into the eternal world, descend into those regions where peace, where hope never comes; and there by the light of revelation behold sin tyrannizing over its wretched victims with uncontrollable fury; fanning the inextinguishable fire, and sharpening the tooth of the immortal worm. See angels and archangels, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, stripped of all their primeval glory and beauty, bound in eternal chains and burning with rage and malice against that Being; in whose presence they once rejoiced. and whose praises they once sung. See multitudes of the human race in

unutterable agonies of anguish and despair cursing the gift, the giver and prolonger of their existence, and vainly wishing for annihilation to put a period to their miseries.

Follow them through the long, long ages of eternity, and see them sinking deeper and deeper in the bottomless abyss of ruin; perpetually blaspheming God because of their plagues, and receiving the punishment of these blasphemies in continual additions to their wretchedness. Such are the wages of sin such the inevitable doom of the finally impenitent. From these depths of anguish and despair, look up to the mansions of the blessed, and see to what a height of glory and felicity the grace of God will raise every sinner that repenteth. See those who are thus favored in unutterable ecstasies of joy, love and praise, contemplating God face to face, reflecting his perfect image, shining with a splendor like that of their glorious Redeemer, filled with all the fullness of Deity, and bathing in those rivers of pleasure which flow forever at God's right hand. Follow them in their endless flight toward perfection. See them rapidly mounting from height to height, and darting onward with increasing swiftness and unwearied wing, toward that infinity which they will never reach. View this, and their say, whether infinite holiness and benevolence may not with propriety rejoice over every sinner that by repentance escapes the miseries and secures the felicity here so imperfectly described.

Why does the Son of God rejoice over every sinner that repenteth? I answer,

1. Why does a mother rejoice over her infant offspring? Is it not because she has given them existence and support? Why does a father rejoice over and press to his heart with new fondness the child, whom he has just rescued from the flames which consumed his habitation? Is it not because he has saved the object of his affections at the peril of his own life? So if it be asked, why Christ rejoices over repenting sinners, we reply, because he has given them spiritual life and nourishment; because he has redeemed them with his own precious blood from eternal wretchedness and despair. In the joy arising from other sources he participates with his Father and the Holy Spirit; but this is a cause of joy almost peculiar to himself. It was long since predicted respecting him, that he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; in other words, that he should see the effects of his sufferings in the repentance and salvation of sinners; and consider this as a sufficient recompense for all the toils and sorrows through which he was called to pass. This prediction is daily fulfilling. Our Immanuel sees the fruit of the travail of his soul in every sinner that repenteth, and rejoices that his agonies were not endured in vain. There are, we trust, not a few in this assembly, over whom he has thus rejoiced. And O! with what affectionate emotions must he regard them. You can in some degree conceive, my friends, what your feelings would be toward a trembling dove, that should fly into your bosom for protection from the talons of a vulture. You can form some conception of the feelings with which David contemplated the helpless lamb, which he had rescued at the peril of his own life from the paw of the lion and the jaws of the bear. But who can conceive of the emotions, with which the Son of David must contemplate an immortal soul, drawn to his feet by the cords of love, whom he has rescued from the roaring lion at such an infinite expense? If we love, and prize and rejoice in any object in proportion to the labor, pain and expense which it has cost us to obtain it, hour greatly must Christ love and prize and rejoice in every penitent sinner! His love and joy must he unutterable, inconceivable, infinite. Compared with his, even a mother's love must be cold. My friends, for once I rejoice that our Saviour's toils and sufferings were so great, since the greater they were, the greater must be his love for us and his joy in our conversion. And permit me to add, if he thus rejoices over one sinner that repenteth,

what must be his joy, when all his people are collected out of every tongue and kindred and nation and people, and presented spotless before his Father's throne! What a full tide of felicity will pour in upon him, and how will his benevolent heart expand with unutterable delight, and swell almost to bursting, when contemplating the countless myriads of the redeemed, he says, Were it not for my sufferings, all these immortal beings would have been throughout eternity as miserable—and now they will be as happy; as God can make them. It is enough. I see of the travail of my soul and am satisfied. My friends, how great must that joy, that happiness be, which satisfies the benevolence of Christ.

2. The Son of God, with his Father and the Holy Spirit, rejoices when sinners repent, because they then begin to return his love, and acknowledge, with admiring gratitude, the wisdom of his dispensations. You need not be told, that it is the very nature of love to wish for a return of affection. You can easily conceive why a fond mother rejoices when her infant child becomes capable of perceiving and returning her love. You can conceive why her joy increases, when the same child arrives at an age sufficient to see and acknowledge her wisdom and love, even in those corrections, which it once perhaps considered as indicating a want of affection. Should any of you be called to attend, for a series of years, some dear friend under mental derangement; and with unwearied love should spend many wearisome days and sleepless nights in promoting his comfort, and preserving him from self-destruction, while he regarded you as an enemy, considered your presence as irksome, and all your labors and precautions as needless and cruel, would you not rejoice, to see his reason returning; to see his eye once more sparkle with intelligence, and beam with affection; to hear him gratefully acknowledging and extolling your friendship, and to perceive in all his looks and actions that he returned it? And why may we not suppose that our compassionate Redeemer, and even our heavenly Father is capable of being affected in a similar way?

They have loved all who repent with an everlasting love, a love stronger than death. But this love is never perceived or returned by the objects of it, while they continue impenitent! On the contrary, they are then enemies to God. and often consider his laws, his dispensations, and even the very means which he employs to bring them to himself, as destructive of their happiness. Similar feelings they exercise toward Christ. They see in him no form or comeliness, and when he comes to bless and save them, they are ready to say, like the man among the tombs, let us alone, what have we to do with thee? But when they repent, the scene is changed. They then come to themselves, and sit at the feet of Jesus in their right mind. The love of God is shed abroad in their hearts. the spirit of adoption is given them, they cry, Abba Father. The law and character of God appear to them perfectly excellent and lovely. The love of Christ constrains them to live not to themselves, but to him who died for them and rose again; while the genuine language of their hearts is, Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none in the earth we desire besides thee. Bless the Lord, O our souls, and all that is within us, bless his holy name; who forgiveth all our iniquities, who healeth all our diseases.

Why do the angels rejoice over every sinner that repenteth? They rejoice,

1. Because God rejoices. It is said respecting David, that whatsoever the king did pleased all the people. So whatever God does, pleases all the angelic hosts. His Spirit is the soul which guides and animates them all; their wills are swallowed up in his; and his interest, glory and happiness,

are dearer to them than their own, or rather are considered by them as their own. Hence his feelings govern theirs. Is he displeased? they burn with holy zeal to execute his vengeance. Does he rejoice? they cannot but participate and echo back his joy. Like the servants in the parable, they rejoice with our heavenly Father when his lost children are found, and stand ready to assist in affording them a welcome reception. They rejoice,

2. Because it is their disposition to rejoice in the happiness of others. They literally love others as they do themselves; and since they know by experience the felicity which results from enjoying the favor of God, they cannot but wish that other creatures should possess it. They see in the fate of the fallen angels, the dreadful consequences of God's displeasure. They cannot therefore but wish that others should escape it. And since they know that repentance is the only way in which sinners of the human race can escape God's anger and secure his favor, they cannot but rejoice when any of them repent.

3. They rejoice when sinners repent, because God is glorified and his perfections are displayed in giving them repentance and remission of sins. The perfections of God are to be seen only in his works. His moral perfections are to be seen only, or at least principally, in his works of grace. There is more of God, more of his essential glory displayed in bringing one sinner to repentance, and forgiving his sins for the sake of Christ, than in all the wonders of creation. Agreeably, the psalmist informs us, that when the Lord shall build up Zion, that is, when he shall enlarge his church, the spiritual Zion, by bringing sinners into it, he shall appear in his glory; in other words, shall appear peculiarly glorious! He does so. In this work creatures may see, if I may so express it, the very heart of God. From this work angels themselves have probably learned more of God's moral character, than they had ever been able to learn before. They knew before that God was wise and powerful, for they had seen him create a world.

They knew that he was good, for he had made them perfectly holy and happy. They knew that he was just, for they had seen him cast down their own rebellious brethren from heaven to hell for their sins. But until they saw him give repentance and remission of sins through Christ, they did not know that he was merciful, and they did not know that he could pardon a sinner. And O! what an hour was that in heaven, when this great truth was first made known; when the first penitent was pardoned! Then anew song was put into the mouths of angels, and while with unutterable emotions of wonder, love and praise, they began to sing it; their voices swelled to a higher pitch, and they experienced joys unfelt before. O how did the joyful sounds, his mercy endureth for ever, spread from choir to choir, echo through the high arches of heaven, and thrill through every enraptured angelic breast; and how did they cry with one voice, Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace and good will to man. Nor is the mercy of God the only perfection displayed in this work. There is more power and wisdom displayed in bringing a sinner to repentance, than in creating a world; and therefore as the sons of God sang together and shouted for joy, when God laid the foundations of the earth, so with still greater reason do they rejoice at beholding the wonders of the new creation in the souls of men. They delight to watch the beginnings of spiritual life in those who had long been dead in sin; to see light and order breaking in upon the natural darkness and confusion of the mind; to see the image of Satan disappearing and to trace the first lineaments of the image of God in the soul. With inexpressible satisfaction do they see the heart of stone transformed to flesh, notice the first penitential tears which flow from the sinner's eyes, and listen to the imperfectly formed petitions, the infant cries of the young child of grace. With the

utmost readiness do they descend from their blissful abode to minister to the new-born heir of salvation, and surround him in joyful throngs, celebrating his birthday with songs of praise. Behold, they cry, another trophy of sovereign, all-conquering grace. Behold another captive delivered by the Son of David, from the bondage of sin, another lamb of his flock rescued from paw of the lion and the jaws of the bear. See the principalities and powers of darkness foiled; see the strong man armed cast out; see the kingdom of Jesus extending, see the image of our God multiplied, see another voice tuned to join in the hallelujahs of the heavenly choirs. This, O our Creator, is thy work. Glory to God in the highest. This, O adorable Immanuel, is the effect of thy sufferings. Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessing and honor and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb forever.

INFERENCES From this subject we infer,

1. The incalculable worth of the human soul. To say that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, is to say all that can be said or imagined on this subject. Our Saviour himself, who spoke as never man spake, could say nothing more expressive of the worth of the soul than this; for in heaven the real value of this immortal spark of intelligence is known; and were it not a jewel of inestimable worth, never would its loss have grieved God at the heart; never would he have given his only Son to redeem it; never would he rejoice, and call on all the heavenly hosts to rejoice with him on its recovery. It can surely be no trifle which excites so deep an interest in the hearts of celestial beings. It can be no trifle, the acquisition of which increases the already ineffable joys of heaven. Yet such is the wretched infatuation of mankind, that they almost universally neglect this precious jewel, and barter it for bubbles, vanities and dreams, though a thousand worlds so bought, were bought too dear.

2. From this subject we infer, that the consequences of dying in an impenitent state will be unspeakably dreadful. You cannot but be sensible, my friends, that the inhabitants of heaven knew perfectly well, what these consequences will be; and did they not know them to be dreadful, unspeakably dreadful, would they thus rejoice over every sinner, who escapes them by repentance? If no punishment awaits impenitent sinners in a future state, or if their punishment be short in duration, or trifling in degree; would celestial beings thus rejoice to see sinners repent? When you see a mother transported with joy at the recovery of a sick child, do you not infer, that she considered the disease as very dangerous? So when we see the inhabitants of heaven rejoicing with new joys over a penitent sinner, must we not infer that they consider the punishment from which he has escaped as inconceivably dreadful?

3. From this subject we infer, that all who repent will certainly persevere and be saved. Suppose; for one moment, that such may fall and perish? Would God, would Christ, would angels then rejoice to see sinners repent? To see them placed in a situation where they had nothing to support them, but their own faithfulness to grace received? Would they rejoice to see penitent sinners in a situation from which perfect Adam fell, and which holy angels failed to keep? No, they would rather weep to see a weak, frail creature placed in a situation from which he would immediately fall, fall into a state if possible, more helpless than that from which Sovereign grace had raised hint.

4. What an astonishing view does this subject give us of the benevolence of angels. Though they are perfectly happy, and though our character and conduct must, to them appear inconceivably hateful, yet they forget themselves to think of us; they forget their own happiness to rejoice in ours.

That we may more fully conceive of their benevolence, it is necessary to recollect, that they have the strongest possible temptations to envy us; and this they would do, did they in the smallest degree resemble mankind; for God passed by their fallen brethren, and provided no Saviour for them. Christ took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham; and now they see us sinful worms of the dust, through Sovereign grace, not only plucked as brands from the fires, in which their fallen brethren are consumed, but even exalted above themselves in glory and felicity, being made the children of God, while they arc only his servants. Yet instead of envying its on this account, or murmuring at God's distinguishing grace, they rejoice in our happiness. Yes, let us hear, and be confounded and hide our faces with shame in the dust; these benevolent beings rejoice to see sinful creatures of an inferior order exalted above themselves. Nay more, they cheerfully condescend to be our servants, even while we are clothed in sinful flesh; and to minister to its as heirs of salvation. This is the charity which seeketh not her own. This is to love one's neighbor as one's self, this is indeed the temper of the Son of God. My friends, are you not certain, that we naturally know nothing of such a temper? Are you not sensible, that such creatures as we are by nature, must be created anew, before we can imitate these benevolent beings? Are you not convinced that if this be the of heaven, we must all be born again before we can see the kingdom of God?

5. From this subject we may learn whether we are prepared for heaven. We presume none will deny that preparation for heaven implies something of a heavenly temper. If then, we are thus prepared we have something of such a temper. Like the angels, we are pleased with God's sovereignty, and rejoice when sinners repent. We desire and pray that the kingdom of God may come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are willing to do and suffer much to promote the salvation of sinners; and we are willing that others should do and suffer more, so as to outshine and eclipse ourselves. If this be our temper, we need no angel to come from heaven and tell us that our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. There has already been joy over us in heaven as penitent sinners, and ere many years have elapsed, there will be fresh joy over us on our arrival there. But if we know nothing of this temper, if we are dissatisfied with the sovereign, distinguishing grace of God, if it gives us no pleasure, to hear of the effusions of the divine Spirit, to see sinners repenting and flocking to Christ; if like the proud elder brother, we feel envious when we behold penitent prodigals rejoicing in the truth; or like the Pharisees, are displeased to hear new-born souls crying, Hosannas to the Son of David; or if we are unwilling to spend and be spent in promoting the spread of the gospel, and the salvation of sinners—it is certain that we in no respect resemble the angels of God; we cannot share in their joys, or join in their songs; and unless our hearts should be renovated by divine grace, we shall never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Once more. Do the inhabitants of heaven rejoice when sinners repent? Then they rejoice in all the means which are employed to bring sinners to repentance. If this be the case, with what joyful emotions must they contemplate the prospect, which our world begins to present to their view. In this fallen, ruined world, once sunk in ignorance and wickedness, where Satan reigned with almost unlimited sway, they now see many societies formed, and a variety of means employed to diffuse the knowledge of Christ and reconcile men to God. The sound of the everlasting gospel has gone out into all the earth. The Scriptures of truth are flying, as it were, on an angel's wing throughout the world; and soon, we trust, will every nation, and kindred, and people hear them speaking to

them in their own tongue, and declaring the wonderful works of God. Already from the farthest parts of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. These songs have also been heard in heaven, and have there doubtless called forth new songs of praise to him, who is wise in counsel and wonderful in working, the real author of everything amiable or excellent both in heaven and on earth.

Over every institution for the spread of the gospel, which he has prompted his creatures to form, there has, we doubt not, been joy in heaven. Comparatively feeble as are the means, and circumscribed as are the operations of this Missionary Society, we doubt not that angels rejoiced in its formation. We doubt not that they are now looking down with mingled emotions of wonder, thankfulness, and love, to see those who are by nature children of wrath, enemies to God, and entirely destitute of concern for his glory or for the happiness of his creatures, engaged in devising means to bring their perishing fellow sinners to repentance. We are certain that every sinner who has been brought to repentance by the exertions of this Society, has occasioned joy in heaven, joy to God, to his Son, to his Spirit, and to angels. My fathers and brethren, what an encouraging thought is this? How should it animate us to reflect, that our feeble exertions produce joy in heaven; that heaven from which all our present blessings come, and in which all our future happiness is to be enjoyed. What more noble, or more glorious motive of action can we have in view, than to glorify God, produce joy in heaven, and rescue sinners front hell. Had we been made instrumental in doing this once only; had only one sinner been brought to repentance in consequence of the exertions of this Society, it would have been a rich, and abundant reward for all that has been done. But through divine grace we have reason to hope, that there has been not only one, but many. Let us then, bless God and take courage, remembering that he who converts a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins. In view of these truths, my hearers, it surely cannot be necessary to solicit your assistance in carrying into effect the objects of this society. We do not solicit it. We will not ask you to bestow favors on Christ; but we tell you that Christ is ready to bestow a favor on you. The rightful possessor and proprietor of heaven and earth; he, who though he was rich, for your sakes became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich, condescends to accept of your assistance to do that, which he could with infinite ease accomplish without it. He condescends to accept as a gift, a small portion of his own bounty, when he might justly demand the whole as a debt; and if a poor subject would consider it as a favor for his sovereign to accept some worthless gift at his hand, and reward him for it a thousand fold, how thankful should we be, that the King of kings, condescends to accept and reward our sinful services; and how joyfully should we seize every opportunity that is offered us of doing or suffering any thing for the sake of Christ. But let us never forget, that if we would have out services acceptable, our hearts must go with them. Like the Macedonian Christians, we must first give our own selves to the Lord, presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service. My friends, are there any of us who have neglected to do this? any over whom the inhabitants of heaven have never rejoiced? If so; it becomes us to repent without delay. To the immediate performance of this duty, my impenitent hearers, you are urged by every motive which is calculated to influence rational beings. You are urged to it by the plain, positive command of Jehovah. God now commandeth all men every where to repent. We lay this command across your path. You cannot proceed one step farther in a sinful course, without treading it under foot. You are urged to it by a regard to your own interest; for except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. You are urged to it by

all the blessed angels, who are waiting with desire to rejoice in your conversion. Above all, you are most powerfully urged to it by the blessed Redeemer, whom you are under the strongest possible obligations to love and obey. He has done and suffered much for you. For you he has tasted death. For you, he cheerfully endured the scoffs and cruelties of men; the rage and malice of devils; and the overwhelming weight of his Father's wrath. In return for all this, he requests of you one small favor.

He merely requests you to repent and be happy. If you comply with this request, he will see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. He will consider the joy resulting from your repentance, as a sufficient recompense for all that he has done and suffered in your behalf. O then, be persuaded, my friends, to comply with this request. Be persuaded to give joy to God, to his Son, and to the blessed angels, to make this day a festival in heaven by repenting. Even now your heavenly Father is waiting for your return, and the Redeemer stands ready with expanded arms to receive you. Even now the white robes and the ring are provided, and the fatted calf is made ready to feast returning prodigals. Even now angels and archangels are ready to pour forth their most joyful songs to celebrate your return. And will you then, by persisting in your impenitence, seal up their lips? Will you render all this preparation in vain; and slight the raiment and the banquet which God has provided? Will you go away impenitent, and thus practically say, there shall be no joy in heaven this day on our account. God shall not be glorified, Christ shall not be gratified, angels shall not rejoice if we can prevent it? If there be any present, of whose feelings and conduct this is the language, we solemnly but reluctantly declare unto you, in the name of Jehovah, that God and his Son shall be glorified, and there shall be joy over you in heaven, notwithstanding all your endeavors to prevent it. Never shall any of his creatures rob God of his glory; and if you will not consent that his grace shall be glorified in your salvation, he will be compelled to glorify his justice in your everlasting destruction. If you will not allow the inhabitants of heaven to rejoice in your repentance, their love of justice, truth and holiness, will constrain them to rejoice in your condemnation, and to sing alleluia, while the smoke of your torment ascendeth up forever and ever. Hear then, ye immortal spirits, ye probationers for eternity, ye heirs of heaven or hell, hear and obey, before it is too late, the warning, inviting voice which calls you to repent.

Chapter 41

S. KNOWLEDGE OF ONE'S SINS, A DIFFICULT ACQUISITION

KNOWLEDGE OF ONE'S SINS, A DIFFICULT ACQUISITION Who can understand his errors? - Psalms 19:12. FROM the preceding part of this psalm it appears that, when David uttered this exclamation, he had been meditating on the purity and perfection of the divine law. From this subject he passed by a very natural transition, to his own transgressions of that law. The more he reflected upon them the more numerous and aggravated did they appear; and the more he felt convinced that he was still very far from discovering them all. Hence he was constrained to exclaim, Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults; that is, from those faults of which I am not sensible, which are hidden even from myself. To understand our errors, is to be acquainted with our faults, or in other words, with our sins; to know how often we transgress the divine law. By asking who can do this, the psalmist evidently intimates that it is exceedingly difficult, and that the knowledge of our sins is a very rare attainment. That it is so, every one, who knows any thing of the divine law, of himself and of mankind, will readily acknowledge. Every such person is sensible that he is very far from knowing his own sinfulness, in its full extent, and feels the necessity of beseeching God to pardon his secret faults. And my friends, it is exceedingly important that we should all be sensible of this, that we should be duly aware how very difficult it is for any person to understand his errors. I propose, therefore, in discoursing on the passage, to show, I. That to acquire a knowledge of our sinfulness, is exceedingly difficult; and, II. Why it is so.

1. To acquire a knowledge of our sinfulness is exceedingly difficult. That it is so, may be inferred from the fact, that very few acquire this knowledge, and that none acquire it perfectly. It may reasonably be presumed that any thing, which all men are concerned to obtain, and which very few do obtain, must be of difficult acquisition. Now it is obvious that all men are concerned to obtain a knowledge of their errors, their sins. Scarcely a person can be found, who does not profess to wish for this knowledge. But it is equally obvious, that very few obtain it in any considerable degree, and that none obtain it perfectly. So obvious is this, that the blindness of men to their own faults has been the constant theme of satirical and moral writers from the earliest ages, whose writings have come down to us. Indeed it is one of the first traits of the human character, of which young persons take notice when they begin to mix with the world; so that he must be very young, and very unobserving, who has not learned that his neighbors and acquaintances are ignorant of their own feelings. Even children, at a very early age, will often discover faults in their parents or instructors, of which these parents or instructors are wholly unconscious. But without insisting on these things, let me appeal to your own observation. Do you not, every day, meet with persons who appear to be perfectly insensible of faults and imperfections, which every man of common sagacity would discover in them on a very slight acquaintance? Do you not know many individuals, whose failings are known from one end of the town to the other, but who know nothing of them themselves? Did you ever know a covetous person, who thought himself covetous? or a vain man, who thought himself vain? or a proud man, who thought himself proud? Do you not often hear persons censure others for faults of which they are themselves guilty, and perhaps in a much greater degree? Do not persons often apply

sermons to their neighbors, which all who know them, are sensible would apply much better to themselves? In a word, do you know any person who, you have reason to believe, is perfectly acquainted with his own failings? or even one who knows them as well as they are known to others? Now if mankind are thus universally blind to their own faults, even to those faults which their fellow creatures can discover in them, much more must they be blind to those secret sins of the heart, which men cannot discover, hut which are exceedingly sinful in the sight of a holy, heart-searching God; for it is evidently much more difficult to acquire a knowledge of the latter than of the former.

Agreeably, we learn both from observation and from the scriptures, that of those sins of the heart, in which men's errors or sinfulness principally consist in the sight of God, they are all by nature entirely ignorant. For instance, the scriptures inform us that the human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, that it is full of evil, that in it there dwells no good thing, that all its thoughts and imaginations are sinful; that it is enmity against God, and not subject to his law, and that it is hard, a heart of stone. They tell us that all men have gone out of the way; that they are dead in trespasses and sins; that there is none righteous, none that doeth good, no not one; that all have broken the divine law, and are under its curse; in a word, that all deserve everlasting misery, from which it is impossible for any to escape, but through the atonement and mediation of Christ. Now it is too evident to require proof that men naturally know nothing of all this, that they are completely blind to the sinful state of their hearts; and so blind, that it is impossible for human means to convince them of it, or to make them sensible of the justice of their condemnation.

Thus, my friends, it ever has been. Thus it was in the days of Solomon; for we read, There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness. Thus it was with the Jews in the days of the prophets. When God charged them with despising his name, they impudently replied, Wherein have we despised thy name? When he threatened them with the punishment which their sins deserved, they cried, Wherefore hath the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us? or, what is our iniquity? or, what is our sin that we have committed against the Lord? Thus it was with the same nation in our Savior's time. When they were crucifying the Lord of glory and persecuting his disciples, they fancied that they loved God, and flattered themselves that they were beloved by him; and at the very moment, when the measure of their iniquity was full, and they were ripe for ruin, they confided in their own supposed innocence and felt secure. The same ignorance of their own characters, the same blindness to their own sinfulness, has been exhibited by mankind ever since. Hundreds of writers have asserted, in opposition to the scriptures, that the human heart is naturally good; that mankind are naturally virtuous, and thousands and tens of thousands have believed the assertion. This is the reason why so many reject the Savior. They will not come to him, because they do not feel that they need him; and they do not feel that they need him, because they are blind to their own sinfulness. And this, my hearers, is the reason why so many of you neglect him. You do not understand your errors. There was a time, when none of you understood them; and though some of you have been convinced of your mistake, in this respect, the larger part are still insensible; and even those who are best acquainted with their own transgressions will readily acknowledge that they are very far from knowing them all. Since then all men are thus ignorant of their own failings and offences, it is evident that to acquire a knowledge of them must be exceedingly difficult. That it is so, is farther evident from the fact, that the influences of the divine Spirit are represented as necessary to

Communicate this knowledge. Speaking of this divine agent, our Savior says, When he is come, he shall convince the world of sin. Now it wil1, I presume, be allowed, that God would not send his Spirit to perform a needless work. But it would be needless to convince men of sin, if they were not ignorant of their sins. Did they possess knowledge of them, or could men communicate to them this knowledge, the convincing influences of the divine Spirit, would be entirely needless. But they are not needless; they are indispensably necessary. It follows then that mankind are so blind to their own sinfulness, so ignorant of their true characters, that the Spirit of God alone can remove this blindness, and give them a knowledge of themselves, of their sins.

Having thus shown that it is exceedingly difficult for men to understand their errors, or to know their sins, I proceed, II. To shew why it is so.

1. It is so, because men are ignorant of the divine law. The apostle observes that, where there is no law, there is no transgression. Of course, while men are ignorant of the law, they must be ignorant of their transgressions. Again, the apostle observes that by the law is the knowledge of sin. Of course, those who know little or nothing of the divine law must know little or nothing of sin. Once more; St. John observes, that sin is a deviation from the law. Of course, unless men are well acquainted with the law, they cannot discover their own deviations from its requirements. But mankind is naturally ignorant of the divine law. In the language of the apostle, they are alive without the law. They have no proper sense of the strictness and spirituality of its precepts. Hence they regard many things as innocent and even as laudable, which the law of God condemns as sinful. Agreeably, Christ informs us, that what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. It is evident that he who would understand his errors, must understand the divine law, which alone can tell him what his errors are. He must have this law in his mind, in his memory, in his conscience; and he must be familiarly acquainted with all the preceptive and practical parts of God’s word, and have a disposition to measure his conduct daily by this rule. But men have naturally neither this acquaintance with the rule, nor this disposition to apply it. On the contrary, they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves. Of course, they must be very far indeed from understanding their errors. But perhaps it will be asked, if men are thus ignorant of the law, how can they be justly condemned for transgressing it? I answer, because their ignorance is a voluntary ignorance. They have the law of God in their hands, and might become acquainted with it, if they would; and it is a maxim with the divine, as well as with human governments, that ignorance of the law excuses no one.

2. Another cause, which renders it difficult for us to acquire a knowledge of our sins, may be found in the nature of the human mind. The mind has been justly compared to the eye, which, while it perceives other objects, cannot see itself, unless it be furnished with a mirror. Hence men usually find it difficult to examine themselves, to discover their own real motives, and the secret springs of action, and to become acquainted with the various exercises of their minds. It is true, they have, in the law and word of God, a faithful mirror, by looking into which they might see and know them; but into this mirror, unhappily, men do not love to look. They dislike it, for the same reason that the Jews hated Christ, viz., because it testifies that their deeds are evil, and threatens them with the divine displeasure. Now while men indulge this dislike, and neglect the Bible, it is as certain that they will never become acquainted with their own hearts, as it is that they will never see their own countenances without a mirror; for Jehovah declares that he alone knows the heart, that none but himself can know it; and the knowledge of it which he possesses is communicated to men only

through the medium of his word.

3. Another cause, which renders it exceedingly difficult for men to discover their own faults, is the prevalence of self-love. I presume, my friends, you will not deny that every man naturally loves himself more than any other object in the universe. Of course, he will be extremely partial in judging himself and exceedingly unwilling to discover faults in one he loves so well. You are sensible that men are seldom, if ever, so keen-sighted in discovering the faults of their children, their friends, and partizans, as they are in discerning the faults of others. You know that we can all see failings in an enemy much more easily, than in a friend. Of course, since men love themselves better than even their friends, or children, they must be still more blind to their own failings, still more slow to discern and acknowledge them. Should a man be counselor, witness, jury, and judge, in a case where his estate or his life was concerned, wou1d you not expect him to determine it in his own favor? But when a man sets himself to examine his own character, and to try his title to the heavenly inheritance, he is counselor, witness, jury, and judge, all in one; and, of course, he will, if possible, pronounce a favorable sentence. He will try himself by some easy rule; he will make the best excuse in his power for every thing that can be excused; he will keep some things entirely out of sight; he wil1 call his faults by the softest name which they can be made to bear; and if there be any thing which he can neither deny, nor overlook, he will ascribe it to the force of temptation, or the frailty of human nature, and plead that it is nothing worse than thousands are guilty of, who pass for honest men.

4. What the Scriptures call the deceitfulness of sin, is another cause which renders it extremely difficult for us to understand our errors. I need not tell you that vice can cloak itself with the garb of virtue, or that sin can assume the name and appearance of goodness. Nor need I inform you that actions derive their character from the motives which prompt us to perform them, so that the same action, which is good when prompted by a right motive, will become sinful when it proceeds from motives which are wrong. Now it is by no means easy for men to ascertain in all cases the real motives by which they are actuated. In consequence of the false names and fair disguises which sin assumes, and in which its deceitfulness consists, we may easily fancy that we are governed by right motives, when in fact we are not so, and thus class our sins among our virtues. For instance, a man may fancy that he is actuated by true zeal for God, when in reality it is nothing but a selfish zeal for his own party, or sinful anger against those who oppose him. We may fancy that we love Christians, when in fact we feel nothing but selfish affection for those of our own denomination.

We may flatter ourselves that we are truly charitable, when we give alms to the poor, and yet we may be really actuated by a desire of applause, or by a wish to do something which gratifies our pride, and makes us think more highly of ourselves. We may think that we feel a true filial fear of God, when we have nothing but that slavish fear of punishment, which makes the devils tremble before him. We may fancy that we are serving God, and aiming to glorify him, when in fact we are only serving and aiming to honor ourselves. We may fancy that we read and attend public worship with right views and feelings, when in fact we perform these duties merely from custom, or formality, or with a design to quiet our consciences. We may fancy that we are only prudent, industrious, and economical, when we are really influenced by that love of money which is the root of all evil, or that love of the world which proves us to be the enemies of God. Now in all these cases, that self-love which has been mentioned, and that partiality which results from it, will prompt us to decide in our own favor, and to conclude that our motives are good. Thus, as the Scriptures

inform us, men are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; and hence as sin communicates its own character to the sinful heart, the heart is said to be deceitful above all things. My friends, it is difficult to know thoroughly a deceitful man. How much more difficult must it be to know a heart which is deceitful above all things!

5. Another cause, which renders it exceedingly difficult, for men to acquire knowledge of their sins, is, the effects which sin produces upon their understandings and consciences. I need not tell you these faculties are the eyes of the soul, without which she can discern nothing. Now it is a most certain truth, that, just so far as Sin prevails in the heart and life, so far it puts out or darkens these eyes of the mind, with respect to all spiritual objects: so that it is always the case, that the more sinful a man really is, so much the less sinful does he appear to himself to be. The more faults he has, the fewer he can discover in himself. This may appear to some of you a paradoxical assertion, but however it may appear it is strictly true, as a moment's attention to the Scriptures will convince you. If you read the accounts there given us of different characters, you will find that the worst men ever seem to be most ignorant of their own faults, and most unwilling to confess and repent of their sins; while, on the contrary, those who were most eminently good, seem to have the worst opinion of themselves, and to be most ready to confess that they were the chief of sinners. And, my friends, is it not so still? Do not some of the worst characters, with whom you are acquainted, appear to think very highly of themselves? And are there not others whom you can justly accuse of no particular fault, who, so far as you can judge, regard themselves as exceedingly sinful? Now this apparently unaccountable difference is owing entirely to the effects of sin. When sin prevails in the heart, it sears the conscience, and darkens the understanding, so that sin is not perceived, and the unhappy, blinded wretch feels most innocent and secure, at the very moment, when he is most in danger. To use our Savior's expression, the light that is in him becomes darkness, how great then he adds; is that darkness. When this is the case, men, as the prophet expresses it, call evil good and good evil, and put darkness for light, and light for darkness. They can no more discover their own sins, than a blind man can discern spots of blood on his garment, or than dust can be perceived in a dark room. We may add in connection with these remarks. that the effect of habit is exceedingly great in rendering men insensible to their sins. Many things which shock us when first presented to our view, cease to affect us at all, after we become familiarized to them. Now men soon become familiarized to their own thoughts, feelings and conduct. They seem like a part of themselves, and, however wrong they may at first appear, they soon cease to shock or offend, and at length pass unnoticed and unperceived. The young soldier starts at the sight of bloodshed and carnage, but after a few battles he plunges his bayonet into the body of a fellow creature with as little emotion as an artificer hews a block of wood. Or, to take another comparison: Enter the mud-walled habitation of a savage, blackened with smoke, covered with filth of every kind, and half filled with the putrefying remains of his loathsome repasts, and endeavor to make him sensible how disgusting these things are, and to inspire him with the love of neatness and order. Could you succeed? Not at all. He sees nothing filthy, nothing disgusting, no want of neatness in his miserable and disgusting abode. Why? Because he is accustomed to it; and his blunted senses are not offended. My friends, it is the same with the sinner. Sin is the defilement, the pollution of the soul. In the sight of God and all holy beings, it is a thousand times more loathsome and disgusting, than any material filthiness can possibly be in ours. But the sinner has always lived in the midst of this moral pollution. He is therefore familiarized and accustomed to it. His spiritual senses, blunted and deadened, are not

offended, and of course, he does not perceive his deformity. He sees nothing loathsome, nothing wrong in his heart, when in the sight of God, it is like an open sepulchre, full of putridity and rottenness. Hence he hears of that fountain which is set open for uncleanness, of that blood which cleanses from all sin, with the same indifference that the savage would listen to a harangue on the benefits of personal and domestic neatness. This being the case, we need not be at a loss to know why it is so difficult to convince men of their sinfulness, to make them understand their errors. My impenitent hearers, this subject is, or ought to be, exceedingly interesting to you. It touches upon the very point, respecting which you are at issue with the Bible, upon the greatest difficulty which opposes your salvation. The point of dispute, the great question is, whether your sins are so numerous and aggravated, and whether your hearts are so entirely depraved, as the Scriptures represent them to be. I presume, if you were convinced that this representation is strictly true; if you were fully convinced that your hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; that they are opposed to God and all goodness, and unwilling to be reconciled to him, there would be no difficulty in the way of your assenting to all the doctrines of the gospel. You would then feel that it is perfectly just for God to condemn you; you would feel that your situation is dangerous and critical; you would feel your need of a Savior and the necessity of regeneration; and you would feel the need of spiritual and divine influences to effect this change. The great, the only question then is, are you entirely sinful, or are you not? The Scriptures, you must be sensible, seem at least to assert that you are. You, on the contrary, contend that you are not. But, my friends, methinks the remarks which have been made ought to excite at least a suspicion in your minds that you may be deceived in this respect. You have heard that it is exceedingly difficult for a man to understand his own errors; that we are extremely prone to be partial to ourselves, to judge too favorably of our own characters. You have heard, and you see that other men do this; you see many around you entirely blind to their own faults; you see that none appear to be sufficiently sensible of all their faults; you have heard how many causes combine to hide our sins from us; and you must be sensible that you arc exposed to the influence of all these causes. Is it not then possible, that you may be deceived; that you may have formed too favorable an opinion of your own characters? Will any one of you undertake to say, that he is wiser than all other men; that though they are blind to their faults, he can discover and has discovered all his own? My friends, if you dare not say this, you must allow it to be, at least possible, that after all your hearts may be as sinful, as much depraved, as the Scriptures represent them to be. You must allow that, perhaps, you are hateful and abominable in the sight of the holy, heart-searching God, and exposed to his everlasting displeasure. All your good opinions of yourselves may be nothing but the effects of secret pride and self delusion; and at the last day, when the discovery will come too late, you may find that you have deceived and destroyed yourselves. My friends, I entreat you to lay these things seriously to heart; for a mistake here will be, must be, fatal. Describing the feelings of penitent sinners, God says, Then shall ye loathe yourselves in your own sight, on account of your iniquities and abominations. But no man can loathe himself, or repent of his sins, in this manner, until he sees that his character and conduct are loathsome; and he who cannot repent, cannot be pardoned; for Christ has said, Except ye repent, ye shall perish. Let me then prevail upon you to bring your characters to a strict, impartial scrutiny, to try them by the law of God and to remember, during the trial, that there is no danger of forming too low an opinion of yourselves; that all the danger lies on the other side; that you will be exposed to the blinding influence of self-love, and many other causes, which will combine to draw from you too favorable a sentence. And when you have done

all, remember that, if your heart condemn you, God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things.

Chapter 42

S. LOVERS OF PLEASURE DESCRIBED AND WARNED

LOVERS OF PLEASURE DESCRIBED AND WARNED "Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" 2 Timothy 3:4

These words describe a character which is, alas! but too frequently found in this sinful world; a character too, which most men are apt to regard with a partial and favorable eye, especially when it is met with among the young. If nothing worse is known of a man, than that he is rather too fond of what are commonly called the innocent pleasures and amusements of life, he is considered by the bulk of mankind as a moral, amiable character, and almost good enough to be admitted into heaven; even though it may be evident from his whole conduct, that he is a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. It is evident from the context, however, that St. Paul, or rather the Holy Spirit by whom he was inspired, did not view this character with so favorable an eye. On the contrary, he classes those to whom it belongs, with the grossest and most notorious offenders; offenders, whose prevalence gives an aspect of peculiar danger to the age in which they live. This know, says he, that in the last days perilous times shall come; for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy; without natural affection, despisers of them that are good, fierce, incontinent, false accusers, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. From the company in which these lovers of pleasure are here placed, we may easily infer what the apostle thought of them, and what is thought of them by him whose message he brought.

Whether the perilous times, of which he speaks, have arrived, or not, we shall not pretend to determine; but certain it is, that very many are to be found among us, who, if we may judge from conduct, are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. To show, by a few simple marks, who belong to this number, is our present design.

I. This number includes all whose fondness for pleasure leads them to violate the commands of God. Nothing is more certain, or more universally known, than that men never willingly offend a person whom they love, for the sake of one whom they do not love. Equally certain is it, that when men are constrained to give up one of two things, they always give up that which they love the least. This being the case, it is undeniably evident, that all who provoke, or sin against God, for the sake of any pleasure whatever, do love that pleasure more than God. Now there are various ways in which men may sin against God in the pursuit of pleasure. In the first place, they may, like our first parents, sin by indulging in forbidden pleasures, in those pleasures which are in themselves sinful. Among these, must be reckoned the pleasures, if they may be called such, which result from gluttony, intemperance, and sensuality: for these are all most pointedly forbidden by the word of God. Revellings also, or assemblies for riotous dissipation, are expressly mentioned among the works of the flesh; and even foolish talking and jesting are forbidden by name. These, therefore, and all similar pleasures, which are expressly forbidden by the word of God, are in themselves, on all occasions and in all circumstances, sinful; and those who pursue them are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. In the second place, pleasures and pursuits which are not in themselves

sinful, or not expressly forbidden, may become sinful by being pursued in an inordinate, improper manner, and by leading us to neglect duties which are expressly enjoined. This is the case with all the pleasures of this life, even with those that are in themselves most innocent; such as the pleasures resulting from friendship, from literary pursuits, or from the enjoyments of the family circle. All these, though innocent in themselves, may and often do become sinful, in consequence of interfering with our duties to God and man, or of being pursued in an inordinate, unseasonable, or improper manner. For instance, we are expressly commanded to redeem the time, to pray without ceasing, to glorify God in all that we do, to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Christ. Consequently, the neglect of any of these duties is a sin, a breach of the divine precepts, and therefore, if we indulge even in the most innocent pleasures, in such a manner as to waste our time, to lose opportunities of glorifying God, to foster a spirit of self indulgence, to encroach upon the season which ought to be allotted to prayer, or to unfit us for the performance of that duty, it is certain that we pursue pleasure in a sinful manner; and if we allow ourselves in such indulgences, if this conduct is in any manner habitual, it incontestably proves that we are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. In the same number must be included,

II. All who are led by a fondness for pleasure to indulge in amusements which they suspect may be wrong, or which they do not feel certain are right. When we love any person supremely, we are careful to avoid, not only those things which we know will displease him, but such as we suspect may do it. We always think it best, in such cases, to be on the safe side, and to avoid everything which we do not feel confident will not be displeasing. It is the same, with respect to God. Those who love him supremely will avoid, not only what they know to be sinful, but what they suspect may be sinful; they will abstain not only from evil, but from the very appearance of evil; and if they are not certain that any proposed indulgence is wrong, yet if they do not know it to be right, they will reject it. They will say, there can certainly be no sin in not pursuing this offered pleasure, but there may be something wrong in pursuing it; and thus God may be displeased, and we will therefore keep on the safe side, and not even incur the risk of offending him, for the sake of any earthly gratification whatever. If any are disposed to consider this as unreasonable and unnecessary strictness, we would refer them to the words of St. Paul, in the 14th chapter of the epistle to the Romans. He there solemnly assures us, that Whatsoever is not of faith is sin; that is, as is evident from the context, whatever a man does, which he is not fully persuaded is right, is sinful to him, even if it were not sinful in itself. And again he says, Whosoever thinketh anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean; that is, if a man suspects any indulgence to be wrong, it is wrong to him, for in partaking of it he acts against his conscience, and feels self-condemned.

All, therefore, who indulge in pleasures which they suspect may be wrong; all whose consciences condemn them in the silence of the night, after returning from a party of pleasure; all who are obliged to use many endeavors to quiet their consciences, and to persuade themselves that there is nothing wrong in their conduct, certainly pursue pleasure in a sinful manner, and are therefore lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; since they will pursue pleasure, though they do not know but in doing it they are offending him. Happy is he, saith the apostle, who condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. But these persons do condemn themselves, in the very things that they allow. And again he says, He that doubteth is damned if he eat; that is, he that doubts whether anything be right, and yet will practice it, is condemned by his own conscience, and will be condemned of God, unless he repents.

III. Those are lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God, who find more satisfaction in the pursuit and enjoyment of worldly pleasure, than they do in his service. That the more we love any object, the more satisfaction we find in its enjoyment, all will allow. This being the case, if we can ascertain in what a man finds the greatest pleasure, we can determine at once what he most loves; for no man is a hypocrite in his pleasures. To apply this remark to the case before us: If a man finds more delight in the service and enjoyment of God, than in earthly pleasures; if he forsakes them all to retire into his closet and converse with his Maker and Redeemer; if he finds no book like the Bible, no place like God's house, no day like the Sabbath, no employment like that of prayer and praise, no society like that of God's people, then it is evident that he loves all pleasures less than God. On the contrary, if he finds more satisfaction in worldly than in religious pleasures; if he prefers a history, a play, or a novel, to the Bible; if he feels happier in a small select party, in a theatre or ballroom, than he does in his closet, or in the house of God; in a word, if he cannot seriously say to his Maker, Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee; then it is as evident as anything can be, that he is a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. There is no more doubt respecting his true character, than if he were openly immoral and profane, or than there will be at the judgment day.

Lastly: All who are deterred from immediately embracing the Saviour, and commencing a religious life, by an unwillingness to renounce the pleasures of the world, are most certainly lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. That men are always ready to renounce any object, for the sake of something which they consider more valuable, all will allow. Consequently, when Christ invites sinners to come through him to God; when God seconds the invitation by saying, Come ye out from among them, and touch not the unclean thing, it is evident that all who refuse or delay to comply, from an unwillingness to renounce their worldly pleasures, are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. There is nothing but this preference of pleasure to God, that can possibly prevent them. Christ has opened the way for them to come to God; he offers to lead them to his Father, and to plead in their behalf. But they will not comply, though heaven is the reward of compliance, and eternal wretchedness the consequence of a refusal. How very much then must they love pleasure more than God, since these powerful inducements cannot persuade them to forsake their pleasures and come to him.

Having thus endeavored to show to whom the character mentioned in our text belongs, we shall proceed to show, in the next place, that, whatever may be thought of them by the world, or whatever they may think of themselves, they are in reality in a most sinful, guilty, and dangerous condition. That the apostle considered them as sinful, in no common degree, is evident, as has been already observed, from the company in which he has placed them. It is still farther evident from the description which he gives of them in some of the verses succeeding the text. For instance, he there informs us, that such are persons of corrupt minds. That they must be so will be evident on a moment's reflection; for what can be a more satisfactory proof of a wretchedly corrupt state of mind, in a rational, immortal being, than a preference of unsatisfying, transitory, sinful pleasures; to his Creator; to a Being of infinite loveliness, excellence and perfection, the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift? Those who are guilty of this are idolators in the worst sense of the term. Idolatry is a breach of the first and great command, Thou shaft have no other gods before me; thou shaft love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. Now these persons have another god before the true God; they have an idol which they

love more than they do him; an idol, to which they sacrifice not only their time, their attention, their talents, but even their immortal souls; an idol, too, of the most worthless and contemptible kind. Though they are urged and entreated by the tender mercies of God, not to be conformed to this world, but to present themselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is their most reasonable service; yet they obstinately and ungratefully refuse to comply, and choose rather to sacrifice themselves on the altar of worldly pleasure, thus robbing God of his due, and ruining the souls he has given them, for the loss of which the whole world can make no compensation. Well, then, may it be said, that they are persons of corrupt minds. In the second place, the apostle informs us, that they resist the truth. This they must do, for their deeds are evil. Christ assures us, that every one who doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. Such persons hate the truth, because the truth condemns and exposes their sinful but beloved pleasures. Its natural tendency is to separate them from their pleasures, and lead them to God; but they resist this tendency; they refuse to give up their sinful pleasures, and labor in various ways to persuade themselves that they are innocent, and that no evil consequences can result from their pursuit. Hence they resist all attempts to turn them from the error of their ways, and all the convictions which at times arise in their minds; the preached word does them no good; they quarrel with those truths which condemn them, as unreasonably strict and severe, and the language of their hearts is, We have loved our idols, and after them we will go.

Hence, thirdly, they are represented as despisers of good men. They consider such men whose conduct reproves them, as the enemies of their happiness, and ridicule them as rigid, morose, superstitious or hypocritical persons, who are needlessly strict and scrupulous, and who will neither enjoy the world themselves, nor allow others to do it. Hence, there are perhaps no characters who hate and despise the truly pious, more bitterly, than those who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, This is to be expected; for the royal Preacher has long since informed us, that as an unjust man is an abomination to the just, so he that is upright in his way is an abomination to the wicked. The sensual, voluptuous Sadducees, those ancient lovers of pleasure, hated and despised Christ and his disciples, even more, if possible, than did the hypocritical, self-righteous Pharisees.

Lastly, the persons we are describing are represented as being dead in trespasses and sins. She that liveth in pleasure, is dead while she liveth; and this is equally true of both sexes. They are dead, as it respects the great end of their existence; dead to every thing that is good, dead in the sight of a holy God, loathsome to him as a corpse is to us, and as unfit for the society of the living Jehovah, as the naturally dead are for the society of the living. You need not be told, that, however dear the persons of our children and friends are to us, while living, yet after they are dead, after the animating, life-supporting spirit has departed, we wish to bury them out of our sight. They cannot then enjoy our presence, nor can we take the least pleasure in theirs; on the contrary, they soon become intolerably loathsome and shocking; and were we unable to remove them, they would soon render our habitations insupportable. Thus, though God loves his creatures as such, yet when they become dead in sin, he ceases to love them; they become exceedingly hateful in his sight, even as a corpse is in ours. Nor are they any more capable of enjoying him. To use his own language, his soul loathes them, and their souls abhor him. Never, therefore, while thus dead in sin, can they be admitted into heaven. They are evidently unfit for it; they could not enjoy it; for there, none of their beloved pleasures will be found. Besides, God will no more suffer them to

enter heaven, than we would suffer the fittest apartments in our houses to be filled with the putrefying corpses of the dead; for heaven is the habitation of his holiness and glory, and he has solemnly declared, that nothing shall enter it that defileth. They, therefore, who love pleasure more than they love God, will not, cannot be admitted into heaven, unless they repent, and wash away their defilement in the blood of Christ. And if they are not admitted into heaven, there is but one other place to which they can go at death, and that place will be their eternal habitation.

Such is the character, and such will be the inevitable doom of all who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. This being the case, it is surely of infinite importance, that we would ascertain whether this is our character. Permit me, then, with the utmost tenderness, and with a most anxious solicitude for your best interests, your true pleasure, to ask all of you, especially the young, Are not some of you lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? Do none of you indulge in pleasures which are in themselves sinful, which tend to ruin you for this world as well as for the next, and which are most clearly forbidden in the word of God? If not, and I world hope this is the case, do none of you indulge in the pursuit of what are called innocent pleasures, in such a manner as leads to sin, to sins of omission at least; in such a manner as leads you to waste precious time, to utter innumerable idle words, to neglect watchfulness, self-denial and prayer, and unfit you for the right performance of these duties? Are you not often in places and engaged in scenes, in which you would not wish the day of judgment or the hour of death to find you? In a word, do you not pursue pleasure in a way which is inconsistent with doing every thing to God's glory, with making preparation for death, with obeying the commands of Christ, and with securing the salvation of your souls? Do none of you indulge in pleasures which you suspect are not entirely innocent, for which your consciences reprove you after you return from them, and which you sometimes find it difficult to justify, even to yourselves? Do you not find more satisfaction in these pleasures than in the service and enjoyment of God; and are you not deterred from complying with your convictions, and immediately commencing a religious life, by an unwillingness to give up these fascinating, but pernicious and ruinous pleasures?

Yes, my friends, you cannot but know, and I know that this is the case with some of you; and I, yet not I, but the word of God declares, that all with whom it is the case, are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. Yes, you love these irrational, transitory, unsatisfying pleasures better than the God who made you, better than the Saviour who died for you, better than the salvation of your own souls, better than all the joys of heaven. Hence you are dead while you live, dead in trespasses and sins, dead to everything good, dead to the great object for which you were created, dead in the sight of God, and utterly unfit for admission into heaven. Hence, also, you resist the truth. This is the reason that the preaching of the gospel does you no good. You are often in the house of God, you hear what is said; you appear solemn, and perhaps at times, are affected by the truth, so that one would think you, like the young ruler, not far from the kingdom of heaven. But you go from the house of God. The world resumes its fatal power over your minds. Your love of pleasure revives. The enchantress waves her magic wand, and beckons you to some of the various temples where she is worshipped. You obey the signal. Your inclinations stifle the voice of conscience, and hurry you away. I see them carry you to some resort of pleasure, falsely so called; there I see some of you engaged in gay and trifling conversation, which banishes all serious thoughts from your own minds, and from the minds of those with whom you converse.

I see others led to places where the gaming table is spread, where the sound of the viol is heard, where the circling glass is employed to drown reflection, and brace up the drooping spirits in the pursuit of pleasure. I hear the plausible arguments, the entreaties, the sneers and sarcasm which are employed to overcome the firmness and banish the scruples of those, who are at first unwilling to join in the mad career. I see and no longer wonder, that the truth is resisted. I no longer wonder that a preached gospel is rendered ineffectual. I no longer wonder that so few are rescued from the whirlpool of pleasure, or that I see its fatal flood strewed with the wrecks of immortal souls. I rather wonder that any escape; that I see some who have reached the shore, and while with a joyful surprise, I hear them singing the praises of their great Deliverer, I am constrained to cry, Truly, this is the finger of God! For what power, short of his, can rescue any from these bewitching scenes, where the Tempter, in the mask of Pleasure, spreads his most subtle and fatal snares! These are the scenes where he carries on, with the greatest success, the diabolical work of temptation and death. These are the places where thought is banished; where religion is forgotten, where God, and death and eternity are kept out of sight, where conviction is stifled, where conscience is seared, where the heart hardened, where the good resolutions, made in a serious hour, are broken; where the young and yet unhardened sinner is gradually trained up to vice and infidelity; where the ruin of millions of immortal souls has been finally sealed. This being the case, we appeal to yourselves, my friends, whether we ought to keep silence, when we see many for whose souls we watch, as one that must give an account, flocking to these scenes of temptation and ruin? No, we cannot, we dare not be silent. Though you will perhaps resent this attack on your favorite pleasures, and consider us as your enemy because are tell you the truth; yet whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, we must speak, and give you warning from God. Not that we hope that our unassisted endeavors or warnings will avail. No, we know too well the strength of your attachment to those pleasures, to hope this. We know too well the specious names by which their deformity is veiled, and the plausible arguments by which the application of these names is justified. Once we thought that these arguments were conclusive, that these specious names were properly applied; that pleasures which displease and dishonor God, waste precious time, and lead to the neglect of duty and the ruin of the soul, might be called innocent pleasures. Yes, with shame I confess that I once believed this. But it was all an error, a delusion resulting from that dizzy whirl of mind, that stupefaction of the nobler powers of the soul, which is produced by circling round the vortex of worldly amusement. That Power who has convinced me of my mistake, is equally able to convince and save you. This is all my hope, all my dependence, and to this Power I look for aid, while from the shore of this fatal, irresistible whirlpool, I call to those whom it is still sweeping away. Help me, ye people of God, with your prayers. Hear and help thy servant, O thou prayer-hearing, wonder-working God, while in thy name he endeavors to pluck thy creatures as brands from eternal burnings.

Ye creatures of the Most High! ye immortal spirits! ye probationers for eternity! listen to this call, to the voice of Jehovah. How long will ye continue to be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? How long continue to circle round that vortex which draws its wretched captives into the gulf that has no bottom; how long lie buried in slumber and death, dreaming of pleasure, while your Creator is displeased, while your Saviour is neglected, while death is approaching, while eternity is at the door, and your unprepared spirits are momentarily exposed to endless perdition! What meanest thou, O sleeper! to slumber while this is thy condition! Is it a time for mirth, when the Judge stands before the door, crying, Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep! Awake, then,

thou that sleepest; escape for thy life; look not behind thee, renounce thy vain pleasures, deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Christ. Say not, my pleasures are too dear to part with. I know they are dear, dear to you as a right hand or a right eye. But what then? It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two eyes, to be cast into hell fire. Say not, if we renounce our pleasures, we shall never more be happy. Rather you will never be happy till you do renounce them, and seek happiness where alone it is to be found. Were the Samaritans unhappy when they had renounced sinful pleasures and embraced the cross of Christ? No; there was great joy in that city. Was the Ethiopian nobleman unhappy, after he had believed on a crucified Redeemer? No; he went on his way rejoicing. Renounce your idolatrous love of pleasure, and this joy will be yours. Enter the ways of wisdom, and you will find them ways of pleasantness. Cease to drink at your broken cisterns which can hold no water, and you shall drink of those rivers of pleasures which flow forever at the right hand of God. Imitate the example of Christ, who began early to say, I must be about my Father's business, and you shall have that rest, that peace which he gives, and rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Do any say, we would gladly renounce our unsatisfying pleasures, and follow Christ, but we feel unable to do so. We fear that when the hour of temptation comes, we shall forget and break our resolutions, and return to the world! My friends, the power of Christ can render you victorious over the strongest temptations. His grace is sufficient for you; and if you can consent that he should take away that inordinate fondness for pleasure that enslaves you, he will do it. You perhaps recollect that, in the account we gave you last Sabbath, it was mentioned, that when the young were persuaded to renounce their vain amusements, a glorious revival of religion soon followed. If you could be persuaded to imitate their example, perhaps the consequences would be similar. Will you not make the experiment, at least for one month! Will you not for one month, one little month, say No, to every call of sinful pleasure, and devote yourselves to the pursuit of religion? Is this too much time to give to the salvation of your souls? Too much to give to him who gave you being; too much to give to that Saviour, who gave his blood for your redemption, and whose language is, My son, give me thine heart. My dying, yet immortal hearers, will you not grant him this small favor? If you still hesitate, still feel undecided, let me entreat you when you go from this house to repair to your closets, and there lay open the Bible before you; bring to your minds the solemn hour of death, and the awful scenes beyond it, and with these scenes full in your view, survey your past lives, consider how you will wish they had been spent, when your last hour arrives; and then, with the eye of God upon you, and with your eye upon the judgment seat, decide whether you will follow Christ or your pleasures.

Chapter 43

S. Love to CHRIST indespensable

Love to CHRIST indespensable

"Jesus with to Simon Peter, Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, feed my lambs." John 21:15. have in this chapter a particular account of an interview between our Saviour, and some of his disciples after his resurrection. Of the disciples, present at this interview, Peter was one. The shameful manner in which he had denied his master, you, doubtless, recollect. Though he had unfeignedly repented of his sin, and, in consequence, obtained pardon, his Master thought proper on this occasion to remind him of it again. With this view he addressed to him the question in our text; and as Peter had thrice denied that he knew him, he thrice repeated the question, and thrice drew from him the declaration, Lord thou knowest that I love thee. And you will observe, my hearers, that, while thus examining this backsliding disciple, he asked him no other question. He did not inquire what Peter believed, or whether he had repented; for he well knew that, where love is present, faith and repentance cannot be absent. The question before us is then, evidently, in our Saviour's view, a most important question. And were he now present, it would probably be the only question, or at least, the first question, which he would ask of each of us. If any one present wished for admission to his church, his table, nothing more would be indispensably necessary to his admission, than an ability to answer this question with truth in the affirmative. Nay more, this is, in effect, the only question which Christ will ask us at the judgment day, the question on our answer to which our destiny will depend; for the language of inspiration, the word by which we shall be judged is, Grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity; but if any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be accursed when the Lord comes; and the Judge himself has expressly declared that no man, who does not love him more than he loves any other object, can be his disciple. My design in the present discourse is, to show why the exercise of supreme love to Christ is thus indispensably necessary to our salvation.

1. The exercise of love to Christ is indispensably necessary, because the want of it proves that we do not, in the smallest degree, resemble him; proves that we are destitute of goodness, and, of course, entirely sinful. It may with truth be asserted, that no man acquainted with the New Testament, who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, can be a good man, or possess the smallest degree of love or desire for goodness. It will be readily allowed that Christ was perfectly good. Every good man will, in some degree, resemble Christ. Now those who resemble each other, will, if they are acquainted, love each other. Place good men in the same town, and as soon as they know each other, they will be friends. Or place them at a distance, and let them become acquainted with each other's character by report, without any personal intercourse; and they will feel a mutual affection and wish to meet. But if all who resemble each other, love each other, then every good man loves good men; much more, will every good man love Christ, who is goodness itself, goodness personified, goodness in its most attractive form. If he loves goodness in the stream, much more will he love it in the fountain. He then who does not love Christ, does not, in any degree, resemble him; does not possess the smallest share of goodness; and, as no one can

really desire what he does not love, does not even desire to be good. Agreeably, we find that all good beings in heaven, and on earth, have ever loved Christ, so far as they have had opportunity to become acquainted with his character.

2. Love to Christ is indispensably necessary, because without it we cannot perform those duties which he requires of his disciples and which are necessary to salvation. For instance, we are required to repent of the sin we have committed against him; but to do this without love is evidently impossible. Can you, my hearers, mourn, can you feel truly grieved, in consequence of having offended a person whom you do not love? You may, indeed, feel a selfish sorrow, if you fear that punishment will follow the offence; but this is not that godly sorrow which works repentance, and which Christ requires. No; when a child mourns that he has grieved his parents, it is because he loves them. When you feel grieved in consequence of having offended a friend, it is because he is your friend. Love then, love to Christ, is an essential part of those emotions which the inspired writers call a broken heart and contrite spirit. Again, we are required to believe, to confide, to trust in Christ. But can we confide in a being, can we trust our all for time and eternity in the hands of a being, whom we do not love? Can a dying man commit his immortal soul with pleasure to the care of one whom he does not love? Can we even firmly believe the promises, and rest with implicit confidence on the assurances, of one whom we do not love? Evidently not. Where there is no love, there will be want of confidence, there will be suspicion. Indeed, the only reason why sinners find it so difficult to believe in Christ is, they do not love him.

Farther; we are required to obey the commands of Christ, to be his servants, his subjects. Now obedience to many of his commands, involves the performance of duties which seem disagreeable, and submission to sacrifices, which we are naturally unwilling to make. He commands us, for instance, to deny ourselves, to take up the cross, to crucify our sinful affections and desires, to part with everything cheerfully at his call, to make sacrifices, which he compares to cutting off aright hand and plucking out a right eye. Now we may be willing to do all this for the sake of one whom we supremely love; for love makes hard things easy, and bitter things sweet. But can any man feel willing to submit to all this for the sake of one whom he does not love? Can any man prefer the interest of Christ to his own, and the honor of Christ to his own reputation, unless he loves Christ more than he loves himself? Yet this Christ expressly requires of all who would be his disciples. In addition to this, we are required to imitate Christ. We are told that he has set us an example that we should follow his steps. But can any one strive to imitate a person whom he does not love? In other words, can he sincerely endeavor to acquire a character with which he is not pleased, in which he sees nothing beautiful or lovely?

Again; we are commanded to rejoice in Christ. Rejoice in the Lord always, says the Apostle, and again I say, rejoice. But how is it possible to rejoice in a being for whom we feel no affection? We can easily rejoice in a friend; but by what unheard of process shall we bring ourselves to rejoice in one whom we do not love? Farther, we are commanded to remember Christ, to commemorate at his table his dying love. But how hard it is to retain in our memories, an object which has no place in our affections. How little pleasure can we find in coming to the table of one whom we regard with indifference? We may indeed, bring our bodies; but our hearts will be absent, and the whole service will be uninteresting to ourselves, and no better than solemn mockery in the estimation of Christ.

Finally, we are commanded to love the friends, the disciples of Christ, and to love them for his sake. But to obey this command without love to Christ is evidently impossible. We cannot love children for the sake of their parents, unless we first love the parents; nor can we love the disciples of Christ for his sake, unless we love Christ himself. It appears, then, that to obey any of Christ's commands without love, is impossible. We may add, that, even if it were possible to obey him without love, our obedience would be unacceptable and worthless; for he searches the heart, he knows what is in man, he cannot be deceived by mere external services and professions, nor is it possible that he should be pleased with them, since he sees them to be insincere.

3. The exercise of supreme love to Christ is indispensably necessary, because without it we cannot relish the society of his disciples, or enjoy communion with them, or consistently unite with them in religious duties. The Apostle John informs those to whom he wrote, that his design in writing his epistle was, to bring others to the enjoyment of fellowship with himself and his fellow disciples. These things declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. Now communion consists in a joint participation of the same views and feelings. That we may enjoy communion with Christians, then, it is necessary that our views and feelings should resemble theirs. But they have exalted views of Christ, and feel supreme love for him. He himself informs us that he has not a disciple in the world, who does not love him more than he loves any other object. How then can one who does not love Christ, relish the society of his disciples, or enjoy communion with them, or unite in their religious services? How unpleasant must be the situation of such a man when surrounded by a circle of lively Christians. Their hearts glow with love to an object in which he sees no beauty. They speak to him of the amiableness and excellence of the Saviour, but he knows not what they mean. Yet he must endeavor to say something, though he has nothing to say; or else maintain a sullen silence, and thus excite doubts of his sincerity. In short, he must feel like a deaf man at a concert of music, or like a blind man in a gallery of pictures, surrounded by others whose senses are gratified and whose admiration is excited. It is the same, when he attempts to unite with Christians in the performance of religious duties. They thank the Saviour, but he feels no gratitude. They praise the Saviour, but he sees nothing to admire; their hearts ascend to heaven on the wings of devotion, but his remains behind. He may indeed find himself able to converse with them on some religious subjects, to contend eagerly for some truths, and to declaim fluently respecting doctrines; but when the beauties and glories of Immanuel are the theme of conversation; when any affection for him is expressed, he must either be silent, or say what his heart does not feel, what it never felt.

Once more; supreme love to Christ is indispensably necessary, because without it we could not possibly be happy in heaven. This, my friends, is capable of strict demonstration. You will allow that no man can be happy who is where he does not wish to be. No man can wish to be in a place where he is separated from all that he loves. But the man who does not love Christ, would find nothing in heaven to love; would find himself separated from all that he loves. All the objects which he ever loved, all the pursuits, employments, and society in which he ever found pleasure, he leaves behind him when he leaves this world. He would, therefore, feel like a stranger in heaven; he would look back to this world as his home; he would wish to return here, for where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also; and as that wish could not be gratified, he would not be happy. But this is not all. To a man who does not love Christ, the society and employments of heaven would

appear exceedingly disagreeable. We have already seen that such a man cannot enjoy the society or cordially unite in the devotions of Christians on earth. For similar reasons, he would find it still more difficult to enjoy the society, or join in the praises of heaven. All who reside there love the Saviour perfectly. They feel and express for him the most ardent and intense affection. Their happiness very much consists in seeing, serving, and praising him. Now what happiness could be found in such society and employments, by a man who does not love the Lord Jesus? You well know that nothing can be more irksome, than to praise what we do not admire; to express ardent affection, when we feel the most perfect indifference.

Yet this would be the situation of one in heaven, who does not love his Redeemer. He must, through endless ages, praise what he does not admire, and profess love which he does not feel; and what is still worse, he must utter these praises and professions to one who knows their insincerity. It would be sufficiently painful to flatter one whom we do not love, even if we could deceive him by our flatteries, and induce him to believe we were sincere. But to flatter one whom we cannot deceive; to stand and utter lies to him, while we are conscious that he knows them to be lies, this would be misery indeed. But it is needless to enlarge. Nothing can be more evident than the fact, that a man who does not love Christ supremely would be unhappy in heaven. Indeed every such person, who is at all acquainted with his own heart; must be conscious of the fact. You doubtless recollect the unhappy man who was executed in this town for murder, about ten years since. While in his dungeon, after listening to the description which inspired writers give of heaven, he told me that he should rather remain in that dungeon through eternity, than go to such a heaven as he had heard described.

Now I appeal to those of you who do not love the Lord Jesus, whether your feelings are not in some degree at least similar to his? If you hesitate to admit this, permit me to make the following supposition. Suppose some town in our country should be made, as nearly as possible, to resemble heaven. Suppose all the inhabitants without exception, to be, not only pious, but eminently so. Suppose all worldly amusements, all political discussions, all commercial transactions, all secular conversation, to be banished from among them; while the presence of Christ should be enjoyed in a peculiar manner, and all the employment should be to love and praise and serve him? Would you joyfully choose that town, in preference to all other places, for your earthly residence? Could you, while retaining your present character, while destitute of the love of Christ, cheerfully leave everything behind, and live happily in such a place? If you reply, No, then is it much more evident that you could not be happy in heaven. If you reply, Yes, we could be happy in such a situation, — I ask, why then do you not, so far as is possible, live such a life of religion here? Why are not those who appear to love Christ most sincerely, and to praise him most ardently, your chosen companions? In a word, if you could be happy in heaven, why do you not seek happiness by living a heavenly life on earth? From what has been said you may learn, my hearers, why the inspired writers lay so much stress on the exercise of love to Christ; why he requires it of all his disciples. It is not for his own sake. It is not because our love can add any thing to his happiness. But it is because that, unless we love him, we are destitute of goodness, and of all love and desire for goodness; and are unable to obey his commands, to enjoy communion with his people, or to be happy with him in heaven. The commands which require us to love Christ are not then mere arbitrary commands; but are founded in the nature of things, and obedience to them is necessary. From this subject we may learn,

1. In what respects many characters highly esteemed among men are deficient, essentially deficient, in the sight of God. I allude to persons whose dispositions appear to be amiable, whose morals are correct, whose religious opinions are perhaps agreeable to truth, and who pay a decent respect, to religious institutions. Can you not easily conceive, my friends, that a man may possess all these qualities and yet be destitute of love to Christ? Do you not know among your acquaintances many persons who have pleasing manners, amiable dispositions, and who live moral lives, and yet do not appear to feel any love to Christ? Are there not some such persons among your acquaintances, whom you would be surprised to hear speaking of the Saviour with affectionate warmth, or expressing grief for having neglected him, or urging others to love him? Do you not perceive that a great alteration must take place even in these moral, amiable persons, before they can sincerely adopt the language, in which Paul and other primitive Christians express their affection for the Saviour; and still more, before they can cordially unite with the redeemed in crying, Worthy is the Lamb to receive glory, and honor, and power, and blessing? If so, you surely cannot blame us for asserting that something more than morality is necessary; that a man may be what is called a good moral man, and yet be no Christian; and that a radical change of heart is necessary to moral men, as well as to immoral and profane. Nor will you complain if, adopting the language of the poet, we exclaim, "Talk they of morals? O thou bleeding Lamb!

Thou Maker of new morals for mankind; — The grand morality is love of thee." The young ruler mentioned in the gospel appears to have possessed all the qualities mentioned above; but yet he lacked one thing, essential to his Maker’s approbation, and his own happiness.

2. Is the question in our text the great important question which Christ addresses to all, and on our ability to answer which satisfactorily every thing depends? Permit me, then, to address this question to everyone who wishes to ascertain the reality of his title to an admission into Christ’s visible church, to an approach to his table, to the heavenly inheritance. Does any one present wish to know whether he is prepared for admission to the visible church? Christ, who keeps the door, says to him, Lovest thou met If thou dost, enter freely. Does any one already in the church, who has lost his first love, or practically denied his master, wish to know whether he is forgiven, whether, notwithstanding this conduct, Christ will make him welcome to his table? The only question to be answered is, Lovest thou me? And if any one wishes to know whether he is prepared for heaven, the question is still the same. Will you say, it is impossible for anyone to answer this question decisively? It appears from our text, that this is a mistake. Peter could say to his heart-searching Lord, when his penetrating eye was fixed full upon him, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. If Peter could thus certainly know, and confidently assert, that he loved Immanuel; all who sincerely love him may say the same, unless their love is so faint that they cannot perceive it. And O how happy is the man who can truly say this! With what delight must he approach Christ’s table! With what confidence can he meet death! with what triumphant joy may he join with the Apostle in exclaiming, —I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.

Chapter 44

S. MAN IN HIS ORIGINAL, AND IN HIS LAPSED STATE.

MAN IN HIS ORIGINAL, AND IN HIS LAPSED STATE.

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but theyhave sought out many inventions. — Ecclesiastes 7:29.

I NEED not inform those of you who are acquainted with the contents of scripture, that in this book Solomon has recorded the result of numerous trials and experiments which he had made in searching after happiness and inquiring after truth. His success in these pursuits does not appear to have been very flattering. After making a fair trial, whether any or all worldly objects could afford happiness, he found nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit. Nor could he boast of much greater success in his inquiries after truth; I said I will be wise, but it was far from me. I applied my heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness. But, here again, he found himself entangled and perplexed by innumerable questions which he could not answer, and difficulties which he could not solve; so that at last he was obliged to sit down content with the discovery of one truth; a truth however of great importance; a truth indeed, which if rightly understood, will go far to elucidate most of the religious questions by which men are perplexed, and respecting which they are divided in opinion; Lo, this only have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions. This passage, which contains the result of the wise man’s inquiries, and the sum of his discoveries, includes two propositions I. God made man upright.

II. Men have sought out many inventions. To illustrate and establish these two propositions is my present design.

1. God made man upright. This assertion evidently refers to the nature of man as he was originally created. In other words, it refers to our first parents, the progenitors of mankind; for we are informed in the account given us of the creation, that God created man in his own image, after his own likeness; and that, after the work of creation was finished, God saw that all was very good. Man then, at his creation, was not only good, but very good, perfectly good. he was, as one observes, a miniature picture of his Maker; for he was made in the image, and after the likeness of the holy God. These passages evidently teach the same truth which is contained in our text, that mankind, or human nature was originally made upright.

Let us consider more particularly the import of this term. The words, upright and righteous, literally signify agreeable, or conformable to rule. Our text then teaches us that man was made in a state of perfect conformity to some rule. If it is asked what rule? I answer, the law of God, for this is the only perfect, immutable and eternal rule to which God requires his creatures to be conformed, and in conformity to which, rectitude or uprightness consists. I say that this is a perfect, eternal and immutable rule; for we are assured that the law of God is perfect; that it is holy, just and good; and that though heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from it, till all be fulfilled. Man then was created in a state of perfect conformity to the law of God. If it be asked in

what this state of conformity consists, or what it implies; I answer, it implies the possession of an understanding perfectly acquainted with the law; of a memory which perfectly retains all its precepts; of a conscience which always faithfully applies it; of a heart which perfectly loves it; and a will perfectly obedient and submissive to its authority; and of an imagination which presents to the mind no images, but such as ought to be entertained. If either of these be wanting, man cannot be perfectly upright, or, in other words, perfectly conformed to the divine law. This assertion it will be necessary to illustrate and prove more particularly.

1. A state of perfect conformity to the divine law implies the possession of an understanding perfectly acquainted with that law. This, I conceive, is too evident to be denied; since no being can act in conformity to a law, or regulate his conduct by a law, with which he is not acquainted. Man then, at his creation, was endued with such an understanding. In the language of Scripture, the divine law was put in his mind. He was not like St. Paul, alive without the law, but alive with the law. He was perfectly acquainted both with the letter and the spirit of it; and saw with the greatest clearness its nature, spirituality, strictness, and extent; so that the path of duty lay, in all cases, as plainly before the eye of his mind, as the path from this house to our habitations ever lay before our bodily eyes. In a word, he so perfectly understood what was required of him, and had such a perfect knowledge of truth and falsehood, of right and wrong, that it was impossible for him, while he remained in his original state, ever to transgress ignorantly, or by mistake. Agreeably, we find knowledge expressly mentioned by the inspired writers as one thing in which the image of God, that image in which man was created, consists.

2. In the next place, a state of perfect uprightness, or conformity to the divine law, implies a memory which faithfully retains all its precepts. The necessity of such a memory is obvious. We cannot regulate our conduct by a law not remembered, any more than by a law which does not exist. Just so far as any of its precepts are forgotten, they must cease to affect us. Memory is the storehouse of the mind, in which all its treasures are laid up; and when any thing fades out of the memory, it no longer exists in the mind. Man then, was originally created with a memory, which faithfully retained every jot and tittle of the divine law, as wax retains the impression of a seal; so that every precept was ready at hand to direct his conduct, on all occasions, and in all circumstances. Of course, while he remained as God created him, it was impossible that he should ever transgress the law through forgetfulness.

3. In the third place, a state of perfect conformity to the divine law implies a conscience which always faithfully applies it. As we have of late repeatedly reminded you, the office of conscience is to apply to our conduct the rule which is given it; and to pass sentence upon us according to that rule. The rule given to man at his creation, was the divine law, and as he perfectly understood and remembered this law, his conscience was ever guided by an infallible rule; and this rule it was always ready to apply. Memory gave her the words, in which the rule was expressed; and understanding gave the exact meaning of those words, so that she could never pronounce an erroneous sentence, never lead man to think, as St. Paul afterwards did before his conversion, that he was verily doing God service when in reality he was violating his commands. Nor did conscience ever slumber or lose any portion of her quick sensibility to right and wrong, but was ever awake, susceptible, and active; so that man always found her saying, as a voice within him, This is the way, walk thou in it. And as man, while he retained his original character, always perfectly complied with her admonitions, conscience, of course, always approved his conduct.

Their constant language was, Well done, good and faithful servant; and as her voice was the voice of God, so her approving sentence was sanctioned by the power of God, and spoke peace to the soul with all his authority and energy. Man, therefore, then possessed in a perfect degree peace of conscience. He had, in the fullest sense of the words, a conscience void of offence; a conscience which was never offended, and which did not offend.

4. In the fourth place, a state of perfect conformity to the divine law implies a heart which perfectly loves that law. This is even more necessary than any thing which has yet been mentioned. Indeed, it is absolutely indispensable: for though the understanding were perfectly acquainted with the law; though the memory perfectly retained, and conscience ever faithfully applied it; yet if the heart did not love its precepts, and love to obey them, they would not be obeyed; for the heart, or in other words, the affections and inclinations, is the ruling faculty of the soul, and will sooner or later subdue and lead captive all the other faculties. Besides, as the law is fulfilled by love, as it principally requires love, it is evident that where there is no love, there can be no real obedience to any of its requirements. Man then, was created with a heart, which perfectly loved the divine law, and which was perfectly inclined to obey. His inclinations perfectly coincided with his duty. He not only walked in the path of duty, but loved to walk in it, and proposed it to others. That he was so, is farther evident from the fact, that he was created in the image of God, for God is love, holy love; and therefore an essential part of his image, in which man was created, must consist in love. God also loves his own law; for it is a transcript of his mind, an expression of his will; and, of course, since man was made in the likeness of God, he must have loved his law. In a word, the divine law was written in his heart by the finger of God, as it afterwards was upon the tables of stone; so that, while man retained the character which God gave him, he could never transgress the law by choice or design.

5. In the fifth place, a state of perfect conformity to the law of God implies a will perfectly obedient and submissive to that law; or, in other words, to the divine government and authority. This, I conceive, is too evident to require proof; for a rebellious, stubborn will, is utterly incompatible with conformity to the law of God. A perfectly obedient and submissive will, then, man originally possessed. His will was swallowed up in the will of God, following just as the shadow follows the body. This resulted as a necessary consequence from the holy love to God's law which reigned in his heart; for the will is the servant of the heart, and follows where the heart leads. The understanding, which is the eye of the mind, discovers objects with the consequences of pursuing or avoiding them; the heart chooses or refuses those objects; and then the will resolves either to pursue or avoid them, according to the inclination of the heart. So long then, as man's understanding was perfectly clear, arid his heart perfectly right, his will could not but be perfectly obedient and submissive to the law of God.

6. There still remains one faculty possessed by man, which it is necessary to consider, viz, that which is usually called the imagination. Whether this faculty is possessed by spirits in a disembodied state, may be doubted. It seems probable that it belongs exclusively neither to the soul nor to the body, but that it results from the union of both. It is that faculty by which the images or ideas of absent sensible objects are presented to the mind. I say the images of sensible objects; for intellectual objects, such as truth, for instance, are perceived by the understanding; and I say of absent sensible objects, for when such objects are present with us, they are perceived by our senses. Now it may be made to appear evident, that such a faculty was necessary for man in his

present situation. He is an inhabitant of one world, destined after a short residence here, to be removed to another. Now the world, to which he must remove, differs so widely from this, that in consequence of the imperfection of language many of its objects cannot be described or presented to our minds, except by the assistance of figures and comparisons drawn from the sensible objects around us. It was therefore necessary that we should be endued with a faculty of perceiving these figures and comparisons, and of forming by their assistance some images or conceptions of heavenly and eternal objects.

It was doubtless for this reason that God gave us the faculty which we call imagination; and when man left the forming hand of his Maker, this faculty, like the others which we have mentioned, was entirely free from moral imperfection. Instead of filling the mind, as it now does, with vain thoughts, waking dreams, and worthless or sinful fancies, it presented nothing but holy images of spiritual and heavenly objects. In every object which met man's senses, his pure imagination enabled him to discover some striking illustration of important truths, some analogical resemblance to those things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, which God has prepared for them that love him. A striking instance of the manner, in which a holy imagination operates, we have in the life of our Savior. To him the whole world was a Bible, and every object a text, from which he drew the most convincing arguments, the most instructive lessons, the most striking illustration of divine truth. Such was the imagination of man, and such its employment, while he retained his original character.

Thus have I separately considered the several faculties of the human soul, and attempted to show that they were all made at first upright, or in a state of perfect conformity to the divine law. And a little reflection will convince us that, if either of these faculties had been imperfect, man could not have been made upright, or created in the image and after the likeness of God. If he had not clearly understood the law, or had not perfectly remembered it, or faithfully applied it, or cordially loved it, or willingly obeyed it, or if his imagination had presented vain, impure, or sinful images to the mind; in either of these cases, he would have been imperfect, or not upright, and God would have been chargable with the imperfection; nor could it have been said with truth, that all his works were very good. It may perhaps be expected that I should now proceed to say something of the human body, with its appetites and propensities; but this is needless. The body is only the habitation of the soul, and its members only the instruments by which the soul acts on surrounding sensible objects. In itself, without the soul, it is nothing but a little mass of organized dust, incapable of doing either good or evil. It is the soul, the inhabitant within, which gives a character to its motions; and if the soul be perfectly holy, its habitation must be perfectly pure. It may, however, be proper to remark, that the appetites of the body were originally, not as they now are, disorderly, craving, and excessive in their desires, but were perfectly under the guidance and control of the mind and desired nothing more than the divine law allowed, and the welfare of man required. Such then was man at his creation, sanctified throughout in spirit, soul, and body, perfect in that image of God which consists in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, But,

II. Though God made man thus upright, they have sought out many inventions. The disjunctive particle, with which the latter clause of our text is introduced, intimates that the royal preacher here means sinful inventions, or inventions contrary to that uprightness, that state of conformity to the divine law, in which man was created. That this must have been his meaning is farther evident from many other inspired passages in which this truth is taught. Thus we are told, that men have

all gone astray, like sheep, and turned every one to his own way; that when the Lord looked down from heaven on the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand or seek after him, he saw that they had all gone out of the way, that they had together become filthy, so that there was none righteous or upright, none that did good, no not one. These expressions teach us, not only that man is now out of the way of righteousness, but that he was originally in it; for otherwise it could not with propriety be said that he had turned or gone out of it. Similar therefore must be the meaning of the wise man, when he says, men have sought out many inventions. That is, first, they have sought out or invented many new ways in which to walk, forsaking the good old way in which God originally placed them. Of this you may be convinced by looking a moment at the present and past situation of mankind, and considering the almost innumerable foolish, sinful ways in which men seek for happiness, and the various forms of false religion which have prevailed, and which still prevail in the world. While the way of truth and uprightness is always one and the same, the new and false ways which men have invented are numerous and continually changing. In the next place, men have forsaken the one living and true God, in whom they live, and move, and are, and sought out or invented innumerable false gods and created idols, to which they give that homage and attention which are due to him alone. To use his own language, they have forsaken him, the Fountain of living waters, and hewn out for themselves broken cisterns which can hold no water. When they knew God, says the apostle, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were darkened; so that they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Of similar conduct we, my friends, are in reality guilty; for, though we do not bow down to false gods of wood and stone, we have all set up idols in our hearts; we all love and serve the creature, more than the Creator; we all take pride in some of those things, the glory of which God has resolved to stain; and are all more or less fascinated and bewitched by the innumerable inventions of luxury and art which men have sought out, and which the world places before us to draw off our hearts from God. In the third place, men have ceased to be conformed to the divine law, and have sought out many other rules, rules more agreeable to their present sinful inclinations, by which to regulate and try their conduct. How numerous and how various are these rules, no one who is acquainted with mankind need be informed. Some adopt for this purpose the laws of their country; others the opinion of some human teacher; while a third and more numerous class govern themselves by the maxims which pass currently in the society of which they happen to be members. Thus in various ways men measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves, and therefore are not wise; for while they follow these rules of human invention, they have lost all that uprightness, that conformity to the divine law, which has been described. For instance, their understandings are so blinded by sinful prejudices and inclinations, that they have lost the knowledge of the divine law. They are all, like St. Paul before his conversion, alive without the law; nor can they be made by mere human teaching to know any thing of its nature, spirituality and extent. Agreeably, we are told that their understandings are darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their hearts. And as men do not now understand, so neither do they remember the law of God. They retain indeed with care, many things which they ought to forget; but are prone to forget what they ought to remember. How many are there among us, who have heard the word of God inculcated from their childhood, who pass whole days without recollecting one of its precepts, or even without reflecting that God has given them a law for the regulation of their conduct. Hence

men are represented as not liking to retain God in their knowledge and as saying to the Almighty, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Hence too the wicked are described as those who forget God; and hence Paul exhorts the Hebrews to give the more earnest heed to the truths they had heard, lest at any time they should let them slip,—an exhortation which plainly intimates that we are exceedingly prone to suffer the truth to slip out of our minds. That we are so, and that our memories are exceedingly depraved, every one must be convinced, who will reflect how much more easily he retains an idle tale or slanderous report than the truth of God's word; and how much sooner he forgets the mercies he has received from God, than the injuries which he receives from men. The conscience also shares in these malignant effects of sin. No longer does she faithfully apply the law of God to our conduct, or pronounce sentence according to its rules. Indeed, it is impossible that she should; for if men neither understand the nature, nor remember the precepts of the divine law, how is it possible that conscience should apply it to our conduct.

It is a rule of which she now knows nothing. She judges according to the rule which is put into her hands, and we have already observed that men invent or seekout false rules for her use. Besides, in consequence of sin, she has lost much of her sensibility, and is prone to slumberer, so that nothing disturbs her but crimes of the first magnitude, and nothing can awaken her but the Spirit of God. Hence St. Paul, speaking of unbelievers, says, even their mind and conscience is defiled ; and of others he says, that their consciences are seared as with an hot iron. Nor has the heart of man escaped the contagion of sin. Indeed, this is the first part affected by it; for while man's heart loves the law, he will always understand, remember, and apply it. It is only because men have ceased to love God's law that they now misunderstand and forget it. It is the sinfulness of the heart alone, which darkens the understanding, renders the memory treacherous, and the conscience insensible and unfaithful. A sinful heart cannot endure an understanding which perceives, a memory which retains, and a conscience which applies the law of God; for these faculties would then be at constant war with the heart, opposing and condemning all her sinful inclinations. A sinful heart loves darkness for the same reason with the midnight thief. Agreeably, our Savior informs us that every one that doeth evil hateth the light neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. This then is the reason why men do not like to retain God in their knowledge. Set the heart right, let it be again reconciled to God and to his law, and all the other facilities will be rectified at once. But alas, the heart will not be set right; for it has become deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. In this depravity of man's heart, the will also shares of course. It has become rebellious, like an iron sinew; for the carnal mind is enmity against God, and not subject to his law. Hence the language of the unsubdued will is, I will not have God to reign over me: not his will, but mine be done. Would time permit, I might proceed to show how the imagination is depraved by the loss of its original conformity to the divine law; how, instead of raising the mind from earth to heaven, it drags down the mind from heaven to earth; fills it with vain thoughts, foolish fancies, and impure sinful images, and debases and degrades every thing great and good by its mean groveling conceptions of them. I might also show how the infection of sin has spread from the soul to the body, inflaming its appetites, and often reducing men by their instrumentality almost to a level with the brutes, and sometimes below them. But on this part of my subject time forbids me to enlarge. I must, however, briefly notice,

Lastly, among the inventions of sinful man the innumerable excuses, pleas, and apologies, which he has sought out to justify his conduct, and to make himself appear unfortunate, rather than

criminal. These excuses are far too numerous to particularize; and in nothing have mankind displayed more ingenuity than in forming them; for though they have lost the knowledge to do good, they are wise to do evil, and to justify it when done. All these excuses, however different, agree in this: they attempt to transfer the guilt of sin from man to God. Indeed it is evident that the guilt cannot be removed from man without casting it upon God; for if man be not guilty, certainly guilty, God, if I way venture to utter it,— is so. But our subject overthrows all these excuses at once; for if God made man upright he cannot be justly blamed for the sins of men; and if men have sought out many wicked and foolish inventions, they alone ought to bear the blame of them and suffer their consequences.

Thus, my friends, have we taken a brief view of what man was, and of what he is; of what he was as God made him, and of what he is since he has, if I may so express it, unmade or destroyed himself. And now who can forbear to weep over such a scene as this; over a world thus dreadfully marred, over a race of immortal beings once bearing the image and likeness of God, perfectly conformed in every faculty to his holy law, and in all respects but little lower than the angels; but now debased, ruined, and enslaved by sin, the image of God lost, his law effaced from their minds, and themselves dead in trespasses and sins, transformed into children of wrath, and heirs of endless perdition. 0, how has the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed! Well might such a spectacle make heaven weep, could tears be shed in heaven. And if it has not done this it has done more. It has brought down God's eternal Son from heaven to earth on an errand of mercy, to seek and to save a race thus ruined and lost. This fact alone, if rightly considered, taken in connection with the manner in which this salvation was effected, will give us more just and enlarged conceptions of the greatness of man's ruin than any thing which can be said of it beside. It will show us that the work of saving was incomparably greater and more difficult than that of creating the world. When the world was created, its Maker did not leave his celestial abode. A word, an act of his will, was sufficient. But when the world was to be saved, its Maker was constrained to descend from heaven, the Creator to take the form of a creature, and a whole life of toil and suffering closed by a most painful and ignominious death, was necessary to effect the work. From the greatness of the work of salvation, then, infer the greatness of man's ruin. Judge that if one, if such an one, died for men, then men were indeed dead.

2. From this subject we may learn the nature and necessity of that moral change which the Scriptures call a new birth, a new creation, and a resurrection from the dead. In other words, we may learn the nature and necessity of true religion. The word religion literally signifies to circle or bind again what had been broken or separated. We have seen how the bands which bound men to God were sundered by the sin of the former. True religion consists in a reunion of these bands, in bringing man back into the state in which he was originally created, and from which he has fallen. Now in order to this, is not a great moral change necessary, if our text be true? If man was originally upright, or perfectly conformed to the divine law, must he not become again upright, before he can be restored to the favor of God? And if all his powers and faculties are depraved by sin, as above described, must not this change be so great, as to be justly styled a new creation, or a new birth? Must not the man be, as it were, made or created anew that he must be so, the Scriptures most clearly assert: If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Ye are created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. Put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds; and put on the new man which is renewed in

knowledge, or made anew, after the image of God. Add to these and many other passages, our Savior's declaration, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,—and you must, I think, be convinced that a great moral change is absolutely necessary; that there can be no true religion, no bringing a man into his former state, no reconciling him to God without it. You will, at least, see that the Bible is a complete whole; that it contains a connected and consistent scheme of divine truth.

3. From this subject, my professing friends, you may learn whether you are what you profess to be; and if so, how far you have advanced in your Christian course.

Chapter 45

S. MANS TREATMENT OF CHRIST

MANS TREATMENT OF CHRIST

"Having yet therefore one Son, his well-beloved, he sent him also, last, unto them, saying, They will reverence my Son" Mark 12:6

These words compose part of the following parable, addressed by our Saviour to the Jews: A certain man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a wine-vat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent unto the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from them of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore, one Son, his well-beloved, he sent him also auto them, saying, They will reverence my Son. But the husbandmen said among themselves, this is the heir; let us kill him and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. The meaning of this parable, as referring to God's dealings with the Jews, and to their abominable treatment of his messengers, and of his Son, is too obvious to require explanation. Nor with its meaning, as referring to them, have we any personal concern. We are only concerned to inquire, how far it is applicable to ourselves; and a little reflection will convince us, that many of the truths which it illustrates, may be applied to as with no less propriety than to the Jews. We, and all other Christian nations, are now what they once were. To us, as well as to them, the prophets, and the Son of God have been sent; for we have their words in the Bible, by which, they being dead, yet speak. He that receives those words; receives Christ, but he that rejects them, rejects Christ. But waiving a consideration of those and other truths, brought to view by this parable, I propose, at present, to confine myself exclusively to that part of it which has been read as our text. God is here represented as saying, with reference to those to whom Christ was sent, They will reverence my Son. We are not to infer from this expression, that God was ignorant of the manner in which his Son would be treated; or that he really expected men would receive him with reverence; for his sufferings and death were explicitly predicted long before his appearance in the world. But God here speaks after the manner of men. He is merely stating what reception it might have reasonably been expected would be given to his Son, by one who did not know or who did not consider the wickedness of the human heart. Such a person, on seeing Christ sent down from heaven to assist men, would have exclaimed, Surely they will receive him with reverence and affection. Though they have persecuted and slain God's servants, yet surely they will reverence his Son. The principal truth taught by our text then, is evidently this; it was reasonable to expect that, when our Saviour visited this world, he would be received by mankind with reverential affection. To show that it was so, is my present design.

I. It was reasonable to expect this, on account of the dignity of Christ's person. We learn from the predictions which foretold his coming, that in person he was divine, and in dignity infinite. Behold, says the prophet, referring to this event, Jehovah God shall come with a strong hand; his reward is

with him, and his work before him. And again, speaking in the language of prophecy, which describes future events as having already taken place, Isaiah says, Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Out of thee, Bethlehem Ephratah, shall he come, whose goings forth have been of old, even from everlasting. To the same purpose the angel who predicted his birth informed Joseph that he should be called Immanuel, God with us; God dwelling with men. Hence, when John came as his harbinger to announce his approach; he cried, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Agreeably to these predictions, we are informed that the eternal Word, who was in the beginning with God, and who was God, was made flesh and dwelt among us; that he is the true God and eternal life; God over all, blessed forever. Now who that believed these predictions; who that saw them fulfilled in the coming of Christ, would not have expected that he should be received with reverence and affection? Was it not highly reasonable to expect that when God came down to visit and dwell with men, he would be received by them in this manner? Were you informed that God was again about to visit us in a similar manner, in a visible form, would not you expect him to meet with such a reception? You will recollect what preparations were made to receive the chief magistrate of these States, on his late tour? Was it not reasonable to expect that at feast equal preparations would have been made for the reception of the God and ruler of the universe? The reasonableness of such an expectation will appear still more evident, if we consider,

II. The relation which subsisted between Christ and mankind previous to his coming. He was their Creator, the Creator of the world; for by him, we are told, were all things created, and without him was not any thing made that is made. He was in the world, and the world was made by him. He was also the preserver of men; for he supports all things by the word of his power, and by him all things subsist. As the Creator and Preserver, he was the rightful possessor of all things; for, we are told, that all things were made not only by him, but for him; that he is appointed heir of all things, and that all things are his. He had also for thousands of years, been constantly showering down temporal blessings upon mankind, giving them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness. In coming into the world then, Immanuel came, as the apostle expresses it, to his own. He came to his own world, to his own creatures, the work of his own hands, to his own dependants, the deeply indebted pensioners of his bounty. And was it not reasonable to expect, that men should receive such a being with reverence, gratitude and affection?

Every other part of creation knew and acknowledged its Creator. Plants and animals, the winds and waves, diseases and death, and even the spirits of disobedience owned his authority, and obeyed his commands. Surely, then, it might have been expected that man, an intelligent creature, the most deeply indebted of his creatures, would receive his Creator and Benefactor with at least equal tokens of reverence and affection. It might have been expected that every habitation should have been thrown open to him; that every heart would have welcomed him, that every tongue would be loud in praises and congratulations, and that all the treasures of earth would be laid at his feet, and all its honors poured upon his head.

III. The design on which Christ came into our world, and the form in which he appeared, rendered it still more reasonable to expect that he would meet with such a reception. Had he visited us merely for his own pleasure, he ought, as our Creator and benefactor, to receive the most

honorable, grateful, and affectionate welcome, which it was in the power of men to give. But he did not come to please or gratify himself. No, he came into the world to save sinners, to seek and to save those who were lost; to redeem those who had rebelled against him, grieved and insulted him, from the terrible punishment which their sins deserved. In order to this, he came as a teacher to restore to men the lost knowledge of God, to bring life and immortality to light, to he the sun of the soul, the light of the world.

He came to be not only its light, but its life; to give it life by laying down his own; and that he might for this purpose lay down his life, he appeared in our nature in the likeness of sinful flesh, and the form of a servant. That this was the design of his coming, mankind were previously informed by the predictions which foretold it. They were told that he would come to be wounded for others transgressions, to be bruised for their iniquities, to bear the chastisement of their peace, and to heal them by his stripes. Who, then, when they saw the Lord of life and glory appear on earth for such a purpose, and in such a form, would not have thought it reasonable to expect that all who had heard these predictions, all who knew the design of his coming, would receive him with every possible demonstration of grateful affection. Who that has seen the almost idolatrous admiration and reverence with which men have often regarded human teachers, and mere temporal deliverers, would not have expected to see this celestial Teacher, this deliverer from interminable evils welcomed with the loudest acclamations; to see men striving to make him some compensation for the glories of which he had stripped himself for their sakes, sympathizing with him in all the sufferings which their sins had brought upon him, and weeping at his feet over the sins which occasioned them?

It has ever been allowed that there is something venerable, as well as affecting, in the sorrows of suffering greatness; and that a wise and good monarch reduced to poverty and distress is a spectacle which no man, not wholly devoid of feeling could contemplate without feeling emotions of respectful sympathy. How venerable, how grand, how dignified then, were the sorrows and sufferings of the Son of God! sorrows and sufferings brought upon him, not by his own misconduct or imprudence, but by his own boundless benevolence. Who, then, would not have expected, that these sorrows should have been held sacred? Who does not perceive that God on the throne of the universe has, if I may so speak, less claims upon the reverence, gratitude and affection of his creatures, than God manifest in flesh in the form of a servant? Who does not see that God, appearing as Immanuel, God with us, has more numerous and more powerful claims upon mankind than God in any other form? If, then, Jehovah is worshipped and adored with rapturous affection, by angels in heaven, much more might it be expected that he should be loved and praised by men, when for their sakes he appeared as a man of sorrows on earth.

IV. The bright, unsullied excellence of Christ’s moral character, and the various estimable qualities which were exemplified in his conduct, furnish another consideration which rendered it reasonable to expect that he would be received with the highest affection and esteem. That goodness ought to excite affection, will not be denied. That magnanimity, courage, and fortitude ought to be regarded with veneration and esteem, is equally obvious. Now, in the character of the man Christ Jesus, goodness of heart and greatness of mind, were combined. He possessed in the highest possible degree every estimable, moral and intellectual quality. He was the only perfect man which the world has seen since the fall. He exhibited human nature in the highest degree of perfection to which it can be raised. In him goodness and greatness were not only personified, but, if I may so

express it, concentrated and condensed. He was light and love clothed with a body. Qualities which are never seen united in men, and which seem almost incompatible with each other, were in him sweetly and harmoniously blended.

Seldom indeed do we see the qualities of the lion and the lamb, of the serpent and the dove uniting together in the same person. Those who are distinguished for benevolence, gentleness, condescension, meekness, compassion, sympathy and sweetness of temper, are usually deficient in magnanimity, courage and fortitude. And on the contrary, those who are remarkable for possessing the qualities last mentioned, are usually destitute of the mild and amiable virtues. But Christ possessed them all. He displayed in the highest degree magnanimity, firmness, courage and fortitude; and those heroic virtues were shaded and softened by all that is mild and amiable and attractive. While he far excelled all the heroes, conquerors, and great ones of the earth in those qualities of which they boast, he rivaled the smiling infant in tenderness and sweetness of disposition. In a word, he was the lion of the tribe of Judah, and he was the lamb of God. Here then was such a character as men had never seen before; a character with which even the holy, Omniscient Judge of excellence was pleased and delighted. Surely then, it might have been reasonably expected that, when such a character was presented to the wondering eye of mankind, they would receive him with reverence and affection; that all the praises which they had for ages lavished on far inferior excellence, would at once have been given to him.

V. The interesting information which our Saviour communicated, and the excellence of the doctrines which he taught, and of the precepts which he inculcated, rendered it still more reasonable to expect that he would meet with such a reception. I need not tell you what respect, what honors have, in all ages and parts of the world, been given to extensive knowledge, to eminently learned men. I need not tell you what crowds of attentive, admiring disciples many philosophers have drawn after them, and with what despotic sway they have ruled the minds of men, even after they were laid in their graves. Lycurgus, Solon, Confucius, Zoroaster, Mahomet, and many others, either have been or now are admired, followed, and almost worshipped by whole nations. Even the very Jews, who rejected the true Messiah, sacrificed their lives by thousands to every impostor who assumed his name, however absurd and groundless might be his pretensions. In addition to these facts we may remark, that mankind usually feel and display a strong degree of curiosity and interest with respect to any message or appearance that relates to the invisible world. Almost every idle tale of spectres and apparitions has power to engage the attention, for a time, even of those who disbelieve it; and should a person with whom we had been acquainted, and whom we knew to have been dead and buried, revisit our world, you can in some measure conceive with what interest he would be regarded, and how eagerly men would press to learn from him the secrets of the grave.

Now who, that was acquainted with facts, and with the purport of Christ’s instructions, would not think it reasonable to expect that he should be received with every mark of eager and respectful attention. He came not merely from the grave, but from heaven, from the other world to this; came to make that world and its inhabitants known to men; came to tell them what shall be hereafter, to lift the veil which conceals eternity, to inform us what befalls the soul after its separation from the body, to describe the proceedings of the judgment day, and the future state of mortals, to reveal things which eye bath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived. In a word, he came filled with all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and willing and able to impart them to

others. In comparison with him, all other teachers and legislators were but as lamps to the sun. In comparison with his instructions, all the discoveries of human wisdom were mere dreams and fables. Even his prejudiced townsmen could not but marvel at the gracious words which proceeded out of his month; and his very enemies were constrained to cry, Never man spake like this man. Nor was this all. His instructions were delivered not as mere opinions, not as the deductions of reason, but as infallible truths; as a revelation from God, a revelation attested by numberless miracles, and thus sealed with the broad seal of heaven. Who then, would not have expected to see the world flocking around him, and all its philosophers with their disciples sitting, like Mary, at his feet, to hear his words.

But, perhaps, some will think it a sufficient reply to all this to say, The world did not know Christ, did not know what he was; otherwise he would have been received in a proper manner. The apostle himself informs us, that none of the princes of this world knew Christ. I readily acknowledge that they did not know him. But why did they not? They certainly might have known him; for the works that he did in his Father's name, bore witness of him; and they received many impostors as the Christ, without the thousandth part of the evidence which he exhibited. But not to insist on this, permit me to remark, that however strongly the excuse may be urged in favor of the Jews, it cannot be urged at all in extenuation of our conduct. If the Jews did not know Jesus to be the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, we do. Every thing in the manner of his appearance which was dark to them, is explained to us. What was prophecy then is history now. We are clearly taught who Christ was, and for what he came and lived and died; and we are also taught, that he who taught the Jews on earth, now speaks to us from heaven; that he who receives his word receives him, and he who rejects it, rejects him.

Even then if it were not reasonable to expect that the Jews should have received him with grateful reverence and affection, it may still be reasonably expected that we should receive him in this manner; that we should believe all his doctrines, obey all his precepts, trust in all his promises, and consecrate all we have and are to his service. He is still in the world, as really as he ever was. He still comes to us by his Spirit, still stands knocking for admission at the door of our hearts, giving us an opportunity to admit him. Who then, that forgets for a moment the depravity of the human heart, would not expect to see all admit him? Who would not expect to find the Creator, Preserver and Saviour of the world regarded as all in all in his own world? Who would not expect to find him the chief subject of conversation in every house, to find him regarded as the best and dearest friend of every family, to hear his name lisped by children as the first word which they were taught to utter; to see all knees bowing to him, to hear every tongue confessing him, and all ages and classes uniting to cry, Hosanna to the Son of David! blessed is he who came in the name of the Lord, to seek and save our lost and ruined race? In short, who that should hear Christian nations professing to believe that Christ died for all, would not expect to hear them add, with the apostle, this love constrains us to live, not to ourselves, but to him who died for us and rose again? My friends, I need not tell you how wretchedly one who should expect this would be disappointed. I have told how it was reasonable to expect Christ would be treated. I need not tell you how he actually is treated. I need not tell you how long a person might live in some of your houses, without hearing the name of Jesus mentioned, except profanely, without hearing one expression, or seeing one token of grateful affection for him.

Surely, my friends, these things ought not so to be. Surely, a Saviour, a self-devoted, crucified Saviour, a divine Saviour ought not to be treated in this manner. Surely, he has a right to expect some better return from our race than he has yet received. And what has he done, that he should be treated in this manner. Many good works has he done for us; for these shall we maltreat him? Well might we blush to belong to a race of beings who treat him thus, had we not each of us still more reason to blush for our own share in the neglect with which he has been treated. Let me entreat you to lay these things seriously to heart, to inquire whether Christ has among his treasures any token of grateful affection from you; to remember that if it were reasonable to expect that Christ should be received in the manner we have described, thus to neglect him is the most unreasonable and the most criminal sin of which we can be guilty. It was the sin which destroyed the Jews. They rejected and slew the prophets, and God punished them with a seventy years captivity. They rejected and crucified his Son, and after almost eighteen hundred years, still groan under the punishment of that sin. My friends, we begin where they left off. Their last sin is our first. Their last step in the career of depravity, the step which plunged them into perdition, is the first step taken by those of you who are still rejecting the Saviour. What, then, will your end be? If your infancy in sin equals their manhood, and even their old age, what desperate lengths may you be expected to go, in sinning against the Saviour, should your lives be spared? O, then, turn while there is hope; turn before it is too late; give to Christ the reception which he has a right to expect; and let your first step in sin be your last. To you, my professing friends, the subject is, if possible, still more interesting. If so much may be reasonably expected of others, what may not be expected of you? of you, who profess to know the Saviour, to hope that he loves, that he has pardoned and saved you? Are you loving and honoring and serving him in as great a degree as he desires? Is your love for him great in proportion to the greatness and number of the sins which you hope he has forgiven? Do you wonder that you are bound to love and praise him, not only for yourselves, but for your unbelieving neighbors, to endeavor to pay their debt of gratitude as well as your own? Were he now corporeally present on earth, and should all the unbelieving part of the town unite in neglecting or insulting him, would you not feel bound to exert yourselves to the utmost to atone for the neglect, to supply the deficiencies? The same reasons exist why you should do it now. O, then, be up and doing. Endeavor to ascertain what the Creator of the world deserves when he visits it in the form of sinful man, to die for its salvation; to calculate what you owe him for the sins he has pardoned, to estimate what the Saviour is worth to you; and say if you can serve him with too great zeal, or persevere too long in his service.

S. MEN TRIED AND FOUND DEFECTIVE.

MEN TRIED AND FOUND DEFECTIVE.

Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.—Daniel 5:27. IN the preceding part of this chapter we are informed, that Belshazzar, king of Babylon, made a great feast to a thousand of his lords and drank wine before the thousand. And while he tasted the wine, he commanded his servants to bring forth the golden vessels, which were taken out of the house of God at Jerusalem; and he, with his guests, drank wine in them, and praised the gods of gold and silver, of brass and iron, of wood and of stone. But while they were thus insulting the Majesty of heaven and earth, by consuming his bounty upon their lusts, and profaning the vessels of his sanctuary, in the same hour there came forth the fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the palace, and the king saw the part of the hand, which wrote. Though he knew not the awful import of the mysterious words thus written, his guilty conscience soon told him, that he had no reason to expect messages of mercy from the invisible world; and therefore his countenance was changed and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another. Nor Were his terrors without foundation; for after the hand was Withdrawn, the words, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN, were found written; words, which were thus interpreted by Daniel the prophet; MENE, God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it; TEKEL thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting; UPHARSIN, thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. The justness of this interpretation was confirmed by the event, for that same night was Belshazzar slain. My friends, this story affords an instructive, admonitory lesson to us all; for though we have not, like Belshazzar, profaned the consecrated vessels of the Lord, or praised the gods of the heathen, who are vanity and a lie, yet we have in various ways insulted our Creator and provoked him to jealousy. We have often conmsumed his bounty upon our lusts; we have perverted those faculties, which ought to have been consecrated to his service; we have loved and served and idolized the world, and the God, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways we have not glorified; and though the displeasure of offended heaven is not now suddenly and openly displayed, as it was in the days of Daniel; though no hand is now sent to write the sentence of condemnation on the walls of our houses, yet there is still an invisible witness, which continually records our actions; there is still a just and omniscient God, by whom these actions are weighed; it is still true that we shall receive of him a just recompense of reward, according to our works. Our days are already numbered and will soon be finished; for God has set bounds to our lives which we cannot pass. Soon shall we be weighed in the balance of eternal truth and justice, and if we are found wanting, we shall be cut in sunder, and have a portion appointed us with hypocrites and unbelievers. And say, my friends, are you all prepared to pass this solemn test? Should the same hand, which wrote the doom of impious Belshazzar on the plaster of the wall of his palace, be now commissioned to write our names, our characters and our doom on the plaster of the walls of this house, are there none here present, whose thoughts would trouble them; none, whose countenances would be changed by conscious guilt; none, over against whose names the damning sentence, telcel, would be seen

inscribed? This is a most interesting and important question to all of us; a question, which ought by no means to remain doubtful; a question, which it is perhaps as much as our immortal souls are worth, to leave for a single day undecided. And why should it remain undecided? Have we not, in our own hands, the balance in which our actions and characters will one day be weighed? Has not the Judge himself informed us, in the clearest manner, of the rules and maxims by which he will be guided in determining our irrevocable doom? Let us then avail ourselves of the information, which he has given us, and resolve, before we leave this house, to know the worst of our situation, and ascertain what sentence we have reason to expect from the mouth of God. Let us this evening, anticipate the proceedings of the judgment day, and impartially weigh our characters, hopes and pretensions in the balance of the sanctuary, that we may discover, before discovery will be too late, whether we are prepared to meet our Judge in peace.

I. Let us place in this balance the pretensions and characters of those, who hope for heaven because they were born in a Christian country, are descended from pious parents; and were by them in their infancy given up to God in the ordinance of baptism, and have enjoyed the advantages of a religious education. That there are persons, who build their eternal hopes on this foundation, daily experience but too plainly evinces; and perhaps there may be some such in this assembly. If so, we must assure them, that they are building upon the sand, and that they will be found wanting, when weighed at the bar of God. For though the privileges, with which such persons are favored, afford them peculiar advantages for becoming religious; yet they do not render them so, but on the contrary, unless suitably improved, greatly aggravate their guilt and punishment. ‘To whom much is given, of them will much be required; and those who are thus early taught their Lord’s will, unless they perform it, will be beaten with many stripes. Think not, says John the Baptist to the Jews, who trusted in their religious privileges — think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father; that is, trust not in your descent from that pious patriarch, nor to your covenant relation to God; for I say unto you, that God is able, of these stones, to raise up children unto Abraham. To the same purpose St. Paul writes to the Philippian Christians. If any man, says he, thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I have more:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee. But, he adds, what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

II. Let us bring to the test of the law and the testimony, the characters and hopes of those, who are trusting for salvation to a good natural disposition, and a harmless, inoffensive life. It is possible, that some of you, my friends, may be trusting to these things. You can plead that your tempers are gentle, conciliating, mild and amiable; that your conduct and deportment are winning and prepossessing; that you are admired and beloved by your friends and acquaintance, and are not conscious of having, in a single instance, willfully injured your fellow creatures or offended your Creator. But if you can plead nothing more than this, you will most certainly be found wanting in the sight of that God, by whom actions are weighed. He will not be satisfied with a bare negative goodness, if we may be allowed the expression. He will not think it sufficient, that you have abstained from outward offences, or avoided overt acts of sin, while you have failed to perform what he has commanded. Those who leave undone what they ought to do, will be as certainly, if not as severely punished, as those who do what they ought not to have done. Not only those vines

which produce the grapes of Sodom, and the clusters of Gomorrha, but those also which do not produce the fruits of holiness, will be cast into the fire; and though you are covered with leaves, and adorned with flowers; though you make a fair flourishing appearance in the sight of men, yet he must and will consider you as barren and unprofitable, because you are destitute of these fruits; he must condemn you as slothful and unfaithful servants, because you have neglected to improve the talents with which you were entrusted. It was part of the heavy charge brought against the king of Babylon, that he had not glorified the God, in whose hands his life was, and whose were all his ways. To the same charge you must plead guilty, since you have never glorified, nor even sincerely aimed to glorify God. The amiable dispositions in which you trust, do not lead you to seek his glory, or to obey his commands. In fact, they have nothing in them of the nature of true religion; but are merely corporeal instincts, and are often found in perfection among irrational animals. You are therefore found wanting. You want the one thing needful; and were our blessed Savior now on earth, he would say to each of you, as he did to the amiable young ruler, One thing thou lackest. Go, and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, take up thy cross and follow me.

III. Another class, perhaps, will boldly come forward and say, though these characters are justly considered as deficient, yet we do not fear that we shall be found wanting; for we have something more than mere negative goodness to plead. Instead of misimproving, or abusing our time and talents, we have improved them with diligence and faithfulness. In stead of injuring our fellow creatures, we have endeavored to promote their happiness by every means in our power. We have been sober, temperate, honest, and industrious; have carefully fulfilled all the social and relative duties of life; have provided for the support of our own families, and been kind and liberal to the poor and afflicted. In short, we have been useful members of society, and have faithfully discharged the various duties, which we owed to our parents, our children, our friends, and our country. We do not, indeed, pretend to be perfect and confess that in the course of our lives, we have sometimes been induced by strong and sudden temptations to say or do things, which were perhaps improper and sinful. But we have always been sorry for these offences, and they are but few and trifling compared with our good actions. We therefore trust that a merciful God has forgiven them, and are ready to appear cheerfully at his tribunal, whenever he shall think proper to summon us away. Such ever has been and ever will be the language of those, who are ignorant of their own hearts, and of the requirements of God’s law; and such we have reason to fear, is the secret language of some in this assembly. But we must assure you, my friends, that if you can plead nothing more than this, you will certainly be found wanting at the bar of God, however safe and confident you may feel; nor can you possibly escape, unless the Judge should break his word, and act contrary to his own solemn declarations. He has summed up the law, by which you will be tried, in the two great commands which enjoin it upon us to love God with all our hearts, and our neighbor as ourselves. Now even though we should allow what we presume none of you will pretend, that you have through life perfectly obeyed this latter command, and loved your neighbor as yourselves; yet you would still be condemned for neglecting to love God with all your hearts. The performance of all the duties, which you owe your fellow creatures, can make no atonement for neglecting the far more important duties, which you owe to your God; for as our Savior has said, in a similar case, these ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone. If therefore, we should even allow the truth of all your pleas, you would still be found guilty, when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, of wanting that perfect love to God, which the divine law inflexibly requires of all, who seek to be justified by its works. But we cannot allow the truth of

these pleas. We cannot allow that any of you have perfectly discharged the duties, which you owe your fellow creatures. You know, you must know, that you have not loved your neighbors as yourselves and that therefore in this respect also, you will be found wanting. But you will perhaps object, that it is impossible for any to love his neighbor as himself; it is contrary to nature; it is morally impossible; and since God is a merciful being, he certainly will not judge us by this severe law, but will make some allowance for the imperfections and infirmities of his creatures. If such are your hopes, listen to our Savior and his apostle, and they will vanish at once. Says the apostle, As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in, or under the law, shall be judged by the law. But will not the rigor of this law be mitigated? No; for, says the Judge, though heaven and earth should pass away, yet one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of the least of these commandments and shall teach men so; the same shall he called least in the kingdom of heaven; that is, shall never enter it; for I say unto you, that except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall, in no wise, enter into the kingdom of heaven. Yet the pharisees had at least as much righteousness, as any moralist at the present day. Some of them could say, we are not as other men are, unjust, extortioners, or adulterers. We fast twice in a week, and give tithes of all we possess. But it is evident from our Savior's own declarations, that those who can say nothing more than this, will be found wanting, and never be admitted into the kingdom of God.

IV. Perhaps another class will come forward and say, we allow that those who trust to their own moral duties for salvation, will be justly condemned; but we have carefully obeyed the commands of the first table; we do not trust to our moral duties, and therefore hope to escape. We have never worshipped false gods; we have made no graven images; we have never taken God's name in vain, nor do we profane his holy sabbath. On the contrary we entertain a great degree of veneration and love for God, we worship him daily in our families and closets; we study his word, honor his institutions, and diligently attend to the preaching of the gospel, in season, and out of season. But permit me to ask,—are you equally careful to perform all the duties, which you owe to your fellow creatures? Does not your whole religion consist in the observances of external forms, prayer, reading and hearing the word? Are you not among the number of forgetful hearers, rather than the doers of the word; and do you not hope, by your religious duties, to atone for your moral deficiencies? Are you not hard and unmerciful in your dealings; peevish, fretful and morose in your families, or indolent in. performing the proper duties of the station in which you are placed? Are you not harsh and severe in censuring the conduct, or condemning the character of your neighbors? Above all, are you not deficient in the great duty of liberality to the poor, and of doing to others, as you would wish that they should do to you? If so, vain are all your religious duties; vain your pretensions of love to God. In vain do you pretend to obey the commands of the first table, while you neglect those of the second; for piety, without morality, is even worse than morality without piety. You will he found guilty of wanting love to man; and consequently, of being destitute of all true love to God, whatever you may pretend; for, says the apostle, he that loveth not his brother. whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen? And again, whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? And again, if any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain.

V. Perhaps some may be found, who will say notwithstanding these observations, still our hope remains unshaken; for we have both piety and morality. We not only deal justly and love mercy, as it respects our fellow creatures, but also walk humbly with our God. We do not make the performance of our duties to men an excuse for neglecting our duties to God; nor, on the other hand, do we consider the discharging of our duty to God as an excuse for neglecting our duties to men; but we carefully attend to both. We keep up the worship of God in our families and closets; we bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; we reverence the sabbath and other institutions of religion, and diligently attend to the word read and preached. In addition to this, we are sober, moral and exemplary in our conduct; careful to promote the welfare and happiness of our families, and kind to the poor, the sick and distressed. In what respect then, can we be said to be wanting?

I answer, if you have nothing more than this, you want many things.

You want that new heart, without which no man can see the kingdom of God. You want that faith without which you must be condemned. You want that repentance, without which you must inevitably perish. You want that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. All these things are every where represented as indispensably necessary to salvation; and yet persons may do every thing which you profess to have done, without either regeneration, faith, repentance or holiness. You can plead nothing more than the pharisee, who went up to the temple, could plead. He discharged his duties to men no less faithfully than you profess to have done; for he was not unjust, nor an extortioner, nor an adulterer; and he gave the tenth part of his goods to the poor. In addition to this, he also attended to the duties, which he owed to God. He went to the temple, he prayed, he thanked God, and fasted twice in a week. Yet he was found wanting, and sent away empty. So the young ruler could say respecting the commandments, all these have I kept from my youth up; and St. Paul tells us, that before his conversion, as touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless. Yet he afterwards counted all his imaginary righteousness as loss for Christ. But you will perhaps ask, if an unregenerate impenitent sinner can do all these things, what need is there of regeneration and repentance? As well may you ask, if an enemy can perform all the outward acts and services of a friend, what need is there of any real friendship? Would you be satisfied with your children, if they served and obeyed you merely from a selfish fear of punishment, or hope of reward? ‘Would you be pleased with any of their attempts to promote your happiness, if you knew that a wish to obtain a portion of your estates was the only motive and governing principle of their conduct? But the slightest self-examination must convince those of you, whom we are now addressing, that you are actuated merely by selfish motives in all the religious and moral duties which you perform. You are not sweetly drawn by the gentle, but powerful influences of love, to obey your Father in heaven. You do not serve him merely for the pleasure of serving him. You serve him as a master, and not as a father. You are actuated either by fear of his displeasure, by a desire of obtaining a share of the heavenly inheritance, or a wish to be freed from a burden of guilt which oppresses you. Self-interest therefore, is really the god, whom you worship; you serve yourselves and not God, in all that you do; and therefore, your services are all sins; they are an abomination in his sight; because you want that principle of supreme love to God, which is found only in the renewed soul, and without which it is impossible to please him in the smallest degree. They who want this, want every thing. But though we should not insist upon this, though we should allow that all your duties were performed with proper views

and motives; yet still you would be found wanting. You would be found wanting with respect to the improvement of your time; for how much of this is misspent. How much is daily wasted in unnecessary sleep, in idle conversation, in foolish or useless pursuits, and in unproductive idleness. You would be found wanting in the government of your thoughts; for what an innumerable multitude of vain, trifling and sinful imaginations pass through your minds in the course of a single day? If your fellow creatures were acquainted with every thing that passes in your breasts, would they not consider you as wanting wisdom and goodness? How then must you appear in the sight of God? You would he found wanting in the government of your tongues; for how many foolish, vain, unprofitable words escape from your lips in the course of a day. Yet says our Savior, for every idle word that men speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment. In a word, you would be found wanting in every respect; for the law of God requires perfect obedience, in thought, word and deed, and pronounces a curse on every one, who does not thus obey it. It requires that all your time, all your talents, all your possessions, all your thoughts and all your affections should be sincerely consecrated and devoted to God; that whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, should be done to his glory. It is in vain to pretend, that you obey this law more frequently than you transgress it; that your good actions are more numerous than your sins. As well might a thief or a murderer say, I have obeyed the laws of my country for many years, and have only broken them in a few instances, and therefore I ought to be forgiven, since my good actions are more numerous than my crimes. Every one must, at once, be sensible of the folly of this plea. Every one must be sensible, that all laws, human and divine, do, and ought to, require perfect obedience, and to punish every willful transgression; and that it would be the height of absurdity to make a law which allowed persons to disobey its precepts. If the law of God allows men to sin in the smallest degree, then God has become the patron and protector of sin, and is no longer perfectly holy, just and true. But the law of God does not allow men to sin in the smallest degree. It considers him who offends in one point as guilty of all, and condemns him accordingly. It considers imperfect obedience as no obedience; and therefore every one who has at any time transgressed in thought, word or deed, every one who cannot produce a perfect righteousness, will be found wanting, when weighed in this impartial balance. But you will say, if this be the case then all will be found wanting; for the scriptures assure us, that there is not a just man on earth, who doeth good and sinneth not. True, my friends, by the law of God we are all found wanting. We have all sinned, and the whole world has become guilty before God. We are all children of wrath, and are already under condemnation. Do you ask, who then will be saved? who will not be found wanting? I answer, those, and those only, who can bring and place in the balance the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a perfect righteousness, without spot or blemish. He perfectly obeyed the whole law. He loved God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself; and he is declared to be the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. That is, he fulfils, or obeys the law in their behalf. Believers are united to Christ by faith in such a manner, that they are one with him in the sight of God, and what he has done is considered as having been done by them; and hence they are said to be complete, or perfect in him, and he is made of God unto them, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Hence believers, though they have neither wisdom, strength, nor righteousness of their own, are wise in Christ's wisdom, strong in his strength, and righteous in his righteousness; and therefore, when weighed in the balance they shall not be found wanting. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. But all, who are not united to Christ by faith, will be found wanting; all their righteousness will be proved

light as nothing and vanity, and they will share in the doom of impious Belshazzar. But here an important question arises: How may an interest in the righteousness of Christ be obtained? I answer—it cannot be purchased, for it is infinitely above all price, nor will he sell his favors. It cannot be merited; for the best merit nothing but destruction. It must come as a free gift. But to whom will it be given? I answer, it is freely and unconditionally offered to all who will accept it by faith. None however, will ever accept it but those, who see that they have no righteousness of their own to plead. None will accept it but those who are truly convinced, that they have never performed a good action, uttered a good word, or exercised one good affection. Hence our Savior informs us, that publicans and harlots, the very refuse of society, will sooner enter the kingdom of heaven, than those, who like the pharisees, trust in themselves that they are righteous. Hence also we find that the promises of the gospel are ever made to the poor in spirit, to the self-condemned sinner, to the mourners for sin, and to the penitent and contrite heart. Such characters see and feel that they have nothing of their own to plead; nothing which they dare place in the balance. They see, as did the apostle, that in them there dwells no good thing; they see that they are wholly unworthy of God's favor, and deserve nothing but death at his hands; they see that if they ever are saved, they must be saved by free, sovereign grace.

Hence they are willing to throw themselves at Christ's feet, and resign themselves entirely to his disposal. They are willing to receive him by faith, as he is freely offered in the gospel, and to depend on his righteousness, and intercession alone for salvation. But never will the self-righteous sinner do this; never will he submit to be saved in this humbling way. He may indeed be willing that Christ should supply the deficiencies of his own imaginary righteousness, and atone for the few trifling sins which he has committed; but he is resolved to have at least part of the glory of his salvation; he will not depend on Christ alone; and therefore in reality does not depend upon him at all, nor will he receive any benefit from him; for our Savior will have no partners in this work. He will save us alone, or leave us to perish. He will have all the glory, or we never shall join in the song of the redeemed.

Thus have I endeavored, in a plain, simple, unadorned manner, to set before you the sentence which you have reason to expect at the judgment day, and the manner in which you may escape the fate of those who will be weighed in the balance and be found wanting. I have avoided every thing which might tend only to amuse, or to render the subject obscure, and have only sought to render it intelligible to persons of every description. And now permit me to ask, what is the result? Will you go to the judgment seat in your own righteousness, or in that of Christ? If you are still determined to depend on yourselves, or on the mercy of God out of Christ, I cannot help it. I would only remind you of what God has said, Cursed be the man, that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled; this shall ye have at my hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow. But if there are any of you, who begin to fear that you shall be found wanting on that awful occasion; any, who feel that they are poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked, let them comply with the gracious counsel and invitation of Christ, and receive of him, a complete and perfect righteousness, without money and without price. He requires of you no other worthiness than a heartfelt conviction that you are utterly unworthy. He requires no other goodness, than a sincere acknowledgment, that you have in you no good thing. He requires nothing else of you, in order to salvation, but a readiness to be saved in

his own way and upon his own terms. Be not then discouraged to find that you are the chief of sinners; that you have no goodness, no worthiness, no righteousness of your own to plead. Did you possess any of these, he would not receive you; for he came to save, not the worthy, but the unworthy; not the righteous, but the sinful; not those who feel able to save themselves, but those, who feel utterly lost and undone without him. So long as you imagine, that you have any good qualities to recommend you to his favor, you are separated from him by an impassable gulf; for sooner may a camel pass through the eye of a needle, than one who is rich in his own opinion enter the kingdom of God.

Chapter 47

S. MESSIAHS VICTORY PREDICTED AND DESIRED.

MESSIAH'S VICTORY PREDICTED AND DESIRED.

Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, 0 most Mighty, with thy Glory and thy Majesty; And in thy Majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; And thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies whereby the people fall under thee. — Psalms 45:3-5. IN these words the psalmist, led by the Spirit of truth, addresses Jesus Christ, the great Captain of our salvation, to whom, as we learn from St. Paul, this psalm refers. In the first verse, the inspired author describes the state of his mind, when he began to pen it. My heart, said he, is inditing a good matter; I speak of the things, which I have made touching the king; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. But before he could proceed farther, the illustrious personage, who was the subject of his meditations, seems to have revealed himself to his enraptured mind, resplendent in glory, and pre-eminent in beauty; so that, instead of speaking of him, as he had intended, he felt constrained to address him as present; and cries out in an ecstasy of admiration and love, Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee forever. The exquisite pleasure which he felt while contemplating this delightful vision, and speaking the praises of his Redeemer, naturally excited in his heart the most fervent desires, that Christ's kingdom might be extended; and that others might be conquered by his grace, and brought to know one whose presence produced such fulness of joy. Hence he cries out in the language of our text, Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, 0 Most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty; and in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of meekness and truth and righteousness, and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. His benevolent prayer was no sooner uttered, than with the prophetic eye of faith he saw it answered. He saw this Lord of his affections, this object of his admiration, this subject of his praises, riding forth through the world in the chariot of his salvation, conquering and to conquer; and exultingly cries, Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of thine enemies, whereby the people fall under thee. My professing friends, no man was ever favored with a view of the glory and beauty of Christ, without feeling emotions and desires similar to those here expressed by the psalmist, without being constrained to pray, as he does, in our text, for the exertion and the triumph of his all conquering grace. For it is impossible to contemplate such a being, and to know the joy, which his presence gives, without ardently desiring, that others, and especially our acquaintance and friends, may share in our joys. And should he be pleased to favor any of us with such views of himself, now we are assembled professedly to pray for the effusions of his grace, and to commemorate his dying love, we shall find no language better suited to express our feelings and desires, than that which is employed by the psalmist in our text. Let us then consider the import of the language, the reasons, why he employed it, and the happy effects, which are witnessed, when the petitions contained in it are answered.

I. The first thing which deserves our attention in this prayer of the psalmist, is the appellation, by which he addresses Christ, O thou Most Mighty. He had, in the preceding verse, celebrated the preeminent beauty and loveliness of his person; Thou art fairer than the children of men. He had

also noticed his grace and mercy, as a mediator, displayed in the invitations and promises, which he uttered; Grace is poured into thy lips. But as he was now about to pray for an exertion of his power, he addresses him by a corresponding appellation, and calls him Most Mighty. The propriety of this appellation will not be questioned, when we consider that with respect to his divine nature, Christ is the Mighty God; the Lord Jehovah, in whose arm dwells everlasting strength. Nor is it less applicable to him considered as mediator. In this character he is Immanuel, God with us; and as such is mighty to conquer, and mighty to save. He is mighty to conquer; for he has led captivity captive; he has conquered sin, and death, and hell—the three most formidable enemies, that ever assailed the happiness of men, or the throne of God; enemies, who have repeatedly foiled, and who laugh to scorn all power short of Omnipotence. Nor is he less mighty to save; for he has saved millions from the most awful fate, in the most desperate circumstances. He says of himself, I am he that speaketh in righteousness, mighty to save. So say all the inspired writers. In a word, all power in heaven and earth is his; and he is able to save, even to the uttermost.

Let us next consider the import of the petition, which the psalmist presents to this Most Mighty of beings. It is, in brief; that he would exert his might, or the power of his grace, for the conversion and salvation of sinners. For this purpose, he prays,

1. That he would arm himself with the necessary weapons; Gird on thy sword. Christ has a sword of justice, and a sword of grace; a sword of justice, to cut off incorrigible offenders; and a sword of grace, to subdue his chosen people, and make them willing in the day of his power. It is the latter, which the psalmist here wishes him to gird on; and this is his word; for, says the apostle, the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. Agreeably, when St. John beheld him in vision in the midst of his churches, he saw a sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of his mouth. It is with propriety, that this word is compared to such a weapon; for the apostle informs us, that it is quick, or living, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and laying open the thoughts and intents of the heart.

It must be observed, however, that this description of the word of God, is applicable to it, only when Christ girds it on, and employs it as his sword. Of what use is a sword, even though it be the sword of Goliath while it lies still in its scabbard, or is grasped by the powerless hand of an infant. In those circumstances it can neither conquer, nor defend, however well suited it might be to do both, in the hand of a warrior. It is the same with the sword of the Spirit. While it lies still in its scabbard; or is wielded only by the infantile hand of Christ's ministers, it is a powerless and useless weapon; a weapon, at which the weakest sinner can laugh, and against which he can defend himself with the utmost ease. But not so when he, who is Most Mighty, girds it on. Then it becomes a weapon of tremendous power, a weapon resistless as the bolt of heaven. Is not my word like a fire, and a hammer, saith the Lord, which breaketh the rock in pieces? It is indeed; for what can be more efficacious and irresistible, than a weapon sharper than a two-edged sword, wielded by the arm of omnipotence? What must his sword be whose glance is the lightning? Armed with this weapon, the Captain of our salvation cuts his way to the sinner with infinite ease, though surrounded by rocks and mountains, scatters his strong holds and refuges of lies, and with a mighty blow, cleaves asunder his heart of adamant, and lays him prostrate and trembling at his feet. Since such are the effects of this weapon in the hand of Christ, it is with the utmost propriety, that the psalmist begins by requesting him to gird it on, and not suffer it to be inactive in its scabbard, or powerless in the feeble grasp of his ministers.

2. The psalmist petitions Christ to go arrayed in his glory and majesty; that glory and majesty, with which he then saw him to be clothed. Feeling himself deeply impressed and affected by the view of this glory and majesty, he could not but hope that the displays of it would produce similar effects upon others. As if he had said, Lord, thy glorious perfections and awful majesty subdue, overwhelm, dazzle, and delight me, and fill my soul with admiration, reverence and love; go then, I beseech thee, and display them to others; and they will feel constrained to submit to thee, as I have been, and to acknowledge that thou art fairer than the children of men, the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. But in what do the glory and majesty of Christ consist? I answer,—glory is the display, or manifestation of excellency. Now Christ is possessed of excellencies or perfections of various kinds; he has some excellencies, which belong to him as God; some, which belong to him as man, and some, which are peculiar to him as God and man united in one person. Of course, he has a threefold glory: This glory, as God, consists in a display of the infinite perfections, and excellencies of his nature. This glory he possessed with his Father before the world was. His glory as man, consists in the perfect holiness of his heart and life. His glory as God and man united in one person, the mediator, consists in his perfect fitness, or suitableness to perform all those works, which the office of mediator requires of him. This is the glory of which St. John speaks, We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. This is the glory in which Christ appears, when he goes forth to subdue sinners to himself; and this, therefore, is the glory which is meant in our text. If it be asked, in what this glory more particularly consists, I answer,—it consists in a fullness or sufficiency of every excellence and perfection necessary to qualify him for the all important office of mediator between God and man; every thing, which is necessary, either to satisfy the justice and honor of God, or to excite and justify the utmost love, admiration, and confidence of man. Now all this Christ possesses in perfection.

He possesses every thing necessary to satisfy the justice and secure the honor of God; for he has once and again declared, by a voice from heaven, that in him, or with him, he is ever well pleased. He also possesses every thing necessary to excite, encourage, and justify the highest love, admiration, and confidence of sinful men; for in him all fullness dwells, even all the fullness of the Godhead. There is in him a fullness of truth, to enlighten sinners, and lead them to believe in him; for in him are hidden all the treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge. He has also a fullness of grace, to pardon, sanctify, and save them; for the riches of his grace are unsearchable. Now the display or manifestation of this infinite fullness of grace and truth constitutes the glory, in which the psalmist wished Christ to appear. He wished him also to appear in his majesty. The difference between majesty and glory consists in this; glory is something, which belongs either to the person or the character of a being; but majesty is more properly an attribute of office, especially of regal office. This office Christ sustains. He is exalted to be a Prince as well as a Savior; he is King of kings and Lord of lords; and it is principally in his character of a king, that he subdues his enemies, and dispenses pardon. The psalmist, therefore, wished him to appear in this character, arrayed in his awful majesty, that while his glory excited admiration, and delight, and love, his majesty might produce reverential awe, and lead sinners to submission and obedience. In the next place, the psalmist prays, that being thus armed with his powerful sword, and arrayed in his glory and majesty, Christ would ride forth through the world, conquering and to conquer. In thy majesty ride prosperously. There is in these words an evident allusion to the manner, in which monarchs were, in those days, accustomed to go forth to battle. Arrayed in dazzling armor, and adorned with all the

ensigns of royal dignity, they ascended a splendid chariot and rode forth at the head of their armies, to assist friendly, or subdue hostile nations. In a similar manner the psalmist wishes Christ, the Captain of our salvation, to go forth, to deliver his people and destroy his enemies; and in the same word prays for and predicts his success. A most striking description of him, as going forth in this manner, we have in the revelation of St. John. I saw heaven opened, said he, and behold a white horse, and he that sat upon him was called faithful and true; and in righteousness doth he judge, and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns: and he had a name written, which no one knew but himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. And the armies of heaven followed him, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. With a similar view of our Redeemer the prophet Isaiah was favored, when he cried, Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah; this that is glorious in his apparel travelling in the greatness of his strength? It is I, the Savior answers, I, that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Such is the glorious personage, whom the palmist here addresses, such the manner, in which he wished him to go forth to war.

II. We proceed now to consider the reasons, why the psalmist wished the Savior to go forth prosperously, and the cause, in which he wished him to engage. Do this because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness. This passage may be taken in two different senses, and it is rather doubtful which was in the mind of the psalmist. He might perhaps intend the truth, meekness, and righteousness of Christ himself; for all these qualities belong to him in the highest degree. He is the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the way, the truth, and the life; and when he goes forth to battle, righteousness is the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness, or truth, the girdle of his reins.

Meekness is also an eminent characteristic of Christ. Learn of me, says he, for I am meek and lowly in heart. Nor is he less distinguished for righteousness. We have seen in the passage already quoted, that he is one, who speaks in righteousness; and that in righteousness he doth judge and make war; and the prophet Isaiah informs us, that as a king, he shall rule in righteousness, and with righteousness judge the poor. If we suppose this to be the meaning of the psalmist, we must understand him as assigning, in these words, the reason why he wished and prayed for the success of the Savior in his glorious expedition. Mayest thou ride prosperously, because thou art true, and meek, and righteous; and therefore, deservest the victory. Or,

2. By meekness, truth, and righteousness, the Psalmist might mean these qualities in the abstract; and if this be his meaning, we must understand him as specifying the cause in which he wished Immanuel to engage. He saw that meekness, truth, and righteousness, were in a great measure banished from the world; that the few, who loved and exercised these virtues, were despised and oppressed, and that error, falsehood, violence, and injustice almost universally prevailed. In a word, he saw what the prophet so feelingly describes and laments. Men, says he, sin in transgressing and lying against the Lord; speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth, and he that forsaketh evil maketh himself a prey. For this wretched state of things the psalmist saw there was no remedy but in the success of his arms, whose kingdom consists in righteousness, and peace,

and joy in the Holy Ghost, and whose design it is, to save all the meek of the earth. Hence, as a lover of goodness, and a friend to mankind, he wished and prayed that the great Deliverer might ride forth prosperously, diffusing truth, and meekness, and righteousness through the land.

III.To enforce his petition, the psalmist predicts the certain success, which would attend Messiah, if he thus rode forth to battle. Thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things; that is, thou shalt know experimentally what terrible things thy power can perform. Hence the church is represented as saying, By terrible things in righteousness shalt thou answer us, 0 God of our salvation. By these terrible things are intended,

1. The destruction, with which he shall overwhelm his incorrigible enemies. This destruction the prophet Isaiah described, when he saw him in vision returning from battle and victory. Why, he exclaims, art thou red in thine apparel, and why are thy garments like his, that treadeth the wine vat. Because, he answers, because I have trodden the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with me; for I have trodden them down in mine anger, and trampled them in my fury, and their blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment. This was fulfilled, when he so terribly destroyed his incorrigible enemies, the Jews, agreeably to his own predictions. It was fulfilled when he no less terribly overthrew pagan, persecuting Rome, and other nations, that conspired against his church. It is still fulfilled in the destruction of all, who obstinately reject his offered grace, and refuse to submit to his authority; and it will be still more signally fulfilled in the awful day, when he shall say, Those mine enemies, that would not have me to reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me.

2. There are also many terrible things which attend, or rather precede, the conquest of those, whom he makes willing to be his people in the day of his power. He sends his spirit to convince them of sin, of righteousness, and judgment; sets his terrors in dreadful array round about them; causes the flaming curse of his broken law to pursue them, pierces the conscience, and cleaves asunder their hearts with his sharp two edged sword, beats down their fancied strength to the earth, and often brings them to the very verge of despair, before they submit, and cry for mercy. That these are terrible things indeed to the awakened sinner, none who have suffered thus need be told; and such are the terrible things, which the right hand or power of Christ performs, when he rides forth to battle, as the Captain of salvation.

Lastly. ‘While thus beseeching the Redeemer to ride forth prosperously, and predicting his success, he seems suddenly to have seen his prayers answered, and his predictions fulfilled. He saw his all conquering Prince gird on his resistless sword; array himself in glory and majesty; ascend the chariot of his gospel, display the banner of his cross, and ride forth, as on the wings of the wind, while the tremendous voice of a herald proclaimed before him, Prepare ye the way of the Lord; exalt the valleys, and level the hills; make the crooked ways straight, and the rough places plain; for, behold, the Lord God comes; he comes with a strong hand; his reward is with him, and his work before him. From the bright and fiery cloud which enveloped his chariot, and concealed it from mortal eyes, he saw sharp arrows of conviction, shot forth on every side, deeply wounding the obdurate hearts of sinners, and prostrating them in crowds around his path, while his right hand extended raised them again, and healed the wounds which his arrows had made; and his omnipotent voice spoke peace to their despairing souls, and bade them follow in his train, and witness and share in his triumph. From the same bright cloud he saw the vengeful lightnings,

flashing thick and dreadful, to blast and consume every thing that opposed his progress; he saw sin, and death, and hell with all its legions, baffled, defeated, and flying in trembling consternation before him; he saw them overtaken, bound, and chained to his triumphant chariot wheels; while enraptured voices were heard from heaven exclaiming, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of God, and the power of his Christ. Such was the scene, which seems to have burst upon the ravished sight of the entranced prophet; transported with the view, he exclaims, Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of thine enemies, whereby the people fall under thee.

And, my friends, permit me to add, that similar scenes, though on a smaller scale, are witnessed by the eye of faith in every place, through which Christ now rides invisibly in the chariot of his salvation. Then the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, which, in the feeble hands of his ministers, had long seemed like a sword rusting in its scabbard, or grasped by an infant, becomes a weapon of resistless energy. Then the arrows of conviction, which had been vainly aimed, and feebly sent, are guided between the joints of the harness, and sinners feel them quivering in their hearts. Then the obdurate and incorrigible enemies of Christ are either laid low by the stroke of death, or blasted and seared by the lightnings of his vengeance, and left like a withered oak, on which the bolt of heaven has fallen, to stand naked and barren, till the appointed time for cutting them down and casting them into the fire! Then truth, and meekness, and righteousness, which had long seemed dead, revive, and ignorance, falsehood, and unrighteousness, are compelled to fly. Then the bonds of sin are burst; Satan is unable to retain his captives; death and the grave lose their terrors; joyful acclamations are heard in heaven, celebrating the return of penitent sinners; and crowds of those, whom, Christ's arrows have wounded, and his right hand healed again, are seen flocking around his chariot, shouting the praises, and extolling the triumphs of their great Deliverer; while those, who, like the psalmist, have been praying and waiting for his appearance join in the song, and exultingly cry, Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of thine enemies, whereby the people fall under thee. And now, if such are the blessed effects of Christ's presence, when he rides forth prosperously, who, that ever saw his glory, can forbear exclaiming with the psalmist, Gird on thy sword, 0 Most Mighty, and in thy majesty ride prosperously! And are there not now special reasons to hope that this prayer will be answered? Nay, that Christ has already begun to answer it? Has he not begun, in more than one heart, to give power and energy to his long inactive sword? Has he not begun to show himself in his glory and majesty to some of his mourning, waiting people among us? Has not the voice of his herald been heard exclaiming, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in this desert a high way for our God? Do not some parts of this town begin to shake under the weight of his thundering chariot wheels, and do not his arrows of conviction begin to fly thick around, causing some of the people, who have hitherto been his enemies, to fall before him? Do not some of you, my hearers, already feel these arrows sharp in your hearts, and does not his word, which has long assailed you in vain, like a sword that had lost its edge, now begin to cut deep, to wound your consciences and lay open your hearts? Yes, my friends, we know, and you know, that these tokens of the approach of his presence begin to be seen and felt. Yes, let his church hear and be glad; let his enemies hear and tremble; he comes, our Prince, our Savior, our Deliverer comes, riding gloriously in the chariot of salvation; comes to bless his people with peace; comes to do terrible things, and make bare his omnipotent arm. And how do you intend to meet this majestic Prince, the King of glory, this illustrious conqueror, should he visit you? Will you meet him as an enemy or as a friend? Will you fall under his arrows of conviction, or be blasted by the lightnings of his vengeance? Alas, at present many of you can

meet him only as enemies. His mark is not instamped on your foreheads; his protecting blood is not sprinkled upon the doorposts of your houses, to prevent the entrance of the destroying angel. There is no altar for prayer erected in your families, to distinguish you from the heathen, who call not upon his name, and upon whom, we are told, his fury will be poured out. Nay, you have not even a seat at his table, to serve as a visible token that you acknowledge him for your friend. Soon will many of you crowd away from him, though one would think you should tremble lest he meet you at the door and ask, why you thus fly from the table of your Maker and Redeemer. But though now his enemies, it is not too late to become his friends. One great object, on which he goes forth in his chariot of salvation, is to convert his enemies into friends. 0, then, seek to be found in this happy number. Cry to him in all the anxiety of alarm,

Lord, bend thy course towards me, plant one of thy sharp, but salutary arrows in my flinty heart that I may fall under thee, and become one of thy people in this day of thy power. And let those, who already feel his arrows in their hearts, beware how they endeavor to extract them, or permit any hand to do it but his own. To those, who will apply to no other physician, he will in due time return to heal their wounds, and speak peace to their consciences. But remember the time is short. Soon will the Savior be gone and then he that is unjust, must remain unjust still, and he that is filthy, must be filthy still. Now, in a peculiar manner, is the accepted time, and day of salvation. And we, my christian friends, how shall we receive our Prince and Savior, should he visit this place? What shall we, what can we render to him, who has remembered us in our low estate, and returned to visit us with his salvation? What indeed, but that offering, which he prizes above all others, a broken and contrite heart? Bring to him such a heart. Show him the scars, which his arrows of love formerly made in it. Remind him and yourselves of the memorable time, when he came to heal the wound, and speak peace to your consciences. Let every heart which he has thus wounded and healed, prepare him room. Let every voice, which he has tuned to join in the hallelujahs of heaven, be now heard celebrating his perfections, and praying for his speedy and universal triumph.

Chapter 48

S. OUR SINS INFINITE IN NUMBER AND ENORMITY.

OUR SINS INFINITE IN NUMBER AND ENORMITY. Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite? Job 22:5. This question was addressed by Eiiphaz to Job. He was led to ask it by a suspicion, that Job was a hypocrite. He had imbibed the erroneous opinion, that great temporal calamities are inflicted on none, except the wicked. Hence he inferred from the unprecedented afflictions of Job, that notwithstanding all his professions and fair appearances of piety, he was a wicked man. He therefore endeavored to convince him that this was his character, and that he had been deceived respecting himself? With this view he addressed him in the language of our text: Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite? Had Job really been what Eliphaz erroneously supposed him to be, this would have been a very proper question, and the charge which it implies, would have been strictly just. It is, therefore, still a proper question to be proposed to all who are ignorant of themselves. Indeed, it may without impropriety be addressed to every child of Adam; since there is not an individual among them, who, if he answer it truly, must not answer it in the affirmative. To establish the truth—that the sins of men are infinite in number and enormity—is my present design. In prosecuting this design it becomes necessary to show, as clearly as possible, what meaning is attached to the terms, sin and wickedness, in the Word of God; I say, in the Word of God; for it is too evident to require proof that by these terms, men usually mean something very different from what is meant by the inspired writers. The word, sin, for instance, is considered by many as synonymous with crime; and by crime they mean the violation of some human law, or of the common rules of morality and honesty. Hence they conclude, that if a man obeys the laws of his country, and lives a sober, moral life, he has few, if any, sins to answer for. A similar meaning they attach to the term, wicked. By a wicked man, they suppose, is intended, a man openly and grossly immoral, impious, or profane; one who treats religion with avowed disrespect, or who denies the divine authority of revelation. But very different is the meaning, which the inspired writers attach to these terms. By wicked men, they mean all who are not righteous; all who do not repent and believe the gospel, however correct their external conduct may be; and by sin, they mean a violation of the divine law, which requires us to love God with all our hearts, and our neighbor as ourselves; for, says the apostle, sin is a transgression of, or a deviation from, the law. This law branches out into various and numerous precepts, prescribing, with great minuteness, our duties towards all the beings, with whom we are connected, and the dispositions, which are to be exercised in every situation and relation of life; and the violation and disregard of any of these precepts is a sin. The gospel, also, has its precepts, as well as the law. It requires repentance, faith and obedience; and neglecting to obey these precepts, is represented as sinful in the highest degree. In a word, when we do not perfectly obey all God’s commands, in feeling, thought, word, and action, we sin. When we do not feel, and think, and speak, and act, as he requires, we are guilty of what are denominated sins of omission. When we feel, think, or speak, or act, in such a manner as he forbids, we are guilty of the sin of commission. These general remarks will be sufficient to convince every one who knows any thing of God, of himself, or of the divine law, that his sins are exceedingly numerous. But since most men are unacquainted with all these subjects, and especially, with the nature, strictness and

extent of God's law, it will be necessary, in order to produce conviction, to be more particular. And since the heart is represented as the fountain, whence all evil flows; the tree which gives its own character to all the fruit produced by it, let us begin with that, and consider,

1. The sin of our hearts; or in other words, of our dispositions and feelings. The sins of this class alone, of which the best man on earth is guilty, are innumerable. They form by far the heaviest part of the charge, which will be brought against every impenitent sinner at the judgment day. Yet most men think nothing of them. They seem to imagine, that if the outside be clean, the feelings and dispositions of the heart are of little consequence. But God thinks very differently; and a moment's reflection will convince us, that a being, who commits no outward sins, may, notwithstanding, be the chief of sinners. Such, for instance, are the evil spirits. None will deny, that they are sinful in the highest degree. But they have no hands, to act; no tongue, to speak. All their sins are inward sins; sins of the heart. It is obvious then, that persons may be the greatest sinners in the universe, without being guilty of one outward sin. The law of God, and the gospel of Christ, teach the same truth. What they principally require, is right feelings and dispositions. What they chiefly forbid and condemn is, feelings and dispositions that are wrong. For instance, love is an affection; repentance is an affection; faith is a feeling; humility a feeling; hope, patience, resignation, and contentment, are feelings. Yet all these are required of us as indispensable duties. On the other hand, unbelief is a feeling; selfishness, impenitence, pride, love of the world, covetousness, envy, anger, hatred, and revenge are feelings. Yet all these things are forbidden as the worst of sins; sins, for which those, who indulge them, will be condemned.

It is evident then, that if we wish to know the number of our sins, we must look first, and chiefly, at the feelings and dispositions of our hearts. And if we do thus look at them, we shall be convinced, in a moment, that our sins are numberless. Every moment of our waking existence, in which we do not love God with all our hearts, we sin; for this constant and perfect love to God his law requires. Every moment in which we do not love our neighbor as ourselves, we sin; for this also we are commanded to do. Every moment, in which we do not exercise repentance, we sin; for repentance is one of the first duties required of us. Every moment, in which we do not exercise faith in Christ, we sin; for the constant exercise of faith the gospel every where requires. When we do not set our affections on things above, we sin; for on these we are required to place them. When we are not constantly influenced by the fear of God, we sin; for we are commanded to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long. When we do not rejoice in God, we sin; for the precept is, Rejoice in the Lord always. When we are not properly affected by the contents of God's word, we sin; for this want of feeling indicates hardness of heart, one of the worst of sins. When we do not forgive and love our enemies, we sin; for this Christ requires of us. In a word, whenever our hearts are not in a perfectly holy frame, we are sinning; for God's language is, Be ye holy, for I am holy; be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect. And if we thus sin, when we do not exercise right feelings, much more do we sin, when we exercise those that are wrong. When we are dissatisfied with any part of God's word, or with any of his providential dispensations; when we feel a disposition to murmur at our situation, at our disappointments and afflictions, at the weather, or the seasons, we sin; for these are heart-risings of rebellion against God, and they render it impossible for us to say, sincerely, Thy will be done. When we hate any one, we sin; for he that hateth his brother, is a murderer. When we feel a revengeful, or unforgiving temper, we sin; for if we forgive not our enemies, God will not forgive us. When we secretly rejoice in the calamities of others, we sin; for

he that is glad at calamities, shall not go unpunished; and God is said to be displeased with those, who rejoice when their enemy falls. When we envy such as are above us, we sin; for envyings are mentioned among the sinful works of the flesh. When we covet any thing, that is our neighbor's, we sin; for this is expressly forbidden by the tenth commandment. When we love the world, we sin; for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. But I forbear to enlarge; for who, that knows any thing of himself, will deny, that the wickedness of his heart is great, and its iniquities numberless?

2. Let us, in the next place, consider the sinfulness of our thoughts. The thoughts are the offspring of the mind, as the feelings are of the heart; and that they may be sinful, the scriptures plainly teach. The wise man declares foolish thoughts to be sinful. Our Savior classes evil thoughts with thefts, murders, and adulteries. 0 Jerusalem, says Jehovah, wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee? Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts. The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination. Hear, 0 earth, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts. Even men's characters are determined by their thoughts and purposes; for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. These passages are more than sufficient to prove that there may be much sin committed in thought. And if vain, foolish thoughts are sinful, who, who, my hearers, can enumerate his sins? Who can even number the sins of this kind of which he is guilty in a single day? And many of these thoughts are rendered peculiarly sinful by being indulged in the house of God, during the hours set apart for devotion, when, if ever, the mind ought to be solemn and collected. But it is here impossible to descend to particulars. We must leave every one to reflect, as he pleases, on the atheistical thoughts, the impious and profane thoughts, the impure, covetous, vain, foolish, and absurd thoughts, which have passed through his mind, and been entertained there. And while you reflect on this, remember, that thoughts are the language of disembodied spirits; that thoughts are words in the ear of God; and that our guilt in his sight, is no less great than if we had actually given utterance to every thought, which has lodged in our minds. Agreeably, we find our Savior answering thethoughts of those around him, just as he would if they had expressed them in words; and in many passages, God charges sinners with saying, what, it appears, they only thought. In the ear of Jehovah then, our thoughts have a tongue; and what he hears them say, we may learn from the inspired declaration. Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is evil continually. And surely no man who believes this declaration, none who believes that thoughts are words in the ear of Jehovah, can doubt that his wickedness is great, and his iniquities numberless.

3. From sins of thought let us next proceed to those of the tongue. From what has been said of our feelings and thoughts, it is evident that this class of sins also must be exceedingly numerous; for it is out of the abundance of the heart, that the mouth speaketh. If then, sin prevails in the heart, it will flow out through the lips. That it does so, is but too obvious. Not to insist on the falsehoods, the slanders, the profane, impious, and indecent expressions, which are daily uttered by many persons, it may be sufficient to remind you, that of every idle word which men speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment. Every idle word then is a sin. But what are idle words? I answer, all that are not necessary, and which do not tend to produce good effects. God's precepts are, Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth; but that which is good to the use of edifying. Let your speech be always with grace, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. Let not foolish talking or jesting, which are not becoming, be once named among you; but rather giving of

thanks. These rules, perhaps, will be considered by some as too strict; but, my friends, they are the rules, which God prescribes in his word; they are the rules, by which we must be tried hereafter. And every word, which does not comport with them is an idle word; and consequently, sinful. How innumerable then, are the sins of the tongue! How large a portion of all the words, which we utter, are at best, but idle words, to say nothing of those which are obviously sinful! Well might the wise man say, that in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin. I shall only add, that whenever we speak of others as we should not wish them to speak of us, we sin against the law of love, and violate our Savior's golden rule, Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even the same to them. Happy is the man, who can truly say, that in this respect alone, his transgressions are not numberless.

4. Let us now consider our sinful actions. And here, my friends, we shall not speak of what the world call sins. We shall say nothing of thefts, frauds, injuries, intemperance, and debauchery. If there are any among my hearers, who are not free from these gross enormities, I must leave the task of reproving them to their own consciences. Our concern is principally with those sinful actions, which are by most men thought innocent; and for which therefore, conscience seldom, if ever, reproves them. To begin with what have been called sins of omission: Withhold not good from him to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. For to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. From these Passages it appears, that whenever men have an opportunity to do good, either to the bodies or souls of men, or of doing any good work for the glory of God, and neglect to improve it, they sin. Of how many sins, then, are we guilty! How many thousands of opportunities for doing good have we suffered to pass unimproved! How much good has been done by many of our fellow creatures, with no greater means, than we have enjoyed! Is not the charge, which was brought against the proud king of Babylon, applicable to many of us? We have failed to glorify the God, in whose hand our breath is. Prayer and praise glorify God. But these duties we have all neglected during a considerable part of our lives; and many of us are still neglecting them. We are commanded, whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God. These precepts apply to our words as well as to our actions; and they prove, that every word which we have not spoken, every action which we have not performed, with a view to promote the glory of God, and, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, is a sin.

Hence it follows, that all the words and actions of unrenewed men are sinful; for they never do any thing, either to the glory of God, or in the name of Christ. Agreeably, we are told, that the ploughing of the wicked is sin; that the prayer, and the sacrifice of the wicked, are an abomination; and that they who are in the flesh, that is, in an impenitent, unconverted state, cannot please God; for without faith it is impossible to please him. We do not mean, that all the words and actions of unrenewed men are outwardly wrong, or sinful; but they all proceed from wrong motives, and are not accompanied by right feelings; they are not performed with that temper and disposition, which God requires, and are therefore, sinful by defect. They are like a body without a soul; the heart, at which God principally looks, and which he requires, is unholy; and therefore, the actions are the same. This is the import of our Savior's comparison; the tree is corrupt, and therefore, the fruit is not good; for a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. To bring all that need be said on this subject to a point;—every feeling, thought, word, and action, which is not, in all respects, as it ought to be, or as God requires it to be, is sinful: but no feeling, thought, word, or action of an

impenitent sinner, is in all respects, what God requires it to be; therefore, every feeling, thought, word, and action of a sinner is sinful. If then men's feelings, thoughts, words, actions, are numberless, so are their sins.

I am aware, my hearers, that this conclusion will startle, and perhaps, offend some of you; but if we follow the scriptures, I see not that we can come to a different conclusion. I only ask to be judged, or rather ask you to judge yourselves, by this rule. If you can prove, by fair appeal to scripture, that any part of your temper and conduct has been perfectly right, perfectly agreeable to God's law, I will acknowledge, that my conclusion is wrong. I will only add, that the scriptures assert, in plain terms, that the thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, that the way of the wicked is an abomination to him; that every work of their hands, and all they offer, is unclean. If we believe these assertions, we must acknowledge that our wickedness is great, and our iniquities infinite, —absolutely numberless.

II. It is further necessary to show, that our sins are infinite, not only in number, but in criminality; that every sin is, in fact, infinitely evil, and deserving of infinite punishment. It is so,

1. Because it is committed against an infinite being, against God, a being infinitely powerful, wise, holy, just and good. The criminality of any offence is in proportion to the excellence and greatness of the person, against whom it is committed. For instance, it is wrong for a child to strike his brother. Should the same child strike his father, it would be incomparably more so. Were his father a king, possessed of every good quality, the act would be still more criminal. But God is our heavenly Father, the universal King, infinitely exalted above every human parent, above every earthly monarch; possessed, in an infinite degree, of every perfection, which can entitle him to the perfect love, confidence, and obedience of his creatures. He is also the author and preserver of the very powers and faculties, which we employ in sinning against him, and he has conferred on us innumerable favors. Of course we are under infinite obligations to love and obey him; and therefore, to violate these obligations, and sin against such a being, must be an infinite evil.

Again—that every sin is infinitely evil and criminal, is evident from the fact, that it is a violation of an infinitely perfect law. It will readily be allowed, that to violate a good law, is a greater evil than to violate a law, the goodness of which is doubtful. It will also be allowed, that if there were any law made by human governments, on obedience to which the honor, the welfare, and even the existence of a nation depended, —to violate that law, would be the greatest crime, which a subject could commit. Now the law of God is perfectly holy, just, and good. If it were universally obeyed, universal and endless happiness would be the consequence. But, disobedience to this law tends to produce universal and endless misery. Take away the law and the authority of God; there would be no right, but that of the strongest; violence, discord, and confusion would fill the universe; sin and misery would overspread the earth, would ascend to heaven, subvert the throne of Jehovah, and compel him to live in the midst of a mad, infuriated mob, the members of which were continually insulting him, and injuring each other. Now every violation of God's law tends to produce this effect.

Farther—every sin is an infinite evil, because it tends to produce infinite mischief. Let us trace this tendency. Suppose all the universe to be holy and happy. A thought or feeling tending to produce sin, rises in the breast of some one creature. This thought or feeling is indulged. It gains strength by indulgence; gradually it extends its influence over the faculties of the mind, enslaves the whole

man, and prompts him to disobey God. Now did it proceed no further, it would still be an infinite evil, for it has depraved and ruined an immortal being, a being, who, but for sin, would have been eternally happy; but, who must, in consequence of sin, be forever miserable. But it will not stop there. The being thus ruined by sin, will become a tempter, and seduce his fellow beings, and they, in turn, will tempt others; and unless God prevent, the infection will spread through the created universe, transforming holy beings into devils, and all worlds into hell! Such, my hearers, is the tendency of sin. Do any deny it? We appeal to facts. The whole universe was once holy and happy. A thought or feeling tending to produce sin, rose in the breast of Satan. He indulged it, and it ruined him. It transformed him from an archangel into a devil. He tempted other angels, and they became devils. He tempted our first parents; they cornplied, sinned, and became the parents of a sinful race. Thus all the sin and all the misery in the universe, all on earth and all in hell, may be traced back to one sinful thought or feeling entertained, at first, in a single breast; and this sin and misery would be far greater than they are, were it not for the restraining power and grace of God. Such then, is the tendency of sin, of every sin; and such effects it would produce, did not God prevent. A sinful thought, or feeling, is like a spark of fire. It seems but a little thing, and is easily extinguished; but it has a tendency to consume and destroy; and let it have room and opportunity to exert itself; let it be fed by combustible materials, and fanned by the winds, and it would destroy every thing destructible in the universe. Similar is the tendency of sin; and who then, will say, that it is not an infinite evil?

Sins derive an infinite malignity from being committed in defiance of motives and obligations infinitely strong. It is evident, that the criminality of any sin is in proportion to the motives and obligations, which opposed its commission. To sin against many and powerful motives, indicates greater depravity, and is, of course, more criminal than to sin against few and feeble motives. Suppose a person is informed that if he commits a certain crime, he shall be imprisoned. If, notwithstanding the threatening, he perpetrates the crime, he shows that he loves the crime more than he loves liberty. Again, suppose him to be assured that if he commits the crime, he shall be put to death. Should he, after that, commit the crime, it would indicate greater depravity than before. It would show that he loved the crime more than life. But the word of God threatens sinners with everlasting misery, if they persist in sin; and promises them everlasting happiness, if they will renounce it. I need not tell you that what is everlasting, is in one respect infinite, viz, in duration. Here then, are two infinitely powerful motives presented to the sinner, to deter him from sin—infinite happiness, and infinite misery. Every one then, who persists in sin, notwithstanding these motives, shows that he loves sin more than everlasting happiness; that he hates holiness more than he dreads everlasting misery. His attachment to sin, and of course, his depravity and criminality, are therefore boundless, or infinite. From all that has been said, it appears that our sins are numberless, and that every one of our sins is infinitely evil or criminal. Every one then, who answers the question in our text with truth, must answer it in the affirmative.

INFERENCES. 1. If our sins are thus infinite in number and criminality, then of course, they deserve an infinite, or everlasting punishment; such a punishment, as God threatens in his word. There is scarcely any truth, which men are more disposed to deny, than this. They contend, that it cannot be just for God to punish sins committed during the short period of our residence on earth, with everlasting misery. But let us examine this objection. Do you not all acknowledge that a murderer may justly be put to death? Yet he might not have been employed more than a single

moment in committing that murder. The fact is, in other cases we never think of inquiring how much time was spent in the commission of any crime. We consider only the nature and magnitude of the crime, and its effects upon society. If the crime is great, and its effects highly pernicious, we conclude at once, that it deserves a severe punishment. Now we have shown, that sin is an infinite evil; that the effects, which it tends to produce, are infinitely mischievous. Of course, it deserves an infinite punishment. And permit me to add, that complaints of the severity of this punishment come with a very ill grace from impenitent sinners; for they will persist in sin, notwithstanding this punishment. It seems then, that instead of being too severe, it is not sufficiently severe to deter them from sin. If men will now violate God's laws, what would they do, had he annexed to their violation only a temporary punishment?

2. If sin deserves an infinite punishment, then it is perfectly right, that God should inflict such a punishment upon sinners. It is no impeachment of his character, no reflection upon his goodness, to say that he will inflict it. This evidently follows as a necessary consequence from what has been said; for justice consists in treating every one as he deserves to be treated; and if sinners deserve an endless punishment, then it is perfectly just and right for God to inflict such a punishment upon them.

3. If it is just that God should inflict such a punishment upon impenitent sinners, then he must inflict it; he is bound by the strongest obligation to inflict it, for he must do what is just and right. And if it is just and right thus to punish impenitent sinners, then it cannot be just and right not to do it. To spare them, would not be treating them as they deserve, and justice consists in treating them according to their deserts. In a word, it is as much an act of injustice to spare the guilty, as it would be to condemn the innocent. This God himself teaches us in his word. He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord. And will the just God do that, which he declares to be an abomination in his sight? The Judge of all the earth must do right.

4. Hence we see why the atonement made by Christ was necessary. Men had all sinned. Their wickedness was great, and their transgressions infinite. Hence they deserved an infinite punishment; and God was obliged, in justice, to inflict on them such a punishment, unless some sufficient atonement could be made. As sin, and the punishment due to sin, were infinite; no atonement, which was not infinite in value, could suffice. And where could such an atonement be found? Men could not make it; for they were already under sentence of death, and forfeited every thing which they possessed. Yet the atonement must be made by a man; because it was for the benefit of men. The language of the law was, man has sinned, and man must die. In this exigency, the Eternal Word, the Son of God, interposed. He consented to become man, to bear the sins of men, or, in other words, the punishment, which their sins deserved; to stand as the representative of sinners, and suffer the curse of the law in their stead. This he has done. He has thus magnified the law and made it honorable. He deserves some reward for this wonderful act of benevolence and obedience. A just God is as much bound to reward him, as he is to punish the wicked. But what reward shall he give him? He needs nothing for himself. But there is a reward infinitely valuable in his estimation, infinitely dear to his benevolent heart. It is the pardon and salvation of his people, of every sinner, who confides in his merits and intercession, and submits to be reconciled, through him, to God. This reward was promised him. This reward is given him. God can now be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. None, however, will believe in

Jesus, none will apply to him for salvation, but those who see and feel, that their wickedness is great, and their iniquities infinite. You may see therefore, my friends, why it is, that I have led your attention to this subject.

It is not because I love to dwell upon it. It is not because I, a miserable sinner, take pleasure in accusing and condemning my fellow sinners. But it is because I, a pardoned sinner, a sinner washed from numberless and infinite offences in the atoning blood of Jesus, wish to bring my fellow sinners to that precious fountain, of which I know the efficacy. It is because, as a messenger of the Lord of hosts, I am commanded to cry aloud, and show to the people their transgressions and their sins: and because I am also directed to preach to you the unsearchable riches of Christ. You may easily conceive how precious the Savior would appear to you, did you feel burdened with the weight of all the sins, with which you are here charged. My friends—penitent simmers, true Christians, do feel thus burdened; they feel that their wickedness is great, and their iniquities numberless. This it is, which leads them to adopt such expressions, as you hear them use in prayer; expressions, which have been used by all the pious before. It is this which leads them to complain, that they are the chief of sinners, and to cry out with the apostle, 0, wretched man, that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Could you feel thus, how would you rejoice to hear of a Savior! How eagerly fly to his atoning blood! And are there none, who feel thus? none, whose sins God has set in order before their eyes? none., who are ready to cry out, My sins have gone over me as a heavy burden; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more in number than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me! Fly, then, to the cross of Christ, in whom we have redemption, through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace.

Chapter 49

S. Our obligations to GOD and Men

Our obligations to GOD and Men

"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God, the things that are God’s." Mark 12:17. the period of our Saviour’s residence on earth, the Jews were greatly divided in opinion, respecting the lawfulness of paying tribute to the Roman emperors, under whose government they were. The Pharisees, prompted by ambition, and a wish to obtain popularity, earnestly contended that, as the Jewish nation were the peculiar people of God, they ought not to submit or pay tribute to a heathen power. The Herodians, as is generally supposed, maintained that, in their present circumstances, it was not only necessary but lawful. In this dispute, the common people sided with the Pharisees, while all who wished to secure the favor of the Roman government, took part with the Herodians. In these circumstances, the enemies of our Lord flattered themselves that by proposing to him this much disputed question, they should infallibly draw him into a snare. Should he decide in favor of the lawfulness of paying tribute, they could represent him to the people as an enemy to their liberties, and thus excite against him their indignation. Should be on the other hand, assert that to pay tribute was unlawful, they could accuse him to the Roman Governor, as a mover of sedition. The plot was artfully laid; and its execution artfully conducted; but in vain did human craftiness attempt to circumvent divine wisdom. Instead of directly replying to their question, our Saviour called for a piece of money, and asked, whose image and superscription it bore. They said Caesar’s. Render then, said he, to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God, the things that are God’s. The spirit of this passage requires us to regard the rights of all beings as sacred, and to give them all what is theirs; or, as it is elsewhere expressed, to render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, and honor to whom honor is due. This important practical truth, we now propose to consider. I do not. conceive that. it requires any proof. You will, I doubt not, readily acknowledge, that we are bound to render to every being, what is his just due. All that is necessary, then, is to show what is due to the several beings with whom we are connected. In attempting to do this, I shall show.

I. What is due to God, and II. What is due to men from each of us.

I. What is due to God; or, what are the things, the property of God, which our Saviour here requires us to render him. The question may be answered very briefly; in one word; and that word is, all; for it is very easy to show that all things are in the most perfect sense the property of God. No right of property can be more perfect than that which results from creation, and surely no one present will deny that all things were created by him. Agreeably he claims them all. The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof; the world and all that dwell therein, for he founded and established it. The silver, he says, is mine; and the gold is mine; mine is every beast of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. Of course, we, and all that we possess are God’s property, more strictly so than anything which we call our own is our property, and he claims it all. But general remarks do not affect us. It is therefore necessary to descend to particulars, and mention separately the things that are God’s and which he requires us to render to him.

1. Our souls with all their faculties, are the property of God. He is the Father of our spirits. Glorify God, says the voice of inspiration, in your spirits which are his. If any of you hesitate to acknowledge the justice of his claim to your souls, look at them for a moment. Contemplate their immortality, their wonderful faculties, the understanding, the will, the imagination, the memory, and then say, whose image and superscription do they bear? Who gave you these faculties? Who endowed them with immortality? Must it not be the king immortal, the only wise God, to whom it is owing that there is a spirit in man; who has given us more understanding than the beasts of the field, and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven? Our souls then, with all their faculties, are his, and to him they ought to be given. Is it asked, what is implied in giving our souls to God? I answer, we give them to him when we employ all their faculties in his service; in performing the work which he has assigned us. We give them to him when our understandings are diligently employed in discovering his will; when our memories retain it, our hearts love it, our wills submit to it, and the whole inner man obeys it. This is what is implied in the first and great command, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength.

2. Our bodies are the property of God. As he is the Father of our spirits, so also is he the former of our bodies. Thine eyes, says the psalmist, did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, when as yet there were none of them. Thy hands, says Job, have made me and fashioned me round about; thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh and fenced me with bones and sinews. The same work God has performed for each of us. Hence the Apostle exhorts us to glorify God with our bodies which are his, and to present them as living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable in his sight, which is our reasonable service. Rendering to God his own, implies then the giving of our bodies to him. This is done when we employ our members as instruments of righteousness unto holiness. It is neglected when we use them as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.

3. Our time is God’s property. This is indeed implied in the remarks which have already been made. Our time is that part of duration which is measured by our existence. But during every moment of our existence, we are the property of God. To his service, therefore, every moment of our time ought to be consecrated. If, at any moment, we are not serving him, we, during that moment, withhold from him ourselves.

4. All our knowledge and literary acquisitions are God’s property. They were acquired by us in the use of that time, and of those faculties which are his; and, of course, he may justly claim them as his own. And we find, that he does claim them. He compares our faculties and his other gifts to a sum of money, entrusted by a master to his servants, to be employed and increased for his benefit. And by the punishment which that master inflicted on a slothful, unfaithful servant, who neglected to improve his talents, he shows us what will be the doom of those who do not cultivate their faculties, or who do not consecrate to him, the fruits of that cultivation. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how we can justify ourselves in acquiring knowledge, unless with a view to serve him more effectually. If it be not sought with this view, it must be sought merely for the purpose of gratifying, enriching, or aggrandizing ourselves; a motive to action, of which God does not approve, and which is in direct opposition to the letter and spirit of our text.

5. Our temporal possessions are God's property. They are all, either the gifts of his providence, or, as was remarked respecting our literary acquisitions, were obtained by the use of time and faculties which belong to him. They are his also by the right of creation, a right, as has been observed, of all rights the most perfect. Agreeably, we find that men are frequently represented in the Scriptures, not as the owners of their possessions, but merely as stewards, to whose care the Lord of all things has entrusted a portion of his property, to be employed agreeably to his directions. These directions allow us to employ such a portion of the property thus entrusted to us, in supplying our own wants, as is really necessary to our support and happiness, or as is consistent with the rules of temperance and the demands of benevolence. But, if any part of it be spent in gratifying what St. John calls the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life, it is devoted to a purpose for which our master never designed it, and he will consider and treat us as unfaithful stewards.

Lastly; our influence is God's property. This follows as a necessary consequence from the preceding remarks. All our influence over others results either from our natural faculties, our knowledge, or our wealth; all of which have been shown to be the property of God. Of course, the influence which we derive from any of these circumstances, is his also, and ought ever to be exerted in promoting his honor and interest in the world. It appears, then, that rendering to God the things that are God's, implies consecrating to his service, our souls, our bodies, our time, our knowledge, our possessions and our influence. He who withholds from God any of these things, or any part of them, does not comply with the precept in our text.

II. I proceed, as was proposed, to show what things are due from us to men. At first view it may seem as if nothing were due; or, at least, that we have nothing which we can render to them; for if, as has been shown, we, and all that we possess are the property of God, what remains for men? I answer, if God had not required us to render something to men, nothing would be due to them, nor should we have the smallest right to bestow anything upon them. But as God is the sole and sovereign proprietor of everything that exists, he has a perfect right to say how it shall be disposed of. He has a right to appoint such receivers as he pleases, and he has in part appointed our fellow-creatures to be receivers of a large portion of what we owe him. To this portion, they have, therefore, a just claim. And when we regard this claim, when we give anything to men, in compliance with the will of God, he considers it as given to him. The question, what is due from us to our fellow creatures, is then equivalent to the inquiry, what are those things which God requires us to give to men, and to which they have therefore a right; a right, founded in his revealed will. This question I now propose to answer.

1. All men, without exception, have a right to our love; a right to expect that we should love them as we love ourselves; and that as we have opportunity, we should do to them, as we should wish them, in a change of situation, to do to us. This, as I need not inform you, God expressly requires. Love thy neighbor as thyself. Whatsoever things ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. Nor are our enemies to be excepted; for, says our Saviour, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. All men then, so far as they are known by us, have a right to our love, and to all the kind offices which love would prompt us to perform. Every man, who dies without having done all the world, all the good which it was in his power to do, dies in debt to the world, or to the world's Creator. Withhold not good, says the voice of inspiration, from him to whom it is due, when

it is in the power of thy hand to do it. Do good to all men, as ye have opportunity. To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. Much more then have our fellow creatures a right to expect that we should do them no injury. They have a right to our good opinion, till they forfeit it by misconduct. They have a right to expect that we refrain from speaking evil of them, except when duty requires it; to expect that persons, reputation and property, should be in our hands as safe as in their own. It is scarcely necessary to add, that all with whom we transact any business, have a right to be treated with the most perfect fairness and honesty. Love will, of course, lead to this. Justice requires it. God commands it. Let no man, he says, overreach or defraud his brother in any matter; for the Lord is the avenger of all such. Now the man who knowingly takes or retains the smallest portion of another's property, is dishonest, unjust, and exposes himself to this threatening. Nor will it avail anything for him to plead that he takes no more than the law gives him; for human laws are necessarily imperfect; and their application must, in many cases, be still more so. They often allow men to take, or to retain that, to which, by the law of God, they have no right. And remember, that we are to be tried, not by the laws of men, but by the law of God. He then, who, in any case, takes more than the law of God, the law of love allows, or retains what that law forbids him to retain, is condemned by it. The rust of his unlawful gain, says an apostle, shall witness against him, and eat his flesh, as it were fire. Among such unlawful gains, must be included all that is acquired by defrauding the public revenues. The only difference between defrauding the public and defrauding an individual, is, that in the former case, we cheat many, and in the latter, only one. The sum which each man pays the public, is paid for a valuable consideration. It is paid for the secure enjoyment of life, reputation, liberty and property. If one man pays less than he ought for this purpose, others must pay more, and then they are defrauded.

2. To all whom God has made our superiors, we owe obedience, submission and respect. As subjects, we are bound to obey, honor and pray for our rulers. Let every soul of you be subject to the higher powers. Submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. Thou shall not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. Pray for all that are in authority. As children we are required to honor and obey our parents. But as this duty has been recently under consideration, it is needless to enlarge. Servants are required to be obedient to their masters with all reverence, not answering again, and to account their masters worthy of all honor; and they, adds the apostle, who have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren, but rather do them service because they are faithful. We may add that the aged, considered merely as such, have a claim to respect. Thou shall rise up, says Jehovah, before the hoary head and honor the face of the old man.

3. To our inferiors we owe kindness, gentleness and condescension. They have a right to expect that their feelings should not be needlessly wounded, and that regard should be paid to their comfort and convenience. Parents provoke not your children to wrath. Masters forbear threatening. Let all condescend to men of low estate. The poor and afflicted have special claims. The afflicted have a right to our sympathy; the industrious poor to pecuniary relief. With respect to this duty, many indulge erroneous opinions. They allow that we ought to be just and honest, to pay our debts, but with respect to liberality to the poor, they seem to imagine that we are left at liberty to do as we please. But if the law of God be adopted as our rule we shall find that it requires charity no less than justice. We shall find that we owe a debt to the industrious poor, which, though they cannot, strictly speaking, demand, God requires us to pay. In his sight, the man who is not

charitable to the poor, is dishonest and unjust. But with respect to the indolent poor, the decision of Scripture is, that if any man will not work, neither shall he eat.

4. Those of us who are members of Christ's visible church, owe to each other the performance of all the duties, which result from our connection. We are bound to watch over our professing brethren, to admonish them when needful, and to seek in all things the peace and welfare of the church. W e are also under special obligations to promote their temporal interest; for while the Scriptures command us to do good to all men, they add, specially to those who are of the household of faith.

Lastly; there are some things which we owe our families and connections. As husbands and wives, we owe each other the strict and faithful performance of the promises which we made, when we were united. As parents, we owe our children the best education for this world and the next, which it is in our power to give them. As heads of families, we are bound to provide for their wants, to the utmost of our power, for he who neglects to do this, has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.

Thus, my hearers, have I stated the principal things which we owe to God, and to men, and the payment of which is implied in rendering to both the things which are theirs. The justice of this statement, I think no one can deny, who does not deny the authority of the Scriptures. On this ground I am prepared to meet any man, and defend the truth of every position which has been advanced. It only remains to improve the subject.

1. In view of this subject, how great, how incalculable is the debt which we have contracted, both to God and to men. All the things which have been enumerated justly belong to them, and ought to have been paid them, from the first moment of our moral existence. But surely I need not attempt to prove that we have not paid them. We have not even rendered to men, the things that are men's; much less have we rendered to God the things that are his. Every day, every hour of our waking existence, we have withheld something both from God and from men, which was due to them. Every day and hour, therefore, our debt to him is increasing. Well then may our Saviour represent us as owing a debt of ten thousand talents. Well may God accuse us of robbing and defrauding him. Will a man, says he, rob God? Yet ye have robbed me.

How vain, how false then, are the pretences of those who assert that they have injured no one, that they pay every one his own; and how presumptuous are the hopes which they build upon this assertion! They make all religion to consist in paying their pecuniary debts, and in avoiding any instance of dishonesty, which is forbidden by human laws. They deny or forget that God has any rights; they think it neither unjust nor dishonest to withhold from him his property. But, my hearers, though we forget God's rights, he will not; nor will he stiffer them to be disregarded with impunity. He knows how to claim and to receive what is his. He has death ready to arrest us. He has ail eternal prison from which there is no escape, in which multitudes of unfaithful stewards are now confined, and in which he will confine us, till the uttermost farthing be paid; unless we can find a surety, able and willing to take our debts upon himself. Hence,

2. We may learn our need of an interest in the Saviour, and the impossibility of being saved without him. We evidently cannot discharge our past debts. Should we, from this moment become perfect, and render both to God and men all that is theirs, it would not prevent our debt from

increasing. It could make no satisfaction for the past. It could cancel no part of the debt which we have already contracted, and for that we should still be answerable, and must still be condemned. In this view the situation of every sinner is desperate. He is loaded with a debt which he is unable to pay, which is constantly increasing, and which he must discharge or perish. But though we have thus destroyed ourselves, in Christ there is help. He becomes surety for all that believe in him; takes upon himself the debt, which they can never discharge, and thus sets their souls at liberty. By the assistance of his grace, and through him as their mediator, they are enabled to present themselves to God, living, holy and acceptable sacrifices. This is the way and the only way of salvation. And now, my hearers, what shall we say to these things? I make no appeal to your passions. I appeal to your understandings and consciences, and ask, is it not just that God should require us to render to him and to men, what is due to each respectively? Is it not just that he should punish those who neglect to do this? Have we not all, even the best of its, neglected to do this? Was it not infinitely good and merciful in God to provide a surety to discharge debts, which we might most justly have been called on to pay! Are we not under infinite obligations to him, who consented to become our surety, and who to save our forfeited lives, laid down his own? And do not reason, conscience, and a regard to our own happiness, combine with Scripture in urging us, to accept the offers of this divine Benefactor; and constrained by his love, to live henceforth to him and not to ourselves! To these questions, my friends, there can be but one true, reasonable, scriptural answer. Practically give them that answer, and your souls shall live.

Chapter 50

S. PRAYER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CHRISTS KINGDOM.

PRAYER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CHRISTS KINGDOM.

Thy kingdom come.—Matthew 6:10. THE well known form of prayer, of which these words are a part, is in every respect worthy of its divine author. On this, as on all other occasions, he spoke as never man spake. In the compass of six short petitions, expressed in language at once simple and dignified he has included every thing necessary for man to ask, or for God to bestow; and at the same time has shown us the spirit, which should animate our devotions, and indirectly, but impressively, taught us our duty to our Creator, to our fellow creatures, and to ourselves. Even the order, in which the several parts of this inimitable prayer are arranged is full of meaning and instruction. By assigning the first place to those petitions, which relate to the honor of God's name, the advancement of His kingdom, and the accomplishment of his will, our Savior probably intended to teach us to prefer these objects to our own private interest and to give them as he invariably did, the first place in our exertions and desires. To this place indeed. they are pre-eminently entitled. They embrace at once the best interests of heaven and of earth—of God and of his creatures. So inseparably is their promotion connected with the highest happiness of our fallen race, that love to man and to ourselves as well as concern for the divine glory, must induce us to prefer it to every other object. Never do we display a temper more worthy of men and of Christians; never do we ask for such a profusion of blessings on ourselves and others, as when we sincerely pray that God's name may be hallowed, that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. These few words express or imply all that boundless benevolence can desire; and were it possible to personify benevolence, these are the words which she should be represented as uttering. The kingdom, for the advancement of which we are here taught to pray, is that spiritual kingdom which Christ came to establish. It is styled the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of heaven, in allusion to a prediction of the prophet Daniel. In the days of these kings, says he, the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shah never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. The nature and design of this kingdom, as well as its future extent, are largely and particularly described by the inspired writers. Our Savior has informed us, that it is not an external kingdom. The kingdom of God, says he, cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, lo, there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you. He has also assured us, that his kingdom is not of this world; and we farther learn from one of his apostles that it consists in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. It is, therefore, a spiritual kingdom; its throne is erected in the souls of men; its laws are the benevolent precepts and doctrines of the gospel; and its subjects consist of those on whose hearts these laws are indelibly inscribed by the finger of God. When therefore we pray that his kingdom may come, we pray for the universal prevalence of Christianity; and for the removal, renovation, or destruction of every thing which tends to retard or limit its progress. We pray that the gospel of Christ may he known, believed, and obeyed throughout the world, that his religion may soon become the only religion of man; and that its glorious effects, righteousness, peace, and holy joy, may universally prevail. The

brief sketch which has been given of the nature of Christ's kingdom is intended to prepare the way for a consideration of the motives which should induce us to pray for its advancement: Some of these motives, as was unavoidable, have already been indirectly brought into view. They, however, deserve to be more fully and particularly stated. The first motive, to which I request your attention, is the divine command. We ought to pray for the advancement of this kingdom, because God, our rightful Sovereign, requires it of us. He commands us to pray for the peace or prosperity of his church; to keep not silence and to give him no rest till he establish and make it a praise in the earth. Even that first and great command, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, implicitly inculcates the same duty; and love to God will necessarily lead us to pray fervently and perseveringly for the advancement of his kingdom. I may add, that the form of prayer, a part of which we are considering, has all the force of a positive divine command; and that we violate both the letter and the spirit of this command, whenever we presume to address our Maker without praying that his 'kingdom may come. With the real subjects of his kingdom these commands will ever be the first and most prevailing motive; and did we all belong to the happy number, we should need no other motive to induce us to pray for its advancement. A plain thus saith the Lord, would influence us more powerfully than volumes of reasoning, or than all the motives which human ingenuity could devise. A second motive, which should induce us to pray for the coming of God's kingdom is, that by this desirable event the divine glory will be greatly promoted. Though God's essential glory is ever the same, and incapable alike of diminution or increase, yet his declarative glory, or, in other words, his glory as displayed to his creatures, is intimately connected with the prosperity of his kingdom, and shines with a greater or less degree of lustre in proportion as that is increased or diminished. The sun is ever bright and luminous, yet its beams may by various causes be obscured or eclipsed, so as to render it apparently dark. So the glory of God, the Father of lights, the Sun of the universe, is often, as it were, shrouded in a veil, and his name is dishonored, rather than glorified, in the view of his intelligent creatures. While the world remains in its present state, this must inevitably continue to be the case. The glory of God is principally displayed in his word and in his works, especially in the great work of man's redemption. But of his word millions know nothing. Of the work of redemption they are equally ignorant; and even the glory of creating and preserving the world, is by them taken from Jehovah, and ascribed to some worthless idol, the work of their own hands. Thus as the apostle expresses it, men have changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things, and have worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.

How many myriads of intelligent, immortal beings are at this moment bowing to stocks and stones, in humble adoration, and giving that worship and glory to some impure or cruel idol, which is due to God alone—while he is comparatively left almost without a worshipper in his own world; a world which he has made, which he preserves and fills with his goodness. The apostle informs us, that when the heathen sacrifice to their idols, they in reality sacrifice to devils. Behold, then, millions of the human race robbing that God whom they ought to love and adore, of his glory, to give it to the prince of darkness, the great foe of God and man. Behold his kingdom extensive, and his subjects almost innumerable, while the kingdom of God is circumscribed within narrow limits, and his subjects are comparatively few. But this is not all, nor even the worst. Would to God that it were. But even in lands called Christian, what contempt is cast upon the ever blessed God! How openly and impiously is his sacred name profaned and blasphemed! How are his holy Sabbaths

dishonored! How is his law of love trodden under foot! How is his word neglected and abused, and the gospel of his Son despised! How little do men thank God for his unspeakable gift! With what profane contempt do multitudes treat the ordinances and institutions of his religion! How little are the dispensations of his providence regarded! How much is ascribed to second causes, while the Great First Cause is overlooked and neglected! And to say no more, how many infidels, politely styled philosophers, have even attempted to rob him of the glory of creating the world, by ascribing its existence to fate or chance, while thousands wish them success in their impious endeavor! Now, my friends, who that feels as a creature of God ought to feel, who has the smallest portion of reverence or love for his Creator, can, without the utmost grief and indignation, see him thus dishonored, insulted, and robbed of his glory? Can a loyal subject hear, without emotion, his sovereign dishonored? Can an affectionate child see his father insulted without being moved? If then we are the subjects, and the children of God, how can we behold our Almighty Sovereign, our heavenly Father, thus insulted, dishonored, without feeling the strongest emotion of indignant sorrow, and fervently praying that his kingdom may come, and that the knowledge of his glory may fill the earth, even as the waters fill the seas? The psalmist informs us that, when the Lord shall build up Zion, that is, extend and establish his kingdom, the spiritual Zion, he shall appear in his glory; he will then appear peculiarly great and glorious in the view of all his creatures. Pray then, ye, who, like David, are grieved when men keep not God's law; ye, who, like Elijah, are jealous for the honor of the Lord of hosts, ye, who, like Moses, desire to see God's glory; pray and beseech him to come quickly, and build up his kingdom on earth. The benefits which will result to mankind from the coming of God's kingdom, furnish another powerful motive to induce us to pray for its advancement. The number and value of these benefits, as they respect the present life, may in some measure be inferred from a consideration of the nature and tendency of Christ's kingdom. It essentially consists, as has already been observed, in righteousness, peace, and holy joy. That all these are much needed in our world, you need not be told. Wherever we turn our eyes, we find little but melancholy proofs of their absence, and of the dreadful prevalence of the opposite evils. Injustice, discord, and wretchedness everywhere abound. The whole earth is filled with violence. Mankind have long been at war with God; they can therefore have little peace either in themselves or with each other. If we contemplate them individually, we find them destitute of benevolence, actuated by base or malignant passions, a prey to care, anxiety and discontent, and often harassed by guilty fears amid the reproaches of a guilty conscience.

If we turn our attention to families and societies, we see the effects of these evil principles in the neglect of family religion, and of the education of youth; in frequent difficulties and distensions; in the invention or circulation of false and scandalous reports; and in innumerable petty frauds and acts of injustice, if we extend our views to the nations of the earth we see the same evils operating on a larger scale. We see nation rising up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; whole countries desolated; extensive cities wrapt in flames; millions of human beings dragged from their families and led forth as sheep appointed for the slaughter, and millions more fainting and dying under the calamities of war, or groaning in hopeless anguish under the iron rod of oppression, or the merciless scourge of slavery. Could we hope that the myriads of immortal souls, who are hurried out of time by these complicated evils, found an end to their miseries at death; could we hope that, after a life embittered by so many sufferings and sorrows, they entered into eternal rest, we might contemplate these scenes with emotions comparatively pleasing. But we cannot hope thus. The scriptures forbid it. They uniformly teach us that a life spent in sin unrepented of, is a

prelude to an eternity of wretchedness and despair; and those who live without God in the world, are expressly said to have no hope. With respect to those, therefore, who die in this situation, we are compelled to believe, unless we renounce our belief in Christianity, that they lie down in everlasting sorrow. From this imperfect sketch of the temporal evils which mankind are suffering, and of the far more to be dreaded evils to which they are exposed beyond the grave, it must, we conceive, be apparent that a remedy for these evils is the one thing needful. But this remedy is only to be found in the universal spread of the kingdom of Christ. Reason and philosophy have long been endeavoring to discover such a remedy, and their votaries have often boasted of their success. But their boasts have proved false, and their endeavors fruitless. They have not even succeeded in finding a remedy for the evils of time; much less for those of eternity. The world is still as full of vice and wretchedness as ever; and it still is and ever will be true, that there is salvation for sinful man in none but Christ; for there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved. But while no other remedy can possibly be found, the universal extension of Christ's kingdom will prove a certain and effectual remedy for all the present and future evils, to which the race are exposed. This is undeniably evident from its very nature. Let righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost universally prevail, and sin and misery will be banished from the world. By righteousness is here intended a temper and conduct conformable to our Savior's rule of equity; whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. By peace is intended peace with God, peace of conscience, and peace with our fellow creatures. By joy in the Holy Ghost is intended those divine consolations which God imparts to his people, and which often cause them to rejoice, as the apostle expresses it, with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Now were these things universally prevalent, what evil could remain to infest the world. Universal righteousness would banish all those evils which spring from fraud, injustice, and oppression; all the crimes which now disturb the peace of society; all causes of contention between nations and individuals. Peace with God would deliver mankind from the heavy judgments and calamities with which he is now constrained to afflict them on account of their opposition to his authority; and from all the unhappiness occasioned by want of resignation, by anxiety, and discontent. Peace of conscience would entirely free them from that guilty fear, remorse, and dread of death, which now often embitter their choicest comforts. Peace with each other would destroy at once the innumerable evils which arise from public and private wars, disputes, and dissensions, while the consolations of the Holy Spirit would fill them with that peace which passeth all understanding, and give them, while on earth, a continual foretaste of the joys of heaven; toward which they will be constantly advancing, and at which they would at length arrive, there to live and reign throughout eternity with him in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore. Such, my friends, are the benefits which would result to mankind from the universal spread of Christ's kingdom, such the glorious effects which it naturally tends to produce. That the description here given of them is not exaggerated, is evident from the language of time inspired writers when speaking on the same subject. In his days, say they, referring to Christ, in his days shall the righteous flourish and abundance of peace so long as the sun and the moon endure. Men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed. The desert and the solitary place shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame man shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. Nation shall no more lift up sword against nation, but they shall beat

their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, neither shall they learn war any more. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion together, and a little child shall lead them; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the cow and the bear shall feed, and their young shall lie down together; and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the serpent's den. Thus that paradisiacal state, which was lost by the first Adam, shall be restored by the second; and love, peace, and happiness universally prevail under the mild reign of him who is emphatically the Prince of peace. Who then, that is not totally destitute of benevolence, can refrain from praying, most fervently praying, that Christ's kingdom may come? He who will not thus pray, and still more he, who opposes the spread of this kingdom, ought to be banished from it forever, and to be considered as the common enemy, fit only to be a subject of the prince of darkness. But it will perhaps be asked, by some, is not this universal spread of Christ's kingdom a mere chimera; one of those delightful visions which a benevolent mind loves to form, but which will never be realized? No, my friends, it is no chimera; if it be a vision, it is one of the visions of the Almighty; and it shall be realized, more than realized; for he has said it and sworn it, who cannot lie.

We may therefore add, as another motive which should induce us to pray for the universal spread of Christ's kingdom, that he has promised, and even sworn by himself, that this event shall infallibly take place. All the prophetic writings abound with the most full, explicit, animating predictions of the approach of a glorious period when the stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands, shall fill the earth; and when all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and Savior. The fulfillment of these predictions was in vision beheld by the prophet Daniel. I saw in the night visions, says he, and behold, one like unto the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came near to the Ancient of days, and there was given unto him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people and nations and languages should serve him. We are further assured, that the Lord shall be King over all the earth; that there shall be one Lord and his name one; that all flesh shall see his glory, and that the knowledge of him shall fill the whole earth, even as the waters fill the seas, and that Christ shall reign till all enemies are put under his feet.

We have therefore all the encouragement to pray for the universal spread of Christ's kingdom, which the most positive divine assurances of an answer to our prayers can give. If it be said, since the event is certain, why should we pray for it? We answer, God has said that for all these blessings, he will be inquired of. Prayer is still no less necessary, than if no promises had been made; for the grand design of these promises is, not to supersede, but encourage prayer, and to afford a firm foundation on which faith may stand, and wrestle with God for their accomplishment. Shall we then despise the riches of his goodness? Shall we lose these invaluable benefits, by neglecting to pray for them? Shall we see God's arm extended, and his hand filled with blessings inestimable and innumerable, and yet neglect to employ the means which he prescribes, to bring them down in copious showers on ourselves, our posterity, and our fallen race? No: let us not thus imitate the fool into whose hands a price is put to get wisdom, but who has no heart to it. Rather let us firmly grasp the divine promises, and pray unceasingly that they may speedily be fulfilled in their fullest extent. As a farther inducement to do this, permit me to remind you that the time allotted for their fulfillment is rapidly advancing, and that the present appearance of the world and the dispensations of providence plainly indicate that God is about to finish his work and cut it short

in righteousness, and that the latter day of Christ's kingdom is beginning to dawn. God is now, agreeably to the predictions of the prophets, overturning the nations; and he will continue to overturn, and overturn, till he shall come whose right it is to reign. In almost all parts of the Christian world, he is exciting desires and producing exertions for the extension of his kingdom, which have never been equaled since the days of the apostles. So long since as the commencement of time last year [1812] translations of the scriptures had been begun, and in many instances completed, into upwards of fifty different languages and dialects; and from that time to the present the blessed work has been prosecuted with unabated, with constantly increasing zeal. At the same period forty-seven societies had been formed in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and seventeen more in this country, for the sole purpose of disseminating the sacred scriptures throughout the world. Since that period, the number of societies for this purpose in England has been nearly doubled, and by their exertions the word of life has been sent, and is still going to almost every part of the habitable globe. In aid of the same glorious cause, more than a hundred missionary societies, and societies for the diffusion of religious knowledge, and for the conversion of the Jews, have been formed, within a few year; in different parts of the Christian world; and they are now 'with united efforts endeavoring to diffuse the knowledge of God and extend the bounds of the Redeemer's kingdom. Notwithstanding the disappointments they have met with, and the various difficulties which they have been called to encounter, their endeavors have in very many instances been crowned with success, so that from the farthest parts of the earth we have heard songs of praise, ascribing glory to the righteous God. For all these unusual and unparalleled exertions it is impossible satisfactorily to account, without ascribing them to their true cause, the agency of God. He it is, and he alone, who has excited in the Christian world these strong desires and extraordinary endeavors to promote the extension of his kingdom. And since he has begun to work, we may confidently expect that he will finish what he has begun, and that the long expected time for the universal spread of his kingdom will soon arrive. Soon will the Jews be brought in with the fullness of the Gentiles; soon will Ethiopia stretch out her hands to God, and the isles of the southern ocean wait for his law. Soon will the enrapturing cry be heard, Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; and the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Even now the angel with the everlasting gospel is flying through the world, saying to every nation and people, Fear God, worship him who made heaven, and earth, and sea; for the hour of his judgment is come. He who sits on the throne is exclaiming, Behold, I create all things new. I create new heavens, and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Prepare ye then the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Exalt the valleys, and level the hills, make the crooked ways straight, and the rough places plain, that the glory of the Lord may be revealed, and all flesh see it together. Since then the kingdom of Christ is thus comparatively nigh, even at the door, let us seize the golden opportunity and improve the precious moments which yet remain, in fervently praying for its arrival. As a farther motive to induce you to this, consider the happy effects which it will have upon yourselves. Nothing can more directly or more powerfully tend to destroy every baleful, malignant passion in your breasts, or promote in them the growth of divine benevolence, than frequently praying for the advancement of Christ's kingdom. When you leave your closets, after supplicating the Father of mercies with strong cries and tears to send the blessings attending his kingdom to all mankind, and to forgive all, not excepting your bitterest enemies, you will breathe the very spirit and temper of heaven; you will be transformed for a time into the image of Christ; you will feel that his kingdom is set up in

your hearts, and that they are filled with righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; an earnest of that heaven, at which you will then be sure of coming. On the other hand, nothing can more certainly prove that you are destitute of love to God, that you are not subjects of his kingdom, that you are not the disciples of Christ, than a habitual neglect of praying that his kingdom may come; nor can you, while guilty of this neglect, offer up a single acceptable petition for yourselves. If then you would not be considered and treated as the enemies of God; if you would possess a heavenly temper and obtain a full assurance of your title to heaven; if you would have your hearts filled with holy peace and joy, and taste the happiness of heaven before you arrive there, pray sincerely, fervently, and perseveringly, that God's kingdom may come.

Let us now, my friends, on the wings of faith, fly forward a few years, and contemplate the world under the mild reign of the Prince of Peace. Let us escape from the wars, the vices and miseries, which surround us, and visit the earth restored to its original state. See it no longer groaning under its Creator's curse; but rejoicing in his smiles. See it no longer producing briars and thorns, but bringing forth fruit in abundance for its almost innumerable inhabitants. See volcanoes forever extinguished, storms hushed to peace, the bolt of heaven deprived of its terrors, the earth no longer trembling and threatening to engulf its inhabitants, and the air no longer wafting the seeds of pestilence and death. Walk through the villages, and behold the lion, the leopard and bear, grazing with domestic animals around the habitations of man. See children sporting near them, fearless of danger, or twining around their bodies the serpent now deprived of his sting. Walk through the cities, and behold every countenance bearing the traces of happiness and benevolence, and clothed with smiles indicative of the peace which reigns within. That our prayer for this event may be acceptable to God, two things are indispensably necessary. The first is, that they be accompanied by corresponding exertions. If it is our duty to pray for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, it is no less our duty to do all in our power to promote it, to use all our influence in supporting its laws, and in bringing others to obey them, especially our families and friends; and when occasion requires, to contribute cheerfully to its propagation and support. He who refuses or neglects to do this, cannot sincerely pray that Christ's kingdom may come; nor can he even repeat our Lord's prayer, without incurring the guilt of formality and hypocrisy. The second thing necessary to render our prayers for the advancement of Christ's kingdom sincere and acceptable is, that we become willing subjects of his kingdom ourselves. It is too evident to require proof, that none can sincerely desire others to submit to the sceptre of Christ, so long as they themselves refuse or neglect to obey him; nor can any present to him an acceptable petition, who do not unreservedly comply with his requisitions. Why call ye me Lord, Lord; and do not the things which I say? Are we, then, my friends, the willing subjects of Christ? This question may be easily answered: If any man, says the Apostle, be in Christ, he is a new creature. Verily, verily, says our Savior, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. If then, we are not new creatures if we have not been born again, we are not, we cannot be, the subjects of Christ's kingdom. And it becomes us to remember that, if we are not his subjects, we must be his enemies; for he has himself said, He that is not with me is against me. But he is willing, he waits to be reconciled. He died for the express purpose of reconciling offending man to his offended God. Come then, my friends, if you have not already done it, come, and touch the golden sceptre of mercy, which he now holds out to you. Open wide your hearts, that the King of glory may come in, and write upon them his law of love, and set up his throne in your affections. Like the Philippians, first give your own selves to the Lord, and then your prayers and offerings will indeed be

acceptable. You will find by experience, that Christ's kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy; and as a reward for obeying and promoting his kingdom on earth, he will finally advance you to share his throne and kingdom in heaven, there to live and reign with him forever and ever.

Chapter 51

S. PUNISHMENT OF THE IMPENITENT INEVITABLE AND JUSTIFIABLE.

PUNISHMENT OF THE IMPENITENT INEVITABLE AND JUSTIFIABLE. As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence.—Jeremiah 22:24. This chapter contains a message from God to the king of Judah. The first part of this message is composed of exhortations to repentance, and promises of pardon, if the fruits of repentance should appear. Then follow most awful threatenings: But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation. For thus saith the Lord unto the king's house of Judah, thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon. Yet I will make thee a wilderness and cities not inhabited. Gilead, you will recollect, was the most pleasant and fertile part of Canaan, and Lebanon was its highest mountain. So the Jews were God's chosen people, his portion and, as we are elsewhere told, his heritage in the earth, in whom he delighted; and the kings of Judah were the head of this chosen people, and on many accounts peculiarly dear to God.

They were the descendants of his servant David with whom he had made a covenant, and Jeconiah the present king was the grandson of Josiah who, in zeal for God, nearly resembled his pious ancestor. Yet God here declares that, notwithstanding this, he would destroy Jeconiah and his kingdom, unless his judgments were averted by speedy repentance. In our text the same declaration is repeated in still more forcible language: As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah king of Judah were the Signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence. The signet was a seal very anciently worn by nobles and monarchs upon the right hand, with which they were accustomed to seal their grants, legislative acts, and judicial sentences. Thus we read in Daniel that the king sealed the stone on the lion's den with his own seal. For this reason, as well as on account of its beauty and value, it was highly prized by the wearer; and, in consequence of its use in sealing royal grants and edicts, it was considered as a symbol of authority. Hence it appears that the declaration in our text is exceedingly strong. It is as if Jehovah said, Were the king of Judah dear to me, as the signet upon my right hand; dear to me as my Sovereign power and authority over the universe, I would cast him from me for his sins, unless he repents. That which immediately follows renders this passage still more interesting. After denouncing upon the sinful king the most awful judgments, God adds, 0, earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. As if he had said, Let no one suppose that this declaration, confirmed by my oath, concerns Jeconiah only; but let all the inhabitants of the earth hear and know, that sooner than suffer impenitent sinners to go unpunished, I will give up all that I most prize, give up my sovereign power and authority. Let them hear and know that, however dear any of my creatures may be to me, I will cast them from me, if they sin and do not repent. I propose, in the present discourse, I. To mention some awful instances in which God has verified this declaration;

II. To state so far as we can learn them from the Bible, the reasons which induce him to act in this manner. The first instance which I shall mention, in which God has verified this declaration, is that

of the apostate angels. These now fallen spirits were originally the most exalted of God's creatures, the noblest image of their Creator which his power ever stamped on the work of his hands. Like him they were perfectly holy; they loved him with perfect love, delighted in obeying his will, and for, we know not how long, a period, perhaps for thousands of ages, were employed in performing it. In a word they were the immediate attendants on his throne, the inhabitants of that heaven which is the habitation of his holiness and glory. Hence if creatures can be dear to God and objects of his love, they were so. But they sinned, and what was the consequence? Let inspiration answer. God spared not the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell, and reserves them under chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day. And our Savior teaches us, that hell itself and its torments were prepared for the devil and his angels. My hearers, look a moment attentively, and without prejudice, upon the awful display of God's justice and holy displeasure against sin. See how high these exalted intelligences once stood, how low they have fallen, how irremediable is their destruction. This one fact is worth ten thousand of those vain sophistical arguments with which sinners attempt to persuade themselves that God will not destroy them, though they persist in sin. Here are no human conjectures or human reasonings, but plain matter of fact. And 0, how awful, how alarming is the fact! What a death blow does it give to all the presumptuous hopes of impenitent sinners! How does it trample on all their vain reasonings! My hearers, were an angel from heaven to assure me that God is too merciful to cast any of his creatures into hell, I could not believe him, while the fact stands recorded in the Bible. Indeed, how could I, how could any man believe that God will not do what he has actually done? If with the fact staring him in the face, any impenitent sinner can hope that God will not destroy him, I would say to that sinner, are you of more consequence, or more dear to God, than were the angels of his presence? If not, why should he treat you more favorably, than he has treated them? You have transgressed the same law which they violated. The sentence which has been executed on them is already pronounced on you? How then can you hope that the same God who spared not them, will spare you? Let me prevail upon you to dismiss all such hopes at once; for as the Lord liveth, though you were the signet on his right hand; though you were dear to him as the angels of his presence he would not save you, if you continue in sin. It is a much greater thing to cast down sinning angels from heaven to hell, than to cast sinful man out of the lower world into hell; and since God has done the greater, be assured he will not fail to do the less.

Another instance, in which God has verified the declaration in our text, is afforded by our first parents. That God loved them, there can be no doubt. That their happiness was dear to him, what he did to promote it, abundantly proves. He made them but little lower than the angels, stamped upon them his own image, crowned them with glory and honor, gave them a world with all that it contained; and as if this were not sufficient, planted for them a garden in that world, resembling heaven as nearly as any thing earthly can do it. Yet in the very day in which they first sinned, he pronounced on them sentence of death, banished them from paradise, and cursed the earth for their sake, to show his abhorrence of their sin. And can any of their descendants be more dear to him than they were? Can any of them hope to escape the curse which fell on the first sinful pair? Surely not. Know, sinful child of Adam, that, were you dear to God as were your first parents, he would not spare you in sin. A third instance of a similar nature may be seen in the destruction of mankind by the flood. We have often read and heard of this event; but our conceptions of it are probably exceedingly inadequate. Indeed, they must be so; for who that has not witnessed such an event, can adequately conceive of it? We have good reason, let it be remembered, to believe,

that the world was at least as populous then as it is now. Let your thoughts then run through the world; collect in imagination the many millions of its inhabitants into one vast assembly. See in this assembly all that is lovely in youth and beauty, all that is magnificent in rank and power, all that is admirable in intellect, all that is venerable in gray hairs. See the eternal Sovereign of the universe contemplating this vast assembly. He doubtless loves them; for they are the work of his own hands, and he hates nothing which he has made. Their happiness is doubtless dear to him, dear as the signet on his right hand; for we are assured, in language suited to our capacities, that it grieved him at the heart, when he saw them pursuing the road to misery. But though his love and mercy plead for them, their sins and his justice call for their destruction.

Yet how much was there in such an assembly to move his pity; to forbid him to listen to the claims of strict justice. Surely, if he will ever relent, when the guilty stand before him, he would have relented then, when he saw how numerous were the victims which justice demanded. But he did not relent. He waited indeed one hundred and twenty years to give them an opportunity for repentance; and he sent Noah as a preacher of righteousness to warn them of their approaching fate; but he did not relent. No; the windows of heaven were opened to rain down destruction on the impenitent; and the fountains of the great deep were broken up, to whelm the guilty race in one common grave. And can you then hope, impenitent sinner, to escape the justice of a God who could do, who has done this? Can you hope that he, who did not relent when he saw a world ready to sink under the sword of justice, will relent when he sees you stand before his bar? No; were you the signet upon his right hand, could you unite in yourself all the beauty, the strength, the intellect, and the life, which now fills the world, he would not hesitate for a moment to doom you to destruction. A fourth instance, similar in kind, though not equally awful, is presented to us in the history of God’s ancient people, the children of Abraham, his friend. How greatly he loved them, how much he did for them, you need not be told. He chose them from among all the families of men to be his peculiar people. For their deliverance, protection, and support, miracles of the most wonderful kind were wrought so frequently, that they almost ceased to be considered as deviations from the established course of nature. For them God descended from heaven and spoke in an audible voice on Mount Sinai. Among them he dwelt almost two thousand years in a visible cloud of glory. To them he came and manifested himself in flesh. To them, says an apostle, pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law and the promises. Theirs, he adds, are the fathers, and of them as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever.

They were indeed, if any nation ever was, as the signet on God’s right hand. Yet how terribly were they scourged! What is their history for some centuries, but a history of desolating judgments, inflicted on them by their offended God? And still his indignation follows them. For eighteen centuries, one generation of them after another has lived a wretched life; and then died without hope, under their Maker’s curse. During all this time, God has been fulfilling the awful declaration which he made respecting them. It is a people that hath no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor. Behold, says an apostle, to the Christian church, speaking of their sufferings, behold the severity of God. If he spared not them, take heed lest he spare not thee. And will he then, 0 impenitent sinner, spare thee? No; though thou wert the signet on his right hand, though thou wert dear to him as all the people whom he loved, and chose, he would not spare thee, unless thou shalt renounce thy sins.

We might easily refer you to multiplied instances of a similar character in the history of God's dealings with smaller communities, and with individuals. We might show you Moses, the highly favored and honored servant of God, shut out from Canaan, and doomed for one hasty, passionate word, to die with those whose carcasses fell in the wilderness. We might show you David, the man so beloved of his God, smarting with wounds, the anguish of which none but a parent's heart can conceive, and followed by an avenging sword, which God declared should never, while he lived, depart from his house. We might show you the mangled corpse of an otherwise faithful prophet, who was for a single act of disobedience into which he was led by deceit, torn in pieces by a lion. But without insisting on these striking proofs of God's displeasure against sin, I shall mention only one instance more; but one which, above all that has been mentioned, displays God's inflexible adherence to the spirit of the declaration in our text. The instance to which I allude is that of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He was indeed the signet on God's right hand in such a sense as no other being ever was; for he was his only begotten and well beloved Son. This object of his affection, though not himself a sinner, stood by his own consent in the place of sinners, to bear the punishment which their sins deserved. And was he treated more favorably than sinners are treated? Did God abate him one pang, take one drop from the bitter cup, or show him the least favor? No; it pleased the Lord to bruise him. He spared not his own Son. And will he then, 0 impenitent sinner, who by refusing to believe in Jesus Christ crucifiest him afresh, will God spare thee? No; though thou wert the signet on his right hand; though thou wert dear to him as the Son of his love, he would not spare thee, when his violated law and his insulted justice call for thy destruction. Such, my hearers, so terrible, so convincing are the proofs which God has exhibited, that he will sooner give up all that is dearest to him, than suffer sin to go unpunished, that he will sooner see heaven and earth pass away, than suffer one jot or one tittle to pass from his law, till all be fulfilled. Hear then, 0 earth, earth, earth! hear this word of Jehovah.

I am well aware, my hearers, that the light in which God has now been exhibited, will by no means be agreeable to the natural heart, that heart which, as inspiration assures us, is enmity against God, and not subject to his law. If any of you have such a heart in your bosoms, you will probably feel disposed to quarrel with what has been said. But remember, if you quarrel, you quarrel not with the speaker, but the Bible. If you strive, you strive not with man, but with that being who has said, Wo to him that striveth with his Maker. I have simply stated facts, as I find them recorded in God's word. I have only stated what he has declared he will do, and what he has actually done, to verify this declaration. Here I must leave it, and proceed, as was proposed,

II. To state some of the reasons why God has formed and enacted such a declaration; or, in other words, why he will sooner give up all that is dear to him, than suffer sin to go unpunished.

It is needless to remark that, among these reasons, a disposition to give pain has no place. As God has sworn by himself, that the wicked shall die, so he has sworn by himself that he has no pleasure in their death. That he is not pleased to see them perish is abundantly evident from the means which he has employed to save them, and especially from the fact, that he has given his Son to open a way for their escape. We have already mentioned the sufferings of Christ, as a most striking proof of God's inflexible justice. We may add, that they afford an equally striking proof of his willingness to show mercy. Surely, no child of Adam can apply the epithet unmerciful to that God, 'who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to die for its redemption. Nor has

a desire to revenge the insults and injuries which sinners have offered to himself, any place among the motives which induce God to punish sin; for he inflicts punishment, not as an injured individual, but as the Sovereign and Judge of the universe who is under the most sacred obligations to treat his subjects according to their deserts. This remark leads us directly to the grand reason why God is so inflexibly determined to punish sin, and to leave no impenitent sinner, however dear or highly exalted, to go unpunished. It is because the welfare of his great kingdom, the peace and happiness of the universe require it. It is because a relaxation of his law, a departure from the rules of strict justice, would occasion more misery than will result from a rigid execution of his law. If this can be made to appear, it will follow, that God's benevolence, his concern for the happiness of the universe, prompt him to punish sin, and to allow no impenitent sinner to go unpunished. With a view to make this appear, I remark, That it is the nature and tendency of sin to produce universal misery. This is evident from the fact, that sin is a departure from God, the only source of happiness. God is the Father of lights, the Sun of the moral universe, the Giver of every good and perfect gift. To forsake him, then, is to lose every good and perfect gift. It is as if our world should fly off from the sun into the region of eternal darkness and frost. Besides sin inflames the appetites, enrages the passions, and, deposing reason from her throne, places them in her seat. Envy, hatred, malice, revenge, suspicion, avarice, pride, ambition and cruelty, are only different forms of sin. The breast, then, in which sin reigns uncontrolled must be the abode of misery. But this is not all. It is the tendency of sin to diffuse misery around, as far as its influence extends, as far as its power can reach. If you doubt this, consider for a moment what would be the consequence, should all the causes, which now operate to restrain the outbreakings of sin, be removed. There would then be no law but the will of the strongest. Systems of human legislation cannot exist, or, at least, cannot be carried into operation, without the assistance which they derive from oaths. But let God cease to punish sin, and oaths would become a mere nullity. They would have no binding influence on the conscience.

Truth could not be discovered. The natural selfishness of the human heart, pressed on one side by most powerful temptations, and restrained by no countervailing force on the other, would continually break out in acts of injustice and violence. Neither reputation, nor liberty, nor property, nor life, would be safe for a single moment. Multitudes of tyrants would every where arise, who, after a brief reign of tumult and blood, would be assassinated, and succeeded by others. Their successors would pursue the same course, and share the same fate. In short, the earth would be, as it was before the flood, filled with violence. If you doubt this, look at the state of France, after her legislators had declared that there is no God, and caused the inscription, death is an eternal sleep, to be en-graven where it should meet the notice of every passer-by; when the parent was betrayed by the son, and the son by the parent; no obligations were regarded; no man's liberty or life was secure for an hour. Yet even there all restraints were not removed; for a few years of disorder could not destroy all the effects of previous education, and obliterate all the salutary principles which had been previously imbibed. Where then would happiness find a dwelling on earth, were every restraint removed, were men suffered to go on from generation to generation in an unrestrained course of wickedness, neither fearing God nor regarding man? Will any reply, if happiness could not be found on earth, during life, it might at least be enjoyed in heaven after death? Alas, my hearers, should God renounce his inflexible determination to punish sin, there would be no heaven. Inspiration teaches us, that the happiness of heaven consists in knowing, loving, serving, and praising God. It is his glory, we are told, which constitutes the light of the

heavenly world above. But there would be no happiness in knowing, serving, or praising him, should he lose the perfections which compose and adorn his moral character. Take away his truth, his justice, his holiness, and all the glory which illuminates heaven would vanish into night. But should God renounce his determination to punish sin, he would stain all these perfections; nay, he would cease from that moment to possess them. He would no longer be true; for he has not only said but sworn, sworn by himself that sinners shall not go unpunished. Where then would be his truth, should they escape?

He would no longer be holy; for holiness implies hatred or opposition to sin. He would no longer be just; for justice consists in executing his law, and rewarding every one according to his works. In short, he would become altogether such an one as ourselves. Who then could find everlasting happiness in seeing, and praising through eternity, such a being as this? A being without truth, or holiness, or justice. Who could either respect or love him? How instantaneously would the praises of heaven cease! How would their golden harps drop from the hands of its now happy inhabitants; and how would angels be compelled to stop in the midst of their unfinished song, Just and true are all thy ways, 0 King of saints! The sun of the moral world would be forever eclipsed, and a black, endless night would shroud the universe. But this is not all. Were sin unrestrained, unpunished, it would soon scale heaven, as it has once done already in the case of the apostate angels; and there reign and rage with immortal strength through eternity, repeating in endless succession, and with increased aggravation, the enormities which it has already perpetrated on earth.

We may add, that, after God had once surrendered his truth, his justice, and holiness; and laid aside the reins of government, he could never more resume them. Nor could he ever give laws, or make promises to any other world, or any other race of creatures, which would be worthy of the least regard. It would be instantly and properly said, He has once violated his word, and his oath, and he may do it again. He has once shown himself fickle, unjust, and unholy, and what security can we have that he will not do it again. Should he silence these clamors by an exertion of his Almighty power, he might indeed have slaves to cringe before him, but he could never have affectionate subjects who would serve him with cheerfulness and confidence; nor could he after once allowing sin to go unpunished, ever punish it again, without exposing himself to the charge of partiality and injustice.

Such, my hearers, would be the terrible consequences, or rather a part of the terrible consequences of God’s renouncing his determination to punish sin. Can you then wonder or complain, that he so inflexibly adheres to this determination? Can you wonder that he will rather give up every thing most precious, than suffer any impenitent sinner, however dear or highly exalted, to escape? Do you not see that, by suffering any guilty individual to go unpunished, he would sacrifice the happiness of the universe to the selfish wishes of that individual? And is it not then most evident, that it is his benevolence, his love, his concern for the happiness of the universe, which prompts him to punish sin? Agreeably, we find the inspired writers ascribing the punishments which he inflicts to this cause. They tell us that he destroyed ancient sinners, because his mercy endureth forever; and God himself, when he said to Moses, I will cause all my goodness to pass before thee, mentioned as one proof of his goodness, that he will by no means clear the guilty. If this appears strange and incomprehensible to any of you, let me ask whether the concern of a just earthly monarch for the happiness of his subjects does not appear as clearly in the prison which he erects for the criniinal and lawless, as in the rewards which he bestows on the

obedient and faithful? If so, is it too much to say that the goodness of God shines as brightly in the flames of hell, as in the glories of heaven? And now, my hearers, allow me to close by beseeching you to lay these things seriously to heart. I do not ask you to believe my opinions or reasonings; but I do ask you to believe plain matters of fact; I do ask you to consider attentively what God has actually done, that you may learn from it the character of the being with whom you have to do, in whose hands you are, and at whose bar you must stand. Remember inspiration has said, Why dost thou strive with him? for he giveth not an account of any of his matters. He will recompense it, whether thou choose or whether thou refuse. 0, then, be persuaded to indulge no hopes of safety which rest on a belief that God will not execute all the threatenings recorded in his word. Be persuaded, instead of wasting your time and provoking him to anger by murmuring against his justice, to embrace at once the means which he has provided for the manifestation of his mercy. Of his mercy to those who repent and believe the gospel, we cannot say too much. We can only say, that it is equal to his justice; and that his determination to save all who repent, is as inflexible as his resolution to destroy all the impenitent. In consequence of the atonement which his Son has made, he can now be just, and yet justify and save all who believe in Jesus. 0 then, ye immortal spirits, ye probationers for eternity, hear, hear, hear, the words of your God! Hear and tremble, while the thunders of his fiery law burst out from Mount Sinai. Hear, believe, and rejoice, while his glad tidings of great joy are loudly proclaimed from Mount Zion. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him turn to the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Chapter 52

S. Participation in other Mens Sins

Participation in other Mens Sins "Neither be partaker of other men’s sins." 1 Timothy 5:22. this chapter the apostle gives Timothy particular directions respecting the duties of his pastoral office; and solemnly charges him before God and the elect angels, to observe these directions; not preferring one man above another, and doing nothing by partiality. One of the most important of his official duties consisted in ordaining other men to the work of the ministry by prayer and the imposition of hands. As it was of the greatest importance that none should be introduced into the ministry who were not suitably qualified, the apostle particularly enjoined it upon him to use great care and circumspection in examining and setting apart persons for this sacred office; and enforced a compliance with this injunction by intimating to him, that, should he neglect it, he would participate in the guilt of every unworthy character, on whom he should carelessly lay hands. Lay hands, says he, suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins, but keep thyself pure. My hearers, though this caution was originally addressed to an individual with reference to the duties of a particular office, it is of universal application. In many other parts of Scripture we are all indirectly, if not directly, cautioned to beware of partaking in the guilt of others; and introducing improper characters into the ministry, is by no means the only way in which a disregard of this caution may be shown. In every state of society, and especially in such a state as exists in a civilized country, under a form of government like ours, we are connected with our fellow creatures so intimately, and by such numerous ties, that there are very many ways in which we may become accomplices, or at least partakers, in their sins; and indeed, without great care and watchfulness, it is impossible to avoid being so. In consequence of these connections, the sins of an individual become the sins of many, and there is no doubt that, in the sight of God, a large proportion of every man’s guilt is contracted by sharing in the guilt of others. This being the case, the subject which we have chosen is, I conceive, peculiarly suitable for a day of public humiliation, fasting and prayer. On such a day, we are called upon to humble ourselves before God, not only for our personal sins, but for all the sins of others in which we have made ourselves partakers. In discoursing on this subject, I shall endeavor to show, when we make ourselves partakers in other men’s sins; and to state some of the reasons which should induce us to guard against partaking in them.

I. When do we make ourselves partakers in other men’s sins? I answer, generally speaking we partake in the guilt of all those sins which we tempt or assist others to commit; of all the sins which we voluntarily or carelessly occasion by our influence or example; of all the sins which we might but do not prevent; and of all the sins against which we do not bear testimony when we have opportunity to do it. On each of these particulars it would be easy to enlarge and to confirm our observations by appropriate quotations from the Scriptures, but these quotations will be more properly introduced in succeeding parts of our discourse. Now from these observations it follows,

1. That ministers make themselves partakers in the sins of their people, when those sins are occasioned by their own negligence, by their example, or by unfaithfulness in the discharge of their official duties. But why do I mention this to you? Not because you are in danger of partaking in this

way of other men's sins, but because my subject naturally leads to this remark; because I am willing to preach to myself as well as to you, and because this remark suggests a sufficient excuse, if excuse be necessary, for the pointed observations which I may be called upon to make in the progress of my discourse; for from this remark it follows that, if you are in danger of sharing in the guilt of other men's sins, it is my duty, as a minister of Christ, to warn you plainly of that danger, and to point out the way in which you may avoid it; and should I neglect thus to warn you, I should myself share in the guilt of all your sins, and of all the sins of which you make yourselves partakers. Now this I can by no means consent to do. I am willing to participate in all your sorrows and afflictions, but I am not willing to share in your sins. I have enough and more than enough of my own to answer for, without participating in yours. Let this be my apology, if in this, as well as in my other discourses, I use great plainness of speech.

2. Parents participate in the sins of their children, when they occasion, and when they might have prevented them. That this remark is perfectly just, when applied to such parents as set before their children a vicious example, I presume none will deny. Should a parent voluntarily pain the bodies of his children, or communicate to them a dangerous and infectious disorder, all would unite in reprobating his unnatural conduct. But is it not as abominable for a parent to pain the minds, as the bodies of his children? And can any poison operate upon their bodies more fatally or more certainly, than the vicious example of a parent will operate upon their minds? If he be intemperate, or indolent, or profane, will not his children, unless a gracious providence prevent, most probably resemble hurt? And may he not be most justly considered and punished as a partaker of their sins; sins, which come, if I may so express it, recommended, and, as it were, sanctified to them by the example of those, whom God and nature had constituted the guides of their youthful steps? But while almost all unite in justly execrating the wretch, who thus poisons the souls of his unsuspecting offspring, there is another class of parents, who, though perhaps equally guilty in the judgment of God, meet with scarcely a censure from the lips of man. I mean those who set their children an irreligious example. This class includes every parent who is not himself truly and exemplarily pious. And why should this class be thought less guilty, than that already mentioned? Is not irreligion as surely destructive to the soul as immorality? Are not impenitence, and unbelief, and insensibility to religion, as positively forbidden, and as severely censured in the word of God, as are intemperance or profanity or theft? Will not every impenitent or irreligious character be as certainly doomed, as a robber or murderer? Why then is an irreligious, less guilty than an immoral parent? But many, who belong to this class, will reply, we teach our children to treat religion and its institutions with respect.

We speak of the Scriptures to them with reverence, and bring them with us to the house of God on the sabbath. True, you do so, but they can perceive but too clearly that you do not cordially love the Bible, or honor its Author, or comply with the instructions of the sanctuary. They there hear many duties inculcated which they do not see you practice. They see, they hear nothing of religion in your families, they see you turn your backs upon the Lord's table; they see you live without God in the world; they see you anxious for their success in this life, but perceive no concern for their happiness in the next. Now what shall prevent them from following your example? And what shall save them from endless perdition if they do? And by what mode of reasoning will you prove, should they perish, that you were not partakers of their sins, and accessories to their eternal ruin? My friends, it will be terrible to hear a ruined child exclaim at the last day, Lord, I lived as my

parents taught me to do, I trod in their steps, I omitted nothing which they prescribed; but they led me along, they were the cause of my sins, and of my destruction. My hearers, if it be true that he who provides not for the temporal wants of his own house, hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel, what shall be said of those parents, who, instead of providing for the spiritual necessities of their children, voluntarily occasion their eternal ruin? But further, parents partake in the guilt of their children's sins when they might and do not prevent them. If it be true, as the Scriptures assert, that a child, trained up in the way he should go, will not depart from it when he is old, then it follows that, whenever children do forsake the right way, it must be ascribed, either wholly or in part, to the negligence of their parents. Either their parents did not warn, and teach, and restrain them as they ought, or they did not pray for a blessing of their endeavors with sufficient earnestness, or they did not seek for wisdom from above to enable themselves to perform parental duties in the most wise and prudent manner. It is probably in this last respect that Christian parents are most deficient. They do not properly realize how much heavenly wisdom is necessary to the right education of children; and, therefore, though they warn and pray for their children, yet they do not pray sufficiently for wisdom for themselves. This omission renders many parents, whose conduct is otherwise unexceptionable, partakers in the sins of their children, and their children's children. They will, probably, unless divine grace prevent, educate their children as we educated them; and their children, when they become parents, will follow their example, and where the spreading mischief will end, God only knows. How careful, how diligent, how prayerful, then, should parents be. Every parent should consider himself as a fountain, from which proceed streams, that will grow broader and deeper as they run, and should recollect, that it depends on himself, under God, whether these streams shall prove poisonous or salutary, convey virtue and happiness, or vice and misery, wherever they flow. Remember the story of Eli. His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not, and his negligence not only made him a partaker in their guilt and punishment, but entailed the judgments of God on his descendants, to the latest generation.

3. The remarks, which have been made respecting parents, will apply, though perhaps somewhat less forcibly, to masters and guardians, and all who are concerned in the government and education of youth. Human laws, you are sensible, make masters answerable, in many instances, for the conduct of their apprentices and servants, and the law of God does the same. It is a maxim in both, that what a man does by another, he does by himself. If a master allows his servants or dependants to use profane language, to neglect the institutions of religion, to profane the Sabbath, to spend his leisure hours with vicious companions, or to indulge in any other wicked practices, when he might prevent it, it is nearly the same in the sight of God, as if he were guilty of the same things himself; and he will be considered as partaking in their sins. You might almost as well spend this day in the streets or ill places of amusement, in idleness and sin, as suffer your children, servants or dependants to do it. Hear the character and blessing of Abraham, ye parents, masters, and guardians. And the Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do? seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

4. Churches become partakers of the sins of an individual member, when these sins are occasioned by a general neglect of brotherly watchfulness and reproof, and when they are tolerated by the church in consequence of a neglect of church discipline. When this is the case the sins of an individual become the sins of a whole church. This is evident from Christ's epistles to the seven churches of Asia. He commends the Ephesian church because they could not bear them that were evil, while he severely reproves and threatens other churches for tolerating among them those things which he abhorred. In a similar manner St. Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for neglecting to excommunicate one of their members who was guilty of a notorious offence; and charges them to put away that wicked person. To these remarks we may add, that every member of a church makes himself a partaker of the known sins of his fellow members, when he neglects to bear testimony against their sins, and to use proper means for bringing them to repentance.

5. We all make ourselves partakers in other men's sins, when we either imitate or in any other way countenance and encourage them. In this way the whole human race make themselves partakers of the sin of our first parents. They imitate them in desiring forbidden fruit, in disobeying God's commands, in endeavoring to hide themselves from his presence, and in attempting to excuse their sinful conduct when called to an account for it. By this conduct all men tacitly justify our first parents, and do in effect say, had we been in their place we would have acted as they did. Thus, to use a law term; they become accessories after the fact. In a similar way do persons often make themselves partakers of the sin of their wicked ancestors. They imitate and then justify their conduct. An attention to this truth will show us why God threatens to visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, and why he often executes this threatening by punishing one generation for the sins of those who have gone before them.

He does so because those, whom he thus punishes, imitate and thus participate in the sin of their ancestors. This is evident from the case of the Jews in our Saviour's time. Behold, says he, I send you prophets and wise men and scribes; and some of them ye will kill and crucify, and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues; and persecute from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily, I say unto you, it shall all be required of this generation. Now the reason assigned for requiring of that generation all the righteous blood shed by their ancestors, is, that they imitated and thus justified their conduct. Their fathers murdered the prophets, and they did the same to Christ and his apostles; thus making the sin of every preceding generation their own. In the same way we may make ourselves partakers of the sins of our contemporaries. When a province rises up in rebellion against its sovereign, every rebel partakes in the guilt of his fellow rebels, since by his example he encourages and justifies them. So in this rebellious world, every impenitent, unbelieving sinner, partakes in the guilt of all other sinners. In justifying himself he justifies them, by persisting in sin he encourages them to do the same, and thus in effect makes their sins his own.

6. Members of civil communities partake of all the sins which they might, but do not prevent. When a person has power to prevent any sin, he is left to choose whether that sin shall, or shall not be committed. If he neglects to prevent it, it is evident that he chooses it should be committed, and by thus choosing it he does in effect make it his own. He shows that he does not hate sin, that he has no concern for the glory of God, but is willing that God should be dishonored and offended. If he is deterred from attempting to prevent sin by fears that he shall draw hatred or trouble or expense

upon himself, it proves that he loves himself more than God; and that he is more concerned for his own interests, than for the welfare of society. Besides, all allow that men ought, if possible, to prevent gross crimes and public calamities, and even human laws would condemn as an accomplice the man who should witness a murder or robbery without preventing it or giving an alarm, when he had power to do it. And why then may not God justly condemn us as partakers of all the sins which we might have prevented! My friends, whether you think it just or not, he will do it; and you will hereafter be called to an account for all the violations of the Sabbath, all the profanity, all the intemperance, all the vice of every kind of which you have made yourselves partakers by neglecting to employ those means for their prevention, which God and the laws of your country have put into your hands.

7. If private citizens partake of all the sins which they might have prevented, much more do rulers and magistrates. To prevent and punish vice is the very object for which they are appointed, the great duty of their office; their office is ordained of God, and they are required by him not to bear the sword in vain, but to be a terror to evil doers, and a praise and encouragement to such as do well. To the faithful and impartial performance of this duty, their oath of office also binds them; and when they thus perform it, they are indeed what they are called and designed to be, ministers of God to us for good. But if they neglect their duty, violate their oaths, and prove false to God, they must answer to him for the incalculable mischief which they will occasion; and all the sins, which they might have prevented will be set down to their account. Next to the doom of unfaithful ministers, that of unfaithful rulers and magistrates will probably be most intolerable.

Lastly: Subjects who have the privilege of choosing their own rulers and magistrates, make themselves partakers of all their sins, when they give their votes for vicious or irreligious characters. I hope, my hearers, it is not necessary to assure you that this remark has no party political bearing. In making it I certainly do not mean to censure one party more than another, nor do I intend the most distant allusion to any of our rulers or magistrates; for I am taught not to speak evil of dignities. I merely state it as an abstract principle, which cannot be denied, without denying the truth of Scripture, that when we vote for vicious or irreligious men, knowing them, or having good reason to suspect them to be such, we make ourselves partakers of all their sins. It is evident that the case bears a great resemblance to that referred to in our text. If Timothy made himself a partaker of the sins of every unworthy character whom he carelessly admitted into the ministerial office, then we certainly make ourselves partakers of the sins of every improper character whom we voluntarily assist in appointing to any public office. But as many, even. among good men, do not appear to think sufficiently of this truth, it may not be improper to insist upon it more particularly. In the first place, God has plainly described the characters whom we ought to choose for rulers and magistrates. Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, and hating covetousness, and place such to be rulers. And again, he that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. He has also told us, that when the righteous are in authority the people rejoice, but that when the wicked bear rule the people mourn. If then we choose different men for our rulers, we slight God’s counsels and disobey his commands.

Again: We are taught in the Scriptures, that we must give an account to God of the manner in which we employ the talents and improve the privileges with which he favors us. Now the right of choosing our own rulers is undoubtedly a most precious privilege. This, I presume, you will readily acknowledge; for we frequently hear of the precious right of suffrage. Now what account of this

privilege can they give to God, who have abused it by assisting to place in authority such characters as were enemies to himself and his government; such characters as he has forbidden us to appoint?

Once more; rulers and magistrates are servants to the public. Now we have already reminded you, that what a man does by his servant, he does by himself. If then we voluntarily assist in appointing vicious or irreligious rulers, we make ourselves partakers of all their sins, and must account for all the good which might have been done, had we chosen different characters.

Thus have I attempted to show when we become partakers of other men's sins. If any think I have asserted more than I have proved, I reply, we meet with instances in the inspired writings, in which God punished ministers for the sins of their people, parents for the sins of their children, children for the sins of their parents, churches for the sins of individual members, rulers for the sins of their subjects, and subjects for the sins of their rulers. But surely he would punish none for the sins of other men, who had not made themselves partakers of those sins. These facts attended to are, therefore, a sufficient proof of all that we have advanced.

I proceed, as was proposed, II. To state some of the reasons which should induce us to guard against partaking of other men's sins.

1. The first reason which I shall mention is, that if we partake of their sins, we shall share in their punishment. Hence when God was denouncing vengeance upon the mystical Babylon, he says, come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. Hence, too, the many woes denounced against the companions of sinners of different classes.

Another reason that should induce us to guard against this is, that we shall have sin enough of our own to answer for, without participating in the guilt of others. He who realizes what sin is, what it is to answer for it, and how numerous and great are his own personal sins, will surely wish to avoid sharing in the transgressions of his fellow sinners. But on this part of our subject, time forbids us to enlarge, and requires us to hasten to the improvement. In the former part of the day, my friends, I endeavored to make you acquainted with your own personal transgressions. I have now attempted to give you a knowledge of the additional guilt you may have contracted by partaking of the sins of others. And is there an individual present, who does not, in some of the ways which have been mentioned, partake of the sins of those around him? Look first, my friends, into your houses; reflect on the conduct of your children, servants, and apprentices, and see if there be no sins there which you might prevent. In the next place, look through the town; that it is full of sin you need not be told. The cry of it ascends not only into the ear of God, but into those of man. Among all the vices which provoke God, ruin men, demoralize society, and bring down the judgments of heaven, there is scarcely one which is not practiced among us. If a man wishes to indulge in profanity, sabbath-breaking, intemperance, gaming, or debauchery, he knows where to find companions to countenance and assist him, and where to find places set apart on purpose for such abominations. Many of these vices stalk abroad among us, in open day.

There is not virtue enough in the community to drive them back into their dens, or to make them hide their heads. The inhabitants of our moral pest houses are suffered to range at large, and spread the contagion of their vices. No wonder, then, that our children inhale the infection; and that

many of the rising generation promise to outstrip in wickedness every generation that has gone before them. If it should, God have mercy on our country; for surely nothing but infinite mercy can save it from destruction! Now, my friends, it becomes its to inquire to whom is the prevalence of these vices to be ascribed? If we have no laws to restrain them, then the blame must rest upon our legislators; and those who choose them are partakers in their guilt. But if we have laws to restrain these abominations, then the blame must rest on those whose business it is to execute the laws; and all who prevent, all who do not assist in the execution of these laws, must share in the blame. For my own part, I am determined that, if loud and repeated testimonies against these things can prevent it, none of this blood shall rest with me; and I advise every one, who has any concern for his own soul, or for his eternal happiness, to adopt the same resolution; fur it will be no light thing to be found partakers, at the judgment day, of the enormous sins which are committed in this town. Happy will it then be for him who can truly say, I am clear from the blood and from the guilt of all men.

2. It is impossible not to perceive how completely our subject justifies the conduct of those much insulted individuals, who have voluntarily associated for the purpose of assisting in executing the laws, and suppressing vice and immorality among us. Their God, the God whom our fathers worshipped, and whom we, their degenerate sons profess to worship, commands them not to be partakers in other men’s sins. They have obeyed the command, and what has been their reward? The same which all the faithful servants of God in all ages have received from those whose welfare they labored to promote, by separating them from their beloved sins. They have been ridiculed, insulted, turned out of those seats of office, which they honorably and faithfully filled; and are indebted wholly to a good Providence, and to the laws which he has given, for their preservation from worse evils. Many of you, my hearers, have calmly sat by and seen this done, if you have not assisted in doing it. And, my friends, those who thus revile and oppose the friends of virtue and religion, would treat Christ and his apostles in a similar manner, were they now on earth.

S. Prayer for Rulers

Prayer for Rulers

"I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty." 1 Timothy 2:1-2. appears from the preceding chapter, that Timothy had been left, by St. Paul, at Ephesus; to watch over the church in that city, and to guard against the introduction of error, by false teachers. In this chapter, the apostle gives him particular directions respecting some of the social and relative duties which were to be enjoined upon all, who professed to be the disciples of Christ. Among these duties, he mentions first in place, as first in importance, that of intercession; or praying for others. I exhort, says he, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority. It is evident that persons in authority are included in the direction to pray for all men. It appears, however, that the apostle did not think it sufficient, to inculcate the duty of praying for them, in this general way only. He felt that it was necessary to make a particular mention of this duty, in a clause by itself. He does, in effect say, While I exhort you to pray for all men, I urge you, especially to pray for those who possess the supreme power, and for all that are in authority. He thus evidently intimates, that, in addition to the general reasons, which should induce us to pray for all men, there are particular reasons why we should pray for those who rule. I propose, in the present discourse, to state the reasons why we should pray, with peculiar frequency and importunity, for all who are invested with authority.

I. We ought to pray for those who are in authority, more frequently and earnestly than for other men, because they, more than other men, need our prayers. In other words, they need a more than ordinary share of that wisdom and grace which God alone can bestow; and which he seldom or never bestows, except in answer to prayer. This is evident in the first place, from the fact, that they have a more than ordinary share of duties to perform. All the duties which God requires of other men, considered as sinful, immortal, and accountable creatures, he requires of rulers. It is incumbent on them, as it is on other men, to possess personal religion; to exercise repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; to love and fear, and serve their Creator; and to prepare for death and judgment; for Jehovah’s language to them is, Though ye be as gods, ye shall die like men; and have your portion like one of the people. In addition to the various personal duties, of a moral and religious nature, which are required of them, as men, they have many official duties, which are peculiar to themselves; duties which it is, by no means, easy to perform in a manner acceptable to God, and approved of men. They are appointed, and they are required to be ministers of God for good to those over whom they are placed.

They are, in a certain sense, his representatives, and vicegerents on earth; for by him they are appointed, and to him they are accountable for the manner in which they discharge their duties. By me, says he, kings reign and princes decree justice; by me princes rule, and nobles, yea, all the judges of the earth. Promotion cometh not from the north, or from the south; but it is God that

setteth up one, and putteth down another. There is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God. Since then, legislators, rulers and magistrates are the ministers and vicegerents of God for good, they are sacredly bound to imitate him, whom they represent; to be such on earth, as he is in heaven; to take care of his rights, and see that they are not trampled upon with impunity; to be a terror to evil-doers, and a praise and encouragement to such as do well. They are also bound, by obligations, which ought ever to be regarded as sacred, and inviolable, to seek the welfare of those over whom they are placed, to prefer it, on all occasions, to their own private interests; to live for others, rather than for themselves; and to consider themselves, their time, and their faculties, as the property of the State. As the influence of their example must be great, it is their indispensable duty to take care that this influence be ever exerted in favor of truth and goodness; and to remember that they are like a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid. Now, consider a moment, my hearers, how exceedingly difficult it must be for a weak, short-sighted, imperfect creature like man, to perform these various duties in a proper manner, and how large a share of prudence, and wisdom, and firmness, and goodness, is necessary to enable him to do it. Surely, then, they who are called to perform such duties, in a peculiar manner need our prayers.

2. Those who are invested with authority, need, more than other men, our prayers; because they are exposed, more than other men, to temptation and danger. While they have a more than ordinary share of duties to perform, they are urged by temptations, more than ordinarily numerous and powerful, to neglect their duty. They have, for instance, peculiarly strong temptations to neglect those personal, private duties which God requires of them as men, as immortal and accountable creatures; and a performance of which is indispensably necessary to their salvation. They are exposed to the innumerable temptations and dangers which ever attend prosperity. The world presents itself to them in its most fascinating, alluring form; they are honored, followed, and flattered; they enjoy peculiar means and opportunities for gratifying their passions; they seldom hear the voice of admonition or reproof; and they are usually surrounded by persons who would consider every expression of religious feeling as an indication of weakness. How powerfully, then, must they be tempted to irreligion, to pride, to ambition, to every form of what the Scriptures call worldly-mindedness?

How difficult must it be for them to acquire and maintain an habitual, operative recollection of their sinfulness, their frailty, their accountability to God, their dependence on his grace, and their need of a Saviour. How difficult, in the midst of such scenes and associates, as usually surround them; to keep death in view; to be in a constant state of preparation for its approach; to practice the duties of watchfulness, self-denial, meditation and prayer; and to preserve, in lively exercise, those feelings and dispositions which God requires, and which become a candidate for eternity. How strongly, too, must they be tempted to make the performance of their official duties, an excuse for neglecting those personal duties, which God requires of all men, in whatever station or circumstance they may be placed. I will only add, with reference to this part of our subject, that the Scriptures intimate with sufficient clearness that those temptations are, in most instances, but too fatally successful.

They inform us, that not many mighty men, not many noble, are saved. Our Saviour farther declares, that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God; and it would be easy to shew that the causes which render it difficult for a rich man, operate with equal force to make it difficult for men clothed with authority, to enter this kingdom. We may remark farther, that they

have many powerful temptations to neglect, not only their personal, but their official duties. They are tempted to indolence and self-indulgence; tempted to prefer their own private interest, to the public good; tempted to pay an undue regard to the selfish wishes and entreaties of their real, or pretended friends; tempted to adopt such measures as will be most popular, rather than those which will be most beneficial to the community; tempted to forget the honor and the rights of Jehovah, and suffer them to be trampled on with impunity. It can scarcely be necessary to add, that persons who are exposed to temptations so numerous and powerful, peculiarly need our prayers.

3. This will appear still more evident if we consider, in the third place, that, should those who are clothed with authority, yield to these temptations, and neglect either their personal or official duties, the consequences will, to them, be peculiarly dreadful. Their responsibility is greater than that of other men. They have greater opportunities of doing both good and evil, than other men. If they do good, they will do much good. If the influence of their example, and their exertions, be thrown on the side of truth and goodness; no one can compute how great, or how lasting, may be the salutary effects which they will produce. On the contrary; if they do evil, they will do much evil. They will, like Jeroboam, make their people to sin. We are informed, by an inspired writer, that one sinner destroyeth much good. This remark is true of every sinner; but it is most emphatically true, of sinners who are placed in authority. One such sinner may destroy more good, and prove the cause of more evil, than a whole generation of sinners who are placed in a lower sphere. And even if they do not actually do evil, they may occasion great evil, and incur great guilt, by neglecting to do good. Says the voice of inspiration, To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. In another place, we are taught that men partake in the guilt of all those sins which they might have prevented. Legislators, rulers, and magistrates, then, are answerable to God for all the possible good which they neglect to do; and they share in the guilt of all the sins which they might, but do not, prevent. So far as those who are invested with authority, neglect to prevent, to the utmost of their power, open impiety, irreligion, disregard of the Sabbath, and of divine institutions, profanation of God’s name, intemperance, and other similar evils; they share in the sinfulness and guilt of every Sabbath-breaker, profane swearer, and drunkard, among those over whom they are placed.

How great, then, is the responsibility of all who are invested either with legislative, judicial or executive authority! How aggravated will be their guilt, how terrible their punishment, should they prove unfaithful to their country and their God! Surely then, they, above all other men, need our prayers; since they have peculiarly difficult duties to perform, are under peculiar temptations to neglect those duties; and, if they neglect them, will receive a punishment peculiarly severe. And remember, my hearers, that we assist to place them in this difficult and dangerous situation. Are we not then sacredly bound to afford them all the assistance in our power, to obtain for them all that wisdom and grace from heaven, which it is in the power of fervent and persevering prayer, to draw down? Shall we place them, as watchmen, upon a steep and slippery precipice, where it is exceedingly difficult to stand, and infinitely dangerous to fall; and neglect the only means which can render their standing secure? God forbid. It is unreasonable, it is ungenerous, it is cruel and unjust, —cruel and unjust, not only to them, but to ourselves, and to the community. This leads me to observe,

4. We ought to pray with peculiar earnestness for all who are in authority, because our own interest, and the great interests of the community require it. This motive, the apostle urges in our text. Pray, says he, for all in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty. These expressions plainly intimate, that, if we wish to enjoy peace and quiet; if we wish godliness and honesty, or, in other words, religion and morality, to prevail among us, we must pray for our rulers. That we depend on them, under God, for the enjoyment of these blessings, is too obvious to require proof. How much, for instance, do the morals, the peace and prosperity of a State, depend upon the enactment of wise and equitable laws. And how much integrity, wisdom, and prudence, how much knowledge of human nature, of political principles, and of the science of legislation, is necessary to enable men to frame such laws. And from whom shall legislators obtain these qualities, if not from the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift; to whom it is owing that there is a spirit in man, and whose inspiration gives us understanding. Again; if the morals, peace and prosperity of a State depend much on the formation of good laws, no less do they depend on the proper execution of those laws. Indeed, the best laws, unless strictly and impartially executed, are perhaps worse than none; since they only serve to show the vicious and abandoned that legal restraints may be disregarded with impunity. But it evidently depends much on rulers and magistrates whether the laws shall be executed with strictness and impartiality; and perhaps it requires more firmness, integrity, and wisdom to execute them in this manner, than it does to enact them. Permit me to add, that it is exceedingly important that those by whom the laws are enacted and executed, should themselves exemplify obedience to the laws; for if they disregard their own enactments, it can scarcely be expected that others should obey them.

Farther; the peace and prosperity of a nation, evidently depend much upon the measures which its rulers adopt, in their intercourse with other nations. A mistake or error in this respect, apparently trifling, may not only involve a nation in great embarrassment, but can plunge it into all the evils of war, and it is too much to expect of fallible, short-sighted creatures, that they should never fall into error, unless they are guided by him who sees the end from the beginning, and who can never err.

Once more; the peace and prosperity of a nation depends entirely on its securing the favor of God. This, I presume, no one will deny. But his favor cannot be secured by any nation, unless its rulers are just men, ruling in his fear. We have already observed, that rulers share in the guilt of those national sins which they might, but do not, prevent. We may add, that nations share in the guilt contracted by their rulers, and in the punishment of their sins. Of this remark, many striking verifications are recorded in the Scriptures. Indeed; if those who are placed in authority, become impious, irreligious, or immoral, they will soon, by the force of their influence and example, impart much of their own character to the people over whom they preside; and thus render them fit objects of the divine displeasure. Permit me to add, that we cannot rationally expect to be favored with wise and good rulers; we cannot expect that God will bestow on them those intellectual and moral endowments which are necessary to render them ministers for good, unless we fervently ask of him these blessings; for favors which we neglect to ask, he may refuse to bestow. Nay more, he will probably punish our negligence and impiety, by turning our national counsels into foolishness. We are informed, that when he pleases, he can take the wise in their own craftiness, and carry headlong the counsel of the froward; that he leadeth counselors away spoiled, and maketh judges to become fools; that he removeth the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged; that he taketh away the heart of the chief of the people, so that they

grope, as in the dark; and that he can, on the other hand, counsel our counselors, and teach our senators wisdom. If, then, we wish to enjoy the protection of wise and equitable laws; if we wish our rulers to be endowed with wisdom, prudence and integrity; if we wish to see our country prosperous and happy; to see learning and liberty, morality and religion flourish; let us never forget to pray with earnestness and perseverance, for all who are invested with authority.

There are some things, in our present situation, which render this exhortation peculiarly seasonable. In the first place, is there not reason to believe, that the duty here enjoined, is a duty which we, and our countrymen generally, have too much neglected? Have we not all been much more ready to complain of our rulers, than to pray for them? Some have complained of our national government, and some of our State government; but where is the man who has prayed for either, as he ought? Have we not reason to believe that, if one half the breath which has been spent in complaining of our rulers, had been employed in praying for them, we should have been much more prosperous and happy, as a nation, than we now are? If any feel convinced that we have erred in this respect, let me remind them that now is the time to correct our error. We are now commencing a new mode of political existence. Now, then, is the time to correct past errors, and to establish right principles. In the second place, it is now peculiarly important and necessary that we should pray for our legislators and rulers, because the duties which they are now called to perform, are peculiarly arduous; and because much, very much depends upon the manner in which these duties shall be performed. Not only our own temporal interests, but the future prosperity of the State, the welfare of our children, and of our children's children, will be seriously affected by the official conduct of our present, chief magistrate, counselors, and legislators. To them is committed the difficult and responsible work of shaping the commencement of our course; and such as is its commencement, will probably be its progress and its termination. Surely, then, every one who has a tongue to pray, ought to employ it in earnestly supplicating the Father of lights, to impart to our present rulers, a double portion of his own Spirit; and to give them, as he did Solomon, a wise and understanding heart, that they may know how to rule and guide this people. Let every one who calls himself a disciple of Christ, remember that one of his Master's commands is, pray, supplicate, intercede for all who are in authority.

View them, my friends, in the light of this subject, and methinks you cannot deny them your prayers. See them placed in an awfully responsible station, where they have numerous and difficult duties to perform, where they are exposed to peculiarly powerful temptations, where they are in imminent danger of losing everlasting life, and incurring aggravated guilt and condemnation. Remember that they are men, and of course, weak, fallible, and mortal. Look forward to the other world, and see them there reduced to a level with other men, and standing before the tribunal of God, where nothing remains of all the honor and influence which they once possessed, except the consequences of the manner in which they employed it. View them in this light, and you cannot but feel for them, and pray for them, that they may obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful, and receive a crown of righteousness in the great day. To conclude; how desirable is it both to rulers and people, that such a disposition should exist; that the religion which enjoins and produces it, should universally prevail among us. What an encouragement would it be to rulers, to unite their own morning supplications with those of the people over whom they were placed, and with what confidence might they engage in the duties assigned them, believing that he whom they and their subjects had addressed, would direct all their paths. Then religion, and morality and peace and

harmony would prevail. Rulers would love their subjects, and seek their good; and subjects would love the rulers, in whose behalf they were daily addressing the throne of grace; while the God whom they both worshipped, would command the blessing upon them, out of Zion; and the world would see how good and pleasant it is for rulers and subjects to dwell together in unity. It is, however, necessary to remark, that all these blessings can scarcely be expected from the prayers of the people alone. They must be attended with the prayers of their rulers. All the considerations which have been urged, as reasons why we should pray for those who are in authority, may be urged with still greater force, as reasons why they should pray for themselves. In this way alone, can they obtain that wisdom and grace which are indispensably necessary to render them faithful in this world, and happy in the world to come. Never, perhaps, since the foundation of the world, has a state been so prosperous, so happy, as was the Jewish nation, while under the government of one who began his reign by saying, Lord, thou hast set thy servant over this great people, and thy servant is as a little child, and knows not how to go out, or come in before them. Give thy servant, therefore, a wise and understanding heart, that I may know how to rule this thy people. God grant that this may be the sincere prayer of all our rulers, and that all the people may say, Amen!

Chapter 54

S. RECOLLECTIONS OF GOD PAINFUL TO THE WICKED.

RECOLLECTIONS OF GOD PAINFUL TO THE WICKED.

I remembered God, and was troubled.—Psalms 77:3.

GOD is a being, whom it is impossible to contemplate with indifference. His character is so interesting, our dependence on him is so complete, and his favor is so indispensably necessary to our happiness, that a distinct recollection of him must always excite either pleasing or painful emotions. We must view him with dread and anxiety, or with confidence and joy. Agreeably we find, that the recollection of God always produced one or the other of these effects upon the mind of the Psalmist. It was usually productive of delight. My soul, says he, shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. But sometimes the remembrance of God produced on his mind very different effects. An instance of this we have in the psalm before us. My soul refused to be comforted; I remembered God and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed; I am so troubled, that I cannot speak. The account, which the Psalmist here gives of his experience, naturally leads to some very interesting inquiries and remarks; remarks, which will probably come home to the bosoms and feelings of almost every person present. There is, I presume scarcely an individual of mature age in this assembly, who cannot Say, with reference to some seasons of his life, I remembered God and was troubled. And there are, I trust, not a few present, who can say, my meditations on God in the night watches have been sweet. Now whence arises this difference? Why is the remembrance of God pleasant to some of us, and painful to others? Why is it sometimes pleasant, and at others painful, to the same individual? These are inquiries intimately connected with our happiness; for since it is impossible for any one to banish all recollection of God, and since the period is approaching, when he will be always present to our minds, it is highly necessary for our happiness, that we should be able, at all seasons, to remember him with pleasure.

I. In pursuing these inquiries, it may be necessary, in the first place, briefly to state what we mean by remembering God. We certainly mean something more than a transient recollection of the word, God, or of any other name, by which he is known. A person may hear or mention any of the names of God, many times in a day, without forming any distinct conceptions of his character, or of any part of it. He cannot, in this case, be said to remember God; for, properly speaking, it is only a word, which he remembers. But by remembering God, I mean, as the psalmist undoubtedly meant, recollecting those ideas, which the term God is used by the inspired writers to signify. When they use the word, they use it to denote an eternal, self-existent, infinitely wise, just, and good Being, who is the Creator and Upholder of all things, who is our Sovereign Lawgiver, and who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will; who is always present with us, who searches our hearts, who approves or disapproves our conduct, who loves holiness and cannot look on sin but with abhorrence, who has power to make us eternally happy or miserable, and who will hereafter exert that power in bestowing endless happiness on some persons, and dooming

others to endless woe, according to their respective characters. Whenever a person has these ideas of God in his mind, when he feels convinced for the time, that there is such a being, and that he is what the Scriptures represent him to be, then he remembers God in the sense of the text.

II. The way is now prepared to inquire, why the recollection of such a being should ever be painful; or in other words, why any of God's creatures should be troubled at the remembrance of him. It may easily be shown, that there is nothing in the divine character or government, which necessarily renders the remembrance of God productive of painful emotions. If there were, the remembrance of God would be painful to all his creatures, upon all occasions. But this is not the case. On the contrary, the remembrance of God is always delightful to holy angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. In fact, the constant presence of God constitutes their heaven. The recollection also of his existence, character, and government, is usually, though not always, highly pleasing to all good men. Nor is it strange that it should be so. It is always pleasing to an affectionate child, to reflect on the character, wealth, honor and influence of his father. The power, grandeur, and riches of their sovereign, are a source of heart-felt exultation and delight to all loyal subjects. They would consider their habitations as highly honored by his presence, and themselves as still more honored by an admission to his palace. For similar reasons, the affectionate children and loyal subjects of the King of kings cannot but exult and rejoice in contemplating the existence, the glories, the favor and the constant presence of their heavenly Father and King. It is and must be pleasing to them to reflect that they are the creatures, the subjects of such an infinitely great, wise, and powerful being. The thought that Jehovah exists and reigns God over all, blessed forever; that he brings good out of evil, causes the wrath of man to praise him, and makes all things work together for the accomplishment of his wise and just designs, cannot but be exceedingly gratifying and consoling to persons of this description, while they contemplate the dreadful prevalence of natural and moral evil in this ruined world. But if there be nothing in the character or government of God, which renders the remembrance of him necessarily painful to his Creatures; and especially if the recollection of him be in itself suited to console, delight and animate them, then it follows, that if any are troubled by the remembrance of God, the cause must exist solely in themselves. My friends, it does so. Nor is it difficult to discover and point out the cause. In one word, it is sin. Nothing but sin can ever render the remembrance of God painful to any of his creatures. None but such as are conscious of sin indulged and guilt contracted, can have reason to say, I remembered God and was troubled. This is evident from facts. The once holy, but now fallen angels, rejoiced in God till they sinned. Our first parents in paradise contemplated his character and government with unmixed delight, till they transgressed his commands. Good men find a similar pleasure in meditating upon these subjects, when they can view themselves as justified from the guilt of sin by the blood of Christ, and when they are conscious of no allowed deviation from the divine law. If our hearts condemn us not, says the apostle, then have we confidence towards God; and the man, who has confidence towards God, cannot be troubled at the remembrance of him. But on the other hand, if our hearts or consciences condemn us, it is impossible to remember him without being troubled. It will then be painful to remember that he is our Creator and Benefactor; for the remembrance will be attended with a consciousness of base ingratitude.

It will be painful to think of him as Lawgiver; for such thoughts will remind us, that we have broken his law. It will be painful to think of his holiness; for if he is holy, he must hate our sins, and be

angry with us, as Sinners—of his justice and truth; for these perfections make it necessary that he should fulfil his threatenings and punish us for our sins. It will be painful to think of his omniscience; for this perfection makes him acquainted with our most secret offences, and renders it impossible to conceal them from his view: —of his omnipresence; for the constant presence of an invisible witness must be disagreeable to those, who wish to indulge their sinful propensities. It will be painful to think of his power; for it enables him to restrain or destroy, as he pleases: —of his sovereignty; for sinners always hate to see themselves in the hands of a sovereign God: —of his eternity and immutability; for from his possessing these perfections it follows, that he will never alter the threatenings which he has denounced against sinners, and that he will always live to execute them. It will be painful to think of him as Judge; for we shall feel, that as sinners, we have no reason to expect a favorable sentence from his lips. It will even be painful to think of the perfect goodness and excellence of his character; for his goodness leaves us without excuse in rebelling against him, and makes our sins appear exceedingly sinful. Thus it is evident, that the consciousness of sin committed and guilt contracted must render the government, and all the perfections of God, objects of terror and anxiety to the sinner; and of course, the recollection of them must to him be painful. Nor is this all. Every sinner loves sin. He places his whole delight in it. The only happiness, with which he is acquainted, consists in gratifying either the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, or the pride of life. But all these things are contrary to the will of God. He forbids the sinner to pursue them; he forbids him to indulge or gratify his sinful propensities; he commands him to mortify and destroy them, to deny himself, to take up his cross, follow Christ, and live a religious life, in which sinners can find no pleasure. He not only requires all this, but threatens all, who do not comply, with everlasting punishment. Whenever, therefore, the sinner thinks of God, he thinks of a being, who crosses all his, darling inclinations, thwarts all his schemes of happiness, and treads down self, that idol which he loves to worship, and to which he wishes every thing to give way. The sinner, therefore, cannot but look upon God, when he views him in his true character, as his greatest and most irreconcilable enemy. Agreeably, he is represented by the inspired writers as saying in his heart, No God; that is, would there were no God, or that I could escape from or resist his power. But this, reason and revelation assure him, is impossible. They tell him, that he can neither deceive God, nor fly from him, nor resist him; that he is completely in his power, and that God will dispose of him just as he pleases. This being the case, it is evident, that whenever he remembers God in the sense of the text, he cannot but be troubled.

It is further evident, that the more clearly they perceive God’s character and their own; the more light is thrown into their consciences, the more mercies, privileges, and opportunities they have enjoyed and abused,—so much the more they will be troubled by a remembrance of God. Whenever they contemplate him, they will be thrown into a state of intestine war, of war with themselves. Conscience will rise up in their breasts, and take God’s part, and reproach them for disobeying his commands, and abusing his favors. Their understandings will side with conscience, and render its reproaches doubly terrible. On the other hand, all their sinful feelings and propensities will array themselves in opposition to reason and conscience, and attempt to defend and justify themselves. Hence inward Struggles and conflicts will arise; the sinner’s mind will become like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; and he can have no rest, until he either becomes Cordially reconciled to God, or succeeds in banishing all serious thoughts of him from his breast. As well then may an imprisoned rebel think of his

sovereign, or a condemned criminal of his judge, with pleasure, as an Impenitent sinner remember his offended God, without being troubled. But it may, perhaps, he objected, that many impenitent sinners appear to remember God, not only without pain, but even with pleasing emotions. I answer, it is not the true God, whom they remember, but an imaginary god, a god of their own creation. Sinners soon find that it is impossible to think of such a God, as the scriptures describe, without anxiety and alarm. Their carnal minds are full of enmity against such a being. They, therefore, proceed to form a god of their own, one who will not interrupt, oppose, or alarm them in their sinful pursuits; and such a god they can contemplate without pain, and even with pleasure. Hence we are told, that they think God to be altogether such a one as themselves, and say in their hearts respecting sin, God will not requite it.

It will, perhaps, be further objected, that there are some things in the character and govermiment of God, which are adapted to allay the apprehensions of sinners, and prevent them from being troubled at the remembrance of him; his forbearance, long-suffering, and mercy, for instance, and especially the display which he has made, of his love in the Gospel of Christ. I answer, it is readily allowed, that these things are suited to encourage and comfort those, who, in the exercise of repentance and faith in Christ, become reconciled to God, and embrace the offers of mercy. Indeed, were it not for these things, not one of our apostate race could ever contemplate God with any other feelings, than those of terror, remorse, and despair; for we have all sinned, and exposed ourselves to everlasting condemnation. But while the mercy and grace of God, as displayed in the Gospel, are well adapted to comfort the penitent believer, they can evidently afford no rational ground of consolation to impenitent sinners, nor enable them to contemplate him without being troubled. Promises of pardon to the penitent, the believer, the reconciled, are nothing to the impenitent, the unbeliever, the unreconciled rebel, whose heart is still at enmity against God. To such persons the divine character and government still remain no less terrible, than if Christ had not died, and mercy were not offered. Nay. they are, in some respects, more so; for the Gospel has threatenings, as well as the Law, and it denounces on those, who neglect it, a much sorer punishment, than does the Law itself. Those, therefore, who neglect the Gospel, and refuse to repent and be reconciled to God, cannot remember him without being troubled. The same may be said of hypocritical professors, at least, of those, who know or suspect themselves to be such; for to them the thoughts of an all-seeing, heart-searching Judge, who cannot be deceived, and who will bring every secret thing into judgment, cannot but be exceedingly painful. The presence of a penetrating master is ever disagreeable to an unfaithful servant.

APPLICATION. 1. This subject, my friends, affords a rule, by which we may try ourselves, and which will assist us much in discovering our real characters; for the moral character of every intelligent creature, corresponds with his habitual views and feelings respecting God. If we never remember him in the sense of the text, or if we think of him infrequently and with indifference, it is an infallible proof; that our characters are wholly sinful, and our situation most dangerous; for we are expressly told, that all who forget God, shall be turned into hell. If we do not habitually contemplate God’s true character and government with heartfelt satisfaction; if we do not rejoice, that the Lord reigns, and that he is just such a being as the scriptures represent him, and that we and all other creatures are in His bands,—it is certain, that we are not reconciled to him, that we still remain under the power of that carnal mind, which is enmity against God. If, though we can usually contemplate these objects with delight, we sometimes find the thoughts of them painful, it

is a proof, that at such times, we are in a state of backsliding, from which we ought immediately to return. But whenever we can remember the true character of God, and the truths connected with it, withmout being troubled, when we can think of appearing in his presence at the judgment day with a humble, solemn joy; and especially, when we feel that to be with him, to see and praise him, forever and ever, is the very heaven which we desire, then we may be sure, that we are his real children, and that we are in a state of actual preparation for death.

2. From this subject we may learn how wretched is the situation of impenitent sinners; of those, who cannot remember God, without being troubled. That such persons cannot enjoy real happiness even in this life, is too evident to require proof; for the world cannot afford it, and they dare not look up for it to heaven, the only source whence it can be derived. Nay more, that great and glorious being, who alone can communicate happiness, is to them an object of dread, and a cause of anxious apprehension. The waters of life, which convey refreshment and felicity to all holy beings, are to them waters of bitterness; and what ought to be their happiness, constitutes their misery. Hence, what ever calamities and afflictions may overwhelm them, however deeply they may be distressed, and however greatly they may need consolation, they cannot look for it to the God of all consolation; for the remembrance of him would only increase their troubles. Indeed, the remembrance of him is usually most painful to sinners, when they are most severely afflicted; because they justly consider their afflictions as proofs of his displeasure. And if the situation of such persons is wretched in life, how much more so must it be at death, and in eternity! You will, I presume, allow, that if there be any such thing as consolation, it must be drawn from the contemplation of God, and of a future state; for it is most certain, that neither this world nor its inhabitants can afford it. But from the contemplation of these objects the dying sinner can derive no consolation. On the contrary, he must, if he thinks of them at all, think of them only with anxiety and dread. If he thinks of God, he can think of him only as a being, whom he has neglected and offended, whose mercies he has abused, and who can view his conduct with no feelings but those of indignation and abhorrence. Every remembrance of him must be accompanied with a recollection of duties neglected, and sins committed, and with fearful apprehensions of his just and eternal displeasure. Which way soever the expiring sinner turns his eye, he can, therefore, discover nothing, which does not add to his wretchedness and despair. If he looks forward, he sees nothing but the dark and gloomy valley of death, through which no friend will accompany him; the burning throne of judgment, to which he is hastening, and eternity, shrouded in blackness and darkness, spreading in boundless extent beyond it. If he looks back, he sees numberless sins following him as accusers to the judgment seat, and threatening there to find him out. If he looks upward, he sees nothing but the frowning eye of a just and angry God, the glories of which search his inmost soul, and wither all his hopes. If he looks downwards, it is to that bottomless abyss, which he cannot but fear awaits him. He "turns, and turns, and finds no ray of hope." My friends, if such be the death of those, who forget God, what must be their eternity? No sooner do they leave the body than that holy, just, eternal being, whose every remembrance troubled them, bursts, at once, in all his burning glories, upon their aching sight! And if merely to remember him were painful, what must the sight of him be? Think of a wretch deprived of his eyelids, and condemned to gaze unremittingly at a scorching sun, till the balls of sight were withered and dried up,—and you will have some faint conception of the feelings of a sinful creature doomed to gaze, through eternity, at the, to him, heart-withering perfections of that God, who is a consuming fire to all the workers of iniquity. My sinful hearers, you, to whom the remembrance of God is painful, will you

not hear and be convinced? I do not so much ask you to believe the scriptures, as to believe the testimony of your own experience. You cannot but be sensible, that the light of divine truth is painful to you; that the thoughts of God, of death, and judgment, trouble you. Nor can your deny, that you are mortal, that you must soon exchange this world for another. Now if the remembrance of God be painful to you while in health, must it not be far more painful to you, when sickness and death come upon you. If the mere recollection of God troubles you, must not the sight of him be incomparably more productive of distress? Why, then, will you put away thoughts, which must return, at a dying hour, to overwhelm you? which must be your eternal companions! Why will you put off that preparation for death, which alone can prevent the recollection, and the sight of God from being productive of anguish? and will convert what is now painful into a source of the purest, of everlasting felicity? Why will you continue in the wretched state of those, who are rendered unhappy by the remembrance of their Creator, of a being, in whose world they live, of whom every thing tends to remind them; a being, who is not far from every one of them, and in whose presence they must dwell forever? How wretched would be the situation of the inhabitants of the ocean, if the element, which surrounds them, and out of which they cannot exist, should become to them a source of misery! And how much more wretched, then, must be the situation of those, who are made miserable by the remembrance or by the sight of him, in whom they live, and move, and from whom they can never fly! Why then, will you not be persuaded to renounce those sins, which are the only cause, that renders the recollection of God painful, and to embrace those terms of reconciliation, which will render the thoughts, and the presence of God consoling in life, delightful in death, and productive of ineffable happiness through eternity? This leads us to remark,

3. How great are our obligations to God for the gospel of Christ, the gospel of reconciliation! Were it not for this, the remembrance, and still more the presence of God would have occasioned nothing but pure unmingled wretchedness to any human being. Were it not for this, no child of Adam could ever have contemplated God in any other light, than that of an inflexibly holy, just, and offended Judge, all whose perfections demanded his destruction. Were it not for this, there could have been nothing before us, but a certain, fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation. It is only when viewed through that Mediator, whom the gospel reveals, that God can be contemplated by sinful creatures, without dismay and despair. But in and through him God is reconciled. In and through him peace is offered to rebellious men; through him we may all have access by one Spirit unto the Father. 0, then, be thankful for the gospel of reconciliation, and show your gratitude, by eagerly embracing the terms of peace, which it proposes. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

4. Is sin alone the cause, which renders the remembrance of God painful? Then let all, who have embraced the terms of reconciliation offered by the gospel, all who desire to remember God without being troubled, beware, above all things, beware of sin. It is sin, my Christian friends, which is the cause of all your sorrows. It is sin alone which spreads a frown over the smiling face of God; sin which hides from you the light of his countenance, which prevents you from always contemplating him with pure, unmingled delight and confidence. Swear, then, an eternal war with sin not only swear, but maintain it. Oppose sin resolutely, crucify it, mortify it in every way, and under all the forms, in which it appears, and it shall not have dominion over you. You shall not have the spirit of bondage again to fear; but the spirit of adoption, whereby ye will cry, Abba,

Father.

Chapter 55

S. SINNERS ENTREATED TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE

SINNERS ENTREATED TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE The Holy Ghost saith, today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. — Hebrews 3:7-8. My brethren, I can think of no introduction to a discourse on this awakening passage more suitable, than that often repeated command of our Savior, He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith. You are here told what the Spirit saith. The Holy Ghost saith, Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. To sinners of all ages, in all situations, of all descriptions, to every one who hath an ear to hear, or a heart to be hardened, the Holy Ghost saith, Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. The import of this language is so obvious as to need little explanation. It requires us to hear God's voice; to hear it, not merely with the external ear, but with appropriate feelings of heart, with faith, love and obedience. it commands us to do this today, immediately, without the smallest delay. The import of the language is, if you ever mean to hear God's voice, if you do not intend to die without obeying it, you must hear it now. And what is the voice of God, which we are thus commanded to hear immediately ~ it is that voice, which says respecting Jesus Christ, This is my beloved Son, hear him; that voice, which now commandeth all men, every where, to repent; that voice which says to every child of Adam, My son give me thine heart; come ye out from an unbelieving world,. and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. The import of all these passages is, be truly religious, and if you intend ever to be so, become so today; while yet it is called today, repent and believe the gospel.

This, then, is the great duty enjoined in our text, the command which we are now to enforce. But when God speaks to men; when the Creator speaks to his creatures; when the King eternal speaks to his lawful subjects, and the Holy Ghost saith, hear his voice and harden not your hearts against him, can it be necessary to urge upon you the duty of immediately obeying his commands? Alas, my friends, that it should be necessary. But necessary as it is, it will be in vain to attempt it unless divine grace incline you to obey. 0, then, that the God, whose voice you are commanded to hear, and the Holy Spirit, who now commands you to hear it, may be present in his powerful influence, while I attempt to enforce upon you an immediate compliance with his commands, to press home upon your consciences the reasons, the motives, which should induce you to become religious today.

Before I proceed to do this let me state, particularly, whom I mean to address. It is not the fool, who says in his heart, there is no God. It is not the profane scoffer, who, disbelieving the scriptures, sneeringly asks, Where is the promise of his coming? It is not he, who, having already presumptuously hardened his heart against the truth, has been given over by the righteous judgment of God to strong delusions, to believe a lie. Such characters, if any such are present, I must leave, where they have willfully thrown themselves, in the hands of that God who is a consuming fire, who has declared, that he will deal with incorrigible offenders. It is the young, who are not hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; it is those, who, rationally convinced of the truth and importance of religion intend at some future period to embrace it; those, whose consciences,

not yet seared as with an hot iron, sometimes cause them to tremble, as did Felix, when they hear of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come; but who, like the same Felix, are postponing a compliance with their convictions to some more convenient season. Such are the characters, whom I now address, and upon whom I would press the importance, the necessity, of immediately becoming religious. The first motive, which I shall set before you with this view, is the shortness and uncertainty of life. I urge you to become religious today, because you are not sure of tomorrow; because today is, perhaps, the only opportunity, with which you will ever be favored. Need I enter upon a labored proof of this truth? Need I remind you, that you are mortal, that it is appointed to all men once to die? Does not the tolling bell almost daily remind you of this? Do you not see your fellow mortals borne, in rapid succession, to their long home, while the mourners go about your streets? Need I tell you, that you are frail, as well as mortal; that you must not only die, but may die soon and suddenly; that the time allotted you, when longest, is short, and may prove much shorter than you are aware; that many are swept into eternity, as in a moment, by unexpected casualties? and that those who fall victims to diseases, are in perfect health the day, nay, the hour, before it assails them; and that of course, the full possession of health, today, is no proof that you will not be assailed by fatal disease tomorrow? Who, let me ask, are the persons, that die suddenly and unexpectedly? Are they the feeble, the infirm? No, my hearers; observation will tell you, that they are the youthful, the vigorous, the strong.

She will tell you that while the former, like a reed, bend before the blast and escape, the latter, like the stubborn oak, brave its fury, and are prostrated. She will tell you, and the physician will confirm her remark, that those, who enjoy the most vigorous health, are most exposed to many of those diseases, which arrest their victims by surprise, and cut short the thread of life, as in a moment. Such is the wise appointment of him, in whose hands is our breath, that none may be tempted to abuse their health and vigor, by drawing from them encouragement to postpone preparation for death. Will you then frustrate the design of this appointment? Will you boast of tomorrow, as if it were your own, when you know not what a day may bring forth? You would pity and condemn the madness of a man, who should stake his whole fortune on the turn of a die, without the smallest prospect of gain. But, my delaying hearers, you are playing a far more dreadful and desperate game than this. You are staking your souls, your salvation on the continuance of life: on an event as uncertain as the turn of the die. You stake them without any equivalent; for if life should be spared, you gain nothing; but should it be cut short, you lose all, you are ruined for eternity. You run the risk of losing every thing dear, and of incurring everlasting misery— for what? For the sake of living a little longer without religion, of spending a few more days or years in disobeying and offending your Creator, of committing sins, which you know must be repented of. And is it wise, rather is it not madness, to incur such a risk? Let the following case furnish the reply. I will suppose that you intend to defer the commencement of a religious life for one year only. Select, then, the most healthy, vigorous person of your acquaintance; the man, whose prospects are fairest for long life, and say, whether you would be willing to stake your soul on the chance of that man's life continuing for a year? Would you be willing to say, I consent to forfeit salvation, to be miserable forever, if that man dies before the expiration of a year? There is not, I presume, a single person present, who would not shudder at the thought of entering into such an engagement, if he supposed it would be binding. My delaying hearers, if you would not stake your salvation on the continuance of any other person's life, why will you stake it on the continuance of your own? Yet this you evidently do, when you resolve to defer repentance to a future period; for if you die before

that period arrives you die impenitent, unprepared, and perish forever. 0, then, play no longer this desperate game; a game, in which millions have staked and lost their souls; but if you intend ever to become religious, begin today, for tomorrow is not.

Permit me to enforce these remarks by an instance in point. A person, who formerly met with you in this house, while in the full enjoyment of youth and health, became convinced of the importance of religion; and expressed a determination to attend the next weekly meeting for religious inquiry. When the day of meeting arrived, she however concluded to defer her attendance till the following week. But before the close of that week, she was in her grave. It is not for us to limit the divine mercy, or to say what was her fate; but, for ought we can tell, the delay of a week proved fatal. Permit me to remind you of another circumstance, which many of you will recollect. I observed to you on the Sabbath, I think the first Sabbath of a year, that perhaps some person might then be present in God's house for the last time. The event verified the peradventure. On the following Wednesday, one, who had been present on the Sabbath, was dead. At the ensuing Thursday evening lecture, I noticed the circumstance, and repeated the remark. Again was it verified. Before the next Sabbath, a person, who had been present at that lecture, was a corpse. On the next Sabbath, I mentioned this also, and repeated the remark a third time; and the following day, a third person, who on the Sabbath, was in perfect health, expired. My hearers, what has occurred, may occur again. No person now before me can be sure that he will be permitted to re-visit this house of prayer. If, then, you intend ever to become religious, begin today, for tomorrow is not. This remark suggests a second reason, why you should not postpone religion to another day. You cannot properly, or even lawfully, promise to give what is not your own. Now tomorrow is not yours; and it is yet uncertain whether it ever will be. Today is the only time which you can, with the least shadow of propriety, call your own. Today, then, is the only time, which you can properly or lawfully give to God. To promise that you will give him tomorrow, or which is the same thing, to resolve that you will become religious tomorrow, is to promise what is not yours, and what may never be yours to give. If then, God deserves any thing at your hands, if you mean to give him any thing, give him what is your own, and do not mock him and deceive yourselves, by promising to give him what you do not possess. If you adopt a different course, and postpone the commencement of a religious life till tomorrow, you will, in effect, say, all the time, that is mine to give, I will give to sin and the world; but that time, which is not mine, and which I have no right or power to give, I will give to God. A third reason why you should commence a religious life today, is, that if you defer it, though but till tomorrow, you must harden your hearts against the voice of God. This our text plainly intimates. It excludes the idea of any middle course between obeying God's voice today, and hardening our hearts; and affirms of course, that all, who neglect to do the former, will do the latter. Every sinner present then, who does, not become religious today, will harden his own heart. This is evident also from the very nature of things. God commands and exhorts you to commence immediately, a religious life. Now if you do not comply, you must refuse, for there is no medium. Here then is a direct, willful act of disobedience to God's commands; and this act tends most powerfully to harden the heart; for after we have once disobeyed, it becomes more easy to repeat the disobedience. But this is not all. If you disobey, you must assign some excuse to justify your disobedience, or your consciences will reproach you, and render you uneasy; if no plausible excuse occurs, you will seek one. If none can readily be found, you will invent one. And when God proceeds to enforce his commands by frowns and threatenings, and to press you with motives and arguments, you must fortify your minds against their influence, and

seek other arguments to assist you in doing it. This also tends most powerfully to harden the heart. A man, who is frequently employed in seeking arguments and excuses to justify his neglect of religion, soon becomes expert in the work of self-justification. He is, if I may so express it, armed at all points against the truth ; so that in a little time, nothing affects him, no arrow from the quiver of revelation can reach his conscience. Urge him to what duty you will, he has some plausible excuse in readiness to justify himself for neglecting to perform it. But if, as is sometimes the case, his excuses prove insufficient, and his understanding and conscience become convinced, that he ought to hear God's voice today he can avoid compliance only by taking refuge in an obstinate refusal, or by resolutely diverting his attention to some other object, till God's commands are forgotten, or by a vague kind of promise that he will become religious at some future period. Whichsoever of these methods he adopts, the present impression is effaced, and his heart is hardened.

He has engaged in a warfare with his reason and conscience, and has gained a victory over them. He has resisted the force of truth, and thus rendered it more easy for him to resist it again. In a word, he has less religious sensibility; he has become more inaccessible to conviction. and less disposed to yield to it, than before. Now this is precisely what the scriptures mean by hardening the heart. And this, my delaying hearers, is what you must do, what you will do, unless you become religions today. God now commands and exhorts you to repent, and places before you many powerful motives and arguments to induce you to obey. If you do not yield to him, you must resist him. You must, if I may so express it, brace up your minds and hearts against the force of the means which he employs to persuade you. Your spirits must resist and strive against his. Of course, you will leave this house more hardened than you entered it: salvation will be placed farther from you, and your conversion will be rendered more improbable than ever. 0, then, if you intend ever to hear God's voice, hear it today, and do not, by hardening yourselves against it, render it a source of death unto death to your souls. As a farther inducement to this, permit me to remark,

First, That if you do not commence a religious life today, there is great reason to fear that you will never commence it. This is a most important, as well as a most alarming truth; and could I persuade you to believe it, I should feel strong hopes, that you would comply with the exhortation in our text; for I venture to assert, that there is no one thing, which encourages you to neglect religion today, so much as a secret hope, that you shall become religious at some future time. Could this delusive hope be destroyed, could you be made to feel, that your eternal salvation depends on your becoming religious today, you would scarcely postpone it till to-morrow. Permit me then to attempt the destruction of this hope, by showing you how groundless it is, and how many circumstances combine to render it probable, that if yon do not hear God's voice today, you never will hear it. With this view I remark, that the very causes which induce you to defer the commencement of a religious life, render it highly improbable, that you will ever become religious. When this duty is urged upon you, you allege, perhaps, that you are not able to become religious, or that you cannot give your minds to it; or that you have not sufficient time for it, or you know not how to begin. Now all these causes will operate with equal force another day. You will then feel just as unable, or, to speak more properly, just as unwilling to become religions, as you do now. When to-morrow arrives you will, therefore, probably defer repentance to some future time when that time arrives, you will again defer it; and will continue to pursue this course till life is spent.

Would the work be rendered more easy by delay, there might be some appearance of a reason for deferring it. But it will not. On the contrary, every day's delay will render it more difficult. Your hearts, as you have already been reminded, will tomorrow be more hard and insensible than they are now; your sinful habits also will be more confirmed; your consciences will be less tender; you will be less susceptible of religious impressions; in a word, you will have greater difficulties to overcome, and less disposition to contend with them, than you have today. It is, therefore, exceedingly improbable, that those who neglect religion today, will attend to it tomorrow.

There is another circumstance, which renders this improbability still greater. The inspired writers teach us, very explicitly, that after a time, God ceases to strive with sinners, and to afford them the assistance of his grace. He gives them up to a blinded mind, a seared conscience, and a hard heart. Thus he dealt with the inhabitants of the old world. Thus he dealt with the wicked sons of Eli. They hearkened not to the voice of their father, says the inspired historian, because the Lord would slay them. That is, God had determined, in consequence of their wickedness, to destroy them, and, therefore, he did not accompany the warnings of their father with his blessing. Thus he dealt with the Jews in the time of the prophet Isaiah, Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. The same terrible punishment was inflicted on the inhabitants of Jerusalem in., our Savior's time. He beheld the city, we are told, and wept over it, saying, 0, that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes! This passage very clearly intimates that there is a time, when sinners may know the things of their peace; but that, if they suffer that time to pass without improving it, the things of their peace will then be hidden from them, and their destruction will be sure.

Hence the apostle exhorts us, in the context, to take warning from the fate of the Jews, who hardened their hearts against God's voice, and thus provoked him to swear in his wrath, that they should not enter his rest. Hence, also, he informs us, that now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation; thus plainly intimating, that tomorrow the day of salvation may be past. If then you, my delaying hearers, harden your hearts today, God may seal them up in impenetrable hardness tomorrow. If you say, I will not embrace the offers of salvation today, God will say, No offers of salvation shall be made you tomorrow. Nor is there small reason to fear this; for of all the sins which men can commit, perhaps no one is more provoking to God, than that of refusing immediately to hear his voice. It is a direct and willful act of rebellion against his authority; it is a sin committed against light and conviction; it is resisting and grieving the Holy Spirit; it is crucifying Jesus Christ afresh; it is practically saying, I know that I must, at some period of life, become religious. It is true death may surprise me, or God may deny his grace, and leave me to perish, if I delay; but I choose to encounter this danger, to incur the risk of losing everlasting happiness and of suffering eternal misery, rather than hear God's voice today.

I will therefore, once more, harden myself against it; I will again trifle with his commands, again make light of my Savior's invitations and walk a little longer in the broad road, sit awhile longer on the crumbling brink of perdition. This, 0 delaying sinner, is the plain language of thy conduct. Thus strong is the aversion, which it expresses to religion, to the service of God. That he must be exceedingly displeased with such a course must be obvious to your own mind. You have then great reason to fear, that your day of grace has almost expired that God will soon swear in his

wrath you shall never enter his rest. How groundless must be your hopes of a future conversion; how small the probability, that if you refuse to hear God's voice today, you will ever become religious. You ought to feel as if this were the only accepted time, as if your day of grace would end with the setting sun, as if all eternity depended on the present hour, on your immediate obedience to the voice of God. But once more, setting aside for a moment all that has been said, suppose that you could be sure of long life, sure of repenting at some future period, it would still be the dictate of wisdom, as it is of revelation, to become religious today. You expect, if you ever do become religious, to repent of all your past sins; for you well know, that without repentance there is no pardon, no true religion; of course, if by postponing religion today you resolve to commit a few more sins, you expect to repent of those sins. You are then, while you delay, constantly making work for repentance; you are doing what you mean to be sorry for; you are building up today, what you mean to throw down tomorrow. How irrational and absurd is this! How foolish, how ridiculous, does a rational, immortal being appear, when he says, I mean to omit some duty, or commit some sin today, but I will be very sorry for it tomorrow. I will not now hear God's voice, but I mean to mourn, to be grieved for it hereafter. My hearers, could you say this to your fellow creatures without blushing? How then can you, without shame, say it to God by your actions? What sincerity can there be in such promises? How can a man sincerely resolve that he will tomorrow repent of conduct which he loves and chooses today! It cannot be. There is not, therefore, the smallest sincerity in the delaying sinner's resolutions of future repentance and amendment. He has no real intention to become religious at any future period of his life; and all his promises are designed merely to quiet his conscience, and prevent her from disturbing him in his sinful pursuits. In every point of view then, it clearly appears to be your duty, your wisdom, your interest, to become religious today.

Thus have I stated some of the reasons, which should induce you to commence, immediately, a religious life. To crown all, permit me to remind you, that it is the express command of God. God now commandeth all men, every where, to repent; and the Holy Ghost saith, obey God's command, hear his voice today, and do not harden your hearts against it. This command, 0 sinner, I lay as a terror across thy path. You cannot proceed one step farther in an irreligious course, without trampling it under foot; without practically saying, God now commands me to repent, but I will not repent; the Holy Ghost saith, hear his voice today, but today I will not hear it. If tomorrow's rising sun finds you out of the narrow way of life, it will find you where God expressly forbids you to be, on pain of incurring his severest displeasure. He has said, rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry; and if you disobey his voice today, you will be guilty both of rebellion and of stubbornness. We might almost venture to say, it, would scarcely be more sinful to go away and commit murder, than to go away and defer repentance; for why is murder a sin? Because, you will reply, God has said, Thou shalt not kill. And has not the same God said, with equal clearness, Repent now, and believe the gospel? To violate this command then, is no less a direct act of rebellion against God, than it would be to take the life of a fellow creature. And will you, can you, dare you, then, be guilty of it? Have any of you already reached such a pitch of impiety and wickedness, as to dare trample on a known command of God, to commit known, willful, deliberate sin, when he has assured us that, if we sin willfully, aftcr we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation? My friends, if any of you dare do this, it is too late to exhort you not to harden your hearts; for they are hardened to the utmost already. I am, however, aware, that you

will not see, or at least will not acknowledge this to be the case. I am aware, that you always have many excuses in readiness, to prove that you are not guilty of willful disobedience. But what will these excuses avail at the last day? They may serve to quiet your consciences, to harden your hearts and buoy you up with deceitful hopes now; but they will answer no purpose then; nay, you will not then dare to offer them; for God has declared that every mouth shall be stopped. Besides, you cannot find a single instance in the Bible, in which God has ever paid the smallest regard to the excuses of sinners. We read of some, who, when they were invited, as you now are, to the gospel feast, began with one consent to make excuse. And what was the consequence? God declared that not one of them should taste it. We read of another who attempted to excuse himself by pretending that he was not able to do what his Lord required. And what was his Lord's reply to this excuse? Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. This, I presume, is the excuse which most of you are now secretly making. You are saying, I do not become religious today, because I am not able; and I must wait till God assists me. Of all the excuses, that sinners can make, this is the most foolish, the most groundless, the most provoking to God. If you can make no better excuse than this, you had much better make none, and say at once, I will not obey God. Groundless and impious, however, as this excuse is, I would pay it some attention, did you really believe it yourselves. But you do not believe it. The resolutions and promises, which you often secretly make, that you will repent tomorrow, or on your dying bed, prove that you do not believe it; for none ever resolves or promises to do what he knows he cannot do. These promises and resolutions then, show that you suppose yourselves able to repent.

There is another fact, which shows still more clearly, that you do not really believe this excuse. When any important event, an event which nearly concerns your present interests, is in suspense, you always feel anxious. If you have no control over the event, you feel more anxious. You cannot rest till it is decided. Suppose, for instance, that your property, your reputation, or your lives, depended on the verdict of a jury., over which you had no control. You would not say, while they were deliberating, it will avail nothing for me to be anxious; I will therefore feel easy and unconcerned. You could not feel unconcerned; you would be anxious till the decision was known. To apply these remarks to the case before us: You know that God now commands you to repent, and threatens you with everlasting punishment, unless you obey. You profess to believe, that you cannot obey without the assistance of his grace. At the same time you must be sensible that it is altogether uncertain whether you will ever receive this assistance; that is, altogether uncertain whether you shall not perish in your sins, as thousands do, while few find the way of life. Now if you really believe this, you would be in a state of constant anxiety, until your destiny was decided; until you knew whether you should obtain divine assistance or not. Shall I be saved, or shall I perish? is a question, which you would be constantly and anxiously asking. But you do not ask this question. You do not feel this anxiety.

You are habitually easy and unconcerned, a demonstrative proof that you do not believe this excuse, that you suppose salvation to be in your own power. Deceive not yourselves then, and insult not God with an excuse, which you do not really believe, and which, if it were true, would transfer all blame from sinners to God, and prove that he alone is guilty of all the wickedness which is perpetrated by his creatures. He knows what you can do, and he does command you to become religious today, and you must obey, or take the consequences. It is painful, my friends, to address you in this language; but when I deliver God's message, I must deliver it plainly: I must, to

the utmost of my power, apply it to your consciences, in all its unbending, unaccommodating strictness; turn it which way we please, it will say nothing but this,—repent, or you perish. And what, after all, is there so very irksome, or disagreeable, in a religious life, that you should wish to defer its commencement? If you must begin some time, why not begin today? Will you reply, I know not how to begin? God's voice, if you listen to it, will inform you. It tells us, that there is a veil upon our hearts; a veil, which prevents us from discerning the path of duty; and it also tells us, that when our hearts turn to the Lord, that veil shall be taken away. Turn then to God Go to him, as his servants, for direction, and he will teach you what you must do. If I mistake not, many of you are like Agrippa, and for a long time have been almost persuaded to be Christians; but you hesitate, you linger, you dread to take the first step.

Perhaps when you are just on the point of yielding to conviction, the question, what will the world, what will my companions say, occurs to you and causes you to fear. You fear to be thought serious; you dread the remarks, the ridicule, which it would draw upon you, and therefore do violence to your convictions, or lock them up in your own breast, till they die away. In this manner thousands gradually and insensibly harden their hearts. till the truth ceases to effect them. Let such remember, that the fear of man bringeth a snare, that Jesus Christ has said, Whosoever is ashamed of me, of him will I be ashamed at the last day. If you cannot bear the reproach of men, how will you bear his condemning sentence; and the everlasting shame and contempt which will follow it? It will then be known that you had serious thoughts, but that you banished them through fear of men; and sinners themselves will despise you as a coward, who did not dare do what he knew to be right. Dare then to do your duty, to obey your conscience and your God, to be religious; for you cannot be a Christian in disguise. You must come out and be separate, or God will not receive you.

Take then, at once, some decided step, and let it be known what you mean to be; and you will find that this, and all the other objects of your fear, are mere shadows, and will feel ashamed that they should ever have influenced you for a moment. If your heart still lingers, press it with the command of God; press it with the dreadful consequence of offending and provoking him to forsake you; press it with the terrors of the last day and all the awful realities of eternity. Above all, press it with the consideration, that if you ever turn to God, it must be today; that your soul, your salvation, your everlasting happiness, depends on your becoming religious today. My friends, are you not convinced that this is the case? Do you not perceive, that if you disobey, or trifle with this solemn command, it will, it must harden your hearts; and render your conversion exceedingly improbable? Do you not perceive that if with this command before you, and with all these motives to obey it, you cannot resolve to obey, you will feel still less disposed to obedience tomorrow, when the subject is forgotten and the world, with all its cares and allurements, again rushes upon you? Be persuaded then to listen and obey, while God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit—while death, and judgment, and eternity, and heaven and hell, continually cry, today, today, hear God's voice, and harden not your hearts!

Chapter 56

S. SINNERS IN ZION DESCRIBED AND DOOMED.

SINNERS IN ZION DESCRIBED AND DOOMED.

Wo to them that are at ease in Zion. Amos 6:1. THE inspired writers, my friends, do not scatter either blessings or curses arbitrarily and indiscriminately without informing us on whom they will fall. They never pronounce a blessing, without specifying the character to whom it belongs. And they never denounce a curse or a woe, without describing some class of sinners against whom it is directed. Thus they rightly divide the word of truth, and give every one his proper portion. An instance of this we have in our text, where God by the mouth of his prophet, denounces a woe or curse against such as are at ease in Zion. My hearers, all who believe that the threatenings of Jehovah are not vain words, will allow that it is highly important for all to know the import of this woe, and whether it is directed against ourselves. That we may obtain this knowledge let us consider the characters here mentioned, and the woe which is denounced against them.

I. The persons here mentioned are described, as being at ease in Zion. Zion, you are sensible, was the name of an eminence on which the Jewish temple formerly stood. Hence the temple was called Zion; and to go up to Mount Zion, was to go up to the temple for the professed purpose of worshipping Jehovah. From the place of worship, the name was gradually extended to the worshippers, so that in process of time the word Zion embraced all who professed to know and worship God, or in other words, the whole Jewish nation; the only nation at that time in the world, by which the true God was worshipped or known. To be in Zion then, taking the word in its largest sense, means to be in a land where the true God is known and worshipped; where religious privileges, similar to those of the Jews, are enjoyed; a land of gospel light and liberty, where Christ, of whom the temple on Mount Zion was a type, is publicly preached, as the only way of access to God. Taking the word in a more limited sense, to be in Zion is to have a seat in the house of God, and to be among those who statedly meet for the professed purpose of religious worship. If we confine the meaning of the term within still narrower limits, it will include only those who have made a public profession of religion. In this sense the word Zion is often used; but from the context it appears that, in this passage, the word is used in its most extensive signification, embracing all who are members of a nation or community by which the true God is professedly known or worshipped. Of course, my hearers, it applies to ourselves; for in this sense we are all in Zion. We live in a land of gospel light and liberty; we enjoy religious privileges similar to those of the Jews; and we assemble at stated seasons in the house of God ostensibly and professedly with a view to worship him. Since then we are all in Zion, let us in the next place, inquire whether we are at ease in Zion.

You will readily perceive that the ease here intended is ease, not of body, but of mind; ease relating not to our temporal but our religious or spiritual concerns. Our bodies may be filled with pain, and our minds harassed with continual afflictions, disappointments, and anxieties, so as to be strangers to peace, and yet we may be perfectly at ease in the sense of our text. Speaking in general terms, persons are at ease in this sense; when they feel neither sorrow nor alarm on

account of their sins; when they are seldom troubled by the admonitions of conscience; when they are unconcerned respecting their future destiny; in a word, when they are not engaged in working out their salvation with fear and trembling, but feel safe, quiet and secure. This unconcern respecting themselves is usually accompanied by at least equal unconcern respecting the salvation of others. Agreeably we are informed in the context, that the persons here described are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph; that is, for the evils and calamities that affect the church. They are far from being able to say with the psalmist, I beheld the transgressors and was grieved; rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not God's law. They never weep over, or pray for, a world lying in wickedness, but view with frigid indifference the prevalence of sin; and manifest no zeal to promote the religious interests of mankind. From this general description of those who are at ease in Zion, it must be evident to the most superficial observer, that they compose a very numerous body. This body may be divided into several classes, corresponding with the various causes to which their ease is to be ascribed. These causes it is necessary to notice.

Since it is impossible for a rational being to be perfectly at ease and unconcerned, while he perceives that he is exposed to endless punishment on account of his sins, it is evident that all who are at ease in Zion, must feel persuaded, either that the punishment with which sinners are threatened will never be inflicted; or that they are not themselves sinners; or that, though sinners, they shall in some way or other escape the punishment which their sins deserve. These three classes include all who are at ease in Zion. The first class deny that any punishment will be inflicted on sinners. The second class allow that sinners will be punished, but deny, or at least, do not perceive that they are sinners. The third class acknowledge that they are sinners, and that sinners will be punished; but still flatter themselves that they shall escape punishment. Let us consider each of these classes in order.

1. The first class includes infidels of every description. Such were those who denied the immortality of the soul, and said, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Such were those who denied God's government of the world, saying, The Lord seeth not, the Lord hath forsaken the earth; he will not do good, neither will he do evil. Such were those of whom the psalmist speaks who contemned God, and encouraged themselves by saying, He will never requite it; and whose conduct led him to conclude that there was no fear of God before their eyes. Such also were the scoffers, mentioned by St. Peter, who walked after their vain lusts, and asked, 'Where is the promise of his coming'! Such characters, there is reason to fear, are to be found at the present day; but it will probably be impossible to disturb their false peace by arguments drawn from a book whose contents they disbelieve. They must be left, unless other means prevent, to enjoy their fatal ease till the day, in which, like the devils, they will believe and tremble. In this first class may also be placed those who believe that all men will be saved; for they deny that the punishment threatened in the Bible will be inflicted on any. Such were those false prophets who cried Peace, peace, when there was no peace, and of whom God said, I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem; for they walk in lies, and strengthen the hands of evil doers, so that none of them doth return from his wickedness. They say still unto them that despise me, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. 'With lies they make sad the heart of the righteous whom I have not made sad, and strengthen the hands of the wicked that he should not return from his wicked way, by

promising him life. Therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts concerning the prophets, Hearken not unto their words, for they make you vain; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord, and behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall; for from the false prophets is profaneness gone out into all the land. Such too were the disciples of these prophets who when they heard the curse of the law blessed themselves in their hearts, and said, We shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our hearts, to add one sin to another; and of whom God said, The Lord will not spare them, but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against them, and all the curses that are written in this book shall be upon them; and the Lord shah blot out their name from under heaven. My friends, if any man, after hearing these passages, can find ease in believing the doctrine of universal salvation, I envy him not the enjoyment of that ease.

2. Let us proceed, in the next place, to the second class mentioned above; the class composed of those who allow that sinners will be punished, but who deny, or, to speak more properly do not appear to believe that they are sinners. They will allow indeed, in words, that they have committed some sins, though even this they do not seem to feel; but they utterly deny that they are such sinners as the Bible describes; and flatter themselves that their sins are far too few and too small to require an infinite atonement, or to merit everlasting punishment. They find, or fancy that they find none better than themselves, few so good, and very many worse. Hence they conclude that they are in no danger, that they have nothing to fear, and of course feel easy and secure. Such were the generation mentioned by Solomon who were pure in their own eyes, but who had never been cleansed from their filthiness. Such too was St. Paul before his conversion. I was alive, says he, without the law once but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. Now to the persons of whom we are speaking, the commandment never came. They are without the law.

They know nothing of its spirituality, strictness, and extent; and since by the law is the knowledge of sin, they being without the law, know nothing of their sins. They never tried themselves by this rule. They never considered that he who does not love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself, tramples at once upon the law and the prophets, and violates in effect every precept of both. And as they never tried themselves by the law of God, it is evident they cannot feel condemned by this law; and since neither human laws nor human maxims condemn them, they feel free from condemnation, and fear no condemnatory sentence, when tried at the bar of God. We endeavored to show you, a few Sabbaths since, how exceedingly difficult it is to understand our errors. Now these persons do not understand their errors. They have never been convinced of sin, of righteousness and of judgment; or have never been awakened, have never complied with the apostolic exhortation, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life. They are, therefore, like a man buried in sleep, totally unconscious of their true character and situation, insensible of their sins, and of the danger to which their sins expose them. Their slumbering consciences were never thoroughly awakened to perform their office. In the language of scripture, they have eyes, but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not; for the spirit of deep slumber is fallen upon them. So deep indeed, so profound are their slumbers, or rather their lethargy, that they are said to be dead in trespasses and sins; and hence like the lifeless tenants of the tomb, they perceive not that they are dead. Hence they never felt that they are exposed to the wrath to come; and, of course, have never fled from it, never asked with anxiety, or even with seriousness, What shall we do to be saved? What may appear still more strange, though they

profess to hope for heaven, they seem to regard it with indifference. At least their hopes do not appear to wean them from the world, or to support them under the evils of life, or to afford them any solid consolation, or even to excite any gratitude; nor do they manifest any desire to anticipate the happiness of heaven by engaging in its employments while here below. In short, every religious feeling is dead or asleep in their breasts; and to every religious object they are insensible. At morning, at noon, and at night, religion may knock at the door of their hearts, but there is no voice, nor any that regardeth. All within is silent, and cold, and still, as a sepulchre.

They are at ease in Zion, asleep in the house of God, dreaming of worldly objects and pleasures, to which they are all awake and alive, and in the pursuit of which, all their powers are engaged. In this class too may be included those who have at some period of life been the subjects of serious impressions, but have either stifled those impressions by a violent resistance—dismissed them with excuses, or suffered them to be effaced by negligence. Such persons have not always been at ease in Zion. Their false peace has been disturbed, their consciences have been awakened, and they have trembled at her voice and smarted under her scourge. But in some one of the ways mentioned above, her voice has been silenced, or she has been lulled to sleep by opiates; and now these wretched self-destroyers slumber even more quietly and profoundly than before, except when the unwelcome light of truth or the disagreeable voice of reproof disturbs them by exciting mingled emotions of anger, contempt and fear. Such persons the apostle compares to trees, twice dead, plucked up by the roots. Their consciences are seared as with a hot iron; and because they receive not the truth in the love of it, that they may be saved, God often sends them strong delusions, so that they believe a lie. Hence they usually remain not long in this class, but after various changes seek refuge and ease in universalism or infidelity.

3. Our attention is next called to the third class mentioned above. This class seem to be less distant from the truth than either of the others. They acknowledge that they are sinners, and that sinners will be punished; and yet they are at ease, for they contrive in various ways to persuade themselves that though other sinners will be punished, they shall themselves escape. In places where the gospel is clearly and faithfully preached, this class is usually much more numerous than either of the former, and includes a greater variety of characters. In the first place, it includes all who maintain their false peace by promises of future repentance and reformation, and by hopes founded on these promises, that they shall secure salvation before death arrives. Such persons, though habitually, are not always at ease. Their avowed belief that they are sinners, and that sinners will be punished, renders it impossible for them to be perfectly free at all times from anxiety and alarm. The attacks of disease, or the sudden death of an acquaintance, or a pungent sermon, will often disturb them for a moment; but they soon recover their peace of mind by making fresh promises and resolutions to become religious at some future period. On the fulfillment of these promises and resolutions they rely with the fullest confidence. They seem not to entertain the smallest doubt that they shall become truly pious before the close of life. At the worst, they shall repent on their dying bed; for these persons almost ever expect to die of some lingering disease, which will afford them full opportunity to fulfil their resolutions and make their peace with God. The possibility that death may surprise them suddenly and unexpectedly, or that God, provoked by their delays, may give them up, is entirely overlooked; and they rely with as much confidence on their anticipated goodness, as if they were actually possessed of it; so that perhaps the most established Christian does not feel more sure of salvation. Agreeably, they are represented in the

context as putting far away the evil day. At the head of the class stands Felix. When he heard Paul reasoning of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, he trembled. His delusive ease was for the moment disturbed, but he soon restored it, by saying, Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee. My hearers, if all the fair promises and good resolutions which have since been made, with reference to a future convenient season, had been executed, the situation and appearance of mankind would be widely different from what they are; joy would have been much more frequently felt in heaven over repenting sinners, and the celestial city would have been thronged by millions who will never enter its gates. But alas, this convenient season very seldom arrives; and, of course, the resolutions which depend for fulfillment upon its arrival, are seldom performed. They serve only to defraud those who make them of their opportunities, and of salvation, and to maintain a delusive fatal ease, which could be maintained by those persons in no other way, and which, if not destroyed, inevitably destroys all who indulge in it. The greater part of those who recur to this method of maintaining it, are to be found among the young, especially among those of them, who have received a religious education, or who have enjoyed from their childhood the clear light of the gospel. Such persons are usually not sufficiently hardened in unbelief to make light of God's threatenings; nor are their consciences so far seared as to render them insensible of their sins; nor can they at once reject the truths which they have been taught, and seek refuge in infidelity. They have therefore no way to render themselves easy in their sins, except that which has now been described; making good resolutions; and their youth, their health, and their expectation of long life, encourage them to adopt this method by promising them many future opportunities or convenient seasons for the performance of these resolutions. There is perhaps no class of sinners whose situation is more dangerous; certainly no one which occasions more anxiety amid uneasiness to the faithful ministers of Jesus Christ, than this. It is impossible to know what course to pursue with them. To wait for the fulfillment of their resolutions, is like pursuing the termination of a rainbow, which still recedes as you advance. They assent to every timing, but they really yield to nothing. Tell them that they are sinners, they confess it; that they are objects of God's displeasure, they acknowledge it; that they are exposed to the wrath to come, they allow it; that they ought immediately to repent and secure salvation, they are sensible that this is their duty. But he, who therefore, expects to see them do this, will find himself most wretchedly disappointed. Visit them to-morrow, and you will find them just where they were before, just as far as ever from the kingdom of heaven; and all your efforts to rouse them must be again repeated, and again prove unavailing. Yet these very persons often look with contempt or indignation upon infidels and heretics, though they are far more inconsistent than either. They seem to fancy that there is some merit in holding and assenting to the truth, though they hold it in unrighteousness; nay more, even though they wrest it to their own destruction; for this many of them do. They justify their delays by pretending that they can do nothing, and by pleading that they must wait God's time; that when he shall see fit to convert them, they are willing to be converted; thus wholly casting the blame of their sins upon Jehovah, and condemning the Almighty that they may justify themselves. In the second place, this class includes all who entertain a false and groundless persuasion that they have already become pious, obtained the pardon of their sins, and secured the favor of God. The reasons why persons feel such a persuasion are various. Some feel it because they are more sober, more moral, and more attentive to the externals of religion, than they were; others, because they have made a public profession of religion, and united themselves to the visible church of Christ; a third class, because their religious sentiments are

correct and orthodox; and a fourth, because they fancy that they have experienced that great moral change, which the inspired writers call regeneration. Their consciences have, perhaps, been awakened, their understandings enlightened, their fears alarmed, and their feelings strongly excited. They have been in some measure convinced of their sins, and fancy that they have truly repented, believed in the Savior, and obtained pardon, when in fact, this is not the case.

Many such instances are mentioned in the Scriptures, and daily observation proves that they are still to be found. But in whichever of these ways, or for which of these reasons soever, persons falsely persuade themselves that they are pious, the effects are the same; they immediately appropriate to themselves all the precious promises which are made to the pious; call God their Father, Christ their Savior, and heaven their portion; and leave to others the warnings and threatenings. Of course they feel perfectly secure. They flatter themselves that their souls are safe, that their salvation is secured; and now they have little or nothing to do, but reap the reward of their labors, and pursue their secular concerns without interruption or restraint.

Thus, my hearers, have we noticed particularly the several classes, which together compose the great body of those who are at ease in Zion. How little reason they have to be thus at ease, will appear, if we consider, as was proposed,

II. The wo, which is denounced against them in our text. Wo to them that are at ease in Zion! The expression is remarkable. There is no particular curse or threatening denounced against them; but the doom is expressed in general terms; in terms, which may include curses and threatenings of every kind; and which are therefore the more terrible. Wo to them; that is, let curses be upon them, let misery pursue them. In the context, however, their doom is more particularly described. It is there declared that the punishment, which they did not fear, shall fall first upon them. But why, it may be asked, is this doom denounced on such characters? Why are they thought worthy of a punishment so severe? I answer,

1. Because the ease which they feel proves that they belong to the number of the wicked. If there is any truth in the Scriptures, it is certain that all who are habitually at ease in Zion know nothing of true religion. They are either careless sinners, or self-deluded hypocrites. The pious man, the true Christian, is described by the inspired writers, as one who mourns for sin, who is engaged in a spiritual warfare, who is fighting the good fight of faith, who crucifies the flesh with its affections and lusts, who is running the Christian race, who is engaged in subduing and mortifying his sinful propensities, who denies himself, takes up his cross daily, and follows Christ, who, as a pilgrim, a stranger, a traveller, is seeking another and better country, who works out his salvation with fear and trembling. Now is it possible, that a man, who is doing all this can be at ease in the sense of our text? A soldier in the field of battle at ease! a man running a race at ease! a traveler, toiling up a steep ascent, bearing the cross, at ease ! a man crucifying sinful propensities, dear as a right hand or right eye, at ease! a man working out his salvation with fear and trembling, at ease! a man who hates and mourns for sin, loves God, and feels concerned for his perishing fellow creatures, at ease in a world lying in wickedness, where God is dishonored, where Christ is neglected, where immortal souls are perishing by millions; where there is so much to be done, so much to be suffered, so much to be guarded against, and resisted; where death stands at the door ready every moment to summon him to his great account! My friends, it is impossible. No Christian can be habitually easy, careless, and indolent in such a situation as this? He may, perhaps, slumber

for a moment, but even then he is not at ease. Agreeably, our Savior represents the enjoyment of this false peace, as the characteristic of one, who is completely subjugated, enslaved, and blinded by sin. When the strong man armed, says he, keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; that is, when sin and Satan keep the heart, and fortify it against God; when the eyes of the mind are so blinded, that they see no danger; when the voice of conscience is stifled, so that it does not warn us of danger; when the heart is so hard, that it does not tremble at God's word; then the soul is at peace, then it is at ease in Zion. But does the Christian, it may perhaps be asked, enjoy no peace? Are we not told of a peace of God which passes all understanding? Does not Christ promise rest to his followers; and are we not told that they who believe have entered into rest? I answer, yes; the Christian does enjoy peace, but it is a peace as widely different from the careless, indolent ease, which we have been describing, as is the rest of a healthy man, from the lethargic slumber of the apoplectic, or the stupefaction of the drunkard. The rest which Christ promises is promised to those who take upon them his yoke, and learn of him. And does he inculcate indolence, or carelessness? Was he ever at ease in this world? Was it not his meat and drink, his employment, and his recreation, his labor and his rest, to do his Father's will and finish his work? Did he not teach his disciples both by precept and example, to work while the day lasts, to be up and doing, waiting for his coming, and watching unto prayer? So the peace which passes all understanding, is promised to them only who, in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known their requests unto God. And we read when the churches of Christ enjoyed rest, they walked in the fear of God. The man then, who is habitually at ease in Zion, is not, cannot be a Christian; he has not one feature of Christ's image, one mark of the Christian character. And if he is not a Christian, he is an impenitent sinner; if he is not righteous he is wicked; for in the sight of God there are but two classes of character among men; and if he is one of the wicked, then wo unto him; for God directs all his messengers to say, Wo to the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

Again, Wo to them that are at ease in Zion! for they are not only sinners, but sinners of no common stamp, sinners whose guilt and sinfulness are peculiarly aggravated, and whose punishment will therefore be peculiarly severe. This will be evident if we reflect a moment on their situation and on the privileges which they abuse, on the motives which they resist, on the obligations which they violate. They are in Zion; and in Zion God is known, in Zion, is his earthly dwelling place, in Zion, he makes the clearest manifestations of himself which have ever been made to mortals; in Zion the thunders of his law are heard; in Zion the gracious invitations of the gospel are proclaimed; in Zion, Christ is set forth evidently crucified as a propitiation for sin; in Zion, life and immortality are brought to light; in Zion, the Sun of righteousness shines; on Zion, the rain of righteousness is poured out; in a word, Zion is God's vineyard, in which his servants are commanded to labor; the field of battle, in which the Captain of our salvation summons his soldiers to combat; and in which crowns, thrones, and kingdoms, immortal as their Giver, are held up to view as the reward of victory.

Here then is every motive to exertion, which can be presented to rational beings; motives addressed to every power and faculty of our natures, to our understandings and to our consciences; to our wills and our affections; to our hopes and to our fears, to our love and to our gratitude; to our desires of happiness, and to our aversion to misery. These motives too are presented to us and urged upon us by God himself, by our Creator, our Father, our Preserver, our

Benefactor, our Sovereign and our Judge; by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He then who is at ease in Zion, must be deaf to God's voice, he must be blind to God's glories; he must be insensible to every spiritual object; he must be regardless of his immortal soul, and unconcerned for the salvation of others; he must sin against light and against love; he is a servant who knows his Lord's will and does it not, and shall therefore be beaten with many stripes. He is a sentinel who slumbers on his post. He then who can be indolent in Zion, would be indolent in heaven; and fall asleep while the glories of Jehovah blazed around him, and the countless myriads of the redeemed celebrated those glories with eternal songs. If the heathen are without excuse, as an apostle declares them to be, though they have nothing but the light of nature; how awfully inexcusable, must those be who are at ease in Zion!

Once more, Wo to them that are at ease in Zion! because there is little reason to hope that they will ever repent. With respect to those whose false peace is disturbed, who are awakened, alarmed, convinced of sin, and inquiring for a Savior, there is some ground to hope. But on what grounds can we hope for the salvation of them that are at ease; at ease in Zion, who scarcely realize that they have a soul; who either feel not that they need salvation, or fancy that it is already secured? If they cannot be roused, if their false peace cannot be disturbed, they must inevitably perish; and, humanly speaking, to rouse them seems impossible. Indeed, what can rouse those who sleep in Zion, where every thing calls to activity? The thunders of Sinai have roared around them; the trumpet of the gospel has loudly sounded in their ears; Christ has called, saying, Go, work to-day in my vineyard; a voice from heaven has exclaimed, Whosoever hath ears to hear, let him hear; ministers have cried, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; death has repeatedly come near and snatched away one and another of their acquaintance into darkness; yet still they are at ease. What then can rouse them?

It is true, God can do it; for with him nothing is impossible. But have we any reason to hope that he will? We may indeed hope, but our hopes must be faint; for he has denounced many most awful threatenings against such characters; he threatens to give them up to their own hearts' lusts, to pour on them a spirit of slumber and of deep sleep; and it does not seem probable that he who denounces such threatenings, he who says, Wo to them that are at ease in Zion, will come to rouse them, till their false peace, and vain confidence shall be forever destroyed by the terrors of the last day. Then, we are told, sinners in Zion shall be afraid, and fearfulness will surprise the hypocrites in heart. Then they will begin to cry to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. Then the foolish virgins, the false and slumbering professors of Christianity, will awake, and cry in despair, Our lamps are gone out. But however desperate the situation of such may appear, it is the duty of Christ's ministers to despair of none, so long as life remains. I must, therefore, improve the subject, by making one more attempt to rouse those among us, who are at ease in Zion. In making this attempt, I do not draw the bow at a venture. I do not speak feeling uncertain whether any of the characters whom I address are present. No, it is but too plain, that many, very many of you are at ease in Zion. Some such may be found probably in almost every pew. This house has become, with respect to many, like a great dormitory, where immortal souls are slumbering away their day of grace, and dreaming of peace, when there is no peace. From how few among you is the cry heard, What must I do to he saved! How few are seen flying from the wrath to come. How many lukewarm professors does the eye of Christ discover, who, though they have a name to live, are in reality dead. How few are the mourners in Zion. How few can say, Rivers of tears run down

mine eyes, because men keep not God's law. How many of you never wept one hour in secret over your sins, or lost one hour's sleep in consequence of anxious concern for your salvation. Even whole families may yet be found among us, from which no prayer, no cry for mercy ascends to heaven.

These, my friends, are awful symptoms. They indicate but too plainly a dreadful prevalence of spiritual insensibility among us. Like the inhabitants of the old world, you are eating and drinking, and planting and building, and marrying and giving in marriage, while death, like the flood, is constantly approaching and threatening to sweep you away with resistless violence to the judgment seat. God hearkens and hears, but you speak not aright. Almost no one repents of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? This insensibility must be removed, this fatal peace destroyed. In God's name, then, I must sound an alarm. In his name, and as his watchman,—who must answer for your souls, if they perish through my neglect,—I set the war-trumpet of Jehovah to my lips, and cry, Wo, wo, wo, to you that are at ease in Zion! Thus saith Jehovah, the great, the mighty, the terrible God, tremble ye that are at ease; rise up and be troubled, ye careless ones, and listen to my voice; for while ye say peace and safety, sudden destruction cometh upon you, and ye shall not escape. Your peace is delusive; your ease is full of danger; it is the stagnant calm which precedes the hurricane and the earthquake; it is the ease which the diseased patient feels when raging inflammation terminates in gangrene; the symptom, the immediate forerunner of death. No farther evidence of your guilt and danger is requisite; nothing more is necessary to secure your condemnation, than the very ease which you feel, and the false confidence which confirms it. It is your not fearing the wo, which brings the wo upon you. It is your very insensibility to your danger, which proves your danger to be great; it is your unconcern for your sins, which proves that they have never been pardoned.

I ask not, then, whether you are guilty of great and notorious offences; I ask not, whether you are unbelievers, or impenitent, or apostates; I only ask, whether you are at ease in Zion? If you are, I, and yet not I, but Jehovah says, Wo, wo unto you! Nor is it every degree of concern, every slight momentary disturbance, every serious thought or check of conscience, which will prove that you are not exposed to this wo. No, it is your habitual feelings and state of mind, which decides your character; and if you are habitually at ease; if you are not working out your salvation, the wo still lies upon you. And remember, the longer it remains upon you, the more heavy and terrible does it become; for he who is not led to repentance by a consideration of the goodness and long-suffering of God, is treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Remember too, that the longer your false peace continues, so much the more improbable it is, that it will be effectually disturbed, till it is forever too late; for with respect to those who have long been at ease in Zion, God's commission to his ministers is, Go and say to this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people gross, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they should hear with their ears, and see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them. The Lord called to weeping, and mourning, and girding with sackcloth, and behold joy and gladness, eating flesh and drinking wine, and it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of Hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord of Hosts. And what will the end of these things be? Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded; but ye set at nought my counsel and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity and mock when your fear cometh.

My careless hearers, your ease must be disturbed, and come to an end. Yes, 0 yes; your fear will come as desolation, your destruction will come as a whirlwind; distress and anguish will come upon you; for the day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens being on fire, shall be dissolved and pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; and the earth with the works thereof shall be burnt up; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. And he is not man, that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. 0, then, since your peace must be finally disturbed, is it not better, that it should be disturbed now, when true peace with God may be obtained, rather than hereafter, when it will avail nothing? Will you still cherish a serpent which is stinging you to the heart? Will you remain at ease, while your sins are unpardoned, while your souls lie in ruin, while God is daily angry, while the wrath to come is rushing on!

Chapter 57

S. SINNERS WILFUL AND PERVERSE.

SINNERS WILFUL AND PERVERSE. And the Lord said, whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market place, and calling one to another, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, he hath a devil. The son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children. — Luke 7:31-35.

IF we ever find infinite wisdom apparently at a loss, it is when she would describe the unreasonableness and perverseness of sinners, or devise proper means to reclaim them. Thus we find her saying to God's ancient people, 0 Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? 0 Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for thy goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. In a similar manner Christ here represents himself as at a loss how to describe the perverseness and obstinacy of his hearers. Whereunto, says he, shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? As it is, however, impossible, that the infinitely wise Savior should ever be really at a loss, he immediately fixes upon a similitude, which strikingly illustrated their character and conduct. They are, says he, like children sitting in the market-place, and saying to their fellows, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not wept. To see the force and oppositeness of this comparison, it is necessary to recollect the manner, in which weddings and funerals were solemnized among the Jews. At their weddings, a procession was formed, preceded by musicians, playing cheerful times, and dancers, who accompanied and kept time to their music. At their funerals also they had mourners, who performed solemn and mournful airs, or uttered cries, lamentations and other expressions of grief. These various ceremonies the Jewish children were accustomed to imitate in their amusements. Sometimes they played cheerful tunes, and rejoiced as at a marriage feast; at others, they tittered mournful sounds, and affected to weep, as at a funeral procession. Sometimes however, children who wished to amuse themselves in this manner, found their companions peevish and unwilling to join them. If they piped and rejoiced, as at a wedding, these ill humored companions would not dance; if to please them, they changed their strain, and mourned, as at a funeral, they would not weep and lament. hence they complained, as in our text, that it was impossible to please them, they would neither do one thing nor another. Similar to the temper and conduct of these perverse children was that of the Jews in the Savior's time, and similar has been the conduct of sinners ever since. To trace this similarity, is my present design.

I. The companions of these perverse children employed various means to conquer their obstinacy and persuade them to join in their amusements. So God has employed a great variety of means to persuade sinners to embrace the Gospel. He has sent judgments to subdue, and mercies to melt them; arguments to convince, and motives to persuade them; threatenings to terrify, and invitations to allure them. In different parts of his word he has exhibited divine truth in every possible variety of form. In one place it is presented plainly to the mind in the form of doctrines; in

another, it is couched under the veil of some instructive and striking parable; in a third, it is presented to us in a garb of types and shadows; in a fourth, it is illustrated by the most beautiful figures; and, in a fifth, exemplified in some well drawn character, or interesting portion of history. In a word, he addresses us, by turns, in language the most plain and simple, the most grand and commanding, the most pointed and energetic, the most sublime and beautiful, the most impressive and affecting, the most pathetic and melting. God and men, this world and the next, time and eternity, death and judgment, heaven and hell, — these rise successively to our view, portrayed in the most vivid colors, and exhibited in various forms, while the whole created universe is put in requisition to furnish images for the illustration of these awful realities; and the infinite wisdom of God himself is exerted, if I may so express it, to the utmost, in devising and employing the most suitable means to impress them upon our minds, and cause them to affect our hearts. Thus he has addressed himself, by turns, to our eyes and to our ears, to our understandings and consciences, to our imaginations and to our affections, to our hopes and to our fears; and caused divine truth to seek admission to our minds by every avenue, to try every possible way of access.

Corresponding to these various means, and to the different modes of instruction adopted in his word, are the various gifts and qualifications, with which he furnishes those, who are sent as his ambassadors to men. As he knows the different tastes and dispositions of men, and the modes of address best adapted to convince and persuade them, he endues his messengers with a great diversity of gifts, so that by one or another of them, every class of hearers may be gratified. He sends some ministers, who are sons of thunder, well qualified to awaken, rouse, and convince the careless; while others, like Barnabas, are sons of consolation, and fitted to comfort the feeble minded and support the weak. Some he furnishes with clear, penetrating minds, and strong reasoning powers, that they may perspicuously state, and ably defend the doctrines of revelation, answer objections, and by sound arguments, convince the gainsayers. To others he gives warm feelings and lively imaginations, that they may urge divine truth upon the hearts and consciences of their hearers, in a more forcible, impassioned and impressive manner. On a third class he bestows the faculty of presenting truth to the mind in a mild, insinuating, persuasive way, by which it steals into and melts the heart, descending upon it like the dews of heaven, or silent showers, which water the earth. Thus, how diversified soever are the tastes and dispositions of men, all may, in turn, be gratified, in consequence of the variety of ministerial gifts, which God employs for the conversion of sinners and the edification of his church. Thus the healing medicine of divine truth is presented to the vitiated palates of sinners in every possible variety of form; or to allude to the comparison of our text, thus do different ministers address their hearers in different strains, sometimes endeavoring to allure them to embrace the gospel, by comparing it to a marriage feast; and, at others, attempting to terrify them to fly to it, by bringing into view the solemnities of death, and the awful scenes which follow it.

II. Notwithstanding the different means employed with these perverse children, they would not be prevailed upon to comply with the wishes of their companions. We have piped unto you, say they, but ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, but ye have not lamented. Precisely similar is the conduct of impenitent sinners. Notwithstanding the great variety of means, which God employs to persuade them to embrace the Gospel; and though, as our Saviour teaches us, these means are no less adapted to produce the effect than a message from the dead, yet still they perversely refuse to comply. Reason with them— they will not be convinced; set motives before them—they

will not be persuaded; address their hearts—they will not be affected; appeal to their consciences—they will not feel guilty; attempt to excite their fears—they will not be alarmed; endeavor to allure them to Christ by promises and invitations—they will not come. Beseech them, weep over them, expostulate with them in the most affectionate and pathetic manner; set good and evil, life and death, hell and heaven, judgment and eternity before them in every form— they make light of all, and go their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandize. In vain have prophets prophesied; in vain have apostles preached; in vain have angels descended from heaven; in vain has the Son of God appeared on earth, and spoken as never man spake; in vain has the Eternal Father proclaimed from heaven, This is my beloved Son, hear ye him :—still sinners will not hear, they will not come to Christ for life, they will neglect the great salvation of the Gospel. Thus it always has been, thus it still is, and thus it always will be, while the heart remains what it is, and almighty grace is not exerted to subdue it.

III. The reason why these perverse children could not be persuaded to comply with the wishes of their companion, was, that they were out of humor, or for some other reason, felt indisposed to gratify them. Similar is the reason, why sinners will not be persuaded to embrace the Gospel, by all the means which God employs for this purpose. They do not come to Christ for life, because they will not. Their proud, selfish hearts, are full of enmity and opposition to God, and therefore they will not be reconciled. It is the gospel itself, which they dislike-; and, therefore, how various soever may be the forms, in which it is presented, how clear soever the light, in which it is displayed, they will still reject it. It is because I speak the truth, says our Savior, that ye believe me not. This, however, sinners are by no means willing to acknowledge. They are afraid to confess, even to themselves, that it is hatred of the truth alone, which prevents them from embracing it. They therefore attempt to excuse themselves by imputing their rejection of the gospel to some other cause; and to no cause do they impute it more frequently, than to the faults of its professors, or to something in the manner or conduct of those, who preach it. Thus, we learn from our text, did the Jews. John Baptist came neither eating nor drinking; that is, he lived in the most frugal, abstemious manner, and, as a preacher of repentance, was reserved in his deportment, and severe in his rebukes. Hence they said, he hath a devil; that is, he is a morose, visionary, melancholy man, little better than one distracted, who knows not what he says. Our Savior, on the contrary, came eating and drinking; he associated with men in an affable, familiar manner, with a view to instruct them, and for the same benevolent purpose visited and conversed with the most abandoned characters. His perverse hearers then changed their tone, and cried, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. In a similar manner do sinners at the present day, attempt to conceal and excuse their opposition to the gospel.

If professors of religion and its ministers live as they ought, soberly, righteously, and godly, they are said to be too rigid, superstitious, righteous overmuch. If, on the contrary, they are of a more cheerful, social turn, the world immediately exclaims, These are your professors, your saints; but in what respect do they differ from others? If they are punctual in attending public and private meetings for religious worship, spend much time in prayer, and devote a considerable portion of their property to charitable and religious purposes, it is immediately said, that religion makes men idle and negligent of their families. If, on the other hand, they are industrious, frugal, and attentive to business, they are no less quickly accused of loving the world, as well as their neighbors, who make no pretensions to religion. If a minister reasons with his hearers in a cool, dispassionate

manner, and labors to convince their understandings, he is accused of being dry and formal in his preaching, or of not believing what he says. If another preaches in a more lively, animated strain, clearly proclaims the terrors of the Lord, and warns his hearers to fly from the wrath to come, he is charged with endeavoring to work on men's passions, and to frighten them into religion. If he insists much on the doctrines of Christianity, the necessity of faith, and the impossibility of being justified by our own works, he is accused of undervaluing morality, and representing the practice of good works as needless. If, on the other hand, he clearly exhibits the pure morality of the gospel, inculcates holiness of heart and life, and states the dreadful consequences of neglecting it, he is charged with driving men to despair by unreasonable strictness and severity. Thus in almost innumerable ways men ascribe their neglect of the gospel to the faults of its professors, or to something in the manner in which it is preached, and thus harden themselves and others in unbelief. But though they may thus deceive themselves, they cannot deceive God. He knows and has said, that the true reason of their rejecting it is, that they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For every one, that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. That this is the case, is evident from men's conduct in other respects. Think not, however, my friends, that in mentioning these things, we are indulging in a spirit of recrimination or complaint. It is not for our own sakes, that we make these remarks — for it is of very little consequence what men may say of us—but for your sakes. It is necessary to your conversion, that you should know what are the true causes of your rejecting the gospel; for until you know these, you will never embrace it. It is also necessary for God's glory, that the cause should evidently appear to be the obstinacy of sinners, and not any deficiency in the means employed by him for their conversion. Whether you will believe this or not, it is most certainly the truth, and you will one day be convinced that it is. Meanwhile, God has not left himself without witnesses to clear his character, and the honor of his gospel, from the groundless aspersions of sinners, —witnesses, which justify him before an ungodly world; for our Savior assures us in the conclusion of this parable, that, however sinners may reject the gospel, and condemn the manner, in which it is preached, still, wisdom is justified of all her children. By wisdom, is here meant, either God himself or the gospel, with the means which he employs for its promulgation. He is the only wise God, and the gospel is styled his hidden wisdom or the wisdom of God in a mystery; while by the means, which he employs to render it successful in building up his church, his manifold wisdom, we are told, is displayed. By the children of wisdom, are intended the children of God, or in other words, those who yield to the force of his appointed means and cordially embrace the gospel. By all such, God, and his ways are justified, and the wisdom of all his proceedings is readily acknowledged. They admire, love, and adore him, for the infinite wisdom, as well as goodness, which appears in the gospel plan of salvation; and, while they contemplate it, exclaim with the apostle, 0 the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

Little less do they admire the wisdom and goodness of God, as displayed in the means, which he employs to promote the success of the gospel; and in the fullness, richness, and variety of the scriptures, and in the diversity of gifts bestowed on his ministering servants. And while they acknowledge, that nothing but his all-conquering grace could have rendered these means efficacious to conquer their own stubborn hearts, and humbly cry, Not unto us, 0 Lord, not unto us, but to thy name be the glory,—they clearly see and unanimously testify, that the only reason, why sinners do not embrace the gospel, is their hatred of the truth, and their opposition to God. Thus wisdom is justified of all her children; and this is the only encouragement, which ministers have to

preach the gospel. They know, that it always has been, and that it always will be, foolishness to them that perish; and that by all such they shall themselves be considered as little better than fools and babblers, for if men have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they thus call those of his household. But they also know, that there are some, though, alas, too few, who are the children of wisdom; and that to them the preaching of the cross will always be the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation. Some such, I desire to bless God, there are in this assembly; some, who receive the truth in the love of it; some, who have felt its transforming, life-giving power; some, who, like all the children of wisdom, justify their heavenly Father and condemn themselves. It is, my Christian friends, indeed a delightful employment to preach to you the unsearchable riches of Christ; for you can, in some measure, feel their worth. It is pleasant to expatiate to you on his glories and beauties; for you have eyes to discern, and hearts to feel them. It is pleasant to invite you to the gospel feast; for you have a disposition to comply. When we display the sufferings of your crucified Lord, and the sins which occasioned them, you are ready to mourn with us in godly sorrow and contrition of heart. And when in more cheerful strains we proclaim the happy consequences of his sufferings, and blow the trumpet, whose silver sounds are pardon, peace, and salvation, for dying men, you are equally ready to rejoice. In a word, your hearts are in unison with the gospel harp; when we strike its golden strings, your feelings vibrate to every touch; and you can accompany us, through its whole compass of sound, from the low notes of pious grief and penitential sorrow, up to the high thrilling tones of enraptured gratitude, love and praise, which almost accord with the harps of the redeemed before the throne. Yes, you have learned that new song, which none can learn, but those who are redeemed from the earth; that song, which is sung in heaven, which will be new to all eternity; and most happy and highly honored do I think myself in being permitted to lead your choir on earth, and to hope that we shall sing it together in the full choir of the redeemed above. It is the greatest of my present supports and consolations, to see in you a proof that my labors are not altogether in vain. 0, then, my brethren, my fellow travelers to heaven, my fellow heirs of its glories! Strive to obtain hearts more and more perfectly attuned to the gospel harp; more habitually disposed to vibrate to its celestial sounds. Daily practice the song of the redeemed, and cause the notes of heaven to be heard on earth. Strive, by adorning the doctrine of God, your Savior, to justify the wisdom, which reveals it, and to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. And if any word I have ever spoken has been blessed to excite godly sorrow or religious feelings in your breasts, let me beseech you, in return, to pray for me, that I may be better furnished with the necessary qualifications for the ministry; that I may never utter an uncertain sound, and that, when I call sinners to mourn for their sins, or to rejoice in a Savior, God’s grace may render the call effectual. Would to God, my friends, we could believe that the class now addressed included all this assembly. But melancholy experience constrains us to believe, that the comparison in our text applies to many present, no less exactly than it did to the Jews. As promising means, as God employed to effect their conversion, have been employed with you. Indeed you enjoy far greater advantages than they did. They had only the Old Testament. You, in addition to that, enjoy the New. They were stumbled and perplexed by the mean circumstances, in which Christ appeared, so different from what they expected. To you the reasons of his appearing in this manner, are fully explained. They rejected the Sun of Righteousness, when he first rose, and when his beams were comparatively feeble; you reject him, while shining in meridian splendor, and after his beams have blessed the nations for more than eighteen hundred years, diffusing light and happiness, wherever they come. They only heard

the predictions of Christ; you have witnessed their exact fulfillment. They refused to hear Christ, while he spake on earth; you turn away your ears now he speaks from heaven. They refused to believe the testimony of prophets and apostles; you reject, not only their testimony, but that of all the multitudes of Christ's ministers, who have preached ever since. It is not surprising therefore, that you should refuse to believe my testimony. I have exerted, to the utmost, the abilities God has given me; in his name, I have, by turns, reasoned and persuaded, exhorted and entreated, invited and threatened, warned and promised, prayed and wept,—but to no purpose.

I have set before you, all that is awful and all that is amiable, all that is alarming and all that is alluring, but without effect. I have sounded the brazen trumpet of the law, but you have not mourned. I have blown the silver trumpet of the gospel, but you have not rejoiced. Other and more able ministers have also addressed you. You have, from this pulpit, heard, at different times, cogent reasoners, eloquent speakers, and impressive, persuasive preachers, endeavoring to prevail with you to embrace the gospel. But all has been vain, and with respect to many of you, I fear, worse than in vain. My labors have now apparently less effect upon many of you than ever. Where they once made some impression, they now pass like water over a rock; where they once convinced, they now only irritate; where I was once received with affection, I am now considered as an enemy, because I tell you the truth. My friends—if, to labor, and watch, and pray for your salvation, with a heart broken with apprehension and tortured with anxiety, lest you should fail of it; if, to goad on a worn out body and jaded mind to exertions in your behalf, under which nature sinks, and life becomes a burden; if, to desire your conversion more than riches, more than reputation, more than health, more than life,—if these things are marks of an enemy, then I am your enemy, and such an enemy, I trust, I shall continue to be to my last breath. In fact, if I except the tempter and the world, you have no enemies but yourselves. God, and Christ, and his servants, are your friends, or would be, if you would permit them; but, alas, you will not. Often would they have gathered you, but ye would not. A deep-rooted, unconquerable aversion to what you think the strictness of Christ's regulations, frustrates all the endeavors of your friends to save you. You know that religion is important, you are convinced that it should be attended to; but you have no heart to it, you have no love for it, and therefore, as you sometimes confess, you cannot give your minds to it. My friends, what will be the end of this? You have seen its end in the Jews. You know how terribly they were destroyed for neglecting Christ; and if they escaped not, who refused him, when he spake on earth, much more shall not ye escape, if ye turn from him who addresses you from heaven. Once more, then, we conjure you by every thing sacred and every thing dear, by every thing dreadful and every thing desirable, to renounce your unreasonable opposition, and yield yourselves the willing servants of Christ. But there is also a third class of persons in this assembly, who must be addressed, though we hardly know in what manner to address them. It is composed of such as resemble the son in the parable, who, when his father said, Son, go work today in my vineyard, immediately replied, I go sir, but went not. When we speak to these persons in an affecting, mournful manner, and bring to their view the solemnities of death, judgment, and eternity, they seem ready to weep. And when we tell them of the goodness of God, the love of Christ, and the happiness of those, who come to his marriage feast, they are equally ready to rejoice, and seem to desire nothing so much as religion. But in a week, or perhaps in a day, they are the same as before. That there are many such among us, is evident from recent circumstances. We, a short time since, as you probably recollect, invited all, who considered religion as the one thing needful, and who meant to pursue it as such, to meet us at a

certain place. We particularly requested, that none would attend, who had not made up their minds on the subject, who were not fully determined to persevere. In consequence of this invitation nearly one hundred persons assembled. I rejoiced at the sight, and immediately wrote to a society, that wished me to make a missionary tour, that in consequence of the serious attention, that existed among my people, I could not leave them. But where now are those, who thus pledged themselves to God, and to each other, and to me, that they would pursue religion? Alas! I fear that their goodness has been as the morning cloud and early dew, that soon pass away. That I should not know what to say to such persons, is not surprising, since, as I observed at the commencement of this discourse, God himself seems as if at a loss what to do with them. As an ancient writer observes, they are, by turns, a minister's comforters and tormentors. They excite his expectations today, but they disappoint him most painfully to-morrow. Let them not think however, that their temporary convictions will prevent them from being numbered among the characters described in our text. Let them not flatter themselves, that their conversion is rendered more probable by these transitory impressions. Every resistance of conviction renders such an event more hopeless.

Chapter 58

S. SINS ESTIMATED BY THE LIGHT OF HEAVEN.

SINS ESTIMATED BY THE LIGHT OF HEAVEN.

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.—Psalms 90:8.

It is a well known fact that the appearance of objects, and the ideas which we form of them, are very much affected by the situation in which they are placed in respect to us, and by the light in which they are seen. Objects seen at a distance, for example, appear much smaller than they really are. The same object, viewed through different mediums, will often exhibit very different appearances. A lighted candle, or a star, appears bright during the absence of the sun; but when that luminary returns, their brightness is eclipsed. Since the appearance of objects, and the ideas which we form of them, are thus affected by extraneous circumstances, it follows, that no two persons will form precisely the same ideas of any object, unless they view it in the same light, or are placed with respect to it in the same situation. These remarks have a direct and important bearing upon the intended subject of the present discourse. No person can read the scriptures candidly and attentively, without perceiving, that God and men differ very widely in the opinion which they entertain respecting almost every object. And in nothing do they differ more widely, than in the estimate which they form of man’s moral character, and of the malignity and deceit of sin. Nothing can be more evident than the fact, that in the sight of God our sins are incomparably more numerous, aggravated and criminal, than they appear to us. He regards us as deserving of an endless punishment, while we scarcely perceive that we deserve any punishment at all. Now whence arises this difference? The remarks which have just been made will inform us. God and men view objects through a very different medium, and are placed with respect to them in very different situations. God is present with every object; he views it as near, and therefore sees its real magnitude. But many objects, especially those of a religious nature, are seen by us at a distance, and of course appear to us smaller than they really are. God sees every object in a perfectly clear light; but we see most objects dimly and indistinctly. In fine, God sees all objects just as they are; but we see them through a deceitful medium, which ignorance, prejudice and self-love place between them and us.

Apply these remarks to the case before us. The Psalmist, addressing God, says, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." That is, our iniquities or open transgressions, and our secret sins, the sins of our hearts, are placed, as it were, full before God’s face, immediately under his eye; and he sees them in the pure, clear, all-disclosing light of his own holiness and glory. Now if we would see our sins as they appear to him, that is, as they really are, if we would see their number, blackness and criminality, and the malignity and desert of every sin, we must place ourselves, as nearly as is possible, in his situation, and look at sin, as it were, through his eyes. We must place ourselves and our sins in the centre of that circle, which is irradiated by the light of his countenance, where all his infinite perfections are clearly displayed, where his awful majesty is seen, where his concentrated glories blaze, and burn, and dazzle, with

insufferable brightness. And in order to this, we must, in thought, leave our dark and sinful world, where God is unseen and almost forgotten, and where consequently, the evil of sinning against him cannot be fully perceived,—and mount up to heaven, the peculiar habitation of his holiness and glory, where he does not, as here, conceal himself behind the veil of his works, and of second causes, but shines forth the unveiled God, and is seen as he is.

Let us follow the path by which our blessed Savior ascended to heaven, and soar upward to the great capital of the universe, to the palace, and the throne of its greater King. As we rise, the earth fades away from our view; now we leave worlds, and suns, and systems behind us. Now we reach the utmost limits of creation; now the last star disappears, and no ray of created light is seen. But a new light now begins to dawn and brighten upon us. It is the light of heaven, which pours in a flood of glory from its wide-open gates, spreading continual meridian day, far and wide through the regions of ethereal space. Passing swiftly onward through this flood of day, the songs of heaven begin to burst upon your ears, and voices of celestial sweetness, yet loud as the sound of many waters, and of mighty thunderings, are heard, exclaiming, "Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Blessing, and glory, and honor, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever." A moment more, and you have passed the gates; you are in the midst of the city, you are before the eternal throne, you are in the immediate presence of God and all his glories are blazing around you like a consuming fire. Flesh and blood cannot support it; your bodies dissolve into their original dust, but your immortal souls remain, and stand naked spirits before the great Father of spirits. Nor in losing their tenements of clay, have they lost the powers of perception. No; they are now all eye, all ear, nor can you close the eyelids of the soul, to shut out for a moment, the dazzling, overpowering splendors which surround you, and which appear like light condensed, like glory which may be felt. You see indeed, no form or shape; and yet your whole souls perceive, with intuitive clearness and certainty, the immediate, awe-inspiring presence of Jehovah. You see no countenance; and yet you feel as if a countenance of awful majesty, in which all the perfections of divinity shone forth, were beaming upon you wherever you turn. You see no eye; and yet a piercing, heart-searching eye, an eye of omniscient purity, every glance of which goes through your souls like a flash of lightning, seems to look upon you from every point of surrounding space. You feel as if enveloped in an atmosphere, or plunged in an ocean of existence, intelligence, perfection and glory; an ocean, of which your laboring minds can take in only a drop; an ocean, the depth of which you cannot fathom, and the breadth of which you can never fully explore. But while you feel utterly unable to comprehend this infinite Being, your views of him, so far as they extend, are perfectly clear and distinct.

You have the most vivid perceptions, the most deeply graven impressions, of an infinite, eternal, spotless mind, in which the images of all things, past, present, and to come, are most harmoniously seen, arranged in the most perfect order, and defined with the nicest accuracy: of a mind, which wills with infinite ease, but whose volitions are attended by a power omnipotent and irresistible, and which sows worlds, suns and systems through the fields of space with far more facility, than the husbandman scatters his seed upon the earth;—of a mind, whence have flowed all the streams, which ever watered any part of the universe with life, intelligence, holiness, or happiness, and which is still full, overflowing and inexhaustible. You perceive also, with equal clearness and certainty, that this infinite, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, all-wise, all-creating mind is perfectly and essentially holy, a pure flame of holiness, and that as such, he regards sin

with unutterable, irreconcilable detestation and abhorrence. With a voice which reverberates through the wide expanse of his dominions, you hear him saying, as the Sovereign and Legislator of the universe, Be ye holy; for I, the Lord your God, am holy. And you see his throne surrounded, you see heaven filled by those only, who perfectly obey this command. You see thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand of angels and archangels, pure, exalted, glorious intelligences, who reflect his perfect image, burn like flames of fire with zeal for his glory, and seem to be so many concentrations of wisdom, knowledge, holiness and love; a fit retinue for the thrice holy Lord of hosts, whose holiness and all-filling glory they unceasingly proclaim. And now, my hearers, if you are willing to see your sins in their true colors; if you would rightly estimate their number magnitude and criminality, bring them into the hallowed place, where nothing is seen but the whiteness of unsullied purity, and the splendors of uncreated glory; where the sun itself would appear only as a dark spot, and there, in the midst of this circle of seraphic intelligences, with the infinite God pouring all the light of his countenance round you, review your lives, contemplate your offences, and see how they appear. Recollect that the God, in whose presence you are, is the Being who forbids sin, the Being of whose eternal law sin is the transgression, and against whom every sin is committed. Keeping this in mind, let us,

I. Bring forward what the Psalmist, in our text, calls our iniquities, that is, our more gross and open sins, and see how they appear in the light of God's countenance. Have any of you been guilty of impious, profane, passionate, or indecent, corrupting language? How does such language sound in heaven? in the ears of angels, in the ears of that God, who gave us our tongues for noble purposes? Bring forward all the language of this kind which you have ever uttered; see it written as in a book; and while you read it, remember that the eye of God is reading it at the same time. Then say, Is this fit language for an immortal being to utter? Is this fit language for God to hear? Especially, let every one inquire whether he has ever violated the third commandment, by using the name of God in a profane or irreverent manner. If he has, let him bring forward his transgressions of this kind, and see how they appear in the light of God's presence. Sinner, this is the Being, whose adorable name thou hast profaned, and who, bending upon thee a look of awful displeasure, says, I will not hold him guiltless, that taketh my name in vain. 0, what an aspect of shocking, heaven-daring impiety, does this assume, when viewed in this situation! Have any of you been guilty of uttering what is untrue? If so, bring forward all the falsehoods, all the deceitful expressions, which you have ever uttered, and see how they appear in the presence of the God of truth; of that God, who has declared, that he abhors a lying tongue, and that all liars shall have their portion in the burning lake. 0, what is it to stand convicted of falsehood before such a God as this! Have any of you been guilty, either at home or in foreign countries, of perjury or false swearing? If so, you may here see the awful Being, whom you mocked, by calling him to witness the truth of a known, deliberate lie. And how, think you, such conduct appears in his eyes? How does it now appear in your own!? When you took that false oath; when you said, somay God help me as I speak the truth, you did, in effect, utter a prayer that his vengeance might fall upon you, if what you swore was untrue. And will not God take you at your word? Will not that vengeance, which you imprecated, fall upon you? 0, be assured that it will, unless deep, timely repentance and faith in Christ prevent. Nor is the guilt of those, who share in the gain of perjury, and permit such as are employed by them to make use of it, much less black and aggravated in the estimation of him, whose judgment is according to truth. Have any of you transgressed the command which says, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy? Such transgressions, I am aware, appear very

trivial on earth; but do they appear so to him who gave this command? Do they appear so in heaven, where an everlasting Sabbath is observed? Let those, who have been guilty of such transgressions, hear a voice from the glory around them, saying, I, to whom you are indebted for all your time, allowed you six days for the performance of your necessary labors, and reserved but one for myself, but one to be employed exclusively in worshipping me, and in working out your own salvation. But even this one day you denied me; when spent in my service, you considered it as a weariness, and therefore employed it, either wholly or in part, in serving yourselves; thus proving yourselves to be wholly unqualified and unfit to enjoy an endless Sabbath in my presence. Have any of you—we must propose the unpleasant question been guilty of violating the command which forbids adultery and its kindred vices? If so, bring forward these abominations, and see how they look in heaven, in the presence of the holy angels, in the sight of that thrice Holy God, who has said, I will come near and be a swift witness against the adulterers, and they shall have their portion in the lake of fire. Have any of you been guilty of fraud, injustice, or dishonesty? Have you in your possession any portion of another's property, without the owner's consent fairly obtained? If so, bring forward your dishonest gains; hold out the hands which are polluted by them, and see how they look in heaven, in the presence of that God, who has said, Let no man overreach or defraud his brother in any matter; for the Lord is the avenger of all such. Have any of you been guilty of intemperance? If so, let such look at themselves, and see how a drunkard, a rational being, self-degraded to a level with the beasts and wallowing in the mire of his own pollution, appears in heaven, in the society of pure angelic spirits, in the sight of that God, who endued him with intellectual powers, and thus capacitated him for being raised to an equality with the angels.

While attending to the preceding remarks, probably many, perhaps most of my hearers may have felt as if they were not personally concerned in them, as if they were guilty of none of these gross iniquities. I would indeed hope, that of some of them at least, none of you are guilty. But these are by no means the only iniquities, of which God takes notice; for our text further informs us, that he has set secret sins, the sins of our hearts, in the light of his countenance. Let us then,

II. Bring our hearts into heaven, and there, laying them open to view, see how they will appear in that world of unclouded light, and unsullied purity.

And, 0, how do they appear! What a disclosure is made, when, with the dissecting knife of a spiritual anatornist, we lay open the ~uman heart, with all its dark recesses, and intricate windings, and expose the lurking abominations, which it conceals, not to the light of day, but to the light of heaven! My hearers, even in this sinful world the spectacle which such a disclosure would exhibit could not be borne. The man, whose heart should thus be laid open to public view, would be banished from society nay, he would himself fly from it, overwhelmed with shame and confusion. Of this every man is sensible, and therefore conceals his heart from all eyes with jealous care. Every man is conscious of many thoughts and feelings, which he would be ashamed to express to his most intimate friend. Even those profligate, abandoned wretches, who glory in foaming out their own shame, and whose mouths, like an open sepulchre, breathe out moral contagion, putrefaction, and death, scarcely dare utter to their own equally abandoned associates every thought and feeling, which rises within them. And if this is the fact, if the heart, laid open to view, would appear thus black in this dark, sinful world; who can describe, or conceive of the blackness which it must exhibit, when surrounded by the dazzling whiteness of heaven, and seen in the light of God's presence, the light of his holiness and glory?

How do proud, self-exalting thoughts appear, when viewed in the presence of him, before whom all the nations of the earth are less than nothing and vanity? How do self-will, impatience, and discontent with the allotments of Providence appear, when viewed as exercised before the throne of the infinite, eternal, universal Sovereign? How do angry, envious, revengeful feelings appear in the eyes of the God of love, and in those regions of love, where, since the expulsion of the rebel angels, not one such feeling has ever been exercised? How do wanton, impure thoughts appear—but we cannot pursue the loathsome, sickening enumeration. Surely, if all the evil thoughts and wrong feelings which have passed in countless numbers through either of our hearts, were poured out in heaven, angels would stand aghast at the sight, and all their benevolence would scarcely prevent them from exclaiming in holy indignation, Away with him to the abode of his kindred spirits in the abyss! To the omniscient God alone would the sight not be surprising. He knows, and he alone knows, what is in the heart of man; and what he knows of it he has described in brief, but terribly expressive terms. The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their hearts. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked! Thus our own hearts appear even to us, if we view them in the light of God's countenance, and recollect that in his sight, thoughts and feelings are actions, that a wanton look is adultery, and hatred murder.

III. Having thus viewed our actual sins of heart and life, as they appear in the light of heaven, let us take a similar view of our sins of omission. Should we neglect to do this, we should see but a small part of our sinfulness; for our sins of omission are by far the most numerous, and by no means the least criminal offences, of which we are guilty. But before we proceed to take this view, allow me to remind you once more, where you are, and in whose presence you stand. Recollect all which you have heard and seen of God's infinite perfections; of his unapproachable glory, of the offices which he sustains, of the works which he has performed, of the blessings which he has bestowed upon us, upon our fellow creatures. Look at him once more, as he appears when seen in the light of heaven; as he appears in the eyes of the angels and archangels around you, and then say what he deserves from his creatures. Does he not deserve, can you avoid perceiving that he deserves, all their admiration, love, reverence, confidence, gratitude and obedience? Does he not, 0 does he not, deserve to be loved, and feared, and served with all the heart and soul and mind and strength? This, you are sensible, is what his law requires of us; and can any requisition be more just and reasonable? Can we refuse to comply 'with it; can we withhold our affections and services from such a being as this, without incurring great and aggravated guilt?

Yet this, my fellow sinners, is the being, from whom we have all withheld our affections and services. Our whole lives present one unbroken series of duties neglected, of favors not acknowledged. And, 0, how do they appear, when we review them in the light of God's countenance! When we see before us our Creator, our Preserver, our Benefactor, our Sovereign, and our heavenly Father; when we see in him, to whom all these titles belong, infinite excellence, perfection, glory and beauty; when we see with what profound veneration, with what raptures of holy, grateful affection, he is regard and served by all the bright armies of heaven; and then turn and contemplate our past lives, and reflect how they must appear in his sight, can we refrain from exclaiming with Job, We have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now our eyes see thee; wherefore we abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes? I have sinned; what shall I say unto thee, 0 thou Preserver of men l Must not each of us say with the Psalmist, Immumerable evils

have compassed me about; my iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more in number than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me! Nay more, when you see what God is, and how he is worshipped in heaven, and then look at the coldness, the formality, the want of reverence, with which you have often approached him in prayer, and listened to his word, must you not feel conscious, that should he call you into judgment, you could not answer for one in a thousand of the iniquities, which have stained your holy things, your religious duties? But the duties which we owe to God, are not the only duties which we are required, and which we have neglected, to perform. While his law requires us to love him with all the heart, it also requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves. And this general command virtually includes a great number of subordinate precepts; precepts, which prescribe the duties of the various relations, that subsist between us and our fellow creatures. And how far have we obeyed these precepts? How far have we performed the duties, which God requires of us, as husbands, as wives, as parents, as children, as masters, as servants, as citizens, and as members of the human family? When we spread our lives before God, and look at them as they appear in the light of his countenance, can we fail to perceive, that we have in all these respects been grossly deficient, that we have left undone many, very many things, which we ought to have done, and that we are far from having discharged the duties of a single relation which we sustain? 0, how much more might we have done, than we actually have done, to promote the temporal and eternal happiness of all, with whom we are connected! Nor do our sins of omission end here. There is another being, whom we are under infinite obligations to love, and praise, and serve with supreme affection. This being is the Lord Jesus Christ, considered as our Redeemer and Savior, who has bought us with his own blood. We are required, and sacredly bound to feel, that we are not our own, but his; to prefer him to every earthly object, to rely upon him with implicit confidence, to live, not to ourselves, but to him, and to honor him even as we honor the Father. Every moment then, in which we neglected to obey these commands, we were guilty of a new sin of omission. Nor have we the smallest excuse for neglecting to obey these commands; for he is most worthy of all which they require. Even the angels, for whom he never died, regard him as worthy to receive every thing, which creatures can give. Much more then may it be expected, that we, for whom he has done and suffered so much, should regard and treat him as worthy. But how grossly have we failed in performing this part of our duty! How must the manner, in which we have treated his beloved Son, appear in the sight of God? How does it appear to us, when we contemplate him as he appears in heaven; when we see the place which He there fills; when we recollect, that in him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells, and that to him are unceasingly ascribed wisdom, and strength, and blessing, and honor, and glory, and power? The subject before us is far from being exhausted, and very far from having had justice done to it; but we must leave it, and hasten to a conclusion. Before we close however, permit me to ask, whether you cannot now perceive the reason, why your sins appear more numerous and criminal in the sight of God, than they do in your own? Have you seen or heard nothing, which convinces you, that they are far more numerous and aggravated than you had supposed? If so, you have seen nothing of what has been exhibited; you have, properly speaking, heard nothing, which has been said; you have not seen your sins in the light of God’s countenance; for had you seen them in that light, they would have appeared, in some measure, to you, as they appear to God himself. ‘Witness, for instance, the effect which a view of God’s glory produced upon the prophet Isaiah. Though he was an eminently good man, and had probably fewer sins to answer for than either of us, yet when in vision he saw

Jehovah seated upon his eternal throne, and heard the surrounding seraphim exclaiming, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory, he cried out in amazement and consternation, Woe is me; for I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips. In a similar manner, my hearers, would you have been affected, had you seen even but a glimpse of those glories, which we have vainly attempted to exhibit. Can you not easily conceive that this would have been the case? Can you not conceive, that were you really placed in heaven, before the throne of God, with all the light of his glory shining around you, all the majesty of His countenance beaming upon you, every glance of his omniscient eye piercing your hearts,—your sins would appear to you far more black and numerous, than they now do? If so, allow me to remind you that a day is approaching, in which you will be constrained to see your sins, as they appear in the light of God's countenance. When that day arrives, his eternal Son, the appointed Judge, will be seen coming in the clouds of heaven with all his Fathers glories blazing around him, and all the bright armies of heaven following in his train. Seated on a throne of resplendent whiteness, with a countenance from the terrors of which the heavens and the earth will flee affrighted, he will summon the whole race of men before him, and there cause their lives to pass in review, expose all their secret sins, lay open the inmost recesses of our hearts; while the flood of pure, celestial light which pours itself around him, will by contrast cause their blackness to appear seven fold more black. Then all disputes respecting the depravity of mankind, and the demerit of sin, will be ended forever. Then no more complaint of the strictness of God's laws, or of the severity of the punishment, which it denounces upon transgressors, will be heard; for every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world stand guilty before God. But a conviction of sinfulness and guilt will then come too late; for there is no available repentance beyond the grave. He that is found a sinner at the judgment day, will continue a sinner, and be treated as a sinner forever.

0, then, my hearers, be persuaded now to come to the light, that your deeds may be reproved, and set in order before you; exercise such feelings respecting them, and so judge yourselves, that you may not be condemned of the Lord in that day.

Chapter 59

S. Selections from the writings of Edward Payson,

Selections from the writings of Edward Payson, 1783-1827

"Remember the words that I spoke unto you, while I was yet present with you." John 14:25 THE HAPPINESS OF HEAVEN!

Only to be permitted to contemplate such a being as Jehovah . . .

to ponder goodness, holiness, justice, mercy, patience and sovereignty — personified and condensed;

to ponder them united with eternity, infinite power, unerring wisdom, omnipresence, and all sufficiency;

to ponder all these natural and moral perfections indissolubly united and blended in sweet harmony — in one pure, spiritual being, and that being placed on the throne of the universe

— to ponder this would be happiness enough to fill the mind of any creature in existence!

But in addition to this,

to have this ineffable Being for my God, my portion, my all;

to be permitted to say, "This God is my God forever and ever!"

to have His resplendent countenance smile upon me;

to be encircled in His everlasting arms of power and faithfulness and love;

to hear His voice saying to me, "I am yours — and you are Mine! Nothing shall ever pluck you from My hands, or separate you from My love — but you shall be with Me where I am, behold My glory, and live to reign with Me forever and ever!"

This is too much! It is honor, it is glory — it is happiness too overwhelming, too transporting for mortal minds to conceive, or for mortal frames to support!

In Heaven, the saints will be entirely lost and swallowed up in God, and their minds will be so completely absorbed in the contemplation of His ineffable, infinite, uncreated glories!

Oh, then, what must it be, to escape forever from error and ignorance and darkness and sin — into the region of bright, unclouded, eternal day!

What must it be, to behold your God and Redeemer face to face!

What must it be, to continually to contemplate, with immortal strength — glories so dazzlingly bright, that one moment’s view of them would now, like a stream of lightning, turn your frail bodies into dust!

What must it be, to see the eternal volume of the divine counsels, the mighty map of the divine mind, unfolded to your eager, piercing gaze!

What must it be, to explore the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths of the Redeemer's love — and still to see new wonders, glories, and beauties pouring upon your minds in constant, endless succession, calling forth new songs of praise — songs in which you will unite with the innumerable choirs of angels, with the countless myriads of the redeemed, all shouting with a voice like the voice of many waters, "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!"

GOD IS ANGRY WITH UNREPENTANT SINNERS "God is angry with the wicked every day!" Psalms 7:11 Do you ask why He is angry?

I answer:

He is angry to see rational, immortal, and accountable beings — spending twenty, forty, or sixty years in trifling and sin; serving divers idols, lusts, and vanities, and living as if death were an eternal sleep!

He is angry to see you forgetting your Maker in childhood, in youth, in manhood — and making no returns for all His benefits.

He is angry to see you casting off His fear and rebelling against Him who has nourished and brought you up as children.

He is angry to see you laying up treasures on earth — and not in Heaven.

He is angry to see you seeking everything in preference to the one thing needful.

He is angry to see you loving the praise of men more than the praise of God; and fearing those who can only kill the body, more than Him who has power to cast both soul and body into Hell.

He is angry to see that you disregard alike His threatenings and His promises, His judgments and His mercies.

He is angry that you bury in the earth the talents He has given you, and bring forth no fruit to His glory.

He is angry that you neglect His word, His Spirit, and His law, and perish in impenitency and unbelief.

These are sins of which every person, in an unconverted state, is guilty. And for these things God is angry — daily angry, greatly and justly angry! And unless His anger is speedily appeased, it will most certainly prove your everlasting destruction! THE CONDUCT OF MEN TOWARDS THEIR MAKER

Mankind seem to consider God as a sort of outlaw who has no rights on earth — or at least as one whose rights may be disregarded and trampled on at their pleasure.

They allow that earthly rulers ought to be obeyed — but they seem to think that no obedience is due to the Sovereign Ruler of the universe.

They allow that children ought to love, honor, and submit to their parents — but they do not appear to think that either love, honor, or submission should be paid to their Creator.

They allow that gratitude is due to human benefactors, and that to requite their favors with ingratitude, is a proof of abominable wickedness. But they practically deny that any grateful return should be made to our heavenly Benefactor for His innumerable benefits, and seem to consider the blackest ingratitude towards Him as scarcely a sin! When a son forsakes his father's house, when he refuses to comply with his entreaties to return, when he chooses to endure all the evils of poverty rather than return home — we are ready to suspect that his father must be a very disagreeable, unlovely, or cruel character, since his own children cannot live with him. At least we shall think this unless we have a very bad opinion of the son. We must condemn one or the other. In the same way, when God's own creatures, whom He has nourished and brought up as children, forsake Him and refuse to return or be reconciled — it gives other beings cause to suspect that He must be a very cruel, unlovely being; and they must either conclude that He is so, or form a very bad opinion of us.

Now, sinners will not allow that the fault is theirs; of course they throw all the blame upon their Creator, and represent Him as such an unkind, cruel Parent, that His children cannot live with or please Him.

It is true, God has power to vindicate His own character and to show the universe that the fault is wholly ours. But this is no thanks to us. The tendency of our conduct is still the same — it still tends to load His character with the blackest infamy and disgrace. This is all the return we make to Him, for giving us existence and then sustaining us. Thus do you requite the Lord, O foolish and unwise people!

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me!" It is evident that you withhold your hearts from God; or, in other words, rob Him of your affections, the very thing which He principally desires. And is this a small offense? Should a person rob you of the affection and esteem of the partner of your bosom, of your children or your friends — then would you not think it a great injury? Would it not in many instances be worse than robbing you of your property? Is it, then, a trifling offense for intelligent creatures to rob their Creator, Father, and Benefactor of that supreme place in their affections to which He has a most perfect right, and which He prizes above everything they possess? The world is, in some form or other, the great Diana, the grand idol of all its inhabitants, so long as they continue in their natural sinful state.

They bow down to it;

they worship it;

they spend and are spent for it;

they educate their children in its service;

their hearts, their minds, their memories, their imaginations — are full of it;

their tongues speak of it;

their hands grasp it;

their feet pursue it. In a word, this poor world is all in all to them — while they give scarcely a word, a look, or a thought to Him who made and preserves them, and who is really all in all. Thus men rob God of their bodies and spirits, which are His, and practically say, "We are our own — who is Lord over us?" From the manner in which we habitually treat the Bible — we may learn what are our feelings and dispositions towards God Himself. For as we treat the Word of God — so would we treat God Himself, were He to come and reside among us in a human form, as He once dwelt on earth in the form of His Son. The contents of Scripture are a perfect transcript of the divine mind. If, then, God should come to dwell among us — He would teach the same things that the Scriptures teach, and pronounce upon us the same sentence which they pronounce.

We therefore feel toward Him — as we now feel toward the Scriptures.

If we reverence and love and obey the Scriptures — then we would reverence, love, and obey God. But if we dislike or disbelieve the Scriptures, if we seldom study them, or read them only with indifference and neglect — then we treat would God in the same manner. Never would He be a welcome guest in a family where His Word is neglected.

SEE THAT YOU ABOUND IN EVERY GRACE

Unless we strenuously aim at universal holiness, we can have no satisfactory evidence that we are the servants of Christ. A servant of Christ is one who obeys Christ as his master, and makes Christ’s revealed Word the rule of his conduct. No man, then, can have any evidence that he is a servant of Christ — any further than he obeys the will of Christ in His Word. And no man can have any evidence that he obeys the will of Christ in one particular, unless he sincerely and strenuously aims to obey in every particular — for the will of Christ is one. In consequence of their natural constitution, of the circumstances in which they are placed, or of the absence of temptation — most Christians find it comparatively easy to avoid some sins, to be exemplary in the performance of some duties, and to cultivate some branches of the Christian temper with success.

One man, for instance, enjoys much leisure and has a taste for study — hence the acquisition of religious knowledge becomes easy to him.

Another is blessed with a mild and amiable disposition, and of course can regulate his temper without much difficulty. A third is constitutionally liberal, and can therefore contribute readily to religious and charitable objects. A fourth is quiet and retiring, and is for this reason little tempted to pride, ambition, or discontent. A fifth is naturally bold and ardent. Of course, he can easily overcome indolence and the fear of man. In a word, there are a very few Christians who, for these and other similar reasons, do not in some respects excel. But the evil is that they are prone, though perhaps without being sensible of it — to attach an undue importance to that grace or duty in which they excel, to make the whole of religion to consist in it, and to neglect other things of equal importance, the performance of which they would find more difficult.

Nay, more — they secretly regard the eminence which they have attained in some respects, as an excuse for great deficiencies in others, and endeavor to atone for a neglect of self-denying duties — by attending with peculiar zeal to those duties which are more easy to themselves.

One man, for instance, is lukewarm in his affections, formal in his devotions, and makes little progress in subduing his sinful propensities. But he comforts himself with the hope that his

knowledge of religious truth is increasing.

Another, who neglects to improve opportunities for acquiring religious knowledge, derives consolation from the warmth of his zeal and the liveliness of his affections.

One person is by no means disposed to contribute liberally for the promotion of Christ's cause and the relief of the poor; but he hopes to atone for his deficiency in this respect, by the frequency and fervency of his prayers.

Another neglects prayer, meditation, and communion with God; but he quiets himself by pleading the pressure of worldly business and by liberal contributions for religious and charitable purposes.

Thus, as there are few Christians who do not excel in some respects — there are few who are not, in many respects, exceedingly deficient. Small indeed is the number of those who sedulously strive to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Nothing is more common than to meet with Christians who in many respects are eminently and exemplarily pious — but who, by some sinful imprudence or defect, render their characters vulnerable, destroy all the good effects of their example, and dishonor instead of adorning religion. They resemble a beautiful and well-proportioned body which has been disfigured by a wound — or which has lost a limb, or some member of which is disproportionally large. While in some respects they are giants — in other respects they are mere dwarfs. Hence not only their reputation, but their influence, their comfort, their usefulness are impaired — and they adorn religion less than many others who are in many respects greatly their inferiors, but who are more uniform and consistent in their conduct.

Christ commands us, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do — to do all to the glory of God. Perhaps some will ask, "How is this possible?" We cannot be always thinking of God — we must attend to our business, provide for our own needs and those of our families. True, but look at a man about to send a ship to a foreign port. As he purchases his cargo and makes the requisite preparations — he considers what articles are most suitable for the market, what provisions most necessary for the voyage, and how the ship is to be rigged and manned; in short, all his plans are laid with reference to the end of the voyage. So the Christian, though not always thinking of Heaven, should take care that all his business and all his pleasures may forward his journey thither, and promote his great object of preparation for that abode of blessedness.

GOD

How much this title implies, no tongue, human or angelic, can ever express — and no mind conceive. It is a volume of an infinite number of leaves, and every leaf full of meaning. It will be read by saints and angels through the ages of eternity, but they will never reach the last leaf, nor fully comprehend the meaning of a single page!

Look back to the time when God existed independent and alone; when there was nothing but God — no heavens, no earth, no angels, no men. How wretched would we, how wretched would any creature be, in such a situation! But Jehovah was then infinitely happy — happy beyond all possibility of increase. He is an overflowing fountain, and a bottomless and shoreless ocean — of being, perfection, and happiness. When this infinite ocean overflows, suns and worlds, angels and men, start into existence.

I would ask you to pause and contemplate, for a moment, this wonderful Being. But where shall we stand to take a view of Him? When we wish to contemplate the ocean, we take our stand upon its shore. But this infinite ocean of being and perfection has no shore. There is no place where we can stand to look at Him, for He is in us, around us, above us and below us. Yet, in another sense, there is no place where we may not look at Him, for He is everywhere. We see nothing which He has not made, no motion which He does not cause; for He is all, and in all, and above all, God over all, blessed forever. Even He Himself cannot tell us fully what He is, for our minds cannot take it in. He can only say to us, "I am that I am. I am Jehovah." THE ETERNITY OF GOD

Try, for a moment, to conceive of a Being without a beginning — a Being who does not become older as ages roll away. Fly back, in imagination, millions of millions of millions of years, until reason is confounded and imagination is wearied in the flight. God then existed, and, what may at first appear paradoxical, He had then existed as long as He has now; you would then be no nearer the beginning of His existence than you are now, for it has no beginning, and you cannot approach to that which does not exist. Nor will His being ever come to an end.

Add together ages of ages; multiply them by the leaves on the trees, the sand on the sea-shore, and the dust of the earth — still you will be no nearer the termination of Jehovah’s existence, than when you first began your calculation. THE LOVE OF GOD

In the words "God is love," we have a perfect portrait of the eternal and incomprehensible Jehovah, drawn by His own unerring hand! The mode of expression here adopted, differs materially from that usually employed by the inspired writers, in speaking of the divine perfections. They say, "God is merciful, God is just, God is holy" — but never do they say, "God is mercy, God is justice, God is holiness." In this instance, on the contrary, the apostle, instead of saying, "God is loving, or good, or kind," says, "God IS love" — love itself. By this expression, we must understand that God is all pure, unmixed love, and that the other moral perfections of His character are only so many modifications of this love. Thus His justice, His mercy, His truth, His faithfulness — are but so many different names of His love or goodness. As the light which proceeds from the sun may easily be separated into many different colors — so the holy love of God, which is the light and glory of His nature, may be separated into a variety of moral attributes and perfections. But, though separated, they are still love. His whole nature and essence are love — His will, His works, and His words are love — He is nothing, can do nothing but love. THE WISDOM OF GOD

Often when the church thinks itself in the most imminent danger, when its friends are ready to cry in despair, "All these things are against us — our destruction is inevitable!" But angels are lost in wonder in view of the means which divine wisdom is, even then, employing to effect its deliverance and turn its despondency into triumph. For some thousands of years they have been contemplating this spectacle — their knowledge and their admiration of God’s wisdom have been continually increasing, and yet every day they learn something new; every day they see new proofs that Jehovah is indeed the all-wise God, that His resources are inexhaustible, that He can never be at a loss, and that He can effect the same object in numberless different ways and by the use of the most improbable means. THE DUTY OF LIVING TO THE GLORY OF GOD

We were created and redeemed for the sole purpose of praising and glorifying our Creator. If we refuse or neglect to do this, we transgress the great law of creation, frustrate the end of our existence, leave unperformed the work for which we were made, do all in our power to prove that

we were created in vain, and to cause God to repent of having made us. Should the sun refuse to shine, should the showers refuse to descend, should the earth refuse to bring forth food, or should trees in a fruitful soil continue barren — then would you not say that it was contrary to nature and to the design of their creation, and that since they no longer fulfilled this design — then they might properly be reduced to nothing again? And do you not see that while you refuse to praise God, your conduct is equally unnatural, and that you may justly be made the monuments of His everlasting displeasure? What would only be unnatural in inanimate creatures — is the height of folly and wickedness in us; because we are capable of knowing our duty, and are under innumerable obligations to practice it.

Let the sun then refuse to shine, the showers to descend, and the earth to be fruitful — but let not rational creatures refuse to praise their Creator, since it is the purpose for which they were created!

HOW CAN CREATURES GLORIFY GOD?

If it be asked how creatures so feeble and ungrateful as we are, can glorify God, I answer — by living in such a manner as naturally tends to make Him appear glorious, amiable, and excellent in the view of His creatures. A son, for instance, honors his parents when he evidently loves, reverences, confides in, and obeys them — because such conduct tends to make those who know him think favorably of his parents. A subject honors his sovereign, when he cheerfully submits to his authority and appears to be contented and happy in his government — because this tends to give others a favorable opinion of his sovereign. In the same way, men honor and glorify God when they show by their conduct that they consider Him the most perfect and best of beings, and love, reverence, and confide in Him as such; for these things naturally tend to excite a high estimation of God in the minds of their fellow creatures.

REVERENCE FOR GOD

With what profound veneration does it befit us to enter the presence, and to receive the favors of the awesome Majesty of Heaven and earth! And how ought we to dread grieving or offending goodness so great, so glorious, so venerable! To illustrate this remark, suppose that the sun, whose brightness, even at this distance, you cannot gaze upon without shrinking — were an animated, intelligent body; and that with a design to do you good, he should leave his place in the heavens and gradually approach you. As he drew more and more near, his apparent magnitude and effulgence would every moment increase; he would occupy a larger and larger portion of the visible heavens, until at length all other objects would be lost, and yourselves swallowed up in one insufferably dazzling, overpowering flood of light! Would you not, in such circumstances, feel the strongest emotions of awe, of something like fear? Would a knowledge that the glorious luminary was approaching with a benevolent design for your good, banish these emotions?

What, then, ought to be the feelings of a sinful worm of the dust, when the Father of lights, the eternal Sun of the universe, who dwells in the high and holy place, and in the contrite heart — stoops from His awesome throne, to visit him, to smile upon him, to pardon him, to purify him from his moral defilement, to adopt him as a child, to make him an heir of Heaven, to take possession of his heart as His earthly habitation? THE DUTY OF LOVING GOD

We ought to love God, because He has given us the power to love. He might have formed us gloomy, morose, misanthropic beings, destitute of all the social affections; without the power of loving any object, and strangers to the happiness of being beloved. Should God withdraw into Himself, not only all the amiable qualities which excite love, but the very power of loving would vanish from the world — and we would not only, like the evil spirits, become perfectly hateful, but should, like them, hate one another.

Every object which can be presented to us has a claim on our affections, corresponding to its character. If any object is admirable — then it possesses a natural and inherent claim to our admiration; if it is venerable — then it has a claim to our reverence; if it is terrifying — then it demands our fear; if it is beautiful and amiable — then it claims and deserves our love. But God is perfectly and infinitely lovely — nay, He is excellence and loveliness itself. If you doubt this, ask those who can tell you. Ask Christ, who is in the bosom of the Father — and He will tell you that God is infinitely lovely. Ask the holy angels, who dwell in His immediate presence — and they will tell you that He is lovely beyond all that even angelic minds can conceive. Ask godly men in all ages — and they will lament that they cannot tell you how amiable and excellent Jehovah is. Ask everything beautiful and amiable in the universe — and it will tell you that all its beauty is but a faint reflection of His.

If all this does not satisfy you, ask the spirits of disobedience; and they, though filled with malice and rage against Him, will tell, if you can constrain them to speak — that the Being they hate is lovely, and that it constitutes the essence of their misery that they can find no blemish in His character. But if God be thus infinitely lovely — then we are under infinite obligations to love Him; obligations from which He Himself cannot release us, but by altering His character and ceasing to be lovely. THE FOLLY OF PREFERRING CREATURES TO GOD Would you not consider a person foolish and absurd, who would extravagantly love and prize a drop of stagnant water — and yet view the ocean with indifference or disgust; or who would constantly grovel in the dust to admire a shining grain of sand — and yet neglect to admire the sun which caused it to shine? Of what folly and absurdity, then, are we guilty — when we love the imperfectly amiable qualities of our fellow worms, or admire the sublimity and beauty of the works of nature — and yet exercise no love to Him to whom they are indebted for all; Him whose glory gilds the heavens, and from whom angels derive everything that can excite admiration or love!

GOD THE ONLY SOURCE OF EXCELLENCE

God only, the Father of lights, from whom comes down every good and perfect gift — makes one creature to differ from another. They are wise only by His wisdom, strong only in His strength, and good only in His goodness. He is entirely the Author of everything good in Heaven and on earth. When creatures acknowledge this and ascribe all the excellencies they possess to Him alone — they then, in the language of Scripture, bring forth fruit, not to themselves, but to His glory.

God is the source of everything excellent or praiseworthy in the intellectual world. To Him angels and men are alike indebted for all their faculties. Reason, memory, wit, prudence, invention and imagination — are only His gifts. The statesman, the warrior, the mathematician, the poet, the orator, the historian, the astronomer, the painter, and the sculptor — all were formed, instructed and directed by Him. By His assistance, all the great enterprises, splendid achievements and admirable works which the world ever saw, were performed. "It is He," says David, "who teaches

my hands to war, and my fingers to fight."

It was He who guided Columbus to the discovery of this new world. It was He who qualified our revered Washington for the great work of delivering his country and assisted him in its accomplishment. And while we admire the gifts of God in men — shall we not admire the great Giver? While we admire the achievements, enterprises and works of men — shall we not admire Him who enabled men to perform them? Shall we rest in streams, and admire them only — without praising the fountain? Surely this is highly unreasonable! THE DUTY OF SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD

Suppose that the members of our bodies, instead of being controlled by the will of the head — had each a separate, independent will of its own. Would they not, in this case, become useless and even mischievous?

Something like this, you are sensible, occasionally takes place. In certain diseases, the members seem to escape from the control of the will and act as if they were governed by a separate will of their own. When this is the case, terrible consequences often ensue. The teeth shut suddenly and violently and lacerate the tongue; the hands beat the face and other parts of the body; the feet refuse to support it, and it rolls in the dust a melancholy and frightful spectacle. Such effects we call convulsions.

There are convulsions in the moral as well as in the natural world, and they take place when the will of man refuses to be controlled by the will of God. Did all men submit cordially to His will — then they would live together in love and harmony — and, like the members of a healthy body, would all promote each other's welfare, and that of the whole system. But they have refused to obey His will, and have set up their own wills in opposition to it; and what has been the consequence? Convulsions, most terrible convulsions, which have, in ten thousand thousand instances, led one member of this great body to injure another; and not only disturbed but almost destroyed the peace of society. What are wars, insurrections, revolutions? What are robberies, piracies, murders — but convulsions in the moral world, convulsions which would never have occurred had not the will of man refused to submit to the will of God?

Never will these convulsions cease, never will universal love and peace and happiness prevail — until the rebellious will of man shall again submit to the controlling will of God, and His will shall be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

If all mankind could be persuaded to say, "Not as I will — but as You will," as sincerely as Christ said it — then sin would that moment cease to exist in the world, God and men would be perfectly reconciled, and His will would be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Yes, let every human being only say to God, with his whole heart, "Not my will, but Yours be done" — and holiness and happiness would instantly fill the world; men would be embodied angels, and earth would become a sublunary Heaven.

I look up to Heaven and there see the blessed and only Potentate, the Creator and Upholder of all things, the infinite and eternal Sovereign of the universe — governing His vast kingdom with uncontrollable power, in a manner perfectly wise and holy and just and good. In this Being, I see my Creator, my Preserver, my unwearied Benefactor — to whom I am indebted for everything which I possess. And what does this Being see — what has He seen, in me? He sees a frail worm

of the dust, who is of yesterday and knows nothing, who cannot take a single step without making mistakes, who is wholly incompetent to guide himself, and who, by his own folly, is self-destroyed. He has seen this frail, blind, erring worm, presumptuously daring to criticize and censure His proceedings, attempting to interfere in His government of the universe, and trying to set up his own perverse will against the will of his Creator, his Sovereign, and his God; his own ignorance — against divine omniscience, and his own folly — against infinite wisdom. This God has seen in me, and this he has seen in you; and who that believes that God has seen this in him, can avoid feeling overwhelmed with sorrow and shame and remorse? We may say what we please of the difficultly of repenting, but it would seem to be a thousand-fold more difficult to refrain from repenting, after having been guilty of conduct like this. O, then, come and perform this easy, this most reasonable duty. Come and repent before God, of your disobedience and opposition to His will, receive through Christ a free and gracious pardon; and then learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, to say, "Father, not my will, but Yours, be done." Should an angel who knew nothing of our characters, but who had heard of the blessings which God has bestowed on us, visit this world — would he not expect to find every part of it resounding with the praises of God and His love? Would he not expect to hear old and young, parents and children — all blessing God for the glad tidings of the gospel?

How, then, would he be grieved and disappointed! How astonished would he be to find that Being whom he had ever heard praised in the most rapturous strains by all the bright armies of Heaven — slighted, disobeyed, and dishonored by His creatures on earth! Would you not be ashamed, would you not blush to look such a visitor in the face, to tell him how little you have done for God, tell him that you are not one of His servants?

O, then, let us strive to wipe away this foul stain, this disgrace to our race and our world.

Let not this world be the only place, except Hell, where God is not praised.

ALL MEN, THE SUBJECTS OF CHRIST The subjects of Christ’s mediatorial kingdom are divided into two grand classes: those who are obedient — and those who are rebellious. The former class is composed of godly men and angels — the latter of wicked men and devils. The former class serves Christ willingly and cheerfully. He rules them with the golden scepter of love; His law is written in their hearts; they esteem His yoke easy and His burden light, and habitually execute His will. All the bright armies of Heaven, angels and archangels, who excel in strength — are His servants and go forth at His command, as messengers of love to minister to the heirs of salvation — or as messengers of wrath to execute vengeance on His enemies. Nor are His obedient subjects to be found only in Heaven. In this world, also, the standard of the cross, the banner of His love, is erected, and thousands and millions, who were once His enemies — have been brought willing captives to His feet, have joyfully acknowledged Him as their Master and Lord, and sworn allegiance to Him as the Author of their salvation. Nor is His authority less absolute over the second class of His subjects, who still persist in their rebellion. In vain do they say, "We will not have this Man to reign over us!" He rules them with a rod of iron, causes even their wrath to praise Him, and makes them the involuntary instruments of carrying on His great designs. He holds all the infernal spirits on a chain, governs the conquerors, monarchs, and great ones of the earth; and in all things wherein they deal proudly, He is still above them. In one or the other of these ways, all must serve Christ. Is it not better to serve Him willingly and be rewarded — than to serve Him

reluctantly and be destroyed? THE SINFULNESS OF UNBELIEF The reason why people who appear to be in some measure convinced of sin, so often lose their convictions; and why so many professors of religion fall away and disgrace their profession — is because the work of conviction was never thoroughly performed; because they were never convinced of unbelief. They saw, perhaps, that they were sinners. They felt convinced of many sins in their tempers and conduct. They in some measure corrected and laid aide these sins; then their consciences ceased to reproach them, and they flattered themselves that they had become new creatures. But meanwhile, they knew nothing of the great sin of unbelief — and therefore never confessed, repented of, or forsook it, until it proved their destruction. They were like a man who should go to a physician to be healed of some slight external wound — while he knew nothing of a deep-rooted cancer which was preying upon his vitals.

Professors, try yourselves by these remarks. Look back to the time when you imagined yourselves to be convinced of sin — and say whether you were then convinced, or whether you have at any time since been convinced of the exceeding sinfulness of unbelief. If not, there is great reason to fear that you are deceived — that you have mistaken the form for the power of godliness.

It is God’s invariable method . . .

to humble — before He exalts;

to show us our diseases — before He heals them;

to convince us that we are sinners — before He pronounces our pardon.

When, therefore, the Spirit of all grace and consolation comes to comfort and sanctify a sinner, He begins by acting the part of a reprover, and thus convincing him of sin. The sin of which He more particularly aims to convince him, is unbelief. "He shall reprove the world of sin," says our Savior. Why? Because they are murderers, thieves, or adulterers? No! Because they are guilty of slander, fraud, or extortion? No! Because they are intemperate, dissipated, or sensual? No! Because they are envious, malicious, or revengeful? No — but because they are unbelievers, because they believe not on Me. If there is one fact or doctrine or promise in the Bible which has produced no practical effect upon your temper or conduct — be assured that you do not truly believe it. THE LANGUAGE OF THOSE WHO NEGLECT THE BIBLE No man will ever voluntarily neglect to make himself acquainted with the contents of a message sent to him by one whom he acknowledges as his superior — or on whom he feels himself to be dependent. Let a subject receive a communication from his acknowledged sovereign — so it will receive his immediate attention. Nor will he, especially if it contains various and important instructions — think a hasty perusal of it sufficient. No, he will study it until he feels confident that he is acquainted with its contents, and understands their import. At least equally certain and equally evident is it, that every man whose heart acknowledges God to be his rightful Sovereign, and who believes that the Scriptures contain a revelation from Him — will study them attentively, study them until he feels confident that he understands their contents, and that they have made him wise unto salvation. The man who does not thus study them, who negligently allows them to lie, for days and weeks, unopened — says, more explicitly than any words can say, "I am Lord; God is not my Sovereign; I am not His subject, nor do I consider it important to know what He requires of me. Carry His messages to those who are subject to Him, and they will, perhaps, pay them some attention." THE

LANGUAGE OF ALL WHO NEGLECT PRAYER

It is natural to man, from his earliest infancy, to cry for relief when in danger or distress, if he supposes that anyone able to relieve him is within hearing of his cries. Every man, then, who feels his own dependence upon God and his need of blessings which God only can bestow — will pray to Him. He will feel that prayer is not only his duty — but his highest privilege. The man who refuses or neglects to pray, who does not regard prayer not as a privilege, but as a wearisome and needless task — practically says, in the most unequivocal manner:

"I am not dependent on God!

I lack nothing that He can give!

Therefore I will not come to Him, nor ask any favor at His hands.

I will not ask Him to crown my exertions with success — for I am able and determined to be the architect of my own fortune.

I will not ask Him to instruct or guide me — for I am competent to be my own instructor and guide.

I will not ask Him to strengthen and support me — for I am strong in the vigor and resources of my own abilities.

I will not request His protection — for I am able to protect myself.

I will not implore His pardoning mercy nor His sanctifying grace — for I neither need, nor desire, the one or the other.

I will not ask His presence and aid in the hour of death — for I can meet and grapple, unsupported, with the king of terrors, and enter, undaunted and alone, any unknown world into which He may usher me." THE REASON OF GOD'S FORBEARANCE WITH SINNERS

How wonderful is the patience and forbearance of God! Here are sinners who have been, for twenty, forty, sixty years — abusing His patience, and misusing all His benefits. Yet, instead of cutting them down, He adds another year, perhaps many years, to their long since forfeited lives.

There are sinners who have wasted and profaned a thousand Sabbaths — yet He allows them another Sabbath, another opportunity of hearing the offers of salvation.

There are sinners who have repeatedly been urged in vain to be reconciled to God — yet He condescends still to offer a reconciliation.

There are sinners at whose hearts Christ has knocked a thousand and a thousand times — but, though they refuse to admit Him, He still knocks again.

O, why are such treasures of goodness lavished on such foolish and self-destructive creatures? Why is such an inestimable prize, put into the hands of those who have no heart to improve it? Why, indeed, but to show what God can do, and how infinitely His patience and forbearance exceed ours.

One reason why God bestows on sinners the day and the means of grace — is that they may have an opportunity of clearly displaying their own characters, and thus proving the truth of the charges

which He has brought against them. He does, as it were, say to the world, "I have accused these creatures of being enemies to Me and to all goodness, and of cherishing in their hearts an obstinate attachment to vice. They deny the charge. I am therefore about to bring them to the test, to try an experiment which will clearly show whether My charges are well-founded or not. I shall send them My word and the gospel of My Son, clearly revealing to them the way of salvation. I shall send messengers to explain and press upon them the truths there revealed. I shall allow them one day in seven to attend on their instructions, and I shall offer them the assistance of My Spirit, to render them holy. These privileges, they shall enjoy for years together. If they improve them aright, if they believe My word, receive and love My Son, and renounce their sins — then I will acknowledge that I have accused them falsely, that they are not so depraved as I have represented them. But, should they, on the contrary, neglect My word, disbelieve the gospel, and refuse to receive and submit to My Son; should they profane the Sabbath, misimprove the day of grace, refuse to repent of their sins and be reconciled to Me — then it will be evident to all that I have not accused them falsely; that they are just such depraved, obstinate, irreconcilable enemies to Me and to goodness, as I have represented them to be in My word.

WE ARE LORDS!

"O my people, listen to the words of the LORD! Have I been like a desert to Israel? Have I been to them a land of darkness? Why then do my people say: We are lords! We don’t need Him anymore!" Jeremiah 2:31

If men are indeed independent of God, it may with safety be asserted that He is almost the only being or object in the universe on whom they are not dependent. From the cradle to the grave, their lives exhibit little else than a continued course of dependence. They are dependent on the earth, on the water, on the air, on each other, on irrational animals, on vegetables, on unorganized substances.

Let but the sun withhold his beams, and the clouds their showers for a single year — and the whole race of these mighty, independent beings expires!

Let but a pestilential blast sweep over them — and they are gone!

Let but some imperceptible derangement take place in their frail but complicated mind — and all their boasted intellectual powers sink to the level of an idiot’s mind.

Let a small portion of that food, on which they daily depend for nourishment, pass from its proper course — and they choke and expire in agony. An insect, a needle, a thorn — has often proved sufficient to subject them to the same fate! And while they are dependent on so many objects for the continuance of their lives — they are dependent on a still greater number for happiness and for the success of their enterprises.

Let but a single spark fall unheeded or be wafted by a breath of air — and a city, which it has cost thousands the labors of many years to erect, may be turned to ashes!

Let the wind but blow from one point rather than from another — and the hopes of the merchant are dashed against a rock.

Let but a little more, or a little less, than the usual quantity of rain descend — and in the latter case the prospects of the gardener are blasted; while, in the other, his anticipated harvest perishes beneath the clods or is swept away by an inundation. But in vain do we attempt to describe the extent of man's dependence, or enumerate all the objects and events on which he depends. Yet all these objects and events are under the control of the great Jehovah! Without His superintendence and appointment — not a hair falls from our heads, nor a sparrow to the ground.

O how far is it, then, from being true, that man is not dependent on God!

"For in Him we live and move and have our being!" Acts 17:28 TO THE IMPENITENT My friends, God offers you the water of life, without money and without price. Everyone may come and take it if he will; and is not this sufficient? Would you have the water of life forced upon you?

What is it that you wish for? My unconverted friends, I will tell you what you wish for. You wish to live as you please here on earth, to disobey your Creator, to neglect your Savior, to fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind. And at death, you wish to be admitted into a kind of sensual paradise, where you may taste again the same pleasures which you enjoyed on earth.

You wish that God would break His Word; stain His justice, purity, and truth.

You wish that God would sacrifice the honor of His law, His own rightful authority, and the best interests of the universe — to the gratification of your own sinful propensities!

Look back to those who have passed the great change through which we must all pass. Think of the patriarchs who died before the flood. They have been perfectly happy for more than four thousand years — yet their happiness has but just commenced.

Think of the lost sinners who died before the flood. For more than four thousand years they have been completely wretched, and yet their misery is but begun. In the same way, there will be a time when you will have been happy or miserable four thousand years — and for four times four thousand years — and yet your Heaven or your Hell will even then be but beginning.

OBJECTIONS OF SINNERS TO THE GOSPEL ANSWERED

Suppose that, while you are dying of a fatal disease — a medicine of great reputed efficacy is offered you, on making trial of which you find yourself restored to health and activity. Full of joy and gratitude, you propose the remedy to others afflicted with the same disease.

One of these people replies to you, "I am surprised that you place so much faith in the virtues of this medicine. How do you know that it was really discovered by the person whose name it bears? Or, even if it were, it is so many years ago, and the medicine has passed through so many hands since, that it is probably corrupted, or perhaps some other has been substituted in the place of the genuine medicine."

Says another, "It may not be suited to the constitutions of men in this age, though it was undoubtedly useful to those who first used it."

"The disease and the cure are both equally imaginary," says a third.

"There are many other remedies of equal or superior efficacy," objects a fourth.

"None of the most celebrated physicians recommend it," replies a fifth.

While a sixth attempts to silence you by objecting to the bottles in which it is stored, and saying that boxes would have been more suitable.

What weight would all these objections have with you? Would they induce you to throw away the healing balm, whose effects you even then felt, sending life and health and vigor through your whole frame? Even thus may infidels and cavilers urge objections against the gospel; but the Christian heeds them not, for he has felt, in his own soul, its life-giving power! Will you say there are no real stars — because you sometimes see meteors fall, which for a time appeared to be stars? Will you say that blossoms never produce fruit because many of them fall off, and some fruit, which appears sound, is rotten at the core? Equally absurd is it to say there is no such thing as real religion, because many who profess it fall away or prove to be hypocrites in heart. Or will you say that a medicine does no good because, though it removes the fever, it does not restore the patient to perfect strength in an instant? Equally groundless and absurd is it to say that religion does not make its possessors better, because it does not, in a moment, make them as perfect as the angels of God. The many false and counterfeit appearances which we meet with, instead of proving that there is no religion in the world — not only prove that there is, but that it is extremely precious; otherwise it would not be counterfeited. No one will be at the trouble of counterfeiting either what does not exist, or what is of no value. No one will make false stones or false dust — though many make false pearls and diamonds. If there were no real money, there would be no counterfeit. In the same way, if there were no real religion — there would be no false religion. One cannot exist without the other — any more than a shadow can exist without a substance.

He who rejects all religion because hypocrites sometimes borrow its name and appearance — acts no less absurdly than he who throws his gold or jewels into the fire because gold and jewels have sometimes been counterfeited.

Surely if Christianity is a delusion, it is a blessed delusion indeed — and he who attempts to destroy it is an enemy to mankind. It is a delusion which teaches us to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. It is a delusion which teaches us to love our Maker supremely and our neighbor as ourselves. It is a delusion which bids us love, forgive, and pray for our enemies, render good for evil, and promote the glory of God and the happiness of our fellow creatures, by every means in our power. It is a delusion, which, wherever it is received, produces a humble, meek, charitable, and peaceful temper. It is a delusion, which, did it universally prevail, would banish wars, vice, and misery from the world. It is a delusion which not only supports and comforts its believers in their wearisome progress through this valley of tears — but attends them in death, when all other consolations fail, and enables them to triumph over sorrows, sickness, anguish, and the grave. If delusion can do this — then in delusion let me live and die — for what could the most blessed reality do more? THE FOLLY OF REJECTING THE GOSPEL Shall we listen to men — when God speaks? Shall blind and ignorant worms of the dust, pretend to know what God will do, better than He who was from eternity in the bosom of the Father? Have you O man, whoever you are, that pretends that the words of Christ are unreasonable or improbable or false — have you ascended into Heaven or descended into Hell? Have you measured eternity and grasped infinity? Have you by searching found out God? Have you found out the Almighty unto perfection? Can you tell me more of Him, than can the Son of His love, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and

knowledge? Does the dim taper of your darkened reason — shine brighter than the glorious Sun of righteousness? Are those to be branded as fools and madmen, who choose to walk in His light, rather than to be led by a mere shadow? No, until you can bring us a teacher superior to Christ, who is the wisdom of God; until you can show us a man who has weighed the mountains in the hollow of his hand, and meted out Heaven with a span; who has lived in Heaven from eternity and can prove that he knows more than Omniscience — we will, we must cleave to Christ! Here is a rock. All is sea besides Him. Nor shall the unbelief of sinners nullify faith in God; for, if we believe not, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF HUMAN REASON

Viewed through any other medium than that of Scripture revelation — man is a riddle which man cannot expound, a being composed of inconsistencies and contradictions which unassisted reason must forever seek in vain to reconcile. In vain does human reason endeavor to ascertain the origin, object, and end of man's existence. In vain does human reason inquire in what man's duty and happiness consist. In vain does human reason ask what is man's present concern and future destination.

Wherever human reason turns for information — she is soon lost in a labyrinth of doubts and perplexities, and finds the progress of her researches interrupted by a cloud of obscurity which the rays of her feeble lamp are insufficient to penetrate.

Suppose you should see a man carrying a little, glimmering candle in his hand at noonday, with his back turned to the sun, and foolishly endeavoring to persuade himself and others that he had no need of the sun, and that his candle gave more light than that glorious luminary. How amazingly great would be his folly! Yet this illustration very feebly represents the folly of those who walk in the sparks of their own kindling — while they disregard the glorious Sun of righteousness!

"Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish, the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him." 1 Corinthians 1:20-21 NATURAL RELIGION

I know that those who hate and despise the religion of Jesus because it condemns their evil deeds, have endeavored to deprive Him of the honor of communicating to mankind the glad tidings of life and immortality. I know that they have dragged the moldering carcass of paganism from the grave, animated her lifeless form with a spark stolen from the sacred altar, arrayed her in the spoils of Christianity, re-enlightened her extinguished candle at the torch of Scripture revelation, dignified her with the name of natural religion, and exalted her in the temple of reason — as a goddess able, without divine assistance, to guide mankind to truth and happiness. But we also know that all her boasted pretensions are vain — the offspring of ignorance, wickedness, and pride. We know that she is indebted to that revelation which she presumes to ridicule and condemn, for every semblance of truth or energy which she displays. We know that the most she can do is to find men blind and leave them so — and to lead them still farther astray, in a labyrinth of vice, delusion, and wretchedness. This is incontrovertibly evident, both from past and present experience; and we may defy her most eloquent advocates to produce a single instance in which she has enlightened or reformed mankind.

If, as is often asserted, she is able to guide us in the path of truth and happiness — then why has she ever allowed her votaries to remain a prey to vice and ignorance? Why did she not teach the

learned Egyptians to abstain from worshiping their leeks and onions and crocodiles? Why not instruct the polished Greeks to renounce their sixty-thousand gods? Why not persuade the enlightened Romans to abstain from adoring their deified murderers? Why not prevail on the wealthy Phoenicians to refrain from sacrificing their infants to Saturn?

Or, if it was a task beyond her power to enlighten the ignorant multitude, reform their barbarous and abominable superstitions, and teach them that they were immortal beings — then why did she not, at least, instruct their philosophers in the great doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which they earnestly labored in vain to discover? They enjoyed the light of reason and natural religion in its fullest extent — yet so far were they from ascertaining the nature of our future and eternal existence, that they could not determine whether we would exist at all beyond the grave! Nor could all their advantages preserve them from the grossest errors and most unnatural crimes!

What would you say of a man who would throw away his compass because he could not tell why it points to the north? What would you say of a man who would reject all the best astronomical treatises because they do not describe the inhabitants of the moon and of the planets? What would you say of a man who would treat with contempt, every book which does not answer all the questions that may be asked respecting the subject of which it treats?

Or, to come still nearer to the point, what would you say of a man, who, when sick of a mortal disease, would refuse an infallible remedy, unless the physician would first tell him how he took the disease, how such diseases first entered the world, why they were permitted to enter it, and by what secret laws or virtues the offered remedy would effect his cure? Would you not say a man so unreasonable deserves to die? He must be left to suffer for his folly.

Now, this is precisely the case of those who neglect the Bible, because it does not reveal those secret things which belong to God. Your souls are assailed by fatal diseases, by diseases which have destroyed millions of your fellow creatures, which already occasion you much suffering — and which, you are assured, will terminate in death unless they are removed. An infallible Physician is revealed to you in the Bible who has, at a great expense, provided a certain remedy; and this remedy He offers you freely, without money and without price. But you refuse to take this remedy, because He does not think it necessary to answer every question which can be asked respecting the origin of your disease, the introduction of such diseases into the world, and the reasons why they were ever permitted to enter it. "Tell me," you exclaim, "how I became sick — or I will not consent to be well." If this be not the height of folly and madness — then what is?

We have not the smallest reason to suppose that, if God had revealed all those secret things which belong to Him, it would have made it more easy than it is now, to know and perform our duty. Suppose, for instance, that God should answer all the questions which may be asked respecting the origin of moral evil and its introduction into the world; would this knowledge at all assist us in banishing evil from the world, or from our own bosoms? As well might we pretend that a knowledge of the precise manner in which a man was killed, would enable us to restore him to life.

Or, should God inform us of the manner in which divinity and humanity are united in the person of Jesus Christ — would this knowledge assist us in performing any one of the duties we owe the Savior? As well might we pretend that a knowledge of the manner in which our souls are united to

our bodies would assist us in performing any of the common actions of life. The Bible tells us that an enemy came and sowed tares. Now, if any man chooses to go farther than this and inquire where the enemy got the tares — then he is welcome to do so; but I choose to leave it where the Bible leaves it. I do not wish to be wise above what is written.

FATE OF THOSE WHO REJECT THE GOSPEL

It is God's invariable rule to deal with His creatures, in some measure, as they deal with Him. Hence we are told that, with the upright — He will show Himself upright; with the merciful — He will show Himself merciful; and with the crooked — He will show Himself shrewd. When, therefore, people come to Him with a pretended desire to know their duty, but in reality, with a view to find some excuse or justification for their errors and sins — then He will allow them, as a punishment, to find something which will harden them in their wickedness.

Thus He will suffer the obstinate believer in universal salvation to deceive himself with his delusive dreams, until he wakes in torments. He will allow the proud, self-righteous opposer of His gospel, to trust in his moral duties, until it is too late to discover his mistake. He will suffer the self-deceived hypocrite to please himself with his false hopes of Heaven, until he finds the door forever shut against him.

All these people did, in effect — wish to be deceived; they hated the light, shut their eyes, and would not come to it; they leaned to their own understandings instead of trusting to the Lord; they never prayed Him to keep them from self-deception and from false paths; they chose to believe Satan rather than God — and therefore are justly left to feel the effects of it. THE WICKED ARE LIKE A TROUBLED SEA

Ungoverned passions are to the mind, what winds are to the ocean; and they often throw it into a storm; for in such a world as this, the sinner must meet with many things which are calculated to rouse his passions. Sometimes he is injured, injured perhaps without cause or provocation — and then his mind is agitated by revengeful feelings.

Sometimes he sees a rival, perhaps an unworthy rival, outstrip him in the race and seize the prize which he had hoped to obtain; and, in consequence, envy, mortification, and chagrin lie gnawing at his heart and cause the greater pain, because he is obliged to conceal them.

Often he meets with some slight affront or insult which wounds his pride and sets his angry passions in a flame — like Haman, who could enjoy nothing because Mordecai refused to pay homage to him. In addition to these things, he is daily exposed to a thousand little nameless vexatious occurrences — which tease and fret and harass him, rendering his mind a stranger to peace.

Often, too, his mind is disturbed by its own workings, without any assignable cause. He feels restless and unhappy, he can scarcely tell why. He wants something, but he cannot tell what. One wave of troubled thought after another comes rolling upon his mind, and he cannot say with the Psalmist, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me — Your comforts delight my soul." These troublesome thoughts and tumultuous workings of the mind, are to the wicked man what the daily flow and ebb of the tide are to the ocean. They keep it in agitation — even when the waves of passion cease to flow.

THOUGHTS OF GOD, PAINFUL TO THE SINNER

Sinners do not like to retain God in their knowledge — because He is omniscient and omnipresent. In consequence of His possessing these attributes, He is a constant witness of their feelings and conduct, and is perfectly acquainted with their hearts. This must render the thoughts of His holiness still more disagreeable to a sinner — for what can be more unpleasant to him, than the constant presence and inspection of a holy being . . .

whom he cannot deceive,

from whose keen, searching gaze he cannot for a moment hide,

to whom darkness and light are alike open, and

who views his conduct with the utmost displeasure and abhorrence?

Even the presence of our fellow creatures is disagreeable, when we wish to indulge any sinful propensity which they will disapprove. How exceedingly irksome, then, must the constant presence of a holy, heart-searching God be to a sinner! No wonder, then, that sinners banish a knowledge of Him from their minds, as the easiest method of freeing themselves from the restraint imposed by His presence.

"They say to God: Leave us alone! We do not desire to know Your ways!" Job 21:14

The armor with which Satan furnishes his followers, is directly the reverse of that Christian armor described by the apostle Paul. Instead of a belt of truth — he girds the sinner with the belt of error and deceit. Instead of the breastplate of Christ's righteousness — he furnishes him with a breastplate of his own imagined righteousness. Instead of the shield of faith — the sinner has the shield of unbelief; and with this he defends himself against the curses of the law and the arrows of conviction. Instead of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God — he teaches them to wield the sword of a tongue set on fire of Hell, and furnishes them with a magazine of cavils, excuses, and objections with which they attack religion and defend themselves. He also builds for them many refuges of lies, in which, as in a strong castle — they proudly hope to shelter themselves from the wrath of God! The false peace and security in which sinners indulge, instead of proving their safety — is only a further evidence of their danger. It proves that the strong man armed, is not disturbed in his possessions, but that he keeps them in peace.

THE GROUNDS OF THE SINNER'S PEACE

There is, perhaps, scarcely a person to be found who does not, in his own opinion, exemplarily perform some part of his duty. On this he looks with no small degree of self-delight and flatters himself that it will atone for all iniquities in his temper and conduct. To this he flies for refuge whenever conscience reproves his deficiencies — and instead of believing the apostolic assertion, that if a man shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all — seems to suppose that if he transgresses the whole law and yet obeys one precept, he is guiltless.

I have met with a person who, though guilty of almost every crime which could disgrace her gender — thanked God, with much apparent self-congratulation, that she was not a thief; and who evidently imagined that her abstaining from this one vice, would secure her from the displeasure of

Heaven.

CONSCIENCE

Conscience is God’s vice-regent in the soul — and though sinners may stupefy and sear it, they cannot entirely silence or destroy it. At times, this unwelcome monitor will awake, and then her reproaches and threatenings are, above all things, terrible to the sinner. During the day, while he is surrounded by thoughtless companions or wholly engrossed by worldly pursuits, he may contrive to stifle, or at least to disregard, her voice. But at night and upon his bed, when all is silent around him, when darkness and solitude compel him to attend to his own reflections — the case is different. Then an awakened conscience will be heard. Then she arraigns the sinner at her bar; tries, convicts, and condemns him; and threatens him with the punishment which his sins deserve. In vain does he endeavor to fly from her torturing scourge or to find refuge in sleep. Sleep flies from him. One sin after another rises to his view, and the load of conscious guilt which oppresses him becomes more and more heavy, until, like the impious Belshazzar, when he saw the mysterious handwriting upon the wall — the joints of his loins are loosed, and his knees smite one against the other. He finds that something must be done. He has heard that prayer is a duty, and he attempts to pray. He utters a few half-formed cries for mercy, makes a few insincere resolutions and promises of amendment; and having thus, in some measure, quieted the reproaches of his conscience, he falls asleep. In the morning he wakes, rejoiced to see once more the cheerful light; the resolutions and promises of the night are forgotten; he again spends the day in folly and sin, and at night retires to his bed — again to be scourged by conscience for breaking his resolutions, again to quiet her reproaches by insincere prayers and promises, and again to break these promises when the light returns.

There is a season and often, perhaps, more than one, in the life of almost every person who hears the gospel faithfully preached — in which it affects him more than ordinarily. Something like light appears to shine into his mind, which enables him to discover objects previously unseen or unnoticed. While this light continues to shine, he feels a much more full and strong conviction of the truth of the Bible and of the reality and importance of religion than he ever felt before. He sees, with more or less clearness, that he is a sinner; that, as such, he is exposed to God’s displeasure; and that, unless some means can be found to avert that displeasure, he is undone.

After such means, he is, therefore, very inquisitive. He reads the Bible more frequently and carefully; he becomes a more diligent, attentive, and interested hearer of the gospel; he is fond of conversing on religious subjects — and perhaps attempts to pray for mercy. Christ stands at the door of his heart and knocks for admittance. With a person in this situation, He is as really, though not as visibly, present, as He was with the Jews, when He said, "Yet a little while, is the light with you." A WOUNDED SPIRIT, WHO CAN BEAR

One reason why the anguish of a wounded spirit is more intolerable than any other species of suffering, is that it is impossible to obtain the smallest consolation or relief under it. This can scarcely be said of any other species of suffering to which mankind are liable. If they lose friends — then they have usually other friends to sympathize with them and assist in repairing their loss. If they lose property — then they may hope to regain it; or, if not, their losses cannot be always present to their mind, and many sources of enjoyment are still open to them. If they are afflicted with painful diseases — then they can usually obtain, at least, temporary relief from medicine and

receive some consolation from the sympathy of their friends. In all cases, they can, for a time, lose their sorrows in sleep and look forward to death as the termination of their troubles. But very different is the situation of one who suffers the anguish of a wounded spirit. He cannot flee from his misery — for it is within. Nor can he forget it — for it is every moment present to his mind. Nor can he divert his attention from it — for it engages his thoughts, in defiance of all endeavors to fix them on any other objects. Nor can he derive consolation from any friends or temporal blessings which he may possess — for everything is turned to poison and bitterness, and the very power of enjoyment seems to be taken from him. Nor can he even lose his sorrows in sleep — for sleep usually flies from a wounded spirit, or, if obtained, it is disturbed and unrefreshing. Hence the exclamation of Job, "When I say, 'My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint,' then You scare me with dreams, and terrify me through visions!"

Look which way it will for relief — the wounded spirit can discover nothing but aggravations of its wretchedness. If it looks within — then it finds nothing but darkness and tempest and despair. If it looks around on its temporal possessions — then it sees nothing but gifts of God which it has abused, and for its abuse of which it must give a terrible account. If it looks back — then it sees a life spent in neglect of God and ten thousand sins, following it as accusers to the judgment-seat. If it looks forward — then it sees that judgment-seat to which it must come and where it expects nothing but a sentence of final condemnation. If it looks up — then it sees that God who is wounding it, and whose anger seems to search it like fire. And if it looks downward — it sees the gulf which awaits its fall! Not even to death can it look forward as the termination of its miseries, for it fears that its miseries will then receive a terrible increase. True, there is one object to which it might look for relief and find it. It might look to the Savior, the great Physician — and obtain not only a cure for its wounds, but everlasting life. But to Him it will not look, until its impenitence and unbelief are subdued by sovereign grace. THE SINNER'S UNWILLINGNESS TO GO TO CHRIST The sinner tries every place of refuge, before he will enter the ark of safety. He is like a person exposed to the storm and tempest, for whom a place of safety is provided which he is unwilling to enter. He flies from one place of imagined security, to take refuge in another. The storm increases; one hiding place after another is swept away — until, at length, exposed without a shelter to the raging storm, he is glad to flee to the refuge provided for him.

Suppose an apparently strong and healthy man should apply to you for needed money, and, when asked why he did not labor for his subsistence, should reply, "Because I can find no one to employ me." If you wished to know whether this or indolence were the true reason, you would offer him employment; and if he then refused to labor, you would feel satisfied that he was slothful and undeserving of your charity. In the same way, when God puts into the hands of sinners a price to get wisdom and they do not improve it — then it becomes evident that they do not wish, that they are not willing, to become pious.

EXCUSES OF THE SINNER ANSWERED Numerous as are the excuses which sinners make when urged to embrace the gospel, they may all be reduced to three: The first is that they have no time to attend to religion. The second is that they do not know how to become religious. The third, is that they are not able to become so.

Lack of time, lack of knowledge, or lack of power — is pleaded by all.

Foreseeing that they would make these excuses, God determined that they should have no reason to make them. By giving them the Sabbath — he has allowed them time for religion. By giving them His word and messengers to explain it — He has taken away the excuse of ignorance. And by offering them the assistance of His Holy Spirit — He has deprived them of the pretense that they are unable to obey Him.

Thus He has obviated all their excuses; and therefore, at the last day, every mouth will be stopped, and the whole impenitent world will stand guilty and self-condemned before God. The convinced sinner wishes to be saved — but then he would be his own savior. He will not consent to be saved by Christ. He cannot bear to come as a poor, miserable, self-condemned sinner — and throw himself on the mere mercy of Christ. He wants to purchase Heaven; to give so many good deeds, as he calls them, for so much happiness hereafter. He goes on to multiply his religious duties, and, with great diligence, makes a robe of his own righteousness with which he hopes to cover his moral nakedness and render himself acceptable in the sight of God. In vain is he told that all his righteousness is as filthy rags; that he is daily growing worse, rather than better; that eternal life can never be purchased. He will stop here, as thousands have done before, resting on this foundation, having the form of godliness, but denying the power — unless the Spirit of God continues to strive with him, and complete the work by showing him his own heart. THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST BRINGS PEACE TO THE SINNER

Even a knowledge of the divine perfections, if it could have been obtained without Christ, would only have driven us to despair, as it did our guilty first parents; for out of Christ, God is a consuming fire. The convinced sinner looks at the greatness of God and says, "How can He stoop to notice a being so insignificant as myself?" He looks at His holiness and says, "God cannot but hate me as a vile, polluted sinner." He looks at His justice and says, "God must condemn me, for I have broken His righteous law." He looks at His truth and cries, "God is not a man that He should lie; He must execute His threatenings and destroy me." He looks at God’s immutability and says, "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? He will never change — He will always be my enemy." He looks at His power and wisdom and says, "I can neither resist nor deceive Him." He looks at His eternity and exclaims, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Thus do all the divine perfections become so many sources of terror and dismay to the convinced sinner. But no sooner does he obtain a knowledge of Christ — than his fears vanish. The divine perfections no longer forbid him to hope for mercy, but encourage him to do it. Instead of the thunders of the law — he hears the compassionate voice of Christ saying, "Be of good cheer, My blood cleanses from all sin! Your sins, which are many, are forgiven!" He feels boldness to enter into the holiest of all through the blood of Jesus, and exclaims with the apostle, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Such are the blessed effects which Paul experienced from a knowledge of Christ, and which every true believer experiences. Can we then wonder that, Paul exclaims, "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith!" Php 3:8-9 THE CONVINCED SINNER BELIEVING IN CHRIST When a convinced, guilty sinner, who feels condemned by the

law of God and his own conscience, and fears the sentence of eternal condemnation from the mouth of his Judge hereafter — hears and believes the glad tidings of salvation, they cause hope in the mercy of God to spring up in his anxious, troubled bosom. He says to himself, "I am a miserable, guilty creature. I have rebelled against my Creator, broken His law, and thus exposed myself to its dreadful curse. How, then, can I escape from this curse, which threatens to plunge me in eternal ruin? Can I call back . . .

the idle words I have uttered,

the sinful desires I have indulged,

the wicked actions I have committed,

the life I have wasted, or

the precious privileges and opportunities I have misimproved?

No! Can I wash away the guilt of these sins from my troubled conscience, or blot out the black catalogue of them which is written in the book of God's remembrance?

No! Can I make any satisfaction or atonement for them, to appease my justly offended God?

No!

Even should I be perfectly obedient in future — still this will not blot out my past sins. Besides, I find that I daily commit new sins; so that, instead of diminishing my guilt — I increase it!

What, then, can I do? Where can I turn? On what can I build any hope of mercy? Why should God pardon me and give me Heaven — when I have done and still do nothing but provoke Him? What can I, what must I do to be saved? The gospel indeed says, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.' It tells me that though my sins be of a crimson color and scarlet dye — yet if I forsake them and turn unto the Lord — then He will abundantly pardon. Why should not I believe in Christ, as well as others? His blood cleanses from all sin. But perhaps I am too great a sinner to be saved. Yet the gospel assures me that Christ came to save the chief of sinners. Why, then, should I doubt? Why should I not believe? I must, I will, I can, I do believe! Lord, help my unbelief!" THE EFFECTS OF CONVERSION When a man stands with his back to the sun — then his own shadow and the shadows of surrounding objects are before him. But when he turns towards the sun — then all these shadows are behind him.

It is the same in spiritual things. God is the great Sun of the universe. Compared with Him — creatures are but shadows. But while men stand with their backs to God — then all these shadows are before them and engross their affections, desires, and exertions. On the contrary, when they are converted and turn to God, all these shadows are thrown behind them, and God becomes all in all, so that they can say from the heart, "Whom have we in Heaven but You? And there is none on earth that we desire besides You!" The effect produced on a sinner who is brought from darkness into God's marvelous light, may be illustrated in the following manner: The Scriptures teach us that angels are continually present in our world and employed in executing the designs of God. Being spirits, they are of course invisible to mortal eyes. Hence we are unconscious of their presence, and therefore are not affected by it.

Now, suppose (for the supposition involves no impossibility) that God should impart to one of our human race the power of seeing these active and benevolent spirits. It is evident that this power would occasion a great change in the conduct and feelings of that man. He would see angels — where other people could see nothing. He would be interested by the sight; he would wish to form an acquaintance with these newly-discovered beings; he would frequently speak of them, of their employments and pursuits. Of course he would no longer be like other men — he would become, in one sense, a new creature, and the angels would appear to him so much more interesting than other objects, that his attention would be much diverted. Hence he would be thought either a visionary, or a deranged man.

Now, the height of divine truth does not make angels visible — but it makes the Lord of angels, the Father of spirits, in some sense, visible. It makes Him, at least, a reality to the mind, or, in the language of Scripture — it enables men to feel and act as if they saw Him who is invisible. It brings God into the circle of objects by which we perceive ourselves to be surrounded; and in whatever circle He is seen — He will be seen to be the most important object in it.

Now, if the sight of angels would effect a change in a man’s character — then much more will seeing the infinite God! His favor will appear all important, His anger dreadful; all other objects will, in a measure, lose their interest — and the man will be thought to be deluded or visionary or deranged.

Suppose a man engaged in some enterprise, for the success of which he is exceedingly desirous. He is surrounded, we will suppose, by a number of people who have it in their power either to aid or oppose his designs. Knowing this, he will, of course, make it his great object to secure their cooperation; or at least, to induce them not to oppose him.

Now, suppose another person to be introduced into the circle around him, possessed of far greater power than any or all of these united, to aid or oppose his designs. This circumstance will produce a great alteration in his views and feelings. It will now be his great object to secure the assistance of this new and more powerful person; and if he can obtain this, he will neither desire the aid nor fear the opposition of others. To apply this to the case of a lost sinner, living without God in the world — he desires to be happy and, for this purpose, to obtain those worldly objects which he deems necessary to happiness. He finds himself surrounded by creatures who have power either to aid or oppose him in procuring these objects. Of course, his principal aim is to avoid their opposition, and secure their friendship and assistance.

Now, suppose this man to begin to realize that there is a God — a being who superintends, directs, and governs all creatures and events; who can make him happy without their assistance, or render him miserable in defiance of all their endeavors to prevent it. Will not the introduction of such a being into the circle around him produce a great alteration in his plans, his views, and feelings?

Before this, he regarded creatures as everything. Now, they will appear comparatively as nothing. Before, God was nothing to him. Now He will be all in all. THE SELF-CONFIDENT

We see many who seem to promise fair for Heaven. They set out as if they would carry all before them, and say to Christ’s people as Orpah did to her mother-in-law, "Surely we will go with you." For a time they appear to run well. Like a flower plucked from its stalk and placed in water — they

look fair and flourishing. Many of their sins seem to be subdued, and many moral and religious duties are diligently practiced. But at length a day of trial comes. Temptations assault them; the world opposes them; the sins which seemed to be dead, revive; the effect of novelty wears off; the tumult of their feelings subsides; their little stock of zeal and strength and resolution is exhausted; and they have never learned to apply to Christ for fresh supplies.

Then it appears that they had no root in themselves. They begin to wither. Their blossoms fall off without producing fruit. They first grow weary, then faint, then utterly fall.

He depended on himself — and not on Christ. He depended on his own promises and resolutions — and not on God's. Hence, when his own stock fails, as fail it must — then he has nothing.

Everyone knows that no stream can rise higher than its fountain head. It is the same in religion; the stream that is to rise as high as Heaven — must have its fountainhead in Heaven. It must flow from that river of life which issues out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, and from that river it must be fed, or it will dry up.

If, with a careful and enlightened eye, we trace the path of a numerous church — then we shall find it strewn with the fallen, the fainting, the slumbering, and the dead — who once set out in their own strength and have been stopped, ensnared, and overthrown by various obstacles and enemies.

CHRISTIANS DISSIMILAR

We must not expect that all people will see the truths of religion with equal distinctness, or feel an equal degree of joy on being first brought from darkness into God's marvelous light. While some pass in a moment from the deepest distress and anguish — to the most rapturous emotions of joy and gratitude; others are introduced so gradually into the kingdom that they are hardly able to tell when they entered it. The subject may be illustrated by the different views and emotions which would be excited in three blind people, of whom one should be restored to sight at midnight, another at dawn, and a third amid the splendors of the meridian sun. The first, although his sight might be as perfectly restored as that of the others — would yet doubt for some time whether any change had been effected in him, and tremble, lest the faint outlines of the objects around him which he so indistinctly discovered, should prove to be the creations of his own imagination. The second, although he might at first feel almost assured of the change which had been wrought upon him, would yet experience a gradually-increasing confidence and hope, as the light brightened around him.

While the third, upon whose surprised and dazzled vision burst at once the refulgence of mid-day, would be transported, bewildered, and almost overwhelmed with the excess of surprise and joy and gratitude!

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN AND THE SINNER

Suppose you have a child who frequently disobeys your commands and neglects the duties which you require of him. Yet, if this neglect and disobedience seem to proceed from thoughtlessness, rather than from a rebellious disposition; if he appears sincerely penitent and every day comes and tells you, with tears in his eyes, "Father, I love you; I am sorry that I have done wrong; I am ashamed of myself and wonder that you have patience to bear with me and that you do not

disinherit me" — then you would love and forgive such a child and feel that there was hope of his reformation. But should your child say, or could you read the feeling in his heart, "Father, I cannot love you. I have never felt one emotion of love toward you, and I have no wish to obey your commands" — then would you not say that his case is hopeless — there is nothing for me to work upon — no feeling, no affection, no desire to do right.

Suppose you wished to separate a quantity of brass and steel filings, mixed together in one vessel — how would you effect this separation? Apply a magnet, and immediately every particle of iron will attach itself to it, while the brass remains behind. In the same way, if we see a company of true and false professors of religion, we may not be able to distinguish between them; but let Christ come among them, and all His sincere followers will be attracted toward Him, as the steel is drawn to the magnet, while those who have none of His spirit will remain at a distance.

Suppose we perceive a number of children playing together in the street — we could not, without previous knowledge, determine who are their parents or where are their homes. But let one of them receive an injury or get into any trouble — and we learn who are his parents, for he immediately runs to them for relief.

Thus it is with the Christian — and the man of the world. While we observe them together, pursuing the same employments and placed in the same circumstances, we may not be able at once to distinguish them. But let afflictions come upon them — and we are no longer at a loss. The man of the world seeks relief in earthly comforts — while the Christian flies to his heavenly Father, his refuge and support in the day of trouble.

FEAR AND HOPE

True religion consists in a proper mixture of fear of God, and of hope in His mercy. Wherever either of these is entirely lacking, there can be no true religion. God has joined these things, and we ought by no means to put them asunder. He cannot take pleasure in those who fear Him with a slavish fear, without hoping in His mercy — because they seem to consider Him as a cruel and tyrannical being who has no mercy or goodness in His nature. Besides, they implicitly charge Him with falsehood by refusing to believe and hope in His invitations and offers of mercy. On the other hand, He cannot be pleased with those who pretend to hope in His mercy, without fearing Him. For they insult Him by supposing that there is nothing in Him which ought to be feared. In addition to this, they make Him a liar by disbelieving His awful threatenings denounced against sinners, and call into question His authority, by refusing to obey Him.

Those alone who both fear Him and hope in His mercy — give Him the honor that is due to His name.

THE LAW HONORED IN THE SALVATION OF THE SINNER

That the gospel method of justification by faith in Christ secures the honor of the law, will appear evident if we consider the views and feelings which it requires of all who would be justified and saved by this method. These views and feelings, taken collectively, are called repentance and faith.

Repentance consists in hatred of sin, and sorrow on account of it. But sin is a transgression of the law. The penitent then hates and mourns for every transgression of the law of which he has been

guilty. But no man can sincerely hate and mourn over his transgressions of any law — unless he sees and feels that it is a just and good law. If he does not see this, if the law which he has transgressed appears in his view unjust, or not good — then he will hate and condemn not himself, but the law and the lawmaker.

Every real penitent then sees and acknowledges that the law which he has violated is holy and just and good and glorious; that he is justly condemned by it; and that he should have no reason to complain of God, if he were left to perish forever. He can say, "I deserve the curse, and let no one ever think harshly of God or of His law, though I should perish forever." And can those who exercise or those who inculcate such feelings as these — be justly accused of making void or of dishonoring the law? Do they not rather honor and establish it, by taking part with it against themselves, by saying, "The law is right — and we alone are wrong"? To place this in a still clearer light, permit me to throw into the form of a dialogue, the feelings which a penitent, believing sinner exercises and expresses when he applies to Christ to be justified or pardoned. Let us suppose the Savior to say to such a person, as He did to those who applied to Him for relief while on earth, "What would you have Me do for you?"

"Save me, Lord, from my sins and from the punishment which they deserve."

"In what do your sins consist?"

"They consist, Lord, in numberless transgressions of Your law."

"Is that law unjust?"

"Lord, it is most just."

"Why, then, did you transgress it?"

"Because, O Lord, my heart was rebellious and perverse."

"Can you offer no excuse, no plea of extenuation of your sins?"

"None, Lord; I am altogether without excuse, nor do I wish to offer any."

"Is not the punishment with which you are threatened, too severe?"

"No, Lord, I do deserve it all; nor can I escape it but through Your rich mercy and sovereign grace."

Such is, in effect, the language of everyone who applies to Christ for salvation; such the feelings implied in the exercise of repentance and faith.

The gospel method of justification, sets before us new and powerful motives to obey the law. For instance, it presents God, the Lawgiver, in a new and most interesting and affecting light. It shows Him to us as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, displaying the most wonderful compassion for our lost and guilty race, and so loving our revolted world, as to give His only begotten Son to die for its offences. Of all the attitudes in which God was ever revealed to His creatures, this is incomparably the most interesting and affecting. It is indeed interesting to view Him as our Creator, our Sovereign, our Preserver and Benefactor — and we are sacredly bound to regard Him in these characters — with gratitude, reverence, and love. But how much more interesting to see Him pitying the sorrows which our sins against Him had brought upon us, and

taking His only Son out of His bosom, to give Him up as a ransom to redeem us from those sorrows!

If God said to Abraham, "Now I know that you love Me — seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me". Then well may we say to God, "Lord, now we know that You love us, that You do not willingly punish us, that You have no pleasure in our death — since You have given Your Son, Your only and well-beloved Son, to die on the cross for our sins."

Thus the gospel method of salvation by revealing God to us in this most interesting and affecting light — powerfully urges us to love Him, to love His law, to repent of having disobeyed it, and to obey it hereafter.

Suppose human legislators could write their laws upon the hearts of their subjects. Would they not then secure obedience far more effectually than they can now do, by all the penalties which they annex to a violation of their laws? If they could give all their subjects a disposition to abhor murder, theft, injustice, and fraud — then would they not secure life and property in the most perfect manner? In the same way, if the law of God can be written in men’s hearts, if His love can be shed abroad in them, if they can be made holy — then it will secure obedience to that law far more effectually than all the thunders and lightnings of Sinai.

ADAM, OUR REPRESENTATIVE

It is sometimes asked, "How it can be right that we should suffer in consequence of the sins of our first parents?" In the first place, it is right because we imitate their example — and thus justify their conduct. We break the covenant and disobey the law of God, as well as they.

Another answer may be given by considering the subject in a different light. The angels who kept not their first estate had no covenant head or representative, but each one stood for himself. Yet they fell. God was therefore pleased, when He made man, to adopt a different constitution of things; and since it had appeared that holy beings, endowed with every possible advantage for obeying God’s law, would disobey it and ruin themselves — He thought proper, instead of leaving us like the angels, to stand for ourselves — to appoint a covenant head or representative to stand for us and to enter into covenant with him.

Now, let us suppose for a moment, that we and all the human race had been brought into existence at once and that God had proposed to us that we should choose one of our number to be our representative and to enter into covenant with him on our behalf. Would we not, with one voice, have chosen our first parent for this responsible office? Would we not have said, "He is a perfect man and bears the image and likeness of God; if anyone must stand or fall for us — then let him be the man"?

Now, since the angels, who stood for themselves, fell — then why should we wish to stand for ourselves? And if we must have a representative to stand for us — then why should we complain, when God has chosen the same person for this office that we would have chosen, had we been in existence and capable of choosing for ourselves?

CHRIST OUR REPRESENTATIVE

Christ "bore our sins" in the same sense in which the Jewish sacrifices, under the law, were said to bear the sins of him in whose behalf they were presented. The lamb which was offered did not itself become a sinner; and as little did Christ, our great Sacrifice, become sinful by bearing our sins. When, therefore, it is said that God laid on Him the iniquities of us all, and that He bore our sins in His own body on the tree — then the meaning is that God laid on Him, and that He bore the punishment which our sins deserved. Our sins were, by His own consent, imputed to Him, or as the word signifies, laid to His account. And He, in consequence, though innocent, was treated as a sinner.

It is a maxim in divine law, as well as in human laws — that what a man does by another, he does by himself. Now, in and by Christ, their surety, all who believe have done and suffered everything which the divine law, and consequently which justice, required. In Him, they have obeyed the law perfectly. In Him, they have suffered the curse which is due to sin. He was made sin for them — and they are made righteous in Him. Thus He is the end of the law for righteousness, to everyone that believes. The law of God is more highly honored by the obedience — and the justice of God more clearly displayed in the sufferings of so exalted a personage — than they could have been by the obedience or the sufferings of the whole human race.

Then, in the plan of redemption, God appears to be, at once, a just God and a Savior. Thus He can be just and yet the justifier of him who believes in Jesus. Justice and truth, as well as mercy and peace — will welcome to Heaven every redeemed sinner who is brought there through the merits of Christ.

Thus we see that these divine attributes, which were set at variance by the fall of the first Adam — are reunited and satisfied by the atonement of the second Adam.

Mercy may now say, "I am satisfied, for my petitions in behalf of wretched man have been answered, and countless millions of that ruined race will sing the praises of boundless mercy forever and ever."

Truth may now say, "I am satisfied, for God’s veracity and faithfulness remain inviolate, notwithstanding the salvation of sinners. Not one word that He has ever spokenn has failed of its full accomplishment."

Justice may say, "I am satisfied, for the honor of the law over which I watch has been secured; sin has met with deserved punishment; the Prince of life has died to satisfy my claims; and God has shown the whole universe that He loves me, even better than He loves His only Son; for when that Son cried, in agony, ’Father, spare Me,’ and I demanded that He should not be spared, God listened to my demands rather than to His cries."

Finally, Peace may say, "I am satisfied, for I have been permitted to proclaim peace on earth, and have seen God reconciling a rebellious world to Himself. Come, then, my sister attributes, Mercy, Truth and Righteousness — let us once more be united in perfect harmony and join to admire the plan which thus reconciles us to each other!"

SINNERS PARDONED FOR CHRIST’S SAKE

It was highly proper that the unexampled benevolence, humility, and other graces which Christ displayed in condescending to obey, suffer, and die in our stead — should receive from His

righteous Father a suitable reward; and that God should manifest, in a signal and illustrious manner, His approbation of such unequaled goodness to all His intelligent creatures. But the Son of God neither needed, nor could receive any reward for Himself; for He is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person, and possesses in the highest degree all possible perfection, glory, and felicity.

Since, therefore, it was necessary that Christ should be rewarded, and since He needed no reward for Himself — His Father was pleased, in the covenant of redemption, to promise Him what would be to His benevolent heart, the greatest of all rewards. He promised Him that if He would make His soul an offering for sin — then He should have a seed and people to serve Him; and that all His spiritual seed, all His chosen people who were given Him by His Father — should, for His sake and as a reward of His obedience, suffering, and death — be saved from the guilt and power of sin, be adopted as the children of God, made joint heirs with Christ of the heavenly inheritance, and receive, through Him, everything necessary to prepare and qualify them for its enjoyment.

Thus God bestows everlasting life, glory, and felicity on guilty rebels, merely for the sake of Christ — and with a view to convince all intelligent beings that He is infinitely well pleased with the holy benevolence which His Son displayed, when He consented to die in their stead.

PERFECTIONS OF GOD DISPLAYED IN THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION

There is more of God, more of His essential glory displayed in bringing one sinner to repentance and forgiving his sins — than in all the wonders of creation! In this work, creatures may see, if I may so express it, the very heart of God. From this work, angels themselves have probably learned more of God's moral character, than they had ever been able to learn before. They knew before that God was wise and powerful — for they had seen Him create a world. They knew that He was good — for He had made them perfectly holy and happy. They knew that He was just — for they had seen Him cast down their own rebellious brethren from Heaven to Hell for their sins. But until they saw Him give repentance and remission of sins through Christ — they did not know that He was merciful; they did not know that He could pardon a sinner. And O! What an hour was that in Heaven, when this great truth was first made known — when the first penitent was pardoned! Then a new song was put into the mouths of angels; and while, with unutterable emotions of wonder, love, and praise, they began to sing it — their voices swelled to a higher pitch, and they experienced joys unfelt before. O how did the joyful sounds, "His mercy endures forever!" spread from choir to choir, echo through the high arches of Heaven, and thrill through every enraptured angelic breast. And how did they cry with one voice, "Glory to God in the highest — on earth peace, and good will to man!"

On no page less ample than that of the eternal, all-enfolding mind which devised the gospel plan of salvation — can its glories be displayed; nor by any inferior mind can they be fully comprehended. Suffice it to say, that here the moral character of Jehovah shines full-orbed and complete! Here all the fullness of the Godhead, all the exquisite splendors of Deity burst, at once, upon our aching sight. Here the manifold perfections of God — holiness and goodness, justice and mercy, truth and grace, majesty and condescension, hatred of sin and compassion for sinners — are harmoniously blended, like the party-colored rays of solar light, in one pure blaze of dazzling whiteness! Here, rather than on any other of His works, He founds His claims to the highest admiration, gratitude, and love of His creatures!

Here is the work which ever has called forth, and which through eternity will continue to call forth — the most rapturous praises of the celestial choirs, and feed the ever-glowing fires of devotion in their breasts. For the glory which shines in the gospel is the glory which illuminates Heaven — and the Lamb who was slain is the light thereof.

CONDITION OF THE WORLD WITHOUT A SAVIOR

Would you learn the full extent of that wretchedness which sin produces — you must follow it into the eternal world and descend into those regions where peace and hope never come. And there behold sin tyrannizing over its wretched victims with uncontrollable fury — fanning the inextinguishable fire, and sharpening the tooth of the immortal worm!

See angels and archangels, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers — stripped of all their primeval glory and beauty — bound in eternal chains, and burning with rage and malice against that Being in whose presence they once rejoiced, and whose praises they once sang!

See multitudes of the human race, in unutterable agonies of anguish and despair — cursing the Giver and Prolonger of their existence, and vainly wishing for annihilation, to put an end to their miseries.

Follow them through the long, long ages of eternity — and see them sinking deeper and deeper in the bottomless abyss of ruin. View them perpetually blaspheming God because of their plagues, and receiving the punishment of these blasphemies in continued additions to their wretchedness.

Such are the wages of sin — such the doom of the finally impenitent! From these depths of anguish and despair — look up to the mansions of the blessed, and see to what a height of glory and felicity, the grace of God will raise every sinner who repents. See those who are thus favored in unutterable ecstasies of joy, love, and praise — contemplating God face to face, reflecting His perfect image, shining with a splendor like that of their glorious Redeemer, and bathing in those rivers of pleasure which flow forever at God’s right hand!

Follow them in their endless flight towards perfection. See them rapidly mounting from height to height, darting onward with increasing swiftness and unwearied wing, toward that infinity which they will never reach. View this, and then say whether infinite holiness and benevolence may not, with propriety, rejoice over every sinner that repents.

THE GOSPEL GLAD TIDINGS Do any doubt whether the gospel is indeed glad tidings of great joy?

Come with me to the Garden of Eden. Look back to the hour which followed man’s apostasy. See the golden chain which bound man to God and God to man, sundered, apparently forever. View this wretched world, groaning under the weight of human guilt, and its Maker’s curse — sinking down, far down, into a bottomless abyss of misery and despair!

See that tremendous Being who is a consuming fire, encircling it on every side and wrapping it, as it were, in an atmosphere of flame. Hear from His lips the tremendous sentence, "Man has sinned, and man must die!"

See the king of terrors advancing with gigantic strides to execute the awful sentence, the grave expanding her marble jaws to receive whatever might fall before his wide-wasting scythe. See Hell beneath, yawning dreadfully, to engulf forever its guilty, helpless, despairing victims!

Such was the situation of our ruined race after the apostasy. Endeavor, if you can, to realize its horrors. Endeavor to forget, for a moment, that you ever heard of Christ or His gospel. View yourselves as immortal beings hastening to eternity, with the curse of God’s broken law, like a flaming sword, pursuing you. See death, with his dart dipped in mortal poison, awaiting you! View a dark cloud, fraught with the lightnings of divine vengeance, rolling over your heads. See your feet standing in slippery places, in darkness — and the bottomless pit beneath expecting your eternal fall!

Then, when not only all hope, but all possibility of escape, seemed taken away, suppose . . .

the flaming sword suddenly quenched;

the sting of death extracted;

the sun of righteousness bursting forth and painting a rainbow on the before threatening cloud;

a golden ladder let down from the opening gates of Heaven, while a choir of angels, swiftly descending, exclaim, "Behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy, for unto you is born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!" Would you, could you, while contemplating such a scene and listening to the angelic message — doubt whether it communicated glad tidings? Would you not rather unite with them in exclaiming, "Glad tidings! Glad tidings! Glory to God in the highest, that there is peace on earth, and good will to men!"

CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE

It was highly important and desirable that our great High Priest should not only obtain for us the heavenly inheritance, but also go before us in the path which leads to it; that He should not only describe Christianity in His discourses, but exemplify it in His life and conduct. This our blessed Savior has done. In Him we see pure and undefiled religion embodied. In Him Christianity lives and breathes. And how amiable, how interesting does she there appear! How convincing, how animating is our Savior’s example! How loudly, how persuasively does His conduct preach! Would you learn submission to parental authority? See Him, notwithstanding His exalted character, cheerfully subjecting Himself to the will of His parents and laboring with them, as a mechanic, for almost thirty years. Would you learn contentment with a poor and low condition? See Him destitute of a place where to lay His head. Would you learn active beneficence? See Him going about doing good. Would you learn to be fervent and constant in devotional exercises? See Him rising for prayer before the dawn of day. Would you learn in what manner to treat your brethren? See Him washing His disciples’ feet. Would you learn filial piety? See Him forgetting his sufferings, while in the agonies of death, to provide another son for His desolate mother. Would you learn in what manner to pray for relief under afflictions? See Him in the garden. Would you learn how to bear insults and injuries? See Him on the cross! In short, there is no Christian grace or virtue, which is not beautifully exemplified in His life. There is scarcely any situation, however perplexing, in which the Christian, who is at a loss to know how he ought to act — may not derive sufficient instruction from the example of his divine Master.

"He who says he abides in Christ, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." 1 John 2:6 "Leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps." 1 Peter 2:21

CHRIST A TEACHER

A celebrated philosopher of antiquity, who was accustomed to receive large sums from his pupils in return for his instructions, was one day solicited by an indigent youth, who requested admission into the number of his disciples.

"And what," said the sage, "will you give me in return?"

"I will give you myself," was the reply.

"I accept the gift," answered the sage, "and engage to make you much more valuable than you are at present." In similar language does our great Teacher address those who apply to Him for instruction, conscious that they are unable to purchase His instructions, and offering to give Him themselves. He will readily accept the gift; He will educate them for Heaven, and will, at length, make them incomparably more wise, more happy, and more valuable, than when He received them.

HOW IS YOUR BELOVED BETTER THAN OTHERS?

"How is your Beloved better than others?" Song of Solomon 5:9 Does not our Friend as far excel all other friends — as Heaven exceeds earth — as eternity exceeds time — as the Creator surpasses His creatures?

If you doubt this, bring together all the glory, pomp and beauty of the world; nay, assemble everything that is great and excellent in all the worlds that ever were created. Collect all the creatures which the breath of Omnipotence ever summoned into being. Then place beside them, our Savior and Friend — that you may see whether they will bear a comparison with Him.

Look, then, first at your idols — behold the vast assemblage which you have collected; and then turn and contemplate our Beloved. See all the fullness of the Godhead, dwelling in One who is meek and lowly as a child. See His countenance beaming with ineffable glories, full of mingled majesty, condescension and love, and hear the soul-reviving invitations which proceed from His lips. See that hand in which dwells everlasting strength, swaying the scepter of universal empire over all creatures and all worlds. See His arms expanded to receive and embrace returning sinners; while His heart, a bottomless, shoreless ocean of benevolence — overflows with tenderness, compassion, and love. In a word, see in Him all natural and moral excellence personified and embodied in a resplendent form; compared with whose effulgent, dazzling glories — the splendors of the meridian sun are dark.

He speaks — and a world emerges from nothing. He frowns — and it sinks to nothing again. He waves His hand — and all the creatures which you have collected to rival Him, sink and disappear. Such, O sinner, is our Beloved, and such is our Friend. Will you not then embrace Him as your Friend? If you can be persuaded to do this — you will find that half, nay, that the thousandth part has not been told you!

All the excellency, glory, and beauty which is found in men or angels, flows from Christ — as a drop of water from the ocean, or a ray of light from the sun. If, then, you supremely love the creature — then can you wonder that Christians should love the Creator? Can you wonder that those who behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, should be sweetly drawn to Him by the cords of love, and lose their fondness for created glories? All that you love and admire and wish for in creatures, and indeed infinitely more — they find in Him. Do you wish for a friend possessed of power to protect you? Our Friend possesses all power in Heaven and earth, and is able to save even to the uttermost! Do you wish for a wise friend? In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Do you wish for a tender, compassionate friend? Christ is tenderness and compassion itself. Do you wish for a faithful, unchangeable friend? With Christ there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His unchangeable love will ever prompt Him to make His people happy! His unerring wisdom will point out the best means to promote their happiness! His infinite power will enable Him to employ those means. In all these respects, our Beloved is more than any other beloved; for creatures are not always disposed to render us happy. When they are disposed to do it — they do not always know how; and when they know how — they are often unable. Better is it, therefore, to trust in Christ, than to put confidence in princes.

CHRIST’S INVITATIONS TO THE WEARY AND OPPRESSED

To all who are afflicted either in body, mind, or estate; all whose worldly hopes and prospects have been blasted by losses and disappointments; all who are weeping over the grave of some near and dear relative — the language of Christ is, "Cast your burden upon Me, and I will sustain you. Call upon Me now in the day of trouble, and I will answer you. You have found that earthly friends and relations die — come, then, to Me and find a Friend who cannot die, One who will never leave nor forsake you, in life or death. You have found that treasures laid up on earth, make to themselves wings and fly away — come, then, to Me, and I will give you treasures which never fail and make you heirs of the heavenly inheritance. No longer spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not — but hearken diligently to My call and come unto Me; hear, and your souls shall live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

CHRIST’S DISPLEASURE AT SIN

We read of Christ’s being angry but three times during the whole period of His residence on earth — and in each of those instances, His anger was excited not by insults or injuries offered to Himself, but by conduct which tended to interrupt or frustrate His benevolent exertions in doing good. When He was reviled as a glutton and drunkard, and possessed by a devil — He was not angry. When He was buffeted, spit upon, and crowned with thorns — He was not angry. When nailed to the cross and loaded with insults in his last agonies — He was not angry. But when His disciples forbade parents to bring their children to receive His blessing; when Peter endeavored to dissuade Him from dying for sinners; and when sinners, by their hardness of heart, rendered His intended death of no service to themselves — then He was angry and much displeased.

Suppose a person whom you had found deserted in the streets when an infant and adopted and educated as your own child, should, when arrived to manhood, rob and attempt to murder you. Suppose him tried, convicted, condemned, and confined to await the execution of his sentence.

You pity him, forgive him, and wish to save his life. You fly to the proper authority, and after much expense and labor, obtain an assurance that if he will confess his crime, he shall be pardoned. You hasten to his dungeon to communicate the happy news. But he refuses to hear you, believe you, or confess his fault — he regards you with aversion, suspicion, and contempt, and turns a deaf ear to your entreaties. Would you not be unutterably shocked, disappointed, and grieved?

What, then, must be the feelings of Christ, when treated in a similar manner by those whom He died to save! Well may He look on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

Come with us a moment to Calvary. See the meek sufferer standing, with hands fast bound, in the midst of His enemies, sinking under the weight of His cross, and lacerated in every part by the cruel whips with which He had been scourged. See the savage, ferocious soldiers raising, with crude violence, His sacred body, forcing it down upon the cross, wresting and extending His limbs, and, with remorseless cruelty, forcing through His hands and feet, the ragged spikes which were to fix Him on it. See the Jewish priests and rulers watching, with looks of malicious pleasure, the horrid scene, and attempting to increase His sufferings by scoffs and blasphemies.

Now contemplate attentively the countenance of the wondrous sufferer, which seems like Heaven opening in the midst of Hell — and tell me what it expresses. You see it indeed full of anguish — but it expresses nothing like impatience, resentment, or revenge. On the contrary — it beams with pity, benevolence, and forgiveness. It perfectly corresponds with the prayer, which, raising His mild, imploring eyes to Heaven, He pours forth to God: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Christian, look at your Master — and learn how to suffer. Look at your Savior — and learn to admire, to imitate, and to forgive.

SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

It has been supposed by many, that the sufferings of Christ were rather apparent than real; or at least that His abundant consolations, and His knowledge of the happy consequences which would result from His death — rendered His sorrows comparatively light, and almost converted them to joys. But never was supposition more erroneous.

Jesus Christ was as truly a man as any of us. As man, He was as really susceptible of grief, as keenly alive to pain and reproach, and as much averse from pain and suffering — as any of the descendants of Adam. As to divine consolation and supports, they were at all times bestowed on Him in a very sparing manner; and in the season of His greatest extremity — they were entirely withheld. Though a knowledge of the happy consequences which would result from His sufferings. rendered Him willing to endure them — it did not in the smallest degree take off their edge or render Him insensible to pain. No, His sufferings, instead of being less, were incomparably greater than they appeared to be. No finite mind can conceive of their extent; nor was any of the human race ever so well entitled to the appellation of the man of sorrows, as the man Jesus Christ.

He saw, at one view, the whole mighty aggregate of human guilt and human wretchedness — and His boundless benevolence and compassion made it, by sympathy, all His own. It has been said by philosophers, that if any man could see all the misery which is daily felt in the world, he would

never smile again. We need not wonder then, that Christ, who saw it all, never smiled, though He often wept. THE LOVE OF CHRIST

In order to form some faint conception of the love of Christ, suppose, my Christian friends, that all your toils and sufferings were ended and you were safely arrived in Heaven, the rest which remains for the people of God. Suppose that you were there . . .

crowned with glory and honor and immortality,

listening with unutterable ecstasies to the song of the redeemed,

contemplating the ineffable, unveiled glories of Jehovah,

drinking full draughts from those rivers of pleasure which flow forever at His right hand,

and tasting those joys which the heart of man has not conceived.

What would tempt you to revisit this valley of tears, commence anew the wearisome journey of life, and encounter all the toils, the temptations, the sufferings and sorrows which attend it? Must it not be love stronger than death, love such as you cannot conceive of, which would induce you to do this?

How infinite, how inconceivable, then, must have been that love which brought down the Son of God from the celestial world to redeem our ruined race! How wondrous must be that love which led Him to exchange . . .

the bosom of His Father — for a veil of flesh;

the adoration of angels — for the scoffs and insults of sinners;

and the enjoyment of eternal life — for an accursed, painful and ignominious death!

Nothing but love could have done this! Not all the powers of Heaven, earth, and Hell combined — could have dragged Him from His celestial throne and wrested the scepter of the universe from His hands! No, it was love alone — divine, omnipotent love, which drew Him down! It was in the bands of love, that He was led as a willing captive, through all the toils and sufferings of a laborious life — and it was these bands which bound Him at the bar of Pilate, which fettered His arm of everlasting strength, and prevented His blasting His murderers to the bottomless pit!

Unless we could ascend into Heaven and see the glory and happiness which our Redeemer left; unless we could descend into the grave and learn the depths of wretchedness to which He sank; unless we could weigh, as in a balance, all the trials, toils and sufferings of His life — never, never can we know the immeasurable extent of His love! But these things we cannot do. None but the omniscient God knows what He felt or what He suffered — none but the omniscient God, therefore, knows the extent of His love.

To think of the love of Christ, is like trying to conceive of existence which has no beginning, and of power which can make something out of nothing. Tongue cannot describe it — finite minds cannot conceive of it — angels faint under it — and those who know most of it can only say, with inspiration, that it surpasses knowledge!

SELF-DENIAL OF CHRIST

The life of Christ was one of self-denial. He denied Himself, for thirty years, all the glories and felicity of the heavenly world — and exposed Himself to all the pains and sorrows of a life on earth. He denied Himself the praises and adorations of saints and angels — and exposed Himself to the blasphemies and reproaches of men. He denied Himself the presence and enjoyment of God — and exposed Himself to the society of publicans and sinners. He denied Himself everything that nature desires. He exposed Himself to everything which she dreads and abhors — to poverty, contempt, pain, and death. When He entered on His glorious and godlike design, He renounced all regard to His own comfort and pleasure — and took up the cross, a cross infinitely heavier and more painful than any of His disciples had been called to bear, and continued to carry it through a rough and thorny road, until His human nature, exhausted, sank under the weight! In short, He considered Himself, His time, His talents, His reputation, His happiness, His very existence — as not His own, but another's; and He ever employed them accordingly. He lived not for Himself, He died not for Himself — but for others He lived, and for others He died!

HE SHALL SEE OF THE TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL

How great, how inconceivable will be our Savior's happiness, after the final consummation of all things! Then the plan for which our world was formed, will be completed. Then every member of the church, for the sake of which He loved and visited our world, will have been brought home to Heaven, to be with Him where He is. And if He loved and rejoiced and delighted in them before they existed, and before they knew and loved Him — then how will He love and rejoice in them when He sees them surrounding His throne, perfectly resembling Himself in body and soul; loving Him with unutterable love, contemplating Him with ineffable delight, and praising Him as their deliverer from sin and death and Hell; as the author of all their everlasting glory and felicity!

Then — O blessed, animating thought — He will be amply rewarded for all His sufferings and for all His love to our ruined race! Then His people shall cease to grieve and offend Him. Then they shall no longer degrade Him by weak, confused, inadequate conceptions of His person, character, and work — for then shall they see as they are seen, and know even as they are known!

Then the whole church shall be presented to Him — a glorious church, without spot or blemish or imperfection; and shall be as a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and as a royal diadem in the hand of our God.

Then, O Zion, as a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. Then shall your sun no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself — but the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and your God, your glory; and the days of your mourning, and of your Savior's suffering, shall be ended!

If we love and prize and rejoice in any object in proportion to the labor, pain, and expense which it has cost us to obtain it — then how greatly must Christ love and prize and rejoice in every penitent sinner! His love and joy must be unutterable, inconceivable and infinite! For once, I rejoice that our Savior's toils and sufferings were so great, since the greater they were — the greater must be His love for us, and His joy in our conversion. And if He thus rejoices over one sinner that repents — then what must be His joy when all His people are collected, out of every tongue and kindred and people and nation, and presented spotless before His Father's throne! What a full tide of felicity

will pour in upon Him, and how will His benevolent heart expand with unutterable delight — when, contemplating the countless myriads of the redeemed, He says, "Were it not for My sufferings — all these immortal beings would have been, throughout eternity, fully miserable; and now they will be as happy as God can make them! It is enough. I see of the travail of My soul, and am satisfied."

CONDESCENSION AND LOVE OF CHRIST

The lowest beggar, the vilest wretch, the most loathsome, depraved, abandoned sinner — is perfectly welcome to the arms and the heart of the Savior — if he comes with the temper of the penitent prodigal. To all who come with this temper — He ever lends a gracious ear. He listens to catch the first penitential sigh; He watches their first feeble step towards the path of duty; He goes before them with His grace, hastens to meet them, and while they are ready to sink at His feet with mingled shame, confusion, and grief — He . . .

puts underneath them His everlasting arms,

embraces, cheers, supports and comforts them,

wipes away their tears,

washes away their stains,

clothes them with His righteousness,

unites them to Himself forever, and

feeds them with the bread and water of life!

Thus He binds up the broken reed, and enkindles the smoking flax. And, like a most tender, compassionate shepherd — He gathers the helpless lambs in His arms and carries them in His bosom.

Thus, by the condescending grace of our Immanuel, Heaven is brought down to earth; the awesome majesty, and inaccessible glories of Jehovah — are shrouded in a veil of flesh; a new and living way is opened for our return to God; and sinful, guilty worms of the dust — may talk with their Maker face to face, as a man talks with his friend.

Trembling sinner, desponding Christian, permit me to take you by the hand and lead you to Jesus. Why do you linger, why do you hang back? It is to Christ, it is to Jesus, it is to the Babe of Bethlehem, to a man like yourselves, to the meek and lowly Savior of sinners — that I would bring you. Here are no terrors, no flaming sword, no burning throne to appall you.

Come, then, to His feet, to His arms, to His heart — which overflows with compassion for your perishing souls. Come and contemplate the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth — and receive from His fullness, grace upon grace.

COMPASSION AND CONDESCENSION OF CHRIST

"Fear not," says the Savior to His penitent, heart-broken disciple.

"Fear not, trembling, desponding soul. My glory, My perfections need not alarm you — for they are all engaged on your side — all are pledged to secure your salvation.

"Tell Me not of your sins. I will take them away.

"Tell Me not of your weakness, your folly and ignorance. I have treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and strength for you.

"Tell Me not of the weakness of your graces. My grace is sufficient for you, for its riches are unsearchable.

"Tell Me not of the difficulties which oppose your salvation. Is anything too hard for Me?

"Tell Me not that the favors you are receiving are too great for you. I know that they are too great for you to merit — but they are not too great for Me to give.

"Nay, more, I will give you greater things than these! I will not only continue to pardon your sins, bear with your infirmities, and heal your backslidings — but give you larger and larger measures of My grace, make you more and more useful in the world, render you more than a conqueror over all your enemies, and at death wipe away forever all your tears! I will receive you to the mansions which My Father has prepared for you in Heaven, and cause you to sit down with Me on My throne forever and ever!"

Thus does Christ comfort those that mourn. Thus He encourages the desponding. Thus exalts those who humble themselves at His feet and constrains them to cry, in admiring transports of gratitude and love, "Who, O who is a God like unto You, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin!"

DEPART FROM ME, FOR I AM A SINFUL MAN, O LORD

As our views of our own sinfulness and of the abominable malignity of sin, are always in direct proportion to our views of the divine purity and glory — the Christian never appears to himself so unspeakably vile, so totally unworthy of his Savior’s love, or so unfit to enjoy His presence — as at the very time when he is favored with these blessings in the highest degree. The consequence is that he is astonished, confounded, crushed, and overwhelmed by a display of goodness so undeserved, so unexpected. When he has perhaps been ready to conclude that he was a vile hypocrite and to give up all for lost; or, if not, to fear that God would bring upon him some terrible judgment for his sins and make him an example to others — then to see his much-insulted Savior, his neglected Benefactor, his injured Friend — suddenly appear to deliver him from the consequences of his own folly and ingratitude; to see Him come with smiles and blessings, when he expected nothing but upbraidings, threatenings, and scourges — it is too much for him to comprehend — he knows not how to bear it — he scarcely dares take the consolation offered him, and thinks that it must be all a delusion.

Even when convinced beyond a doubt that it is not so; when he feels the healing virtue of his kind Physician pervading his whole soul and sees Him stooping to cleanse, to comfort, and embrace him — he shrinks back, involuntarily, as if the spotless Savior would be contaminated by his touch! He sinks down ashamed and broken-hearted at His feet! He feels unworthy and unable to look up! The more condescendingly Christ stoops to embrace him — so much lower and lower does he sink in the dust. At length his emotions find utterance, and he cries, "O Lord, treat me not thus kindly. Such favors belong to those only who do not poorly requite Your love as I have done. How can it be just, how can it be right — to give them to one so undeserving? Your kindness is lavished upon me in vain! Your mercies are thrown away upon one so incorrigibly vile! If You pardon me

now — then I shall offend you again! If You heal my backslidings — then I shall again wander from You. If You cleanse me — then I shall again become polluted. You must, O Lord, give me up; You must leave me to perish — and bestow Your favors on those who are less unworthy, less incurably prone to offend You!"

Such are often the feelings of the broken-hearted penitent; thus does he shrink from the mercy which pursues him — thus he seems to plead against himself. And, though he desires and prizes nothing so much as his Savior's presence — he feels constrained by a sense of his vileness and pollution to ask Him, and almost wish Him to depart and leave him to the fate which he so richly deserves.

JOY OF COMMUNING WITH GOD

At times, God is pleased to admit His children to nearer approaches and more intimate degrees of fellowship with Himself and His Son, Jesus Christ. He sends down the Spirit of adoption into their hearts, whereby they are enabled to cry, "Abba, Father!" and to feel those lively affections of love, joy, trust, hope, reverence and dependence, which it is at once their duty and their happiness to exercise toward their Father in Heaven. By the influences of the same Spirit He shines into their minds, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He causes His glory to pass before them, and makes them, in some measure — to understand the perfections of His nature. He also reveals to them the unutterable, inconceivable, unheard of things which He has prepared for those who love Him! He applies to them His exceeding great and precious promises, makes them to know that great love with which He has loved them — and thus causes them to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. He shines in upon their souls with the dazzling, melting, overpowering beams of grace and mercy proceeding from the Sun of righteousness. He gives them to know the heights and the depths, the lengths and the breadths, of the love of Christ which passes knowledge, and fills them with all the fullness of God. The Christian, in these bright, enraptured moments, while thus basking in beams of celestial light and splendor — forgets himself, forgets his existence, and is wholly absorbed in the ravishing, the ecstatic contemplation of uncreated beauty and loveliness. He endeavors to plunge himself into the boundless ocean of divine glory which opens to his view, and longs to be wholly swallowed up and lost in God. His whole soul goes forth in one intense flame of gratitude, admiration, love and desire. He contemplates, he wonders, he admires — he loves and adores. His soul dilates itself beyond its ordinary capacity and expands to receive the flood of happiness which overwhelms it. All its desires are satisfied. It no longer inquires, "Who will show us any good?" but returns unto its rest, because the Lord has dealt bountifully with it. The scanty, noisy, thirst-producing streams of worldly delight — only increase the feverish desires of the soul; but the tide of joy which flows in upon the Christian is silent, deep, full and satisfying. All the powers and faculties of his mind are lost, absorbed, and swallowed up in the contemplation of infinite glory! With an energy and activity unknown before — he roams and ranges through the ocean of light and love, where he can neither find a bottom nor a shore! No language can utter his feelings; but, with an emphasis, a meaning, an expression which God alone could excite, and which He alone can understand — he breathes out the ardent emotions of his soul, in broken words, while he exclaims, "My Father and my God!"
TO CHRISTIANS IN THE COMMENCEMENT OF A REVIVAL

Yes, O Christian, whoever you are, however tempted and distressed, however languishing and despairing you may be — the Master has come and calls for you. He does, as it were, call you by name, for He knows the names of His sheep. They are engraved on the palms of His hands, and He cannot forget them. His language is, "Where is this and that and the other one, among My flock, who used to watch for the tokens of My approach and come at the sound of My voice? Why do they not come to welcome My return and rejoice in My presence? Have they backslidden and wandered from My fold?"

Go and tell them that their Shepherd has come, and calls for them. Say unto them, "How long will you go about, O backsliding people? Return unto Me, and I will heal your backslidings." Are they tempted and distressed?

Go, and tell them that their High Priest and Intercessor, One who has been in all points tempted like as they are and who can therefore be touched with the feeling of their infirmities — has come and calls for them to spread their temptations and afflictions before Him. Are they borne down with a load of guilt and the weight of their sins against Me, so that they are ashamed to look Me in the face?

Tell them that I will receive them graciously and love them freely. Are they carried away by their spiritual enemies and bound in the fetters of vice, so that they cannot come to welcome Me?

Tell them that I am come to proclaim deliverance to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. Is am come to rescue the lambs of My flock from the paw of the lion and the jaws of the bear. Are they oppressed with fears that they shall one day perish by the hand of their enemies?

Go and tell them that My sheep never perish, and that none shall finally pluck them out of My hand. Are they slumbering and sleeping, insensible of My approach?

Go and awake them with the cry, "Behold the Bridegroom comes! Go out to meet Him!"

It is profitable for the children of God often to . . .

reflect on what they formerly were,

meditate on their once wretched and helpless condition,

look to the rock whence they were hewn, and to the pit whence they were dug.

Look back, then, Christians, to the time when you were . . .

the enemies of God,

the despisers of His Son,

the willing slaves of the father of lies,

and children of disobedience!

Look back to the time when . . .

your hearts were hard as the nether millstone;

your understandings were darkened;

you were alienated from the life of God;

your wills were stubborn, perverse and rebellious;

your affections were madly bent on the pleasures of sin;

every imagination of the thoughts of your hearts was evil only, and continually evil!

Look back with shame and self-abhorrence to the time when you . . .

lived without God in the world,

drank in iniquity like water,

served various lusts and vanities,

fulfilled the desires of the flesh and the mind,

casted God's law behind your backs,

stifled the remonstrances of conscience,

quenched the influences of the divine Spirit,

neglected the Holy Scriptures,

mocked God with pretended worship, while your hearts were far from Him.

How many calls and invitations did you slight! How many sermons did you hear, as though you heard not! How many prayers were offered up in your presence — while you, perhaps, never considered for a moment in what you were engaged, but allowed your thoughts to wander to the ends of the earth!

Even then, God was watching over you for good — and yet how ungratefully did you requite Him! How many mercies did you receive without making one grateful acknowledgment! How did you strive to provoke Him to jealousy and lead Him, if possible, to alter His gracious designs in your favor! A rebel against God,

a resister of the divine Spirit,

a slave of Satan,

a child of wrath,

an heir of Hell —

such, O Christian, was once your character! And nothing was then before you, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation!

When we remember an absent friend, we usually think with deep interest of the place where he is, of the business in which he is engaged, and of the time when we shall meet him.

Christians, you know where your Master is. You know what He is doing. You know that He now appears in the presence of God for you, that He ever lives to make intercession for you, and that before long you shall see Him and be with Him.

Think then, much and often, of the Heaven where He resides, of the perfect wisdom, fidelity, and constancy with which He there manages your concerns.

Remember that . . .

He watches for you while you sleep,

He labors for you while you are idle,

He intercedes for you even while you are sinning against Him! Will you, then, ever sin? Will you, while awake, ever be idle? Will you be unfaithful or slothful in laboring for Him — while He is ever active and faithful in promoting your interests?

Admire the free grace of God, who save you from such a dreadful plight!

"Look to the hole of the pit from which you were dug!" Isaiah 51:1

CHRISTIANS, MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

Since Christ is the head of the body of which Christians are members — then He has a right to expect the same services from them, which we expect from our bodily members. Now what we expect from our bodily members is that every one, in its proper place, should perform the services allotted it, executing the purposes and obeying the commands of the head. We do not expect that each member should have a separate will or pursue a separate interest or act in any respect as if it were independent. If any part of our bodies does not fulfill these expectations and yield prompt and implicit obedience to our will — then we conclude it to be diseased. If the acts of the will produce no effect upon it — then we conclude it to be dead and remove it, if possible, as a useless encumbrance.

We further expect that our bodily members, instead of attempting to provide, each one, for its own needs — will depend upon the wisdom and foresight of the head for all necessary supplies. In a word, we know that it is the part of the head to plan, direct, and provide — and the part of the members to obey and execute. Precisely similar are the duties of Christians, considered as the members of Christ. No Christian must have a separate will or a separate interest of his own — or act, in any respect, as if he were an insulated, independent individual. As there is but one head — so there must be but one governing, guiding will, and that must be the will of Christ. If any neglect to execute His will — then they are spiritually diseased. If this neglect is habitual — then they are spiritually dead and were never really united to Christ; for His real members never die.

It is also their duty to depend on Him for everything, for the supply of all their temporal and spiritual necessities; and never to attempt anything but in reliance on His wisdom, grace, and strength. As well may our feet walk safely or our hands work skillfully, without assistance and guidance from the head — as Christians can perform any service without the grace of Christ their head, in whom are laid up all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and grace. THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSOLATION

Christians, a man now fills the throne of Heaven. And who is this man? Believer, mark it well. It is a man who is not ashamed to call you brother. It is a man who can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities, for He has been in all points tempted like as you are — yet without sin. Whatever your sorrows or trials may be — He knows by experience how to sympathize with you. Has your Heavenly Father forsaken you, so that you walk in darkness and see no light? He well remembers what He felt when He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Has Satan wounded you with his fiery darts? He remembers how sorely His own heart was bruised when He wrestled with principalities and powers and crushed the head of the prince of darkness. Are you assaulted with various and distressing temptations? Christ was tempted to presume upon His Father's love, and to worship the father of lies. Are you pressed down with a complication of sorrows, so as to despair even of life? The soul of Christ was once exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Are you mourning for the danger of unbelieving friends? Christ's own brethren did not believe in Him. Does the world persecute and despise you, or are your enemies those of your own household? Christ was despised and rejected of men, and His own relations stigmatized Him as a madman. Are you suffering under slanderous and unjust accusations? Christ was called a man gluttonous and a drunkard — a friend of publicans and sinners. Are you struggling with the evils of poverty? Jesus had nowhere to lay His head. Do Christian friends forsake or treat you unkindly? Christ was denied and forsaken by His own disciples. Are you distressed with fears of death? Christ has entered the dark valley that He might destroy death.

O, then, banish all your fears. Look at your merciful High Priest who is passed unto the heavens, and triumphantly exclaim with the apostle, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

There are promises of light and direction to find the path which leads to a holy life; promises of assistance to walk in that path; promises of strength to resist and overcome all opposition; promises of remedies to heal us when wounded, of cordials to invigorate us when faint, and of most glorious rewards to crown the end of our course.

You will hear Jehovah saying, "Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God! I will strengthen you — yes, I will help you — yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness." Though you are in yourself but a worm, you shall thresh the mountains and beat them as small as the dust.

Look next at Him who gives these promises. It is one who is almighty — and who therefore can fulfill them. It is one who cannot lie — and therefore will fulfill them. It is one who possesses all power in Heaven and on earth, one whose treasures of grace are unsearchable and inexhaustible, one in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. With all this fullness — faith indissolubly unites us.

Say, then, you who despond and tremble when you contemplate the almost immeasurable distance between your own moral characters and that of Christ — what, except faith in these promises and in their Author, is necessary, to support, encourage, and animate you in going on to maturity?

Let not the Christian listen to the suggestions of indolence, despondency, and unbelief — but let him listen rather to the calls and promises of Christ. See what He has already done for those who relied on His grace.

Look at Enoch, who walked with God.

Look at Abraham, the friend of God.

Look at Moses, the confidential servant of God.

Look at Daniel, the man greatly beloved of God.

Look at Stephen, full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

Look at Paul, glowing with an ardor like that of "the enrapt seraph, who adores and burns" — and at the many other worthies with whom the historian and biographer have made us acquainted. See to what heights they soared. And who enabled them to make these approaches, to soar to these heights? He, I answer, who now calls upon you to follow them — He who now offers you the same assistance which He afforded them.

Rely, then, with full confidence on His perfections and promises, and recommence with new vigor your Christian warfare. Do you still hesitate and linger? O you of little faith — why do you doubt? Why cast a trembling, desponding glance upon the roaring wind and stormy waves which oppose your progress? Look rather at Him who calls you onward — at the omnipotent arm, which is to be your strength and support. Look until you feel faith and hope and courage, reviving in your breast. Then say to your Lord, "I come. I will follow where You lead the way. I will once more aim, with renovated strength, at the holiness which I have long deemed unattainable."

This world is the place for labor, and not for rest or enjoyment, except that enjoyment which may be found in serving God. We shall have time enough in the coming world to rest and to converse with our friends. It may well reconcile us to separation here, if we hope to be forever with them there.

The young Christian thinks it would be best that he should be always lively, zealous, and engaged in religion — that he should feel faith, love, and humility in constant exercise and be like a flame of fire in his Master’s service. But our blessed Teacher thinks otherwise.

He knows that the most effectual, and, indeed, the only way, to mortify sin in our hearts — is to make us hate it; and the way to make us hate it is to allow us to feel it.

He knows that the only way to make us fervent and diligent in prayer, is to show us how many things we have to pray for, and convince us of our absolute need of His assistance.

He knows that the best way to make us humble and contented is to show us what we are and what we deserve it.

He knows that the only way to wean us from the world is to render it a place of fatigue and uneasiness.

He knows that there is nothing like the want of His presence to teach us the worth of it; and nothing like a sense of the dangerous nature of our disease, to show us the value of an almighty Physician.

Upon this plan, therefore, it is, that all His various dispensations toward Christians are conducted — and until they are acquainted with this, they cannot understand them.

CHRIST UNCHANGEABLE

As amid all the vicissitudes of the seasons, the succession of day and night, and the changes of the weather — the sun remains and shines in the same part of the heavens. In the same way, amid all the daily changes which the Christian experiences, from darkness to light, and from summer to winter, in calms and tempests — the Sun of righteousness still continues the same; and 'tis the same love and wisdom which leads Him to hide or to unveil His face. But the Christian is at first ready to imagine that the changes in his feelings, proceed from changes in Christ; as those who do not consider the motion of the earth, imagine that the sun really rises and sets.

Above all, I would say to the Christian — never distrust the kindness, the love, the wisdom and faithfulness of your Savior — but confide in Him who has promised that all things shall work together for your good. Though you may not now know what He is doing — you shall know hereafter. You will see the reason of all the trials and temptations, the dark and comfortless hours, the distressing doubts and fears, the long and tedious conflicts with which you are now exercised; and you will be convinced that not a sigh, not a tear, not a single uneasy thought was allotted to you — without some wise and gracious design.

Say not, then, like Jacob of old, "All these things are against me!" Say not, like David, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul!" For all these things are for your good, and you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of Christ's hand!

Why should you, who are sons of the King of Heaven, be lean and discontented from day to day? Remember that, if you are in the path of the just — then you are the heir of God and joint heir with Christ, of an inheritance which is incorruptible, eternal, and that fades not away. Be not discouraged at the small progress you appear to make or the difficulties you may meet with. Why should the infant be discouraged because he has not the strength of manhood or the wisdom of old age? Wait on the Lord in the diligent use of His appointed means, and He will strengthen your hearts, so that you shall mount up as on eagles' wings — you shall run, and not be weary — you shall walk, and not faint.

Who is he that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God. Let him go to Jesus, the compassionate Savior of sinners, who heals the broken in heart, who gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them in His bosom. Go, I say, to Him! Tell Him all your griefs and sorrows! Tell Him that your souls cleave to the dust! Tell Him that iniquities, doubts, and fears prevail against you! Tell Him that you are poor and miserable and wretched and blind and naked. Go to His mercy-seat, where He sits as a merciful High Priest, on purpose to give repentance and remission of sins. Go and embrace His feet, lay open your whole hearts, state all your difficulties, complaints, and diseases — and you will find Him infinitely more gracious than you can conceive; infinitely more willing to grant your requests than you are to make them. He is love itself — it is His very nature to pity. Have you a hard heart? Carry it to Him, and He will soften it. Have you a blind mind? He will enlighten it. Are you oppressed with a load of guilt? He will take it of. Are you defiled and polluted? He will wash you in His own blood. Have you backslidden? "Turn unto Me," says He, "O backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings."

Come, then, to Christ and obtain those influences of His Spirit by which you shall be enabled to grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So shall your path be as

the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day.

How great are the privileges which result from an ability to say, "Christ is mine!" If Christ is yours, then all that He possesses is yours. His power is yours, to defend you! His wisdom and knowledge are yours, to guide you! His righteousness is yours, to justify you! His Spirit and grace are yours, to sanctify you! His Heaven is yours, to receive you!

He is as much yours as you are His, and as He requires all that you have to be given to Him — so He gives all that He has to you. Come to Him, then, with holy boldness, and take what is your own. Remember you have already received what is most difficult for Him to give — His body, His blood, His life. And surely He who has given these, will not refuse you smaller blessings. You will never live happily or usefully — you will never highly enjoy or greatly adorn religion — until you can feel that Christ, and all that He possesses, are yours, and learn to come and take them as your own!
THE BIBLE ENTIRELY PRACTICAL

We may challenge any man to point out a single passage in the Bible which does not either teach some duty or inculcate its performance — or show the grounds on which it rests or exhibit reasons why we should perform it. For instance:

all the preceptive parts of Scripture prescribe our duty;

all the invitations invite us to perform it;

all the promises and threatenings are motives to its performance;

all the cautions and admonitions warn us not to neglect it;

the historical parts inform us what have been the consequences of neglecting and of performing it;

the prophetical parts show us what these consequences will be hereafter;

and the doctrinal parts show us on what grounds the whole superstructure of duty or of practical religion rests.

In the judgment of God, there is no more heinous sin than that of hearing, with unconcern, His messages of love and mercy. "Does not My word do good to him that walks uprightly?" It always does. Yet Christians often go away from hearing the word unaffected.

DUTY OF STUDYING THE BIBLE

The Scriptures are given to us as a rich mine, in which we may labor and appropriate to ourselves all the treasures we find. The more diligently we labor, and the more wealth we obtain — so much the more is the Giver pleased. As we cannot be too careful not to pry into the secret things of God — so we cannot be too diligent in searching into everything which God has revealed. If we search in the manner which He has prescribed — then we shall make all the good things contained in the Scriptures our own, in a still higher sense. We shall make that God, that Savior, that holiness, that Heaven which the Bible reveals — our own forever, our own to possess and to enjoy. In short:

Every truth of Scripture, is ours to enlighten us.

Every precept of Scripture, is ours to direct us.

Every admonition of Scripture, is ours to warn us.

Every promise of Scripture, is ours to encourage and animate us. For these purposes God has given Scripture, and for these purposes we are to receive it.

PRAYER

We may judge of the state of our hearts — by the earnestness of our prayers. You cannot make a rich man, beg like a poor man; you cannot make a man that is full, cry for food like one that is hungry; no more will a man who has a good opinion of himself, cry for mercy like one who feels that he is poor and needy.

The symptoms of spiritual decline are like those which attend the decay of bodily health. It generally commences with loss of appetite, and a disrelish for spiritual food, prayer, reading the Scriptures and devotional books. Whenever you perceive these symptoms, be alarmed, for your spiritual health is in danger; apply immediately to the great Physician for a cure.

The best means of keeping near to God, is the prayer-closet — here the battle is won or lost.

If a man begins to be impatient because his prayers for any blessings are not answered, it is a certain proof that a self-righteous dependence on his own merits prevails in his heart to a great extent; for the language of impatience is, "I deserve the blessing! I have a right to expect that it would be bestowed, and it ought to have been bestowed before this."

It is evident that a man who feels that he deserves nothing, will never be impatient because he receives nothing; but will say, "I have nothing to complain of — I receive as much as I deserve."

Again, when a man wonders or thinks it strange that he does not receive a blessing for which he has prayed — it shows that he relies on his own merits. The language of such feelings is, "It is very strange that I, who have prayed so well and so long and had so much reason to expect a blessing — do not receive it."

People who feel truly humble, on the contrary, are surprised, not when blessings are withheld, but when they are bestowed. It appears very strange and astonishing to them, that God should bestow any favors on creatures so unworthy as themselves, or pay any regard to prayers so polluted as their own. This is the temper to which every person must be brought before God will answer his prayers.

PRAISE

No one needs to be told that the surest method to obtain new favors from an earthly benefactor, is to be thankful for those which he has already bestowed. It is the same with respect to our heavenly Benefactor.

I have somewhere met with an account of a Christian who was shipwrecked upon a desolate island, while all his companions perished in the waves. In this situation, he spent many days in fasting and prayer that God would open a way for his deliverance; but his prayers received no answer. At length, musing on the goodness of God in preserving him from the dangers of the sea, he resolved to spend a day in thanksgiving and praise for this and other favors. Before the conclusion of the day, a vessel arrived and restored him in safety to his country and friends.

Another instance, equally in point, we find in the history of Solomon. At the dedication of the temple, many prayers were made and many sacrifices offered without any token of the divine acceptance. But when singers and players on instruments began as one to make one sound to be heard, in praising and thanking the Lord, saying, "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever," then the glory of the Lord descended and filled the temple. The reason why praise and thanksgiving are thus prevalent with God is that they, above all other duties, glorify Him. "Whoever offers praise," says He, "glorifies Me"; and those who thus honor Him, He will honor. THE LORD'S SUPPER

At the communion table, we are in fact assembled to attend our Savior's funeral, to look at His dead body, as we look at the countenance of a deceased friend before the coffin is closed. And if every wrong, every worldly feeling should die away while we are contemplating the corpse of a friend — then how much more ought this to be the case when this friend is Christ! I think it may be profitable sometimes to shut ourselves up in imagination, in our Savior's tomb, and feel as if He were there buried with us.

At the table of our Lord, each of us should recollect the personal favors and marks of kindness which we have received from Christ, or through His mediation. Our temporal mercies, our spiritual privileges should all pass in review. We should look back to the never-to-be-forgotten time of love, when He found us poor, miserable, wretched, blind and naked; dead in trespasses and sins, having no hope, and without God in the world.

We should remember how He pitied us, awakened us, convinced us of sin, and drew us to Himself by the cords of love. We should remember how often He has since healed our backslidings, pardoned our sins, borne with our unbelief, ingratitude, and slowness to learn; supplied our needs, listened to our complaints, alleviated our sorrows, and revived our drooping spirits when we were ready to faint. In short, we must remember all the way by which He has led us these many years, through a wilderness of sins, sorrows, trials, and temptations. Thus we shall be convinced that no sickly infant ever cost its mother a thousandth part of the care and labor and suffering — which we have cost our Savior; and that no mother has ever shown her infant a thousandth part of the watchful tenderness which our Savior has shown to us.

Was Christ a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? Then, Christians, we need not be surprised or offended if we are often called to drink of the cup of sorrows, or if we find this world to be a valley of tears. This is one of the ways in which we must be conformed to our glorious Head. Indeed, His example has sanctified grief and almost rendered it pleasant to mourn. One would think that Christians could scarcely wish to go rejoicing through a world which their Master passed through mourning. The paths in which we follow Him, are bedewed with His tears and stained with His blood. It is true that from the ground thus watered and fertilized, many rich flowers and fruits of paradise spring up to refresh us, in which we may and ought to rejoice. But still our joy should be softened and sanctified by godly sorrow. When we are partaking of the feast which His love has spread for us — then we should never forget how dearly it was purchased.

"There's not a gift His hand bestows,

But cost His heart a groan!" The joy, the honor, the glory, through eternity shall be ours — but the sorrows, the sufferings, the agonies which purchased it, were all His own.

RELATIVE DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS

Since all Christians are members of the same body — they ought not to envy each other. What could be more absurd than for the eye to envy the dexterity of the hand — or the feet to envy the perspicuity of the eye which directed their motions and prevented them from running into danger? Still more absurd is it, if possible, for one Christian to envy the gifts or graces or usefulness of another — since the whole body, and he among the rest, enjoys the benefit of them. The fact is, whenever God bestows a favor on any Christian — He does, in effect, confer a favor on all; just as when a man heals or clothes one part of the body — he confers a benefit on the whole. Rejoice and bless God, then, Christians, when He honors or favors any fellow Christian — for it is an act of kindness done to you, and will promote your present and eternal felicity. No Christian should be dissatisfied with his lot, if he is poor and despised. Neither should he indulge pride, if honored and prospered. Every Christian is in that exact situation which God in His infinite wisdom, sees best for him — and the most highly favored Christians are, in many respects, dependent on the lowest. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.' If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? And if the whole body were hearing, where were the smelling? But now God has set the members in the body, every one as it has pleased Him," and it is the same in the great body of Christ.

It is incumbent on every Christian to ascertain for what he is qualified — and what service he is called to perform for the body of which he is a member. You can easily conceive what would be the consequence, in the human body — should the feet attempt to perform the work of the hands; or the hands attempt to perform the office of the eye.

Almost equally pernicious and ridiculous are the consequences occasioned by the self-ignorance, vanity, or false modesty of many Christians. They either do not know their place — or if they do, will not perform the duties of it.

Hence some will attempt to perform the duty of social prayer or of exhortation or of expounding the Scriptures, whom God never designed, and therefore never qualified for that work; and who, of course, cannot perform it in an edifying, acceptable manner. While others, whom He had thus qualified, for some cause or other, decline attempting it. Hence it is too often the case, that a church of Christ, instead of resembling a well-organized body in which the several members know and keep their place and perform its duties — resembles a disorderly family in which no one knows his place, and, of course, there is nothing but confusion and complaint.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

There are some Christians whom it is not very easy to love, on account of some disagreeable peculiarities about them. But we shall love them hereafter, as we love our own souls, and they will love us in a similar manner. Besides, our Savior loves them, notwithstanding all these imperfections. Ought not we to love those whom He loves? If He were now visibly on earth and we were permitted to stand by His side, if we saw Him bend a look of love on any individual, would not our affections immediately flow out toward that person, however disagreeable or imperfect he might be? Such a look our Savior does bend on the most unlovely of His disciples. Let us, then, love them all, for His sake.

"Not for ourselves, but others" is the grand law of nature, inscribed by the hand of God on every part of creation. Not for itself, but others — does the sun dispense its beams. Not for themselves, but others — do the clouds distill their showers. Not for herself, but others — does the earth unlock her treasures. Not for themselves, but others — do the trees produce their fruits or the flowers diffuse their fragrance and display their various hues. In the same way, not for himself, but others, are the blessings of Heaven bestowed on man. And whenever, instead of diffusing them around, he devotes them exclusively to his own gratification and shuts himself up in the dark and flinty caverns of selfishness — he transgresses the great law of creation; he sacrilegiously converts to his own use, the favors which were given him for the relief of others — and must be considered, not only as an unprofitable servant, but as a fraudulent servant who has worse than wasted his Lord's money!

He who thus lives only to himself and consumes the bounty of Heaven upon his lusts, or consecrates it to the demon of avarice — is a barren rock in a fertile plain! He is a thorny bramble in a fruitful vineyard! He is the grave of God's blessings! He is a desert of the moral world. And if he is highly exalted in wealth or power — then he stands, inaccessible and strong, like an insulated towering cliff which exhibits only a cold and cheerless prospect, intercepts the genial beams of the sun, chills the valleys below with its gloomy shade, adds fresh keenness to the freezing blast, and tempts down the lightnings of angry Heaven.

How different is this from the gently-rising hill, clothed to its summit with fruits and flowers, which attracts and receives the dews of Heaven, and retaining only sufficient to supply its numerous offspring — sends the remainder in a thousand streams to bless the valleys which lie at its feet!

DUTIES TO THE HEATHEN

It is a fact that vigorous and persevering exertions in favor of religion abroad, naturally excite, and are inseparably connected with similar and successful exertions at home. Witness the example of Great Britain. While she was reaching the full cup of life and salvation to other countries — the drops which fell from it refreshed and fertilized her own. Witness the present religious situation of our own country. Never, in the same space of time, was so much done for its amelioration; never were the Scriptures so generally diffused among us; never were our domestic missions in so prosperous a state; never were their endeavors crowned with so much success — as since we began to send Bibles and missionaries to the heathen. God has been pouring out spiritual blessings upon our churches, our towns, our villages and our schools. Thus, for every missionary whom we have sent abroad — He has given us ten to labor at home.

If we wish to obtain greater blessings of a similar kind — then we must seek them in a similar way. If vice and infidelity are to be finally conquered and banished from our country — then the battle must be fought, and the victory won, on the plains of India.

True charity receives her instructions, as well as her existence, from faith in God's Word; and when faith points to human beings in danger — then charity, without delaying to propose questions, hastens to their relief.

Our houses are built, our vineyards are planted, around the base of a volcano. They may be fair and flourishing today — tomorrow, ashes may be all that remains. Open your hands wide, then, while they contain any blessings to bestow — for of that which you give, you can never be

deprived.

CHRIST GLORIFIED IN HIS CHURCH

When we look at the sun, we only perceive that it is a bright and glorious luminary. But when we behold the earth in spring, in summer, or autumn, clothed with luxuriant vegetation, adorned with flowers, and enlivened by myriads of sportive, happy beings; when we compare this state of things with the rigors, the frost, the barrenness of winter — we recollect that the sun is instrumentally the cause of this mighty difference, and reflect how gloomy and desolate our world would be if wholly deprived of its beams, we have far more clear and enlarged conceptions of the value and excellence of this luminary. The sun is then, if I may so express it, glorified in the earth, and admired in all the productions and beneficial effects which result from his influence. In a similar manner will Christ, the Sun of righteousness, be glorified and admired in His people. It will then be clearly seen how much mercy was necessary to pardon their sins, how much grace was required to sanctify, preserve and glorify them; how much wisdom, goodness, and power were displayed in devising and executing the wondrous plan of their redemption. They will not, therefore, be admired — but Christ will be seen and admired in them. The assembled universe will be ready to exclaim with one voice, "How infinitely powerful, wise, and good must He be — who could transform sinful, guilty worms of the dust — into beings so perfectly glorious and lovely!"

MISCELLANEOUS DIRECTIONS TO CHRISTIANS

God commands all men to repent. Christians have enough to repent of daily — and should always be in a penitent frame.

Let your great Physician heal you in His own way. Only follow His directions and take the medicine which He prescribes — and then quietly leave the result with Him.

What God calls a man to do — He will carry him through. I would undertake to govern half a dozen worlds — if God called me to do it; but I would not undertake to govern half a dozen sheep — unless God called me to it.

To a person who has been frustrated in a benevolent design: I congratulate you and anticipate your eventual success. I do not recollect ever to have succeeded in anything of importance, in which I did not meet with some rebuff at the commencement.

THE WAY TO CURE A COVETOUS SPIRIT

Suppose you were to pass over a pit which had no bottom — would you endeavor to fill it up, or bridge it over?

Anticipated sorrows are harder to bear than real ones — because Christ does not support us under them. In every trouble, we may see the footsteps of Christ’s flock who have gone before us.

Christian friends, when separated from each other’s society, may derive comfort from the reflection that God is able to extend a hand to two of His children at the same time, however remote may be their places of habitation.

Everything we do or say should be immediately tried by a little court within our own hearts. Our motives should be examined, and a decision made on the spot.

Our best rule is to give God the same place in our hearts — that He holds in the universe. We must make Him all in all. We should act as if there were no beings in the universe, but God and ourselves.

As the eye which has gazed at the sun, cannot immediately discern any other object; as the man who has been accustomed to behold the ocean turns with contempt from a stagnant pool — so the mind which has contemplated eternity, overlooks and despises the things of time.

If at any time you have enlargement in prayer and are favored with access to the throne of grace — do not go away satisfied and self-complacent. Pride says, "I have done very well now — God will accept this." You perhaps discover that this is the suggestion of pride; it then takes a new turn, "Another would not have discovered it to be pride — I must be very humble to see it thus." Thus if you continue the search, you will find pride, like the different layers of an onion, lurking one beneath another to the very center.

Praise Christ for everything. He is the foundation of every good thought, desire, and affection. It should be our aim to draw all we can from Him by prayer — and return Him all we can by praise.

O DEATH! WHERE IS YOUR STING?

The power of death, the last enemy, is destroyed — as it respects all who believe in Christ. Instead of being the jailer of Hell and the grave — death is now, as it respects Christ's people, the porter of paradise! All he can now do, is to cause them to sleep in Jesus, release their immortal spirits from the fetters which bind them to earth, deposit their weary bodies in the tomb, as a place of rest until Christ comes at the last day to raise them incorruptible, glorious, and immortal; and reunite them to their souls in a state of perfect, never-ending felicity. TO THE MINISTERS OF CHRIST

Every benevolent person is gratified by being made the bearer of pleasing news. The messenger who is commissioned to open the prison doors of an insolvent debtor or pardoned criminal, and restore him to the embraces of his family; the officer who is sent by his commander in chief to carry home tidings of an important victory; and still more the ambassador who is appointed to proclaim pardon and peace, in his sovereign's name, to conquered rebels — thinks himself, and is thought by others, to have received no common favor. Should God put into your hands the wonder-working rod of Moses; should He commission and enable you to work miracles of beneficence, to enrich the poor, to comfort the miserable, to restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, health to the diseased, and life to the dead — you would esteem it a favor and honor incomparably greater than earthly monarchs can bestow. But in committing the gospel to your care, God has conferred on you honors and favors, compared with which even the power of working miracles is a trifle! He has put into your hands, the cross of Christ — which is an instrument of far greater efficacy than the rod of Moses. He has sent you to proclaim the most joyful tidings that Heaven can desire, or that earth can hear. He has sent you to preach deliverance to captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, the balm of Gilead and the great Physician to the spiritually wounded and diseased, salvation to the self-destroyed, and everlasting life to the dead. In a word, He commissions and enables them to work miracles, not upon the bodies, but upon the souls of men; miracles not merely of power, but of grace and mercy; miracles, to perform which, an angel would think himself highly honored in being sent down from

Heaven; miracles from the performance of which it is difficult to say whether greater glory redounds to God, or greater happiness to man. Well then may every minister of Christ exclaim with Paul, "I thank my God for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry!"

Though in committing the gospel to their trust, God has conferred on ministers the greatest honor and favor which can be given to mortals — yet, like all other favors, it brings with it a great increase of responsibility. Remember that the more highly anyone is exalted, in this respect — the more difficult it becomes to stand, and the more dangerous it is to fall. He who falls from a pulpit — seldom stops short of the lowest abyss in Hell.

Chapter 60

S. Sin avoided by considerations of GOD

Sin avoided by considerations of GOD "How can I—sin against God?" Genesis 39:9 my hearers, is the genuine language of a pious heart. It ought to be the language of every heart. To every tempter, to every temptation, our invariable reply should be, How can I sin against God! To persuade you to make this reply, whenever you are tempted to sin, is my present design. And perhaps I cannot prosecute this design more effectually, than by attempting to show you what is implied in the language which we wish yon to adopt. This therefore I propose to do. The meaning, the force of this language lies almost entirely in the word God. And O how many reasons, why we should not sin against him, are wrapped up in this one word! Could we, my hearers, make you see the full import of this word; could we pour upon your minds the overwhelming flood of meaning which it contains, you would feel, that no additional motives were necessary, to deter you from sinning against him whose name it is. But this we cannot do. Could we take this one word for our theme, and expatiate upon it through eternity, we should be able to tell you but a part, a small part, of its meaning. All we can do is, to tell you something of what it means, in the mind, in the mouth of a pious man. Suppose such a man placed before you. Suppose you see him assailed and urged to sin, by every temptation to which human nature can be exposed. Suppose that on the one hand, the world holds up all her pleasures, riches and honors, and says to him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt consent to sin. And suppose that, on the other hand, she places before him poverty, imprisonment, contempt, torture, and death, and says, To all these evils I doom thee, if thou refuse to sin. Then hear him reply, How can I sin against God? and listen while he tells you what he means by this language. Notice his expressions; weigh well the reasons which he assigns, and see whether he does not act wisely, whether he does not constrain you to justify his conduct in refusing to yield to temptation and sin against God. And if you feel, as we proceed, that he completely justifies himself in the eye of reason, that he speaks and acts wisely, then make his language and his conduct your own.

1. God, you may understand the good man as saying, is a being of perfect, of infinite excellence. His works, as well as his word, assure me that he is so. They assure me that from him comes every good and perfect gift; that he is the Father of lights, the source of all the intellectual and moral excellence, which is possessed by creatures, whether in heaven, or on earth. Now there must be more in the fountain, than there is in all the streams which proceed from it. There must be more excellence in the Creator, than in all the creatures which he has formed. How then can I sin against him? There are many of my fellow creatures, who possess much intellectual and moral excellence, and whom I should therefore be unwilling to offend. And ought I not, then, I appeal to you whether I ought not, to be far more unwilling to offend him, who is the source of all excellence? who is excellence itself'! Do you ask me to be more particular I reply, God is holy. He is the thrice Holy One; he cannot look on sin, but with the deepest abhorrence. How then can I sin against him? How can I insult his spotless purity, by polluting myself with sin, when the light of his holiness shines around me? God is good, infinitely good, he is goodness itself. And O, how can I sin against goodness, infinite goodness? God is just, and his justice binds him to punish sin.

He is Almighty, and his power enables him to punish it. I am unable to resist him, if I wished to do it. How can I, how dare I, then, offend him, and provoke his justice to employ his power in destroying me? God is everywhere present, and knows all things. How then can I sin against him? How can I pollute by my sins a place which is made sacred, which is rendered holy ground, by his presence? God is infinitely wise. In his wisdom he counsels me not to sin; and how can I disregard the counsels of infinite wisdom? God is true; he is truth itself; he has told me that misery is the consequence of sin, and how can I disbelieve eternal truth? God is merciful and gracious. He has mercifully offered to forgive all my transgressions, great and numberless as they are. How can I then, if there is one spark of gratitude or ingenuousness in my heart, ever consent to offend him again? God is condescending. He has graciously condescended to feel and express an interest in my welfare, and in that of my fellow worms. And how can I then abuse his condescension? In fine, when I see that everything glorious, excellent, and lovely is summed up in the character of one Being, how can I sin against that Being?

2. God is my Creator. He is the former of my body, the Father of my spirit. As such he is my nearest relative. How then can I sin against him? Look at this body. He contrived it. He formed every particle of it. He gave me these limbs, these senses. How then can I employ them in offending him? Consider my soul. He breathed it into me. He endowed it with all the faculties which it possesses. And can I suffer them to sin against him who gave them? Shall the thing formed rise up against him who formed it? I am not my own, I am the property of him who made me. Everything which I possess is his. And how can I disregard his rights? How can I be so foolish, so ungrateful, so impious, as to sin against a Father; against such a Father, against him but for whom I had never existed? You would not justify me in offending an earthly parent. You would justly censure me, you would consider me as an unnatural wretch, should I plant thorns in the breast of a kind father, an affectionate mother. And ought you not much more to condemn me, —ought I not to abhor myself, should I offend and grieve my Father in heaven?

3. God is my Preserver and Benefactor. He has watched over me and preserved me, every moment since my existence commenced. He has shielded me from ten thousand evils and dangers. He has preserved me, while multitudes of my coevals have perished. He is preserving me at this moment. How can I then, while in the very act of experiencing his preserving goodness, requite him with disobedience? And while he has been my constant preserver, he has in numberless other ways acted as my benefactor. All the happiness which I ever tasted, he imparted. All the blessings which I ever enjoyed, he gave. Each of them bore this inscription, The gift of God. The food which has nourished me, the garments which have clothed me, the habitation which has sheltered me, the relatives and friends whose kindness has cheered my existence; all come from him. And even now, it is his light which shines around me; it is his air which I breathe; the earth on which I stand is his; even now my hands are filled with blessings which he has bestowed. How then can I raise them against him? How can I requite with ingratitude this kind, constant, unwearied benefactor!

4. God is my rightful Sovereign. As my Creator and Proprietor, he has the best of all possible titles to control me. He, who gave and who preserves my existence, has surely a right to prescribe the manner in which I shall spend it. He who gave me my limbs and faculties has surely a right to say what I shall do with them. And he has exercised this right. He has enacted laws for the regulation of my conduct. These laws he has made known to me. And they forbid me to sin. They forbid this

particular sin, which I am now urged to commit. And I see not how I can escape from the obligations which I am under to obey them. I see not how I can escape from the government of God, or cease to be his rightful subject. And while I am one of his subjects, I see not how I can disobey him, without becoming a rebel and a traitor, and thus exposing myself to his just displeasure. And how can I do this? How can I consent to become a rebel against the King of kings, the Sovereign of the universe? How can I dare brave the displeasure of Omnipotence, of one who governs all things by the word of his power? And why should I wish to do it? All his commands are holy and just and good. They require nothing of me which does not tend to secure my best interests, my everlasting happiness. They forbid nothing which would not debase and injure me. Why, then, should I transgress, how can I transgress such a law as this, when in doing it I sinned against the greatest and best of sovereigns?

5. God is the providential, as well as moral Governor of the universe, and the sole Dispenser of all blessings, natural and spiritual. As such I am constantly dependent on him for everything which I need. I am in his hands; as he has given, so he can take away, all that I possess. He has only to speak the word, and all blessings forsake me, all evils come upon me; nor can all creatures united continue to me one blessing, which he sees fit to take away, or avert one evil which he commissions to assail me. How can I, then, unless I become a madman, consent to forfeit, his favor and incur his displeasure, by sinning against him? Especially how can I do this, when I know that he is the Judge, as well as the Governor of the universe, and that, as such, he will summon me to his bar, and pronounce upon me a sentence, which will render me happy or miserable forever! I know he has power to execute this sentence. I know that he has power to destroy both soul and body in hell. And dare I, can I, then, offend him! Can I barter heaven for the temptation which now urges me to sin? Can I take the price of sin in my arms, and for the sake of it plunge into hell? Can all the rewards which you offer compensate me for the heaven, which I shall lose by sin? Are all the tortures, with which you threaten me, to be compared with those miseries, into which I shall sink myself by sin? You will not assert this. I cannot then, —O, no, no, —I cannot consent to sin against God. Ask me to do anything else, however difficult or painful, and I will, if possible, comply; but ask me not to sin against God; ask me not to destroy body and soul forever, for this I cannot, cannot do.

6. God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As such so he loved our ruined race, that he gave his only begotten Son to die for its salvation. He gave him to die for me, for my relatives, for my fellow creatures. He gave him to die for us, when we were sinners, rebels, enemies; gave him, that we might be saved from the consequences of our own follies and vices. Through his crucified Son, he has offered me pardon and peace and everlasting life, on the easy terms of renouncing my sins, and believing in him. Nay more, he has besought me to accept of salvation on these terms, and to be reconciled to himself. He has shown himself willing to receive and welcome me no less kindly, than the father in the parable received and welcomed his returning prodigal son. And the Saviour, by consenting to die for us, has evinced love and condescension equally wonderful. He has done and suffered more for us than any earthly friend would or could have done. Now if I consent to sin, I shall crucify afresh this Saviour; I shall dishonor and offend and grieve the Father who gave him to die for me. And how can I do this? How can I requite him evil for good? Tell me, ye who urge me to sin, how can I so far divest myself of gratitude, of ingenuousness, of all sensibility to kindness as to be guilty of such conduct'! Tell how I can ever justify myself, how I can

ever prove that I am not a base ungrateful wretch, if I should consent to sin against my God and Redeemer, after they have done all this. But you cannot tell me. You can furnish me with no apology, with no shadow of an excuse for such ingratitude. Tempt me not then to be guilty of it, for I cannot, no, I cannot sin against the God and Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all grace and mercy. I cannot grieve and crucify afresh that Saviour who has voluntarily expired for me on the cross.

Thus, my hearers, have I endeavored to show you something of what a good man means when he says, How can I sin against God; and stated some of the considerations which he may urge as reasons why he cannot consent to sin against him. And now let me ask, Are not these reasons more than sufficient to justify him in refusing to sin, however strongly he may be urged to it? Is there anything in this language which indicates weakness, or superstition, or enthusiasm? Rather, does it not approve itself to the understanding and conscience of every person present, as being perfectly reasonable? Would you not censure and condemn him, should he consent to sin against God, when considerations so numerous and so powerful forbid it? If so, you must, would you be consistent, condemn yourselves whenever you sin; for, my hearers, every consideration which the good man has now been represented as urging to prove that he ought not to sin against God, may be urged with equal force to prove, that you ought not to sin against him. If the good man ought to adopt such language, then each of you ought to adopt it. If it is wise and proper that he should form such a determination; then, for the same reason, it is wise and proper that you should form it. And now to come to the great object of this discourse, let me ask, will you not adopt it? We set before you God, the infinite, everlasting God; a being absolutely perfect, in whom all possible excellence is concentrated and condensed; a being who is your Creator, your Preserver, your Benefactor, your rightful Sovereign, your Judge; a being who has so loved you, that he spared not his own Son; but delivered him up for us all, and whose offers of grace and mercy are continually sounding in your ears. This Being we set before you and say, How can you sin against him? And what we wish of you is, that each of your hearts should echo, How can I sin against God?

Let me then repeat the question, Is this, shall it henceforth be, the language of your hearts? Perhaps some may reply, It is, it shall be their language. We will no more sin against God. If we ever sin, it shall only be against our fellow creatures, or against ourselves, not against him. But, my friends, all sin is against God. Though in some forms it may be more immediately against ourselves, or our fellow creatures, yet in every form it is ultimately against him. It is against his law, his authority, his government, his glory. It strikes at him directly in all these respects. To say that we will no more consent to sin against God is equivalent to saying, We will no more consent to sin at all. And saying this implies repentance; for the same views which lead a man to say, How can I sin against God? will lead him to repent of having already sinned against him. Besides, God's first command is, Repent. To disobey this command is, therefore a sin. Of course, he who says, How can I sin against God? will say, How can I defer repentance a single hour? All the considerations which ought to have prevented him from sinning against God, will now operate to make him repent of his sins.

He will say, Against this infinitely perfect Being, against infinite wisdom and power and holiness and justice and goodness and mercy and truth, I have sinned. Against my Creator, and Preserver and Benefactor, I have sinned. Against my Sovereign and Judge, against the mighty Monarch of the universe, against the God and Father of MY Lord Jesus Christ, against my adorable crucified

Saviour, I have sinned. And O, how could I do this? What cruel ingratitude, what impious folly and madness, possessed me! I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes. And he who says this, will also believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He will see that unbelief is one of the greatest sins which can be committed against God; that it calls in question all his perfections, and represents him as wholly unworthy of confidence. How then, he will ask, can I any longer persist in it? Besides, he will see that he needs such a Saviour as Jesus Christ, to save him from the consequences of sins which he has already committed against God, and from those sinful propensities which urge him to sin afresh. This will operate as an additional reason why he should believe without delay. Having exercised repentance and faith in Christ, he will proceed to exhibit the effects of both, by denying himself, crucifying his sinful propensities, and replying to every temptation; How can I sin against God? And now, my hearers, if any of you mean to adopt the language of our text, you will soon have occasion to make use of it. As soon as you leave this house, and through the remainder of the week, you will be assailed by temptations from within and without, to sin against God. Those of you, who have hitherto neglected religion, will be tempted to neglect it a little longer. And those of you, who have professedly embraced it, will be tempted to act in a manner inconsistent with your profession. The situation of both classes will be this. On one side, a thousand little tempters of various kinds will be whispering, Do consent to sin against God. Sin against him at least in this one thing. It will be a trifling offence, and you can repent of it afterwards, and be forgiven. On the other side, God will stand in all his infinite perfections, in all his endearing relations, and with the tenderness of a father, with the authority of a master, with the majesty of a universal monarch, will say, Yield not to these temptations; sin not against me. Then you will be called to weigh the rights, the claims of Jehovah against the pleadings of temptation. Then you must either adopt, or reject, the language of our text. Now then, while temptation is at a distance; while the voice of passion is silent, while reason and conscience can speak and be heard, determine which you will do. To assist in forming a right determination, consider how frequently, how greatly you have already sinned against God. How often, when temptation urged you, and God forbade you to sin, have you yielded to the former, and disobeyed the latter. Are not those instances already sufficiently numerous? Are they not too numerous? Are you not ready to wish that, when tempted to sin, you had always replied, How can I sin against God? Do you feel nothing like sorrow, nothing like relenting, when you reflect how often you have sinned against all that is endearing in relation, against all that is sacred in authority, against all that is touching in kindness? Can you contemplate God impartially and say, I think I have treated him as well as he deserves to be treated. He has no reason to complain of the manner in which I have treated him. I have paid him all that I owe him. I have loved him and feared him, and obeyed and thanked him, as much as he has any right to expect? If you cannot say this; if you feel that you have not treated your God, your Creator, your Benefactor, your Redeemer. as he deserves, can you refrain from lamenting it? Is there nothing in your breast which makes you wish to fall at his feet and say, Lord, I have not treated thee as thou art worthy to be treated. I have sinned, I have committed iniquity. I have done foolishly.

O, forgive me, for thy Son’s sake forgive me, and let me offend thee no more. If anything within urges you to do this, O yield to it; for it is the Spirit of God urging you to repentance. If you feel any disposition to do it, indulge that disposition; for it may prove the commencement of repentance. And if you repent of past sins, you will feel disposed and enabled to say with new resolution, How can I any more sin against God? for you will then come under the influence of new motives, and will see new reasons why you should guard against sin; for as soon as you become a penitent

sinner, you will be a pardoned sinner; you will taste and see that the Lord is good; you will know something of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; and that love will constrain you to live, not unto yourselves, but to him who died for you and rose again. Then you will say, How can I, a redeemed sinner, a pardoned sinner, whom Christ has bought with his own blood, who have by a most wonderful display of divine grace and mercy, been saved from the lowest hell, —how can I any more sin against my deliverer? I am become a member of Christ. How call I crucify my head? God has adopted me as a child: How can I sin against my Father in heaven? The Spirit of God has taken up his residence in my heart: How can I grieve him and provoke him to forsake me?

Such are some of the new motives under whose influence you will come, if you now yield to him who urges you to repent. O then yield to the gentle inward monitor which, I would fain hope, is now whispering repentance. Give way to those better feelings which are beginning to rise within you; and under their influence fall at the feet of your much injured and long offended, but still gracious God. Let me, I beseech you, let me see peace restored between you and him before you leave this house. Come with me to his mercy seat and say, Other lords, O God, have had dominion over us; but they shall rule us no more. We have sinned, greatly sinned against thee, but we would sin no more. O hold us back from sin; turn us from all our iniquities; help us to say from the heart, we will be thy people; and say thou to us, I will be your God.

Chapter 61

S. Solomons Choice

Solomons Choice “And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.” 1 Kings 3:10 the context we are informed that, soon after Solomon’s coronation, the Lord appeared to him by night, and said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father, and I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in; and thy servant is in the midst of a great people that cannot be numbered for multitude. Give thy servant, therefore, a wise and understanding heart, to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, nor riches, nor the lives of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold I have done according to thy word; I have given thee a wise and understanding heart, so that there shall be none like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. My friends, though our situation differs in many respects from that of Solomon, yet from this passage we may learn many interesting and important truths. We may learn from it, indeed, almost everything that is necessary to render us prosperous and happy, both with respect to this world and to that which is to come. To illustrate and enforce some of the principal truths which it teaches, is our present design.

I. The address which God made to Solomon when he said, ask what I shall give thee, he does in effect make to each of us, especially to the young. It is true, the age of visions and revelations is past; God does not now speak to us with an audible voice, nor is it necessary that he should. The revelation which he has given us in his word, renders it needless. But the language in which he addresses us in his word is precisely similar to that in which he spoke to Solomon. By erecting a throne of grace in heaven, opening the way to it, inviting us to come to him with our requests, and promising to grant our petitions when they are agreeable to his will, he does in effect say to each of us, Ask what I shall give thee. I have set before thee the blessing and the curse, the way of life and the way of death. On the one hand, I set before thee Christ and holiness and everlasting life; on the other, sin and the world and eternal death. Choose then which thou wilt have. Wilt thou have the pleasures of sin, or the pleasures of religion? Wilt thou have treasures on earth, or treasures in heaven. Wilt thou have the praise of men or the praise of God? Wilt thou have Christ, or wilt thou have the world? To these questions of his Creator every man by his conduct returns a direct, unequivocal answer. If he pursues religion as the one thing needful, he practically replies, Lord, I choose religion; I choose thee for my portion, and Christ for my Saviour, and heaven for my rest. Give me but these, and I am satisfied. If, on the contrary, he devotes himself supremely to sinful or worldly pursuits, he no less directly replies, Lord I choose the world. I choose its pleasures as my happiness, its riches as my portion, its applause as my honor. Give me them and I ask nothing more. I shall not trouble myself as to the consequences of this choice hereafter. Let me but be happy in this world. Others, if they please, may have the other world to themselves.

II. Though we are not, like Solomon, kings; and therefore need not, as he did, qualifications requisite for that office; yet we all need spiritual wisdom and understanding, and may therefore all imitate his example in making our choice. For instance, the young may do this. Every one may say, Lord thou hast given me an immortal soul, a soul which thou hast made, and for the loss of which thou hast taught me, that the gain of the whole world would be no compensation. But I know not what to do with it. I know not how to keep it, nor where it will be safe, but am in danger of losing it continually. I find myself in the midst of a sinful, seducing world, exposed to innumerable snares and temptations, surrounded by artful and insidious enemies who often assume the garb of friends, with many paths opening before me, each of which appears to be the path to happiness. I am told that in this world scarcely any object appears in its true colors; but that good is often put for evil, and evil for good, darkness for light, and light for darkness. I am also told, and I begin already to find with truth, that I have a most deceitful heart, ever watching to betray me; that my understanding is blinded by sin, that I am inclined to evil, not to good; that my appetites and passions will unceasingly strive to lead me astray. Already have they begun to do it; already have I been guilty of many errors and mistakes. I fear that I shall be guilty of more. O then, thou Father of spirits, thou Father of lights, give me, I beseech thee, a wise and understanding heart, that I may discern between good and evil, and have strength to avoid the one and pursue the other. O condescend to be my shepherd, the guide of my youth; lead me in the way that is everlasting.

Every parent, also, has reason to adopt the prayer of Solomon. Everyone, who sustains this relation, may say, Lord, in addition to my own soul, thou hast confided to my care the souls of my children, with an injunction to educate them for thee, and teach them the good and the right way. But we have no wisdom nor skill, nor strength to do this. Our children have derived from us a corrupt nature which we know not how to subdue. They are exposed to the influence of bad examples, and many other evils, against which we know not how to guard them. Even we ourselves shall set before them a bad example, unless thy grace prevent. We are in danger of ruining them by too much indulgence, on the one hand, or too much strictness and severity on the other. When we look around us the find but few, even among the wise and good, who succeed in educating their children aright; how then can we hope to succeed, we who are like little children ourselves, and need every moment to be taught, and guided, and upheld by thee. Give us then, O our heavenly Father, give us a wise and understanding heart, that we may know how to perform this great duty, and be preserved from the guilt of ruining the immortal souls committed to our care, and compelling thee to require their blood at our hands. Again,

Professors of religion have reason to imitate the example of Solomon. By admitting us into thy church, O Lord, they may say, thou hast in a measure committed to our care the honor of thy religion, the success of thy cause. If we display a wrong spirit, or conduct in a sinful or imprudent manner, thy religion will be despised, and thy great name blasphemed by many around us; we shall be as stumbling blocks in the path of life to occasion the destruction of our fellow creatures, perhaps of our nearest friends. This, O Lord, we are in continual danger of doing. We are exposed to dangers from within and from without, on the right hand and on the left. While we avoid one extreme, we are in danger of running into another. When we aim to recommend religion by cheerfulness, we are in danger of falling into levity and vain conversation, and when we endeavor to avoid levity, we are liable to prejudice our friends against religion by gloominess and melancholy. Against these and innumerable other dangers, to which we are exposed, we have no

skill or wisdom to guard. We know neither how to go out nor how to come in. Give thy servants therefore, O Lord, a wise and understanding heart, that we may adorn thy religion, and honor thy great name. Give us that wisdom which is from above, which is pure, peaceable, full of good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Make us what thou requirest us to be, wise as serpents and harmless as doves. I might proceed to show that ministers, magistrates, and indeed persons in every situation and relation of life, have abundant cause to pray frequently for a wise and understanding heart, that they may know how to perform the duties of their respective stations. As an encouragement for all to do this, I observe,

III. That God is pleased with those who make the choice and sincerely offer up the prayer of Solomon. Our text informs us that God was pleased with his conduct on this occasion, and since he is, yesterday, today, and forever, the same, he is pleased with all who imitate his example. He is pleased with their conduct,

1. Because it is the effect of his grace. We are told that the Lord rejoices in his works, and with reason does he rejoice in them; for they are all very good. If he rejoices in them he must, of course, be pleased with them. But to induce persons to make the choice and offer up the prayer of Solomon, is always his work, the effect of his grace. It is one of those good and perfect gifts which come down from the Father of lights; for no man, who is not taught and influenced by the Spirit of God, will ever make this choice or sincerely utter this prayer. Men naturally choose and ask very different objects. Should God say to an impenitent sinner, Ask what I shall give thee, he would reply, —Lord, give me temporal prosperity, give me pleasures or riches or honor; for these are the great objects which every sinner loves and desires, and in the acquisition of which his happiness consists. When the Lord looketh down from heaven upon the children of men, he seeth that there are none that understand, none that even seek after God. Before a man can sincerely choose God for his portion, and prefer spiritual wisdom to all earthly objects, his natural views must therefore be changed; he must be taught to love and value the objects which he naturally despised, and to despise the objects which he supremely loved and pursued. In a word, he must become a new creature, and to create him anew is the work of God. Since then God is pleased with all his works, and since this is his work, he must be pleased with the choice and with the prayer mentioned in our text.

2. He is pleased with it, because it indicates opinions and feelings similar to his own. In the opinion of Jehovah, spiritual wisdom, that wisdom of which the fear of God is the beginning, is the principal thing, the one thing needful to creatures situated as we are. In comparison with this he considers all temporal objects as worthless. His language to us is, above all things get wisdom and with all thy gettings get understanding. Now those, who make the choice which Solomon made, estimate objects according to their real value; that is, according to their value in the estimation of God. Their opinions and feelings in this respect correspond with his; and since all beings are necessarily pleased with those who resemble them, God cannot but be pleased with those who resemble him in this respect. These opinions and feelings are a part of his own image, and he must love his own image and be pleased with it wherever it is seen.

3. God is pleased with those who thus pray for a wise and understanding heart, because such prayers are indicative of humility. When Solomon said, I am as a little child, I know not how to go out, or how to come in, give thy servant therefore a wise and understanding heart, it evidently

indicated a low or humble opinion of his own qualifications, and a deep conviction of his need of divine illumination. Similar language indicates similar feelings in all who adopt it. It indicates that they are not too proud to be taught, that they possess what our Saviour calls the temper of a little child. Now no temper so well becomes such creatures as we are; no temper is so pleasing to God to no temper does he make so many precious promises as this. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted. To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. Thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. These promises are sufficient proofs that God is pleased with humility, and since the language of our text indicates humility, God cannot but be pleased with all who sincerely adopt it.

4. God is pleased with such characters, because their conduct evinces that they are actuated by a benevolent concern for his glory and for the happiness of their fellow creatures. It is evident that Solomon in our text was actuated by such a temper, and not by a selfish regard to his own interests. He does not say, give me wisdom and understanding that I may have the praise of it, that my fame may be extended, but that I may discern between good and evil, and know how to rule this thy great people. He knew, as he observes in the context, that God had placed him on the throne. He therefore feared that if he should prove incompetent to the duties of this station, God who called him to it would be dishonored. He feared that the mistakes and faults of the servant would reflect disgrace upon the master who employed him. He also knew that the happiness of his people depended much upon his own qualifications for government. It was a regard for the honor of God, and for the happiness of his people, therefore, rather than for his own sake, that he wished for wisdom and understanding. A similar disposition actuates those who sincerely imitate the conduct of Solomon at the present day. When the young pray for wisdom to guide them in the journey of life, the parent for assistance in educating his children, the professor for grace to adorn his profession, and the magistrate or minister for necessary qualifications, it is not so much for their own sakes as for the sake of others. It is that they may be enabled to honor God and do good to their fellow creatures by a faithful performance of their respective duties. It is true that many selfish, unhallowed desires may, and often do, intrude on such occasions; but still the prevailing governing disposition is such as has been described. Now this is a disposition exceedingly pleasing to God, whose name and whose nature is love, and who requires us to exercise that charity which seeketh not her own.

Once more; God is pleased with those who imitate the example of Solomon, because it actually and greatly tends to promote his glory. This it does in two ways. In the first place, by praying to him for wisdom, we do in effect profess a belief that he exists, that he is a prayer hearing God; and, especially, that he is the only wise God, the Father of lights, the author and giver of every good and perfect gift. As we honor a man, when we apply to him for counsel and advice in difficult cases, so we honor God, when we apply to him for wisdom and grace. In the second place, by confessing that we are as little children, —ignorant, blind, and helpless, and praying for a wise and understanding heart, we do in effect give God the glory of all that we are enabled to do in his service, or for the happiness of our fellow creatures. Our language is, not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, who are foolish and ignorant, but unto thee, who art the author of all wisdom and goodness, be

the glory of everything which we are enabled to perform. When we read of the wisdom of Solomon in connection with our text, we are led to admire not Solomon, but him who first taught him to pray for wisdom, and then gave him all that he possessed. When St. Paul says, by the grace of God I am what I am, he evidently turns away the attention of his admirers from himself to God, and refers to his grace the glory of all he did and suffered in the cause of Christ. So when persons at the present day confess that they have no wisdom or goodness of their own, and pray that God would give them a wise and understanding heart, they give him the whole glory of all the wisdom and understanding which they afterwards exhibit through life. Now since God's glory is exceedingly dear to him, and since this conduct thus tends to promote his glory, he must evidently be pleased with those who imitate it. As a farther inducement to imitate the example of Solomon; I observe,

IV. That all who make his choice, and adopt his prayer, shall certainly be favored with a wise and understanding heart. That Solomon received this gift you need not be told. Equally certain is it that all who imitate him shall receive it in such a degree, as their situation and circumstances require. This is evident, in the first place, from the fact already adverted to, that it is God who by his grace inclines them to make this choice. It is he alone who convinces us of our natural blindness and ignorance, and of our need of divine illumination. It is he who teaches us to estimate objects according to their real worth, and to choose spiritual wisdom in preference to all earthly objects. It is he who opens the way to the throne of grace, and gives us all the graces which are necessary to enable us to pray acceptably. Surely; then, he will not after all this refuse to bear the prayers which he has himself taught us to make. He cannot but gratify the desires which he has himself inspired. We know not, says the apostle, what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for its with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God. That God will gratify the desires of those who thus pray for wisdom, is farther evident from his express promises. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth liberally to all men and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. If thou cry after knowledge and lift up thy voice for understanding, if thou seek her as silver and search for her as for hid treasures then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, and find the knowledge of God. In a word, If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Once more; as a farther inducement to make the choice of Solomon, I observe, that this is the surest way of obtaining a competent share of the good things of the present life. Because thou hast asked this thing, said God to Solomon, and hast not asked for thyself long life, nor riches, nor the life of thine enemies, behold I have done according to thy words; and have also given thee what thou hast not asked, both riches and honor, so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee, all thy days. In a similar manner Christ promises to reward similar conduct in his disciples. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. In this, as in other respects, it is true that he who loseth his life for Christ's sake shall save it; that is, he who from a principle of supreme love to Christ and his religion neither desires nor seeks for riches and honor, shall receive as large a portion of them, as an infinitely wise Father sees it best for him to possess.

IMPROVEMENT. Is it true, as we have asserted, that God does in effect say to every person present, or at least to every young person, Ask what I shall give thee? It becomes us all then to inquire what reply we are making to this address. Say then, my hearers, what are you asking God to give you? Some of you, I fear, do not ask anything of him. Prayer is a duty to which you are almost or altogether strangers. But still your conduct has a language, and what does it say? What is the object of your prevailing desire and pursuit? What would you ask for, if you should pray and ask for that which you uniformly love and desire? If we may judge from the conduct of a large proportion of this assembly, they would be far from adopting the language of Solomon. Many of the young would say, Lord, let us be admired and beloved for wit, beauty, dress, accomplishments. Let our days be filled up with a round of diversions and amusements. Let us live a long life of ease, gaiety and worldly pleasure, and when old age comes, if there be any such thing as conversion, let us be converted, and taken to heaven. Others would say, —Lord, give us wealth with all the blessings it bestows. Let us outstrip all our rivals in the acquisition of property, and excel them in the elegance of our habitations, our dress, our equipage; while the prayer of a third class would be, —Lord, grant us honor and distinction.

Raise us to an elevated rank in society, and let those, who are now our equals, bow down to us. In short, if we may judge from the conduct of many of you, long life, pleasure, riches and honor, the very things which Solomon did not ask, would be the favors for which you would petition, and for the sake of which you would be willing to renounce the gift of a wise and understanding heart. Now if this be the case, you can surely have no reason to wonder or complain, if God should take you at your word. He has put a price into your hands to get wisdom; but like the fool you have no heart to it. He has told you that godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as of that which is to come; but you will not believe him. You have, therefore, no promise for this life or the next; and if, in the other world, you should find yourselves in the wretched situation of the rich man who fared sumptuously every day, and, like him, beg for a drop of water to mitigate your anguish, God may justly say to you, as Abraham did to him, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things.

Thou didst choose the world for thy portion, and thou hast had it. Christians, on the contrary, had all their evil things in the other world; but now they are comforted and ye are tormented. But if any of you are conscious that you have made the choice, and that you are daily uttering the prayer of Solomon, this subject is to you full of consolation and encouragement. God is pleased with your choice. He is pleased with those who have made it, he is pleased whenever you approach him in prayer with the language of Solomon on your lips. You have not perhaps been aware how many graces yon were exercising, how much you were honoring and pleasing God; while, lying in the dust, ashamed and broken hearted before him, you have said, —Lord, I am ignorant, weak and helpless, as a little child, entirely unfit for the situation in which thou hast placed me, and ignorant how to go out or come in as I ought. Give me therefore, O God, a wise and understanding heart, that I may know my duty and practice it by glorifying thee, and promoting the happiness of my fellow creatures. You did not realize, perhaps, while saying this, as you have often done, to God, you were exercising faith, humility and benevolence, and promoting the glory of God. Yet all this you were doing; all this you will do, whenever you sincerely repeat this language. It will please the Lord whenever you ask this thing, and the more frequently and fervently you ask it, the more will he be pleased. Nor shall you ask in vain. Your prayer shall be answered by the bestowal of

increasing measures of knowledge and grace; and the less you think of and desire temporal blessings, the more certainly will God bestow them upon you in such a degree as your present and future happiness requires. Pray then without ceasing, and be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Chapter 62

S. THE BIBLE ABOVE ALL PRICE

THE BIBLE ABOVE ALL PRICE Preached before the Bible Society of Maine, May 5, 1814

THERE are two objects which a speaker who addresses his fellow-beings on an occasion like the present, ought ever to keep in view. Of these objects, the first, and with respect to his hearers, the most important is, to induce them to prize as it deserves a volume, which, notwithstanding its unrivalled claims to attention, is too generally neglected. The second is, to procure their assistance in gratuitously distributing this volume among their destitute fellow-creatures. These objects, though distinct, are intimately connected; for if we can be induced suitably to prize the Sacred Scriptures ourselves, there will be little difficulty in persuading us to aid in communicating them to others; and there is but too much reason for presuming that he, who is not desirous to impart this treasure to all around him, knows nothing of its real value, nor of the temper which it is designed to produce. With respect to a part, and we trust a very considerable part, of the present assembly, the objects which we have mentioned may be considered as already attained. There are, we doubt not, many before us, who entertain a profound veneration for the Bible; and in whose breasts it has an advocate, who pleads its cause, and that of the destitute, far more powerfully and successfully than we can do. To such persons nothing need be said in favor of a book, which not only affords them support and consolation under the troubles of life, but enables them to contemplate death with pleasure, and, to borrow its own language, makes them "wise unto salvation." If all present are of this description, our object is obtained, and farther remarks are needless. But it is presumable that, in every assembly, many are to be found, who, through inattention to the subject, or from some other cause, have formed very inadequate conceptions of the worth of this volume, and who consequently do not feel the infinite importance of putting it into the hands of others. It is also notorious, that even among such as profess to venerate the scriptures, there are not a few who seem to regard them as deficient in those qualities which excite interest and attention. It may not be improper therefore, on an occasion like the present, to make a few remarks with a design to show, that while the scriptures are incalculably valuable and important, viewed as a revelation from heaven, they are also in a very high degree interesting and deserving of attention, considered merely as a human composition. As the whole volume of scripture will form the subject of these remarks, it was thought unnecessary to select any particular part of it as a text. Were we permitted to adduce the testimony of the scriptures in their own favor, as a proof that their contents are highly interesting, our task would be short, and easily accomplished. But it is possible that, to this testimony, some might think it a sufficient reply, to apostrophize the sacred volume in the language of the captious Jews to our Savior;- "Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true." No similar objection can be urged however, against our availing ourselves of the testimony which eminent uninspired men have borne in favor of the scriptures. From the almost innumerable testimonies of this nature, which might easily be adduced, we shall select only that of Sir William Jones, a Judge of the supreme court of judicature in Bengal-a man, says his learned biographer, who, by the exertion of rare intellectual talents, acquired a knowledge of arts, sciences, and languages, which has seldom been equaled, and

scarcely, if ever, surpassed. "I have carefully and regularly perused the scriptures," says this truly great man, "and am of opinion, that this volume, independent of its divine origin, contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of eloquence- than can be collected from all other books, in what ever language they may have been written." How well he was qualified to make this remark, and how much it implied in his lips, may be inferred from the fact that he was acquainted with twenty-eight different languages, and with the best works which had been published in most of them. That a volume, which in the opinion of such a man, is thus superior to all other books united, cannot be so insipid and uninteresting a composition as many seem to imagine, it must be needless to remark. That his praises, though great and unqualified, are in no respect unmerited, it would be easy, were it necessary, to prove by appropriate quotations from the book which he so highly extols. But its morality will be more properly considered in a subsequent part of this discourse; and its unrivalled eloquence and sublimity are too obvious, and too generally acknowledged, to require illustration. If any imagine that he has estimated too highly, the historical information which this volume contains, we would only request them to peruse it with attention, and particularly to consider the assistance which it affords in accounting for many otherwise inexplicable phenomena, in the natural, political, and moral world. A person who has never attended to the subject, will, on recollection, be surprised to find for how large a proportion of his knowledge he is indebted to this neglected book. It is the only book which satisfactorily accounts, or even professes to account, for the introduction of natural and moral evil into the world, and for the consequent present situation of mankind. To this book we are also indebted for all our knowledge of the progenitors of our race, and of the early ages of the world;-for our acquaintance with the manners and customs of those ages;-for the origin and explanation of many remarkable traditions, which have extensively prevailed, and for almost every thing which is known, of many once flourishing nations; especially of the Jews, the most singular and interesting people perhaps, that ever existed. It is the Bible alone, which by informing us of the deluge, enables us to account satisfactorily, for many surprising appearances in the internal structure of the earth, as well as for the existence of marine exuvise on the summits of mountains, and in other places far distant from the sea. By the same volume we are assisted in accounting for the multiplicity of languages which exist in the world; for the degraded condition of the Africans; for the origin and universal prevalence of sacrifices; and many other facts of an equally interesting nature. We shall only add, that while the scriptures throw light on the facts here alluded to, the existence of these facts powerfully tends, on the other hand, to establish the truth and authenticity of the scriptures. In addition to these intrinsic excellencies of the Bible, which give it, considered merely as a human production, powerful claims to the attention of persons of taste and learning, there are various circumstances, of an adventitious nature, which render it peculiarly interesting to a reflecting mind. Among these circumstances we may, perhaps not improperly, mention its great antiquity. Whatever may be said of its inspiration, some of the books which compose it are unquestionably the most ancient literary compositions extant, and perhaps the most ancient that ever were written; nor is it very improbable that letters were first employed in recording some parts of them, and that they were written in the language first spoken by man. It is also not only the most ancient book, but the most ancient monument of human exertion, the eldest offspring of human intellect, now in existence. Unlike the other works of man, it inherits not his frailty. All the contemporaries of its infancy have long since perished and are forgotten. Yet this wonderful volume still survives. Like the fabled pillars of Seth, which are said to have bid defiance to the

deluge, it has stood, for ages, unmoved in the midst of that flood which sweeps away men, with their labors into oblivion That these circumstances render it an interesting object of contemplation, it is needless to remark. Were there now in existence a tree which was planted; an edifice which was erected; or any monument of human ingenuity which was formed, at that early period, in which some parts of the Bible were written, would it not be contemplated with the keenest interest, carefully preserved as a precious relic, and considered as something little less than sacred? With what emotions then, will a thoughtful mind often open the Bible; and what a train of interesting reflections is it, in this view, calculated to excite? While we contemplate its antiquity, exceeding that of every object around us, except the works of God, and view it, in anticipation, as continuing to exist unaltered until the end of time, must we not feel almost irresistibly impelled to venerate it, as proceeding originally from him, who is yesterday, today, and forever the same, and whose works, like his years, fail not? The interest which this volume excites by its antiquity will be greatly increased, if we consider the violent and persevering opposition it has encountered, and the almost innumerable enemies it has resisted and overcome. We contemplate, with no ordinary degree of interest, a rock which has braved for centuries the ocean’s rage, practically saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." With still greater interest, though of a somewhat different kind, should we contemplate a fortress which, during thousands of years, had been constantly assaulted by successive generations of enemies; around whose walls millions had perished; and to overthrow which, the utmost efforts of human force and ingenuity had been excited in vain. Such a rock, such a fortress, we contemplate in tbe Bible. For thousands of years this volume has withstood, not only the iron tooth of time, which devours men and their works together, but all the physical and intellectual strength of man. Pretended friends have endeavored to corrupt and betray it; kings and princes have perseveringly sought to banish it from the world; the civil and military powers of the greatest empires have been leagued for its destruction; the fires of persecution have often been lighted to consume it, and its friends together; and at many seasons, death, in some horrid form, has been the almost certain consequence of affording it an asylum from the cry of its enemies. It has also been almost incessantly assailed by weapons of a different kind, which, to any other book would be far more dangerous than fire or sword. In these assaults, wit and ridicule have wasted all their shafts; misguided reason has been compelled, though reluctantly, to lend her aid, and after repeated defeats, has again been dragged to the field; the arsenals of learning have been emptied to arm her for the contest; and in search of means to prosecute it with success, recourse has been had, not only to remote ages and distant lands, but even to the bowels of the earth, and the region of the stars. Yet still the object of all these attacks remains uninjured, while one army of its assailants after another has melted away. Though it has been ridiculed more bitterly, misrepresented more grossly, opposed more rancorously, and burnt more frequently, than any other book, and perhaps than all other books united, it is so far from sinking under the efforts of its enemies, that the probability of its surviving until the final consummation of all things is now evidently much greater than ever. The rain has descended; the floods have come; the storm has arisen, and beat upon it; but it falls not, for it is founded upon a rock. Like the burning bush., it has ever been in the flames, yet is still unconsumed; a sufficient proof, were there no other, that He who dwelt in the bush preserves the Bible.

If the opposition which this volume has successfully encountered renders it an interesting object of contemplation; the veneration which has been paid to it, the use which has been made of it, and

the benefits which have been derived from it by the wise and good, in all ages, make it still more so. Who would not esteem it a most delightful privilege to see and converse with a man who had lived through as many centuries as the Bible has existed; who had conversed with all the successive generations of men, and been intimately acquainted with their motives, characters, and conduct; who had been the chosen friend and companion of the wise and good in every age-the venerated monitor, to whose example and instructions the wise had ascribed their wisdom, and the virtuous their virtues. What could be more interesting than the sight, what more pleasing and instructive than the society of such a man? Yet such society we may in effect enjoy, whenever we choose to open the Bible. In this volume, we see the chosen companion, the most intimate friend of the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, and their pious contemporaries; the guide, whose directions they implicitly followed; the monitor, to whose faithful warnings and instructions they ascribed their wisdom, their virtues, and their happiness. In this volume, we see the book in which the deliverer, the king, the sweet psalmist of Israel delighted to meditate, day and night; whose counsels made him wiser than all his teachers; and which he describes as sweeter than honey, and more precious than gold. This too is the book, for the sake of which our pious ancestors forsook their native land and came to this then desolate wilderness; bringing it with them, as their most valuable treasure, and at death, bequeathing it to us, as the richest bequest in their power to make. From this source, they, and millions more now in heaven, derived the strongest and purest consolation; and scarcely can we fix our attention on a single passage in this wonderful book, which has not afforded comfort or instruction to thousands, and been wet with tears of penitential sorrow or grateful joy, drawn from eyes that will weep no more. There is probably not an individual present, some of whose ancestors did not, while on earth, prize this volume more than life, and breathe many fervent prayers to heaven that all their descendants, to the latest generation, might be induced to prize it in a similar manner. Thousands, too, have sealed their belief of its truth with their blood; rejoicing to shed it in defense of a book, which, while it led them to the stake, enabled them to triumph over its tortures. Nor have its effects been confined to individuals. Nations have participated largely in its benefits. Armed with this volume, which is at once sword and shield, the first heralds of Christianity went forth conquering and to conquer. No less powerful than the wonder working rod of Moses, its touch crumbled into dust the temples of paganism, and overthrew, as in a moment, the immense fabric of superstition and idolatry which had been for ages erecting. To this volume alone it is owing that we are not now assembled in the temple of an idol; that stocks and stones are not our deities; that cruelty, intemperance and impurity do not constitute our religion; and that our children are not burnt as sacrifices at the shrine of Moloch. To this volume we are also indebted for the reformation in the days of Luther; for the consequent revival and progress of learning; and for our present freedom from papal tyranny. Nor are these benefits, great as they are, all which it has been the means of conferring on man. Wherever it comes, blessings follow in its train. Like the stream which diffuses itself, and is apparently lost among the herbage, it betrays its course by its effects. Wherever its influence is felt, temperance, industry, and contentment prevail; natural and moral evils are banished, or mitigated; and churches, hospitals, and asylums for almost every species of wretchedness, arise to adorn the landscape, and cheer the eye of benevolence. Such are the temporal benefits which even infidelity itself, if it would for once be candid, must acknowledge that the Bible has bestowed on man. Almost coeval with the sun, its fittest emblem, it has, like that luminary, from the commencement of its existence, shed an unceasing flood of light on a benighted and wretched

world. Who then can doubt that He, who formed the sun, gave the Bible to be "a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path ?" Who, that contemplates this fountain, still full and overflowing, notwithstanding the millions who have drank of its waters, can doubt that it has a real, though invisible connection with that river of life, which flows forever at the right hand of God?

Thus far we have considered the Bible as merely a human composition, though, as was unavoidable, some rays of divinity have from time to time burst through the cloud in which we vainly attempted to shroud it. But if it be in this view thus valuable and interesting, in what language shall we describe the importance it assumes, when viewed as a revelation from GOD;-as the book which has guided millions of immortal beings to heaven; as the book which must guide us there, if we ever reach those mansions of eternal day! That it is so, we shall not at present attempt to prove. In addressing such an assembly, on such an occasion, we have a right to take it for granted-to proceed on the supposition, that you believe with the apostle that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God." Viewed in this light, what finite mind can estimate its worth, or describe the reverence and attention with which it ought to be regarded? The ancient Greeks had one sentence, which they believed, though without foundation, to have descended from heaven; and to evince their gratitude and veneration for this gift, they caused it to be engraved, in letters of gold, on the front of their most sacred and magnificent temple. We, more favored, have not a sentence only, but a volume, which really descended from heaven; and which, whether we consider its contents, or its Author, ought to be indelibly engraven on the heart of every child of Adam. Its Author is the author of our being; and its contents afford us information of the most satisfactory and important kind, on subjects of infinite consequence; respecting which all other books are either silent, or speak only doubtfully and unauthoritatively. It informs us, with the greatest clearness and precision, of every thing necessary either to our present or future happiness; of every thing, in fact, which its Author knows, the knowledge of which would be really useful to us; and thus confers those benefits, which the tempter falsely pretended would result from eating the forbidden fruit; making us as gods, knowing good and evil. In the fabulous records of pagan antiquity, we read of a mirror endowed with properties so rare, that by looking into it, its possessor could discover any object which he wished to see, however remote; and discern with equal ease, persons and things above, below, behind, and before him. Such a mirror, but infinitely more valuable that this fictitious glass, do we really possess in the Bible. By employing this mirror in a proper manner, we may discern objects and events, past, present, and to come. Here we may contemplate the all-enfolding circle of the Eternal mind, and behold a most perfect portrait of Him, whom no mortal eye hath seen, drawn by his own unerring hand. Piercing into the deepest recesses of eternity, we may behold Him existing independent and alone, previous to the first exertion of His creating energy. We may see heaven, the habitation of His holiness and glory, "dark with the excessive brightness" of his presence; and hell, the prison of his justice, with no other light than that which the fiery billows of his wrath cast," pale and dreadful," serving only to render "darkness visible." Here too, we may witness the birth of the world which we inhabit;-stand as it were by its cradle, and see it grow up from infancy to manhood, under the forming hand of its Creator. We may see light at his summons starting into existence, and discovering a world of waters without a shore. Controlled by His word, the waters subside, and islands and continents appear, not, as now, clothed with verdure and fertility, but sterile, and naked as the sands of Arabia. Again he speaks; and a landscape appears, uniting the various beauties of spring, summer, and autumn; and extending farther than the eye can reach. Still all is silent; not even the

hum of insects is heard, and the stillness of death pervades creation; till, in an instant, songs burst from every grove; and the startled spectator, raising his eyes from the carpet at his feet, sees the air, the earth, and the sea, filled with life and activity, in a thousand various forms. Here too, we may contemplate the origin and infancy of our race;-trace from its source to its termination that mighty river, of which we compose a part; and see it separating into two great branches; one of which flows back in a circle, and loses itself in the fountain whence it arose; while the other rushes on impetuously in an opposite direction, and precipitates itself into a gulf which has no bottom. In this glass, we may also discover the fountain, whence flow those torrents of vice and wretchedness which deluge the earth; trace the glorious plan of Divine providence running, like a stream of lightning, through the dark and stormy cloud of sublunary events; and see light and order breaking in upon the mighty chaos of crimes, revolutions, wars and convulsions, which have ever distracted the world; and which, to a person unacquainted with the scriptures, must ever appear to produce no beneficial effect; but to succeed each other without order, and to happen without design. Here too, we may contemplate ourselves, in every conceivable situation and point of view;-see our hearts laid open, and all their secret recesses displayed;-trace as on a map, the paths which lead to heaven and to hell; ascertain in which we are walking; and learn what we have been, what we are, and what we shall be hereafter. Above all, we may here see displayed to view, that wonderful scheme for the redemption of self-destroyed man, into which "angels desire to look " and without which the knowledge of God, and of ourselves, would serve only to plunge us in the depths of despair. We may behold Him, whom we had previously seen creating the world, lying as a helpless infant in a manger; expiring in agonies on the cross; and imprisoned in the tomb. We may see Him rising-ascending to heaven-sitting down "at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high;" and there swaying the sceptre of universal empire, and ever living to make intercession for his people. Finally, we may see Him coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, to judge the world. We may see the dead, at His command, rising from their graves; standing in awful silence and suspense before His tribunal; and successively advancing, to receive from His lips, the sentence which will confer on each of them an eternal weight of glory, or consign them forever to the mansions of despair. Such are the scenes and objects, which the scriptures place before us;-such the information which they afford. Who will deny that this information is important; or that it is such as we might naturally expect to find in a revelation from God?

Equally important to the present, and future happiness of man, are the precepts which the scriptures inculcate. With the greatest clearness and precision; and with an authority, to which no other book can pretend, they teach us our duty to God, to our fellowcreatures, and to ourselves. That spiritual kingdom, whose laws they promulgate, consists in "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and were these laws universally obeyed, nothing but righteousness, peace, and holy joy, would be found on earth. Should any one deny this, after perusing them attentively, it would prove nothing, but the weakness of his understanding, or the depravity of his heart. They require us to regard God with filial, and our fellow creatures with fraternal affection. They require rulers to "be just; ruling in the fear of God;" and subjects to "lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty." They require the husband to "love the wife even as himself;" and the wife "to reverence her husband." They require parents to educate their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord " and children to love, honor, and obey their parents. They require masters to treat their servants with kindness; and servants to be submissive, diligent, and faithful. They

require of all, temperance, contentment, and industry; and stigmatize, as worse than an infidel, him who neglects to provide for the necessities of his family. They provide for the speedy termination of animosities and dissensions, by requiring us to forgive and pray for our enemies, whenever we pray for ourselves; and to make reparation to all whom we may have injured, before we presume to appear with our offerings in the presence of God. In a word., they teach us, that "denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ." These duties they require us to perform, with constancy and perseverance, on penalty of incurring the everlasting displeasure of our Creator, and its dreadful consequences. In addition to these instructions and precepts, the scriptures furnish us with the most instructive examples-examples, which most plainly and convincingly teach us, both what we must shun, and what we are to pursue. On every rock, where immortal souls have been wrecked -at the entrance of every path which leads to danger, they show us some self-destroyed wretch, standing like a pillar of salt, to warn succeeding travelers not to approach it; while at the gate, and in the path of life, they place many divinely instructed and infallible guides, who lead the way, beckon us to follow, and point. to the happy mansions, in which it ends. Knowing how powerfully we are influenced by the example of those with whom we associate, it introduces us to the society of the most amiable and excellent of our species; makes us perfectly acquainted with their characters and pursuits; admits us into, not only their closets, but their hearts; unveils to us all their secret springs of action; and shows us the hidden source whence they derived wisdom and strength to subdue their sinful propensities, and overcome the world. By opening this volume, we may at any time walk in the garden of Eden with Adam; sit in the ark with Noah; share the hospitality, or witness the faith of Abraham; ascend the mount of God with Moses; unite in the secret devotions of David; or listen to the eloquent and impassioned addresses of St. Paul. Nay more, we may here converse with Him, who spoke as never man spake; participate with the spirits of the just made perfect, in the employments and happiness of heaven; and enjoy sweet communion with the Father of our spirits, through his Son, Jesus Christ. Such is the society, to which the scriptures introduce us; -such the examples, which they present to our imitation; requiring us to follow them, "who through faith and patience, inherit the promises;" to walk in the steps of our divine Redeemer; and to be "followers of God, as dear children." Nor does this precious volume contain nothing but instructions, precepts, examples, and threatenings. No, it contains also "strong consolation ;"-consolation suited to every possible variety and complication of human wretchedness; and of sufficient efficacy to render the soul, not only resigned, but joyful in the lowest depths of adversity;-not only tranquil, but triumphant in the very jaws of death. It is the appointed vehicle, by which the Spirit of God, the promised Comforter, communicates not only his instructions, but his consolations to the soul. It is, if I may so express it, the body which he assumed, in order to converse with men; and he lives and speaks in every line. Hence it is said to "be quick," or living, "and powerful." Hence its words "are spirit, and they are life;"-the living, life-giving words of the living God. The consolation which it imparts, and the blessings which it offers, are such as nothing but omnipotent goodness can bestow. It finds us guilty; and freely offers us pardon. It finds us polluted with innumerable defilements; and offers us moral purity. It finds us weak and enslaved; and offers us liberty. It finds us wretched; and offers happiness. It finds us dead; and offers everlasting life. It finds us "having no hope and without God in the world," with nothing before us, "but a certain, fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation;" and

places glory, and honor, and immortality, full in our view; and while it urges us to pursue them, by the exercise of faith in the Redeemer, and "patient continuance in well doing," it encourages and animates us in the pursuit, by the most condescending offers of assistance, and "exceedingly great and precious promises;" promises signed by the immutable God, and sealed with the blood of his eternal Son; promises which, one would think, are sufficient to render indolence active; and timidity bold. Unfailing pleasures; durable riches; immortal honors; imperishable mansions; an unfading crown; an immovable throne; an everlasting kingdom; an eternal weight of glory; perfect, uninterrupted, neverending, perpetually increasing felicity, in the full fruition of God, are the rewards, which these promises assure to all penitent believers. But in vain do we attempt to describe these rewards; for "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things, which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Such are the circumstances, which render the Bible interesting as a human composition;-such the instructions, precepts, and promises, which it communicates as a revelation from God and in proportion to the importance of its contents, are the evils which would result from its absence or loss. Destroy this volume, as the enemies of human happiness have vainly endeavored to do; and you render us profoundly ignorant of our Creator; of the formation of the world which we inhabit; of the origin and progenitors of our race; of our present duty, and future destination; and consign us, through life, to the dominion of fancy, doubt and conjecture. Destroy this volume; and you rob us of the consolatory expectation excited by its predictions, that the stormy cloud which has so long hung over a suffering world, will at length be scattered and a brighter day succeed;-you forbid us to hope that the hour is approaching, when nation shall no more lift up sword against nation; and righteousness, peace, and holy joy, shall universally prevail; and allow us to anticipate nothing, but a constant succession of wars, revolutions, crimes, and miseries, terminating only with the end of time. Destroy this volume; and you deprive us, at a single blow, of religion, with all the animating consolations, hopes, and prospects which it affords; and leave us nothing but the liberty of choosing,- miserable alternative!-between the cheerless gloom of infidelity, and the monstrous shadows of paganism. Destroy this volume; and you unpeople heaven; bar forever its doors against the wretched posterity of Adam; restore to the king of terrors his fatal sting; bury hope in the same grave which receives our bodies; consign all who have died before us, to eternal sleep, or endless misery; and allow us to expect nothing at death, but a similar fate. In a word, destroy this volume; and you take from us, at once, every thing, which prevents existence from becoming, of all curses, the greatest. You blot out the sun; dry up the ocean; and take away the atmosphere of the moral world; and degrade man to a situation, from which he may look up with envy to "the brutes that perish." Who then would not earnestly wish to believe the scriptures, even though they came to him, unattended with sufficient evidence of their divine origin. Who can be so much his own enemy, as to refuse to believe them, when they come attended with evidence, more than sufficient to satisfy all but the willfully incredulous? Who, in this view of them, imperfect as it is, is prepared to say, that they are not of all books the most important; that they ought not to be prized and studied as such, by all who possess them; and put, without delay, into the hands of all who do not? Were this inestimable treasure in the exclusive possession of any individual, would you not consider him as the most malevolent of beings, if he neglected to communicate it, as soon as possible, to his fellowcreatures? And if he were a stranger to the use of the press, would not the common feelings of humanity require him to spend whole nights, as did a wealthy merchant in the East, in transcribing it for their use? What possible excuse then, can we assign, for neglecting to

distribute this treasure, when the press affords us the means of doing it at so trifling an expense? Will it bc said, that few, or none of our fellowcitizens are destitute? It is a fact within the knowledge of this society, that the deficiency of Bibles in this District, to say nothing of other places, is far greater, than they are able to supply. Will it be said, that none are destitute of the sacred volume, but in consequence of their own fault; and that they are therefore unworthy to receive such a gift? Admitting this to be the case, which in many instances, however, it is not, is this an excuse for neglecting them, which it becomes us to assign? Had God adopted such a rule in the distribution of his favors; -had he bestowed the Bible on none but the deserving; who among ourselves should ever have been favored with it? Will it be said, that few, or none of our fellowcitizens are destitute?

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presented all his little hoard; servants have given a third part of their annual wages; and more than one military corps have offered a certain proportion of their pay. In consequence of these astonishing and unprecedented exertions, the sacred scriptures, or at least parts of them, have already been printed and circulated in upwards of forty different languages and dialects. Shall we then be idle, while all ranks and denominations are thus actively engaged in this glorious work? While Britons, Russians, Swedes, Polanders, Germans, Swiss, Italians, Greeks, Africans, and Indians, are employed in diffusing the scriptures, shall Americans alone do nothing? Or shall we bc last and least among Americans in favoring and promoting such a design? It is with no small reluctance we are obliged to confess, that in this rank, a very considerable part of this District may justly be placed. All that has been done here, has been done by comparatively a few. We speak with confidence, when we assert, that among all the societies which have been formed for the distribution of the scriptures, in our own or in other countries, not one can be found which has received assistance so disproportionate to what might have been reasonably expected, as this. And to what is the existence of this disgraceful fact to be ascribed? Are the inhabitants of this District less religious, do they value the Bible less,-or their property more than others? This, we presume, you will not feel disposed to allow. Shall we not then, do all in our power, to wipe off so foul a stain from this section of our country? Shall we give our destitute countrymen regret, that they were not born in any other part of the world, where they would have been supplied with the scriptures, rather than in this Christian land? Shall the eye of Omniscience, while it surveys the globe, find here the only spot, where the water of life is not permitted to flow freely;-where the cry of the poor for Bibles is disregarded; and thus be provoked to take from us a gift, of which we seem not to know the worth? There is reason to believe, that unless we speedily and diligently exert ourselves, this will be the case. He "who cannot lie" has declared, that "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the seas."

The period in which this prediction will be fully accomplished, is now evidently and rapidly approaching. The greatest of those obstacles, which once opposed its fulfillment, are already removed or overcome; and it is more than probable that before very many years have elapsed, there will be scarcely a human habitation on earth, unless indeed it be among ourselves, in which the Bible will not be found. Let us then engage as one man, in hastening the arrivnl of this glorious and long expected day. Let us give wings to the Bible. Let us guide this life-giving stream into every abode and cottage in our wilderness. And permit us to express a hope, that your assistance in promoting this design, will not be confined to the present occasion; but that you will aid our exertions. by becoming active members of this society. Above all, while engaged in conveying the Bible to others, let us beware of neglecting it ourselves. Let us bind it to our hearts as our most valuable treasure; study it with that reverence and attention which its character demands, and submit implicitly to its decisions, as to "the lively oracles of God." Thus we shall be impressed with a conviction, far more strong and abiding than any external evidence can produce, That all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Thus shall we be enabled by our own experience, to feel and adopt the language of the Psalmist, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. More to be desired are they than gold; yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, or the honey-comb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned,

and in keeping of them there is great reward."

S. THE BLAMELESS PAIR

THE BLAMELESS PAIR

"And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Luke 1:6 The persons of whom the Holy Ghost has borne this honorable testimony are Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. The character here ascribed to them, so excellent and desirable in itself, is especially deserving the regard and imitation of all who are united by conjugal ties. As this union is the source and basis of all the social relations, the character of those who "are no more twain but one flesh" must necessarily exert a powerful influence, not only over the domestic circle, but through all the ramifications of human society. It will be the object of this discourse, I. To consider and illustrate the character described in the text; and, II. To present some reasons why all who have entered the marriage state should endeavor to make it their own.

I. The first thing which demands attention in the character of this truly excellent and happy pair, is, that they were righteous before God. This, my hearers, is a great thing. It is, indeed, very easy to be righteous in our own estimation; nor is it very difficult to be righteous in the estimation of our fellow creatures; but it is by no means equally easy to be righteous in the estimation of God. He is constantly with us: he sees our whole conduct; nay more, he reads our hearts. To be righteous before him, then, is to be really, inwardly, and uniformly righteous. It is to be the same persons in every situation, and on all occasions; the same at home, and abroad, in solitude and in society. But much less than this will suffice to make us righteous in the estimation of our fellow creatures. They are not always with us; they do not see the whole of our conduct; and of our hearts, our motives, they know almost nothing. Of course, they know very little of our real characters. How little, for instance, do the nearest neighbors really know of each other. How many characters, which now stand fair, would be blasted in a moment, were every part of their outward conduct only, laid open to public view? And how many husbands and wives, who are generally supposed to live happily together, would be found mutual tormentors, were they fully known to the world! How wretchedly then are those persons deceived, who flatter themselves that they are righteous before God, merely because their characters stand fair in the estimation of men. And yet how many flatter themselves in this manner. How many feel and act, as if they were to be judged by men only, and not by the heart-searching God; —as if that part of their conduct only, which is known to the world, was to be brought into judgment; and not every secret action, thought, and feeling. My hearers, permit me to warn you against this ruinous delusion. Remember that, in order to be really righteous, you must be righteous before God. Remember, that no man, who would not be thought righteous by his fellow creatures, if his whole conduct and his whole heart were laid open to them, is righteous before God. Do you start at this assertion? A moment’s reflection will convince you that it is strictly true. The whole conduct, and the whole heart of every man, is perfectly known to God. Now if God, knowing a man thus perfectly, judges him to be righteous, then his fellow creatures, did they know him as perfectly, would judge him to be righteous. Hence it follows, that every man is unrighteous, whom his fellow creatures would judge to be unrighteous,

were they perfectly acquainted with his conduct and with his heart. Try yourselves by this rule. Would men think you righteous, did they know you as perfectly as God knows you? Then you are righteous. Would men think you unrighteous, did they know you thus perfectly? Then you are unrighteous. It may, however, be necessary to remark, that in making these assertions, I proceed on the supposition, that men should judge of you by the rule of God's Word, the rule by which God himself judges of your character. With this qualification, the truth of these assertions must, I conceive, appear evident to all. And is it not, to some of you at least, an alarming thought, that if men, did they know you perfectly, would think you unrighteous, then God certainly does think you so? And that he will treat you accordingly, unless you repent? If this thought does alarm any one, let me entreat him not to dismiss it hastily. Keep it in mind, make use of it to regulate your conduct, and to try your character; and when your heart and life become such, that an impartial jury of your fellow creatures, perfectly acquainted with both, and judging of them by the rules of God's Word, would pronounce you truly righteous, then, and not till then, may you venture to hope that you are righteous before God. But the opinion of men, if they knew us perfectly, and judged us by the Word of God, would be according to truth; and, of course, deserve our regard. Yet while they know so little of us, as they actually do, their good opinion can prove nothing in our favor, except it be, that our outward conduct, so far as it comes under their notice, is correct. Still less can our own opinion that we are righteous prove us to be so. Agreeably, we find St. Paul saying, It is a very small thing with me to be judged of man's judgment, yea, I judge not mine own self; but he that judgeth me is the Lord. And is it not wonderful, my hearers, that every man who believes there is a God, does not, like the apostle, feel as if the opinions of other beings respecting him were of very little consequence? —that many, who acknowledge there is a God, should think so little of his judgment, and so much of the approbation of their fellow creatures? We do not feel and act thus in other similar cases.

If we perform any work which requires the exertion of mental abilities, or of manual skill, we do not much desire or regard the applause of ignorant, incompetent judges. But we wish to know what judicious men, men of taste and information, think of it; and we value the approbation of one such man more than that of hundreds of inferior stamp. And were there one man in the world, whose taste and judgment were infallible, and whose decision would fix forever the character of our work, we should prefer his approbation to that of all the world beside. Why, then, do we not thus supremely prize, and labor to obtain the approbation of God, the only being who really knows us; whose judgment is infallible, on whom our destiny depends, and whose sentence will stamp our characters with a mark, which can never, never be effaced! Thus did the pious pair, whose example we are contemplating. They studied to approve themselves to God; and he declared, in return, that they were righteous before him; and had the whole world known them as perfectly as he did, the whole world would have assented, with one voice, to the truth of this declaration.

Again: This pair walked in all God's commandments and ordinances blameless. I do not, however, mention this, nor do I conceive the inspired writer mentioned it, as something different or distinct from being righteous before God. It is rather mentioned as an effect and a proof of their being righteous. To be righteous, is to be conformed to the rule of right; and the only rule of right is the will of God, as expressed in his commandments and ordinances. These two words, though nearly synonymous, are not perfectly so. The commands of God are his moral precepts, or those precepts which are designed to regulate our temper and conduct on all occasions. By his

ordinances are meant those religious rites and institutions, which he has directed us to observe. Repent, believe the gospel, be holy, —are commands; religious worship, baptism, and the Lord's supper, are ordinances. He that is righteous before God will observe both. In this respect many fail. Some pretend to obey God's commands, while they neglect his ordinances. Others visibly observe his ordinances, but neglect his commands. The truly righteous esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and observe them, not on occasions only, when it suits their convenience, but habitually. Thus did the persons whose character we are considering. They walked in God's commandments and ordinances, as in a path which they never forsook. The term walk signifies a course of life. To walk in God's commandments and ordinances, is to have the heart and life constantly regulated by them. It is not to step occasionally into the path of duty, and then take many steps in a different path; but it is to pursue this path with undeviating steadiness and perseverance, without turning aside either to the right hand or to the left. Nor was it a part only of God's commandments and ordinances that this pious pair observed; for we are told, that they walked in them all. They did not select such as were easy, or reputable, and neglect others. Nor did they observe those only, which they had little temptation to omit; but to use the language of the psalmist, they had respect to all God's commandments. Hence their characters and conduct were blameless, or irreproachable. Not that they were absolutely perfect. Some imperfection, doubtless, attended all their moral and religious performances; but there was nothing particularly blamable, no allowed insincerity or neglect. In the sight of men, their characters were spotless; and in the sight of God they possessed that simplicity and godly sincerity, which entitled them to the honorable appellation of Israelites indeed, in whom was no guile.

Such is the example here presented for the imitation of all, especially heads of families. But in order that the example should produce its full effect, it is necessary to show, more particularly, what is now, under the Christian dispensation, implied in walking in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blamelessly.

1. It implies the exercise of repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. These are the two first and great commands of the gospel, on obeying which our obedience to all other commands, and our acceptable observance of all Christian ordinances depends. This was the sum of St. Paul's preaching; these were the first duties which our Saviour directed his disciples to press upon all their hearers; and which he himself inculcates upon all. When the Jews asked him, What shall we do, that we may work the work of God? his answer was, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. Until we begin to perform these duties, we cannot be righteous before God, nor walk in any of his commandments or ordinances; for inspiration hath declared, without faith it is impossible to please him.

2. Walking in all God's commandments and ordinances blamelessly, implies great diligence in seeking a knowledge of them. No man can regulate his conduct by a rule, with which he is unacquainted. No man can walk in all God's commandments and ordinances, unless he knows what they are; nor can any man know what they are, unless he is familiarly acquainted with the Scriptures. As well might a mariner find his way to a distant port, without ever looking to his chart or compass. And the commands and ordinances of God are so numerous, that without daily and long continued attention, we shall certainly forget or overlook some of them; shall never obtain such a clear, systematic view of our duty, as is necessary to its performance. That copy of the Old Testament, which Zacharias and Elizabeth possessed, was doubtless worn with frequent use. It

must have been their daily counsellor and guide.

3. Walking in all God's commandments and ordinances blamelessly, implies a careful performance of all the duties which husbands and wives owe each other. These duties are summarily comprehended in the marriage covenant, in which the husband solemnly promises, before God and men, that he will love, provide for, and be faithful to his wife; and the wife, that she will obey, love, and be faithful to her husband. This covenant has the nature of an oath, and as such involves all who violate it in the guilt of perjury. The duties which they thus solemnly bind themselves to perform, are no more than God requires of them in his Word. He there commands husbands to love their wives, even as they love themselves, and wives to be subject in all things to their husbands. He commands them to make this union resemble that which subsists between Christ and his church. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as the church is subject to Christ. There must be but one will in a family, but every act of that one will must be prompted by love, love like that which Christ displays for his church. In no family are all God's commands obeyed, in which this love on the one part, and this submission on the other, are not found.

4. Walking in all the commandments and ordinances of God blamelessly, implies a careful performance, on the part of parents, of all the parental duties which he has enjoined. He requires us to give them a religious education, to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; to teach them diligently his revealed will, speaking to them of it, in the house, and by the way, when we lie down and when we rise up; and to restrain them when they would pursue vicious courses. We have also reason to believe that he requires parents to dedicate their children to him in baptism. That they ought to be dedicated to God, and presented to Christ for his blessing, all Christians are agreed, though our Baptist brethren do not think them proper subjects of baptism. But our Saviour's command, Suffer little children to come unto me, or to be brought to me, and forbid them not, —certainly makes it the duty of every Christian parent to present his children to Christ, and to pray for his blessing upon them, whatever may be his opinion respecting infant baptism. Nor can Christ fail to be displeased with those parents, who, by neglecting to bring their children, do, in effect, forbid them to come. And no Christian parent, who believes infant baptism to be an ordinance of God, can pretend that he walks in all God's ordinances, while he neglects it. Indeed, while any of you, my professing hearers, neglect it, you are violating your own express covenant engagements.

5. Walking in all God's ordinances and commandments blamelessly, implies the maintaining of the worship of God in the family. It is acknowledged, that there is no command which, in so many words, says, worship God in your families, or, maintain family prayer. Yet that this is a duty incumbent on heads of families, is, perhaps, as clearly taught in the Scriptures, as if it were the subject of an express command. We have, for instance, the example of good men in favor of it. God expresses full confidence that Abraham would maintain religion in his family. Joshua's resolution was, As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. David, after the public exercises of religion were finished, returned to bless his household; that is, to unite with them in an act of worship; and our Saviour often prayed with his little family of disciples. Families that call not upon God's name are classed among the heathen, and it is intimated that God will poor out his fury upon them. Besides, we are commanded to pray always on all occasions, and in all circumstances; of course, in our families. And St. Peter exhorts husbands and wives to live

together as heirs of the grace of life, that their prayers may not be hindered, —an expression which evidently refers to united prayers, and intimates that he thought it very important that such prayers should not be hindered; and that he took it for granted that Christian families would offer such prayers. Besides, the reasonableness, the propriety, and the happy effects of family worship, show it to be a duty.

It is reasonable and proper, for families have mercies in common to ask for, and they receive favors in common for which they should unite in expressing their gratitude. And the happy effects which result from a right performance of this duty, are, innumerable and inestimable. It has a happy effect upon the head of the family himself. It tends to make him circumspect, to produce watchfulness over his temper and conduct through the day; for how can he indulge sin or give vent to angry passions in presence of the family, when he recollects that he is a priest in his own house; that he prayed with them in the morning; and that he will again be called to pray with them at night? He cannot but feel, that, if the rest of his conduct is not of a piece with this, his own children and servants will despise him for his inconsistency. This practice has also a most salutary influence upon the happiness of domestic life. If any unpleasant feelings arise between members of the same household, such feelings can scarcely outlive the return of the next season for family devotion. Affection and peace must return, when they next meet around the family altar, unless one or the other is a hypocrite. Thus dissensions are prevented, and domestic peace and harmony are perpetuated. I may add, that it always tends to produce, and often does produce, the most happy effects upon the children of the family. At least, it is certain that a much larger proportion of children are moral, and become pious, in families, where this duty is properly performed; than in those where it is wholly neglected, or only occasionally attended to.

6. Walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly, implies a suitable concern for the present and future happiness of servants, apprentices and dependents. Their health must be regarded. More labor should not be exacted of them, than we would be willing should be exacted of our own children, were they placed in similar circumstances. Their rights must be held sacred. We are commanded to give unto our servants that which is equal and right, remembering that we have a Master in heaven. Their feelings must not he trifled with. If they are faulty, let them be told of their faults with mildness; but passionate, contemptuous language, should never be addressed to them. Ye masters, forbear threatening, is the command of Jehovah.

7. Walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly, implies a careful performance of all the duties which we owe our neighbors. Our Saviour has taught us to include in this class all our fellow men, to whom we have opportunity of doing good. He that is righteous before God will ever be a good neighbor. The present and future happiness of all his fellow creatures will be dear to him, and he will promote it as far as his ability extends. Of course, he will never knowingly injure them in their persons, reputation, or estate. And in receiving and returning their visits, he will be governed, not by the sinful or foolish customs, which the fashionable world has adopted, but by a regard to God’s glory and their best good.

8. Walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly, implies a proper use of the temporal good things which are entrusted to our care. Nothing should be wasted, for God will require an account of all. Nothing should be employed to gratify the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life; for property so employed is much worse than wasted. We must use the

world as not abusing it, and employ every portion of our property in a manner which God will approve, and to the purpose for which it was given. He that wastes his possessions, wastes God's property, and the poor's patrimony; he that consumes them upon his lusts, gives them to swine.

Lastly; Walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly, implies a sacred observance of the Sabbath, a diligent attendance on the public worship of God, and a commemoration of Christ at his table. All these things are God's ordinances, and, if we except baptism, they are perhaps the only ordinances which he has appointed under the Christian dispensation. Heads of families, who neglect either of them, cannot be said to walk in all God's ordinances blamelessly.

Having thus considered and illustrated the character brought to view in the text, I proceed, as was proposed,

II. To state some reasons, why all who have entered the marriage state should endeavor to make it their own. But is this necessary? Can any of you, my hearers, need reasons or motives to persuade you to the acquisition of such a character? Does it not commend itself at once to the understanding, and to the conscience of every man who is possessed of either? If, however, any of you need such reasons, they can easily be assigned.

1. God approves, and requires you to possess, such a character. He commands you to be righteous before him. His language is, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. All the commandments and ordinances which have been mentioned are his. They are sanctioned by his authority; a neglect of them will be punished by his power; a performance of them will be rewarded by his grace. The curse of the Lord, we are told, is in the house of the wicked; but he loveth and blesseth the habitation of the righteous. And is it not reasonable that we should obey his commands? Is it not desirable to avert his curse from our dwellings, and to have his blessing in our habitations? Who, that believes there is a God, would not have his family one of the few faithful families, on which God looks with approbation? Who would not wish that the eye of God should discover in it nothing displeasing to him?

2. Consider how much it would promote your present happiness to possess such a character. Where can happiness be found on earth, if not in such a family as has now been described? Mutual affection and harmony, peace and contentment would dwell in it. All the gifts of Providence would be enjoyed with a double relish, because they would be received as the gifts of a Father, and be sanctified by his word and prayer. Almost every cause of domestic unhappiness would be excluded. There would be no room for anxiety, uneasiness, and alarm; for such a family could cheerfully trust in God to supply all its real wants, and to shield it from all real evils. Even if afflictions came, they would come as mercies, and deprived of their stings. In short, such a family would be of one heart and of one soul; that heart and that soul would be devoted to God, and God in return would devote himself to them. And O, how pleasant, how soothing, how refreshing, would it be to the husband, the father, to return at evening to such a house, after the labors and fatigues of the day, to be greeted with affectionate smiles, and to return them; to shut out the world with its follies and cares, and to feel, while rejoicing in the circle of those whom he loved, that God was looking down upon them with approbation and delight; that an unseen Saviour was rejoicing in the midst of them, to see the happiness which he had purchased, and which his religion bestowed! How sweet, to close an evening thus pleasant, and a day spent in the service of God, by uniting

around the family altar in an offering of prayer and praise to their great Benefactor, and then lie down to rest with that feeling of sincerity and safety, which filial confidence in heaven inspires! Some may, perhaps, choose to call this representation, religious romance; but it is sober reality; it is no more than has been actually enjoyed; and if we see few families in which it is realized, it is only because there are few, in which both heads of the family walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

3. Permit me to remind you how greatly such a family would honor God and adorn religion. It would, indeed, in such a world as this, be like one of those ever verdant islands, which rise amidst the wide ocean of Arabian sands, and whose constant verdure leads the weary and thirsty traveler to seek for the hidden spring which produces it. It is, perhaps, impossible for an insulated individual to exhibit all the beauty and excellence of Christianity; because much of it consists in the right performance of those relative duties, which he has no opportunity to perform. But in a religious family, a family where both husband and wife are evidently pious, religion may be displayed in all its parts, and in the fullness of its glory and beauty; and one such family will do more to recommend it, and to soften the prejudices of its enemies, than can be effected by the most powerful and persuasive sermon. The subject is very far from being exhausted. Many more powerful arguments and motives in favor of imitating the character here recommended might easily be urged; but the unexpected length to which the preceding remarks have been extended, compels me to omit them, and to close with a short address by way of application.

Permit me to commence this address by asking each married pair in this assembly, whether their family is such as has now been described? whether they resemble the parents of John the Baptist? Are you both righteous before God? and do you walk in all his ordinances and commands blameless? If not, whose fault is it? Is it the husband's? or the wife's? or the fault of both? In some families, doubtless both are in fault; neither is righteous. Alas, that there should be such families, and so many of them among us! Alas, that persons should ever enter the married state, so totally unqualified to discharge all its most important duties; that immortal souls should be committed to the care of those who know not their worth, and who will do nothing to effect their salvation! Is this the character of any fathers and mothers present? and if so, shall it continue such? Remember, ye who are in this state, especially ye who have just entered it, that, however happy you may now be, affliction will come, sickness will come, death will come; and what will you then do, ye who have made no provision for such events, ye who have no God to support and comfort you? Be assured, the time will arrive, even in the present life, when you will feel the need of religion; feel that everything besides is comparatively worthless. Remember, too, ye who now love and rejoice in each other, that you must meet in another world; and that the fate of each in that world will depend much upon the conduct of the other. If you now encourage each other in neglecting religion, you will then meet as the bitterest of enemies, and load each other with reproaches and execrations. Each one will then say, O, that we had never met! Had I not been connected with you, had I possessed a religious partner, I might now have been happy. But you tempted and encouraged me to live without God, and to neglect my Saviour; and now I must, in consequence, be miserable forever! On the contrary, should either of you now become truly religious, you may be instrumental in effecting the salvation of the other; and then with what joy will you both meet in heaven! O then, live together in such a manner, that you may hereafter meet with joy; live as it becomes two immortal beings traveling hand in hand to judgment and eternity. Live together in this world as

heirs of the grace of life, and you shall live together in heaven, as happy participants of its bliss. But there are probably other families in which the fault lies on one only of the partners. Perhaps, O husband, it is your fault, that both are not religious. You have a pious partner, one whom you cannot but acknowledge is pious. But you refuse to unite with her in making your habitation a temple of God, the abode of religion, of peace and happiness. You do not, perhaps, oppose her; but you afford her no assistance in her journey to heaven. In this respect she is a widow. She is deprived of one of the greatest blessings which a wife has a right to expect from a husband; and must pursue her way solitary, alone. When she rejoices, she cannot impart to you her joys; when she is sad, she cannot make you understand the cause of her sadness, nor receive from you any consolation or relief. Nay more, you are the chief cause of her sorrows. She mourns with a heart almost broken, because she is compelled to leave you behind, to fear that you will perish forever; and the more kind you are in other respects, so much the more does her grief increase. Yet she, probably, does not express it, lest she should give offence, and be reproached for indulging needless apprehensions. And while you give all this pain to her, of what happiness do you deprive yourself; happiness here, and happiness hereafter! O, then, let it no longer be your fault, that religion is not enthroned, and adorned, and enjoyed in your families; but now, while the Spirit and the bride invite, come and taste of the water of life freely. In other cases it is, perhaps, the fault of the wife; and if so, how great a fault! What hardness of heart, what inexcusable obstinacy, does it evince, to stand out not only against the authority of God, and the invitations of the Saviour, but the arguments, persuasions, and entreaties of her nearest earthly friend! What cruel unkindness, to plant thorns in the breast of him, who looks to you for his chief earthly consolation; to seal up his lips when he wishes to give vent to the feelings of his heart; to compel him to feel that, when he prays in his family, he prays alone; and to see that his labors for the salvation of his children are rendered almost fruitless for want of a partner to assist him. O, then, let no wife, no mother, in this assembly, be so unmindful of what she owes to her husband, her children, her Saviour, her God, as to continue in an irreligious state. And wherever either partner is pious, let both become so; and then shall the voice of joy and rejoicing be heard is your, habitation, as it is in the tabernacles of the righteous.

Blessed be God, there are some such families among us, —families, in which, as we have reason to hope, both the husband and wife resemble the parents of John the Baptist. Let those who are thus highly favored show their gratitude to God, by striving to become eminently pious. Let them quicken and assist each other in the good work, and be mutual helpers of each other’s faith and joy. When you return to your habitations, consult together, and inquire, whether there is any commandment or ordinance of God, in which you are not both walking; any duty which you are neglecting; anything in your families which is displeasing to Christ. If anything of this kind is discovered, put it from you instantly, however dear. Thus you will each have increasing reason to bless God through eternity, for giving you a pious partner; and when you meet in heaven, you will love each other with pure and immortal affection, as instruments employed by God to fit each other for that world, where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God.

Chapter 64

S. THE CHILDREN OF THE COVENANT, THE SAVIOUR'S FIRST CARE

THE CHILDREN OF THE COVENANT, THE SAVIOUR’S FIRST CARE

"Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." Acts 3:25-26

These words compose part of a sermon delivered by St. Peter to an assembly of his countrymen; a sermon, on many accounts highly interesting, and especially on account of the success with which it was attended; for it appears from the context, that it was the means of converting some thousands of the hearers. In that part of it which has now been read, the apostle suggests several considerations which were calculated deeply to affect the minds of his audience. He reminds them, that they were descended from pious ancestors; that, in consequence of this, they were the children of the covenant which God had made with their fathers, and especially with Abraham, the illustrious progenitor of their race; and that, from regard to this covenant, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, had sent him first to them, to bless them in turning away every one of them from his iniquities. My hearers, are there any in this assembly to whom this address of the apostle to his countrymen is applicable? There are. All the baptized persons here present, who have been dedicated to God by believing parents, and who have not cordially embraced the Saviour, are in a situation almost precisely similar to that of the audience whom St. Peter addressed on this occasion. To all such baptized persons present then, to all in this assembly, who have been dedicated to God, by believing parents, in the ordinance of baptism, I say, Ye are the children of the covenant which God made with your parents, and to you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, now sends him to bless you in turning away every one of you from your iniquities. In discoursing farther on this passage, so interesting to believing parents and to their children, I shall endeavor,

I. To explain and establish the assertion, that all who have been dedicated to God by believing parents, are children of the covenant which Gad has made with their parents, and especially with Abraham, the great father of the faithful. With this view I remark, that the blessings of the covenant, which God made with Abraham, were all included in three great promises. The first was, In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. The second was, To thee and to thy seed will I give this land; that is, the land of Canaan. The third was, I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee. Of these promises the first was made to Abraham as an individual. It merely assured him that the promised seed of the woman, who was to bring blessings to all nations, should descend from him, or be one of his posterity. This promise has long since been fulfilled by the birth of Christ, the promised seed, who was born of a daughter of Abraham. Of course we have nothing to do with it, except to receive the Saviour whose coming it reveals. The second promise was made to Abraham, considered as the progenitor of the Jewish nation, the twelve tribes of

Israel; and this promise also has been fulfilled by their being put in possession of Canaan, the promised land. With this promise therefore we have no concern, only so far as it has a typical reference to the heavenly Canaan. The third promise, I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee, —was made to Abraham, considered as a believer, in covenant with God; as the great father of the faithful, or of all who should believe with a faith similar to his own. In this promise, the covenant which God made with Abraham principally and essentially consists; in the stipulations which we find in the 17th chapter of Genesis, where God says to him, I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee. It is this covenant, of which circumcision was the seal, with which we are principally concerned, and to which the following discourse refers. That the Jews were the children of the covenant, it is needless to prove, since it is everywhere asserted by the inspired writers, as well as in our text. In passages too numerous to mention particularly, they are styled God's covenant people, children of the promise, and represented as being born in covenant, and as enjoying covenanted blessings. Speaking of the Jews in his own day, St. Paul says, Who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises. This covenant, it may be farther remarked, was perfectly distinct from the Mosaic law, and from the covenant which God made with the Jews as a nation, when he brought them out of Egypt, and which was afterwards renewed at Mount Sinai; for the apostle tells us, that it was confirmed of God in Christ four hundred and thirty years before the law was given; and that being thus confirmed it could never be disannulled. Agreeably, we meet with various allusions to this covenant scattered through the Old Testament. The children of thy servants, says the psalmist, shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee. The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and to them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. And as for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord: my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words that I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth even forever. And again God says, fear not O Jacob my servant, and thou Jeshurun, whom I have chosen, for I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground, I will pour out my Spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among grass, and as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob, and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel. Since then it cannot be denied, that the Jews were in covenant with God, the only question is, whether the baptized children of professed believers, at the present day, are in the same situation; whether they, like the Jews, are born in covenant, and stand in the same relation to God, which the Jews formerly sustained. With a view to prove that they are so, I observe,

1. It is frequently predicted by the prophets, that in the latter days the Gentiles should, like the Jews, be brought into covenant with God, and share with them in the blessings of the covenant. Thus in the prophecy of Hosea, God says, I will have mercy on them that had not obtained mercy. I will call them my people which were not my people. This passage is quoted by St. Paul, to prove that the Gentiles, or nations, as the word signifies, should be taken into covenant with God, and become his people, as the Jews had formerly been. In many chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah, this event is more particularly predicted and described. The Jewish church is there assured, that the Gentiles shall come to her light, that they shall come bringing her children in their arms, and

that these shall supply the place of the children whom she had lost.

2. In the second place, we learn from many passages in the New Testament, that all these promises and predictions were fulfilled. We are there told, that Abraham is the father of all who believe, though they be not circumcised, as were the Jews; that the blessing of Abraham has come upon the Gentiles; that all who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. St. Paul, writing to the Ephesian church, says, Wherefore, remember that ye, being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now ye, who were sometimes afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. Therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. And in the succeeding chapter he speaks of it as a great mystery, which had not been made known, but which was then revealed, that the Gentiles, or nations should be fellow heirs with the Jews, and of the same body. My hearers, reflect a moment on the import of these passages.

They teach us, that all true believers, all who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed; but if they are Abraham's seed, they must be Abraham's heirs, heirs of the same promises and spiritual privileges, which he enjoyed. But one of the privileges which he enjoyed, was the liberty of bringing his children into covenant with God, and one of the promises which was made to him was, I will be a God to thy seed after thee. If then, Christians are Abraham's heirs, they also have the same privilege of bringing their children into covenant with God, and God's language to every Christian parent is, I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee. Agreeably, the same passage tells us, that they are heirs according to the promise, and that they are fellow-heirs with the Jews.

It appears then, that Christians stand in the same place, which was formerly occupied by the Jews; we take up what they laid down; we receive the privileges and blessings which they forfeited; the kingdom of God, which was taken from them according to our Saviour's prediction, has been given to us; and therefore if their children were in covenant with God, so, my Christian friends, are ours. This conclusion is confirmed, and the whole subject illustrated by St. Paul in that well known allegorical passage, in which he compares the church to a good olive tree, of which the Jews were the natural branches. But these natural branches, he tells us, were broken off, and Gentile believers grafted in their room; and these Gentile believers, he adds, now partake of the fatness and sap of the good olive tree; that is, they enjoy those church privileges, which the Jews lost by unbelief; and, of course, the privilege of bringing their children into covenant with God. That this must be the apostle's meaning, is evident from another passage in the same chapter, in which he says, if the first fruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches. By the root here he evidently means parents, and, by the branches, their children; and the import of his assertion is, that if the parents be holy, so are the children. It must, however, be observed, that he is here speaking, not of personal, but of relative holiness, of that kind of holiness which results from being dedicated to God. In this sense, the vessels of the tabernacle were said to be holy, because they were consecrated to the service of God; and in the same verse, the children of believing parents are holy, because they have been consecrated to God in the ordinance of baptism. The passages which we have quoted, are scarcely a tenth part of those which might be adduced from the Scriptures on this subject; but they are, I conceive, abundantly sufficient to show that believers are the children and heirs of Abraham; that, like him they are in covenant with God;

that the same promise, which was made to him, is now made to them; that they have the same right to dedicate their children to God, as he had; and, consequently, that all the baptized children of believing parents, are, as the Jews formerly, the children of the covenant which God made with their fathers, and especially with Abraham, the great father of the faithful.

If these truths have been established, it follows, that we are authorized to address every baptized child of believing parents in the language of St. Peter in our text; for if such persons are in a situation similar to that of his hearers, we ought to address them in a similar manner. To all such persons then, in this assembly, to all of every age who have believing parents, but who are not themselves believers, I say, To you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, bath sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. That you may understand the import of this address, it is necessary to remind you, that one of the privileges which the Jews enjoyed in consequence of being children of the covenant was, the enjoyment of the first offer of that salvation which Christ had accomplished.

Thus, when Christ commissioned his disciples to preach the gospel, he charged them to begin at Jerusalem; to preach the glad tidings first to the Jews. Until they should have done this, he forbade them to go to the Gentiles, or to enter into any city of the Samaritans. This command the apostles strictly observed. They preached the gospel at first, we arc told, to none but the Jews only; and St. Paul, addressing the Jews at Antioch, says, It was needful that the gospel of Christ should first be preached to you. These remarks will enable you to understand, why St. Peter, in our text, says to his Jewish hearers, to you first God sends his Son to bless you. It is the same at the present day. God sends the offer of salvation first, to the children of believing parents. In this respect he acts as a wise earthly prince would do, Were such a prince disposed to confer distinguishing favors and privileges upon any person, he would doubtless offer them to the children of his obedient subjects, who had sworn allegiance to him before he offered them to the children of rebels, or of strangers, who had not submitted to his government. Now your parents have sworn allegiance to God, and engaged to submit to his government, as obedient subjects. They have also engaged to use all their influence to induce you to do the same. In token of their readiness to do this, they have solemnly and publicly dedicated you to God, to be his forever; and he has so far accepted this dedication, that he now sends you the first offer of pardon and salvation, through his Son. In his name, then, in the name of your parents' God, of Him into whose adorable name you have been baptized, I now solemnly make you this offer. In his name, I declare that he has sent his Son, in whom all blessings are deposited, and by whom they are conferred, to bless you, to bless every one of you; to bless you with all temporal and spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. At the same time, I inform you, that he can confer these blessings upon you only by turning you from your iniquities; for so long of you cleave to them, it is impossible that Christ should bless or prove a blessing to you; since between sin and misery there is an inseparable connection. I also inform you that you cannot be turned from your iniquities but by your own consent; for so long as you live and are unwilling to renounce them, it is impossible that you and they should be separated. Christ's language to you is, Turn ye at my reproof, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words unto you. Come ye out from the ungodly world, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and be a father to you, and ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Such are the invitations, such the promises of your heavenly Father and Redeemer. And now I ask every baptized person present, what answer will you return

to these invitations? With respect to those of you who have arrived to years of understanding, it is time that your answer was given. It is time that it were known to whom you belong; whether you are for Christ or against him; whether you intend to ratify or to discard what your parents have done in your behalf. While you were infants, God permitted them to act for you; but now you must act for yourselves, and stand or fall by your own choice. And what is that choice? Will you take your parents' God to be your God? Will you give yourselves up to him as you have already been given up by them? Will you take upon yourselves that covenant which they have made in your behalf, and perform its duties, that you may enjoy its blessings? Will you receive Christ as all must do who would receive power from him to become the children of God? and as a proof of your willingness to receive him, will you turn from your iniquities, and renounce the sinful pleasures and pursuits of which you are naturally so fond? Before you reply to these questions, permit me to suggest some considerations, which, by the blessing of God, may induce you to return such an answer as your duty and happiness require. In the first place, permit me to remind you that you are this day to determine whether God or the world shall be your portion, whether Christ or Satan shall be your king. One of these masters you must serve; both you cannot serve, and you are now to decide, in the presence of heaven and earth, which you will serve. Your conduct from this day will show whose servants you intend to be. In the second place, permit me to remind you, that the choice you make will make a complete discovery of your true characters. If you choose to persist in pursuing worldly objects, and the pleasures of sin, it will prove that you prefer sin to holiness, that you are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; nay, it will prove that you are God's enemies, for the Scriptures assure us that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, and that whosoever will love the world is the enemy of God. What is still worse, it will prove that you are irreconcilably God's enemies, that you are so strongly opposed to his character and government; that the tears, entreaties, and example of your parents cannot induce you to love him. In the third place, remember that your choice is to be made for eternity. You are not to choose whether you will serve sin and Satan in this world, and God in the next; but whether you will be the slaves of sin, and, of course, the enemies of God forever; for what you choose to be in time, you will continue to be through eternity. On the decision which you this day make, it will probably depend whether myriads of ages hence you shall be angels in heaven, or spirits of disobedience in hell; for it becomes you to remember, In the fourth place, that your choice will decide, not only your character, but your doom. You must receive the wages of that master whom you choose to serve. Now the wages of sin, we read, is death, eternal death; but the gift of God is everlasting life. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. They that sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, etc. In choosing between God and the world then, you are choosing between life and death, between heaven and hell, between happiness eternal and ineffable, and misery endless and unutterable. And will you then, can you then choose death and hell and everlasting woe? Will you, by your conduct, say to all about you, I am a wretch so totally devoid of goodness, that I prefer the world to God, the tempter to Christ, sin to holiness, hell to heaven. If so, surely your guilt will be no common guilt; for you can make no excuse. You cannot even plead ignorance; for you have lived in pious families; you have had a religious education; you have seen the influence of religion upon your parents; you have had good examples placed before you; you have from your earliest years heard much of God and of your Saviour; you have heard many prayers addressed to them; your earthly parents have united with your Father in heaven, in persuading you to love him; and his word has been read in your presence, and placed in your

hands.

If then you reject your God and Saviour, you reject him knowingly and voluntarily. You reject a known, and not an unknown God. After seeing the difference between a life of religion and a life of sin, you deliberately choose the latter. Nay more, you reject not only God, but your parents' God; you violate not only the obligations which all his creatures are under to love and serve him, but the peculiar obligations which result from your baptismal dedication to God, and say by your conduct, let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us. Your conduct then dishonors God more than the conduct of a thousand heathen, who never heard his name; and if they, as the apostle declares, are without excuse, how totally inexcusable must you be, should you follow their example. In addition to this, you will be guilty of the most inexcusable ingratitude. In giving you pious parents, God has conferred on you one of the greatest blessings which he could bestow.

He might have caused your souls to inhabit bodies among the heathen, where you would never have heard of a Saviour, where your parents would have dedicated you to false gods, and perhaps have offered you in sacrifice upon their altars! And will you requite him for this favor by practically saying, I regret that my parents were pious, or that they dedicated me to God? Would I had been born in an irreligious family, where I should never have been troubled with religion or prayer, but where I might have indulged in the pursuit of worldly pleasures without interruption or restraint. Will you ungratefully undo all that your parents have done for your salvation, and tear yourselves out of the arms of the Saviour in which they have placed you? Will those of you whose parents have ascended to heaven, do this? If so, remember that as your guilt will be no common guilt, so your punishment will be no common punishment. How awfully aggravated it will be, you may learn from the terrible threatenings denounced against the unbelieving Jews who like you were children of the covenant.

Christ declares that the very heathen will rise up against them in the day of judgment and condemn them; that it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in that day than for them, and that while many shall come from the east and the vest, and the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God, the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In a word, he tells us that they who know their Lord's will and do it not shall be beaten with many stripes. And will you then, by refusing to turn from your iniquities, pull down upon yourselves this terrible fate? Shall all the tears, prayers and exertions of your parents only serve to increase your condemnation? Shall the baptismal water with which you have been sprinkled, be converted into drops of liquid fire? Shall the blessings which Christ was sent to bring, be transformed into curses; and will you, to whom they are first offered, be the first to reject them? You are like Capernaum, raised, as it were, to heaven by your privileges. Will you, by abusing or neglecting them, be yourselves cast down to hell, to the lowest hell? And now I wait for your reply.

What answer shall I return to him that sent me, to him who sends his Son to bless you in turning away every one of you from your iniquities? I suspect that most of you will return no direct answer, but plead for time to deliberate, for a little longer delay. But, my friends, this time cannot be granted. You have already delayed too long. The Jewish children were required to partake of the passover, and appear before God at the solemn feasts, as soon as they arrived at a proper age; and this, as we learn from our Saviour's example, was the age of twelve years. If they refused or

delayed to comply, they were doomed to be cut off from among the people; to lose forever the privileges which they slighted. Now a large proportion of those whom I am addressing, have not only reached, but overpast this period of life. Not a few baptized persons present have reached the meridian of life, and some have even advanced beyond it. You ought then long since to have embraced the Saviour, and thus have become prepared to appear at the table of Christ, who, the apostle tells us, is our passover that was sacrificed for us. Already are you liable to be cut off forever from his people, in consequence of delaying to receive him; and will you then talk of a longer delay?

It cannot be granted. Soon will you, like the Jews, be broken off as withered branches, because of unbelief. Soon will the kingdom of God be taken from you and given to others. God's language to you is, Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Today, if ye will hear my voice, harden not your hearts. This day then, this very day, must you make your choice. This very day must you choose between God and the world, between Christ and the tempter, between heaven and hell. This day, before you leave this house, must you decide the great, the all-important question, whether you will be happy or miserable forever. Heaven and hell are now waiting your answer. Heaven is waiting to rejoice in your repentance. Hell is waiting to exult in your fall. To which then will you give joy? The answer is given. Your hearts have uttered it; God has heard it. It is already recorded in heaven, and your future conduct will soon cause its import to be known on earth. At least, some of you have, I hope, answered as you ought. Some of you, I hope are ready to say to Christ's church, as did Ruth to Naomi, Entreat us not to leave you, nor to return from following after you; for where you go, we will go; where you dwell, we will dwell; your people shall be our people, and your God our God. The Lord do so to us and more also, if aught but death part you and us. Farewell, vain world! farewell, sinful pleasures! farewell, sinful companions! Our Fathers' God calls us, our Saviour invites us, and we have determined to comply with the call, and cast in our lot among his people. And is this your determination? this the sincere language of your hearts? Welcome then, ye once wandering lambs of the flock; welcome to the fold of Christ; welcome to his church, welcome to the good and great Shepherd, who gathers the lambs with his arms and carries them in his bosom. We bid you a thousand and a thousand welcomes to the ark of safety; and while we congratulate you on your happy escape from the snares of the world, and the toils of the tempter, we would unite with you in blessing him who has set your sin-entangled feet at liberty, and inclined you to choose the wise, the better part. You now ratify what your parents have done in your name; you consent to take their God for your God, and to give yourselves up to him in the bonds of his everlasting covenant. Remember then, that from this time, your language must be, What have we to do any more with idols? we have opened our mouths unto the Lord, and we cannot go back. Follow on then, to know the Lord, and you shall know him, and in due time reap, if you faint not. But have all, to whom, this discourse is addressed, returned such an answer? Fain would I hope this to be the case; yet I cannot but fear, that some of them have not. I cannot but fear that some are still delaying a reply, and saying to the preacher as Felix did to Paul, Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. But my friends I cannot depart without a direct and decided answer. Indeed, persist in delaying, I have one; for, in this case, to delay, is to refuse. Reflect then, a moment, before you persist in your determination to make a longer delay. Listen to the warning, which God has recently sent you in his providence, as if with a view to add weight and efficacy to the present discourse. Think of the young person whom death, a few weeks since, snatched away from among us. He was, like you, a

child of the covenant; he felt the obligation which this privilege imposed upon him, and it is but a few months since you saw him, in this place, publicly ratifying the vows which his parents had previously made in his name. But suppose he had delayed to embrace Christ as you are now intending to do. A delay of only a few months would have been fatal to his everlasting happiness; for he was deprived of his reason by the violence of disease, almost from the moment in which it arrested him. Had not sickness found him prepared, he must have died unprepared. So some of you may have but a few months to live, and delay may be everlasting death. And even should your lives be spared, delay may be equally fatal. God may, and he probably will, take from you his holy Spirit forever, and give you up to final hardness of heart, as he did the Jews. Remember the Jews at Antioch. When Paul offered them salvation and they delayed to accept it, he said to them, It was necessary that the gospel should first be preached to you; but since ye put it from you, and count yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles; for so hath the Lord commanded. My friends, if God commanded his apostle to turn from the children of the covenant, when they rejected his offer, will he not turn from you, if you do the same? Most certainly he will. Beware then, lest there be among you any profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright; for ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, and found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. My friends, if you, through fear of losing your worldly pleasures, refuse to embrace the Saviour now, you will, like Esau, sell your birthright; and if you do, it will be too late to repent; you will find no place for repentance, though you should carefully and tearfully seek it. But why should I multiply words? I have fulfilled my commission. It was necessary, first, to offer Christ to you, and I have done it. I repeat the offer. I once more assure you, that to you first God sends his Son to bless you, in turning every one of you from his iniquities. Will you then persist in rejecting him, or, what is the same thing, in delaying to accept his offer? If so, your doom is sealed. You have bid farewell, a long, an eternal farewell to God, to Christ, to his church, to your religious friends, to happiness. Your blood be upon you, I am clear. From henceforth I turn to others; to those who have not been dedicated to God.

It was my duty, my friends, first to offer Christ to others This duty I have discharged, and am now at liberty to make the same offer to you. Your heavenly Father, is more careful for your happiness than even your earthly parents. They refused or neglected to give you to him in your infancy, but he has provided a Saviour, through whom you may present yourselves to him and be accepted. The Gentiles accepted Christ, when the children of the covenant rejected him. Will you then imitate their example. Will you give yourselves to that God, whom the children of the covenant neglect? Will you accept the privileges which they despise? If so, the blessing of Abraham will come upon you and your families, as it has on thousands of the Gentiles; and God will make with you an everlasting covenant, as he did with him, to be a God to you. To those of you, who are parents then, this subject is peculiarly interesting. It shows you the reason, why your children are not admitted to the ordinance of baptism.

It is because they are not children of the covenant, and they are not children of the covenant, because you have refused to take hold on that covenant, which God offers to make with you. His language to you has long been, Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear and your souls shall live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David. But it is evident, that the parent, who will not make a covenant with God for himself, cannot covenant for his

children. If he will not give himself to God, he cannot in sincerity give them to God. If he has no faith himself, he cannot present them in faith, and without faith nothing can be done acceptably. But no sooner does a parent become a believer in Christ, and embrace him as the mediator of the new covenant, than he is enabled and entitled to present his children to God through Christ, and claim for them covenanted blessings. This we find was the case under the ancient dispensation. No sooner did one of the Gentiles become a proselyte to the true religion, and receive the seal of the covenant, than his posterity became entitled to share in all the privileges which were enjoyed by the Jews; and to receive the seal of circumcision.

It was the same under the New Testament dispensation. When a Jew or a Gentile embraced Christ by faith, not only he, but his household, were baptized, as we see in the case of the jailor, of Lydia, and Stephanus; but never do we find an instance, in which the children of any but professed believers were admitted either to circumcision or to baptism on their parents' account. This then, if you love your children, affords an additional reason why you should, without delay, embrace the Saviour, that you may present them to him for his blessing, and thus render them the children of the covenant. They themselves, if they were acquainted with their best interests, would entreat and beseech you, as soon as they could speak, to dedicate yourselves to God, that you might thus be prepared and entitled to present them. This subject is also highly interesting to those parents, who are professed believers. I need not tell you, that no promised blessing can become ours, unless it be received by faith; or that without faith it is impossible to please God. It is by faith alone, that we can take hold on the covenant for ourselves; and it is only by faith that we can dedicate our children to God in such a manner, as to be accepted, and obtain for them the most precious blessings of the covenant. But real believers do not always exercise faith, no, not even when they present their children to God. They too often suffer themselves to fall into a cold backsliding state, and then the dedication of their children becomes a mere formality. In addition to this, many professors awfully neglect to fulfil their vows by which they have publicly and solemnly bound themselves to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. By this negligence, they do, in effect, throw themselves out of the covenant, at least so far as their children are concerned. So did not Abraham. I know him, says Jehovah, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. Here the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, is made to depend upon Abraham's performance of the essential duties of the covenant. It is the same at the present day. If you, my professing friends, forget your covenant engagements, God will forget his promises; he will not give the blessings of the covenant to your children.

Chapter 65

S. THE CHRISTIAN MANNER OF EXPRESSING GRATITUDE.

THE CHRISTIAN MANNER OF EXPRESSING GRATITUDE. The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain. But when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.—2 Timothy 1:16-18. THE enemies of Christianity, while stating its supposed defects, have asserted that it recognizes neither patriotism nor friendship as virtues; that it discountenances, or at least does not encourage, the exercise of gratitude to human benefactors; and that its spirit is unfriendly to many of the finer feelings and sensibilities of our nature. But these assertions prove only that those who make them are unacquainted with the religion, which they blindly assail. Nothing more is necessary to show that they are groundless, than a reference to the character of St. Paul. This distinguished apostle of Jesus Christ was, in a degree which has seldom, if ever, been equaled, imbued with the spirit, and controlled by the influence of that religion, which he at once inculcated and exemplified. Yet we find in his writings the most touching expressions, and in his life the most striking exhibitions, of love to his countrymen, friendship, gratitude, and indeed of every sentiment and feeling, which gives either nobleness or loveliness to human character. We readily admit however, or rather we assert it as an important truth, that his religion, though it extinguished none of these feelings, modified them all. It infused into them its own spirit, regulated their exercises and expressions by its own views, and thus stamped upon them a new and distinctive character. It baptized them, if I may be allowed the expression, with the Holy Ghost, in the name of Jesus Christ. Hence, the apostle expressed neither his patriotism, nor his friendship, nor his gratitude, precisely as he would have done, before his conversion to Christianity.

These remarks, so far at least as they relate to gratitude, are illustrated and verified by the passage before us, in which he expresses his sense of obligation to a human benefactor. This benefactor was Onesiphorus, who appears to have been an Ephesian of wealth and distinction, and who had in various ways, and on different occasions, manifested a generous concern for the apostle’s welfare. Especially had he manifested such a concern, when St. Paul, oppressed by powerful enemies, forsaken by those who ought to have assisted him, and struggling without success to regain his liberty, lay bound in fetters at Rome. While he was in this destitute and friendless condition, borne down by a power which it seemed impossible for him to resist, Onesiphorus generously espoused his cause, sought him out very diligently and found him, supplied his wants from his own stores, and was not ashamed to be known as the friend and patron of a poor despised prisoner in chains. This unexpected kindness from a stranger, a foreigner, on whom he had no natural claims, —kindness, too, displayed at a time when cool friends prudently kept at a distance, and many of his own countrymen were among his bitterest enemies, made a deep impression upon the grateful heart of St. Paul. The gratitude which he felt, it was natural that he should express; nor was there any thing in his religion, which forbade him to express it. But though his religion forbade neither the exercise nor the expression of gratitude, it taught him to express it in such a manner, as became a Christian, an apostle, a servant of that

Master, whose kingdom is not of this world. He did not therefore idolize his benefactor; he did not load him with flattering applauses: but from the fullness of his heart he poured out a prayer for him to that God, who alone could reward him, as the apostle wished him to be rewarded. In this prayer he asked for him and his family the same favor, which, as we learn from his life and writings, he supremely desired and sought for himself. This was an interest in God's pardoning mercy. The Lord, he cries, give mercy unto his house. The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.

It is more than possible, that to some persons this mode of expressing gratitude will appear frigid, unmeaning, and unsatisfactory. They will regard it as a very cheap and easy method of requiting a benefactor; and were the case their own, they would probably prefer a small pecuniary recompense, or an honorary reward, to all the prayers which even an apostle could offer on their behalf. It is certain however, that such persons estimate the value of objects very erroneously, and that their religious views and feelings differ very widely from those which were entertained by St. Paul. But so far as any man's religions views differ from those which he entertained, they must differ from truth; for the apostle, it will be recollected, was guided by inspiration; his religious views were imparted to him by the unerring Spirit of God, they must therefore, have been in perfect accordance with truth. It is surely then most important, that we should ascertain what they were, in order that we may make them our own. What they were respecting some most interesting subjects, we may learn from the passage before us. From this passage we may also learn, in what manner it becomes the disciples and ministers of Christ to express their gratitude to human benefactors. And no one, who shall adopt the religions views by which St. Paul was influenced, can fail to perceive that the method which he employed for this purpose, was most worthy of himself and most wisely adapted to promote the best interests of the friend, to whom he felt himself indebted. What these views were let us now endeavor to ascertain. In the petition which was offered by the apostle for his benefactor, mention is made of a day to which that petition has reference The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day. The mode of expression here employed is in some respects peculiar, and worthy of remark. It is a mode of expression which men never adopt, except when they speak of some subject, of which their hearts are full. While it seems intended to designate a particular day, it furnishes no mark or description, by which the day referred to can be ascertained. The same expression is, however, frequently used in other parts of the inspired volume, and from the connection in which it is invariably found we may infer with certainty what day is intended by it. It is the great day, for which all other days were made, the last day of time and the first day of eternity, the day of general judgment and retribution, in which the mighty Maker, and Sovereign, and Judge of the universe, will summon all intelligent creatures before his tribunal, and subject them to a trial, on the result of which, their eternal destiny will depend. This day is elsewhere styled, the day of the Lord, the great day of his wrath, and the great day of God Almighty. It is the day of the Lord, says an apostle, in which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth with all the works that are therein shall be burnt up. When that day shall arrive, the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and every eye shall see him coming in the clouds with power and great glory; and all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. Then shall be realized what St. John saw in vision.

I saw, he says, a great white throne, and him who sat upon it, before whose face the heavens and the earth fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books, according to their works. Such, my hearers, is the day here intended, and such are some of its attending circumstances and events. To the mind of St. Paul, who possessed that faith, which is the evidence of things not seen, this day, with all its infinitely glorious and tremendous realities, was in effect ever present and visible. His mental eye, aided by the light, and strengthened by the energies of inspiration, even then saw its dawn in the distant horizon. To that day his thoughts and affections were chained. With reference to that day he was constantly acting. To secure mercy for himself and for his fellow sinners in that day, was the great object for which he lived, and labored, and suffered, and for the sake of which he counted not even his life dear. No wonder then, that when he had occasion to mention such a day as this, a day which thus occupied and engrossed his whole soul, he should style it simply, that day, and take it for granted that every hearer would perceive at once, what day he intended. No wonder, that the transcendent brightness of such a day should in his view, eclipse the light of other days, and that he should speak of it as if it were the only day which deserved the name. And no wonder, that with such a day in his eye, he did not pray that his benefactor might be recompensed by the enjoyment of wealth, and honor, and prosperity, in the present world. To his mind, engrossed as it was by far nobler objects, all these things, and indeed all which this world can afford, must have appeared worthless and empty indeed. And how could he ask for his friend a portion, with which he would not have satisfied himself; how could he ask for him a portion in this world only, when his inspired eye saw the flames, in which it is destined to be consumed, just ready to kindle around it, and wrap it in the blaze of a general conflagration! Might it not rather be expected, that he would ask for him a favor connected with the great day, which he saw approaching; a favor, the bestowal of which would secure his safety amidst all its perils, and his happiness forever? Such a favor he did ask. And that he should ask it, was a natural consequence of the religious views, which he entertained. He knew that his friend was an accountable creature, in a state of probation for eternity, that he, in common with the rest of mankind, must appear at the bar of God in the judgment day; and that the sentence, which he should then receive, would either raise him to the enjoyment of happiness inconceivable, or plunge him into wretchedness inexpressible. Knowing these things, how could he do otherwise than breathe out a fervent prayer, that his benefactor might be prepared to receive a favorable sentence, and find mercy of the Lord, his judge, at that day. But what is the precise import of the petition that he might then find mercy, and what did it imply? An answer to these questions will throw much additional light on the views which were entertained by the apostle, when he uttered the prayer before us. Mercy, as exercised by a judge, or a sovereign, is the opposite of justice. It is shown only, when the guilty are spared, or when they are treated more favorably than they deserved. Its brightest display is made, when a criminal, justly condemned to die, is pardoned. God, the universal Sovereign and Judge, shows mercy, when he pardons those who were justly doomed by his righteous law to the second death; that death, from which there is no resurrection. To pray that any one may find mercy of him at the judgment day, is to pray that he may then be pardoned, or saved from deserved punishment, and accepted and treated as if he were righteous. St. Paul, when he prayed that Onesiphorus might find mercy of his Judge at that day, must then have believed, that he would at that day need mercy or pardon. And if so, he must have believed, that in the sight of God, he was guilty; for by the guilty alone can pardoning mercy

be needed. The innocent need nothing but justice.

They may stand boldly and safely on the ground of their own merits. But the apostle well knew, that on this ground, not a single individual of the human race can stand before God in judgment. He knew, for he often declared, that all, without a single exception, have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and that in his sight no man living can be justified by any performances or merits of his own. He knew, that however blameless or excellent any man's character may appear in the view of men, he has sinned against the statute book of heaven, against the Supreme Legislator's great law of love, that law which binds him to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and his neighbor as himself. He knew, that when tried by this law before an omniscient, heart-searching Judge, he must inevitably be found guilty, and receive a sentence of condemnation and that mercy alone could then save him. Indeed these are among the fundamental truths of that gospel, which the apostle made it the great business of his life to proclaim. To these truths every fact and doctrine of that gospel bears testimony. Why was a Savior provided for all men, if all men are not sinners?

Why did that Savior command his gospel to be preached to all men, if all men do not need salvation? Why is mercy offered to all men, why are all men exhorted to seek it, if all do not need mercy? And these truths, which had been revealed to him and engraven upon his heart by the Spirit of God, the apostle could neither disbelieve nor forget; nor could he suffer himself to be so far blinded by admiration, or friendship, or gratitude, as to except even his benefactor from their universal application. No; kind, and generous, and noble, as was the disposition which that benefactor had manifested, and disposed as the apostle must have been to view his character in the most favorable light, he knew it could not meet the demands of God's perfect law. He could not conceal from himself the unpleasant truth, that his friend was, like other men, a sinner, and that as such he would need mercy of the Lord at that day. And had Onesiphorus distinguished himself as a benefactor, not to himself only, but to his counted; had he sacrificed much, and hazarded every thing to secure her liberty, the apostle would still have entertained the same views respecting his character and situation in the sight of God. He entertained, and often expressed, the same views respecting himself. He knew, that notwithstanding the blamelessness of his external conduct, his zeal and fidelity in preaching the gospel, and all his unexampled sacrifices, labors and sufferings in the service of Christ, he should still need mercy at that day; that justice would condemn, and that mercy alone could save him. And were he now alive, were he a native of our country, and were he standing in the midst of us with all the feelings and partialities of his countrymen glowing in his bosom, he would believe, and would not hesitate to declare, that our own Washington, beloved, admired, and revered as he justly was, and is, will need the mercy of his Judge at that day. Are there any present, whose feelings revolt at this assertion? Let them then select the most illustrious individual of our race; let that individual be, if they please, Washington himself; let them suppose him to approach, with a fearless air, the judgment seat of the Eternal, and say to him who sits upon it,—I demand to be exempted from every expression of thy displeasure, and to have everlasting life conferred on me as my due. I have earned it, I deserve it, justice awards it to me; give me but justice, and I ask no more. Reserve thy mercy for such as need it. Would you not strongly reprobate language like this? Then must you acknowledge that no man can claim any thing on the ground of justice; that all, without exception, will need mercy at that day. A distinguished modem philosopher, Adam Smith, well known by his celebrated treatise on the Wealth of Nations, has

some remarks relative to this subject, which are so just and apposite, that you will readily excuse me for quoting them. "Man," says this writer, "when about to appear before a being of infinite perfection, can feel but little confidence in his own merit, or in the imperfect propriety of his own conduct. To such a being, he can scarce imagine that his littleness and weakness should ever seem to be the proper object either of esteem or regard. But he can easily conceive how the numberless violations of duty of which he has been guilty, should render him the object of aversion and punishment; nor can he see any reason why the divine indignation should not be let loose without any restraint, upon so vile an insect as he is sensible that he himself must appear to be. If he would still hope for happiness he is conscious that he cannot demand it from the justice, but that he must entreat it from the mercy of God. Repentance, sorrow, humiliation, contrition at the thought of his past conduct, are, upon this account, the sentiments which become him, and seem to be the only means, which he has left, of appeasing that wrath which he has justly provoked. He even distrusts the efficacy of all these, and naturally fears, lest the wisdom of God should not, like the weakness of man, be prevailed upon to spare the crime, by the most importunate lamentations of the criminal. Some other intercession, some other sacrifice, some other atonement, he imagines, must be made for him, beyond what he himself is capable of making, before the purity of the divine justice can be reconciled to his manifold offences." Such, my hearers, is the language of a writer, whom no one, that is acquainted with his character, can suspect of superstition, or weakness, or of entertaining too favorable views of Christianity. But to return. It may perhaps be said, if the apostle's views were such as have now been described, if he believed that justice must pronounce a sentence of condemnation on all without exception, on what could he found a hope, that either himself, or his benefactor, or any other man, will find mercy of the Lord at that day? Indeed, how could he, while he entertained such views, ask mercy either for himself or for others, without being guilty of irreverent presumption? How could he, a sinful worm of the dust, dare request the inflexibly just and holy Sovereign of the universe, to pronounce from his judgment seat, a sentence more favorable than impartial justice required, or than it would seem to allow? And when he presented such a request, did he not appear to ask, in effect, that the Judge of all the earth would cease to do right; that he would deviate from the path of equity, sacrifice his justice, and sully his yet unspotted character, for the sake of sparing guilty creatures, whom law and justice condemned? These questions are perfectly reasonable and proper, and it would be impossible to answer them in such a manner as to justify the apostle, were not a satisfactory answer furnished by the gospel of Jesus Christ. That gospel reveals to us a glorious plan, devised by infinite wisdom, in which the apparently conflicting claims of justice and mercy are perfectly reconciled.

It informs us that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; that God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. It informs us, that in consequence of the atonement, which this Son of his love has made, he can be just, and yet justify, or show mercy to him, that believeth in Jesus. And it assures us, that to every one, who truly believes in him, abundant mercy shall be shown. On this ground alone the apostle rested all his own hopes of finding mercy at that day. On this ground alone did he found a hope, that his benefactor might then find mercy. On this ground alone, did he dare ask that mercy might be granted him. And his petition, that he might find mercy, involves a request, that he might be induced to become, if he were not already such, a sincere disciple of Jesus Christ, and be found

among his faithful followers at that day; for well did the apostle know, that unless he were so he must inevitably perish without mercy. He knew, that as all the light and warmth which we receive from the sun, come to us through the medium of its beams, so all the mercy which God will ever dispense to men, must come to them through the medium of his Son Jesus Christ, who is the brightness, the effulgence, or shining forth of his glory. Take away the beams of the sun, and you cut us off from all the benefits which we derive from that luminary. Take away Jesus Christ the Savior, and you cut us off from all participation of God's mercy, and from all the benefits which that mercy bestows upon a guilty world. And the man, who shuts out Jesus Christ from his heart, shuts out the sunshine of God's mercy from himself, and, to use the language of an apostle, has neither part nor lot in the matter. This leads us to remark farther, that though the apostle believed all men will need mercy of the Lord at that day, he did not believe that all will then find mercy. This is evidently and strongly implied in the petition, which we are considering. Would he have thought it necessary to pray that Onesiphorus might find mercy, had he believed that all will find mercy? Would he have asked for his friend, his benefactor, a favor which he believed will be conferred indiscriminately upon all? This would have been worse than idle. It would have been unworthy of himself, and a mockery of his friend. It would have been like praying that he might have a portion of the air, and the light, which are common to all. When he prayed that his benefactor might find mercy, he intimated that it was at least possible, that he might fail of finding it. And when he prayed that the Lord would grant unto him that he might find mercy, he evidently prayed for a favor, which he did not suppose would be granted to all. Indeed he knew, for he asserts that all do not believe. And he knew that those who do not believe, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on them. My hearers, I have given you a brief sketch of the apostle's religious views, so far as they are expressed or implied in the passage under consideration. And now let me ask, could he, with such views, have expressed his gratitude in a manner more worthy of himself or more indicative of a wise and affectionate concern for the welfare of his benefactor, than by offering for him this petition? Would not the favor which it requests, have been cheaply purchased by Onesiphorus at the expense of all his earthly possessions? And can any man whose religious views resemble those of St. Paul, express affection for his children, or concern for his friends, or gratitude to his benefactors, more clearly and consistently, than by beseeching God to grant unto them that they might find mercy of the Lord in the great day?

It would be improper to conclude this discourse without reminding you, that if Onesiphorus, notwithstanding all his generous disposition and beneficent actions, will need mercy of the Lord at that day, then each of you my hearers will certainly need it. Yes, mortal, accountable, sinful creature, That awful day will surely come, The appointed hour makes haste, When thou must stand before thy Judge, And pass the solemn test. And 0, how greatly wilt thou then need mercy, when, stripped of all thy possessions, of all thy friends, thou shalt stand a naked, trembling, helpless creature, before the tribunal of thy God! How wilt thou need mercy at that great and terrible day, in which, as inspiration declares, the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, and the stars shall fall from heaven; and the heaven shall depart as a scroll, and every mountain be moved out of its place; and the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and the bond and the free, shall attempt to hide themselves in the dens and rocks of the mountains, and shall say unto the mountains and to the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand? He, he alone,

who finds mercy. And he alone will find mercy then, who seeks it now, and who seeks it in the only way, in which it can ever be found—by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are not then found to have believed in him, you will find no mercy; and unless you find mercy, it were far better for you, that you had never been born. Do you ask for what shall we need mercy? I answer, if for nothing else, yet for the neglect with which you have treated the Savior, to whom you are so deeply indebted. In former ages, God found reason to say to his creatures, A son honoreth his father and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is mine honor? and if I be a Master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of Hosts. With at least equal force and propriety may our Savior now say, Men are grateful to their benefactors and deliverers; but if I am such, where are the proofs of that gratitude which they owe to me? I see triumphal arches raised, and costly preparations made, and loud acclamations poured forth, to welcome a human benefactor. But where are the grateful returns which I had reason to expect from those, for whom I descended from heaven, and suffered and died? My hearers, contrast your obligations to the Savior with those which you owe the man who has recently visited us; compare the proof of gratitude, which the latter has received, (La Fayette - this sermon was preached on the occasion of his visit to Portland) with those which have been shown to Jesus Christ, and then say, whether our Savior has not reason to complain; whether we have not reason to feel guilty and ashamed. Is it not, 0 is it not but too evident that our God and Redeemer hold at most, but the second place in our estimation, and that we honor the creature more than the Creator? If you think, that we have not rewarded our earthly benefactor more than he deserves—and that we have, I am not disposed to assert—you must surely allow, that we reward our heavenly Benefactor infinitely less than he deserves. There is not, probably, a habitation or a heart in our country, which would not be thrown open to welcome the former. But, 0, how many hearts are shut against the latter, even when he comes and knocks for admission. Thousands, and tens of thousands flock to see the former; but how few, comparatively, wish for an acquaintance with the latter. To sit at table with the former, is regarded as an honor and a privilege, for which men are willing to pay dear; while the table of Jesus Christ, though spread with a banquet of God’s own providing is comparatively forsaken. My hearers, can these things be otherwise than highly displeasing to God? Can he see the son of his love treated with such neglect and ingratitude by creatures whom he died to save, and not he greatly offended? And will not such conduct appear even to us, to need pardoning mercy, when he whom we have thus requited, shall be seen coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory? Then our triumphal arches, our expensive preparations, and all our expressions of gratitude to a human benefactor will rise up in judgment against us, to condemn us, if we shall be found to have neglected the infinitely great, and generous, and condescending Benefactor of our race. My hearers, in this respect we are all in a greater or less degree guilty, and have all cause for repentance. Who can say, with truth, in this respect I have made my heart clean? Who can impartially review the manner, in which he has requited his Savior, and then dare to say that he shall not need mercy? My hearers, let me entreat you to seek that mercy now. Let me charge you, by all that is glorious and terrible, and awful in the solemnities of that day, to seek that mercy now; for he who neglects to seek it now, will not find it then. To him who rejects it now, it will not be offered then; for him who refuses to ask it now, even an apostle might then plead in vain. Let us then send many humble and urgent invitations to our Savior to bless us with a gracious visit. And should he deign to favor us with his presence, let every heart be ready to receive him; let every voice be prepared to greet him; and let old age, and manhood, and youth emulate each other in

shouting him welcome, and bringing to him the tribute, which is due to our greatest and best Benefactor.

Chapter 66

S. THE CHURCHES INCREASED

THE CHURCHES INCREASED * Preached at the first meeting of the Cumberland Conference of churches.

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. — Acts 9:31. IN this passage, my friends, we have two things presented to our view, which it is at once pleasing and unusual to see. In the first place, we see the church of Christ enjoying an interval of rest. That this, though a very pleasing, should be an uncommon sight in a world like this, is not surprising. While passing through it the church of Christ is in an enemy's country; a country in which it is exposed to constant trials, temptations and assaults; and in which we are warned to expect tribulation. Like the first disciples it is embarked on a tempestuous sea, where the waves run high, and the winds are contrary; while the haven of eternal rest seems far distant, and a night black with stormy clouds conceals it from view. But when, as is sometimes the case, Jesus comes to visit his church walking upon the tempestuous sea, then for a short season the storms are hushed, the clouds scattered, and great calm succeeds. Then, as in the text, the churches enjoy rest. In the second place, we see in this passage, what is still more uncommon and pleasing, the church improving this season of rest in a suitable manner. Generally speaking, the churches of Christ are far from doing this. On the contrary, in the short intervals of outward peace and prosperity allotted them, they are prone to decline, to forsake their first love, and become formal, useless and conformed to the world; so that storms are often less dangerous and hurtful to them than a calm. But in the present instance, this was not the case. The churches improved this interval of rest in some measure as they ought. Hence they were edified or built up, and walking in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. In other words, their numbers, as well as their graces, were greatly increased. The mode of expression here employed plainly intimates, that the great additions made to their churches were a consequence of their walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. From the passage therefore, may be fairly deduced the following proposition: When the members of churches walk in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, great additions will probably be made to them of such as shall be saved. To illustrate and establish this proposition, is my present design. In the prosecution of this design I am led to inquire,

I. What is meant by walking in the fear of God? By the fear of God is here evidently meant, not that guilty, slavish fear, which impenitent sinners often feel, but the holy, filial fear, which is peculiar to real Christians. This fear is every where represented by the inspired writers as one of the most essential parts of true religion, and is indeed not infrequently used by them to denote religion itself. It is produced and maintained in the heart by the agency of the divine Spirit. It arises from a believing apprehension and an experimental knowledge of the existence, character, perfections, and constant presence of Jehovah; it is occasioned by a spiritual discovery, made to the soul, of his awful, adorable and infinite perfections; and its natural effects are, veneration for God, submission to his will, obedience to his commands, and a holy watchful care to avoid every thing

which may grieve, displease, or provoke him to forsake us. From the brief description of the nature and effects of Godly fear, it appears, that walking in the fear of God implies,

1. A habitual and profound veneration for his character and institutions. This veneration is directly opposed to irreverence, carelessness, and formality in the service of God. It extends to every thing of a religious Nature with which he is connected. It leads those who are under its influence to worship him with humility and godly fear; to venerate his names and attributes; to treat his ordinances and institutions with reverential regard, to read and hear his word with humility and prostration of soul, to honor and sanctify his holy day, and to remember that holiness becometh his house forever. The profound veneration for God, and for every thing of a religious nature with which he is immediately connected, is required of us by the inspired writers in almost innumerable passages. Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and let him be your fear and your dread. Stand in awe and sin not. Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Thou shalt not take the name of thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold such guiltless. To this man will I look, who trembleth at my word. It requires but a very small acquaintance with the scriptures to convince us, that the most eminent saints, and those who were admitted to the greatest intimacy with their Maker, have ever been most distinguished for the reverence and godly fear which we are considering, and which these passages so expressly require. These dispositions are far more important than most Christians are aware; for God is a jealous God, jealous for the honor of his great name, and he has given us many awful proofs that he will not suffer himself to he irreverently treated with impunity. On a most awful occasion he said, I will be sanctified in them that draw near to me. Churches, therefore, whose ministers do not feel and exhibit this veneration for God, who worship him in a formal, careless manner, and take little or no care to bring their hearts into a suitable frame, when they are about to enter his sanctuary, approach the throne of grace, or come to the table of Christ, have no claim to be considered as walking in the fear of God; nor any reason to hope for the tokens of his favor.

2. Walking in the fear of God implies humble and unreserved submission to his authority. That it is the natural tendency of fear to produce submission to the being feared, you need not be told. This submission will correspond in nature and effect with the fear which occasions it. A servile fear will produce only a constrained, apparent submission; but the fear we are describing will produce a submission cordial and unreserved, such as the scriptures require. The influence of this fear will extend to all the powers and faculties of the soul. It will constrain the understanding to submit implicitly to the authority of God’s revealed will; producing that meek, docile, child-like acquiescence in its decisions, without which our Savior assures us that none shall enter the kingdom of heaven. This disposition is directly opposed to that pride of human reason, that presumptuous, caviling, unyielding spirit, which leads men to set up their own vain fancies and prejudices in opposition to the word of God; to deny, pervert, or explain away those parts of it which they dislike; and to object against every thing which does not coincide with their own humors, or preconceived opinions. A person who is suitably influenced by this temper needs no arguments to convince him of the truth of any doctrine, however mysterious or contrary to his previous sentiments it may be, which comes supported by the authority of a plain Thus saith the

Lord. This authority is to him, what oaths are said to be in another case, an end of all strife, and dissension, and he bows down before it with a ready and pleased submission. The fear of God also influences the will, rendering it pliable and submissive; and conforming it to the will of God. Its language to God is, Not my will but thine be done. It is therefore directly opposed to that independent, rebellious, repining spirit, which leads men to set themselves up as the rivals of Jehovah, to question or disregard his authority, to oppose his sovereignty, to complain of the strictness of his law, and to murmur at the dispensations of his providence. It leads those who are under its influence to rejoice that the Lord reigns, and to feel pleased and satisfied with what he is, with all that he says, and with every thing he does. The indulgence of a discontented, unreconciled temper is therefore evidently incompatible with walking in the fear of God.

Farther. The fear of God controls and regulates the affections. It leads those who are under its influence to love and to hate, to hope and to fear, to rejoice and to mourn in conformity with the divine commands. It teaches us to love being, truth, and holiness; and to hate nothing but sin. It teaches us to hope for glory, honor, and immortality through the merits of Christ, and to fear nothing but the displeasure of God, and those sins which excite it. It teaches us to rejoice in God, and to mourn for our sins, and for the sins and miseries of others. These effects it produces in direct proportion to the degree in which its influence is felt.

Lastly. The fear of God controls, in some measure at least, the imagination. It is true that this lawless, and almost untameable power seems to be less influenced by the fear of God, than any other faculty of the soul. Still, wherever the fear of God exists, the imagination will be constrained, in some degree, to submit to it. Its sallies will be carefully watched, its excursive wanderings will be checked; it will be speedily recalled when it roams into forbidden ground, and be often compelled to assist the Christian in his meditations on death, judgment, and the realities of eternity. Knowing that the thought of foolishness is sin, he who fears God will at least strenuously endeavor to prevent vain thoughts from lodging within him, and his endeavors will gradually be crowned with success. Such is that submission of the soul to God, which walking in his fear implies.

3. Walking in the fear of God implies a holy jealousy of ourselves, and a watchful care to avoid every thing which may grieve, displease, or provoke him to forsake us. The kind of fear, which we are describing, proceeds from love. He who is under its influence fears God only because he loves him, and he fears him supremely because he loves him supremely. This supreme affection leads him to desire, above all things, God’s favor and presence, and to dread nothing so much as their loss. He feels that God’s favor is life, and that his loving kindness is far better than life. He feels that God is the health, the strength, the happiness, the life, the salvation of his soul. In one word, God is to him all in all. His language is, Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth I desire besides thee. When God is present, difficulties vanish, burdens become light, afflictions are pleasant, sorrow is turned to joy, a new luster is spread over the whole face of nature, temporal blessings are enjoyed with double relish, and spiritual privileges become privileges indeed. But when God departs, strength, and hope, and happiness depart with him. The Christian finds that his sun is gone; his spirits droop; his graces languish; existence becomes a burden; the means of grace are insipid, and temporal friends and comforts become like pictures in the absence of light, which, however beautiful, can afford no pleasure. Since such are the consequences of God’s absence, it is not surprising that the Christian should fear it above all things; and that this fear should lead him to guard with scrupulous watchfulness and care against

every thing which may tend to expose him to such an affliction. Speaking of the covenant which he will make with his people, God says, I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Hence it appears, that it is the natural tendency of the fear of God to preserve those who feel its influence from apostacy and declension. It leads them like Enoch to walk with God; to keep near to him, to wait upon him in the diligent use of all the appointed means of grace, and to guard against the first symptoms of declension; and, when asked whether they will forsake him, to reply with Peter, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. Such, my friends, are the principal effects of the fear of God; and if we would walk in his fear, we must feel and exhibit these effects, not only occasionally, but habitually, and like David have respect to all God's commandments, and be in the fear of God all the day long. In the preceding remarks I have attempted to show what effects the fear of God will produce upon the temper and conduct of an individual, who walks in it, or is habitually under its influence. Now, as churches are composed of individuals, it follows, that, when all, or nearly all the members of a church live under the habitual influence of this principle, the church itself, considered as a body, will walk in the fear of God; and all the duties which are incumbent on it as a body, will be diligently and faithfully performed. Of those duties, which are incumbent on the church itself, rather than on any member of it separately considered, the first is, to provide the means of grace and of religious instruction for itself, its children, and those who are immediately connected with it. It, is the indispensable duty of every church to provide, if possible, a suitable place for the public worship of God, and a competent teacher to lead in his worship, and perform the other duties of the ministerial office. Every Church ought to consider these things as the necessaries of life; for such they are in the strictest sense. Indeed, they have a much better claim to this title, than many things to which it is commonly applied. If, as our Savior informs us, one thing is needful, then the means of obtaining that one thing, are of the first, and most pressing necessity.

It is indispensably necessary that a Christian should know and do the will of God; but it is not necessary that he should live. It is indispensably necessary that children should be instructed and converted, but it is not in the same sense necessary that they should live. It is better that he and his family should he without a shelter, and without food, than that they should be without the means of grace, of religious instruction and salvation. Every church which walks in the fear of God will feel this, and act upon this principle. They will say, we can do without everything else, better than we can do without the preaching of the gospel. They will say, if he who provideth not for the temporal wants of his own, and especially for those of his own house, has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel, what is he who provides not for the far more pressing spiritual wants of his own soul, and of those who are dependent on him? Our fathers felt, and acted on this principle. As soon as a town contained sixteen families they felt able to support the gospel, and did support it. And every church which walks in the fear of God will feel and act in a similar manner.

They will fear, that if they neglect it, they shall be found guilty of lightly esteeming those precious gifts which Christ purchased with his blood, that he might bestow them on the rebellious; for among these gifts, pastors and teachers for the work of the ministry, hold a conspicuous place; they will fear that by this neglect they shall offend God, and provoke him to forsake them; an evil, which as we have already seen, those who walk in his fear dread above all other evils. They will fear that, if, like the Jews, they run every man to take care of his own house, and stuffer the house of God to lie waste, he will scourge them for it as he did his ancient church by withholding his

blessing, and blasting their labors. And they will fear when their children are suffered to grow up without enjoying the stated preaching of the gospel, and without forming habits of observing the Sabbath, and attending statedly on the public worship of God, they will acquire habits of neglecting all religious institutions, and perish in their sins. Surely no church, which does not dread these evils, and guard against them, so far as they are able, by providing a suitable place of worship, and a competent religious teacher, can be justly said to walk in the fear of God. The second duty incumbent on churches, considered as such, consists in faithfully maintaining the discipline of Christ in his house. This duty a church which walks in the fear of God will, it is evident, carefully perform. They will not, by neglecting it, render themselves partakers of other men's sins. They will tolerate among themselves none of those sins which are expressly said to exclude such as are guilty of them from heaven. They will admit none but such as exhibit scriptural evidence that they are the disciples of Christ, and they will be induced by no worldly motives to retain such as he requires them to exclude. This they will do, lest God should forsake them, if he sees among them the accursed thing. A church which neglects this duty, which spares known offenders through fear of temporal inconvenience or loss, cannot be said to walk in the fear of God. They fear something else more than they fear him. A third duty incumbent on churches, considered as such, consists in assembling at proper seasons for social worship. This duty an apostle expressly enjoins. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhort one another daily. This last clause seems to intimate that he referred, not so much to assembling on the Sabbath, as to more private assemblies for the purpose of mutual exhortation and social prayer. Such meetings will be highly valued and carefully maintained by every church which walks in the fear of God. A fourth duty incumbent on every church considered as such, is to take care of the religious education of its children. It is true that the religious education of children is a duty more immediately incumbent on their parents; but it is incumbent on churches to take care that such of their members as are parents perform this duty. The neglect of it ought to be regarded as a subject of church discipline. Addressing his ancient church as an individual, God says, Thou hast taken my Sons and my daughters which thou hast borne unto me, and hast sacrificed them unto idols to be devoured. Is this a small matter, that thou hast slain my children? But it is evident that the Jewish church did not actually sacrifice children to idols in its collective capacity. This was the act of individual parents. Yet because the church did not interpose to prevent the sacrifice, it is charged upon it as the act of the whole. And so if children of the church are now sacrificed to Satan on the altar of the world by their parents, the church itself is answerable so far as their own neglect was the cause.

Lastly. It is the duty of churches, as such, to assist feeble and destitute sister churches with pecuniary aid according to their ability. The primitive churches considered it as a duty, nay it was often enjoined upon them as a duty, to assist other churches, when circumstances made it necessary, in supporting their poor. Much more then may we consider it as a duty to assist in furnishing them the means of grace, when without such assistance they cannot obtain the blessing. This is a duty which we owe, not only to them, but to the cause of Christ, which will thus be advanced, and to our fellow creatures, whose salvation may thus be effected. If the love of God does not dwell in him, who can see a brother or sister destitute of daily food without attempting to relieve them, how can the fear of God rule in a church, which can see sister churches destitute of the bread of life, without making an effort to supply them? I proceed to inquire, II. What is meant by walking in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. When our blessed Savior was about to be separated

from his disciples he promised that he would not leave them comfortless, but that he would pray the Father, who would send them another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, that he might abide with them forever. This gracious promise he has faithfully performed. The Holy Ghost has been sent from heaven to dwell in the hearts of believers, and all the comforts of a religious nature which they enjoy on earth, are communicated by him. These comforts are of various kinds, and it is impossible on the present occasion fully to describe them. We can only mention some of the principal. Among the consolations of the Spirit we might perhaps, without much impropriety, enumerate the graces which he bestows, and the temper which he produces. As the Spirit of grace, he is the author and the preserver of all those graces which constitute the Christian temper. As the Spirit of God, he makes the soul a partaker of the divine nature, and creates it anew in the image of God. As the Holy Spirit, he sanctifies us throughout, in spirit and soul, and body, communicating to us that holiness without which no man can see the Lord. As the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, he produces in us a heavenly temper, weans us from things below, and draws our affections to things above. The fruits of the Spirit, says an apostle, are love, joy, peace, long suffering, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Now if any happiness is connected with the exercise of these graces, if there is any pleasure in being holy, in resembling God, in possessing a heavenly temper, as there undoubtedly is the greatest, then the graces which the Spirit of God imparts and the temper which he produces, may justly be reckoned among the comforts of the Holy Ghost. But since these fruits of the Spirit are usually considered as something different from his consolations, we shall not farther insist upon them on the present occasion, though they are doubtless possessed by all, who walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. Of these comforts properly so called, I mention,

1. Peace of conscience, or, in other words, peace with God, arising from a persuasion wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, that we are pardoned and accepted in the Beloved. It is true that the pardon of sin is procured for us by the death and intercession of Christ; hut it is also true that this blessing is applied to us only by the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. It is his peculiar work, to subdue the enmity and unbelief of our hearts, and when this work is accomplished, to take the things which are Christ's, and show them to us. He opens the eyes of the guilty, desponding, and almost despairing sinner, and shows him that Christ is just such a Savior as he needs; that he has performed and suffered every thing necessary for the complete salvation of his people; that by him all who believe are justified from those things from which they could not be justified by the Law of Moses; and that he is able to save, even to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. These precious encouraging truths he persuades and enables the sinner to embrace; and the consequence is, that, being justified by faith, he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and he feels that his sins are forgiven him for his name's sake. His conscience being purged from dead works, no longer condemns him, and therefore he has confidence towards God, and knows by experience the blessedness of him, whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. This blessedness, consisting in peace of conscience and peace with God, he continues to enjoy so long as he walks in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost; being filled, as the apostle expresses it, with all joy and peace in believing. With this state of pardon and acceptance is intimately connected,

2. A strong and well-grounded hope, arising at times to a full assurance, that we are adopted into God's family, and that consequently we have a title to all the privileges of his children. This hope,

so productive of happiness to all who possess it, is produced and maintained in the souls of believers by the Spirit of God. Hence the apostle prays that the Christians at Rome might abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. This hope the Spirit produces and maintains by forming in the hearts of believers the image of their heavenly Father, giving them a filial temper towards him, and then shining in upon his work in their heart and enabling them to discern it. Agreeably, we find the apostle writing to believers, Ye have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father; and the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Having thus convinced the believer that he is a child and an heir of God, the Holy Spirit enables him to claim and enjoy the privileges of a child, and the apostle informs us that, through Christ, Christians have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Agreeably, so long as Christians walk in the fear of God, the Holy Spirit enables them at all times to approach him as their Father in heaven, with holy boldness and filial confidence; to make known to him all their wants, to cast upon him all their cares, and to claim his protection, guidance, assistance, and blessing. He also enables them to understand, believe, and apply to themselves the exceeding great and precious promises of his word; to feel a strong confidence that he will withhold from them no good thing, and that he will cause all things to work together for their good. Thus he comforts and supports them under their various trials, and enables them to discover, even in the severest, new proofs that they are the children of God. He teaches them that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth; and that their present light afflictions which endure but for a moment, will work out for them a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory. Hence they are enabled to glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience and many other blessed effects.

3. Another branch of the comforts of the Holy Ghost consists in the foretastes, which he here gives believers, of the joys of heaven. The apostle, after informing us, that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived of those things which God has prepared for them that love him, adds,— but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. Of the truth of this assertion every Christian, who walks in the fear of God, is convinced by happy experience. Like the blessed inhabitants of heaven, such persons are enabled by the Holy Spirit, to enjoy fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, to participate in the joy that is felt in heaven when sinners repent, and to unite with the spirits of the just made perfect in ascribing blessing and glory, and power unto God and the Lamb. At intervals, which return more or less frequently, in proportion to their diligence, zeal, and fidelity, God is pleased to grant them still greater consolation, to lift upon them the light of his countenance, and cause them to rejoice in his salvation. He sheds abroad his love in their hearts, makes them to know the great love wherewith he has loved them, shines in upon their souls with the pure, dazzling, transforming beams of celestial mercy, truth, and grace; displays to their enraptured view the ineffable beauties and glories of him who is the chief among ten thousand, and enables them in some measure to comprehend the lengths and breadths, the heights and depths of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

While the happy Christian, in these bright enraptured moments, sinks lower and lower in self—abasement and humility, the Spirit of God, stooping from his blest abode, raises him as it were on his celestial wings, and places him before the open door of heaven, and enables him to look in and commtemplate the great I AM, the Ancient of days, enthroned with the Son of his love,

the brightness of his glory. He contemplates, he wonders, he admires, he loves, he adores. Absorbed in the ravishing, the ecstatic contemplation of uncreated loveliness, glory, and beauty, he forgets the world, he forgets himself, he almost forgets that he exists. His whole soul goes forth in one intense flame of admiration, love and desire, and he longs to plunge into the boundless ocean of perfection which opens to his view, and to be wholly swallowed up and lost in God. With an energy and activity of soul unknown before, he roams and ranges through this infinite ocean of existence and happiness, of perfection and glory, of power and wisdom, of light and love, where he can find neither bottom nor shore. His soul dilates itself beyond its ordinary capacity, and expands to receive the tide of felicity which fills and overwhelms it. No language can do justice to his feelings, for his joys are unspeakable; but with an emphasis, a meaning, an energy, which God only could excite, and which God alone can comprehend, he exclaims in broken accents, My Father, and my God! Thus by the agency of the Spirit is he filled with all the fullness of God, and rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory, till his wise and compassionate Father, in condescension to the weakness of his almost expiring child, graciously draws a veil over glories too dazzling for mortal eyes long to sustain; leaving him still however in the enjoyment of that peace of God which passeth all understanding. Such, my friends, are the joys which the Spirit of God occasionally imparts to those who walk in his fear; or rather such is the exceedingly imperfect description of them which we are able to give.

Having thus attempted to show what is meant by walking in the fear of God and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, I proceed to show,

Ill. That when the members of churches habitually walk in this manner, great additions will probably be made to them of such as shall be saved. That this will be the case appears probable,

1. From the consideration, that such a life and temper, displayed by professed Christians, will naturally and most powerfully tend to convince all around them of the reality and happy effects of religion, to remove their prejudices against it, and to show them that its possession is highly desirable. No one who has attended to the subject can doubt, that, if we except the natural enmity of the heart to God, the manner in which professors generally live is the greatest of all obstacles to the success of the gospel. It is this which blunts the edge of the sword of the Spirit, and causes the arrows of conviction to rebound from the sinner’s breast. It is in vain to press on our impenitent hearers the necessity of regeneration, while they see little or no difference between those who profess to have been the subjects of this change and themselves. It is vain to tell them that religion is productive of happiness, while professors appear gloomy, anxious, and dejected, instead of walking in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. But when professors live as they ought, when the fear of God rules in their hearts, and the peace of God beams forth in their countenances; when they cause their light to shine before men, and adorn the doctrine of God in all things; then sinners begin to tremble, their most plausible objection is wrested from them; their armor is taken away, and they are exposed, naked and defenceless to the arrows of conviction. The life of every Christian then becomes a sermon more pungent and convincing than any which ministers can preach; and the church, while she thus appears fair as the moon, and clear as the sun, is more terrible than an army with banners to the enemies of religion.

2. That great additions will be made to churches which walk in this manner, is probable from the consideration, that walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, is exceedingly

pleasing to God, and naturally tends to draw down upon them his blessing. Indeed he has bound himself by many promises to bless and build up his church, when its members conduct in this manner; and in no instance, that can be adduced, has he failed to fulfil these promises. Them that honor him he will honor. But in no way can churches honor him more effectually than by living in the manner described above; and, therefore, when they thus honor him, they may expect that he will honor them by preserving them from division, and adding abundantly to their numbers and graces. That this will probably be the case, appears,

Lastly, from the consideration that, when churches walk in this manner, it proves that God is pouring out his Spirit upon them, and that a revival of religion is already begun. That without the influences of the Holy Spirit a church cannot walk in his comforts, is too evident to require proof; and that without them no church will walk in the fear of God, is equally certain. Whenever we see a church walking in this manner, we may be confident that God has commenced a work of grace among them, and there is every reason to hope that this work will be carried on till many are added to the church. The subject we have been considering, my friends, suggests several important reflections. And,

1. Permit me to ask all the professed disciples of Christ in this assembly, whether the churches which they represent, or with which they are connected, walk in the manner which has now been described. Have you reason to believe that all, or nearly all your members are walking in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost? Are the churches to which you belong, diligent and faithful in the performance of these duties which are incumbent on them as a body, or in their collective capacity? Do they all consider the stated preaching of the gospel as the first necessary of life, and act accordingly? Is proper care taken to secure the religious education of children? Is discipline faithfully maintained, according to the rules of Christ's house? Is there no evil, no accursed thing tolerated among you? Are your members careful not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is? and do they reprove, exhort, and admonish each other, agreeably to the commands of Christ and their own covenant obligations? If any of you are conscious that the churches which you represent, are not walking in this manner, permit me to ask,

2. How far is this melancholy and criminal deficiency owing to yourselves? From the fact, that your churches have selected you to represent them on this occasion, we infer, that you have some reputation and influence among them. Now have you done every thing, which it is in your power to do, to persuade and induce your brethren to walk in this manner? Are you walking yourselves in this manner? If the Master, whom you profess to serve, were visibly present, would he say of each of you, This man does walk in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost? If not, can you say how far the declining state of the churches, which you represent, is imputable to yourselves, or how much, or how soon, their state might be improved by your example and exertions, were they such as they ought to be?

3. Permit me, with affectionate earnestness, to press upon every professed disciple of Christ here present, the importance, the indispensable necessity of walking himself, and of doing every thing in his power to induce his brethren to walk, in the manner which our text describes. To this the providence, as well as the word of God, now calls us. For a long time the churches in this vicinity, as well as through New England, have enjoyed rest; rest, probably, much more undisturbed, and

privileges far greater, than were ever enjoyed by the primitive Christians. Indeed, what they thought a calm, we should probably consider a storm. All they wished for was, to be exempted from the spoiling of their goods, from bonds and imprisonment, from the stake and the cross, and to have liberty to serve God in peace. They never thought of requesting an ungodly world to assist them in building places for worship, in supporting the gospel, or even in providing for their poor. All these things they regarded it as a privilege, as well as a duty, to perform. Could they have been placed in such a situation as we are, they would have thought it rest indeed. And shall we then abuse the goodness of God, and ungratefully requite him for the rest which he affords us by neglecting to walk in his fear, and practically regarding the consolations of his Spirit as a light thing? Shall we by misimproving a calm, provoke him to send us a storm? Shall we, by declining from our first love, and neglecting to repent, constrain him to remove our golden candlesticks out of their places? God forbid. Let us rather walk ourselves, and if possible, persuade the churches with which we are connected to walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. And let us not confine our exertions to our own churches, but endeavor to make this county, at least, as a fruitful field, and a well watered garden. Let those who are of us build the old wastes, and repair the desolation of former generations, assured that, if we water others, we shall in turn be watered ourselves. And 0, that every member, every professor of religion present, may return with the spirit of a missionary, the spirit of primitive Christianity, glowing in his breast, and that his example and influence may work like leaven till all around him are leavened. And may God in mercy say to these churches, From this day forth I will bless you. To conclude. From the subject before us, all present may learn much of the nature of true religion, and in what manner to distinguish it from its counterfeits. It consists in walking in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. These two things God has joined, and let no man attempt to put them asunder. He who does this, and teaches men to do it, shall he called least in the kingdom of heaven; that is, according to the Jewish idiom, shall never enter it. Beware then, my hearers, of making this separation yourselves; beware of all who attempt to make it. Wherever you hear a man speaking loudly of his religious joys and consolations, while he does not exhibit corresponding evidence that he fears God; while he is careless in his conduct, vain and trifling in his conversation, and irreverent in his manner of speaking of God and of religious subjects, be assured that his joy is only that of the hypocrite, or of the stony ground hearer which shall endure but for a moment; and be not surprised, if you should afterwards see such a man fall away. And on the other hand, when you hear a man profess to fear God, while he ridicules or denies the reality of the comforts of the Holy Ghost, be assured that he is one who, while he has the form of godliness, knows nothing of its power.

Chapter 67

S. THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS NOT TO BE DESPISED.

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS NOT TO BE DESPISED. Who hath despised the day of small things.—Zechariah 4:10.

THESE words were addressed by Jehovah to his ancient people, soon after their return from the Babylonish captivity. They were then few in number, poor, feeble, and on the point of being swallowed up by their enemies. But notwithstanding all these discouraging circumstances they proceeded, almost immediately after their return, to lay the foundations of a temple for the worship of God. It may well be supposed that, as it respects richness and magnificence, there would be a wide difference between such an edifice, as these poor captives could build, and that which had previously been erected by the wisest and wealthiest of monarchs. There was so; and those among them who had seen the temple of Solomon, wept aloud when they saw the foundations of the new temple laid, on account of its comparative meanness. Indeed, they seem to have felt as if such a temple were not worth finishing; and their unreasonable, ill-timed contempt of it, combined with other circumstances, so much discouraged their brethren, that for several years little was done towards its completion. It was with a view to reanimate them, and to encourage their exertions, that the message contained in this chapter was sent. In this message God reproved those who had regarded the new temple with contempt, and those also who thought that they were unable to finish it. He informed them that the work was his, that it was to be effected not by human might nor power but by his Spirit; that Zerubbabel, who had laid the foundations, should live to place the top stone, shouting, Grace, grace unto it; and that those who had despised the day of small things, or, in other words, the feeble commencement of the work, should witness its completion. In farther discoursing on the passage before us, I shall endeavor to show,

I. That in all God’s works, especially in his works of grace, which are effected not by might, nor by power, but by his Spirit, there is usually a day of small things;

II. That many often despise this day; and III. That it ought not to be despised.

I. In all the works of God, and especially in his works of grace, which are effected not by might, nor by power, but by his Spirit, there is usually a day of small things that is, in other words, there is a season in which his work makes but a very small and unpromising appearance. All that is necessary to convince you of the truth of this assertion is to refer you to some of God’s works. Look at his works of creation. It was a day of small things with this world, when it lay a wild chaotic mass without form and void, and shrouded in darkness. Look at his works of providence. The oak was once an acorn; the mightiest rivers may be traced back to an insignificant rivulet or spring; the philosopher, the warrior, the statesman, the poet, was once an infant; the powerful civilized nation was once a horde of savages. But it is especially to God’s works of grace, that the remark under consideration refers; and to them we must especially look for illustrations of its truth. It was a day of small things with the Old Testament church, when Abraham and his family were its only members. It was a day of small things with the New Testament church, when all its members could assemble in one small room, and sit down at one table. And every branch of this church, wherever

planted, and however flourishing it may now be, has had its day of small things. It was such a day with the church of Christ in New England, when all its members disembarked from one vessel, and worshipped God on the barren shore, without a sanctuary, and without even a habitation to shelter them. And probably there is not a church in this country, which was not for a time small and feeble, and obliged to struggle with many difficulties. Similar remarks may be made respecting all the societies and institutions which have been formed for the promotion and diffusion of Christianity. Look, for instance, at the British and Foreign Bible Society, at the Baptist Missions in the East, at Sabbath Schools, and at all the National Societies which have been formed for the education of ministers, for sending missionaries to the heathen, and for the distribution of tracts. Compared with what they now [1824] are, they were originally but as the acorn compared to the oak.

Similar remarks may be made respecting God's work of grace in the hearts of individuals. Every Christian has his day, and almost all Christians, alas, much too long a day of small things; a day in which his love, faith, and hope, knowledge, usefulness, and comfort are small. Look at Nicodemus. It was such a time with him when he came to Jesus by night. Look at the twelve disciples. It was such a time with them until after the day of Pentecost. They were foolish, and slow of heart to believe; they were altogether in an error respecting the nature of that kingdom which Christ came to establish, and there were frequent strifes among them who should be the greatest. Look at the Corinthian Christians. I, brethren, says St. Paul, could not speak unto you as spiritual, but as carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. This language intimates, not only that the Corinthians had made little progress in religion, but that babes in Christ or young Christians generally, are in many respects carnal, and by no means distinguished for spirituality. Look too at the Hebrew Christians. Ye need, says an apostle, that one teach you what be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. If we turn from the primitive, to modern Christians, we shall find at least equally striking proofs that, generally speaking, they all have a day of small things. With many who, we hope, are Christians, this day continues through life. Indeed, in comparison with what Christians will be hereafter, in comparison with the spirits of just men made perfect, the attainments of the most eminent Christians in this world are but small things, and their whole life but a day of small things. It was St. John who said, It doth not yet appear what we shall be. It was St. Paul who said, I have not attained; I know but in part; we see through a glass darkly. In fine, the kingdom of God here below, whether we contemplate it as set up in the world, or in the hearts of individual Christians, is at first but as a grain of mustard seed, sown in the earth, or as a stone cut from a mountain.

II. Many persons despise the day of small things, which attends the commencement of God's works. His enemies do so. What do these feeble Jews? said some of his ancient enemies. Will they fortify themselves? will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the Stones out of the heaps of rubbish that are burnt? If but a fox go up, he shall break down their wall. With at least equal contempt was Christianity regarded both by Jews and Gentiles, while its day of small things continued. And the same contempt is felt and expressed by multitudes of its enemies at the present day, with respect to the attempts which are making to evangelize the world. You need not be informed that ridicule is thrown with liberal hand upon the hopes and labors of missionaries among the heathen, and upon the expectation which Christians entertain of the conversion of the world. Because it is now a day of small things with respect to this work, because comparatively

few of the heathen have as yet embraced Christianity, many of its avowed and secret enemies look with scorn upon all attempts to extend its influence, and gravely tell us, that the conversion of the heathen is impossible, and that even if it is to be desired, which they seem to doubt, it is not to be expected. With at least equal contempt do many of them look upon the commencement of God's work of grace in the hearts of individuals around them, and stigmatize it as the effect of weakness, superstition, or enthusiasm. In the second place, not only the enemies, but even the friends of God, sometimes despise the day of small things, which attends his work during its infancy. They did so in the instance referred to in our text. They have done so in many instances since. We do not mean that, like his enemies, they regard his work with absolute contempt. But they think too little of it; they undervalue it, and they are by no means sufficiently thankful for it; and may therefore be said, comparatively speaking, to despise it. This for instance, is sometimes the case at the commencement of a revival of religion, especially when it commences and proceeds in a gentle and gradual manner, and is confined to individuals of little weight in society. In such circumstances, a considerable portion of the church, which is thus favored, are often guilty, in a greater or less degree, of despising the day of small things. They wish to see the wealthy, the learned, and the great brought to the foot of the cross; or, at least, to see great numbers converted; and because they do not see this, they will scarcely allow that there is any thing to encourage exertion, or call forth thankfulness.

I leave it with your consciences, my professing friends, to decide whether a considerable part of this church has not more than once exemplified these remarks. Still more frequently, perhaps, are Christians guilty of despising, or too lightly esteeming the work of God in their own hearts. Forgetting that the Christian must be an infant, a child, and a youth before he can arrive at the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus, they wish, and seem to expect to become men at once; and when these unscriptural expectations are disappointed; when they find that with respect to their knowledge, faith, comfort, and usefulness, their day is a day of small things, they are too often ready to feel as if nothing had been done for them; and as if so small a portion of grace, as they possess, were scarcely worth cultivating. Hence, while looking for great things they overlook small things; and neglect those means and exertions, by which alone small things can ever be made to become great. Others go still farther, and because they do not find in themselves so much religion as they wished and expected, will not allow that they possess a particle. Hence they will not unite with the friends of Christ, will not confess him before men, will not commemorate his dying love; as if these duties and privileges were reserved exclusively for mature and eminent Christians. In these and various other ways, which time will not allow me to particularize, Christians are often guilty of despising the day of small things.

I proceed now, as was proposed, III. To state some reasons why it ought not to be despised.

1. We ought not to despise the day of small things, because such conduct tends to prevent its becoming a day of great things. If all the Jews had despised the foundations of the temple, as some of them did, they would never have exerted themselves to finish it. So those who despise the day of small things, where missions are concerned, will do little to promote them. None who despise a small revival of religion will make the exertions which are necessary to render it great. And the Christian, who despises or overlooks the blessings which he has already received, will not seek and pray with proper earnestness for greater blessings. Besides, despising the day of small things always involves much ingratitude. It is practically saying, we have nothing to be thankful for.

It leads us, instead of blessing God for what he has given, to murmur because he does not give more. And this directly tends to prevent him from giving more. It is a very trite but a very just remark, that the way to obtain much. is to be thankful for little. As it respects the attainment of blessings from heaven, this remark is especially true. Thanksgivings are at least as efficacious as prayers. And ingratitude will shut the ear of God against the most fervent prayers. Let none then despise the day of small things, unless they wish to prevent it from becoming a day of great things.

2. We ought not to despise the day of small things, because the inhabitants of heaven, whose judgment is according to truth, do not despise it. Angels do not. No, they rejoice over one sinner that repenteth. Though it be a poor sinner, an ignorant sinner, a despised individual, still they rejoice. They rejoice, though the work is just begun, and though its glory is obscured by many remaining defects, weaknesses and imperfections; evils which they see incomparably more clearly than we do. Now there is not, I believe, a single protestant missionary establishment in the world, which has not been the means of converting at least one individual. There is not then a protestant missionary establishment on earth, which has not occasioned joy in heaven. Of course, there is not one which is despised in heaven.

Again. Our Savior does not despise the day of small things. It was said of him, The bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench; he will bring forth judgment unto victory. In this prediction young and feeble Christians, who have but little grace, are compared to the wick of an extinguished lamp, in which but a spark of fire remains. It does not burn brightly, it sends forth no flame; but it emits smoke, and that smoke mounts upward,—a fit emblem of the weakest Christian, whose desires, though faint and few, ascend to heaven. Yet even such a disciple as this, the compassionate Savior does not despise, and will not reject. No, he feeds his flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs with his arms and carries them in his bosom. See these remarks verified in his treatment of Nicodemus. Instead of despising him for his cowardice, ignorance, and slowness to learn, our Savior received him kindly, and gave up his own necessary rest, for the sake of communicating instruction to his mind. Look too at the manner in which Jesus treated his twelve disciples, and at his interview with Thomas, with Mary Magdalene, and with Cleophas after his resurrection; and you will be convinced that while on earth he did not despise the day of small things. Nor does he now despise it. Even so small a gift as a cup of cold water to the meanest of his disciples, if given for his sake, he does not despise. The feeble minded and the weak he commands his ministers to support and comfort. Them that are weak in faith he commands his churches to receive. Hear too what he says to one of his feeble churches; I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; and I will make thine enemies to come and worship at thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee, for thou hast a little strength.

Once more. Our heavenly Father does not despise the day of small things. Hear what he said of a child, the son of Jeroboam; In him is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel; therefore he alone of the house of Jeroboam shall come to his grave in peace. Look also at the parable of the prodigal son. When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him. In fine, as those of you who are parents do not despise, but are pleased with the first stammering accents of your children, especially when they lisp the words, father, mother, so our heavenly Father listens with pleasure to the first feeble, imperfect prayers of his children, when, guided by the Spirit of adoption, they come lisping, Abba, Father. Now if angels, if our Redeemer, and our heavenly Father, do not despise the day of small

things, surely it does not become us, imperfect creatures, to despise it.

3. We ought not to despise the day of small things, because these things, though small, are of unspeakable value. Inspiration styles faith precious faith, and declares that it is more valuable than gold tried in the fire. Indeed it is so; for it is the gift of God, and who shall despise his gifts? It is the work of God, and there are no works like his works. The man, whose faith is but as a grain of mustard seed, is interested in all the promises of the gospel; he is a child of God, a joint-heir with Christ of the heavenly inheritance. In fine, grace, the least particle of grace, is glory begun; and all the figures which man ever made, were they placed in one line, with worlds for units, could not express the ten thousandth part of its value. How irrational then to despise what is so infinitely valuable.

Finally. We ought not to despise the day of small things, because it is the commencement of a day of great things. It will become so, because these small things are the work of God; and as for God, his work is perfect, and what he doth shall be forever. He never leaves his work unfinished; for his language is, I will work, and who shall let it? When I begin, I will make an end. These predictions will be verified in the future success of missionary exertions, and the final universal prevalence of Christianity. The stone cut from the mountain without hands, shall itself become a mountain, and fill the whole earth. The streams of divine knowledge, which now flow in scanty rivulets, shall become broad and deep rivers, and overflow the world; for the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth, even as the waters fill the seas. A little one shall become a thousand and a small one a strong nation. I the Lord will hasten it. These predictions will also be verified with respect to God's work of grace in the heart of every believer; for he who begins a good work in the heart, will perform it to the day of Christ Jesus; so that the weakest disciple may boldly say, with the psalmist, The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me; he will guide with his counsel and afterwards receive me to glory. Yes, that tender plant, that bruised reed, which trembles before every breeze, is the planting of the Lord, and shall become a tree of righteousness. That smoking wick shall burn bright. That poor, despised, ignorant, feeble Christian, who is now but a babe in grace, shall become a youth, a perfect man in Christ Jesus; for God will strengthen him, yea, he will help him; yea, he will uphold him with the right hand of his righteousness. In a word, the weakest Christian now on earth, shall one day be among the spirits of just men made perfect; shall be equal to the angels; shall shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of his Father; for the path of the just is as the rising light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Permit me now to apply the subject,

1. By asking every individual present, is it with you, in a religious sense, even so much as a day of small things? In other words, have you any religion? Have you faith, even as a grain of mustard seed? Has the light of heaven dawned within you? Unless you have been converted, regenerated, born of God, this is not the case; for if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; he has been created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works; and if he be not in Christ, he is not a Christian, he has not a particle of faith, he is yet in his sins. If any ask, how may I ascertain whether 1 have become a subject of this new creation? I answer, every one who is a subject of it can say, Whereas I was once blind, I now see. Every subject of it loves and finds his happiness in those religious employments and pursuits, which he once hated or neglected; and has in a great measure lost his relish for those worldly, sinful pleasures in which he once delighted.

Every Christian, though but a babe in grace, hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and desires the sincere milk of the word, that he may grow thereby. If this is the case with any of you, beware how you deny what God has done for you; beware how you despise the day of small things; beware how you ungratefully neglect to thank God for the inestimable blessings which he has bestowed upon you. I call them inestimable; for they strictly and literally are so. No man, no angel can estimate their worth, or the greatness of your obligation to him who bestowed them. 0 Christian, Christian, did you but know what God has done for you; could you see the end of the path into which he has guided you; could you behold the meridian brightness of that day which has dawned within you; how would you rejoice, and exult, and call upon your soul and all that is within you, to bless and extol your benefactor! How would you watch over and cultivate and labor to increase the seeds of grace which he has sown within you? And how would this church exert itself, how would it bless God for every instance of conversion, for every token of his presence, did it duly estimate the day of small things! Seek and pray then, for this attainment; and if you would obtain greater blessings from heaven, send up more numerous and fervent thanksgivings for the blessings which it has already bestowed on us.

One caution, and I have done. There is an opposite error, or mistake, into which many professors fall. Instead of despising the day of small things, they trust too much to it, and are satisfied with it. They conclude too hastily, that the work of grace is begun in their hearts and flatter themselves that it will advance to perfection, without any additional exertion on their part. Nay more, they perhaps fancy that their attainments are great, and indulge in self-complacency and pride. This mistake is far more dangerous than the former. Better despise the day of small things, than be proud of it, or rest satisfied, or make it an excuse for sloth and presumption. That you may be guarded against this error, remember that the day of small things is a day of increase; that every one who has any grace, desires and labors to obtain more grace.

Chapter 68

S. THE DEAD IN SIN MADE ALIVE.

THE DEAD IN SIN MADE ALIVE. And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of our flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; (by grace are ye saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus.—Ephesians 2:1-7.

NOTHING, my friends, is more profitable to Christians, than frequent meditations on what they once were, and what has been done for them by divine grace. Meditations on these subjects are exceedingly well suited to increase, at once, their gratitude, love and humility. To such meditations our text naturally invites us. The apostle here reminds the Ephesian Christians of their former state and character, and contrasts it with their then happy situation, and mentions the Author of the great change, in consequence of which they had passed from death unto life. And lest any should suppose that such a change was necessary for none but those, who like the Ephesians had been heathen and idolaters, he intimates, that he and his fellow apostles, who were Jew; had been by nature in a similar state, and had experienced a similar change. To all the true disciples of Christ, then, whether Jews or Gentiles, and to you, my Christian friends, among the rest, the language of our text may, with propriety, be addressed. You know, that once you were dead in trespasses and sins; you know, that you once walked according to the course of this world, as children of disobedience, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; you know that you were by nature children of wrath, even as others; and you hope that God has quickened, or made you alive, and raised you up to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. This passage, then, contains your religious history. It describes what you once were, and shows what you are now, and what God has done for you. To illustrate more largely these several particulars, is my present design. To you the subject cannot but be interesting, and it will be little less so to you, my impenitent hearers, if you recollect that in describing what Christians once were, we are describing what you are still.

I. Once, my Christian friends, you were dead in trespasses and sins. In the figurative language of scripture, a man is said to be dead to any object, or class of objects, when he is wholly insensible to it, or unaffected by it, or unsusceptible of impressions from it. Thus Paul speaks of himself as dying, or becoming dead to the world; meaning that he was less and less affected by worldly objects, and more and more insensible to their influence. So you were once dead with respect to your Creator, your Redeemer, to religious, to divine things, and to all the concerns of your everlasting peace. In other words, you were entirely insensible to these things; they did not affect you, they made no impression upon your minds, any more than if they did not exist, and, in fact,

you did not at all realize their existence. You were alive to other objects. You possessed an animal life, which enabled you to have communion with the irrational animals in the pleasures of sense. You possessed what may be called rational or intellectual life, by which you were qualified to maintain intercourse and communion with your rational fellow creatures in the pursuit and enjoyment of worldly objects. But of that spiritual life, which renders the soul susceptible of impressions from spiritual objects, and prepares it for the enjoyment of intercourse with God and holy beings, you were entirely destitute. Being thus spiritually dead, you were, of course, devoid of spiritual sense. You could neither hear, nor see, nor feel. You could not hear God's voice, either in his word, or in the dispensations of his providence. He spoke once, yea, twice, but you perceived it not; nor did you ever truly hear a single sermon, though you might, perhaps, listen to many. You were also spiritually blind. You saw no glory in God, no beauty in Christ, no hatefulness in sin, no excellency in the plan of salvation revealed in the gospel. Like all men in their natural state, you received not the things of the Spirit of God, but they were foolishness to you; neither could you know them, because they are spiritually discerned, and you had no spiritual sight. Nor were you less destitute of feeling.

You felt nothing of the load of guilt, which pressed you down; nothing of the wickedness and hardness of your own hearts; nothing of the goodness of God and the dying love of Jesus Christ. You did not even feel, that you were dead, but lay buried in a grave of trespasses, and wrapped up in a winding sheet of sins, as insensible of your situation as a corpse, and as completely cut off from all intercourse or communion with God and holy beings, as a corpse is from intercourse with the living; nor did you any more desire to rise from this state, than a corpse desires to rise from the slumbers of the grave. Many attempts, indeed, were made by the beings around you, to rouse you from this state, and sometimes they teemed, for a moment, to be attended with partial success. Like a corpse operated upon by the power of electricity, or galvanism, you exhibited some faint symptoms of returning animation, or at least of irritability; your eyes were perhaps half unclosed, and you cast an anxious glance around; but the bands of death were too strong to be thus broken, and you soon relapsed into a state of complete moral insensibility. But,

2. While you thus lay, in a spiritual sense, dead in trespasses and sins, you were in another sense, alive, awake and active. Though dead to your Creator, you were alive to your fellow creatures though dead to the futtire world, you were alive to this; though destitute of that life which the holy Spirit communicates, you were vehemently actuated by that evil spirit, which, as our text informs us, works in all the children of disobedience. Hence, you walked according to his will, or which is the same thing, according to the common course of this sinful and apostate world. The tempter, as a strong man armed, kept possession of your hearts, as his castle, and by a constant succession of temptations suited to your depraved taste, he excited your appetites, inflamed your passions, and thus hurried you forward with blind eagerness and impetuosity in a course of self-gratifications and disobedience to God. As the world around you lived, so you lived. Like them, you cast off fear, and restrained prayer before God; like them, you neglected your Creator, your Redeemer, your souls and eternity; and like theirs, your whole employment and happiness consisted in fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Some of you, especially during the season of youth, were most intent on gratifying the desires and appetites of the body. You drank deep of the intoxicating cup of pleasures, rejoicing in youth, and walking in the way of your own hearts, and the sight of your eyes. Others were more devoted to the service of those passions, which are seated in the

mind; and to gratify them by the acquisition of wealth, or honor, or applause, was the grand object of your lives. In a word, you lived, just as hundreds around you, whose madness and depravity you contemplate with mingled surprise, pity and abhorrence, are living now. Meanwhile, God hearkened and heard, but you spake not aright. None of you repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? but every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.

3. Being then dead in sin, and children of disobedience, you were of course children of wrath; or in other words, objects of the just indignation and wrath of God. He was angry with you every day; and once and again insulted justice cried, Cut them down—why cumber they the ground? But mercy interposed, and you were spared. Meanwhile, you thought nothing of the justice, which threatened, or the mercy, which spared you, but were wholly occupied by your worldly pursuits; and with scarcely a thought of an hereafter, remained insensible as a corpse, over which the thunders were rolling, and round which the lightnings of heaven were spending all their fury. You went on with the tempter enthroned, and strongly fortified in your hearts; sin spreading its deadly influence through all the powers of your soul, and all the members of your body; a frowning and angry God looking down upon you from above, his curse resting upon your persons, your possessions, and all the works of your hands; the world spreading all her allurements, to draw you on in the broad road to destruction, and hell opening wide in the path before you; while death, with his envenomed dart, stood waiting a commission to transfix and hurl you down to quenchless flames below. Such, my Christian friends, was once your character and situation. Such, my impenitent hearers, is still yours. Having thus shown what you were, we proceed, II. To show what God has done for you. And,

1. When you were thus dead in trespasses and sins, he quickened, or made you alive. You lay, some of you a longer, and some a shorter time in the wretched state, which has been described, like the dry bones which the Prophet saw in the valley of vision, and there you had lain till now, had not sovereign grace interposed. But he, who had from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, in his own appointed time, began to manifest towards you his eternal purposes of love. The season approached, in which he determined, that the dead should hear the voice of the Son of man; and that they who heard should live. In preparing you for the great change, God dealt with you, not as machines, but as rational beings. He sent some one to call to you, saying, 0 ye dry bones, hear ye the word of the Lord. Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead. By the influences of his Spirit, the call was rendered in some measure effectual. These influences were, however, as yet exerted only in operating upon your rational powers and faculties. Your attention was roused, and turned to religious objects. Your slumbering consciences were awakened, and began to review your past lives and present characters; to compare them with the divine requirements, and to upbraid you with your numerous deficiencies. Your understandings were convinced that something must be done, and done speedily. The new objects thus presented to your mind, and the new interest which they excited, weakened the influence of worldly objects, and rendered you less eager in their pursuit. You began to read the scriptures, and other religious books, with something of a desire to understand them. You felt disposed, you could scarcely tell why, to associate with pious persons, to hear religious conversation, and to frequent religious meetings. You listened with more interest, than formerly, to the preached word; you felt yourselves personally addressed, and the truths which you heard, sometimes pleased, sometimes offended, and sometimes condemned and

distressed you. Thus your attention was more and more strongly fixed on religious subjects; and the interest which they had excited increased. But still you were far from being sensible of your true character and situation. You did not know, or even suspect, that you were dead in trespasses and sins; that your minds were enmity against God, or that it was impossible for you, in your situation at that time, to please him. Ignorant of God's righteousness, you went about to establish your own, and refused to submit to the righteousness of God. While engaged in this fruitless attempt, your minds were agitated and perplexed by various and conflicting emotions. Sometimes you imagined that you were almost a Christian, and not far from the kingdom of heaven. Then some new discovery of the wickedness of your hearts seemed to put you farther from it than ever. In consequence of repeated disappointments of this kind, you were often strongly tempted to entertain hard thoughts of God. You falsely imagined, that you were willing to come to Christ, but could not; and that God refused you the necessary assistance. Hence you were often tempted to go back, and give up your religious pursuits in despair. But this you found impossible. The burden of guilt, and the deep anxiety which you now felt, would not allow you to rest, though you felt more and more at a loss what to do, or to conjecture the cause of your ill success. By slow degrees, however, you begin to discover the cause. The commandment, as the apostle expresses it, came to you more clearly and powerfully; and as its light increased, sin revived and you died. You began to perceive something of that spiritual death, of which you had not been aware. You found, that in you there dwelt no good thing, that your hearts were impenetrably hard and insensible; that all your religious duties had proceeded from selfish principles, and were of course abominable in the sight of God. Then you felt, more than ever, your need of a Savior; but, at the same time, more unable, or more unwilling than ever, to come to him. But at length you were made to see clearly, that the faultwas your own; that you would not come to Christ for life; and that you were dead, utterly dead, in trespasses and sins, and that unless God interposed to save you, you should remain dead forever. This led you to submit, unconditionally, to sovereign mercy, and prepared you to feel, that if ever you were saved, you must be saved by grace, and to give all the glory of your salvation to him to whom it is due. Thus the preparatory work was accomplished, and he, whose work it was, saw that all obstacles to the display of his grace were removed; and then, as the apostle expresses it, by the working of that mighty power which wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, he breathed into you the spirit of life, and you became a living soul. At first, however, you were perhaps scarcely conscious of the wonderful change, or at least, were conscious of it only by its happy effects. But these effects were such, as could result from nothing but the communication of spiritual life.

You found yourselves as it were in a new world. A new and interesting class of beings and objects, which had always surrounded you, but which you had hitherto never perceived, now presented themselves to your view; and the scriptures, which had heretofore seemed like the earth, at its first creation, a mighty chaos, without form and void, now appeared to you full of beauty, order and harmony. This was the consequence of your possessing those spiritual senses, which ever accompany spiritual life; and which enable the possessor to discern both good and evil. You now began, for instance, to possess and to exercise spiritual sight. The eyes of your understanding were opened to see wondrous things out of God's law. Among these wondrous things, one object appeared preeminently glorious, beautiful and lovely. This was Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. The light, which flowed from him, rendered both himself and other spiritual objects visible. The wondrous plan of salvation by him, now opened to you: you began to know God, and Jesus Christ,

whom he hath sent, a knowledge of whom is eternal life, and to understand something of the various offices, which Christ sustains with respect to his people. At the same time, you began to hear God's voice in his word and in the dispensations of his providence. You could now hear him speaking peace to his people and to his servants and the sound was music to your ears. You were also endued with spiritual feeling. Your hearts of stone were transformed to flesh, you became susceptible of deep and lasting impressions from religious objects, and felt a quick sensibility when they were presented to your minds. Nor were you devoid of spiritual taste. You could now taste and see that the Lord is good; you hungered and thirsted after righteousness; and as newborn babes, desired the sincere milk of the word. And while you were thus endued with new senses, adapted to perceive spiritual objects, the new life, which God had given you, began to spread through all the powers and faculties of your nature, rendering them instruments of righteousness unto holiness. Having thus restored you to life, God next proceeded,

2. To raise you from the grave of sin, and cause you to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. The situation, which had suited and pleased you while in a state of spiritual death, became disagreeable and irksome to you, when restored to life. The spirit of disobedience, which had wrought in you, was banished, and succeeded by the Holy Spirit, the author of life and peace. You could no longer walk according to the course of this world, nor were you any longer children of wrath. God, therefore, by freely pardoning all your sins, removed the load of guilt and wrath, which, like the great stone at the door of Christ's sepulchre, had confined you to the tomb; called you out from among the dead, who had hitherto been your associates; added you to his church, as members of the great body of Christ; conferred on you the name and privileges of sons and heirs of God, and thus gave you a title to the heavenly inheritance, and did, in effect, make you sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Believing in him, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of the heavenly inheritance. By the influences of the same Spirit you were taught, as are all who have risen with Christ, to set your affections on things above, to look at things unseen and eternal; and to seek for that heavenly city, into which Christ as the forerunner of his people, has entered to take possession in their name, and to prepare a mansion, which shall receive them at death; when you shall actually sit down with him on his throne in the heavenly places, and live and reign with him forever and ever.

3. We are told what prompted God to raise you from the dead, and confer on you these unmerited favors, namely, his own sovereign, self-moved goodness. God, says the apostles who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; for by grace are ye saved, not of works, lest any man should boast. That nothing but sovereign grace thus saved you; and that nothing but God's self-moved goodness or love prompted him to bestow on you that grace, is evident from the description already given of your natural character and situation. You were by nature dead in trespasses and sin. Of course, you did not raise yourselves from the dead. You did not even know, that you were dead, nor had you one desire to be raised from death, till God gave it you, much less did you, while in that state, perform any good works, to merit God's favor. On the contrary, you were children of wrath, and deserved nothing but the wrath of God forever. Nothing but God's grace then, or in other words, nothing but his unmerited favor, raised you from this state, and nothing but his love led him to grant you that grace. But how could he love those who were dead in trespasses and sins, and consequently more hateful in his sight, than a putrefying corpse is in ours?

I answer,—he loved you as in Christ, and merely for the sake of Christ, whom he had from eternity appointed to be your covenant head. Our Savior, you recollect, often speaks of a people, who were given to him by his Father. All that the Father giveth me, says he, shall come to me; and this is the will of my Father, that of all that he has given me I should lose none. Now of all who were thus given to Christ, he was from eternity appointed to be the covenant head. Hence we find the apostle, in the preceding chapter, saying of himself and all other Christians, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, according as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Of this people, thus chosen in Christ as their head, and given to him, you, my Christian friends, were a part, and as such, God loved you. As he says to his ancient people, I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you; so we may consider him as saying to us, I have loved you in Christ, and for his sake, with an everlasting love, therefore I have raised you from the death of sin.

Hence the apostle, speaking of Christians, says, God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. Here then, my Christian friends, you may trace up the streams of your happiness to the fountain, and see them all flowing from the great abyss of God's eternal, sovereign, distinguishing love. And his design, in thus loving and saving you, was, as the apostle informs us in the verse succeeding our text, that in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Not for your sakes, then may he say, do I this, be it known to you, but for my great name's sake, that it may be glorified thereby. Not unto us, then may we in turn reply, not unto us, but unto thy great name alone, 0 Lord, be all the glory and all the praise.

APPLICATION.—1. My Christian friends, has God done all this for you? Has he loved you with an everlasting love? Has he quickened you, when you were dead in trespasses and sins; has he raised you up together and made you sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus? Has he done all this for children of wrath, done it for you of mere grace or mercy, without any desert of such favors on your part? Need any thing, then, be said to convince you, that you ought to love him, to praise him, to live to him and him only? If it is a sin not to be grateful for life, is it not a much greater sin to feel no gratitude for the gift of spiritual and eternal life? If sinners ought to love him, who created them, because he is the former of their bodies, and the father of their spirits, ought not you much more to love him for creating you anew in Christ Jesus unto good works? What sum would induce you to be again thrown back into the awful situation from which his grace has raised you? What would tempt you to consent to be again dead in trespasses and sins, under the power of Satan, and children of wrath, and in a state of awful uncertainty, whether you ever awake? For what would you sell the gifts, which you hope a benevolent God has given you? Would you exchange them for all the worlds he ever created? lf not, you ought to be as grateful, as if he had actually given you all these worlds; for, in fact, he has given you more. 0 then, bless the Lord, and forget not all his benefits. Let the love of Christ constrain us. Let me urge and entreat you, by the tender mercies of God, by all that he has done for you, by all that you hope for, to present your bodies and your souls a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2. Has God done all this for you? Then he will do more. Has he loved you from eternity? Then he will love you to eternity. Has he raised you from spiritual death? Then he will never suffer you to fall under the power of death a second time. Has he given you spiritual life? Then he will give it more abundantly. Has he made you sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus? Then, as surely as Christ ascended to heaven after his resurrection, so surely shall you ascend to heaven, and sit down together with him there forever and ever. This is evident from the design, which God had in view in raising you from spiritual death. He did it, as our text informs us, that in the ages to come, he might display the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. But should he cease to carry on the work he has begun, the riches of his grace could not be displayed; all the glory of his grace would be obscured, and all that he has done for you, would be worse than thrown away. For his name's sake, for his glory's sake therefore, he will continue to carry on the work he has begun in you, and render it perfect in the day of Christ Jesus. Be not then discouraged by the difficulties and obstacles you meet with; work out your salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that God worketh in you to will and to do. He will give more grace. He will perfect that which concerneth you; he will not forsake the work of his own hands. Plead with him, then, what he has done, as a reason why he should do more. Cry to him, with the Psalmist, thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, and my eyes from tears? To conclude. We have already observed, my impenitent hearers, that what Christians once were, you are still. You are dead in trespasses and sins; you are walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, and are, of course, children of wrath. Whether God will ever raise you from this state, is altogether uncertain. He has nowhere promised that he will. You are altogether unworthy of such a favor. You are condemned already, and he may justly leave you to perish. If you ask what you shall do; God's answer is, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. If you reply, We cannot do this,—I can only say, I have no commission to notice such an excuse; my business is to bring you God's messages. This I have done in his own words. Consider how you will treat them.

Chapter 69

S. THE DIFFICULTY OF ESCAPING THE DAMNATION OF HELL.

THE DIFFICULTY OF ESCAPING THE DAMNATION OF HELL. My hearers, I am not without apprehensions, that the passage, which I have chosen for the subject of this discourse, will sound harshly in your ears; and that its first effect will be to excite, in many breasts, feelings by no means favorable to the reception of truth. But it is a passage, which was uttered by the compassionate Savior of sinners, and I cannot, I dare not, pretend to be more merciful than he; I dare not suffer either a false tenderness, or a fear of giving offence, to prevent me from calling your attention to his words; words, which, if properly regarded, cannot fail to produce the most salutary effects. The words, to which I refer, are recorded in Matthew 23:33. How can ye escape the damnation of hell? This appalling question was addressed by our Lord to the scribes and pharisees. It evidently intimates that their situation was exceedingly dangerous, if not desperate;—that it was almost, if not quite, impossible for them to escape final condemnation. My impenitent hearers, I will not assert that your situation is equally dangerous, or that your escape from the dreadful retributions of eternity is equally improbable. But the word of God will justify the assertion, and a regard to your eternal interest constrains me to assert, that your situation is exceedingly dangerous; that the obstacles which oppose your salvation are very great and numerous; and that the improbability of your escaping the wrath to come, is by no means small. To produce in your minds a conviction of this truth, is my object in the present discourse. Could you be thoroughly convinced of it, one great obstacle, which now opposes your salvation, would be removed. So far as I have observed, nothing more effectually prevents men from flying from the wrath to come, than a groundless persuasion, that to escape it is easy. Nothing so much encourages men to neglect religion, as a false belief; that they can easily become religious at any time. Nothing prevents more persons from obtaining a well founded hope of salvation, than a delusive hope that they shall, some how or other, be saved. Could this delusive hope, this groundless persuasion, be destroyed; could they be made to see their real situation, and the obstacles, which oppose their escape, they would, at once, be alarmed; their false peace would be effectually disturbed, and they would begin to cry, with earnestness, what shall we do to be saved? How shall we escape the wrath to come?

It is for these reasons, my careless hearers, and not to gratify myself; that I call your attention to this subject. It is much more for your interest, than it can be for mine, that you should entertain just views respecting it. Let me then hope for your attention, while I endeavor to show you, from the word of God, what your situation actually is: what are the obstacles which oppose your escape and which render it highly improbable that you will escape final condemnation. In the first place, permit me to remind you, that you are, even now, under sentence of condemnation. You are already doomed to eternal death by the righteous law of God. This is a truth, which persons of your character are ever apt to forget. Many who assent to the fact that sinners will be condemned at the judgment day, do not seem to be aware, that they are condemned already. Yet nothing can be more certain. On this point the declarations of scripture are explicit and full. They assure us, that all have sinned, that the wages of sin is death, that the soul that sinneth shall die, that sinners are under the curse, or condemnatory sentence of God’s violated law, that he who believeth not is

condemned already, and that the wrath of God abideth on him. This being the case, it is evident, unless the execution of this sentence can be averted, unless you can obtain pardon of your offended God, you must perish forever. But the inspired writers assure us, with one voice, that the execution of this sentence cannot be averted, that pardon cannot be obtained, without the exercise of repentance and faith in Christ. On these terms alone salvation is offered, and if we neglect them there is no escape. Now that you may exercise repentance and faith, or become truly religious, several things are necessary, each of which is attended with great difficulties.

It is necessary that you should be roused from that careless, secure state, in which all men naturally live; that you should see religion to be all-important, and thus be led to attend to it with earnestness. To use the language of inspiration, you must be awakened; for with respect to your spiritual and eternal interests, you are asleep. Now it is evident, that no man will attend seriously to religion, unless he sees it to be an object of importance. No man will exert himself to escape a danger, which he does not perceive; no man will think seriously of flying from the wrath to come, until he sees that he is exposed to this wrath. And it is equally evident, that no man, who, in a spiritual sense, is asleep, will see that he is exposed to this wrath, until he is roused from his slumbers, until he becomes awake to eternal realities. Of this, your own experience and observation must convince you. You cannot but know, that religion does not appear in your view to be all important; that you do not perceive yourselves to be exposed to the wrath of God; and you know also, that so long as this continues to be the case you will make no exertions to escape it. You cannot but be sensible, that should you live a hundred years in your present state of religious indifference and insensibility, you would not advance a single step towards preparation for death, nor make one effort to become truly religious. It is then evidently necessary, that you should be roused from this spiritual lethargy to a sense of your danger; your slumbers must be disturbed; your dreams of security and of worldly happiness must be banished, and you must awake to the realities of the eternal world; awake to a conviction that religion is the one thing needful, and that without it you must perish forever. Until this is done, nothing can be done. Until this is done you will no more take one step towards heaven, than a man buried in sleep will commence a journey. But to rouse you from this slumbering, careless state, to fix your attention on religious subjects, is exceedingly difficult. Of this, too, your own experience may convince you. The speaker has been laboring for many years to effect this object by every means in his power; but with how little success, you well know.

Nay more, God has long been using means to rouse you. He has called you, Awake thou that sleepest; rise up, ye that are at ease; be troubled, ye careless ones; woe to them that are at ease in Zion! He has enforced attention to these calls by the dispensations of his providence. He has sent mercies and afflictions. Many of you he has visited with sickness, and thus brought you near to the eternal world; and he has caused all of you to witness, in repeated instances, the death of friends and acquaintance. But all in vain. You still slumber on, and dream of worldly objects, while death is daily approaching to hurry you to the bar of God. You still feel a strong unwillingness to have your false peace disturbed, and to commence a religious life. To every messenger of God, to every friendly monitor you reply, I pray thee have me excused. A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep. Here then is one great difficulty, which opposes your conversion. And is there not great reason to fear, that it will prove insuperable? Does it not render your conversion, and consequently your escape from final condemnation, highly

improbable? Since you have already lived so many years without becoming religious, and even without being persuaded to make it an object of earnest attention, is it not probable that you will continue to live in the same manner till death arrives, especially since all means have been tried in vain, and no new means remain to be employed? But this is not all. That you may escape final condemnation it is necessary, not only that you should be roused to think seriously of religion, but that you should be induced to pursue it with constancy and perseverance. You must be awakened, and you must be kept awake; and the latter is the more difficult thing. For though it is by no means easy to rouse you to a sense of your situation, it is far more difficult to prevent you from relapsing into a state of spiritual slumber. The very air of this world, has a drowsy effect; and there is a strong and constant propensity in the human heart to lose all serious impressions, and to become careless and indifferent respecting its eternal interests. Besides, religion is always disagreeable to men, when they first make it a subject of attention. They cannot then embrace its promises; they know nothing of its divine consolations; they see nothing in the Bible, but a system of restrictions, and threatenings, and penalties; it requires them to renounce the objects which they love, and gives them nothing in return; every page seems to impose on them some duty which they are unwilling to perform, or requires of them some sacrifice which they are unwilling to make, or denounces against them some threatening which they are unwilling to believe. Hence they are strongly tempted to withdraw from it their attention, and return to their former careless state. Hence scarcely one in five of those who are roused from their slumbers, can be prevented from again falling asleep, though to sleep is to perish. Here again, we may appeal to your own observation and experience. Many of you have, at different times, been roused from your natural state of careless security.

You have been made to see that religion is important. You have felt something of the powers of the world to come, and resolved to attend to your eternal interests. But no sooner were these impressions made, than they began to be effaced; in a few days, or at most in a few weeks, they were entirely gone, and your slumbers became more profound than before. Similar effects of this propensity to lose serious impressions you have often witnessed in others. How many in this assembly have you seen attending to religion for a while with earnestness, and then again treating it with entire neglect? Now this propensity remains in your breasts in its full force, and it will forever oppose all persevering attempts to become religious. Here, then, is another great obstacle, which opposes your conversion. And when you consider how great it is; when you reflect on the instability of your religious views; on the proneness of your thoughts to wander from religious subjects, even while in the house of God, does it not appear highly improbable even to yourselves, that you shall ever be the subjects of permanent religious impressions; that you shall ever be induced to pursue religion with that fixedness of purpose, that intensity of feeling, and that persevering diligence, which alone can secure success? Does it not appear exceedingly probable, that you will continue to live as you have done, making resolutions, but delaying their accomplishment, until your day of grace comes to an end, and the sentence of final condemnation is executed upon you? Should you however be enabled to overcome these obstacles, others still greater will oppose your progress. With whatever diligence and perseverance you may attend to religious subjects, it will avail nothing, unless you obtain proper views of your own characters, or, to use the language of scripture, unless you are convinced of sin; for no man will seek to escape the condemning sentence of God’s law, unless he fears it; no man will fear it, unless he sees that he deserves it, and no man will see that he deserves it, unless he sees himself to be, not only a

sinner, but a great sinner; such a sinner as the Bible asserts him to be. Besides, no man can repent of his sins, until he is convinced of them; and we have already seen, that without repentance there is no pardon. A deep and thorough conviction of your own sinfulness then, is indispensably necessary to your salvation. But to produce such a conviction in your minds is one of the most difficult things imaginable. It is always exceedingly difficult to convince a man against his will, to convince him of any unwelcome or disagreeable truth; and the more disagreeable any truth is, so much the more difficult it becomes to produce a conviction of it.

How difficult it is for instance, to convince a consumptive man of his danger. How difficult to make men sensible of their own faults or to make fond and injudicious parents see the faults of their children. But there is no truth more disagreeable to men, no one, therefore of which they are so unwilling to be convinced, as that which asserts their exceeding sinfulness. To see their sins is mortifying, is painful, is alarming. They will therefore shut their eyes against the sight as long as possible. Many sins they will deny themselves to be guilty of; what they cannot deny they will extenuate, and for those which they cannot extenuate, they will make a thousand excuses. If the fallacy of one excuse is shown, they will fly to another, and from that to a third, and fourth; and when all their pleas and excuses are answered, they will return and urge them all a second time with as much confidence as at first. But this is not all. The scriptures teach, and observation proves, that one effect of men's sinfulness is to make them blind to their own sins. It prevents men from forming clear conceptions of the rule of duty, that is, the law of God. Sin consists in a transgression of this law, and so long as men have indistinct conceptions of it, they will, of course, have very imperfect views of their transgressions. Sin too renders men in a great degree insensible to the perfections, the authority and even to the existence of God; and therefore, they see little of the criminality of offending him. Besides, sin impairs, and almost destroys the sensibility of conscience, and thus prevents her from perceiving and reproving what is wrong in our temper and conduct. These remarks we see daily verified in our intercourse with the world. We often see the most abandoned characters entirely blind to their own views. We see that the longer men persist in vicious courses, the more insensible they become to the voice of conscience. It is the same with respect to those sins of the heart, of which you are all, my careless hearers, guilty; and of which you must be convinced, or perish. It is even more difficult to see these sins in ourselves, than it is to perceive those which are open and gross. Hence the exclamation of the psalmist, Who can understand his errors!

Hence too, we find multitudes of sinners mentioned by the inspired writers, who when reproved by God's messengers for their sins boldly replied, What is our iniquity, and what is our sin, that we have transgressed against the Lord? When he said, Ye have despised my name, they replied, Wherein have we despised it? When he said, Ye have robbed God, they did not fear to reply, Wherein have we robbed thee? And when he charged them with uttering impious language, they asked, What have we spoken against thee? Now since human nature is the same in every age, and since it can thus impudently repel the charges of God himself, how exceedingly difficult, or rather how impossible, must it be for us to convince you, that you are sinful in that degree which the Bible describes! Here, as before, we may appeal to your own experience. You know the scriptures assert, in the most unequivocal terms, that the hearts of men are full of evil, that they are desperately wicked, that they are enmity against God; yet these assertions do not convince you that your hearts are thus sinful. What then will ever convince you of it? God will give you no

new revelation of the fact, and his ministers can say nothing more than you have already heard, hundreds of times. And yet you must be convinced of it, or your condemnation is certain. Here then is another and apparently an insuperable obstacle which opposes your escape, and which renders it exceedingly improbable, that you ever will escape final condemnation. But suppose all these difficulties removed; suppose, though there is little ground for the supposition, that by some means or other you should be made sensible of your sins; still, new obstacles no less insurmountable remain to oppose your salvation. Every sinner, when convinced of his sinfulness and danger, invariably asks deliverance in a way in which it cannot be obtained. He relies upon his own watchfulness, strength and exertions to subdue his sinful propensities, and upon his own prayers, tears and merits, to obtain the pardon of his sins. In the language of an apostle, he goes about to establish his own righteousness, and does not submit to the righteousness of God. Disregarding our Savior's assertion, without me ye can do nothing, he attempts to do every thing without obtaining by faith the assistance of Christ. He says, I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me. Yet still the convicted, but misguided sinner will endeavor to come to God and to obtain his favor without Christ. And though he is assured, that without the teaching of God's good Spirit he never will be able to understand the scriptures, he will not humbly pray for this teaching, but endeavor to ascertain their meaning by his own unassisted researches. These errors, if persisted in, prove fatal. The man is soon bewildered and lost, and never ends the way to heaven: for we are taught, that the scriptures make men wise to salvation, only through faith in Christ Jesus. Agreeably, the apostle, speaking of such characters, says, they followed after righteousness, but they have not attained to righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling stone. At the same stumbling stone multitudes have ever since continued to stumble and fall to rise no more. After laboring a while to establish their own righteousness, as the apostle expresses it, they begin to fancy that they have succeeded. They become pleased and satisfied with themselves, and imagine that all is safe: their alarm subsides, their religious zeal declines, and they settle down upon a false foundation, never to be disturbed till the day, in which God shall come to sweep away their refuges of lies, and overflow, as with a flood, their hiding-place. Others fall into a mistake of a different nature, but no less fatal. Eager to obtain relief from their guilty fears and apprehensions, and yet unwilling to obtain it by the exercise of repentance and faith in Christ, they daily seek for the application of some promise, or for some change in their own feelings, which shall encourage a hope, that their sins are forgiven. What they thus earnestly seek, they are almost sure to find. They are powerfully, but transiently, affected by some promise or encouraging portion of scripture; like the stony ground hearers, they receive it with joy; they consider this joy as a proof of their conversion, and sit down satisfied, that now they are safe. But they are deceived, fatally deceived. They have no root in themselves; and therefore endure but for a time and in a season of temptation fall away. My careless hearers, if you would know how many are thus deceived and perish, look at this church, or at any other church of Christ. See how many there are, who, after professing to be converted, and appearing joyful and zealous for a time, lose every thing of religion, except the name, and a little of the outward form. Yet all these persons had surmounted the first two great difficulties mentioned above. They had been roused from their slumbers, and they had been convinced of their sins; but in consequence of that strong propensity which is natural to all men, to neglect the guide provided by God, they only escaped one snare, to be entangled in another equally fatal. The same propensity exists with equal force in your breasts.

Should you then be roused to think seriously of religion; nay, should you be convinced of your sins, still it is exceedingly probable, that like them you would go about to establish your own righteousness, or be fatally deceived by a false conversion. If you think this improbable, if you say within yourselves, we would be more wise and more cautious, it only proves, that you are under the influence of a self-confident spirit, which would infallibly plunge you into these very snares. But suppose you should be preserved from these snares, that you should be enabled to surmount all the difficulties which have been mentioned, there would still remain another obstacle, which would alone be sufficient to render your conversion altogether improbable. This is a sinful, hard, unbelieving heart, which is full of enmity against God, and of opposition to his truth; and which will never believe, or submit to God, until its enmity and opposition are taken away. This you do not at present perceive. No sinner perceives it, until he has been convinced of his sinfulness and danger; till he sees, that his own exertions cannot save him, and till the true character of God and of his law is clearly brought to his view. Until this is done, he always fancies that he has some love to God, and that he sincerely desires to please him. But when he sees what God is, and what he requires, then this long concealed opposition never fails to burst forth, and the sinner finds his heart, instead of submitting to God, filled with dislike of his character and of his law. It will not repent, it will not believe in Christ, for we are assured, that every sinner hates the light, and will not come to it. Finding the light then unpleasant, the convinced sinner, if left to himself, makes a desperate effort, shuts his eyes against it, returns to his former state, and probably plunges into infidelity or some other error equally fatal.

Thus it was with many during our Savior's residence on earth. They followed him so long and so constantly, that they considered themselves as his disciples, and are so called by an inspired writer. But on a certain occasion our Savior brought clearly to their view some of those truths, which are peculiarly disagreeable to a sinful heart. The consequence was that they forsook him forever. In a similar manner, I have known many go back and perish, after they seem to have almost reached the entrance of the way of life. I have seen them sensible, that they were the chief of sinners, fully convinced, that everlasting misery would be their portion, unless they repented and embraced the Savior, and assenting to the truth that he was able and willing to save them. I have seen them in this state for several days, unutterably distressed by a sense of guilt and fear of God's wrath, while their understandings and consciences waged an ineffectual war with their obdurate hearts, and made vain attempts to subdue them. At length their hearts gained a fatal victory; their conviction of the truth was banished, the voice of conscience was silenced, and they returned to their former courses, and their last state became seven-fold worse than the first. The same obstacle, my careless hearers, will oppose your salvation with a strength and violence, of which you can at present, form no conception. Terrible proofs of its power I have often witnessed, when attending the sinner's dying bed. I have seen them, when they knew that their disease was mortal, and that they had but a few days to live, fully convinced that hell would be their portion unless they repented—agonizing in view of their approaching fate —expressing no doubt, that the Savior was ready to receive them, if they would apply to him with sincerity, and yet refusing to apply to him, and at last dying in despair, rather than accept, on these terms, his offered grace. While I have been holding up to their view the power, the compassion, and love of the Savior, his precious promises, and his readiness to receive all who come to him, they have replied, yes, it is all true, but my hard, wicked, unbelieving heart will not repent, will not believe, will not pray. I can repeat prayers with my lips, but my heart feels them not. My hearers, how great, how insuperable,

must be the obstacle, which, in such circumstances as these, can prevent a sinner from accepting salvation on the terms of the gospel! Whether you now believe it or not, 0 sinner, the same obstacle opposes your salvation, and you will one day be convinced of it.

I might easily proceed to mention other obstacles, which render your escape from final condemnation improbable, for it would require a volume to enumerate them all. I have said nothing of the fascinating power of worldly objects; nothing of the contagious influence of evil example; nothing of the strong current of prevailing customs and prejudices, which must be stemmed; nothing of the chain, which long continued habits of sinning have thrown over you; nothing of the many deceivers, who will spread snares for your feet, and cry peace, when there is no peace; nothing of the sophistical arguments, which will be employed to overthrow your conviction of the truth; nothing of the temptations to neglect religion, which will daily assail you on the right hand and on the left; nothing of that great adversary, who, as inspiration informs us, keeps your hearts like a strong man armed, and is not to be cast out of them, but by a stronger than he. But the obstacles, which I have mentioned, are surely sufficient to render it exceedingly improbable, that you will escape final condemnation. And remember that all these obstacles are of such a nature as to furnish you with no excuse. They all originate in your own sinful carelessness, presumption and opposition to the truth. There are no obstacles on the part of God, or of the Savior. It is your hearts, it is yourselves, which place all these mountains in the path to heaven. And now, my careless hearers, would it answer any purpose, I could sit down and weep in anguish over the picture I have drawn, or rather, which the pencil of inspired truth has drawn of your situation. To see immortal souls thus situated, to see their way to life thus blocked up by their own folly and sinfulness, to see so many powerful causes combining to thrust them down to endless, remediless ruin is a sight, over which even angels might weep; nay more, it is a sight, over which the Lord of angels has wept with unavailing compassion. Do any of you reply, It cannot be, that our situation is so terrible, so dangerous, so nearly desperate, as has now been represented. Why then do the scriptures of truth describe it as such? Why were all the inspired messengers whom God has ever sent to men so much alarmed and distressed by the situation of their hearers? Why did one cry, 0 that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night on their account? Why did another exclaim, I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart; for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren my kinsmen according to the flesh? Nay more, why is there joy in heaven, why do angels rejoice over every sinner who repents? They must be perfectly acquainted with his situation; and did they not see it to be dangerous, awfully dangerous, they never would think his escape from it, by repentance, an occasion of such joy. 0 then, believe not your own deceitful hearts; but believe the angels, believe the scriptures, believe God, believe the Savior, when he tells you, that strait is the gate, and narrow the way, which leadeth unto life, and that few there be who find it. If you will not believe all these witnesses, if you refuse to pay any attention to this warning it will furnish another proof of the greatness of those obstacles, which oppose your salvation, and of the improbability of your escape. I have no hope of ever being able to set before you truths more alarming, more adapted to rouse you from your slumbers than those, which have now been exhibited. The word of God contains nothing more alarming, and did you really believe it, the archangel’s trump would not rouse you more effectually than these truths. And shall they not rouse you? Will you still sit unconcerned on the verge of the abyss, with the wrath of God abiding on you, while you are so far from safety, while so long and difficult a journey is before you, while precipitous mountains rise,

and deep gulfs sink, and powerful enemies lie in ambush, and numberless snares are spread between you and heaven? Will you sit thus, and lose the precious hours, while the night of death is approaching, while the shadows of evening are already stealing upon some of you, and while none of you is sure of a week or a day? 0 ye gay, thoughtless triflers! Is this a situation for carelessness and gaiety? 0 ye, who are laboring to be rich! is this the place, in which you would lay up treasure? 0 ye immortal spirits! condemned already, and hastening to hear the confirmation of your sentence at the tribunal of God, can you find nothing more important than the trifles, which now engross your attention? If you have not cast off all regard to God's word, if you are not infidels in theory, as well as in practice, you cannot, methinks, contemplate with perfect indifference the view, which has been given of your situation. You cannot feel perfectly at ease, while you hear it clearly proved from the scriptures, that there is very little probability of your escaping final condemnation. If you are, in any degree, roused from your slumbers, one great obstacle is removed. But remember that it may easily return. Consider how easily the present impression may be effaced, how soon it may be lost, and how much more dangerous your situation will then be. Welcome every serious thought then, as you would welcome an angel from heaven.. Cherish it as the apple of your eye, nay, as your own soul. Avoid every thing which tends to banish it. Dread more than death its departure. Repair to every place, in which your serious impressions may be strengthened, and use, with earnest diligence and solicitude, every means which may increase them. Remember, that your soul, your eternal all, is at stake; that the question to be decided, is, whether you shall spend your eternity in heaven, or in hell, and that at present, it is exceedingly probable the latter will be your portion. Do any reply, the difficulties to be surmounted are so great, and the probability of our surmounting them so small, that we have no courage to make the attempt. It will therefore be best to give ourselves no concern respecting it, but to enjoy life while we can. And do you thus talk of enjoyment in such a situation, and while exposed to such a fate as this? Well may we say of such enjoyment, it is madness. It is far more irrational and preposterous than the mirth of criminals confined in a dungeon, and doomed to die, who attempt to drown their fears by noise and intoxication. There is no necessity for your adopting this desperate resolution. Though your destruction is probable, it is not yet certain and nothing but your own folly can make it so. It would indeed be certain, the obstacles before you would be insurmountable, were there not an Almighty, Sovereign Helper, who can assist you to overcome them, and who is ready to afford you assistance. While, therefore, you justly despair of saving yourselves, go to him, and implore his help. Go, and tell him, that you have ruined yourselves by disobeying him; that you have raised impassable mountains between yourselves and heaven; that you do not deserve his assistance; that you are justly condemned already, and merit nothing but eternal condemnation. This, however, which is the only safe course, I fear your sinful hearts will not consent to pursue.

I fear that however you may now feel, you will dismiss your serious thoughts, and banish the subject from your minds, almost as soon as you leave this house. This I cannot prevent. My arm is too weak to draw you out of that fatal current, which is rapidly sweeping you away to destruction. I can only sit on the bank and weep as I contemplate the increasing strength of the current, and breathe out in agony, cries to that God, who can alone rescue you from its power, and prevent it from hurrying you into that bottomless gulf; in which it terminates. And come, you my Christian hearers—come all, who have been rescued from this fatal current; all, who can feel compassion for perishing immortals, come, and assist in crying to him for help. That you may be excited to this, look at the scene before you. Look around, and see how many of your children, acquaintances

and friends, are swept away towards perdition, while they sleep and know it not, and no voice, but that of God, can rouse them. Do you know whither they are hastening? Do you know what hell is? Do you consider how improbable it is, that they will escape its condemnation? Do you consider that unless grace prevents, they will, in a few years, be lifting up their eyes in torment and despair? Surely, if you know and consider these things, one universal cry of; God have mercy upon them! will burst from every Christian heart.

S. THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST "Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God" John 20:28

What think ye of Christ? is a question, which ought to be proposed to all who bear the Christian name, and to which every one should be ready to give a clear and explicit answer; especially at the present day, when so many seem disposed to thinly wrong, or not to think at all, on this interesting subject. Whether the perilous times, foretold by the apostle, have arrived, when men shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, I shall not undertake to determine; but it must be evident to every one, that professed Christians entertain not only different, but contrary opinions, respecting the character of our blessed Saviour, and the object of his mission; and it is equally evident that; while we thus think differently on these subjects we cannot all think right. Some represent the Saviour as truly and essentially God; others consider him only as a creature, more or less highly exalted; while not a few reduce him to a mere weak and helpless mortal, whose death was intended, not to make an atonement for the sins of the world, but to attest the truth of his instructions, and afford an example of patience and resignation.

Now it is, I think, abundantly evident, that of these opinions some must be essentially and fatally wrong. I am aware, indeed, that some deny this, and contend that all may be essentially right, though they differ in some points of little consequence; and that it is no matter what a man believes, provided he be sincere in his belief, and his external conduct be good. But the character of our Saviour is not one of these points of little consequence, concerning which men may differ in opinion, and yet be right in the main. On the contrary, it is the very sum and essence of the gospel scheme of salvation, and if we are not right on this point, we are right in nothing. The divinity and atonement of our Saviour, are truths of such momentous importance, that either they who assert, or those who deny them must be guilty of a damnable heresy, if there be any such thing. This will, I trust, appear evident, from a moment’s consideration.

If Christ be not truly and essentially God, then they who worship him as such, are guilty of gross and abominable idolatry, in giving that glory and honor to a creature, which is due to the Creator alone; and how a gross idolater can be a good Christian, it is difficult to conceive. On the contrary, we are told that he who denieth the Son, denieth the Father also; that he who believeth not the record which God gave of his Son, hath made him a liar; and that he who doth not honor the Son, honoreth not the Father. Now if Christ be God, then those who deny it, deny God the Father; they make him a liar, and they do not honor him as God; and how they can do all this, and yet be Christians, it is not so easy to determine.

You see, therefore, that the doctrine of our Saviour’s divinity is not a mere speculative or metaphysical doctrine, which may be admitted or rejected without any ill consequences; but it is a doctrine which involves consequences of the utmost importance, and of which either the opposers or the favorers must be essentially in the wrong. Nor is it any breach of charity to say this. Charity has nothing to do with doctrines. It does not require us to represent truth and falsehood as equally

right, or to suppose that every road will conduct men to heaven, as well as the strait and narrow path pointed out by our Saviour. But it requires us to love and pity and pray for those whom we think to be wrong, that God may bring them to the acknowledgement of the truth. It does not require us to think, that the hearts of all men are naturally good, when the word of God plainly asserts the contrary. It does not require us to think those to be right, who differ from its in opinion, for this would imply a belief that we are wrong; but it requires that we should by no means revile, despise, or persecute them on account of their erroneous opinions, but be equally ready to do kind offices to them, as to those who adopt our own sentiments. In a word, it requires us to separate the person from the fault, to hate the sin, while we love and pity the sinner; to shun and condemn the ways of error, but be kind and friendly to those who stray therein. He who does this, and he alone, possesses that charity which the gospel requires. In the passage which has now been read, as the subject of this discourse, we find Thomas, one of the apostles, addressing our blessed Saviour as his Lord and his God. To justify those who follow his example in this respect, and to enable them to give a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear, I shall endeavor to show, in the following discourse, that Jesus Christ is truly Lord and God, as well as man; or, in other words, that he possessed a truly divine, as well as human nature.

Since this is a subject altogether beyond the limited sphere of our rational powers, it would never have been discovered, nor can it now be proved, but by a revelation from God to man. To the revelation, therefore, which God has given us, must we resort for arguments, to prove the proposition we are considering; and if we find it there revealed, we are bound to receive it, though it may be involved in mysteries which we cannot comprehend. Our first argument in favor of our Saviour's proper divinity, will be drawn from those passages which intimate or assert a plurality of persons in the Godhead; of which there are several in the Old Testament. When God was about to create man we find him saying, Let us make man in our own image. When man fell, God said, The man is become as one of us. When he resolved to confound the builders of Babel, he said, Let us go down, etc. Now it is impossible satisfactorily to account for this mode of expression, without supposing that there are more persons than one in the Godhead, and this supposition is rendered highly probable by various other passages, which plainly imply the same thing. In a great variety of instances throughout the Old Testament, the word which we render God in the singular, in the original is Gods. Thus, in Deuteronomy it is said, in the original, the Lord our Gods is one Lord. In Kings, we find the people exclaiming, the Lord, he is Gods, the Lord, he is Gods. And so likewise in Job, Where is God my Makers, who giveth songs in the night. To mention only two other instances of the many which might be adduced, we find it written in the original, Isaiah 54:1-17, Thy Makers is thine husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name, and thy Redeemers the Holy One of Israel, the Gods of the whole earth shall He be called. So, in like manner, in Ecclesiastes it is written, Remember thy Creators in the days of thy youth. This doctrine of a plurality of persons in the Godhead, being thus intimated in the Old Testament, is openly and clearly taught in the New. Among other proofs of this, we find the apostles commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. But surely, our Saviour never would have thus joined his own name with that of the Father, in this solemn manner, had he not himself been God. To which we may add, that had the Apostle considered Christ as a mere creature, he would not have united his name with that of God the Father, in the benediction with which he concludes some of his epistles. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen. To place this point beyond all doubt or controversy, however, the

beloved disciple informs us, that there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and that these three are one; and though the opposers of our Saviour's divinity have endeavored to prove that this text is an interpolation, yet they have never succeeded; and any one may perceive, by reading the chapter, that the sense would be incomplete without it. Our second argument in support of the doctrine of our Saviour's proper divinity, is drawn front his own conduct and declarations while here on earth. Those were such, that unless he was essentially God, he must be considered as an impostor and blasphemer, as the Jews represented him. Though he knew how exceedingly prone the Jews were to idolatry, and how many reasons they had for worshipping him as God, yet he took no pains to prevent it, but on the contrary, seemed to encourage it by every means in his power. Instead of saying like the ancient prophets, Thus saith the Lord, he ever says, Thus I say, and hence he was said to teach as one leaving authority. When the prophets performed miracles, they always did it in the name of God; the apostles wrought them in the name of Christ, but our Saviour always wrought them in his own name, and by his own power. Whether he raised the dead, or cast out a devil, or calmed the tempestuous waves, it was always done in the same Godlike manner. The prophets, the apostles, and even angels, never allowed themselves to be worshipped on any pretence whatever; but he not only allowed it once and again, but expressly taught, that all men ought to honor the Son, even as they honor the Father, that he was the Son of God, and that he and his Father were one.

Now, suppose all this done by a mere mail, or by any created being; suppose such a being teaching with authority; working miracles in his own name, forgiving sins whenever he pleased, suffering himself to be worshipped and addressed by the titles Lord and God; nay more, claiming to be one with the Father, and to be honored as he was honored; and then say, whether he could be considered as a very meek, humble, and submissive being; say whether you should not consider him an impostor and blasphemer? It is evident that the Jews who heard him call himself the Son of God, supposed that he meant to claim divine honors, and for this very reason they were about once and again to stone him, because, as they said, he was guilty of blasphemy, and though he was only a man, made himself God. Now here was a fair opportunity to rectify their mistake, if such it was, and had he not meant to be understood as claiming divine honors, he would most certainly, have immediately undeceived them. He would have shrunk with horror front the idea of making himself God; and leave told the Jews plainly and instantly, that he was not God, but only a man, or at most, a created being. But instead of this, we find him still claiming equality with God, and at length suffering himself to be crucified for this very thing, for this very charge of blasphemy, founded on his calling himself the Son of God, which he might so easily have explained to their satisfaction. We might insist longer on this part of our subject, did our time permit; but we can only request any unprejudiced person, to read the history of our Saviour's life, and if he does not feel an irresistible conviction, that he meant to be considered as something more than a creature, we know not the meaning either of his words or actions. A third argument, in favor of our Saviour's divinity, may be drawn from those passages in which all the attributes and perfections of Deity are ascribed to Christ. Thus for instance, is God eternal; so is Christ. I, says he, am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; the beginning and the ending, Who was, and is, and is to come. He has neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but his throne is forever and ever, and his years shall not fail. Is God self-existent? So is Christ. He, we are told, has life in himself, so that no one has power to take his life from him; but he laid it down of himself. I, says he, have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again. Is God unchangeable? So is

Christ. Jesus Christ, says the apostle, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Is God omnipresent'? So is Christ. Wheresoever, says he, two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them; Lo, I am with you always, says he to his apostles, to the end of the world. Is God omniscient? So is Christ. Lord, says Peter, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. Before Philip called thee, said he to Nathaniel, while thou wert under the fig tree, I saw thee. Does God search the heart? So does Christ. He knew, we are told, what was in man; and once and again he perceived the thoughts, both of his enemies and friends. Is God omnipotent? So is Christ; for I, says he, am the Almighty. Is God infinite in wisdom? Christ is the only wise God our Saviour. In a word, there is no attribute or perfection ascribed to God, which is not in like manner ascribed to Christ.

Fourthly: The works and offices of Christ prove his divinity, since none but God, could do what he has done and must do. As he himself declares, whatsoever things the Father doth, these doeth the Son likewise. Did God make all things for himself? The apostle informs us, that by Christ the world was made; that he in the beginning laid the foundations of the earth, and that the heavens are the work of his hands. By him, we are also told, were all things created that are in heaven and in the earth, whether visible or invisible, all things were created, not only by him but for him; so that without him there was not any thing made which was made. Does God preserve and overrule the world he has made? Christ, we are told, upholds all things by the word of his power; and in him all things subsist. Is it the prerogative of God alone to forgive sins? Christ forgave sins not only once, but often in his own name. Does God raise up and quicken the. dead; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. Does God act the part of a father, a lawgiver, a shepherd, and a protector to his people? Christ is all this to his church. Does God reveal himself as the only Saviour? Christ is the Saviour of lost men. Is God the judge of the whole earth'? Christ is the judge of quick and dead, who will one day judge the world. In a word, Christ is the Creator, Upholder, Governor, Saviour, and Judge of the world, and consequently he must be God. Who but God could call all things out of nothing by the breath of his mouth, and uphold them by the mere word of his power? Who but God is capable of undertaking the great work of man's redemption? A creature, be he ever so exalted, owes all that he is to his Maker, and when he has done and suffered all in his power, he is still an unprofitable servant, and has done no more than it was his duty to do. Consequently he can perform no works of supererogation. He can do nothing to save others. The most he can hope for, is to save himself. Who but God is capable of acting the part of head to his church, and a shepherd to his people, scattered as they are over so many different parts of the world? Who but he could listen to so many different prayers, as are daily and hourly offered up before him, and send to each an answer of peace, —succoring the tempted, comforting the distressed, supporting the weak, reclaiming the backslider, enlightening the benighted mind, and causing all things to work together for the good of his people? Who but God is capable of sustaining the character, and performing the office of the Judge of quick and dead? Who but the only wise and omniscient Jehovah, who sees the end from the beginning, could justly and accurately sum up the guilt of each individual, in such a manner as to assign to all their just recompense of reward? The being who could do this, must be intimately acquainted with the character, life and disposition of every one of the human race; he must know precisely what advantage were enjoyed; what helps and what hindrances, what warnings and what temptations, fell to the lot of each one before him.

He must know, not only every thought, word and action, but the principles from which they proceeded, the motives which induced them, the time, manner and other circumstances by which they were attended, and the effects which they sooner or later produced. Let any one pursue this chain of thought in his mind, and consider what is required to constitute a suitable judge of an assembled world, and instead of thinking that any being, less than divine, could sustain this office, he will wonder how even God himself can perform what it requires.

Again: Another argument in favor of the divinity of Christ, may be drawn from the worship which was, is, and will be paid him. In our text, and in various other instances, we find him worshipped by men, and we have already observed that God requires all men to honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. We find the devils also worshipping him, and deprecating his wrath in the humblest manner: Jesus, thou Son of God, Most High, we beseech thee that thou torment us not. Nor is this confined to men and devils; for even the blessed angels themselves, not only did, but do, and will continue to worship him. When God bringeth his first begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him. The apostle tells us, that to Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess him Lord, unto the praise and glory of the Father. In the vision, with which the beloved disciple was favored, of the heavenly world, he saw in the midst of the throne of God, and of the four living creatures, and of the elders, a Lamb as it had been slain, and this Lamb was equally with God the object of their worship and adoration. The four living creatures, and the four and twenty elders, we are told, fell down before the Lamb, casting their crowns at his feet; and the apostle beheld and heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures and the elders, crying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and wisdom, and riches, and glory, and honor, and blessing; and every creature which is in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, heard I, saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him who sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.

Now, who is this, that thus sits in the midst of the throne of God, and is worshipped equally with him by all the holy armies of heaven? If you remember the solemn declaration of God, I am the Lord, that is my name, and my praise will I not give to another, you must suppose that he to whom the Father thus commits the glory of creating, governing, redeeming and judging the world, and of sharing with him the throne and the praises of heaven, must be God himself; he must be coequal and coeternal with the Father. Meanwhile, if there be any who are condemned, as guilty of idolatry, for worshipping and honoring the Son even as they honor the Father, let them comfort themselves with the reflection, that they are doing no more than is daily and hourly done in heaven, and no more than the rest of the children of God will do to all eternity.

Lastly: That Christ is God; is implicitly and expressly asserted in very many passages, both in the Old and New Testament. The Psalmist informs us, that the Israelites tempted the Most High God in the wilderness; but St. Paul, treating of the same subject, says, they tempted Christ. Christ, therefore, is the most high God. In our text, we find Thomas calling him, My Lord and my God; and the elders of Ephesus are charged to feed the flock of God, which he purchased with his own blood. St. Paul speaks of Christ, as God manifest in the flesh; as God over all, blessed forever, and as the only wise God our Saviour. In the epistle to the Hebrews, as if he foresaw that the time would come, when Christ would be considered as chief of the angels, he asks, To which of the angels said God at any time, thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee? Of his angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But, mark the difference;

unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. To the same purpose the beloved disciple declares, that Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life; and that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And lest we should have any doubt who was intended by the Word, he adds, and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. These high characters and titles of our Saviour, are perfectly agreeable to the prophecies which foretold his coming into the world. He shall be called, says one of the prophets, Immanuel, which is to say, God with us. Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace; and of the increase of his government, there shall be no end. But perhaps some will pretend, that the word God is here used in an inferior sense, and that Jehovah, which the Jews called the incommunicable name of God, is never applied to our Saviour. In answer to this, it may be said, that the prophet, speaking of Christ, says, and His name shall be called Jehovah, our Righteousness. In the prophecy of Zechariah, Jehovah is introduced as saying, They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and mourn. If it be Jehovah who was pierced, then, beyond all controversy, Christ is Jehovah. So, in the same prophecy, Awake O sword, against the man who is my fellow, saith Jehovah. Now who is the man, where is the man, who can be the fellow, or as it might be rendered, the equal of Jehovah? Surely, it can be none but He, who was God and man united, even the man Christ Jesus. Once more; the prophet Isaiah tells us, that he saw in vision Jehovah, sitting on a throne high and lifted up, and surrounded by seraphim, who cried, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, and the whole earth is full of his glory. Yet St. John expressly assures us that it was Christ whom Isaiah then saw; consequently, Christ must be Jehovah sabaoth, or the Lord of Hosts. Now, collect together what has been said, and say whether the doctrine of our Saviour's proper divinity, could possibly have been more clearly taught in the word of God, than it is; whether it can now be expressed, in more full, forcible, intelligible terms, than it is expressed by the inspired writers. We may challenge any person who denies this doctrine, to tell how it could be asserted in plainer terms, or to find language more definite than has now been quoted from the sacred volume. But perhaps you will be ready to ask; Since this great truth is so plainly taught in the word of God, how is it possible that it should ever be called in question? and how do those who oppose it support their cause? This is a very natural question, and to it we reply, that our Saviour's divinity never was called in question, for want of sufficient proof, but, for want of a disposition to submit to sufficient proof. It was called in question, because we ignorant worms of the dust cannot understand it, and because our proud reason will not submit to believe God himself, unless what he reveals is perfectly intelligible to our comprehension. It was called in question, because it is a maxim with the self-styled philosophers of the present day, that there should be no mysteries in religion, though the Apostle himself tells us, that, beyond all controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. If you ask what arguments can be brought against it by its opposers, I answer, they object,

1. That if Christ be God, there will be more than one supreme being, which is absurd; and that we make three Gods, to be one God, which is a contradiction. But this objection is founded upon a mistake. It supposes that we make three Gods, instead of three persons in one God. No one ever pretended that three persons were one person, or that three Gods were one God, but that three persons are one God. This is indeed above reason, but it is not contrary to reason; and if any one wishes to have it explained and understood, his wishes shall be gratified, when he will explain and

understand God's eternity, his omniscience, his omnipresence, and his creative power; or even when he can explain how his own soul acts upon, and moves his body. If any one will meditate on these subjects, he will soon find they are as mysterious and unintelligible as the doctrine of three persons in one God. The truth is, every thing that respects God's existence, is and must be mysterious to finite creatures, because he is an infinite being, and as well might an insect hope to take in the universe at one glance of his eye, as we to comprehend the manner of God's existence; and should any one pretend to give us a revelation of God, which contained no mysteries, but was perfectly plain to our limited capacities, it would be a sufficient reason for rejecting it; for if we cannot comprehend ourselves, much less can we hope to comprehend God. But,

2. All the numerous passages, which assert that Christ was a man, are also marshaled in array to prove that he was not God, while in reality they are nothing to the purpose, —for those who assert that he was God, allow that he was also man in the strictest sense of the word. They believe that he was God manifest in the flesh, and that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The same may be said of those passages which are so triumphantly quoted in opposition to the doctrine of our text, in which Christ declares, that he was inferior to his Father, that he knew not the period fixed for the day of judgment, that without his Father he could do nothing, and many others to the same purpose. We fully believe all this: We believe that, considered as the Son of man, as Mediator, he was inferior to the Father, and knew not the times appointed; but we also believe, with the apostle, that he thought it no robbery to be equal with God, and that in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. The truth is, that all the pretended arguments, which are usually alleged to disprove our Saviour's divinity, prove just nothing at all, or at least nothing to the purpose. They only prove, what all allow, that Christ, in one sense, was a man and inferior to the Father. Indeed, in one sense they rather prove, that he was a divine person; as for instance, where he says, The Father is greater than I. Now suppose any being but God to say this; suppose a man, an angel, or a super-angelic being saying, God is greater than I, —and consider how absurd such a speech would appear.

Now of the things we have spoken, this is the sum. There are plain intimations in the Old, and positive assertions in the New Testament, that there is more than one person in the Godhead, coequal and coeternal. When Christ came on earth, he gave great reason to suppose that he claimed divine honors as one of these persons; and for this claim he was put to death without renouncing it. He was worshipped, both on earth and in heaven, by angels, men and devils, and all the attributes, perfections, names, and works of God, are ascribed to him, at least as often as they are to the Father. If this does not prove him to be truly and essentially God, nothing can prove it. Consider then what has been said, and the Lord give us understanding in all things. I close with a brief application.

Let none imagine that they truly believe in Christ, merely because they profess to believe that Christ is God; for even the devils themselves believed this, and trembled at the belief. It is one thing to assent to this with our understanding, and another to consent to it with our wills, and embrace it in our hearts. The apostle informs us, that no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. It is evident he did not mean by this, that none could say these words, —Jesus is Lord, —without divine assistance. But he meant that no one could cordially consent to, and embrace the proposition contained in these words, without being enlightened by the divine Spirit.

He meant that no one could say from the heart, that Jesus is God, without being divinely taught. Consequently it is evident, that those who deny that Jesus is Lord, have not the Holy Ghost. They are not led by the Spirit of God, and therefore are not his children. They have not the spirit of Christ, and therefore are none of his, and the same must be said of those, who have only a speculative belief of this truth. It is not only a rational, but a cordial conviction, which is necessary; it is not with the head, says the apostle, but with the heart, that man believeth unto righteousness. Now every true Christian has this cordial belief. He has had such a sight and sense of his own guilty, lost condition, that he sees and feels, that nothing short of an infinite, almighty Saviour will suffice to save him; he feels that he cannot trust to any creature however exalted; he cannot put confidence in an arm of flesh; he cannot trust in any thing less than God. And by the enlightening influences of the divine Spirit, he is made to see that Christ is God, that he is an almighty and all-sufficient Saviour, just such a Saviour as his perishing soul requires. Then, and not till then, he can say, Jesus is Lord; then he can believe and trust in him for salvation; then he can say with the apostle, I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day. On the contrary, he who never has been truly convinced of sin, who has never seen the guilt he has contracted, and the depravity of his nature, feels no need of an almighty Saviour; he has never been enabled to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; he has never believed in him so as to rejoice with joy unspeakable; and consequently he cannot say from the heart, that Jesus is Lord. Not being able to say this, he cannot have that true faith, which works by love. Not having faith, he cannot perform any good works acceptable to God; for without faith it is impossible to please God; and not being able to please God, he cannot be accepted of him. If then, my friends, you would perform truly good works; if you would have true justifying faith, by which you may serve God acceptably; if you would be saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, let it be your chief concern to obtain such conceptions of his character as shall lead you cordially to say with Thomas, My Lord and my God!

S. THE END OF TIME

THE END OF TIME And the angel whom I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth, lifted up his hand to heaven; and sware by him that liveth forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that therein are, and the earth and the things that therein are, and the sea and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer; but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.—Revelation 10:5-7. IN the commencement of this chapter St. John informs us, that he saw in vision a mighty angel descend from heaven, clothed with a cloud, and having a rainbow upon his head, while his countenance shone resplendent as the sun, and his feet were like pillars of fire. This angel, placing one foot upon the land and the other upon the sea, lifted his hand to heaven, and swore by the everlasting God, who created the heavens, the earth, and the sea, with all which they contain, and who therefore possesses both the right and the power to prescribe limits to their duration, that there should be time no longer but that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets. My hearers, we have witnessed, and perhaps reflected and moralized on the lapse of time. In this passage we are called to contemplate its termination. We are called to see that current, on whose bosom we have been borne ever since our existence commenced, swallowed up in the ocean of eternity. This forms a most interesting object of contemplation; but it is too vast, and embraces too many particulars, to be seen by us at once as a whole. Let us, then, divide it into parts, and consider them separately. The several particulars which it is necessary to consider may be included in an answer to the three following questions:

What is meant by the end of time? When will the event denoted by this phrase arrive?

What will be the attending circumstances and consequences of this event?

I. What is meant by the end of time? or, in other words, by the declaration, There shall be time no longer?

Time, so far as man has any concern with it, is that portion of duration which is commensurate with the existence of our world, and which is measured by its diurnal and annual revolutions. It began when this world began to exist. Agreeably we are informed that, in the beginning, that is the beginning of time, God created the heavens and the earth. Previous to this event there was, properly speaking, no such thing as time. There was duration, there was eternity, but time there was none. So long as this world continues to exist, time will continue; and when it shall cease to exist, the end of time will have arrived; or, in the language of our text, there will be time no longer. The end of time, and the end of the world, are, then, expressions of the same import.

II. When will the event denoted by these expressions arrive? We learn from our text that it will arrive when the mystery of God shall be finished. To that period the oath of the angel refers; and when that period arrives there shall be time no longer. By the mystery of God is intended the

design, or object, for which he created the world, and toward the accomplishment of which he has ever since been advancing. This design is here called a mystery, that is, something secret, or concealed; because, until God revealed it, it was entirely hidden from mortals; and because it is still but partially revealed. So far as was necessary for the information of mankind, God has communicated it to his servants the prophets, and the other inspired writers of the sacred volume, That through their instrumentality it might be made known to others. From them we learn, that God's great object in creating this world and its inhabitants was to gratify, and glorify himself. Their language is, The Lord hath made all things for himself; Thou Lord hast made all things; and for thy pleasure they are, and were created; and they represent God, as saying, respecting every one who is called by his name, I have created him for mine own glory.

Now God at once glorifies and gratifies himself when he displays his perfections in his works. Some of his perfections, as, for instance, his power, wisdom and goodness, he displayed in the creation of the world; and they, as well as some other perfections of his nature are still displayed in its providential government. But the principal display of his perfections is made in the work of redemption by Jesus Christ, the great object to which all his works of creation and providence ultimately refer. Agreeably, inspiration informs us, that for Jesus Christ all things were created; that all power in heaven and earth is given to him; that to him all judgment is committed, that he is made head over all things to his church; and that to him there is given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him. This kingdom here mentioned is usually called Christ's mediatorial kingdom; and over this kingdom he is to reign so long as the sun and moon endure; that is, in other words, till time shall be no more. When the purposes for which this kingdom was given to Christ, and set up in the world, are accomplished, the mystery of God, mentioned in our text, will be finished. Now the purposes, for which this kingdom was given to Christ, include two things. The first is, the complete salvation of all who are given to him by the Father. We are informed that by him, as the Captain of their salvation, God is bringing many sons to glory. He must then reign, his mediatorial kingdom must continue, till all the chosen sons of God are brought home to glory, or to mansions prepared for them in heaven, their Father's house. Hence our Savior declares that, before the end shall come, the gospel of his kingdom must be preached to all nations. The reason is obvious. The destined subjects of this kingdom, the chosen sons of God and heirs of salvation, are to be gathered, we read, out of every kindred and nation and tongue and people. Of course, the gospel, by which they are to be called and gathered into the kingdom of Christ, must be preached to all nations before the mystery of God can be finished, before the end of time and of the world can arrive. The second thing, included in these purposes, is the complete and final subjugation of all Christ's enemies. Agreeably, an apostle informs us, that he must reign till all enemies are put under his feet; and that, when this is done, when he shall have put down all opposing rule, and power, and authority, then the end shall come. This event synchronizes, as our text informs us, with the sounding of the trumpet of the seventh angel. Accordingly, we read in a succeeding chapter that when the seventh angel sounded, great voices were heard in heaven, saying, the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and Savior. Thus when all Christ's chosen people are brought home to glory, and all his incorrigible enemies are placed under his feet, the mystery of God which he is now accomplishing will be finished, and then will the end come and there will be time no longer.

Time, then, may be considered as an island, raised out of the ocean of eternity by the Creator for specific purposes, and destined, when these purposes shall be accomplished, to sink again and be lost in the ocean from which it rose, and whose waves on every side bound its shores. The appointed day and hour when this shall take place is known, we are informed, neither to man nor to angel, but to God only. It must however be obvious to all, who can discern the signs of the times, that though it is still at a considerable distance, the course of events betokens its approach. We have already remarked that, before the end can come, the gospel must be preached to all nations. And how much has been recently done, how much is now doing and with increasing success, to accomplish this work! God's ancient people, the Jews, must also be called into the fold of Christ, and with them the fullness of the Gentiles. And present appearances indicate, as I need not inform you, that these events are not very far distant. The downfall of Papal superstition, of Mohammedanisn, and of the Turkish empire, are predicted events, which must take place before the end of time can arrive. And that these events are not very distant, who can doubt? The great mystery of God is then evidently approaching its consummation, the end of all things is comparatively at hand. And it becomes us to remember that, with respect to ourselves, the end of time is still more near. To each individual the hour of death is the end of time. When that hour arrives to any one God does in effect say to him, there shall be time no longer. Let us now inquire,

III. What will be the attending circumstances and consequences of this event? That this question may receive a proper answer it must be considered with reference to ourselves, our race, and the world which we inhabit.

1. With respect to ourselves, considered as individuals, the end of time, or, which is the same thing to us, the end of our lives will be attended by circumstances, and followed by consequences most important and interesting. In the first place, we shall then be separated at once from all temporal and earthly objects. The relations which we now sustain to such objects, and the connexions which now bind us to them, will be entirely and forever dissolved. The world will no longer be our habitation; this country will no longer be our country; our houses, lands, and other temporal possessions, for which we have labored, will no longer be our property. One moment after our death they will no more be our's than if we had never possessed them. The richest and the poorest of us will then be reduced in this respect to a perfect equality. The places which now know us will know us no more forever. Of all our possessions nothing will remain to us but the necessity of accounting for them to our Judge, and the consequences of the manner in which we have employed them. Then too, the ties which now bind us to our fellow creatures will be dissolved. We may now have numerous relations and connections; we may surround ourselves by a large circle of admiring, affectionate friends; but death will separate us from them all, and in one moment after its arrival we shall be as friendless as the beggar who dies unknown in a foreign land. Our surviving friends may indeed weep over our remains; they may honor them with sumptuous funeral rites; they may say much in our praise, and give us a place in their memories; but we shall know nothing of all this, nor, if we could, would it afford us the smallest gratification. In fine, the world with all which it contains will be no more to us than if it ceased to exist, at the very moment of our dissolution. To these remarks there may be one exception. If we are real Christians, if we have become united to Christ as our Head, and to his people as fellow members, we have formed a union which death itself cannot dissolve. The truly pious will meet all their pious friends again, meet and know them as friends, and be separated from them no more forever. In the second

place, with the end of time our state of probation, and our day of grace will end. We shall be removed from our present religious privileges and means of spiritual improvement. Not another petition can we ever offer, not another sentence can we ever read in the word of God; not another offer of pardon and salvation can we ever hear; not another opportunity of warning, or of doing good to our fellow mortals can we enjoy. Prepared or unprepared we must go. Our accounts, whether ready or not ready for the inspection of our Judge, must be sealed up to the judgment of the great day; our plans, our begun enterprises, our works, whether finished or unfinished, must all be left just as they are. No part of the work which God has required to be performed in time, can be done in eternity; for there is in this sense no work nor device. In the third place, when time ends, eternity will begin. The moment in which we leave this temporary and mutable state, we shall enter a state which is eternal, and, of course, unchangeable. Sound philosophy unites with revelation in declaring, that no essential change can take place in eternity. The moment in which we leave the body and enter the future world, eternity will set its stamp upon us, exclaiming, Such as I find you, you shall continue to be while I endure. He that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is sinful, let him be sinful still. It is necessary, however, to recollect that, when the good man leaves the body, he leaves all his remaining sins and imperfections behind, and enters eternity a pure and spotless spirit; while on the other hand, the wicked leave all their apparent goodness behind, and enter eternity with the character and feelings of a fiend; for, says our Savior, To him that hath, more shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.

Let us next consider the circumstances and consequences which will attend and follow the end of time with respect to the human race. Considering them separately, as individuals, these circumstances and consequences will be the same to each of them, as have already been mentioned but we now speak of them collectively, including ourselves, of course, in the number. And first, when the end of time shall arrive, the general resurrection will take place. Then all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation; for there shall be a resurrection not of the just only but also of the unjust. In the second place, at the end of time, the day of judgment, the great day for which all other days were made, will arrive. The Judge will be seen by every human eye, coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; the whole human family, small and great, shall be placed before his tribunal to be judged and rewarded according to their works; the righteous and the wicked shall be separated from each other; the former shall be called to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world, while the latter will be doomed to depart accursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. These sentences will be no sooner pronounced than executed. The righteous will ascend triumphantly with their Savior to heaven, there to live and reign with him forever; while the wicked will be thrust down to their destined prison, between which and the abodes of the blessed a great and impassable gulf will be fixed.

It remains only to consider what will then be the fate of the globe which we inhabit. It has already been seen that the end of time, and the end of this world must take place at the same moment. While the world continues, time must continue, and when the world ends, time ends. Agreeably, we are informed that, when the period referred to shall arrive, the earth with all its works shall be burnt up; for then the design for which it was created will have been accomplished, and its longer

existence would be useless. Then the gold, the silver, the jewels, and all the glittering but delusive objects, for which so many thousands have bartered their souls, shall be destroyed; then the monuments, the palaces, the cities, which their vain builders fondly hoped would render their names imperishable, shall be whelmed in one common ruin; then the exploits and achievements, the civil and political systems, from which their authors hoped to derive a deathless fame, shall all be blotted out and forgotten; then those literary works on which the impious pride of man had inscribed the epithet, immortal, will be consumed like a worthless scrap of paper. In fine, all the works of men will pass away with the world which contained them, and it will be clearly seen, that they 'built too low, who built beneath the skies;' and that all who did not labor for the glory and honor and immortality beyond the grave, labored in vain, and spent their strength for nought.

It will have already occurred to you, my hearers, that we have led your attention to the subject before us with special reference to the circumstances in which we meet. We have just passed the line which separates two of those divisions of time, by which our short span is measured out. We have bid an eternal farewell to one year, and entered on another, which to some of us must, and to any of us may, prove the last. Yes, to some of us, the end of time, with its attending circumstances and consequences, will arrive before the close of the present year. There are some present who have reason to say, My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me. Whether I shall preach, whether you will hear, another new-year's sermon, God only knows. During the past year, twenty-eight individuals of this society, nineteen adults and nine children, have passed the bounds of time, and entered on eternity. This number does not include those who have died while absent from us. To an equal number the end of time will probably arrive during the present year. As no one of us can say that he shall not be among this number, let us pause, and, with the end of time full in our view, indulge those reflections which it is suited to excite, and for which the occasion calls.

1. In view of this subject, how insignificant, how unworthy of an immortal being, do all merely temporal and earthly pursuits appear! Look at these pursuits, ye who are engaged in them, and then at the scene before us, and methinks you can scarcely fail to be convinced of the irrationality of your conduct. You have spent many years in these pursuits, and what is all that you have really acquired worth? What will all the connections you have formed, and all the friends you have acquired, be worth to you, when the hour of separation, which may come tomorrow, shall arrive? What will all the applause you ever have obtained, or ever can obtain, be worth to you, when your ear, closed in death, can no longer hear it? What will a portion in this world he worth to you, when the world itself, with all which it contains, is burnt up? What is it worth to those who died the last year? The answer to all these questions is short,—just nothing. You have spent many years then, the most valuable years of life, years which if spent aright would have secured eternal salvation, in acquiring nothing. Nor is this all. By thus laboring for temporal, when you ought to have been pursuing spiritual and eternal objects, you have incurred the just displeasure of your Creator; you have been treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Yes, sinner, the only treasure you have accumulated is a treasure of wrath. Of all that you have acquired this, this alone, can you carry with you when you leave this world. Can you then deny that your conduct has been irrational in the extreme? If you do deny it let me ask, whether you really believe that your souls are immortal? If so, you believe that they will exist after death, that they will be in existence a hundred or a thousand years hence, and that, when that period arrives, happiness will appear to them as

desirable, and misery as dreadful, as it does now. Have you then secured any thing which will promote your happiness a hundred years after death? Have not all your cares and labors had respect to the present life? And if this be not folly what is? Surely the folly of him who wastes his childhood and youth in idleness and play, is wisdom itself compared with the folly of him who lays up his treasure on earth, and makes no provision but for the present life. That you may be still farther convinced of this, contrast your conduct with that of the real Christian, who has diligently sought, in God's appointed way, for glory and honor and immortality beyond the grave. He has laid up something for eternity, something which will render him completely happy when time shall be no more. And the portion which he has secured is not only valuable but safe; for it is laid up in heaven. Tis world, with all which it contains, may be burnt up, without diminishing his treasure in the smallest degree. Death may come, the end of time may come, and his happiness, instead of being diminished, will be immeasurably increased; for at death he goes to his portion; while you, at death, will go from yours forever. Is not his conduct then wisdom and yours folly? Would it not be folly to invest all your property in a bank which you knew would fail, or embark it without insurance on board a vessel which you knew would founder? If any of you are convinced that it would be, remember that it is not yet too late to be wise. The end of time is not yet arrived to you; and until that arrives, you will enjoy the day of grace and the means of salvation. 0, then, improve them while you may. Whatever you do must be done quickly, for your time is short, and there is no work nor device nor knowledge in the grave whither you are hastening.

2. In full view of the end of time let me ask, are you all, my hearers, prepared for it? Are you prepared to part with your friends, to leave all your temporal possessions, to be removed from the means of grace, to enter the world of spirits, the eternal world, to have the stamp of eternity placed upon your characters? In a word, are you prepared to meet your God, to stand before him in judgment and see the earth sink from under your feet in the flames of one wide-wasting, all-devouring conflagration? If you are not prepared, nay, if you have the smallest doubt of your own preparedness, give yourselves no rest till all scriptural cause of doubt is removed.

3. Proper views of the subject before us will be useful to us, my Christian friends, in approaching the table of our Lord. In approaching that table, we shall act a part in the great work which God is carrying on, and commemorate an event which constitutes its corner stone. We shall scarcely assert more than the Scriptures will warrant, if we assert, that the world was created to serve as a spot on which the cross of Christ might be erected. In approaching this table we shall also observe an institution which forms a connecting chain between the first and second coming of Christ, or between his crucifixion and the end of the world. The return of each communion season adds a new link to this chain; and though we shall all be laid in the grave long before its completion, yet the work will be carried on by successive generations of believers, and the Lord's supper will be observed for the last time on earth but a few days before his second coming. But for an eternity of ages after that event, the blessings which are here symbolically represented and received by faith, will continue to be enjoyed by all who ever worthily partook of the Lord's supper. My brethren, are you prepared to come and observe in a proper manner an institution so sacred, so interesting, so intimately connected with the most important event of time, and taking hold in its consequences of the remotest ages of eternity? Can you come and by faith look back along this chain to the cross of Christ, as the foundation of your hopes, and then look forward to the end of time and see him coming in the clouds of heaven to fulfil, and more than fulfil all your hopes? Surely if you can do

this, you will be ready to say with Paul, I am crucified to the world and the world to me. What have I any more to do with its idols or its perishing objects? What indeed have I to do with it, or in it, but to perform the appointed duties of my station and finish the work for which I was placed here? Too long have I run in the race with men of this world, who have their portion in this life. Too long have I been a competitor for the worthless prize which they are pursuing. But I will be so no longer. I forsake the race, I stand aside, and say, let others pursue and obtain, if they can, the pleasures, the applause, the possessions, which this world offers to her votaries.

I resign them all. I have another race to run, I have nobler objects to pursue; and to this race, to these objects, to the service of my Savior, and to the pleasures, the honors, the possessions of eternity, I now, in the presence of God, consecrate my future life and all my powers. My brethren, can you hesitate to adopt and carry into effect this language? Do not those of our number, who died the past year now wish that they had adopted it? Could you be assured that to you the end of time will arrive before the conclusion of the present year, would you not aim to adopt it? Why not then adopt it now? He whom you call your Master requires you to be always ready, and waiting for his coming, because you know not when he will come, and because he will come at an hour when he is not expected. Is he then really your Master, or is he not? You can prove that he is, only by obeying him. Before you approach his table, then, and seal your covenant engagements afresh, inquire whether it is your present fixed purpose, to obey this command. Inquire whether you are proving that you truly repent of the sins of the past year, by sincerely resolving that you will endeavor not to bring them into the year on which you have entered. To conclude. On the last new year's day, many, who are now gone from us, were in your situation. They sat in your seats; they heard such truths as you are now hearing; they saw the Lord's table spread before them. And now, after the lapse of one year only, one short year, they are in eternity; some of them, we hope, in heaven; others, we fear, not. Such a change, such a mighty change can one year make. And as one year since they were in your situation, so before this year closes, some of you will probably be in their's. Yes, some of you have heard the last new-year's sermon.

Chapter 72

S. THE FEELINGS AND EMPLOYMENT OF SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

THE FEELINGS AND EMPLOYMENT OF SAINTS IN HEAVEN. And cast their crowns before the throne.— Revelation 4:10.

SAINT JOHN, in this chapter, describes a vision, with which he was favored, of the heavenly world. After presenting to our view the throne of God, in the midst of which Jesus Christ appeared, as a lamb that had been slain, he proceeds to inform us by whom this throne was surrounded. Among those who surrounded it, he saw four and twenty elders, clothed in white robes, and having on their heads crowns of gold. These elders represented the whole church of Christ in its perfect and glorified state, as it will appear in heaven, after the consummation of all things. Their white robes were an emblem of the spotless purity with which it will then be adorned; while their golden crowns represent the regal dignity, the glory, honor, and immortality, with which, agreeably to the often repeated promise of our Savior, all his real disciples shall be invested in heaven. In our text the apostle informs us what use they made of these crowns. They cast them before the throne, or at the foot of the throne, on which sat the Father and the Son. This action, like every other part of the apostle's vision, was symbolical, or figurative. It is not however on that account less full of instruction. It illustrates in a very clear and striking manner, some of the principal traits in that character, which all the redeemed will possess in heaven. Let us then, endeavor to ascertain its import, together with the feelings which prompted it, and of which it was an expression. In attempting this, it is necessary to recollect that all the rewards, which await the righteous in heaven, are often summed up in the comprehensive expression of a kingdom. I appoint unto you a kingdom, said our Savior to his disciples, as my Father hath appointed unto me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame, and am seated with my Father on his throne. In allusion to these and other similar promises, St. Paul says, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them also which love his appearing. And in the same spirit all the redeemed in heaven are represented as saying to Christ, Thou hast made us kings unto God, and we shall reign forever and ever. As the rewards of heaven are thus called a kingdom, and as a crown is the distinguishing badge or ornament of royalty which is worn by kings alone, it follows that, as has already been intimated, the crown mentioned in the text represented every thing which the righteous had received as a reward. Casting these crowns at the foot of the throne, was, therefore, the same as casting their kingdom, with all its dignity, glory and honor, at the feet of God and the Lamb. Hence it is easy to perceive the import of this action and the feelings which prompted it. In the first place, it was an acknowledgment of what God is, and of what he deserves from his creatures. The Scriptures inform us that he is one, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things. All things are of him, as their Creator, and First Cause; all things are through him, as they are preserved, sustained and affected by his constant agency; and all things are to him, as they are designed for his pleasure and glory. Of all these truths the action, which we are contemplating, was an acknowledgment. They who performed it, declared by its performance, a full, heart-felt conviction, that all which they were, and all which they possessed, was from God,

and that therefore all ought to be rendered to him alone; that all the streams which issued from this fountain ought to flow back to it again. Were there any doubt that such was in fact the import of this action, the language with which it was accompanied must remove it. ‘While they cast their crowns before the throne, they exclaimed, Thou art worthy, 0 Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power; for thou hast made all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created. And as they uttered this ascription, they cast themselves also before the throne; thus in effect saying, From thee, 0 Lord, we derived all that we are, and all that we possess; and to thee, therefore, we bring it back. To thee belongs all glory, and honor, and power, and to thee therefore we ascribe it. And while this action expressed a general acknowledgment, that all glory is due to God, it implied a more particular acknowledgment, that to him all the glory of their salvation belonged. It was as if they had said, From thee, 0 Lord, we have received these crowns; but we are wholly unworthy of them; to thee alone they belong; for by thy sovereign grace alone were we prepared for them; by thy grace alone were we enabled to perform the good work which thou hast been pleased thus to reward; and by thy grace were we brought to the enjoyment of these rewards. Grace prompted the plan of our salvation, and grace carried it into execution. Grace prepared for us a Savior, and chose us in him before the foundation of the world; grace inclined us to choose, and to follow the Savior thus provided; and grace has finally crowned us with eternal glories. To thy grace then, 0 our God, thy free, rich, sovereign, distinguishing grace, belongs all the glory of our salvation, and to that grace we ascribe it. In all that we offer, or can offer, we do but present thee with that which is thine own. Not one gem in these celestial crowns belongs to us; not one will we retain. Thou art all in all, and we are nothing; nothing but shadows painted by thy beams, nothing but sinful dust and ashes, deserving of everlasting destruction, whom thou hast rescued, pardoned, sanctified, preserved, and raised to glory.

Having thus considered the import of this action, let us attend, in the second place, to the feelings which prompted it, and of which it was an expression. In the first place, it was prompted by, it was an expression of, perfect humility. This quality has never existed on earth in perfection, except while our Savior resided here, since the fall. Ever since the fall, man has been a proud creature. Indeed the exercise of pride was one essential part of his fall. Not content with the honor and immortality with which he was crowned, he proudly desired to become as a god, knowing good and evil. The same proud disposition has ever since constituted a principal feature in the character of fallen man. It essentially consists in a disposition to exalt and arrogate glory to ourselves, and thus withhold it from him to whom alone it is due. Hence the constant struggle which has ever existed among fallen men for pre-eminence. Hence the love and desire for the chief room, and the uppermost seats. Hence, too, the little success which attends the preaching of the gospel. Pride forms the principal obstacle which exists in the heart of man to the reception of its humbling doctrines. And even after the pride of the heart is so far subdued as to admit these doctrines, it still maintains its existence, and occasions the Christian more trouble than all other sinful propensities united. It is the very last of his internal enemies, over which he obtains any victory; and many, many victories does it previously obtain over him. In his breast it usually assumes the form of spiritual pride, the most absurd and detestable form which it can assume. An exemplification of it in this form we see in our Savior’s first disciples. It prompted their frequent disputes respecting the question who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It prompted the request made by two of them, that they might sit, one on the right hand, and the other on the left of our Savior, in his kingdom. In a thousand similar ways it has operated in the hearts of Christians ever since. If their

Savior is graciously pleased to grant them any peculiar, though yet wholly undeserved manifestations of his love; to favor them with any unusual consolation, to furnish them with more than ordinary gifts for the benefit of the church, or to crown their endeavors to do good with success, immediately this busy sin begins to operate; self-complacent thoughts and feelings begin to rise; and a vain, wicked elation of mind ensues, which obliges their generous benefactor either to withdraw his gifts, or embitter them with some attendant infirmity or affliction. Thus even St. Paul himself, after being favored with a rapture into the third heaven, was obliged to have a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure. In Christians of smaller attainments, favors incomparably less than he enjoyed, are sufficient to exalt them above measure, and to make a thorn in the flesh necessary for their humiliation. The exercise of more than ordinary generosity, or a little more than usual fluency and fervency in prayer, or one instance of conversion effected by their instrumentality, may produce such consequences. Nay, they may be proud even of their humility, proud of the manner in which they confess, and of the earnestness with which they pray against the operations of pride. To this fruitful, accursed source of mischief must be also ascribed, all the discontent and mournings of which they are guilty; for a man free from pride would be always contented and thankful; all the censorious remarks which they make respecting others, for a perfectly humble man can never be censorious; all the dissensions which prevail among Christians; for only by pride cometh contention. This evil farther leads them to overrate their own attainments, conceals from them their deficiencies, and thus in various ways retards their progress.

Nothing is a greater obstacle to prayer than pride; nothing more effectually prevents us from receiving answers to prayer; for why should God bestow further favor upon one who is proud of those which he has already received? Should any of you my hearers, employ a servant to carry your alms to the poor, and should you find that he appropriated part of the money designed for this purpose to his own use, or that he gave it to your pensioners in his own name, and thus diverted their gratitude from you to himself, would you not cease to employ him? And can we then wonder that God should withhold his gifts from those who make use of them to nourish pride, and who take part of the glory of them, to themselves? Indeed this is the grand reason why we receive so little. God is abundantly able to give, willing to give, disposed to give his people far more than they receive; but he is obliged to withhold from them his gifts, to hide his face from them, to turn his smiles into frowns, lest their pride should be increased. But this pride must all be left behind forever, when they leave the body. No particle of it will ascend with them to heaven. There they will have no wish for the chief places, no desire for admiration and applause. There they will keep back no part of the glory which belongs to their Creator and Redeemer; but, like their representatives seen by John in the vision before us, will cast their crowns and themselves, without the least reserve, before the throne of God and the Lamb. Nothing within them will say, I was saved because I deserved salvation. Nothing in them will say, we were in part the authors of our own salvation; but the language of every heart will be, My salvation was wholly of the Lord. Jesus is the author, the finisher, and rewarder of my faith. In the second place, the action which we are contemplating, expressed, and was prompted by perfect love to God and the Redeemer. Not the understandings only but the hearts of those who performed it, said, God is infinitely lovely, infinitely worthy of all the affection which we can feel, of every proof of affection which we can offer. Now I need not inform you that every man will choose to crown or adorn that object which he best loves. Naturally the object which every man best loves is himself. Hence he wishes to crown,

adorn, exalt himself. Thus pride springs from selfishness, and the one is always in exact proportion to the other. But every Christian begins, when he becomes such, to love God supremely. Of course he begins to wish that God may be glorified and exalted. But in the present life, this love, and, of course, its effects are not perfect. As there is some pride, so there is some selfishness, in the heart of the most holy Christian on earth. But in heaven there is none. There the redeemed love God perfectly, love him with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; love him far better than they love themselves. Of course their whole desire is to glorify and exalt him. They are far better pleased to see their crowns at his feet than upon their own heads. At his feet, therefore, they cast them, and in performing this action express, in the most striking manner, perfect love. In the third place, this action was prompted by, and expressed perfect gratitude. The natural effect of gratitude for favors received, is a wish to make some return for those favors; and to make such return is, of course, its natural expression. The more numerous and valuable these returns are, the greater is the gratitude which prompted them presumed to be. Look then at the return which these redeemed spirits make to God for his goodness. They bring themselves, their crowns, all that they are, and all that they have, and cast it at his feet. The language of this action is, Lord, we would fain make some return for all thy goodness to us. But we have nothing except what thou hast given us. All this we bring to thee, and consecrate it without reserve to thy service. Did we possess more, we would consecrate it to the same use. It is enough for us to see and promote thy glory, to be instruments of thy pleasure, and to have thee accept our worthless services, our inadequate returns.

Lastly. This action expresses the most profound reverence. Had they felt nothing more than love and gratitude, they might have attempted to place their crowns on the head, or at least in the hands of him who was the object of these affections. But they regarded him also with the most awful veneration. This they expressed by casting their crowns at his feet. It was as if they had said, that which is the brightest ornament of our heads, is barely worthy to lie at the feet of Jehovah. At his feet we ourselves are scarcely worthy to be. But since he permits us to be there, we esteem that place as the highest honor we can enjoy, and prefer it to all earthly thrones, prefer it even to a throne in heaven without our God.

REFLECTIONS.—1. From this subject it may easily be made to appear that the views and feelings of Christians in this world resemble those of the redeemed in heaven, and differ from them not at all in kind, but only in degree. They resemble them just as the opening blossoms and immature fruit of a tree, resemble the perfectly ripe fruit of the same tree. Every Christian, who has listened to these remarks, can scarcely fail to have felt a consciousness, that he possesses in some degree the views and feelings which have now been described. He feels something of the same love to his God and Redeemer, of the same gratitude for his goodness, the same reverence for his character, which are manifested by his brethren made perfect in heaven; and he is so far possessed of humility, as to be sensible and ashamed of his pride, and to hate and pray and struggle against it. He also expresses these feelings in a similar manner. He ascribes, he loves to ascribe glory to God, and the Lamb, and he wishes to ascribe it to them more perfectly. He wishes to cast himself, and all that he possesses, without reserve, at their feet; and he is ashamed, he feels self-abhorrence, he repents, when he finds himself withholding any part of their due. Never is he so happy, as in those favored moments when he can make the nearest approaches to the temper, and engage most earnestly in the employments of the heavenly world. How plain, how

undeniably evident then is it, that he is preparing for that world and destined to enjoy it. He is here in the school of Christ, going through a course of education to fit him for it. This course will be completed, and as soon as it is completed he shall be raised to join those who have passed before him through the Christian seminary, and whose education for heaven is finished. Hence,

2. Every one present may easily learn whether he belongs to this happy, highly favored number. In order to ascertain this, you have only to inquire whether you are conscious of possessimig views and feelings similar to those which have now been described; whether you possess a kindred spirit with those celestial beings who are now casting themselves and their crowns before the throne of the Eternal; whether, while you contemplate them, your hearts say, Were I among them, and possessed of a crown like them, I well know what use I should choose and rejoice to make of it; and especially whether you prove the sincerity, the reality of these feelings by aiming to glorify God on earth, and cast yourselves and all that you possess at his feet. If so, you do indeed belong to the family, a branch of which we have been contemplating, and ere long you shall be among them, wear a robe and crown like them, and with them exultingly cast it before the throne. And remember the more you do for God in this world, the brighter will your celestial crown be. And will you not wish it to be bright, when you cast it at the feet of the Redeemer? Will you not wish to be able to make large returns for all his favors? Can you be contented that your crown should be the least glorious of all which will be cast before him? If not, daily strive to brighten it now. Every good work which you perform, every acceptable prayer which you offer, every right feeling which you exercise, every sincere attempt to grow in grace and knowledge, will add one to the gems which adorn it, and help to render it less unworthy of being cast at your Redeemer's feet.

3. How evident does it appear from this subject, that no self-righteous character, no one who trusts in himself, or in his own merits for salvation is preparing for heaven, or possesses any thing of its spirit, or without a change in his disposition can be admitted there. Such a man, instead of casting the crown at the feet of Christ, places it on his own head, and wears it there; and there he would wear it even could he enter heaven. He has none of the Views, none of the feelings, which animate its humble inhabitants in performing the action before us. Indeed, according to his views, it would be perfectly proper that he should wear it; for if he gains it by his own wisdom, strength and goodness, why should he not retain it? who, besides himself, has any right to it? He has fairly won and therefore ought to wear it. But no such self-won crowns will ever be seen in heaven. All the crowns which will ever be seen there, are crowns which Christ merited, and which his grace assisted his people to obtain. All the white robes ever seen there, will be robes which were washed and made white, not by our tears, nor in any fountain which human wisdom ever opened but in the blood of Christ; the fountain in which all may wash and be clean.

Finally. Let us now, my professing friends, while we come around the table of our Lord, endeavor to render this place, as much as possible, like heaven, by imitating the temper of heaven. This table is an earthly representation of the rainbow-encircled throne, which John saw in Vision. Here our God and Savior sits on a mercy seat to accept our vows and offerings. Bring yourselves then, and all that you possess, as an offering, and with love, gratitude, humility, and reverence, cast it down at his feet. Thus by anticipating the employments of heaven, you will be increasingly prepared to join in them; you will carry away more of a heavenly spirit, and will obtain fresh courage to maintain your Christain warfare, animated by the assurance, that neither selfishness, nor pride, nor any other enemy, which now assails you and defiles your services, shall be able to

follow you to heaven.

Chapter 73

S. THE FULLNESS OF GOD DWELLING IN CHRIST

THE FULLNESS OF GOD DWELLING IN CHRIST In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. — Colossians 2:9. THIS is asserted of Jesus Christ. It appears, at the first glance, to contain most important truth; truth which cannot but be interesting to all who wish to form just conceptions of our God and our Redeemer. Indeed, there are few passages in the inspired volume which would sooner arrest the attention and excite the inquiries of one who was reading it for the first time.

I. Let us endeavor to ascertain its import, that we may learn what it is designed to teach us. In attempting this it is necessary to inquire what is meant by all the fullness of the Godhead. The original word, here rendered fullness, signifies that by which any thing is filled, completed, or made perfect. Thus when it is said, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; by the fullness of the earth is evidently meant, all those things with which the earth is filled or every thing which it contains. So by the fullness of the Godhead is meant, all that the Godhead contains, all the natural and moral attributes of Deity; every thing, in short, which renders the divine nature perfect and complete. This phrase then includes in its import the whole deity or divinity, with its attributes of infinity, eternity, immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, holiness, justice, goodness, mercy, faithfulness and truth. Should it be thought that the word fullness does not necessarily mean so much as this, yet it must, I think, be allowed, that all the fullness of the Godhead cannot mean anything less; for if any one perfection or attribute of diviiiity be taken away, all the fullness of the Godhead would not remain. There would be something wanting. The divine nature would not be full; or in other words, perfect and complete. Wherever then all the fullness of the Godhead dwells, there every natural and moral attribute of divinity will be found.

Let its next inquire what is meant by the assertion, that all this fullness dwells in Christ. There are, in the original, two words which, in our translation, are rendered to dwell. The first literally signifies, to reside, as in a tent or tabernacle, and is used to denote a temporary residence. This word is used by St. John when he says, The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; literally, resided among us, as in a tabernacle or temporary habitation. The other word signifies, to dwell as in a house, or fixed habitation, and is always used to signify a more permanent residence; because a house is permanent, compared with a tent. Now it is the latter word, the word that signifies a permanent residence, which is used in our text. The import of the assertion which it contains, then, is this: All the fullness of the Godhead resides in Jesus Christ, as in its permanent or fixed habitation.

It is further asserted that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily. The word body is not infrequently used by the inspired writers to signify what is real and substantial, in distinction from that which is shadowy, figurative, or typical. Thus an apostle, speaking of the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, says, They are a shadow of good things to come, but the body, that is, the real substance, of which they are only shadows or types, is Christ. In a similar sense the word bodily appears to be used in our text. It signifies really or substantially, and teaches us that all the

fullness of the Godhead dwells in Jesus Christ, not in a figurative or apparent, but in a real sense. From the preceding examination of the several parts of our text, the import of the whole appears to be this: The whole Deity, with all its natural and moral attributes, actually resides in Jesus Christ, as a fixed or permanent habitation.

II. Let us inquire, whether this statement of the irnport of our text corresponds with other parts of the inspired volume. A very slight examination will convince us that it does. In the first place, we are taught in many passages that the Father and the Spirit dwell in Jesus Christ. Our Savior frequently declared that the Father dwelt in him, and added, He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. And the Spirit of God, the Spirit which inspired the Jewish prophets, is repeatedly said to be the Spirit of Christ. He is also represented as having the Spirit without measure, and as communicating the Spirit to others. Now the whole Godhead is included in the Father, the Son or Word, and the Holy Spirit. Wherever all these dwell, all the fullness of the Godhead must dwell. But we have seen that the Father and the Spirit dwell in Jesus Christ. And all allow that the Son or Word dwells in him. In him, therefore, the whole Godhead dwells. In the second place, Jesus Christ is represented in many parts of the inspired volume as possessing and exercising all the perfections of Deity. We are informed that all things were made by him, that without him was not anything made that was made; that he upholds all things by the word of his power, and that all power in heaven and on earth is his. He must then be Almighty. We are informed that in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, that he knows the Father, even as the Father knows him, and that he knows what is in man. Speaking of himself he says, all the churches shall know that I am he who searcheth the heart. He must then be omniscient. We are informed that he is with his ministers always to the end of the world, and that wherever two or three are assembled in his name he is in the midst of them. While residing on earth, he spoke of himself as being in heaven, and after he ascended to heaven he was represented as still being on earth. He must then be omnipresent. In fine, we are informed that he fills all things, that he filleth all in all, and that he is all in all. In him, of whom this is said, all the fullness of the Godhead or every natural and moral attribute of the Deity must surely dwell.

Having thus given a brief statement of the import of our text, and confirmed the truth of that statement by an appeal to other parts of revelation, I request your attention to some important inferences which naturally result from it.

1. If all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Jesus Christ, then in Jesus Christ alone can God be found. The scriptures inform us that mankind have, without a single exception, forsaken God, that they have all gone out of the way, have all gone astray like sheep, and turned every one to his own way, and that the way of peace they have not known. Having thus wandered from God, they have lost him, lost knowledge of him, lost his image, lost his favor, so that they naturally live without God in the world. But they must return to him, they must find him again, or be lost forever; for he is the Father of lights, the Fountain of holiness and felicity. Agreeably, an apostle declares it to be the will of God that the sons of men should seek after him, if peradventure they may find him. Now if we wish to find a man who is always in one place, we must go to that place, go to his residence. It is vain to seek him or to expect to find him anywhere else. So, since the whole Godhead resides in Jesus Christ, as in a permanent habitation, we must repair to Jesus Christ, if we would find God. We shall in vain attempt to find him, to acquire knowledge of him, or to gain his forfeited favor, if we seek him anywhere else. Thus the scripture, speaking of spiritual wisdom and understanding,

or, in other words, of the knowledge of God says, Where shall it be found, and where is the place thereof?

Man knoweth not its place, neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, it is not in me; the sea saith, it is not with me. Where then is its place, seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living I God understandeth the why thereof and he knoweth the place thereof. What he knows he has revealed to us. He has informed us, that it is all placed in Jesus Christ, that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are laid up in him. In him alone then can we find God. Accordingly he says, I am the way and the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me. No one knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father. Let every man then, who would find a lost God, come without delay to Jesus Christ, in whom he dwells. In him, God is, if I may so express it, always at home. In him he will always be found. No where else will any find him. They may seek him in the works of creation; they may search for him in the dispensations of his providence; they may look for him in his word; but never will they find him, till they come to Jesus Christ; for even the scriptures, we are informed, make men wise unto salvation only through faith in Christ Jesus. But if we come to him, we shall be enabled to say with the primitive Christians, God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. On hearing these remarks some will perhaps say, we do not understand what is meant by finding God. It is not easy to make an impenitent sinner understand what is meant by this expression, though it is perfectly understood by every real disciple of Christ. So far as it can be explained to others, I will, however, endeavor to explain it. To a careless, thoughtless sinner, God does not appear to be a present reality. He may assent to the fact that God is every where present, but he does not feel his presence, it does not appear real to him; it does not affect him, it does not influence his conduct. He comes, perhaps, to the house of God on the Sabbath. He is told that God is here; but he does not perceive his presence. There is no weighty impression upon his spirits of a present God, none of that awe or reverence or godly fear which the presence of God ought to produce. He hears hymns sung in which strong emotions of admiration, gratitude and love to God are expressed; but he does neither feel such emotions himself, nor perceive any thing to excite them in others. He stands up to pray, but he perceives no being present to whom his prayers may be addressed.

If he has been taught that prayer is a duty, he may perhaps enter his closet and attempt to pray. But he does not feel that God is present there to hear him. He speaks, as it were into the air, and his prayers, as such a person once expressed it, do not seem to rise above his head, do not appear to ascend to heaven. Should his conscience be awakened, and should he in consequence begin to feel that there is a God, and to cry for mercy, God appears to be at a great distance from him, and he cannot come near, cannot find any way in which to approach him. He cannot understand what the apostle meant when he said to Christians, ye who were formerly afar off are now brought near by the blood of Christ. But let such a man come to Christ, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells, and a great change will take place in his views and feelings. God will then become to him a present and most interesting reality. Then he will perceive his presence every where, especially in his closet, and in places of public worship. His heart will glow with those emotions which are expressed in the songs of praise; his affections and desires will ascend to heaven with the public prayers, and in private devotion he will be able to say with the Psalmist, It is

good for me to draw near to God; and instead of living as he once did, without God in the world, he will like the primitive saints walk with God.

2. If all the fullness of the Godhead dwelleth in Christ, then no man can obtain a portion of that fullness, except by applying to Christ. The truth of the inference is so obvious as scarcely to require either illustration or proof. Did all the light in the universe dwell in the sun, no man, it is evident, could obtain light except from the sun. Were all the water which exists in the world collected into one reservoir, no man, it is obvious, could obtain water without applying to that reservoir. Equally evident is it that since all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, no man can obtain a portion of that fullness without applying to Christ. This truth will appear exceedingly important and interesting to all who are aware of the fact, that unless we can obtain a portion of the fullness of God, we must pine in eternal want. The mercy which pardons sin, the divine light which illuminates the understanding, the grace which purifies the heart, the strength which resists temptation, overcomes the world, and endures to the end; the consolation which supports the soul under trials and afflictions; the triumphant faith, and the hope full of immortality, which are requisite to give victory over death, and all the everlasting joys and glories of heaven flow from the fullness of God, and no man can partake of them without partaking of that fullness. A participation of that fullness is then the one thing needful to every child of Adam; and better, infinitely better would it be for any one to be destitute of every thing else than to want this. Better would it be for us to be deprived of possessions, friends, reputation, health, sense and reason, than to lose forever this one thing needful. If any think that this is too strong language, I answer, it is not stronger language than the scriptures warrant us to use. They represent it as the greatest of all blessings to partake of this fullness; and the want of it as of all evils the most terrible. Addressing those who were destitute of it, our Savior declares that they were poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked. At the same time, he counsels them to come to him for a supply; thus intimating that from him alone they could obtain it. All his invitations speak the same language. When he stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; that is, if any man feels a want, let him come unto me and receive a supply, he plainly intimated that in him alone the water of life could he found, that by him alone human wants could be supplied. Well then, might an apostle exclaim respecting him, Neither is there salvation in any other.

3. From the fact that all the fullness of the Godhead resides in Jesus Christ, we may infer the necessity and the worth of that faith in him, on which the inspired writers lay so much stress. That you may have just views of this subject, look first at him. See in him an infinite, inexhaustible fullness of all spiritual blessings; a fullness of light sufficient to illuminate all minds; of mercy to pardon all sins; of grace to sanctify all hearts; of happiness to make all human beings forever blessed. Then turn and look at mankind. See them as they are described in the word of God, spiritually blind, sinful, guilty and wretched. Now what is necessary to banish all their evils, supply all their wants, and secure to them endless felicity? Is any thing, can any thing more be necessary, than to form such a channel of communication between them and Jesus Christ, that the fullness of the Godhead which dwells in him may flow out to them? If such a channel could be formed, would not this fullness of light, mercy, grace, and felicity pour itself into their souls till, in the language of an apostle, they were filled with all the fullness of God? My hearers, faith, faith in Christ, and faith alone does form such a channel of communication as this. This is the appointment of God. He has established such a constitution, that whenever any sinner begins to exercise faith in Christ, he

shall begin to partake of that fullness which dwells in Christ, and the degree in which he partakes of this fullness, will be just in proportion to the strength of his faith. We may illustrate this truth by a reference to events which took place during his residence on earth. The whole multitude, we are informed, sought to touch him; for there went virtue out of him and healed them all. On another occasion, a diseased female said, if I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole. She did touch it, and healing virtue instantly flowed into her enfeebled frame. In both these cases, it was the touch of faith which drew virtue from Christ. They touched him, because they believed, or had faith that there was in him virtue sufficient to heal their diseases. Agreeably, our Savior said to the patient last mentioned, Thy faith hath saved thee. Just so now, when a sinner, who feels that he is sick in soul, exercises faith in Christ, though he cannot, as then, manifest his faith by touching him, yet he finds that a spiritual healing virtue is imparted to him. He finds that his understanding is enlightened, that his sins are pardoned, that his wounded conscience is healed, that his heart is sanctified, and that peace and happiness, such as he never tasted or even conceived of before, are shed abroad within him.

Hence an apostle informs us, that he who believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself, that is, the happy effects which result to him from believing, are a witness within that there is such a person as Jesus Christ, and that to believe in him is to partake of his fullness. These effects of faith are illustrated by our Savior himself in an address to his disciples. I, says he, am the vine, ye are the branches. This comparison he pursues at considerable length, and clearly teaches them, that by faith a union was formed between him and them, analogous to that which exists between a vine and its branches, and that as life and sap flow from the vine into every branch, so his fullness flows into the souls of all who believe in him. Hence an apostle, speaking of believers, says, Of his fullness have we all received. Well then, might St. Peter call faith in Christ, precious faith; for what can be more precious than that which forms an indissoluble union, and a free communication between a lost, needy, guilty sinner, and a Savior in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead. He who has this faith is incalculably rich, though he should possess nothing else, and he who has it not, is miserably poor, though he should possess all which the world can give; for

4. If all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Jesus Christ, then he who is destitute of faith in Christ, or he who has never made a believing application to Christ, has no share in that fullness. His mind is not enlightened; his sins are not pardoned; his heart is not sanctified, he has no part in the kingdom of heaven. It is written that, though he who believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, yet he who believeth not the Son is condemned already and shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. It is true that such a man may have many qualities which appear amiable and estimable in the view of men; his moral character may be fair, and he may possess the external form of religion. But he has not a particle of that fullness which dwells in Christ, and his doom is pronounced in those words of our Savior, From him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.

5. Does all the fullness of the Godhead dwell in Jesus Christ? Then all the spiritual wisdom, knowledge, holiness, and happiness which exist in the world, and all which are possessed by the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven, proceed from him. You cannot find either on earth or in heaven, a good man who does not derive all his goodness from Christ, or who will not humbly and gratefully acknowledge that he does so; one who will not say with St. Paul, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God; that is,

my spiritual life is constantly supported by supplies which faith draws from him. And how amiable, how glorious, how worthy of all love, admiration, and praise, does our Savior appear in the view of these truths. See him containing in himself all the infinite fullness of Deity. See myriads of his believing disciples in all parts of the world daily, hourly, living upon this fullness, and drawing from him those supplies which are necessary to the promotion and advancement of religion within them. Every hour virtue flows out of him, to heal them all. Some of them are poor, some of them afflicted, some of them tempted, some of them sick, some of them dying; yet to all and to each, he imparts just what their situation requires. To each he says, My grace is sufficient for thee. And while he is thus imparting grace to many thousands on earth he is pouring a flood of glory and felicity into ten thousand times ten thousand of his servants in heaven, filling them to overflowing with all the fullness of God. And who can conceive the benevolence, the tenderness, the compassion, with which he looks down on his great family, and sees them all deriving life and nourishment from him! Must not the affectionate feelings with which he regards them, far exceed in tenderness, in intensity, those with which a mother contemplates the infant to which she gives support? Can we disbelieve him, when he says to his church, Though a mother should forget her infant son, yet will not I forget thee? And if there is happiness in doing good, in communicating happiness, how exquisitely happy must our Savior be! If we should feel exquisite gratification in feeding a hundred famished orphans, what must he feel while he feeds so many thousands of once perishing immortal souls with the bread and water of life!

6. Does all the fullness of the Godhead dwell in Jesus Christ? How safe, how happy, how enviable then is the situation of those, who believe in him? They are inseparably united to one in whom all the fullness of the Godhead permanently dwells; a way of communication is opened by which this fullness will forever flow out to them. What more can they wish for, or conceive of? Well might our Savior say to one in this situation, I know thy poverty, but thou art rich: poor in thyself, but rich in me. My professing friends, if you are what you profess to be, this enviable situation is yours. If you would enjoy all its advantages, you must pray unceasingly for increasing faith, since the supplies which you obtain from the fullness of Christ will be in exact proportion to the strength and constancy of your faith. And if you wish your faith to be strong, you must look not at your own emptiness merely, but at his fullness; not at your poverty, but at his riches. You must contemplate him as he is exhibited in our text. You must endeavor to obtain enlarged views of what is meant by all the fullness of the Godhead. You must remember that he loves to impart it, that he has promised to impart it, that he cannot but impart it to all Who believe in him; and that his language to every believer is, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in thy weakness. And remember too, that when you approach his table, if you come in a proper manner, you come to Christ himself; if you receive these sacramental symbols in a proper manner, you will receive Christ himself, and of course will receive a portion of that fullness which dwells in him. If you do this, you will know experimentally the truth of his declaration, My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Finally, does all the fullness of the Godhead reside in Jesus Christ? then let every one present, who has not already done it, be persuaded to apply to him for a share of this fullness. That you may be induced to take this step, let me ask, is there nothing in all this fullness which you need? Have you all the spiritual wisdom and knowledge which you need? Have you no sins to he

pardoned, no sinful propensities to be subdued, no temptations to overcome? Is your preparation for death, and for heaven completed? Have you provision made sufficient to supply your wants through eternity? If not, I invite you, in Christ's name, to come to him for a supply. I invite you to a friend, a brother, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells, and who will take far more pleasure in imparting to you this fullness, than you will in receiving it; for he says himself, It is more blessed to give than to receive. But why do I invite you? Let me rather set before you his own invitation. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.

Chapter 74

S. THE GOSPEL, GLAD TIDINGS

THE GOSPEL, GLAD TIDINGS "The glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust" 1 Timothy 1:11

Among the numerous burning and shining lights which our blessed Saviour has, at different periods; placed in his golden candlesticks to enlighten the church, during the long and gloomy night of his absence from the world, perhaps none have burned brighter, with a flame more vehement, or with rays more clear, or shone with more constant, bright and unclouded luster, than the great Apostle of the Gentiles. Of all whose characters have been transmitted to us, either in profane or sacred history, he appears to have made the nearest approaches to the Sun of righteousness, and, in consequence, to have felt most powerfully the attractive influence of his love; to have imbibed most plentifully his enlightening, life-giving beams; to have reflected most perfectly his glorious image; and to have moved with the greatest velocity in the orbit of duty. His life affords a striking verification of our Saviour’s remark, that to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much. As his devotional feelings were peculiarly strong and lively, so is the language in which he expresses them. It seems to hold a kind of middle rank between that which is employed by other Christians, and that which will hereafter be poured forth by saints and angels before the throne. Thoughts that glow, and words that burn, are every where scattered through his pages. One instance of this, among many which will occur to every pious mind, we have in our text. Never, perhaps, since the gospel was first promulgated to a dying world, has it been more justly or happily described, than in this brief but glowing passage, in which the Apostle styles it—the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

I need not inform you that the word, gospel, literally signifies glad tidings. Substitute these words for the term made use of in our text, and you have, the glorious glad tidings of the blessed God. What other sounds, like these, ever vibrated upon mortal ears? What other combination of words could be formed, so full of meaning, of energy, of life and rapture, as this? Who but the fervent Apostle, or rather, who but the Holy Spirit, by whom he was inspired, could ever have formed such a combination? And who does not wish to understand and feel the full import of these divinely inspired, enrapturing words? What ear is not erect, what mind does not expand, what heart does not open and dilate itself, to drink in; the glorious glad tidings of the blessed God, committed to a mortal’s trust? Would to heaven, my friends, you could on this occasion hear the import of these tidings fully unfolded; their infinite worth and importance clearly stated. But this you will never hear on earth; for here we know but in part, and, of course, can prophesy but in part; but when that which is perfect shall come, that which is in part shall be done away. Till that day of perfect light shall burst upon us, the day in which we shall know even as we are known, you must be content to see the inestimable treasure of the gospel dispensed from earthen vessels, dispensed in scanty measures, and too often debased by the impurities of the frail vessels which contain it. In attempting to dispense to you a portion of this treasure on the present occasion, I shall, in the first place, endeavor to show what the gospel of Christ is, by illustrating the description given of it in our text. From this description we learn,

I. That the gospel of Christ is "tidings." This is the most simple and proper conception we can form of it. It is not an abstract truth, it is not a merely speculative proposition, it is not an abstruse system of philosophy or ethics, which reason might have discovered or formed—but it is simply tidings; a message, a report, as the prophet styles it, announcing to us important intelligence, intelligence of a connected succession of facts; of facts which reason could never have discovered; intelligence of what was devised in the counsels of eternity for the redemption of our ruined race, of what has since been done in time to effect it, and of what will be done hereafter for its full completion when time shall be no more. It is true, that, in addition to these tidings, the gospel of Christ contains a system of doctrines, of precepts and of motives; but it is no less true, that all these doctrines, precepts and motives, are founded upon the facts, communicated by those tidings in which the gospel essentially consists; and that to their connection with these facts, they owe all their influence and importance. Perfectly agreeable to this representation, is the account given us of the primitive preachers, and of their mode of preaching the gospel. They acted like men who felt that they were sent, not so much to dispute and argue, as to proclaim tidings, to bear testimony to facts. Their preaching is styled their testimony, and the very word which we render to preach, literally signifies to make proclamation as a herald. Hence St. Paul speaks of the ministry which he had received to testify the gospel of the grace of God; and St. John, referring to himself and his fellow apostles, says, we do testify that God sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. The gospel of Christ, then, essentially consists in tidings; and to proclaim these tidings and testify their truth in connection with the doctrines and precepts, of which they are the basis, and with the consequences of receiving and of rejecting them, is to preach this gospel as it was originally preached.

2. The tidings which constitute the gospel of Christ are glad tidings; tidings which are designed and perfectly adapted to excite joy and gladness in all who receive them. That they are so, is abundantly evident from the nature of the intelligence which they communicate. They are tidings of an all-sufficient Saviour for the self-destroyed, of an offended God reconciled, of pardon to the justly condemned, of sanctification to the polluted, of honor and glory to the degraded, of deliverance to captives, of freedom to slaves, of sight to the blind, of happiness to the wretched, of a forfeited heaven regained, of life, everlasting life to the dead. And must I prove that these are glad tidings? Does the sun shine? are circles round? is happiness desirable? is pain disagreeable? And is it not equally evident, that the tidings we are describing are glad tidings of great joy. But it may in some cases be necessary to prove even self-evident truths. To the blind it may be necessary to prove that the sun shines. And, in a spiritual sense we are blind. We need arguments to convince us, that the Sun of righteousness is a bright and glorious luminary; that the tidings of his rising upon a dark world are joyful tidings. Such arguments it is easy to adduce, arguments sufficient to produce conviction even in the blind. If you wish for such arguments, go and seek them among the heathen, who never heard of the gospel of Christ. There, see darkness covering the earth, and gross darkness the people. See those dark places of the earth, filled not only with the habitations, but with the temples of lust and cruelty. Enter into conversation with the inhabitants of those gloomy regions. Ask them who made the world; they cannot tell. Who created themselves? they know not. Ask what God they worship, they will point to a plant or animal, a stock or a stone.

Ask how the favor of these miserable deities is to be obtained; their priests, their temples, their religious ceremonies with one voice reply, by the performance of rites indecent, cruel and absurd; by tormenting our bodies, by sacrificing our children, by acts of brutish sensuality and diabolical cruelty. Ask them where happiness is to be found, they scarcely know its name. Ask for what purpose they were created, they are at a loss for a reply. They know neither whence they came, nor whither they are to go. View them in the night of affliction: No star of Bethlehem, with mild luster, cheers or softens its gloom. View them on the bed of sickness: No kind hand administers to them the balm of Gilead; there is no interpreter, no intercessor to say, Deliver them from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom. Contemplate them in their last agonies. No atoning blood speaks peace to their guilty conscience; no gospel brings life and immortality to their view; no blessed Comforter points to an opening heaven; no kind shepherd goes with them through the dark valley which leads to the dominions of death; no Saviour appears to disrobe the monster of his terrors, or deprive him of his fatal sting, but they are left to grapple with him unassisted and alone. If in this awful conflict they ever seem to display courage and fortitude, it is only the fortitude of insensibility and the courage of despair. In a word, they live without God, they die without hope, their situation is, in many respects, more wretched than that of the beasts that perish. Yet such, my hearers, would have been your situation, were it not for the gospel of Christ. Who, then, will say that the tidings which it communicates are not glad tidings of great joy? Are any still unconvinced? Do you demand stronger evidences of this truth? You shall have them. Come with me to the garden of Eden. Look back to the hour which succeeded man's apostasy: See the golden chain, which bound man to God, sundered apparently forever, and this wretched world groaning under the weight of human guilt and of its Creator's curse, sinking down, far down, into a bottomless abyss of misery and despair. See that tremendous being who is a consuming fire, encircling it on every side, and wrapping it as it were in an atmosphere of flame. Hear from his lips the tremendous sentence, Man has sinned, and man must die. See the king of terrors advancing, with gigantic strides, to execute the awful sentence, spreading desolation through the vegetable, animal and rational kingdoms, and brandishing his resistless dart, in triumph over a prostrate world. See the grave expanding her marble jaws to receive whatever might fall before his wide wasting scythe, and hell beneath yawning dreadfully to engulf forever its guilty, helpless, despairing victims. Such was the situation of our ruined race after the apostasy. There was nothing before every child of Adam, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. There was but one road through this world, but one gate that opened out of it, —the wide gate and the broad way that leads to destruction. My friends, endeavor to realize, if you can, the horrors of such a situation. I am aware that to do this is by no means easy. You have so long been accustomed to hear the tidings of salvation, that you can scarcely conceive of what would have been our situation, had no Saviour appeared. But endeavor, for a moment, to forget that you ever heard of Christ, or his gospel. View yourselves as immortal beings, hastening to eternity, with the curse of God's broken law, like a flaming sword pursuing you, death with his dart dipped in mortal poison awaiting you, a dark cloud fraught with the lightnings of divine vengeance rolling over your heads, your feet standing in slippery places in darkness, and the bottomless pit beneath, expecting your fall. Then, when not only all hope, but all possibility of escape seemed taken away, suppose the flaming sword suddenly extinguished, the sting of death extracted, the Sun of righteousness bursting forth, painting a rainbow upon the before threatening cloud, a golden ladder let down from the opening gates of heaven, while a choir of angels swiftly descending,

exclaim, Behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. Would you, could you, while contemplating such a scene, and listening to the angelic message, doubt whether it communicated glad tidings? Would you not rather unite with them in exclaiming, Glad tidings, glad tidings, glory to God in the highest, that there is peace on earth and good will to men?

If this be not sufficient, if you still doubt, go and contemplate the effect which these tidings have produced wherever they have been believed. We judge of the nature of a cause by the effects which it produces, and, therefore, if the reception of the gospel has always occasioned joy and gladness, we may justly infer that it is glad tidings. And has it not done this? What supported our trembling first parents, when sinking under the weight of their Maker's curse, and contemplating with shuddering horrors the bottomless abyss into which they had plunged themselves and their wretched offspring? What enabled Enoch to walk with God? What cheered all the pious antediluvian patriarchs through their wearisome pilgrimage of several hundred years? What consoled them in affliction? what supported them in death? Nothing, I answer, nothing but the precious words in which the gospel was first promulgated to a ruined world: The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. This line, this little line, in which the glad tidings are so briefly and obscurely revealed, contains, so far as we know, all the consolation which the children of God enjoyed for almost two thousand years.

Here the well-spring of salvation was first opened to the view of mortals; here the waters of life, which now flow broad and deep as a river, first bubbled up in the sandy desert; and thousands now in heaven stooped and drank and live forever, tasting the joys of heaven on earth. The next intimation of the gospel was given to Abraham in the gracious promise, it, thee and thy seed, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. This passage is little less brief and obscure than the other; but what effects did it produce upon the mind of the venerable patriarch? Let our Saviour inform us: —Abraham earnestly desired to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad. Yes the distant view of a Saviour through the long vista of two thousand years, was sufficient to fill him with joy. What then would he have felt, had he seen what we see, and heard the tidings which we hear? had he seen that grain of mustard seed, which he contemplated with rapture, expanding into a tree of life; whose branches fill the earth, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations? Nor did the gospel, darkly as it was revealed, produce less happy effects on the minds of other ancient believers. Witness the case of Job. See him for the trial of his faith, delivered into the power of him whose tender mercies are cruel. See him stripped of all his possessions, deprived of his children by a sudden and violent death, ridiculed and tempted by his wife, denounced as a hypocrite by his friends, covered from head to foot with ulcers as raging and painful as hell could make them, and his soul transfixed by the arrows of the Almighty, the poison whereof drank up his spirits. See him even then, when heaven, earth and hell seemed combined against him, when all God's waves and billows went over him, rising above them all, fixing the eye of faith upon the promised Messiah, and with unbroken confidence triumphantly exclaiming, I know that my Redeemer liveth, —that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. But on this part of my subject I cannot farther enlarge; for time would fail me to tell of David, of Isaiah, of Daniel, of Zechariah, and of the many other prophets, kings and righteous men, who desired to hear the tidings which we hear, and rejoiced in the anticipation of a Saviour's birth. Never did the psalmist pour forth such enraptured strains, never did he strike

his harp with so much of a seraph's fire, never did the prophets employ such glowing language, as when, "rapt into future times," by the spirit of prophecy, they contemplated and endeavored to describe the advent of that Saviour, whose incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and triumph the gospel announces. Suffice it to sty, that all the religious joy and consolation, which was tasted in this world for four thousand years, flowed from prophetic intimations of a Saviour's birth. Yes, to this event every pious eye, during all those years, looked forward, striving to catch a glimpse of it through the gloom of ages; to hear predictions of this event every pious ear was open. At length, those who waited for the consolation of Israel are gratified. The voice of a herald is heard, exclaiming, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. He who was emphatically the desire of all nations, appears, and the joy occasioned by the tidings of his birth is such, as we should expect from the joy which expectation of his birth had excited. See the wise men of the past, rejoicing with exceeding great joy, when they saw the star which guided them to the feet of their new born Saviour. See the shepherds rejoicing and glorifying God, while they beheld him lying in a manger. Hear aged Simeon, while with streaming eyes and an overflowing heart he held the infant Saviour in his arms, exclaiming, Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. Hear the acclamations of joy, of wonder, of praise, which followed his steps, wherever he went about doing good. Mingle with the throngs that surrounded him on his entrance into Jerusalem. Hear a prophetic voice exclaiming, Rejoice greatly, and shout, Oh daughter of Jerusalem, —for, behold, thy King cometh unto thee, just and having salvation.

Hear the whole multitude, in obedience to this command, breaking forth into joy, and with a loud voice glorifying God, while even the children cry, Hosannah to the Son of David! blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Follow the progress of his gospel through the world. See great joy in the city of Samaria, because Philip had preached Christ to them. See the Gentiles of Antioch glad, because they heard that to them this Saviour was to be preached. See a multitude of believers, in almost all ages of the world, rejoicing in an unseen Saviour with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Then look tip, and see heaven sympathizing in the joy of earth. See angels desiring to look into these things. Hear them exulting over every sinner that repents. Listen to the song of the redeemed: Now unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion forever. Hear the eternal Father of the universe justifying all these expressions of joy by exclaiming, Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, forests, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob and glorified himself in Israel. Then pause and say, whether the tidings which excite all this joy are not glad tidings? Have patriarchs and prophets been deceived? Were the apostles and primitive Christians mad? Are the angels of light infatuated or blind? Is the all-wise God in an error? Does he call upon all his creatures to rejoice, when no cause of joy exists? You must either assert this, or acknowledge that the gospel of Christ is glad tidings of great joy.

3. The gospel is not only glad tidings, but glorious glad tidings. That it is so, is asserted in other passages, as well as in our text. St. Paul, contrasting the gospel and the law, with a view to show the superiority of the former, observes that if the ministration of death was glorious, the ministration of the Spirit must be still more glorious; for if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. Glory is the display of excellence, or perfection. That the gospel contains a grand display of the moral excellencies and

perfections of Jehovah, will be denied by none, but the spiritually blind, who are ignorant of its nature. But to give only a general view of this grand display of God's character in a single discourse, or even in a volume, is impossible. With less difficulty might we enclose the sun in a lantern. We shall not, therefore, attempt to describe a subject, which must forever be degraded, not only by the descriptions, but by the conceptions, I will not say of men, but of the highest archangel before the throne. On no page less ample than that of the eternal, all-infolding mind, which devised the gospel plan of salvation, can its glories be displayed, nor by any inferior mind can they be fully comprehended.

Suffice it to say, that here the moral character of Jehovah shines full-orbed and complete: here all the fullness of the Godhead, all the insufferable splendors of Deity, burst at once upon our aching sight: here the manifold perfections of God, holiness and goodness, justice and mercy, truth and grace, majesty and condescension, hatred of sin and compassion for sinners, are harmoniously blended, like the parti-colored rays of solar light in one pure blaze of dazzling whiteness. Here, rather than on any of his other works, he founds his claims to the highest admiration, gratitude and love of his creatures: —here is the work, which ever has called forth, and which through eternity will continue to call forth the most rapturous praises of the celestial choirs, and feed the ever glowing fires of devotion in their breasts; for the glory which shines in the gospel is the glory which illuminates heaven, and the Lamb that was slain is the light thereof. To the truth of these assertions, all will assent, who can say with the apostle, God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

If any doubt respecting the character of the gospel still exists in your minds, it must surely vanish when you recollect that it is,

4. The gospel of God, of the blessed God. It is composed of tidings, of which God is the author, tidings which God himself first proclaimed in the garden of Eden to our ruined progenitors, which angels afterwards caught from his lips, and which his Spirit has since dictated to inspired messengers. They are the tidings, not only of God, but of the blessed God; of a being unutterably happy in himself, and disposed to communicate his happiness to creatures. They are the effulgence of the God of glory; they are the over flowings of the fountain of happiness; they proceed from Him in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore. If then we may judge of the stream by the fountain, or of any work by its author, who can doubt that the gospel is glorious glad tidings, since it is the tidings of the blessed God. What that is not glorious can proceed from the God of glory? What that is not calculated to give joy to all holy beings, can proceed from the God of happiness and peace?

Having thus attempted to show what the gospel is, I proceed,

II. To consider its human administration. It was committed, says the apostle, to my trust. But why? I answer, the gospel was no more designed to remain locked up in the breast of its author, than the rays of light were intended to remain in the body of the sun. That its glad tidings might produce their designed effect, it was necessary they should fly abroad, and be made known to mortals. But by whom should they be communicated? The importance of the message seemed to require, that Jehovah himself, or at least the most exalted of his creatures, should be the messenger. But this,

human weakness forbade. It is evident from facts recorded in the Scriptures, that whenever Jehovah has spoken to man, either in person, or by the ministry of his angels, his hearers have been dazzled, dismayed and overwhelmed. They did not retain sufficient self-possession to understand or even listen to his words. And though, when Christ appeared as the Son of man, in a state of humiliation, his hearers were not thus affected, yet since he has re-ascended to his native heaven, the glories in which he is arrayed are too insufferably bright for mortal eyes to behold; as is evident from the effects which his appearance produced upon the beloved disciple, St. John. In condescension to our weakness, therefore, God has been pleased to commit the gospel to individuals selected from our own ruined race; individuals, who, having experienced its life-giving and beatifying power, are prepared to recommend it to their perishing fellow sinners. Of these individuals, the first to whom it was committed were the apostles; it was committed to them as a proclamation is committed by earthly princes to their heralds, not to be retained, but communicated. For a similar purpose, it is still committed to ministers of an inferior rank; for he who gave apostles, prophets and evangelists for the work of the ministry, has also given pastors and teachers for the same glorious work. The only difference is, that they received their commission and instructions immediately from Christ himself, while we receive ours through the medium of their writings. Christ was their Bible, and they are ours. But notwithstanding this difference, every real minister of Christ, at the present day, may with strict truth and propriety say, I also am an ambassador of Christ, and his gospel has been committed to my trust. If any deny this assertion, and demand proofs of its truth, it is sufficient to reply, that God acknowledges us to be his ambassadors, and stamps his seal upon our commission, by the effects which he produces through our instrumentality. The gospel of Christ, when faithfully dispensed by its ministers, still produces the same effects as were produced by it when uttered by himself and his apostles. In our lips, as well as in theirs, it proves a savor of life unto life, to all that receive, and of death unto death to all who reject it. In our lips, as well as in theirs, it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. To this proof of a divine commission, St. Paul himself appealed, when it was denied. Speaking to those who were converted by his ministry he says, the seals of my apostleship are ye in the Lord. Ye are our epistle of recommendation, known and read of all men; forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistles of Christ, written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God; not on tables of stone, but on fleshly tables of the heart. To similar proofs of a divine commission, every faithful minister of the gospel may still appeal; for, blessed be God, none of them are without such seals of their ministry; such epistles of recommendation from Christ, who hath made them ministers of the New Testament, not merely of the letter which killeth, but of the Spirit which giveth life. The view which has been taken of the gospel of Christ, suggests many highly important and interesting remarks; but the time requires me to omit them, and to proceed to the customary addresses. My fathers and brethren in the ministry, is the gospel, which has been committed to our trust, the glorious glad tidings of the blessed God? How delightful, how honorable, then, is our employment, and how unspeakable are our obligations to him who has called us to it; who has allowed us to be put in trust with the gospel; that gospel, which was first preached by himself to our first parents in paradise; that gospel, which it has been the highest honor and happiness of prophets to predict, of apostles to preach, of martyrs to seal with their blood, and even of angels to announce and celebrate! Only to be permitted to hear this gospel, is justly considered as a distinguished favor. What then must it be to preach it? Those who experience its power to save, who are allowed to taste the blessings which it imparts, feel as if a

whole eternity would be merely sufficient to pay their mighty debt of gratitude to the Redeemer. What then ought we to feel, through whom that saving power is exerted; by whose instrumentality those blessings are conferred, and who, receiving mercy of the Lord to be faithful, are enabled to save not only ourselves. but them that hear us! Well may each of us say with the apostle, I thank my God, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry. Well may we with him count not even our lives dear unto ourselves, that we may fulfil the ministry which has been committed to us, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And well may we exhort each other in his language: Seeing we have received this ministry, to faint not, but to be instant in season and out of season.

Heathen writers inform us of a soldier, who, when sent out by his general with tidings of a victory, would not stop to extract a thorn which had deeply pierced his foot, until he had delivered his message to the Senate. And shall we, then, when sent by Jehovah with such a message, a message the faithful delivery of which involves his glory and the eternal happiness of our fellow creatures—shall we linger, shall we suffer any personal inconveniences, any difficulties, any real or fancied dangers, to interrupt or retard us in the execution of our work? Shall we, with the true water of life, the true elixir of immortality in our possession, suffer our own private concerns to divert us from presenting it to the dying, and forcing it into the lips of the dead? Shall we, with Aaron's censer in our hands, hesitate whether to rush between the living and the dead, when the auger of the Lord is kindled, when the plague has already begun its ravages, and thousands are falling at our right hand, and ten thousand at our left? Shall we wait till tomorrow to present the bread of life to the famished wretch, who, before tomorrow arrives, may expire for want of it? Surely if we can do this, if we can be so regardless of our obligations to God, and of our duty to man, the least punishment which we can expect, is to be debarred from that salvation which we neglected to afford to others, and to be made answerable for the blood of all the souls who, in consequence of this neglect, perished in their sins. Let us then, my fathers and brethren, never forget, that the king's business requireth haste, and that who or whatever stands still, we must not. Let the sun pause in his course, though half the world should be wrapped in frost and darkness by his delay; let rivers stagnate in their channels, though an expecting nation should perish with thirst upon its flood-forsaken banks; let long-looked for showers stop in mid-air, though earth, with a thousand famished lips, invoke their descent; but let those who are sent with the life-giving tidings of pardon, peace, and salvation, to an expiring world, never pause, never look or wish for rest, till their Master's welcome voice shall call them from their field of labor to everlasting repose; to that world where those, who, as burning or shining lights, have turned many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars, and as the brightness of the firmament forever and ever. A few words to the assembly, and I have done. Is it true, my hearers, that the gospel, which you have often heard, is the glorious glad tidings of the blessed God? Then in every one by whom it is truly believed, it will infallibly excite holy joy, admiration and praise; for every report which is thus believed must produce effects corresponding to its nature and import. If you hear and believe mournful tidings, they will occasion grief. If you hear and believe joyful tidings, they will no less certainly occasion joy. If you hear and believe an account of any glorious enterprise, or splendid act of liberality, it will call forth admiration and applause. If then you really believe the glorious glad tidings of God; you must and will rejoice, you will admire and bless the Author. Has the gospel, then, produced these effects upon you? Do you know what it is to be filled with joy and peace in believing? Can you, do you unite with the inhabitants of heaven, in ascribing to Christ all that heaven can give? In a word, do you feel that the gospel is glorious glad tidings of great joy? and is it the language of your

hearts, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift?

If not, it is most certain that you never believed the gospel; for the apostle assures us, that it does work effectually in all that believe; and we have already seen that it has, in all ages, filled the hearts of believers with joy, and their lips with praise. And if you believe not the gospel, how awful is your responsibility, your criminality, and your danger! In your view, the Sun of righteousness has no beams. You see nothing lovely in that Saviour, whom all good beings, on earth and in heaven, love with the most ardent affection. Surely then you are wrong, or they are. Either they must be deceived, or you must be blind. In your breasts the most delightful tidings, that ever vibrated on mortal ears, excite no joy. To you the glorious gospel of the blessed God, that gospel which is the wisdom of God unto salvation, that gospel whence flows all the happiness that ever will be tasted by man; on earth or in heaven, and which will, through eternity, excite the, admiration and the praises of angels, appears little better than foolishness. In vain, as it respects yourselves, have prophets prophesied; in vain have apostles preached; in vain have martyrs sealed the truth with their blood; in vain have angels descended from heaven with messages of love; in vain has the Son of God expired in agonies on the accursed tree; in vain has the Holy Spirit been sent to strive with sinners; in vain has a revelation of all these wonders been given. You still refuse to believe, and by your unbelief practically charge the God of truth with falsehood; for, says the apostle, he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed the record which God gave of his Son. Unhappy men! To you the awful words of the apostle apply, in all their force: If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. On you the dreadful sentence falls: He that believeth not, shall be condemned. Your character and doom are described in the declaration: He who believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

"Woe to the wretch, who never felt

The inward pangs of pious grief;

But adds to all his crying guilt

The stubborn site of unbelief.

"The law condemns the rebel dead;

Under the wrath of God he lies;

He seals the curse on his own head,

And with a double vengeance dies." And will you die under the weight of this double vengeance? Will you go to the regions of despair, from a world, which has been moistened by a Saviour’s atoning blood? from a world which has resounded with the glad tidings of pardon, peace, and salvation? O, do not, I beseech you in God’s name, and for Christ’s sake, do not be infatuated; do not madly reject, the glad tidings. Once more I proclaim them in your ears. Once more I declare unto you, that it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken! for unto you, to each one of you, is the word of this salvation sent.

S. THE GUILT OF INDIFFERENCE TO DIVINE THREATENINGS.

THE GUILT OF INDIFFERENCE TO DIVINE THREATENINGS.

Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants, that heard all these words.—Jeremiah 22:24. WHEN the events recorded in this chapter took place, Jeremiah had been employed for more than twenty years in discharging the duties of his prophetical office. During that period he had brought a great number of messages from God to his countrymen, in which their sins were enumerated, and the most terrible judgments denounced, both upon them and upon the neighboring nations, unless they should repent. But most of these messages had long since been forgotten; and a repetition of them seemed to produce no salutary effect. God therefore saw fit, instead of sending them new messages by the mouth of his prophet, to adopt another method of proceeding. A description of this method, and a statement of God's reasons for adopting it, are given in the first verses of the chapter before us: The word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, saying, Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words which I have spoken to thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day that I first spoke unto thee, even unto this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them, and return every man from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

There did indeed seem reason to hope, that this method might produce the desired effect. Though the warnings, and threatenings, and revelations of God, when delivered separately, with perhaps long intervals intervening had made no impression upon the hearers; yet it might be hoped that, when all these warnings and threateniugs were collected, and presented to their minds at once, they would prove more efficacious. Accordingly, the experiment was tried, the record was made, and read, first to the people, and afterwards to the king and his princes; and we need only turn over the prophecy of Jeremiah to be convinced, that it was one of the most alarming, heart affecting messages which was ever sent by God to men. It was, in effect, a letter written with his own hand, subscribed with his own name, sealed with his own seal, and dropped front heaven at their feet. And its contents were at once terrible and melting beyond description. It contained such denunciations of divine, Almighty vengeance, as, one would think, were sufficient to chill the blood and freeze the soul with horror; and, at the same time, such affectionate invitations to repentance, such tender and often repeated assurances of God's readiness to forgive the penitent offender, as must have melted any thing but a heart of adamant. Yet, says our text, yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king nor any of his princes when they heard these words. The mode of expression here made use of; plainly and forcibly intimates that there was sufficient reason why they should have been thus affected; and that their insensibility was exceedingly criminal. They ought to have been afraid, they ought to have rent their garments; that is, they ought both to have been alarmed, and to have felt in view of their sins, those strong emotions of grief, indignation and abhorrence, which the Jews were accustomed to express by rending their clothes. And now, my hearers, judge, I pray you, between God and these incorrigible sinners. What other means could he employ to bring them to repentance, and thus render it possible to

pardon their sins? And when these means proved ineffectual, what remained but to fulfil his word, manifest his truth and holiness, and satisfy the demands of justice, by executing upon them the destruction from which they refused to fly? If you judge righteous judgment, you will take part with God in his controversy with these obdurate rebels, and say that he and his throne are guiltless, that they richly deserved their fate. And yet, many of you cannot say this; many of you cannot, in the case before us, pronounce a righteous sentence, without at the same time condemning yourselves. God is pursuing, and for a long time has been pursuing, the same method with you, which he employed on this occasion with the Jews. He has caused all his awful denunciations against sin, all the terrible judgments which he has inflicted upon impenitent sinners, and all the far more terrible woes with which he will overwhelm them in the world to come, to be recorded in a book, in the volume of inspiration. The very roll, which Jeremiah wrote by God's command, in which he expresses so clearly his indignation against sin, and which it was so criminal in the king of Judah and his princes to disregard, forms a part of this volume. Nor is this all. The same God, who spoke to them by his prophet, has, in these latter ages, spoken to you by his Son. By him he has revealed himself to us in the most interesting attitudes; he has addressed us in the most impressive language; he has addressed us as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; in the attitude of taking from his bosom his only begotten and well-beloved Son, that he might give him up for us all, to bear our sins on the cross. In the instructions, in the gospel of that Son, he has set before us denunciations of vengeance far more tremendous; invitations and offers of mercy far more tender; proofs of his goodness far more affecting; and motives to love and obedience far more powerful, than were ever exhibited to his ancient people. He has brought life and immortality more clearly to light; he has rent asunder the veil which concealed the eternal world from the view of mortals; he has made the glories of heaven to blaze down upon our eyes; he has caused the unquenchable flames of hell to flash up before our faces; he has caused the groans of the latter, the songs of the former, the blast of the last trumpet, and the sentence which the final judge will pronounce upon the righteous and upon the wicked, to resound in our ears. In fine, all that he has done, all that he designs to do, he has recorded in the Scriptures. He has dictated them by his own Spirit; he has subscribed them with his own name; he has stamped upon them the broad seal of heaven; he has authenticated them by fulfilling many of the prophecies which they contain, and, addressing them to us as it were by name, has caused them to drop from heaven into our hands. And he has told us why all this is done. It is done with the same view with which the record of Jeremiah was made. It was done that we, and other sinners, to whom its contents relate, might read and hear them; and thus be induced to return unto our forsaken God, and receive, through the atonement and intercession of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of all our iniquities. In part this design has been accomplished. The record has reached us. Its contents have been made known to us. You have all read them and heard them read. And some of you, we trust, have not heard them in vain. You have complied with the gracious design for which they were sent. You have been alarmed by their threatenings. You have felt grief and shame and self-abhorrence, in view of your sins; you have renounced them, and returned to your forsaken God, and he has freely forgiven you all your trespasses. But many of you, my hearers, though you have heard and read the same truths, have not been thus affected by them. You have rather imitated the king of Judah and his princes. You have not been alarmed; you are not now alarmed, when you hear the threatenings of God's word; and some, who once were so, have ceased to feel alarm. Nor have you felt those emotions which the Jews were accustomed to express by rending their garments.

You have not been grieved; you have not been ashamed; you have not felt self-abhorrence on account of your sins; nor have your hearts relented in view of God's mercies. No, as certainly as the charge in our text stands recorded against the king of Judah and his princes, so certainly does it stand recorded against you in the book of God's remembrance, that though you have heard all his words, yet you were not suitably alarmed, or affected by them; but listened to them, for the most part, with indifference and unconcern. This charge then we must as it were, extract from the records of heaven, and press it upon your attention. It is by far the heaviest charge which we have to bring against you, or indeed which can be brought against sinners. That you are moral, in the common acceptation of the term, we do not undertake to deny. That you are punctual in attending on the public worship of God, and treat the institutions of religion with apparent respect, I readily allow. That I am under great, very great obligations to your kindness and generosity, I acknowledge with gratitude. But still I must press upon you the charge of hearing the word of God with an almost total indifference, with a most criminal unconcern. I call you to witness against each other, that this charge is true. I call upon your own consciences to bear testimony to its truth. I call with reverence on the insulted majesty of heaven, to witness the manner in which his declarations are received in this house, and the little effect which they produce. What sinner is now led by them to fly from the wrath to come? What individual is now excited by them to ask, What shall I do to be saved? Where is the individual who is one half so much affected by all that God has said and recorded, as he would be by intelligence that some temporal calamity is impending? The charge is then fully substantiated. Heaven and earth, God and men, your own observation and your own consciousness, bear testimony to its truth. And while it is thus proved in all its length and breadth to be true of impenitent sinners, it is also true, though we hope to a less extent, of many who have professed repentance. Yes, many who once trembled at the word of the Lord, have almost, if not entirely ceased to tremble at it. Many of the professed servants of God hear his declarations, his threatenings, his warnings, even those which are addressed to his church, with feelings very little removed from indifference. Nay they can see one of his most awful threatenings now executing, one of his most terrible judgments now inflicting upon us, without laying it seriously to heart. We allude to the almost total withdrawal of his gracious presence and of divine influences, a judgment, compared with which, pestilence, famine, and conflagration would be mercies. Yes, though we would fain not tell the disgraceful fact in Gath, nor publish it in the streets of Askelon, yet it must be told, that the words God, and Christ, and heaven, and hell, and judgment, and eternity, have almost become in this house idle words, without force or significancy; that the glorious glad tidings of the blessed God here excite no joy, and meet with no reception; that the things which many prophets and kings desired to see, and into which even angels desire to look, can scarcely command an hour's languid attention; and if God's threatenings are to excite fear, or his glad tidings to inspire joy, they must be proclaimed elsewhere; they must be addressed to hearts which have not acquired a more than adamantine hardness under the means of grace. And is it indeed come to this? Is it indeed become a fact, that in this house, where God has so often displayed his power and grace, where the lighting down of his glorious arm has so often been seen, and where so many hearts once seemed to bow with reverence before his commands, and drink in with delight his promises, he is now become a cypher, and his word an idle tale? Is it true that he has, in this favored place, seen himself treated with such indignity, that even his patience and forbearance could no longer endure it, and he was constrained to depart? Yes, my hearers, it is indeed come to this. The glory is departed. The gracious presence of God, which once filled this

house, and almost made itself visible, is withdrawn, and its departure will he final, it will never return, unless we become more suitably affected by the contents of his word, and by a recollection of the sins which have constrained him to forsake us; for his language respecting them who treat Him as we have done, is, I will go and return to my place, until they acknowledge their offence and seek my face. But we shall never acknowledge our offence, till we are convinced of it; we shall never be convinced of it, till it is set clearly before us, in all its blackness and enormity, and with all its aggravations. This therefore I have of late frequently attempted to do; attempted it so often, that you are perhaps weary of the repetition and ready to wish that your attention might rather be called to some other subject. But, my hearers, what would it avail, in the present state of things, to call your attention to any other subject? What subject soever is chosen for a theme of discourse, it must be drawn from the word of God; and what can it avail to present subjects to you from his word, unless you pay some regard to its authority; unless you are, at least in some degree, affected by its contents, when they are pressed upon you? On this often repeated subject I must therefore still insist. It must still be my first, my principal aim and endeavor, to make you sensible of the enormous, the heaven-provoking, heaven daring wickedness of hearing without emotion the declarations of Jehovah. It is a sin which, however lightly any may regard it, involves in itself all the worst and most provoking sins of which men can be guilty. It involves, for instance, and expresses the utmost contempt of God. The man who hears God’s threatenings without being afraid, and his kind invitations and promises without being melted, does in effect say to his face, I consider nothing which thou canst utter as of sufficient importance to excite the smallest emotion; neither thy favor nor thy displeasure is of the least consequence to me; I dread not thy threatenings, I regard not thy promises; after thou hast said all that thou canst say, I remain perfectly unmoved, and prepared to execute, not thy pleasure, but my own. And if this does not express the utmost contempt of God, what can express it?

It is a well known fact, that our feelings toward any being may be estimated, with great exactness, by the regard which we pay to his words, and by the degree in which they affect us. If we feel any respect, or esteem, or affection for a person, we listen to his words with proportional interest and attention; and if they relate to important subjects in which we are concerned, they will produce some effect upon our minds. On the contrary, if we thoroughly despise any one, all that he can say will be heard with indifference, and produce no effect upon us. This is so well known, that we cannot insult a man more grossly, we cannot wound his feelings more deeply, than by showing him that we pay no regard to any thing which he can say; that all his offers of friendship, all his threatened displeasure, all his arguments and entreaties, are heard by us with indifference and unconcern. No words which language affords could express contempt of him so effectually. Yet this insult, this greatest of insults, has been offered to the awful majesty of heaven and earth a thousand and ten thousand times, in this very house. And it is offered to him afresh as often as any individual hears his word read or spoken without being affected by it. This sin also involves and indicates the highest degree of unbelief, of that unbelief which makes God a liar. When a man brings us intelligence of most important events, of events in which, if true, we are deeply interested, we cannot tell him more plainly that we disbelieve every thing which he has said, than by remaining perfectly unaffected. If we thus remain, he sees at once that we have no confidence at all in his veracity, or in other words, that we believe him to be a liar. Now the intelligence which God communicates to us in his word is, if true of the very highest, nay of infinite importance. Every man who believes it, feels that it is so, and is affected by it in exact proportion to the degree of his

belief. He then who is but in a small degree affected by God's word, has but little faith in it, and he who is not at all affected by it, has no faith in it at all. He is as completely an infidel as any one who ever gloried in the name.

Again; those who hear or read the word of God without being affected, display extreme hardness of heart. They show that their hearts are absolutely unimpressible by any motives or consideratiomis which infinite wisdom itself can suggest; that they are of so much more than flinty hardness, as to resist that word which God himself declares to be like a fire, and a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces. Such are some of the sins of which they are guilty, who hear without emotion the declarations of Jehovah. And we assert, with the utmost confidence and solemnity, that three worse sins never polluted the heart of fallen man, or fallen spirit. Three worse sins cannot be found in those regions of final abandonment and despair, where sin, in all its dreadful forms, rages uncontrolled. If any suppose that we exaggerate, that we portray the sinfulness of hearing God's word without regarding it in colors too dark, let them look into the Scriptures; and if any thing which is there recorded can produce conviction in their minds, they will find enough to convince them that we have not been, that on this subject we cannot be guilty of exaggerating.

They will find multiplied proofs that, in God's estimation, no sin is so abominable as this; that no sin fills up so soon the sinner's measure of iniquity, or draws down such sure, and swift, and awful destruction upon his head. Look, for example, at the old world. It was corrupt, it was filled with violence, every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was evil only, and that continually. Yet God still bore with it; for its inhabitants had not yet heard his messages with indifference. A day of grace, a space for repentance, was therefore afforded them. Noah, a preacher of righteousness, was sent to reprove them for their sins and to warn them of the destruction which was impending, and which would fall unless they repented. But they would not repent; they were not alarmed, they heard the warnings of Noah with indifference and unconcern; and this God could not bear; this sealed their doom, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

Look next at God's ancient people in the days of Jeremiah and his contemporary prophets. They had for ages been guilty of every other sin which tended to provoke God to jealousy. They had forsaken him to worship idols; they had polluted his temple with their idolatrous abominations; they had offered their children in the fire to Moloch; and what their character and conduct were in other respects, we may learn from God's own description of it: Your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue muttered perverseness. None calleth for judgment, nor pleadeth for truth; they trust in vanity and speak lies, they conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity; their feet run to evil, and are swift to shed innocent blood; and judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off, for truth is fallen in the street and equity cannot enter. Now could any nation be in a worse moral and religious state than this? Yet all this God bore with, for years he bore with it. He sent them more highly gifted prophets, more faithful reprovers; and if they would have listened to these reprovers and turned from their iniquities, he would have forgiven all. But Jeremiah and other prophets had warned them in vain; when God had caused all his threatenings to be written in a book and read in their ears, and saw that they were not afraid, neither rent their clothes he could bear with them no longer, but gave them up to speedy and terrible destruction. Read the writings of Jeremiah and the other prophets of that age, and you will find that the unconcern with which they regarded God's reproofs and threatenings, are mentioned far more frequently than any of their other sins, as the immediate

cause of their ruin.

Once more, look at the Jews in our Savior's time. From the testimony of their own historian, Josephus, as well as from the writings of the Evangelists, it is evident, that irreligion and every kind of immorality, every species of crime, prevailed among them in an almost unexampled degree. And yet our Savior says, if I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin. As if he had said, the sin of hearing, with unconcern and unbelief, the messages which I have brought them from heaven, so far transcends all other sins, that in comparison with it, they are as nothing, and not worthy even to come into the account. My hearers, this is decisive, this is sufficient. Nothing more need be said to prove that, in the judgment of God, there is no sin like that of making light of his declarations; that there is no sin which so certainly draws down the most terrible expressions of his indignation. My hearers, if any of you wonder at this, let me remind you that, in similar cases, we judge in a similar manner. Suppose a son to become idle, vicious, profligate; to be guilty of frequently and grossly disobeying his parents; to run into every kind of excess; yet they do not give him up as hopeless, do not disinherit or banish him on account of all this, so long as their expostulations, their entreaties, their tears appear to produce any effect upon his feelings. But when this ceases to be the case, when all which they can say is heard by him, and all their distress and their tears are seen by him, with perfect indifference, then they despair; then they say, he no longer regards us as his parents, we have lost all influence over his mind; there is no reason to hope that our endeavors to effect his reformation will avail any thing; let him go from us; let him follow his own course, since all attempts to restrain him are vain. Just so our Father in heaven bears and forbears, notwithstanding many gross provocations, so long as his word produces any effect upon us; so long as there seems to be the least reason to hope that we shall ever yield to its warnings and admonitions. But when he sees that they are all regarded with indifference; that we are neither alarmed by his threatenings, nor melted by his invitations, then he treats us as he treated Israel of old. Israel, says he, would not hearken to my voice, and my people would none of me; so I turned and gave them up to their own lusts, and they walked in their own counsels. Now, my careless hearers, this sin, this greatest of sins, this sin which has destroyed so many millions of immortal beings, we charge upon you; the truth of the charge has been sufficiently proved, and you yourselves cannot deny it. Even now many of you are, probably, exhibiting additional proofs of its truth. You have this day heard some of God's most terrible threatenings repeated; you have heard from his own word that he will execute them with infallible certainty, if you remain in your present state; and you have now heard how great, how provoking, how destructive a sin it is, not to be alarmed by these threatenings. Yet it is probable, it is, I fear, but too certain, that many of you are not alarmed; that many of you hear all this with as much unconcern, as the king of Judah and his princes heard the words of Jeremiah's roll. And if this is the case, what will it avail that your dispositions are amiable, that your morals are unimpeached, and that you treat the institutions of religion with some apparent respect? 0, what can all these things avail, so long as your hearts are polluted, and your characters blackened in the sight of God, by the worst and most provoking of all sins? Were there any reason to hope that arguments or entreaties would induce you no longer to be guilty of it, gladly would I employ them. I would beseech you no more to tell Jehovah to his face that he cannot make you tremble, that he cannot make you weep, lest he should be provoked to make you tremble with evil spirits, and to cast you into outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. I would beseech you to comply with the purpose for which he has caused his declarations to be recorded and placed in your hands, by repenting of your sins,

embracing the Savior, and receiving through him a full and gracious pardon. But in vain should I urge these and other considerations drawn from the word of God, so long as that word is regarded by you with indifference. I may go round and round, and assail you on every side, and seek every where for some avenue through which the truth may enter; but all will be vain, until you learn to revere and tremble at the words of Jehovah. But shall our endeavors, my professing hearers, prove equally unsuccessful with you? If they do so, they will certainly continue to prove unsuccessful with impenitent sinners; for as Moses said to God; Lord the children of Israel have not hearkened to me; how then should Pharaoh hear me? So we may say, If God's own professed servants do not tremble at his word, how can we hope that sinners will tremble? If it does not lead you to repentance, how shall it lead them to repent? My brethren, it is painfully affecting, it is in the highest degree alarming, to see how little apparent effect is now produced upon this church by appeals which would once have affected it like an electric shock. And it is still more affecting and alarming to see how little we are affected by the spiritual judgments under which we are perishing. Were a pestilence raging in this town, we should feel. Were half its habitations involved in one conflagration, we should feel, nay, should trade and commerce suffer a stagnation, we should feel. But since we are suffering nothing more than the loss of God's gracious presence and its irreparable consequences, the decline of religion, the prevalence of a moral pestilence, which ends in the second death; and the spreading of a conflagration in which immortal souls are consumed, we seem to forget that we have any cause for sorrow and alarm. My brethren, these things ought not so to be; and let me add, so they must no longer be. If you ever did feel any thing, if you ever expect to feel any thing, now, now is the time to feel, and not to feel only, but to act. In Christ's name I say to you, Whosoever hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. In his name I say to you, Either cease to call me Master and Lord, or treat me as such by hearing and obeying my words. I charge every declining professor before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and as he will answer it at the judgment day, to remember from whence he has fallen, and repent, and do his first works; and to recollect in a practical manner and with self-application, the declaration of Jehovah, To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word. And to all of every description I say, Hear ye, give ear; be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken; and what he hath spoken, he will assuredly perform. Hearken then to the voice of the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because of the destruction which is coming upon my people.

Chapter 76

S. THE MARK OF DELIVERANCE.

THE MARK OF DELIVERANCE. And the Lord said unto him, go through the midst of the city, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations, that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in my hearing, go ye after him through the city, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity; slay utterly old and young; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark.—Ezekiel 9:4-6. IN the preceding chapter we have an account of a discovery, made by Jehovah to the prophet Ezekiel, of the many idolatrous, impious and iniquitous practices, which secretly prevailed among the Jews. Being brought in vision to Jerusalem, the prophet was successively conducted to different places in the city, and introduced into the most secret recesses of its inhabitants, that he might see the hidden wickedness, of which they were guilty, and be convinced, by his own observation, that they were ripe for ruin. After giving him this view of the sins of his people, God proceeded to threaten them with the most tremendous judgments, and appealed to the prophet, whether these judgments were not richly deserved. Hast thou seen all this, says he, 0 son of man? Is it a light thing that the house of Judah commit the abominations that are committed here? for they say the Lord seeth not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth; therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, and though they cry with a loud voice, I will not hear. The fulfillment of these threatenings was immediately witnessed by the prophet in vision, but in their execution mercy was mingled with justice. He cried in mine ears, says the prophet, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near. And behold six men came from the way of the higher gate, every man with a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side. And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations, that are done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said, Go ye after him through the city and smite. Let not your eye spare, neither have pity. Slay utterly young and old, but come not near any man, upon whom is the mark. My hearers, St. Paul informs us, that all the calamities, which were experienced by the Jews, happened unto them for ensamples to others, and that they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. It therefore becomes us to study their history with the greatest attention, and to compare their character and conduct with our own; that we may derive from it that instruction, which it is intended to afford; and especially that we may learn what we have reason to expect at the hands of God. In this point of view, perhaps no part of their history is more interesting or instructive, than that of which a representation is given in our text. We there see that when God commissioned the messengers of vengeance, who had charge over Jerusalem, to exterminate its guilty inhabitants, he took care to set a mark of deliverance upon all who sighed and cried for the abominations that were perpetrated among them; and since God's rules of government and methods of proceeding with mankind are in all ages essentially the same, we may, from this particular instance, fairly deduce the following general proposition;—When God visits the world, or any part of it, with his desolating judgments, he usually sets a mark of deliverance on such as are suitably affected with the sins of their fellow creatures. To illustrate and establish this proposition, is my present design; and with this view I shall endeavor to show what is

implied in being suitably affected with the sins of our fellow creatures; and that on such as are thus affected, God will set a mark of deliverance, when others are destroyed by his righteous judgments.

I. What is implied in being suitably affected with the sins of our fellow creatures? That we are naturally disposed to be little or not at all affected with the sins of others, unless they tend, either directly or indirectly, to injure ourselves, it is almost needless to remark. If our fellow creatures infringe none of our real or supposed rights, and abstain from such gross vices as evidently disturb the peace of society, we usually feel little concern respecting their sins against God: but can see them following the broad road to destruction with great coolness and indifference, and without making any exertion, or feeling much desire to turn their feet into a safer path. Our nearest neighbor may be an atheist, a deist, a profane swearer, a Sabbath breaker, a neglecter of God and religion, an intemperate man, or any other character equally remote from that of a Christian, without exciting in our breasts any concern for the dishonor which he casts upon God, any uneasiness respecting his awfully dangerous situation, or any anxiety to convince him of the error of his ways. Nay more, we are naturally but too much disposed to contemplate the sins of our fellow creatures with pleasure, either because the contrast between their vices and our own virtues gratifies our pride, or because their wicked practices seem to justify ours, and encourage us to hope for impunity in sin. In short, the language of our feelings and of our actions naturally is, what have I to do with my neighbor's conduct or belief? or what is it to me how he lives? Let him, if he pleases, disobey and dishonor God, and ruin his own soul, provided he will not injure me.

It is no concern of mine: he must look to himself; am I my brother's keeper? Nor is it at all surprising that this should be our language, for we naturally think as little of our own souls, or of our own sins, as of those of our neighbors; and it can scarcely be expected, that he who takes no care to save himself, should feel much concern for the salvation of others. This being the case, it is evident that a very great and radical change must take place in our views and feelings, before we can be suitably affected with the sins of our fellow creatures, if the conduct of the persons mentioned in our text is the standard of what is suitable. They are represented as sighing, and even crying, on account of the abominations which were practiced by their fellow citizens; expressions, which plainly intimate that they were not only affected, but very deeply affected with a consideration of the vices which prevailed around them. Though they lived in an evil day, a day of peculiar calamity and distress, when the judgments of God were falling heavily upon their nation; yet they not only found time to mourn for the prevailing sins of the age, but they appear to have felt more poignant grief for those sins, than for the desolating judgments which they occasioned. They sighed and cried, not so much because their rulers were incorrigibly wicked and infatuated, their country laid waste, their capital destroyed, and many of their fellow citizens carried into captivity, as because of the abominations which were committed by the remnant that had escaped. An imitation of their example in this respect, is the first proof we shall mention of being rightly affected with the sins of others; for we may be affected, and even deeply affected, with the sins of our fellow creatures, as well as with our own, without being rightly affected. We may mourn for them merely on account of the punishments which they bring upon ourselves, or upon the community of which we are members. But if we fear sin more than the punishment of sin; if we mourn rather for the iniquities, than for the calamities which we witness; if we are more grieved to see God dishonored, his Son neglected, and immortal souls ruined, than we are to see our commerce

interrupted, our fellow citizens divided, and our country invaded, it is one proof that we resemble the characters mentioned in our text. In the sight of God however, no feelings or affections are genuine, but such as produce corresponding practical effects. He will not consider our grief for the prevalence of any evil as sincere, unless it excites habitual and earnest endeavors for its suppression. We therefore observe,

2. That being suitably affected with the sins of our fellow creatures implies the diligent exertion, by every means in our power, to reform them. It is, perhaps, in this respect, that we are most liable to fail. There are many, who will readily allow that vice and infidelity prevail among us, in a most alarming manner; that the Sabbath is most shamefully dishonored; that God's name is impiously profaned in our streets; that multitudes of our fellow creatures are evidently in the way to eternal ruin; and that in consequence of our national sins, we have every reason to expect national judgments still heavier than those which we have already experienced. That it should be so, they will also confess is a very melancholy thing, and for a moment they will, perhaps, appear to be deeply affected by it; but still they use no means and make no exertions to counteract, or repress the evils, which they profess to lament. But as it is not sufficient to confess and lament our own sins, without renouncing them, so neither is it sufficient to mourn for the sins of others, without attempting their reformation. This attempt must be made,

First, by our example. That men are imitative beings; that the force of example is almost inconceivably great, and that there is, perhaps, no man so poor or insignificant, as not to have some friend or dependant who may be influenced by his example, are truths so obvious, that it is scarcely necessary to mention them. This being the case, every person is most sacredly bound, in times of prevailing degeneracy, to act an open, firm, and decided part in favor of virtue and religion; and resolutely endeavor, by his example to discountenance vice and impiety in every shape. In an especial manner should he avoid the very appearance of those evils, which are most prevalent around him, and practice with double care and diligence those virtues, which are most generally neglected and despised. In vain will he pretend to mourn over the sins of the times, who by his example encourages, or at least, does not discountenance them. In the second place, if we would prove the justice of our claim to the character described in our text, we must attempt to suppress vice and impiety by our exertions. We must endeavor ourselves, and exert all our influence to induce others to banish from among us intemperance, profanity, violations of the Sabbath, neglect of religious institutions, and other prevailing sins of the age and country in which we live. Thanks to the kind providence of him, by whom kings reign and princes decree justice, we enjoy peculiar advantages for attempting this arduous, but glorious work with success. In our highly favored land, the interests of virtue and religion are fenced around by wholesome laws; and in consequence of the nature of our government, the care of seeing that these laws are faithfully executed, is in a greater or less degree committed to almost every individual among us. But it becomes us to remember that where much is given, much will be required. It has been justly remarked, that when God confers on us the power to do good or repress evil, he lays us under an obligation to exert that power. Agreeably the apostle informs us, that to him who knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin. Hence it follows, that we are accountable for all the good which we might but have not done; and for all the evil which we might but have not prevented. By conniving at the sins of others therefore, we make them our own. If the name of God be profaned, if his holy day be dishonored, if a fellow creature by intemperance render his family wretched,

spread a snare in the path of his children, destroy his health, and finally plunge himself into eternal ruin, when we by proper exertions might have prevented it, a righteous God will not hold us guiltless, nor will rivers of tears, shed in secret over these sins, wash out the guilt thus contracted. If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, behold we knew it not, doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it'? and shall he not render to every man according to his works'? If then we would avoid his displeasure; if we wish him to set upon us a mark of deliverance, we must exert all the power and influence with which we are entrusted, to repress the outbreakings of irreligion and vice. Those who will, if permitted, trample alike on divine and human laws, and thus show that they neither fear God nor regard man, must be taught by their apprehensions, if they can be taught by no other means, to hide their vicious propensities in their own breasts; or at least, not to suffer them to stalk abroad with unblushing front in open day. And I am aware, that to attempt this, is a most disagreeable and ungrateful task, a task which very few are willing to perform. Many will mourn over the prevalence of sin in their closets, who dare not, or at least will not exert themselves to oppose it in public. When God asks, Who will stand up for me against the evil doers? who will rise up for me against the workers of iniquity'? to many are to be found, even among his professed friends, who instead of immediately answering to the call, and boldly appearing like the children of Levi on the Lord's side, pusillanimously shrink back from the honorable service, pretending that others may more properly engage in it than themselves. In fact, though we are willing to enjoy the consolations and rewards of religion, we are all too much afraid of its difficulties and duties; too unwilling to deny ourselves and take up the cross. We are sufficiently willing, that God should take care of our honor, interest, happiness; but when any thing is to be done or suffered for him, we are too prone to begin with one consent to make excuse. We are exceedingly jealous of our own rights and privileges, and ever ready to execute those laws, which secure our persons, our property and reputation. But we discover little jealousy for the honor of the Lord of Hosts; and too often suffer those laws, which are made to secure his name and his day from profanation, to be violated with impunity. But however natural or general such conduct may be, it is altogether inexcusable nor can we be guilty of it without forfeiting all claims to the character mentioned in our text. In vain shall we pretend to love God; in vain shall we profess to he concerned for the happiness of man, in vain shall we express sorrow for the prevalence of vice and irreligion, if we will not expose ourselves to some inconveniences, submit to some sacrifices, and make some vigorous exertions to preserve God's name from profanation, his institutions from dishonor, and the souls of our fellow creatures from everlasting perdition. God will set no mark of deliverance upon us in the day of vengeance, unless we prove the sincerity of our attachment to his cause, of our hatred of sin, and of our grief for its prevalence by appearing openly and decidedly against it. On the contrary, he will, nay he has already set on such pusillanimous friends a mark of reprobation. Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this evil and adulterous generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. In the third place, to our exertions we must add our prayers. Exertion without prayer, and prayer without exertion, are alike presumptuous, and can be considered as only tempting God— and if we neglect either, we have no claim to be numbered among the characters described in our text. My hearers, permit me to request your particular attention to this remark. There is but too much reason to fear, that a regard to order, or some similar principle induces many to exert themselves for the suppression of vice, who prove by their

total neglect of prayer for divine influence, that they are strangers to the first principles of the oracles of God.

Lastly. Those who are suitably affected with the sins of their fellow creatures, will certainly be much more deeply affected with their own. While they smart under the rod of national calamities, they will cordially acknowledge the justice of God, and feel that their own sins have assisted in forming the mighty mass of national guilt. While they contemplate him whom their sins have pierced, they will mourn and be in bitterness, as one that mourneth for an only son. While they feel constrained to repress the vices of others with a decided and vigorous hand, they will feel, that if they are not themselves guilty of the same vices, it is wholly owing to sovereign, unmerited grace: and the cordial conviction of this truth, will temper their firmness with meekness and tenderness, and lead them to pity the offender, while they abhor the offence. If this temper be wanting, all other proofs that we are suitably affected with the prevalence of vice, will avail nothing. It is this, which distinguishes the real mourner from the proud, censorious, self-righteous hypocrite, who condemns others that he may exalt himself who censures the mote in his brother's eye, but knows nothing of the beam in his own; whose language to God is, I thank thee, that I am not like other men; and to his fellow creatures, stand by thyself come not near me, for I am holier than thou. Such are, of all persons, most hateful to God, and the most unlike the characters mentioned in our text. In fact, it will ever be found, that he who is most affected by the sins of others, will mourn most sincerely and feelingly for his own; and that he who is most solicitous for his own salvation, will exhibit the greatest concern for the salvation of the souls of his fellow creatures.

Thus have we endeavored to show what is implied in being suitably affected with the vices that prevail among us. Should any one feel disposed to question the truth of the observations, which have been made, it would be easy to confirm them, did time permit, by appealing to the history of Noah, of Lot, of Moses, of David, of Hezekiah, of Ezra, of Nehemiah, of the prophets, of the apostles, nay, of our blessed Lord himself; nor would it be difficult to prove, that there is scarcely a good man mentioned in the scriptures, who was not thus affected with the sins of the age, and country in which he lived. But it is necessary that we hasten to show, as was proposed,

II. That on such as are thus affected, God will set a mark of deliverance when those around them are destroyed by his desolating judgments. The truth of this proposition may be inferred,

1. From the justice of God. It will be recollected that national judgments are always the consequence of national sins. But in the guilt of these sins the characters we are describing do not share. On the contrary, they mourn for them, hate them, and oppose them by every means in their power. If their endeavors to promote national reformation are unsuccessful, the guilt does not lie at their door. Justice therefore, forbids that they should share in the punishment, which this guilt brings down. As they have separated themselves from others by their conduct, it requires that a mark of separation and deliverance should be set upon them by the hand of a righteous God. Hence the plea of Abraham with regard to Sodom, a plea of which God tacitly allowed the force. Far be it from thee to destroy the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? It is true, that the characters of whom we are speaking, have like others, violated the law of God, and are by nature children of wrath, and exposed to its awful curse. But however guilty they may be as individuals in the sight of a heart-searching God, they are blameless, considered merely as members of a

community, and it is in this light only that they are here considered. Justice itself therefore, requires that they should be spared, and there is no doubt that God often suspends the punishment merited by guilty nations, lest the righteous should be involved in their destruction. Witness the preservation of guilty Zoar for the sake of Lot, and the declaration of the destroying angel, I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. The truth of the proposition we are considering, may be inferred,

2. From God's holiness. As a holy God he cannot but love holiness; he cannot but love his own image; he cannot but love those who love him. But the characters of whom we are speaking, evince by their conduct, that they do love God. They bear his image. His name is written in their foreheads. Like the righteous God they love righteousness and hate and oppose iniquity. It is their love to God and their holy jealousy for the honor of his great name, which causes them to mourn when he is disobeyed and dishonored. His cause, his interest, his honor, they consider as their own. A holy God therefore, will, nay, he must display his approbation of holiness by placing upon them a mark of distinction. While he loves holiness, while he loves himself, he cannot but love them, and cause all things to work together for their good. The truth of this assertion we infer,

3. From his faithfulness. God has said, Them that honor me I will honor. But none honor him more highly than those who appear openly and resolutely on his side, in opposition to sin. His truth, his faithfulness then requires, that he should honor them by placing upon them some mark of distinction. Besides, those who are affected with the sins of mankind in the manner described above, exhibit the most infallible proof, that they are the genuine disciples of Christ, and the real children of God. Like their heavenly Father and their divine Redeemer, they are grieved with the sins of rebellious man. They have complied with the command which says, Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate; and I will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters. But if they are children, then heirs; heirs of God, of all the exceeding great and precious promises, which are given us in Christ Jesus; promises, which the eternal purpose and solemn oath of God bind him to fulfil. He has provided for them chambers of protection. His name is a strong tower, into which they flee, and are safe and to this place of refuge he invites them. Come, my people, enter into thy chambers, and hide thyself for a little moment, till the indignation be overpast.

Thus it appears that the justice, the holiness, and the faithfulness of God, unitedly bind him to set a mark of deliverance on those who are suitably affected with the sins of their fellow creatures. But these are the perfections, which as sinners, we have the greatest reason to fear. If then they secure our safety, how safe must we be.

Lastly. That God actually does set a mark of deliverance on such characters, is evident from various facts recorded in scripture. See, for instance, Noah, that preacher of righteousness, saved in the midst of a drowning world. See Lot, whose righteous soul was grieved and vexed with the wickedness of the Sodomites, snatched as a brand from the burning storm, which overthrew the cities of the plain. See Elijah, who was jealous for the honor of the Lord of Hosts, fed by ravens, when all his countrymen were suffering the miseries of drought and famine. See Jeremiah, Baruch, and Ebedmelech, escaping unhurt from the perils of fire and sword, when Jerusalem was taken by storm; and the disciples of our Lord, many years after, saved by his warnings from the Roman sword, while their countrymen were destroyed. And though the age of miracles has

passed away, yet had we an inspired history of the world from the days of the apostles, we should doubtless find recorded many equally striking proofs of God's care of his people; for it is still true, to adopt the language of St. Peter, that the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly and to reserve the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished. Will it be objected to this statement, that facts equally strong may be adduced on the other side; facts, which prove that God does not always thus deliver his people?

We allow it. We allow that the real friends of God often drink deeply of the cup of affliction, which is put into the hands of sinful nations? But why is it so? It is because they first partake of their sins. It is because they do not bear a public testimony for God, and oppose as they ought the progress of vice and infidelity. They suffer themselves to be entangled by that fear of man, which bringeth a snare, and to be guided by the heaven-distrusting counsels and temporizing policy of that earthly, sensual wisdom, which is too often miscalled prudence. They conduct in such a manner as to leave it doubtful whether they are the real children of God; and therefore, he treats them in such a manner, as often causes them and others to doubt whether he is their Father. Were they always suitably affected with the sins which prevail around them, they would much less frequently share in the calamities which those sins occasion. But it will perhaps be said, that many of the most bold and faithful servants of God and opposers of vice, have suffered even unto blood striving against sin. We grant it, but still it is true, that the mark of God was upon them. It appeared in those divine consolations, which raised them far above suffering, and the fear of death, and enabled them to rejoice and glory in tribulation. Did not Stephen exhibit this mark, when his murderers saw his face, as it had been the face of an angel? Did not Paul and Silas display it, when at midnight their joy broke forth, in the hearing of their fellow prisoners, in rapturous ascriptions, and songs of praise? Did not some of the martyrs display it, when they exclaimed in the flames, We feel no more pain, than if reposing on a bed of roses? If we now seldom see this mark of God set upon his children, it is only because the fires of persecution are extinguished, and because such Christians as Stephen, and Paul, and the martyrs, are no longer to be found in the church. But however God may sometimes see fit to expose such as truly mourn for the prevalence of sin, to sufferings in this world, he will most certainly set a mark of deliverance upon them in the world to come. The Son of God, clothed in the linen garments of his priestly office, has sprinkled them with his blood, which, like the blood of the Passover, is a signal for the destroying angel to pass them by. He has set upon them a mark, not with pen and ink, but by the Spirit of the living God, by whom they are sealed to the day of eternal redemption. Thus they bear the mark of the Lamb, and have their Father's name written in their foreheads, while their great Intercessor bears their names engraven in his book of life, and upon the palms of his hands; and neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, shall erase them.

IMPROVEMENT. My hearers, the subject we have been considering, at all times interesting, is rendered peculiarly so to us by the circumstances in which we are placed. We live in a day, when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth, and the desolating flood, after laying waste many nations and kingdoms in its progress, has at length reached our shores, and where it will stop God only knows. We have however, but too much reason to expect the worst. The same sins which have ruined other nations, and which, wherever they exist, provoke the vengeance of offended heaven, evidently prevail among us in an alarming degree, and give us just occasion to fear, that since we resemble the old world in its vices, we shall share in its plagues. And even if God in

mercy should avert merited ruin, it is certain that we must all appear at the judgment seat of Christ, to receive the things done in the body. It is therefore, infinitely important for us, both in a temporal and in a religious view, to ascertain whether we are in the number of those, upon whom God has set a mark of deliverance, that his destroying angel may not touch them. From our subject we may learn this. If we are in the number of those who sigh and cry for all the abominations that are committed among us, God has certainly set upon us a mark of deliverance and salvation; but if not, if we contemplate them with indifference, or while we profess to lament, make no exertions to repress them; we have reason to expect nothing but a mark of reprobation. Permit me then, my hearers, to ask, how are you affected with the sins which prevail amongst us? That there are many such sins, sins sufficient to excite and justify our most pungent grief you need not be told.

You cannot but be aware, that throughout our country, vice and impiety are awfully prevalent; that God's name is most daringly profaned; that his day is by multitudes dishonored and neglected; that his friends and institutions are ridiculed and despised; that the whirlpool of intemperance is engulfing its thousands and tens of thousands, and that the soul is almost universally neglected and undone. The cry of our sins, like that of Sodom and Nineveh, has long since ascended up before God. My hearers, how are you affected with these things? Are you more disposed to weep for our national sins, than for the miseries which we feel, and the dangers which we fear? Are you endeavoring, by your example, your exertions, and your prayers, to repress the progress of vice and impiety within your sphere of action; and do you appear openly on the Lord's side, as the bold, unwavering, determined friends of religion and morality? These are questions of infinite importance, but they are questions which conscience alone can answer. To every man's conscience then, we appeal, and ask, should God, preparatory to our destruction as a people, send a messenger into this house, to set a mark on all who are suitably affected with the prevailing sins of the age, on whose foreheads would the delivering mark appear? Would it, I address the question to every hearer, would it appear on thine? We are happy to have it in our power to remark, that a partial answer to these questions is afforded by the occasion which has called us together. The existence of the society which I now address, affords, at least presumptive evidence, that there are some present, who do not contemplate with indifference, the progress of vice and impiety; and its members exhibit, at least one of the characteristic features of the persons described in our text. We would hope that the other features necessary to complete the character, are not wanting; and that while they are unitedly endeavoring to check the progress of vice by their exertions, they are individually aiming to advance the same object by their example and their prayers. My brethren, if this hope be well founded, our subject affords you encouragement, ample as your most enlarged desires. It assures you, that he, who humbles himself to behold what is done in heaven, notices and approves the sorrow, with which you contemplate sin, either in yourselves or others, and the exertions which you are making to repress its progress. The mark of the eternal God is upon you. The destroying angel is forbidden to touch you; whatever may befall our country or the world, you are safe as omnipotence can render you. The new heaven and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, is your destined habitation, where those sins, which you now hate and oppose, shall no longer molest you, and where you shall reap the glorious rewards, which the Captain of our salvation has prepared for them that overcome. Nor is this all. The cause in which you are engaged is as honorable and its success as certain, as the rewards of victory are glorious. It is the cause of truth, of religion, of God; the cause in which all holy beings are engaged; the cause in which the Son of God laid down his life. It will be finally victorious. Will it

be descending too low, if I add, it is also the cause of our common country. It is on the exertions of the friends of morality and religion alone, that its deliverance from present calamities and its future welfare depend. It is in the field of conflict between virtue and vice, between religion and impiety, that our enemies are to be repelled; that peace is to be conquered for us. One victory gained here, will do more for us than many on the ocean or the land; and the most encouraging circumstance attending our present situation, is, that a faithful few are to be found in different parts of our land, who are willing to fight the battles of the Lord, and come up to his help against the mighty.

Go on then, my brethren, and prosper; secure of the good wishes and co-operation of all the real friends of God, and of man, and of our country; nay more, secure of the blessing and assistance of him, who has promised, that when the enemy comes in as a flood, his Spirit shall lift up a standard against him. We will only add the address of the prophet to Asa and his people, while engaged in the work of national reformation with its happy effect. The Lord is with you, while ye be with him. Be strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded. When Asa heard these words, he took courage, and put away all abominations out of the land. May God grant that you feel encouraged in a similar manner to repress, with a prudent and vigorous hand, every abomination which shall attempt to raise its baleful head among you. And are there any present, who cannot cordially unite in this prayer; any, who contemplate the formation and the exertions of this society with an unfriendly eye; any, who instead of feeling disposed to sigh and cry on account of the prevalence of vice and irreligion, are disposed to consider it as a proof of weakness or superstition to be thus affected? If any such there are, permit me to ask, ought not the creatures, the subjects, the children of God to mourn, when their Creator, their Sovereign, their Father, is dishonored? Ought not the friends of our Redeemer to feel grieved, when he is neglected and crucified afresh? Ought not all, who love their country, to lament, when they see the same sins prevailing among us, which have already drawn down the vengeance of heaven on so many once flourishing kingdoms!

Chapter 77

S. THE OPPRESSED SOUL SEEKING DIVINE INTERPOSITION

THE OPPRESSED SOUL SEEKING DIVINE INTERPOSITION "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." Isaiah 38:14

These words compose part of a psalm, penned by Hezekiah, king of Judah, on his miraculous recovery from a dangerous disease. In the first part of this psalm, he describes the views and feelings which occupied his mind when he saw himself apparently on the brink of the grave. From this description, it appears that, though he had been one of the best kings with which God ever blessed a nation, he viewed his sins as great and numerous, and felt that he was, on account of them, justly exposed to the divine displeasure. Hence death appeared dreadful to him, and his dread of it was increased by the darkness which, at that time, before Christ had brought life and immortality to light, hung over a future state. Hence too he was assailed by fearful apprehensions of God’s anger.

I reckoned, says he, that as a lion he will crush me in pieces; he will cut me off with pining sickness; from day to night he will make an end of me. In consequence of these apprehensions he could neither look nor ask for help from God with confidence, as he had been accustomed to do. My eyes, he exclaims, fail upward; that is, I cannot look upward, cannot look to heaven for relief and consolation, as I formerly could. And when he endeavored to pray, he found that he offered nothing which deserved the name of prayer; for unbelief and despondency prevailed. Like a crane or a swallow, says he, so did I chatter; that is, my prayers were little better than the complaints of a bird entangled in the snare of the fowler. Finally, he gave up all hope, and cried in bitterness of soul, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living. But to the righteous there ariseth light in the darkness. There did in this case. And as soon as it began to dawn, faith revived, and he cried, though still with a feeble voice, O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me; that is, be my help and deliverer, make my cause thine own, and do all that for me which thou seest to be necessary. My hearers, if language was ever uttered by man, which all men ought to adopt; if a petition was ever presented by man, which all men ought to present before the mercy-seat, it is this. It is the very language which every soul does in effect adopt, when it applies to Jesus Christ in the exercise of faith. Would to God, I could persuade you all to adopt it from the heart. Then would your salvation be secure. I must make the attempt, though I must confess with very feeble hopes of success. With this view I shall endeavor to show,

I. That you all need someone to undertake for you; in other words, you need someone to make your cause his own, and to assist you in performing that work, on the performance of which your everlasting happiness depends. You are not indeed, like Hezekiah, on the bed of sickness, and apparently on the brink of the grave; but you soon will be there; and even before that time arrives, as well as then, and afterwards, you will need, greatly need someone to make your cause and your work his own. But, more particularly, you need someone to undertake,

1. To support and comfort you under the trials of life, and carry you safely through them. None of you know how numerous or how severe may be the trials which await you. This remark applies

with particular force to all who have not far passed the meridian of life. If you live to old age, your afflictions, in all probability, will not be few. One thing at least is almost certain. If you live to that age, you will outlive nearly all the friends and companions of your youth; nearly all whose affection and society now make life pleasant. One after another, they will drop into the grave, and each successive loss will give your heart a pang. Some, who are now your friends, will become your enemies, or at least their friendship for you will cool, and this may give you a pang still more severe. Some of you will lose children, perhaps all your children; others will see their children conduct in such a manner, that they will often wish, though in vain, that they had been written childless: others will meet with pecuniary losses and disappointments, and perhaps be constrained to leave their children almost or altogether unprovided for. Look back upon the history of this town for a few years, and you will not doubt that some who are now wealthy will be called in their old age to struggle with want, and die in poverty. And those who escape these trials must encounter the unavoidable evils which wait upon declining years.

You must suffer pain and sickness, your senses and faculties will decline; you will be eclipsed by younger rivals; you will begin to feel that you are becoming less useful, and perhaps less respected; you will gradually lose your capacity for exertion, and for enjoyment; and every year, as it passes over your heads, will take something from your diminishing gratifications, and add something to your increasing infirmities. Youth, beauty, vivacity and vigor will be gone never to return; and the certainty that death is not far distant will, unless you are prepared for it, embitter your reflections, and prevent you from drawing comfort from within. Such is the common lot of man. But some of you will doubtless meet with afflictions still more severe, —and all are liable to meet with them, —afflictions, which will wring your hearts with agony, and tempt you to seek relief by forbidden means. And do you not then, need someone to undertake that he will support and comfort you under these trials, that he will make them all work together for your good, and finally bring you out purified and refined, as gold out of the furnace? When relatives, children, and friends shall die, or prove unkind, will you need no one to supply their place in your affections, and console you for their loss? When earthly possessions are taken away, will you need no one who can give you durable riches? When your body, or your mind, or both together, shall be diseased, will you need no kind physician to administer relief? Finally, when youth and sprightliness and vigor are gone, when heart and flesh fail, will you not need someone who can be the strength of your heart, and your portion forever. Yes, my hearers, my frail, dying hearers, you do, indeed you do, need someone who can undertake to perform all these things for you.

2. You need someone who can undertake to be your guide through life. The Scriptures assure us, that it is not in man who walketh, to direct his own steps, and a very limited observation will convince us that this assertion is strictly true. We cannot look around us without seeing numberless instances, it, which passion, prejudice and evil example lead men astray; and we must be very young indeed, or very much favored, if the same causes have not already led us into errors. Even if men were less under the influence of these pernicious counselors than they are, yet as they cannot look into futurity, nor foresee the consequences of events, they would greatly need a guide who can do both. Such a guide is necessary even to our happiness in the present life. For one proof of this, look at the connections which men form. As the young come forward on the stage of life, they connect themselves, and can scarcely avoid connecting themselves in various ways with their fellow creatures. They choose associates, friends, partners in business, and

perhaps partners for life. Much of their success and happiness in the world depends on their making a wise choice.

Yet, as they cannot search the heart, they are exceedingly liable to be deceived in the character of those with whom they form connections, and to make a choice of which they will bitterly repent. They are especially liable to such mistakes, because they form most of their connections in early life, when they are, rash, inexperienced, and unacquainted with mankind. And how fatal may such mistakes prove. We may choose friends who are vicious or impious, and who will corrupt our principles or our morals. We may choose partners in business, who will prove imprudent or dishonest, and plunge its into inextricable embarrassments. We may choose partners for life, whose temper and conduct will make life a burden. Even if we choose those whose characters are good, we may be deceived; for how many, whose morals are correct in youth, prove unkind or licentious or intemperate in after life. For proofs of this, look at the many unhappy families which are every where to be found.

Look at the many wives, whose lives are embittered by husbands improvident, or passionate, or unfaithful, or intemperate. Once they appeared moral, amiable, affectionate; but now how changed! Look too at the husbands whose peace is destroyed, whose home is disturbed by the temper or conduct of their partners; and who are driven to seek abroad that quiet which their own firesides do not afford. Now who can assure you, my young friends, that you will not form connections which will prove productive of similar evils! Who can assure you that persons, who are now apparently all that you can wish them to he, will not hereafter adopt vicious courses, and pierce your hearts through with many sorrows? Surely then you need a guide, a counsellor, who knows not only what is in man, but what every man will prove, to be in future life. Without such a guide, you are every day liable to mistakes which will shed a disastrous influence on all your succeeding days. But if you need such a guide as it respects this world, how much more as it respects the world to come. You do not; I presume, doubt, that your happiness hereafter will depend upon the path which you pursue here. Now consider a moment how many different paths present themselves to your choice, each one of which is declared by those who walk in it to be right. Consider how numerous, and how various are the religions opinions which prevail in the world; and in how different a manner different interpreters explain the Scriptures. Consider too, your own passions, inclinations and prejudices, and how powerful an influence they exert to lead you astray. Consider that, not your hearts only; but even your intellectual faculties are injuriously affected by sin, and that, ten thousand temptations and evil examples will assail you. Now who is to guard you against all these evils, who is to teach you which of all the ways that open before you, is the only right way? Who is to guide you in that way, and prevent you from turning aside; when you have found it? Surely you need some infallible guide to do this; someone who can and will undertake to instruct and guide you in the way of peace. Not more does the helpless infant need a mother’s care, than you need such a counsellor and guide. If any of you are still unconvinced of this truth, cast your eyes around upon your fellow travelers, and upon those who have preceded you in the journey of life. See how many of them have wandered and lost themselves. Hear the voice of inspiration assuring you, that comparatively few of them have found the straight and narrow way to life, and that none of them ever found it without a guide. And are you wiser, can you hope to be more successful than all who have preceded you? Can you, alone and unguided, safely prosecute that journey which has proved fatal to so many thousands of your race?

3. Still more do you need someone who will undertake to afford you effectual assistance in subduing your spiritual enemies, the enemies which oppose your salvation. These enemies are numerous and powerful, artful and indefatigable; they have already enslaved and destroyed myriads of your fellow creatures, and no man ever overcame them without assistance. Of these enemies the first class is composed of your own sinful appetites, passions, and inclinations. If you know anything of yourselves you know that these are adversaries to your salvation. You know that they are perpetually aiming to lead you astray, to carry you far from God, to withdraw your attention from spiritual and eternal objects, and to oppose at every step your return to duty. You know that, if a man follows where they lead, he will never become religious. And is it easy to avoid following where they lead? Is it easy to turn them, and make them point toward heaven? Is it easy to bring them into willing subjection to reason and revelation?

If you ever made the attempt, you know it is not. You know it is like attempting to make water flow up an acclivity. And do you then need no one to assist you against these enemies? enemies who are seated and fortified in your own bosoms, who are a part of yourselves, who never sleep when you are awake, and who seem to be not only irritated but even strengthened by opposition? Can even the most moral young person before me be sure that these enemies will not render him the slave of open vice and immorality before he dies? Can he be sure that his appetites will not lead him to gluttony, intemperance or sensuality? Can he be sure that his passions will not betray him into other vices equally ruinous? No; and he who feels most confident of his own strength, only betrays his own self-ignorance, and is most likely to fall. Hundreds have died drunkards, debauchees, and even murderers, who once as little feared becoming such characters as any of you do now; and who, if their future conduct had been revealed to them, would have exclaimed with Hazael, What! is the servant, a dog, that he should do this great thing? And even if your appetites and passions should not lead to open ire, they may keep you in an irreligious state, and thus prevent your salvation.

Another of these enemies is the world. I use the term in its most extensive sense, as including all worldly objects and Worldly men. It would require a volume to exhibit the various ways in which the world, used in this sense, opposes your salvation; I can now do little more than hint at them. I only ask, do not the pleasures and gratifications of the world allure you? Do not its honors and possessions entangle your affections? Do not its cares and concerns occupy your mind? Does not the dread of its contempt influence you? Does not the weight of its example, the torrent of its customs press on you with a force almost irresistible? May not our Saviour say of thousands in every age, as St. Paul said of Demas, They have forsaken me, having loved this present world? In a word, does not the world weigh almost as heavily upon the souls of men, as this globe itself would weigh upon their bodies, were they placed under its pressure? Say then, frail, sinful mortal, can you unassisted bear up against this pressure? Can you, single handed, withstand a world in arms, a world too, which has so strong a party in your own breasts, ever ready to betray you into its power? My friends, the man who supposes that he needs no assistance against this enemy, no mighty ally to undertake for him, never attempted to subdue it, but has ever been, and still is, its willing captive, its slave.

I might mention the tempter, him whom inspiration emphatically styles the adversary, as another enemy who opposes your salvation; but those whom I am addressing would probably believe nothing that I could say on this subject, even though I should enforce it by quotations from the

Scriptures. I must however remind you of the inspired assertion, that those who would be soldiers of Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation, must wrestle not only against flesh and blood, not only against their own sinful passions and the opposition of sinful men, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness, or the spirits of wickedness. And I must assure you that those, who were possessed by evil spirits in our Saviour's time, would as soon have freed themselves from these tyrants, as any man unassisted will free himself from those snares of the devil, in which he takes and holds men captive at his will. But,

4. Most of all do you need someone who can and who will undertake to plead your cause in heaven, and effect a reconciliation between you and your justly offended God. You are all, my hearers, sinners. That you are so, at least in some degree, none of you will deny; and if you are sinners, even in the smallest degree, if you have ever committed one sin, you are condemned by that law, of which every sin is a transgression; your lives are forfeited, nor can you ever redeem the forfeiture. Though you should offer thousands of sacrifices, and ten thousands of rivers of oil; though you should give your first-born for your transgression, the fruit of your bodies for the sin of your souls, it would not avail. The sentence is pronounced, and the decree has gone forth, it is graven in the records of heaven, and has from thence been copied into the Bible, that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified, that in the sight of God no living man can be justified by any works or merits of his own. No; the honor of God's violated law must be secured, the claims of inflexible justice must be satisfied, sufficient atonement must be made for sin, a mediator, who can negotiate peace between God and the sinner on proper terms must be found, an intercessor, an advocate must be provided, whose voice can be heard in heaven, who can approach the burning, unsullied throne of the Eternal to plead your cause; who can enforce his plea by considerations, the efficacy of which God will acknowledge; who can throw the broad shield of his merits over your unworthiness and your sins, and on the ground of those merits obtain your pardon, your acceptance, your salvation. Unless this can be done, unless such a mediator and intercessor will undertake for you, and make your cause his own, the cause must go against you, the sentence of condemnation already pronounced must stand irreversible. For yourselves you will be unable to plead. For yourselves you will not dare to plead, for every mouth shall be stopped, and the whole world stand guilty before God. O, then, how greatly do you need someone to undertake for you. When death approaches, with judgment and eternity just ready to burst upon you, how will you need one to whisper peace to your troubled conscience, and soothe you with assurances that he will make your cause his own. How much will you need one to support and comfort and cheer you, when passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death. And when you shall stand naked and defenseless before the eye of your Judge, that eye from the terrors of which the heavens and the earth will flee affrighted; when the books shall be opened in which all your sins are recorded, and when your speechless tongue will have no word to utter in arrest of judgment, how much will you need one who can say with authority, Spare that sinner, I have undertaken to answer for him, 1 have made his cause my own.

Having thus shown that you all need someone to undertake for you, I would proceed to show,

II. That there is no one on earth or in heaven, who is both able and willing to undertake for you, except the Lord Jesus Christ. On this point the Scriptures are full and explicit. They inure us that he alone is the light of the world; that he is the shepherd and Bishop of souls; that no man cometh to the Father but by him; that it is his grace, which is sufficient for us; that he is the only Mediator

between God and man, and that there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we can be saved. If you recollect the several things mentioned in this discourse, which he, who would undertake for us, must do, and the various offices which he must sustain, you will, I think, be convinced of this truth. You will be convinced that no one can possess both the ability and the disposition to undertake for you who is not, at once, God and man. He must be God or he cannot have the ability to do it. He must be omniscient and omnipresent, or how could he teach and guide with infallible skill millions of beings in different parts of the world, and at the same time manage their concerns in heaven?

He must be Almighty, or how could he support and comfort these millions under all their various trials, make them victorious over all their enemies, and finally raise their bodies and souls to heaven. He must be infinite in goodness, condescension, patience and compassion, or he would never consent to undertake for creatures so unworthy and perverse as we are. And while it is necessary that he, who would undertake for us must possess these perfections of God, it is equally necessary that he should be man. No one could perform the work of a mediator between God and man in one person; nor could any other make satisfaction or atonement for our sins. He who would make atonement for the sins of man, must perfectly obey the divine law and suffer its penalty. He must die, must shed his blood in our stead; for inspiration declares that, without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. But as God, Christ could not die. As God, he had no blood to shed.

It was therefore necessary that he should assume a nature which could die; a nature in which he could shed his blood; the nature of those beings who had sinned, and for whom atonement was to be made. Agreeably, we are told that, forasmuch as those for whom he died were flesh and blood, he also took part of the same, that through death, he might destroy him that had the power of death. And while his human nature enabled him to die, his divinity gave worth and efficacy to his death, and qualified him to plead for his people efficaciously, as one who had authority. In him alone then, who was Immanuel, God with us, God manifest in the flesh, can we find one who is qualified to undertake for us. In him alone do we find one, who can do all that for our bodies and our souls, for time and eternity, which our welfare requires. And all this, I remark,

III. He will, he does undertake to do for every one who applies to him in the exercise of faith. To everyone, however vile, sinful, guilty, and wretched, who in faith comes to him crying, Lord, I am oppressed, ruined, lost, undertake for me, his promise is sure. He never did refuse to hear the cry of such a suppliant. Him that cometh unto me, he says, I will in no wise cast out. To everyone that thus comes to him, his language is, What wilt thou that I should do for thee? Wouldst thou be enlightened, instructed, guided? Follow me, and I will teach thee the good and the right way; I will guide thee into all truth, I will guide thee even unto death. Wouldst thou be supported and consoled under the various trials which await thee in life, and carried safely through them? Trust in me; and I will be thy comforter; I will even cause thee to glory in affliction, and to be joyful in tribulation. Wouldst thou be assisted to overcome thy sinful propensities, the world and the tempter? Rely on me and my grace shall be sufficient for thee and make thee more than conqueror. Wouldst thou have someone to care for thine eternal interests, and plead thy cause in heaven? Commit it to me, and I will plead it successfully, for I possess all power in heaven and on earth, and ever live to make intercession for all who trust in me. Wouldst thou have thy soul saved with an everlasting salvation? Entrust it to my care, and I will undertake to save it, in defiance of all

that can oppose. Cast all thy concerns, and care, and wants, upon me, and I will undertake to conduct and provide for them all; I will make with thee an everlasting covenant, well ordered in all things and sure. And now, my hearers, are not your understandings at least convinced that you need someone to undertake for you? Are you not convinced that the Lord Jesus Christ alone can effectually undertake for you? And are you not convinced that, if you apply to him in the exercise of faith, he will undertake for you? Why will you not all then thus apply to him? Why not imitate St. Paul, and be enabled to say with him, I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day. What St. Paul had committed to Christ was his soul with all its concerns. And he knew that, in consequence of his committing it to Christ, Christ had undertaken to keep it, to save it: an undertaking which he would infallibly accomplish. On this all the apostle's hope of salvation was founded. And no man can found a scriptural hope of salvation on any other ground. If St. Paul, after all his sufferings and sacrifices and labors, would trust in nothing but this, surely we can safely trust in nothing else. O, then, be persuaded to cry from the heart in the language of our text, Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me. By all the scenes of sorrow, and trial and affliction through which you must pass; by all the dangerous mistakes, the fatal errors into which, as frail, fallible, short-sighted creatures you are liable to fall; by the number, malice, and strength of the enemies which oppose your salvation, and which must be overcome; by all the sin of which you have been guilty, and for which pardon must be obtained; by your dying agonies; by that dread hour in which you must appear before God in judgment, I conjure you to secure, without delay, a comforter, a guide, a protector; an intercessor, a Saviour, by applying believingly to Christ to undertake for you. But perhaps some of you will say, we have already done this. We have long since believed in Christ for salvation, we rely upon the mercy of God through him; we have entrusted all our spiritual and immortal interests to his care, and therefore we need feel no anxiety respecting them. We trust that we are safe, and that all is well. My hearers, these things are easily said, but thousands say them who never trusted in Christ, and for whom he never undertook. To such an one an apostle said, Thou sayest, I have faith; but wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? The faith which applies to Christ is a living faith, that is, a faith which is alive, and which makes its possessor alive in the service of God; a faith which, while it relies on Christ alone, is as active, and diligent, and watchful, and prayerful, and self-denying, as if it relied entirely on itself. Let those, whose pretended faith is not of this kind, remember that Christ saves his people, not simply by working for them, but by working in them, and thus disposing and enabling them to work out their own salvation. When he undertakes for a sinner, he undertakes not to save him without love, repentance, obedience, and a diligent, humble use of the means of grace, but he undertakes to make him perform all these duties. Be assured then that, if you live in the neglect of all these duties, Christ has not undertaken for you, and that, of course, you never truly applied to him. But apply to him in sincerity, and you will soon find a change in yourselves, which will prove that he has undertaken for you, that he has begun to work in your hearts, that he is guiding you into a knowledge of the truth; that he is interceding for you at the bar of God. Yes, truly believe in him, and you will soon have evidence that he has undertaken for you; for every one that believeth hath the witness in himself. My hearers, will you not be persuaded to do this? Must we have the pain of seeing you struggling with afflictions, led astray by errors; subdued and carried captive by your spiritual enemies, and finally dying without hope, and appearing before God without an intercessor, when such a comforter, teacher, and helper, and intercessor as the Lord Jesus Christ, offers to undertake for you? If I can prevail with no others, let

me, at least, hope to prevail with those of you who are afflicted, with those of you who feel ignorant, with those of you who feel burdened by conscious sinfulness and guilt, with those who are asking, What shall we do to be saved? To all such, this ought to prove a word in season. O let them receive it as such. Let them at once repair to the almighty and compassionate Saviour of sinners, and earnestly cry, Lord Jesus have mercy on us, for we are oppressed.

S. THE ORACLES OF GOD

THE ORACLES OF GOD

"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? much every way; chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" Romans 3:1-2 With the history of God’s ancient people, of his gracious interpositions in their favor, and of the distinguished blessings which he conferred on them; this assembly are, it is presumed, familiarly acquainted. None who are thus acquainted with it need be informed, that the works which he wrought for this highly favored nation were, emphatically, great. They were even so in his estimation; for he frequently speaks of them as demanding and displaying, a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm. In the performance of these works, most of the established laws of nature were repeatedly suspended or counteracted; and miracles became events of daily occurrence. Rocks poured out water, and waters were turned to blood; the clouds rained bread, and the winds brought flesh; rivers and seas divided, and the earth opened; the regular succession of day and night was, in a part of the world at least, interrupted, and the sun and the moon stood still in their habitations. Important changes, changes the consequences of which are still extensively felt, were also effected in the political world. A powerful nation was nearly destroyed by an unexampled series of miraculous judgments; seven other nations were exterminated, or driven from their territories; and a new nation, of a peculiar character, was formed, and planted in their room. Nor was this all. Events of a far more extraordinary nature, and of incomparably deeper, and more awful interest than any which have yet been mentioned, occurred. Angels descended from their celestial abodes; disclosed themselves to the eyes, addressed themselves to the ears, and interposed, visibly. in the affairs of mortals: and even Jehovah Himself, coming forth from that unapproachable light which he inhabits, visited and dwelt among men in a manner cognizable by their senses; went before his favored people in a pillar of cloud and fire: conversed face to face with an individual of our species, As a man talketh with his friend; and on Sinai, displayed his presence, his perfections, and his supreme legislative authority, with such attending circumstances of grandeur and terror, as will never again be witnessed on earth, till the day of final retribution shall arrive.

Now why was all this done? The all-wise God who does nothing in vain, and who never acts without an adequate motive, must, surely, have designed to effect some most important object, by these unparalleled works of wonder and power: of condescension and love. He did so; and he has informed its what it was. He had set his love upon this favored nation; he had chosen them to be his own peculiar people; and he lead promised, with an oath, to bestow on them distinguishing blessings. To glorify himself, by displaying his power, his faithfulness, and the riches of his goodness in the fulfillment of this promise, was, as he repeatedly declared, the object which he had in view while performing these works. And what were these promised blessings; the bestowal of which demanded and justified such a profusion of miracles; such extraordinary interpositions and manifestations of Divinity? That they must have been great indeed, cannot be doubted. A brief enumeration of them will show that they were so. They included, the deliverance of the nation from

Egyptian bondage; their settlement in a land flowing with milk and honey; the formation of a national covenant between them and their God; and the establishment of his worship, and of the true religion among them, while all other nations were enslaved by the grossest ignorance, superstition, and idolatry. Such advantages had the Jew; such were the blessings connected with circumcision. We have not yet, however, enumerated them all. The apostle informs us in our text, that the chief blessings enjoyed by his countrymen, consisted in their possession of the Sacred Scriptures; here styled, the oracles of God. It must be recollected, that in making this assertion, he expressed, not his own sentiments merely, but, the mind of the Spirit, by whom he was inspired. We are, therefore, to regard this passage, as containing the testimony of the Spirit of God, that is, of God himself, to the value of the Scriptures. We learn from it, that he viewed them as the most valuable gift which he had bestowed upon the Jews; and their possession as constituting the principal advantage, enjoyed by them above other nations. Now consider a moment, my hearers, how much this implies. You have heard a brief statement, a statement which, you are sensible, falls far below the truth, of the wonderful works which God wrought for this people.

You have heard that his design in performing these works was, to glorify himself, by bestowing on them corresponding blessings. And now it appears, that of all the blessings thus bestowed; blessings, in conferring which God designed to make a grand exhibition of his perfections, and display the riches of his goodness to a favored people, the Scriptures were, in his estimation, the greatest; greater than their deliverance from the most cruel bondage; greater than the possession of the promised land; greater than all their civil and political privileges; greater, even, than all their other religious advantages. The passage before us, then, taken in connection with the facts which have been mentioned, evidently teaches that, in the judgment of God, the Scriptures are one of the most valuable gifts which he can bestow; one of the richest blessings which men can possess. It is scarcely necessary to add, that, if they are so in his judgment, they are so in reality; since his judgment is ever according to truth. And if they are really thus valuable, we ought thus to value them. If they held, the first place among the gifts, which God bestowed on his ancient chosen people, they certainly ought to hold the same place in our estimation, among the gifts which his Providence has bestowed on us. We ought to prize them above our temporal possessions, our liberties, our civil and literary privileges; and to regard their extensive dissemination among us as the richest blessing, which is enjoyed by this highly favored land. To the truth of the preceding remarks and conclusions, many of my hearers will, I doubt not, yield a ready and cordial assent. Some, however, may feel disposed to ask, why does God, and why should we, value the Scriptures less highly? To this question an answer may be found in the title, by which the Scriptures are here designated. They are styled, The Oracles of God. That we may perceive the full import of this title as used by the apostle, and understand what a volume of meaning it conveyed to the minds of his Gentile converts, we must turn our attention for a moment to the heathen oracles; so frequently mentioned, and so highly extolled, by the historians and poets of pagan antiquity. In their writings, the word here rendered, oracles, is used to denote the answers, given, or supposed to be given, by their gods, to those who consulted them according to a prescribed form. By a common figure of speech, the word, oracle, was afterwards applied to the temples or shrines where such answers were given. Whether, as is now generally supposed, these answers were forged by the priests, or whether, as some have contended, they were the results of diabolical agency, it is not necessary to inquire. Suffice it for our present purpose to remark, that though proverbially ambiguous and obscure, they were regarded with the most

profound veneration, and relied upon with the fullest confidence, by a very large proportion of the heathen world. No enterprise of importance was undertaken without consulting the oracles; splendid embassies, with magnificent presents, were sent from far distant states and monarchs for this purpose; the most costly sacrifices were offered, with a view to obtain a propitious answer; and, in more than one instance, contending nations submitted to them the decision of their respective claims. With these facts the Gentile converts to Christianity were well acquainted: in these opinions and feelings of their countrymen, they had, previously to their conversion, participated. From their earliest years they had been taught, not only by precept, but by the far more impressive lessons of example; to venerate the oracles; to rely upon them as infallible guides; and to consider them as a tribunal, from whose decisions there was no appeal. The effects of these prejudices and feelings, thus early imbibed, thus deeply rooted, thus wrought as it were into the very texture of their minds, could not be wholly and at once obliterated, by their subsequent conversion to Christianity. The word, oracles, could scarcely fail to excite in them some of the ideas and emotions, with which it had been so long, and so intimately associated. It must still have retained, in their ears, a venerable and sacred sound. No title, then, could be better adapted to inspire them with veneration for the Scriptures, than that which is here employed by the apostle. It probably appeared to them, far more impressive and full of meaning, than it does to us. Nor would it appear less sacred, or less full of important meaning to the Jew. In their minds this title would be associated with their once venerated Urim and Thummim; and with those responses which Jehovah gave to their fathers by an audible voice, from the inner sanctuary, where he had formerly dwelt, or manifested his presence, in a peculiar and sensible manner. In our version of the Scriptures, this place is frequently styled The Oracle; and it was the only place which ever really deserved the name. The answers which God there gave to the inquiries of his worshippers, were full, explicit, and definite; forming, in all respects, a perfect contrast, to the ambiguous and delusive oracles of Paganism.

These remarks will assist in ascertaining the ideas, which the apostle’s language was suited to convey, and which we may, therefore, presume he intended it should convey, to the minds of his contemporary readers. By employing this language, he did in effect say to the Gentile converts, All that you once supposed the oracles of your countrymen to be, the Scriptures really are. They are the true and living oracles, of the only living and true God. With at least equal force and clearness did his language say to the Jews, The scriptures are no less the word of God, and no less entitled to veneration and confidence, than were the answers which he formerly gave to your fathers, by an audible voice from the mercy seat. It can scarcely be necessary to add, that, though the apostle here refers to the Old Testament only, his expressions are equally applicable to the New; for the same God, who in the former spake by the prophets, has in the latter spoken by his Son: and by apostles, whom His Son commissioned, and His Spirit inspired. The New Testament is, therefore, no less than the Old, an oracle. Both united now compose, The Oracles of God. That this title is given to the Scriptures with perfect truth and propriety, no one who acknowledges their divine inspiration will, it is presumed, deny. They do not indeed, and it is one of their chief excellences that they do not, resemble in all respects the heathen oracles. They neither answer, nor profess to answer, such questions, as were usually proposed to them. They inform no man what will be the duration of his life, nor by what means it will be terminated. They will not predict to us the result of any particular private, or public enterprise. They will not aid the politician in devising, nor the soldier in executing schemes for the subjugation of his fellow creatures. They were never

designed to gratify a vain curiosity; much less to subserve the purposes of ambition or avarice, and this is, probably, one reason why many persons never consult them. But though they give no answers to such questions as these passions suggest, they answer questions incomparably more important, and communicate information infinitely more valuable. If they inform no man when or how his life will be terminated. they inform every man who rightly consults them, how both its progress, and its termination, may be rendered happy. If they inform no man how he may prolong his existence in this world, they will inform every man how he may secure everlasting life in the world to come.

If they give no information respecting the result of any particular enterprise, they will teach us how to conduct all our enterprises in such a manner, that the final result shall be glory and honor, and immortality. And while they inform individuals how they may obtain endless felicity, they will teach nations how to secure national prosperity. In fine, whatever a man's situation and circumstances may be, whatever offices or relations he may sustain; this oracle, if consulted in the manner in which God has prescribed, will satisfactorily answer every question, which it is proper for him to ask; every question, an answer to which is necessary either to his present, or future well being; for it contains all the information, which our most wise and benevolent Creator sees it best that his human creatures should, at present, possess. Indeed we have reason to believe, that should he now condescend to visit and converse with us in a visible form, he would answer all our inquiries by referring us to the Scriptures; for when our Saviour, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, resided on earth, he pursued this course with respect to such questions, as had been already answered in the Old Testament. To such as proposed any of those questions his usual answer was, What saith the scripture? What is written in the law? How readest thou? And if he pursued this course while the Scriptures contained the Old Testament only, we may presume that he would now pursue it exclusively; since the revelation, which God designed for men, is completed by the addition of the New. In possessing the Scriptures, then, our country possesses every real advantage, that would result from the establishment of an oracle among us, where God should give answers to his worshippers by an audible voice, as he formerly did to the Jews. Indeed we possess advantages, in some respects far greater than would result from such an establishment; for wherever the oracle might be placed, it would unavoidably be at a distance from a large proportion of those who wished for its advice; to consult it, a long and expensive journey would often be necessary; and, in many cases of frequent occurrence, an answer, thus obtained, would come too late. But in the Scriptures we possess an oracle, which may be brought home to every family, and every individual; which may be placed in our habitations, in our closets, and consulted daily or hourly, without fatigue, expense or delay; nay more which may be made the companion of the traveler on his journey, and of the mariner on his voyage. In this oracle we possess all, and much more than all, that was possessed by the ancient church in its Urim and Thummin, its ephod, and its sanctuary. By placing it in our closets, and consulting it aright, we may make them to us, all that the Holy of Holies was to the pious Jew; a place where God will meet us, converse with us, answer our inquiries, and accept our offerings. In fine, we have in this oracle, the very mind and heart of our Creator. The thoughts and purposes of his mind, and the emotions of his heart, lie here in silence, waiting an opportunity to make themselves known. Hence, whenever we open the Scriptures, we do in effect, open the lips of Jehovah, and the words of Eternal Truth burst at once upon our ears; the counsels of unerring wisdom address our understandings and our hearts. It is true, that, owing to various causes which we shall presently notice, many, who have

the oracles of God in their hands, are by no means aware of these facts. God speaketh once, yea twice; but man perceiveth it not.

It is also true, that in consequence of having been familiar from our childhood with much of the information which these oracles impart, we are generally far from being sensible, how deeply we are indebted to them, how great is their value; and how deplorable our situation would be rendered by their loss. If we would form just conceptions of these several particulars; we must place ourselves, for a moment, in the situation of a serious, reflecting, inquirer after truth, who has reached the meridian of life, without any knowledge of the Scriptures. Let us suppose such a man to have diligently studied himself, his fellow creatures, and the world around him; and to have made use of all the assistance, which heathen philosophy can afford. Let us suppose, that he has pursued his inquiries as far as unassisted human intellect can go; and that he now finds himself bewildered in a maze of conflicting theories and enveloped by all that distracting uncertainty, perplexity, and anxiety, into which the researches of men unenlightened by revelation, inevitably plunge them. To such a man what would the Scriptures he worth? What would he give for a single hour’s opportunity of consulting an oracle, which should return such answers to his inquiries as they contain? Would you rightly estimate the information which he might derive from such an oracle during that short period? See him, then, approach it, and listen while he consults it.

Perplexed by the numberless questions which impatiently demand a solution, and agitated by an undefinable awe of the invisible, mysterious being whom he is about to address, he scarcely knows how, or where, to commence his inquiries. At length he hesitatingly and tremblingly asks, "To whom are the heavens above me, the world which I inhabit, and the various objects with which it is filled, indebted for their existence?" A mild, but majestic voice replies froth the oracle, In the beginning, God created the heavens, and the earth, and all that is therein. Startled by the scarcely expected answer, but soon recovering his self possession, the inquirer eagerly exclaims, "Who is God—what is his nature—his character—his attributes?" God, replies the voice, is a Spirit: He is from everlasting to everlasting, without beginning of days, or end of years; and with him is no variableness, nor shadow of turning; He fills heaven and earth; He searches the hearts, and tries the reins of the children of men; He is the only Wise, the Almighty, the High, and Holy, and Just, One; He is Jehovah, Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; but one who will by no means clear the guilty. A solemn pause ensues. The inquirer’s mind is overwhelmed. It labors, it sinks, it faints, while vainly attempting to grasp the illimitable, incomprehensible Being, now, for the first time, disclosed to its view. But a new, and more powerful motive now stimulates his inquiries, and, with augmented interest, he asks, "Does any relation or connexion subsist between this God and myself?" He is thy Maker, returns the oracle, the Father of thy spirit, and thy Preserver; He it is who giveth thee richly all things to enjoy; He is thy Sovereign, thy Lawgiver, and thy Judge; in Him thou dost live, and move, and exist, nor can any one deliver thee out of his hands; and when, at death, thy dust shall return to the earth as it was, thy spirit will return to God who gave it. "How," resumes the inquirer, "will he then receive me?" He will reward thee according to thy works. "What are the works," the inquirer asks, "which this Sovereign requires of me?" Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. Every transgression of this law is a sin; and the soul that sinneth shall die. "Have I sinned?" the inquirer tremblingly asks. All, replies the

oracle, have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. The God, in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified." A new sensation, the sensation of conscious guilt, now oppresses the inquirer, and with increased anxiety he asks, "Is there any way in which the pardon of sin may be obtained?" The blood of Jesus Christ, replies the oracle, cleanseth from all sin. He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy. "But to whom shall it confess them?" the inquirer resumes "where shall I find the God whom I have offended, that I may acknowledge my transgressions, and implore his mercy?"

He is a God at hand, returns the voice; He is not far from thee; I, who speak to thee, am he. "God be merciful to me a sinner," exclaims the inquirer, smiting upon his breast, and not daring to lift his eyes towards the oracle: "What, Lord, wilt thou have me to do?" Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, answers the voice, and thou shalt be saved. "Lord, who is Jesus Christ? that I may believe on him?" He is my beloved Son, whom I have set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood; Hear thou him, for there is salvation in no other. Such are, probably, some of the questions which would be asked by the supposed inquirer; and such are, in substance, the answers which he would receive from the oracles of God. That these answers contain but a small part of the information, which may be drawn from them, it is needless to remind you. Yet of this small part only, who can compute the value? Who can say what it would be worth, to one who should rightly improve it? To beings situated as we are, —to immortal, accountable, sinful creatures, hastening to eternity, to the tribunal of a justly offended God; what is wealth, what is liberty, what is life itself, compared with such information as this? compared with instructions, which make them wise unto salvation? compared with that knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ, which is eternal life? To these remarks it may, perhaps, be replied; that, though to a man who had never seen the Scriptures, they might serve, in some respects, as an oracle; and even prove a gift of inestimable value, yet to us, and to others, who have long been familiar with their contents, they can answer no such purpose, and must, therefore, be of far inferior worth. Why, it may be asked, should we consult them as an oracle, when we are already acquainted with the answers which they will return? But has the man who asks this, or has any man that ever existed, drawn from the Scriptures all the information which they contain? He who asserts, or supposes that he has done it, proves only that he needs to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God; for they assert that, If any man thinketh he knoweth any thing, if he supposes himself to have acquired sufficient knowledge of any religious subject, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

It may reasonably be doubted whether any one present would have discovered that the declaration of Jehovah, I am the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, furnishes a conclusive proof of the existence of the human soul, during the period which elapses between death and the resurrection, had not our Saviour pointed it out to us. And how many times might we have read the declaration; Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedec, before we should have suspected, that it involves all those important consequences, which St. Paul deduces from it in his epistle to the Hebrews? These instances render it reasonable to suppose, that many other passages contain proofs and illustrations of important truths, which have never been noticed; and which yet remain, to reward the researches of future inquirers. However this may be, it is certain, that he who but seldom consults the oracles of God, he who does not habitually repair to them as his counselor and guide, will receive from them no satisfactory answers. He only, whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates therein day and night, will be like a tree planted

by the rivers of water, which bringeth forth its fruit in season.

It may further be remarked in reply to the objection before us, that many of the terms in which the oracles of God are expressed, contain a fullness, a depth, or rather an infinity of meaning, which no created mind can ever fully comprehend. What finite mind, either human or angelic, ever fully comprehended, or ever will fully comprehend, all that is contained in the names assumed by Jehovah, in the titles given to Jesus Christ, or in the words, eternity, heaven, hell, everlasting punishment, everlasting life? Now he who most frequently consults the oracles of God, in the manner prescribed by their author, will penetrate most deeply into the unfathomable abyss of meaning, which these and other terms of a kindred nature, contain. He may, indeed, receive the same answers to his inquiries, which he had received on former occasions; but these answers will convey to his mind, clearer and more enlarged conceptions of the truths which they reveal. His views will resemble those of an astronomer, who is, from time to time, furnished with telescopes of greater power.

Or, to vary the figure, what at first seemed only an indistinct shadow, will become a vivid picture, and the picture will, at length, stand out in bold relief. In fine, he will know more and more of those subjects, which, to use the language of an apostle, pass knowledge; and will enjoy, in a corresponding degree, all the benefits which the Scriptures are designed and adapted to impart. These remarks may be elucidated by a familiar illustration. The lisping child, and the most profound astronomer, uses the word, sun, to denote the same object. The child, however, means by this word, nothing more than a round, luminous body, of a few inches in diameter. But it would require a volume, to contain all the interesting and sublime conceptions, of which this word stands for the sign, or with which it is associated, in the mind of the astronomer. So different individuals may employ the same scriptural terms and phrases; and they may employ them to denote the same objects. Yet wide, almost immeasurably wide, may be the difference between the ideas, which these terms convey to their minds, or which they employ them to express. One man may see little, or perhaps, no meaning, in an expression, which shall fill the mind of another even to overflowing, with the fullness of God.

It may, perhaps, be farther objected to the views which have now been given of the Scriptures, that, as they do not speak in an audible voice, their answers to our inquiries can never possess that life, that energy, that character of deep, impressive solemnity, which attend the responses of a living oracle, such as was formerly established among the Jews. An epithet which is applied to the Scriptures by another inspired writer will assist in obviating this objection. He styles them the lively or living oracles. In perfect conformity with this language an apostle declares that, the word of God is alive and powerful. And another apostle asserts, not only that it is alive, but that it imparts life. Ye are born again, he says to believers, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible; even by the word of God, which liveth, and abideth forever. Now what do these assertions mean? They doubtless mean something, for inspired writers make no unmeaning assertions. What they mean we may, perhaps, learn from our Saviour’s language, The words that I speak unto you, are spirit, and they are life. They were so when he uttered them; they are so still. And they are life because they are spirit; because the Living Spirit of the Living God does, as it were, live in them, and employ their instrumentality in imparting life to all, who consult them in the manner which he has prescribed. Take away his accompanying influences, and the living oracles become, in the emphatic language of an apostle, "a dead letter." But he who consults them aright, does not find

them a dead letter. He finds no reason to complain, that they do not address him with all the force and vivacity of a living speaker. On the contrary he finds, that the living, life giving Spirit, by whom they were inspired, and who still lives and speaks in every line, carries home their words to his understanding, his conscience, and his heart, with an enlightening, vivifying energy, which no tongue of man, or angel, could ever impart to language. The voice of God himself; bursting in thunder from heaven, could scarcely speak in accents more powerful, commanding, and impressive. Is this language too strong? What then means the interrogation of Jehovah? Is not my word like a fire, and like a hammer, which breaketh the rock in pieces? Indeed it is. It has been the instrument of breaking all tire flinty hearts that ever were broken; and every heart which it breaks, it heals again. Yes, The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. And what more can be expected of any oracle, what can man wish that any oracle should do more, than effect the illumination of his understanding, the conversion of his soul, the communication of wisdom to his mind, and of joy to his heart?

It is, however, readily acknowledged that thousands, who possess and peruse the Scriptures, derive none of these benefits from their perusal, and receive from them no satisfactory answers. But the reason is obvious. They do not consult them in the manner which God has prescribed. They do not consult them, as an oracle of God ever ought to be consulted. They do not, for instance, consult them with becoming reverence. They do not feel, when opening the sacred volume, that the mouth of God is about to open, and address them. They do not feel as they will acknowledge an Israelite ought to have felt, when approaching the Holy of Holies, to ask counsel of his Maker. On the contrary, they peruse the Scriptures with little more reverence, than the works of a human author.

They consult them, as they would consult a dictionary or an almanac. Indeed we are all, in this respect, criminally deficient. Permit me here to make a direct, but respectful and affectionate appeal to the consciences of my audience, and ask, had you seen an Israelite approach, and address the oracle of Jehovah, in the same manner, and with the same feelings, with which you have too often perused the Scriptures, would you not have expected to see him, instead of receiving a gracious answer, struck dead by a flash of that fire which consumed Nadab and Abihu, the irreverent sons of Aaron? My hearers, if we would consult the oracles of God in a manner acceptable to him, and beneficial, or even safe, to ourselves, we must practically remember the declaration which he made on that awful occasion; I will be sanctified in all that approach me; and the language of our hearts, when opening the sacred volume, must be, I will now hear what the Lord my God shall say; speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. Nor is sincerity less necessary than reverence to one, who would rightly consult the oracles of God. By sincerity is meant a real desire to know our duty, with a full determination to believe and obey the answers we shall receive; however contrary they may be to our natural inclinations, our favorite pursuits, or our preconceived opinions. How useless, how much worse than useless, it is to consult these oracles without such a disposition, we may learn from a divine declaration, recorded in the book of Ezekiel. Some of the elders of Israel, it appears, visited the prophet, professedly with a view to inquire of the Lord. But the only answer which they obtained was this; Are ye come to inquire of me; As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you. He also informs us what were the reasons of this

determination. These men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face; and should I be at all inquired of by them? He then proceeds to declare, that if any man, of any nation, shall presume to consult him with idols in his heart, he will set his face against that man, and answer him according to the multitude of his idols. My hearers, if we consult the oracles of God with a view to draw from them an answer, which shall gratify our sinful inclinations, or justify our questionable pursuits and practices, or support our favorite prejudices, we do, in effect, come to inquire of the Lord with idols in our hearts, and can expect nothing but a corresponding answer. The same remark is applicable to every one, who consults the Scriptures, while he neglects known duties, or disobeys known commands. Such a man has idols in his heart; idols which he prefers to Jehovah; and why should he be favored with any further answers, while he disregards those which he has already received? We may see these remarks exemplified in the history of Saul. He had been guilty, he was still guilty, of known disobedience; and therefore, when he inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not. To a similar cause, the ill success of many, who now consult the Scriptures, without deriving from them any advantage, is, doubtless, to be ascribed.

There are others whose want of success in consulting the oracles of God is owing to their unbelief. As no food can nourish those, who do not partake of it; as no medicines can prove salutary to those, who refuse to make use of them; so no oracles can be serviceable to those, by whom they are not believed with a cordial, practical, operative faith. It must ever be remembered that though the Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, it is only through faith in Christ Jesus. To those, in whom this faith does not exist, wisdom is not imparted.

Finally, many persons derive no benefit from the oracles of God, because they attempt to consult them without prayer. But without prayer, though they may be read, they cannot, properly speaking, be consulted. Consulting an oracle is an act, which, in its very nature, implies an acknowledgment of ignorance, and a petition for guidance, for instruction. It is the act of a blind man, extending his hand to an unseen guide, and requesting his assistance. He, then, who reads the Scriptures without prayer, does not really consult them; does not treat them as an oracle; and, therefore, shall not find them such. It is to him, who first humbly speaks to God, that God will condescend to speak. It is to him, who, with the temper of a little child, and with a heart which receives the truth in the love of it, consults the oracle upon his knees, and prays over every response, that God will unlock all his hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He who, in this manner, daily consults it, shall he guided as safely, as an all-wise God can guide him; and conducted to heaven as certainly, as there is a heaven; for if he who walketh with wise men shall be wise, how much more shall he who walketh with God? Whatever else we neglect, then, let us not neglect the Scriptures.

Whatever else we consult, let us not fail to consult the oracles of God. Should we be guilty of this negligence, the queen of the South will rise up in the judgment, and condemn us; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; but wisdom, infinitely greater than that of Solomon, is here. Nay, the heathen will rise up, and condemn us; for they spared no labor or expense in consulting their worthless oracles; but we have the living oracles of the living God in our hands, and may at all times consult them, without expense, and without fatigue. Who, then, will be so much his own enemy as to neglect them? When the Infinite, the All-wise, the Almighty God, stooping from his eternal throne in the heavens, condescends to address us as a father; to place before us a transcript of his mind and his heart; to converse with us familiarly, as a

man talketh with his friend; to narrate the history of his past works, and of past ages; and to reveal to us future scenes, and events; and when the information thus communicated, involves the fate of the world which we inhabit, our own eternal destiny, and that of our fellow creatures; who can be so insensible, so sottish, so impious, as to refuse attention! Whosoever hath ears to hear, let him hear. O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Jehovah! Listen, O listen, when thy Maker speaks. But to consult the oracles of God is not the only duty imposed by their possession. Another duty, which we are no less sacredly bound to perform, is to place them, so far as we have ability and opportunity, in the bands of our destitute fellow creatures. An opportunity of performing this duty is now presented you. The object of the Society, at whose instance we are assembled, is, to furnish a numerous, valuable, and too long neglected class of our fellow citizens, with the sacred oracles; and to persuade them, if possible, to consult these oracles in such a manner, as shall insure their present moral and religious improvement, and their final salvation. In the prosecution of this object, the Society need, and request, your countenance, your aid; and they will not, we trust, request it in vain. By granting it, you may place in the hands of a fellow immortal, at once, all the truth, which the Father of Lights was employed, for many ages, in communicating to mankind. You may confer on him, at a very trifling expense, those sacred oracles, which, at the expense of numberless miracles, God conferred on his chosen, favored people, as the most valuable gift which his providential hand could bestow.

You may confer a blessing more valuable than wealth, than liberty, than life itself. All your other possessions, without the Bible, world be a gift, incomparably less precious than the Bible alone. By conferring this gift on mariners, we shall assist in discharging a debt of no trifling magnitude, which has already remained too long unpaid. To mariners we are indebted, under God, for a considerable portion of those very oracles, with which we are now requested to furnish mariners. That several of the writers of the New Testament, and a still greater number of the apostles, belonged to this class of society, you need not be informed. We are, also, deeply indebted to them in a temporal view. They have long acted a humble, indeed, but a most important part, in extending the boundaries of human knowledge, in aiding the progress and diffusing the blessings, of civilization, and thus promoting the general interests of mankind. To them our country is indebted for its discovery, and its settlement. To them this city, in common with all other commercial cities, is indebted for its prosperity. Their direct, or indirect agency has erected, decorated, and furnished your houses, replenished your stores, and increased your wealth and population to their present extent. Take away seamen, and where is commerce? Take away commerce, and where is the prosperity of this city? They are the hands which she extends to the east, and to the west, to grasp, and bring home to her bosom, the rich fruits of widely distant climes. To them we are all indebted for the various foreign productions, which compose so large a part of the conveniences, and even necessaries, of civilized life. You can visit no town, you can scarcely find a cottage, in our country, to the support and comfort of whose inhabitants, mariners have not contributed.

It must not be forgotten that, in procuring for us these advantages, our seamen have placed at hazard, not only their lives, but their eternal interests. Of this fact, as well as of our obligations to this neglected part of the community, must of us have, probably, thought too little, and too lightly. While enjoying, at our ease, the fruits of their perils and labors, we have too often failed to recollect, that the men who procured for us these enjoyments, did it at the expense, of cutting

themselves off from most of the comforts of civilized, social, and domestic life; depriving themselves, in a great measure, of the religious institutions and privileges with which their countrymen are favored; throwing themselves into the midst of snares and temptations, and jeopardizing all that is valuable, all that ought to be dear, to an immortal, accountable being, advancing to meet the retributions of eternity. We have not sufficiently adverted to the obvious fact, that the mariner, while pursuing the voyage of life, is almost inevitably exposed to rocks, whirlpools, and quicksands, incomparably more dangerous, and more difficult to shun, than any which he is called to encounter in navigating the deep. A very little reflection will convince us, that, while he continues to be exposed to these dangers without any safeguard, foreign productions must be obtained at an expense, infinitely transcending their value; an expense which no finite mind can estimate, and which no benevolent mind can contemplate but with horror. Did we view this subject in the light of revelation, and feel in view of it as we ought; it may well be doubted, whether we could enjoy the productions thus obtained, or even consent to make use of them. When David thirsted for water from the well of Bethlehem, whence he had often drawn refreshment in his youthful days, and some of his soldiers, at the hazard of their lives, broke through an opposing army to procure for him a cup of this much desired water, he refused to drink of it, but poured it out before the Lord, exclaiming, Be it far from me that I should do this; is it not the blood of the men, who went in jeopardy of their lives! He felt that water, thus obtained, was too precious for a mortal’s lips: too precious for any other use, than that of being offered to the Lord of life. And who will deny, that this was the language, that these were the genuine feelings, of a noble, benevolent; pious mind? Yet how often do we forget to exercise similar feelings, in similar circumstances? How often do we, without reflection, eat, and drink, and wear, the price of blood, the blood of the soul! How deeply dyed with this blood are foreign productions, before they reach our hands! How many of our fellow immortals have sunk, not in the ocean merely, but in the gulf of perdition, that we might be gratified with the fruits of other climes! My hearers, were there no other remedy for these tremendous evils, were they necessarily and inseparably connected with commerce, every one who possesses a particle of that spirit by which David was then animated, or of that concern for immortal beings which glowed in the bosom of the Son of David, would say, that commerce ought to be at once, and forever, abandoned. Every one who has the feelings, I will not say of a Christian, but of a man, would exclaim, "Better, infinitely better, that we should be confined to the productions of our own soil, than that so many of our fellow creatures, our countrymen, should be exposed to such imminent danger of moral and eternal ruin!" But we are not reduced to this alternative. A remedy for the moral evils to which our mariners are exposed is already provided, and may easily be applied. Let them all be furnished with the oracles of God. Let those by whom they are employed, whose advice they will, probably, respect, say something to them of the value of these oracles, and of the infinite importance of consulting them aright. Let measures be taken for enabling them to enjoy the full benefit of our religious institutions, during the short periods of their residence on shore. In a word, let them be convinced, that we regard them as immortal, accountable creatures; that we feel a deep solicitude for their present and future happiness; that we are willing to do all in our power to secure it; and that we believe it can be secured by no other means, than those which the Scriptures reveal. Is this requiring too much? I will not offer such an insult to the understandings and the hearts of this assembly, as to indulge a suspicion that they are disposed to reply, "It is." Some of the largest commercial cities in our own, and in other countries, have already practically said, "It is not requiring too much." The members of

this Marine Bible Society, and many others among your fellow citizens, have, in the same manner, made a similar reply.

They have made the most laudable exertions to meliorate the moral condition of your seamen, and to furnish them with an antidote to those evils to which they are peculiarly exposed; and nothing, but a more extensive and efficient cooperation on the part of those who employ them, is wanting to render these exertions successful. And is it possible that, in an age like the present, and in a city like this, such a cooperation should continue to be wanting? Is it considered as important that no vessel should be sent to sea, without some medicinal provision for the health of its crew? and is it not, at least, equally important, that every vessel should be furnished with the remedy, which God has provided for the moral diseases, to which seamen are particularly exposed? Self-interest alone, were there no other motive, should prompt the careful performance of this duty; for these diseases, when suffered to become inveterate, prove, not only fatal to the subjects of them, but injurious to their employers. It is impossible to estimate, with any approach to accuracy, the losses which commercial men have sustained, in consequence of the negligence, the unfaithfulness, and the intemperance of those, to whom their property, while on the ocean, was necessarily entrusted; but no one, who has attended at all to the subject, can doubt, that these losses have been great. Nor will any unprejudiced person doubt, that many of them would have been prevented, had proper attention been always paid to the moral and religious improvement of seamen. There is, probably, no merchant, whatever his religious sentiments may be, who would not think his property more safe, in the care of such as revere and consult the oracles of God, than of those who do not possess, and, of course, cannot regard them.

Permit me to proceed a step farther, and inquire, whether that God, who so often constrains men to read their sins in their punishment, and employs the vices, which their negligence has fostered, to scourge them, may not have permitted the numerous and shocking piracies which have been recently perpetrated, with a view to chastise commercial nations, and rouse them from their criminal insensibility to the religious interests of seamen? What else could such nations expect, either from his justice, or from the manner in which they have long treated this neglected portion of the community? They commit the mariner to the ocean at an early age, before his character is formed, or his principles established. Inexperienced, unarmed, unprepared for the assault, he is there assailed by temptations, which it would require the full vigor of mature, and deeply rooted, virtuous principle to resist. Day after day, and year after year, the assault is continued, without intermission, and in almost every conceivable variety of form; while no friendly hand is extended to aid, no cheering voice is employed to encourage him in maintaining the arduous conflict. Can we then wonder; that, sooner or later, he is overcome? And when he is once overcome, whence shall he derive any inducement, or encouragement, to resume the contest? He has, indeed, a conscience, and, for a time, it will speak. Bat though this monitor may reproach him for his fall, she cannot assist him to rise; she cannot even inform him where assistance may be obtained. The oracles of God would give him this information, but he has them not. Destitute of this guide, the reproaches of an accusing conscience serve only to torment him. They become too painful to be endure; how shall he silence them? There is one way, a terrible, a desperate way indeed, but he knows no other. Example points it out to him, and urges him to follow it; and he obeys. He flies to the intoxicating bowl, drowns his reason and his conscience together, and by degrees, become a beast, nay, an incarnate fiend. What is now to restrain him from crime, from piracy, from murder?

What is to prevent the remainder of his wretched life from being spent in the perpetration of every outrage, which excites the abhorrence of earth, and the indignation of heaven? Suppose it, (the supposition is, alas! too often realized,) to be thus spent. Death, which comes to all, must at length come to him. It may come as the messenger of public justice; or it may come in the form of what we call a casualty, and hurry him to the bar of his offended God, in a fit of intoxication, or with a half tittered curse upon his lips. My hearers, this is no fiction. It is the real history of hundreds, probably of thousands; of many, too, who commence the voyage of life, with prospects no less bright, with hopes no less sanguine than your own. And who, that has the feelings of a man, can contemplate unmoved, ruin like this? ruin so complete, so terrible, so hopeless! My hearers, it is from such ruin, that we now implore you to assist in saving your fellow creatures, your countrymen. We entreat you to furnish them with that volume, which a most wise and merciful God has given to lost, bewildered, guilty man, for his oracle, his solace, and his guide. Say not, the gift will avail them nothing. Facts do not warrant this assertion. In proportion to the seed sown upon it, the ocean has yielded as rich a harvest as the land.

It would be easy to enlarge on this fruitful topic to a much greater extent. It would be easy to suggest a multitude of considerations, suited to convince the understanding, and to affect the heart. But we purposely omit them. Why should we occupy your time, and weary your patience, with arguments and motives urged by mortal lips, when we have before us an oracle, which, in a few impressive words, will inform us, at once, what we ought to do? To this oracle we refer the seaman’s cause. To its unerring decisions we appeal; and in this appeal, we doubt not, you will cordially unite. It is presumed that the only question, relative to this subject, which any individual present can wish to propose, is this; Is it a duty incumbent on me, to aid in promoting the moral and religious improvement of seamen? We may consider this question as having been proposed in the silence of the heart, and He who reads the heart has given this answer: —If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, I knew it riot; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall he not render to every man according to his works? Is not this answer sufficiently explicit? Is it not as perfectly applicable to the case before us, as if it had been originally uttered with an exclusive reference to seamen? Are they not "drawn" by powerful temptations, as by a thousand cords, to that second death from which there is no resurrection? Are not many of them "ready to be slain" by their vices? enemies which kill, not the body only, but the soul. And if we neglect to furnish them with the Scriptures, do we not "forbear" to attempt their deliverance? Should any one still consider this answer as inapplicable, let him impute the error, not to the oracle, but to the erring lips which gave it utterance, and listen to another response: Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it, but, as thou hast opportunity, do good to all men. Can any thing more be necessary? Surely, no one will insult Jehovah by asking, whether it is doing good to seamen, to place his word in their hands. Surely, no one can doubt whether, should He address us from heaven, he would command us to furnish them with the Scriptures. Some may; however, wish to inquire, whether the efforts, which are now making to promote the religious interests of seamen, will be crowned with ultimate success. To their inquiries this is the answer: The abundance of the seas shall be converted unto the church of God, the ships of Tarshish shall bring her sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, even as the waters cover the seas. My hearers, we shall add no more. When God speaks, it

becomes man to be silent.

Chapter 79

S. THE PROMISED FRUIT OF CHRISTS SUFFERINGS.

THE PROMISED FRUIT OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS.

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.—Isaiah 53:11 Could any of us have seen what angels saw, when the Son of God left the bosom of his Father, and exchanged a throne in heaven for a manger on earth; could we have seen him divesting himself of his glory, laying aside the form of God, assuming the form of a servant, and appearing on earth, in the likeness of sinful flesh, with the avowed purpose of living in poverty, and dying an ignominious, agonizing, and accursed death—we should naturally have been led to exclaim, What adequate object can he have in view? What motive can be sufficiently powerful to induce such a being to make sacrifices so great, to encounter sufferings so exquisite! This question an apostle has partially answered. He has informed us, that Jesus Christ endured the cross and despised the shame for the sake of the joy set before him. In what this joy consisted, we may learn from the chapter before us, and especially from our text. It is here predicted that he shall see of the travail of his soul, that is, of the fruits or effects of his sufferings, and be satisfied. In the context we are informed what these fruits will be. He shall justify many, he shall see his seed, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. The joy set before him, for the sake of which he endured the cross, and despised the shame, was then the joy, which would result from seeing his Father glorified and sinners saved, in consequence of his incarnation, sufferings, and death. This, our text declares, he shall see, and the sight will satisfy him. While contemplating it, he will feel that he is amply rewarded for all his sacrifices, toils, and sufferings. My hearers, the prediction in our text has already been partially fulfilled; it will be fulfilled in a still greater degree, before time shall end; and its complete fulfillment will be witnessed in eternity. These three assertions we propose to illustrate, establish, and improve.

I. The prediction before us has already been partially fulfilled. Already has our Redeemer seen much of the fruit of his sufferings. Our once barren world, watered by his tears and his blood, has already produced a large harvest of righteousness and salvation. his cross, like Aaron's rod, has budded and blossomed, and begun to bear precious incorruptible fruit. From his cross sprang all the religious knowledge, all the real goodness, all the true happiness, which has existed among mortals since the fall. On his cross, which, like the ladder seen by Jacob in vision, unites heaven and earth, myriads of immortal beings, who were sinking into the bottomless abyss, have ascended to the celestial mansions; —their myriads now alive, are following them in the ascent. In the patriarchs, prophets, and pious Israelites; in the apostles, and other primitive preachers of christianity; in the numerous converts, who, by their instrumentality, were turned from darkness to light; in all the truly pious individuals, who have since existed among men; in all the real Christians who are now on earth, our Redeemer has seen the fruits of his sufferings. In every real Christian now present he sees one of these fruits, sees a soul, which has been redeemed by his blood from endless wretchedness and despair, and made an heir of glory and honor and immortality. 0 then, how much, how very much, has ho already seen effected, in fulfillment of the promise before us! How many immortal souls have been plucked as brands from everlasting burnings! How many

individuals have been instructed, sanctified, pardoned, comforted, and made more than conquerors, through him that loved them! How many pious families have rejoiced together in his goodness; how many churches have been planted, watered, and made to flourish How much happiness have the members of all these churches enjoyed in life, in death, and in heaven! What an exceedingly great, and almost innumerable multitude of happy spirits, redeemed from among men, are now surrounding the throne of God and the Lamb! And even while I speak, the number of these happy spirits, and the harvest, which springs from a Savior's sufferings, is increasing. Even while I speak, sinners in different parts of the world are flocking into the kingdom of God. Even while I speak, immortal souls, washed in a Savior's blood, sanctified by his spirit, and just made victorious over the last enemy, death, are entering heaven from the four quarters of the globe, and commencing their everlasting song, Now unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion forever and ever. And while our thrice blessed Redeemer has thus seen, and still sees the happiness of human beings increased by his sufferings, he has also seen, and still sees the glory of God augmented in an equal degree. He has seen millions, who were once enemies to his Father, transformed to friends; he has seen millions, who once blindly worshipped false gods, and ascribed to them the glory of creating, preserving, and governing the world, turning from their worthless idols to worship the only living and true God, who made heaven and earth. He has seen his Father's law obeyed and honored by multitudes, who, but for him, would have continued to trample it under foot. He has seen ten thousand times ten thousand of prayers and ascriptions of praise, ascending from a world, which, but for his interposition, would never have offered one of these acceptable, spiritual sacrifices to his Father. He has seen the eternal throne surrounded, and him who sits upon it adored by almost countless multitudes, who were once dishonoring God on earth, and preparing to blaspheme him in hell. In fine, he has seen his religion flying through the world as on angels' wings, scattering blessings wherever she comes, and loudly proclaiming peace on earth, good will to men, and glory to God in the highest. Surely then, the prediction before us has already been partially fulfilled.

II. During the period which must elapse before time shall end, this prediction shall receive a much more ample accomplishment. That this will be the case, we might almost venture to predict from present appearances, even were the scriptures silent respecting it. Never since the days of the apostles have such exertions, as are now witnessed, been made to extend the triumphs of the cross; never has such a grand and powerful combination of means been employed for this purpose; never has the blessing of heaven more evidently attended human efforts; never have been seen such clear and striking indications that a great moral revolution in the world is approaching. If we turn to the scriptures, we shall find the hopes and expectations thus excited abundantly confirmed. We there find the most explicit predictions, the most animating assurances of the future universal prevalence of pure Christianity. All that has been seen is but the first fruits of that rich harvest, which our Redeemer will yet gather in. He who cannot lie has not only promised, but sworn by himself that the Jews and Gentiles shall be brought into the fold of Christ, that the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth, even as the waters cover the seas; that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and Savior, and that for many successive ages, he shall reign triumphantly over every nation, and kindred, and people.

While predicting this extension of the Messiah's kingdom, and describing the future glories of his reign on earth, the sacred writers exhaust all the powers of language, and burst forth into such

poetic, enraptured strains, as the Spirit of God could alone inspire. And 0, how will our Redeemer see the effects of his sufferings, when all these glowing descriptions shall be realized; when, with benevolent delight, he shall glance his eye over this once ruined, polluted, wretched world, and see all his enemies baffled; ignorance, error, superstition, vice, and misery banished, his religion everywhere enthroned in the hearts of men, the earth filled with holiness, and happiness, and peace; while from fertile plains, smiling villages, flourishing towns, and populous cities, one universal cloud of incense ascends before God, and the voice of the whole human family, as the voice of one man, pours forth the language of prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving to the Father of all; and the wide open gates of heaven are continually thronged by those, who pour into it from the east and the west, from the north and the south, to swell the number of its happy inhabitants, and add new voices to its everlasting songs! What countless myriads will then be saved! How gloriously will salvation triumph ! How will God be glorified, how will the fruits of holiness abound, when all those parts of the world, which are now a moral wilderness, shall become as Eden, and the whole earth be made as the garden of God. And how will human happiness be increased, when generation after generation shall taste the felicity of heaven, during a long life on earth; and then, by an easy and peaceful death, be removed to the mansions of eternal rest.

III. But it is to the final consummation of all things, it is to eternity, that we must look for the complete fulfillment of this animating prediction. Not till then will the great work of redemption be finished; not till then will our Redeemer see so much of the fruit of his suffering, as is necessary to satisfy him. But then he will see all, that is here promised; all, that he ever expected to see; all, that is wanting to render him perfectly satisfied. He will then see the bodies of all his people raised from the grave, glorious, incorruptible, immortal, and perfectly resembling his own; for, says an apostle, addressing Christians, he shall change our vile bodies, and fashion them like unto his own glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power, by which he is able to subdue even all things to himself.

Then will his triumph over death and the grave be complete. Then, as inspiration expresses it, death will be swallowed up of victory. Then, too, our Redeemer will see all his chosen people assembled around him, perfect in holiness, and perfectly happy in the contemplation of his glory and the enjoyment of his presence. For this he prayed just before his crucifixion. Father, said he, I will that those whom thou hast given rue, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory. He cannot then be entirely satisfied, till this prayer is answered in its full extent, till every one whom the Father has given him is brought home to glory. At the period to which we refer, and not till then, will this be done. The last redeemed sinner will then have exchanged earth for heaven, and have begun to gaze with rapture on the unveiled glories of his Redeemer.

Finally. Our Savior will then see the great work, for the accomplishment of which he died, completed. He will see that spiritual edifice, the foundation of which was laid in his blood, which has been so long erecting, standing before him finished, resplendent in glory, and perfect in beauty. Says an apostle, Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.; but that it should be holy, and without blemish. The church which Christ thus loved, and for which he gave himself, is called his body. All who compose it are styled his members. Now until the last member of this mystical body is raised to heaven, and fixed in its destined place, the body itself will not be perfect and complete, and of

course, Christ its head will not be satisfied. But when that is done, his satisfaction will be complete. Then all his members will be fixed forever in the place, which he is now preparing for them, in a state of absolute perfection—perfection in knowledge, and holiness, and happiness. And 0, what tongue of man can describe, what finite mind can conceive, the enrapturing sight, on which the eye of our Redeemer will then rest!

He will see an innumerable multitude of immortal beings, with capacities like those of angels, reflecting in body and in mind, his own spotless, glorious image, no less perfectly than the polished mirror reflects the dazzling image of the noon day sun. He will see them all filled to overflowing, with unutterable felicity, and glowing, like the seraphs around them, with burning love and melting gratitude to him, who redeemed them by his blood. He will see them casting their eyes downward to contemplate the lake of fire, the everlasting burnings, from which they have been thus redeemed, and then raising them to gaze on their Deliverer, with emotions which even the language of heaven cannot express, but which he can read in their swelling, and almost bursting hearts. He will see them, in holy transports of affection and humility, casting themselves and their crowns at his feet; hear them cry, with a voice like that of many waters, and of mighty thunderings, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth! Blessing, and glory, and honor, and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever. Stretching his omniscient eye through eternity, he will see them enjoying all this happiness, and ascribing all this glory to God, during its endless ages; their minds continually expanding, their faculties enlarging, and their souls drinking in more and more of that fullness of the Godhead, the whole of which they can never contain. And while he sees all this, he will see, that but for his sufferings and death, all these immortal beings, now so holy, so glorious, so happy, would have been sinners, demons, fiends, doomed to drink forever of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation. All this, and much more than this, much more than man or angel can describe, he will see, and while he sees it, will exclaim, Father, It is enough; thy promise is fulfilled; I am satisfied.

Permit me now. my hearers, to lead your attention to some reflections, which our subject naturally suggests, and which will, I trust, be found to have an intimate connection with the object for which we are now assembled.

1. How great, how glorious, how worthy of its Author, does the work of redemption appear, when viewed in the light of this subject. If it was a work worthy of God, to create the world; if it is a work worthy of God, to preserve and govern the world, much more was it a work worthy of him to redeem the world. If his infinite perfections were ever called into action by an adequate motive, it was when they were called to exert themselves in effecting the salvation of a self-destroyed race of immortal intelligences, and to promote the glory of his great name in effecting it. The accomplishment of such a work as this was a motive, which might well bring down the Son of God from heaven, and carry him through all his toils, and support him under all his sufferings. His toils and sufferings were indeed inconceivably great; but so was the object which he had in view; and so was his promised reward, the joy set before him.

2. What conceptions is this subject suited to give us of the happiness, which is now enjoyed, and which, through eternity, will be enjoyed by our divine Redeemer! You have all, my friends, heard much of the happiness of heaven. Those of you, who are christians, know something of it

experimentally; for you have tasted the first fruits of the heavenly inheritance. Your conceptions of it are, indeed, exceedingly inadequate, but you know it to be great. Estimate, then, as far as you are able, the amount of happiness which a single individual will enjoy in heaven, during a whole eternity. Proceed to multiply this amount of happiness by the almost countless number of the redeemed. Then recollect, that Jesus Christ has said, it is more blessed to give than to receive; that is, there is more blessedness, or happiness, in giving, than in receiving. Now Jesus Christ gives, and saints and angels receive, all the happiness, which creatures will ever enjoy in heaven. Of course, as the giver of this happiness, is more blessed, more happy, thall all the receivers, could we then concentrate in one bosom all the happiness, which is enjoyed by all the saints and angels in heaven, it would still be inferior, far inferior to that, which is enjoyed by Jesus Christ alone. Christian, does not your heart exult to hear of the happiness which your Savior enjoys? Does it not labor, and swell almost to bursting, while vainly attempting to fathom that bottomless tide of felicity, which every moment pours, and through eternity will continue to pour, all its fullness into his in finite mind

3. in the light of this subject how great, how lovely does our Savior's benevolence appear? It is to his benevolence alone, that his happiness is to be ascribed. It is the benevolent mind only, which finds more happiness in giving than in receiving. Of course, if our Savior were not benevolent, he would never place his happiness in making others happy. He would be far from being satisfied, far from feeling that he is amply rewarded for all his toils and sufferings, by seeing others enjoy the fruits of them. But this it appears, does satisfy him. All the reward which he expected, all which he desires is, the satisfaction of seeing God glorified, and sinners saved. Here then is perfect disinterested benevolence, benevolence worthy of him whose name is love. And now, my hearers, permit me to apply these remarks to the object for which we are now assembled. This object is, as you are all aware, to unite our efforts, and afford our assistance, in extending the benefits of redemption, in carrying out this great work of man's salvation. We have seen that this is the noblest of God's works, a work, which is every way worthy of himself. To be employed as a willing instrument in carrying on this work, is then the greatest honor, which God can confer on man. Would you not think it an honor to be employed by him in preserving and governing a world? But greater, far greater is the honor of being employed as a co-worker with God in saving a world. This honor have all his saints. This honor we are invited to share.

Again. We have seen, that with the promotion of this work, our Savior's enjoyment of his promised reward is connected. In proportion as this work advances, his satisfaction increases. And does not this fact furnish all who love him with a powerful motive to exertion? Professed disciple of Jesus Christ, do you love, do you wish to gratify your Master, your Redeemer? Is it the language of your heart, what shall I render to my Lord for all his benefits? If so, this is the answer, Labor to promote that cause, which lies so near his heart; that cause, for which he shed his blood; Labor and pray, that the Savior may see more and more of the fruit of his sufferings. While doing this, you will, in effect, be employed by God as a hand, to convey to him a part of his promised reward. And what employment can be more honorable, more delightful, more congenial with the best and strongest feelings of every Christian's heart!

Farther, we have seen that this subject exhibits, in the clearest light, our Savior's disinterested benevolence. We have seen, that the joy set before him, for the sake of which he endured the cross and despised the shame, was the joy, not of exalting or of enriching himself, but of

communicating happiness to others. This, this, was all the reward, which his benevolent heart desired, for labors and sufferings unexampled. In this, as in other respects, his example is proposed to us for our imitation. And imitate it we must, if we would prove that we are his disciples; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his. I repeat it, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. No, the man who does not possess and exhibit some portion of the Savior's disinterested, self-denying benevolence, of his compassion for immortal souls, of his readiness to labor and suffer for their salvation, is not, cannot be, a Christian. He may be any thing else, but he cannot be a Christian. Nor can he be a disciple of Christ, who would not feel himself amply rewarded for all his exertions by the pleasure of seeing them crowned with success. This reward will, as we have seen, satisfy our Savior. Surely then, it ought to satisfy us. And this reward, all, who cordially engage in promoting his cause, shall receive. For the Savior must be satisfied. God has said it, and it must be done. He must have the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. As sin has reigned unto death, so must grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. Talk not of difficulties.

What are difficulties to omnipotence; to him, who speaks and it is done; who commands, and it stands fast; and who can cause a nation to be born in a day? All then, who cordially engage m this work, may engage in it with the certainty, that they shall not labor in vain. As certain as it is that the Savior shall not lose his reward, so certain it is, that they shall not lose theirs. His interest and theirs are inseparably united; when he is satisfied, they will be satisfied. Nor will his faithful servants be required to wait long for their promised reward. Not very far distant probably, is the period, when our Redeemer shall see the promise before us fulfilled in its utmost extent. Already do we witness no equivocal indications that its complete fulfillment is approaching. Already has the day of millennial glory begun to dawn. Already has the daystar been seen from mountains of the East. Already are "blest voices" heard exclaiming from heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; and we have no small reason for hoping, that, before the conclusion of the present century, the same blest voices will be heard to cry, Alleluia, the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever! My hearers, when this period shall arrive, will it not be in the highest degree painful and mortifying to be constrained to say, the long predicted, long expected hour is at length come, but I have done nothing to hasten its arrival. My Savior has gathered in his promised harvest, but none of the seed, which produced it, was sown by my hand, or watered by my tears! If you would not be the subjects of reflections so mortifying, seize the precious opportunity which is afforded you, of committing your seed to the earth, so that hereafter, when he who soweth, and he who reapeth shall rejoice together, you may participate in the joy of your Lord.

Let no one attempt to excuse himself by saying my services are not wanted. Let no one say, Since God has promised that his Son shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied we may safely sit still, and leave him to fulfil this promise. He will indeed fulfil it, but he will fulfil it by human agency. And before it can be fulfilled, before every enemy can be put under our Savior's feet, many exertions must be made, much treasure expended, and many battles fought. Satan, the prince and god of this world, will not resign his usurped dominion without a struggle. The more clearly he perceives, that his time is short, the greater will be his wrath, and the more violent his efforts. During that portion of time, which yet remains, the war which he has long waged with the Captain of our Salvation, will be carried on with unexampled fury. If you would survey the progress and

result of this war, cast your eyes over the world, which is to be at once the field of battle, and the prize of victory. See the earth filled with strong holds and high places, in which the prince of darkness has fortified and made himself strong against the Almighty. See all the hosts of hell, and a large proportion of the inhabitants, the power, the wealth, the talents, and influence of the world ranged under his infernal standard. See his whole artillery of falsehoods, sophistries, objections, temptations, and persecution, brought into the field, to be employed against the cause of truth. See ten thousand pens, and ten times ten thousand tongues, hurling his poisoned darts among its friends. On the other hand, see the comparatively small band of our Savior's faithful soldiers drawn up in opposing ranks, and advancing to the assault, clothed in panoply divine, the banner waving over their heads, while in their hands they wield unsheathed the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, the only weapon, which they are allowed, or wish, to employ. The charge is sounded, the assault is made, the battle is joined,—far and wide its fury rages; over mountains and plains, over islands and continents, extends the long line of conflict; for a time, alternate victory and defeat wait on either side. Now, exulting acclamations from the Christian army proclaim the fall of some strong hold of Satan. Anon, infuriated shouts from the opposing ranks announce to the world, that the cause of Christ is losing ground, or that some Christian standard bearer is fallen. —Meanwhile, far above the noise and tumult of the battle, the Captain of our salvation sits serene, issuing his commands, directing the motions of his followers, sending seasonable aid to such, as are ready to faint, and occasionally causing to be seen the lighting down of his own glorious arm, before which whole squadrons fall, or fly, or yield themselves willing captives. Feeble, and yet more feeble still, gradually becomes the opposition of his foes. Loud, and yet louder still, rise the triumphant acclamations of his friends, till at length, the cry of Victory! Victory! resounds from earth to heaven; and, Victory! Victory! is echoed back from heaven to earth. The warfare ceases,—the prize is won,—all enemies are put under the conquering Savior's feet; the whole earth, with joy, receives her king; and his kingdom, which consists in righteousness, and peace and holy joy, becomes co-extensive with the world. Such, my hearers, is the nature, and such will be the termination and result of the contest, which is now carrying on in the world. In this contest we are now all engaged on the one part or the other; for in this warfare there are no neutrals, he that is not with Christ is against him. Let us all, then, if we have not already done it, enlist under his banner, and make a common cause with him against a rebellious world; and when he shall appear to judge the universe, he will say to us, Come and sit down with me on my throne, even as I overcame, and am seated with my Father on his throne.

Chapter 80

S. THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED DREADFUL AND INTERMINABLE.

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED DREADFUL AND INTERMINABLE. Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Mark 9:44. A MINISTER, my hearers, who would be faithful, must frequently compare his preaching with the scriptures, and inquire, not only whether he preached the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, but whether he gives to every particular doctrine and precept just that place in his sermons, which its importance deserves, or which is given to it in the word of God. On instituting such an inquiry, I find that it is long since I called your attention, particularly, to the punishment, which awaits impenitent sinners in a future state. I have, indeed, frequently alluded to it, and mentioned it incidentally, as was unavoidable; but I have not, I believe, for some years, made it the subject of a discourse. In a word) the doctrine of future punishment has not, of late, filled such a place in my sermons, as it fills in the Bible, as it fills in the discourses of our great teacher, Jesus Christ. I, therefore, feel bound in duty to call your attention to the subject, painful as it is. Some of you may, perhaps, say, or at least think, that it will do no good. I know not that it will; for, so far as I can learn, nothing that I have said of late has done any good. Tell me what subject will do you good, and I will preach upon it. But some will, perhaps, go farther, and say, this doctrine has no tendency to do good it is altogether idle, to think of frightening men into religion. With such remarks I have nothing to do. It is my duty, not to decide what doctrines are likely to do good, but to preach such doctrines as I find in the scriptures; not to determine what means will prove effectual, but to use those means which God has appointed. Of these means this doctrine is one: and whether it does good to any of you, or not, I know that it has done good to thousands; that thousands have been moved by fear to fly from the wrath to come. I know also, that if you believe it, it will do good to you and no truth can be of service, which is not believed. In fine, I dare not pretend to be either more wise, or more compassionate than our Savior; and he thought it consistent both with wisdom and with compassion, to utter the words of our text. And he evidently uttered them with a view to alarm his hearers. He addressed himself to their fears, with a view to produce obedience to his commands. The command, which he thus enforced, was this; If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for, he adds, it is better for thee to enter into life with but one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

There can, I think, be no doubt, that in these expressions our Savior alludes to the manner, in which the Jews disposed of the bodies of the dead. Sometimes, as is the custom with us, they placed them in tombs, where they were, of course, consumed by worms. At others, they prepared a funeral pile, on which the body was placed in order to be consumed by fire. After the fire had been suffered to rage, till nothing remained but cinders and ashes, they quenched the glowing mass, and carefully deposited it in an urn. If we suppose that our Savior alluded to these customs, his expressions may be thus paraphrased You have seen what is done with the body after death. You have sometimes seen it consumed by worms, which, after they had devoured it, died for want of nourishment. And you have sometimes seen it consumed by a fire, which, after a while, was

quenched: But there is another death, which is followed by consequences far more terrible, which affect not the body only, but the soul. Those who die this death, shall be preyed upon by worms, which will never die, and become the fuel of a fire, that will never be quenched. They will be forever dying forever suffering the pangs of the second death, but will never die, never cease to exist. It will be as if the bodies, which you have seen entombed or burnt, could feel the worms, which devour, or the fires, which consume them. Such must have been the import of these expressions, if our Savior alluded, as we have every reason to believe he did, to the funeral ceremonies of the Jews. But whether he did, or not, allude to them, the import of his language is substantially the same. It is indeed figurative; but not, on that account, less full of meaning, or less terrible. Let us then, with feelings similar to those which prompted him to utter this language, lift the veil of figurative expression, and contemplate the awful truths, which it partly discloses, and partly conceals.

I. In dilating upon these truths, I shall say little of the corporeal sufferings, which await impenitent sinners beyond the grave. Such sufferings will certainly compose a part of their punishment; for we are assured that their bodies shall come forth to the resurrection of damnation; and our Savior's language respecting the rich man, who in hell lifted up his eyes, being in torments, more than intimates, that anguish of body was an ingredient in his wretchedness. Indeed, as the body is the servant of the soul, and at once its tempter to many sins, and its instrument in committing them, there seems to be a manifest propriety, in making them companions in punishment. We shall only add, that as after the resurrection the bodies of the wicked will be immortal, they will be capable of enduring suffering, which in this world would cause instant death. But though we know little, because the scriptures say little, of the nature of their bodies, or of the miseries which await them, it is otherwise with respect to the sufferings of the soul. To these sufferings the declarations of scripture seem principally to refer; and these declarations our knowledge of the soul, and of the causes which will hereafter operate to render it miserable, enable us, in some measure, to understand. Especially, will it assist us in understanding the first clause in our text—where their worm dieth not. This expression evidently intimates, that the soul will suffer miseries, analogous to those which would be inflicted on a living body, by a multitude of reptiles constantly preying upon it. And it may be understood to intimate further, that as a dead body appears to produce the worms which consume it, so the soul, dead in trespasses and sins, really produces the causes of its own misery. What are those causes? or, in the language of our text, what is the gnawing worm, which is to prey upon the soul hereafter! I answer,

1. Its own passions and desires. That these are capable of preying upon the soul, and occasioning, even in this life, most acute suffering, those of you, whose passions are naturally strong, need not he informed. And those of you, whose passions are less violent, whose tempers are comparatively mild, may be convinced of the same truth, by seeing the effects of passion upon others. Look, for instance, at a man who is habitually peevish, fretful, and discontented. Has he not gnawing worms already at his heart! I look at the envious man, whose cheek turns pale, and who feels a secret pang, when he hears a rival commended, or sees him successful. Is there no gnawing worm in his bosom'! Look at the covetous man, who wears himself out in the pursuit of wealth, and who is daily harassed by craving desires, cares and anxieties. Can any worm gnaw worse than these'! Look at the votary of ambition, whose success depends on the favor of the great, or of the multitude; who pants to rise, but is kept down by a rival, or by adverse

circumstances; and whose mind is full of contrivances, jealousies, and rivalships. Is there no corroding tooth at work in his breast? Look at the proud man, whose blood boils at every real or fancied neglect; at the passionate or revengeful man, who has always some quarrel upon his hands; at the drunkard, whose passions are inflamed by intoxicating potions, and you will find fresh proofs of this truth. It is true, indeed, that none of these passions make men completely wretched in this world, and the reasons why they do not, are obvious. In the first place, there are, in this world, many things, which are calculated to soothe, or, at least, to divert men's passions. Sometimes they meet with success, and this produces, at least, a transient calm. At another time, the objects, which excite their passions, are absent, and this allows them a little quietness. And there are so many things to be attended to, that men have not always leisure to indulge their passions, or attend to the uneasiness which they produce. Above all, they are from their infancy under the operation of causes, which tend to restrain their passions, and weaken, or at least confine, their rage. Besides, every man must sleep, at intervals, and while he sleeps his passions are at rest. But suppose all these things to be removed, suppose a man to be deprived of sleep, and chained down with nothing to do, but to feel his passions rage continually; suppose him to meet with no success, nothing to soothe his ruffled feelings; suppose the objects, which excite his strongest passions, to be constantly before him; and, finally, suppose all outward and inward restraints to be taken off. Would not such a man be, even in this life, inconceivably wretched? And yet even his wretchedness would be nothing, compared with that, which the sinner's passions and desires will occasion him in a future state.

There his passions, which are now in their infancy, will start up into giant strength; there, all outward and inward restraints will be taken off; there he will have nothing to divert his attention, nothing to assist him in forgetting even for a moment, his tormenting feelings; there every object, which he ever desired, will be removed from him forever, while the desire will remain in equal, in vastly increased force; there he will be surrounded with malicious, cruel, raging companions, who will continually blow up his passions to the highest pitch of fury. There not even the respite, which sleep now affords, will be found. Nor is this all. Nothing inflames the passions of men more than suffering. Even men, who are at other times good tempered, often become impatient, discontented, and even angry, when harassed by severe pain, long sickness, or repeated disappointments. How terribly, then, will the passions of sinners be enraged by the exquisite, hopeless sufferings of a future state! How will they curse themselves, and all around them, and as the scriptures declare, blaspheme God because of their plagues. Against him and against all good beings, they will feel the most furious, implacable hostility; for they will be entirely under the dominion of that carnal mind, which is enmity against Jehovah. In addition, the scriptures teach us, that they will see, though afar off, and with an impassable gulf between them, the happiness of the righteous; and this sight will occasion envy, compared with which, all the envious feelings ever entertained on earth are nothing. Every sinner too will find in the regions of despair some, whom his arguments, his solicitations, or at least his example, helped to bring there; and they will overwhelm him, and enrage his passions, with the bitterest reproaches. Nor will sinners there retain the least shadow of those natural affections, or amiable disposition; which some of them possess here; for our Savior declares, that from him, that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have. Now consider all these things, and say, who can describe, or conceive of, the misery which sinners will suffer from their own gnawing passions, or of the blasphemies, the execrations, the wild uproar, the raging madness, which will be witnessed, when all the wicked,

from all ages and parts of the world, are imprisoned together in the blackness of darkness, like ravenous lions in their dens. To this God refers, when he says of sinners, They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind; that is, they have indulged sinful passions in this life, and those passions, blown up, as from a wind to a whirlwind, shall be their future companions and tormentors.

2. The gnawing worm, of which our Savior speaks, includes the consciences of sinners. The sufferings inflicted by conscience will be even more painful, than those which are occasioned by the sinner's passions; for terrible as are the gnawings of passion, those of conscience are still more so. Her scourge draws blood at every stroke. Even in this world she has drawn many, as she did Judas, to despair, madness, and suicide. But her loudest rebukes, her keenest reproaches here, are mere whispers, compared with the thundering voice, in which she will speak hereafter. Here she speaks only at intervals. There she will speak without intermission. Here the sinner has various ways of stifling her reproaches, or diverting his attention from them. He may rush into scenes of business or amusement; he may silence her with sophistical arguments and excuses, or with promises of future amendment; and, when all other means fail, he may drown her for a season in the intoxicating bowl, as too many, alas, madly do. But there, he will have no means of silencing, or escaping from her reproaches, for a moment. Here she knows comparatively little of God, of duty, or of sin; and therefore, often suffers the sinner to escape, when she ought to scourge him. But there she will see every thing in the clear light of eternity, and in consequence, instead of a whip of small cords, will chastise the sinner as with a scourge of scorpions.

There the sinner will clearly see what a God he has offended, what a Savior he has neglected, what a heaven he has lost, and into what a hell he has plunged himself. All the sins which he has committed, with all their aggravations and consequences; all the sabbaths he enjoyed, the sermons which he heard, the warnings and invitations which he slighted, the opportunities which he misimproved, the serious impressions which he banished, will be set in order before him and overwhelm him with mountains of conscious guilt. And 0, the keen unutterable pangs of remorse, the bitter self-reproaches, the unavailing regrets, the fruitless wishes, that he had pursued a different course, which will be thus excited in his breast! The word remorse, is derived from a Latin word, which signifies, to gnaw again, or to gnaw repeatedly; and surely, no term can more properly describe the sufferings which are inflicted by an accusing conscience. Well then may such a conscience, when its now sleeping energies shall be wakened by the light of eternity, be compared to a gnawing worm. The heathen made use of a similar figure to describe it.

They represented a wicked man as chained to a rock in hell, where an immortal vulture constantly preyed upon his vitals, which grew again as fast as they were devoured. Nor is this representation at all too strong. Even in this world, where conscience is comparatively weak, I have often seen the bed, and the whole chamber of the sick man, shake under the almost convulsive agonies, which her lash inflicted. I have been told by persons, suffering under most painful diseases, that their bodily sufferings were nothing to the anguish of mind which they endured. I have seen a man of robust constitution, vigorous health, strong mind, and liberal education, tremble, like an aspen leaf, and scarcely able to sustain himself, under the pressure of conscious guilt, and pungent remorse. A man in similar circumstances has been known to rise in winter, at midnight, and run for miles, with naked feet over the rough and frozen ground, in order that the bodily pain, thus occasioned, might, if possible, divert his attention, for a time, from the far more intolerable anguish

of his mind. And a dying infidel has been known to exclaim, Surely there is a God, for nothing less than omnipotence could inflict the pangs which I now feel! What then must be the pangs inflicted by a gnawing conscience in eternity?

II. Our Savior speaks not only of a gnawing worm, but of an unquenchable fire. What reference this may have to the corporeal sufferings of the wicked, I shall not pretend to decide; but it appears evident, from other passages, that so far as the soul is concerned it refers to a keen and constant sense of God's presence and righteous displeasure. He says of himself, I am a consuming fire; and a fire is kindled in mine anger, which shall burn even to the lowest hell. These expressions evidently intimate, that a view of his perfections, and constant presence, combined with a sense of his displeasure, will affect the soul, as fire does the body, withering its strength, and drying up its spirits. Some of you have formerly known a little of this; and you know, or, at least, will easily conceive, that no fire can torture the body more keenly, than a sense of God's displeasure does the soul. But to those of you, who know nothing of this experimentally, it will be more difficult to convey any clear apprehension of this subject. The following supposition may perhaps assist in doing it. Suppose that when Washington was the commander of our armies, you had been a soldier under him, and had been detected in a plot to betray your country. Suppose yourself to be brought before him, surrounded by the whole army, and compelled by some means to fix your eyes steadily, several hours, on his,—encountering, during the whole time, his stern, indignant, and withering glances. Would you not soon have found your situation intolerably painful? Would not his glance seem to thrill through your soul, and almost scorch it like fire, or blast it like lightning? What then must it be to see yourselves surrounded by a just and holy God, to meet his heart-searching, heart-withering eye, wherever you turn, fixed full upon you; to see the Author of your being, the Sovereign of the universe, the great, the glorious, the majestic, the omnipotent, the infinite Jehovah, regarding you with severe displeasure; to see his anger burning against you like fire! 0, this will be indeed a fire to the soul! A fire which will be felt in all its faculties, and fill them to the brim with anguish,—anguish, as much greater than any which could be occasioned by material fire, as the Creator is superior to his creatures. It is then, 0, it is a fearful thing, to fall into the hands of the living God, that God, who is a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity

III. We learn from the passage before us, that these sufferings will be endless. Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And three times successively, our Savior declares, in the context, that the fire shall never be quenched. In the original language of the New Testament, the language which our Savior used, there are no expressions which more fully and unequivocally signify eternity, or endless duration, than those which are here employed. In another passage, the very same expressions are applied to the punishment of the wicked, which are used to describe the duration of God's existence. He liveth, we are told, forever and ever; and we are assured, that the wicked shall be tormented forever and ever. If any further proof of this truth is wanting, it may be found in the nature of the punishment itself. We have seen that the gnawing worm, of which our Savior speaks, is the passions and consciences of sinners. Now these belong to the soul; they are as it were a part of it, they are some of its essential faculties. Of course, they must live as long as the soul lives; and as the soul is immortal, they must be immortal. We have also seen, that the fire, which will scorch the souls of the wicked, is a sense of God's presence and anger. Now as he lives forever, and is unchangeably the same, he must forever be displeased with sinners, and be constantly present with them. In other words, the fire of his anger must burn forever. It is a fire,

which cannot be quenched, unless God should change or cease to exist. It is this, which constitutes the most terrible ingredient of that cup, which impenitent sinners must drink. Dreadful as will be their sufferings, they would be comparatively light, were there any hope of their termination. But of this there will be no hope.

Every thing will conspire to force upon the sinner's mind, a full conviction, that his existence and his sufferings must continue forever; that they will be without mitigation and without end. And this conviction will above all things, whither his courage, and his strength. It will banish all thought of summoning up patience and fortitude to endure his wretchedness, and cause him to sink down under it in the faintness of despair. My hearers, if any of you think I exaggerate, or color too highly, listen to the plain, unadulterated language of God himself. The wicked shall be turned into hell, even all that forget God. They that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. In the hand of Jehovah is a cup, and the wine is red, and he poureth out the same. But the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them. They shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and shall be tormented with fire, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever. Will any one, on hearing these passages, reply, My feelings revolt at such statements; I will not, cannot believe them? Then you must reject the Bible; for it is full of such statements, and every fact, every doctrine, confirms them. The incarnation of the Son of God, the tears which he shed for sinners, the blood which he poured out for sinners, the joy which angels feel when one sinner repents, and the unutterable anxiety which inspired men felt for the conversion of sinners,—all conspire to prove, that the fate of those, who die without repentance, without conversion, must be inconceivably dreadful. Will you then say, such a punishment cannot be just?

It is impossible that I should deserve it? But remember that you know nothing of your sins, or of what sin deserves. Were you properly acquainted with your own sinfulness, you would feel convinced, that it is just. All true penitents feel and acknowledge that it would have been perfectly just to inflict this punishment upon them. Were not you impenitent, you would feel the same. Besides, this punishment, dreadful as it is, is nothing more than the natural, necessary consequence of persisting in sin. The corroding passions, the remorse of conscience, and the displeasure of God, which will constitute the misery of sinners, are all the results of sin. Every sinner has the seeds of hell already sown in his breast. The sparks, which are to kindle the flames of hell, are already glowing within him. Christ now offers to extinguish these sparks. He shed his blood to quench them. He offers to pour out his Spirit, as water, to quench them. But sinners will not accept his offer. They rather fan the sparks, and add fuel to the fire. How then can they justly complain, when the fire shall break out into an unquenchable conflagration, and burn forever! As well might a man, who should put vipers into his bosom, complain of God, because they stung him. As well might a man, who has kindled a fire and thrown himself into it, complain of God, because the flames scorched him. But I can spend no more time in answering objections, or in defending the justice of God, against the complaints of his creatures. I cannot stand here coolly arguing and reasoning, while I see the pit of destruction, as it were, open before me, and more than half my hearers apparently rushing into it. I feel impelled rather to fly, and throw myself before you in the fatal Path, to grasp your hands, to cling to your feet, to make even convulsive efforts to

arrest your progress, and pluck you as brands out of the burning. My careless hearers, my people, my flock, death, perdition, the never dying worm, the unquenchable fire, are before you! Your path leads directly into them. Will you not then hear your friend, your shepherd? Will you not stop, and listen at least for a moment? Will you, 0, will you refuse to believe that there is a hell, till you find yourselves in the midst of it? 0, be convinced, I conjure you, be convinced by some less fatal proof than this.

Yet how can I convince you? How can I stop you? My arm is powerless; yet I cannot let you go. I could shed tears of blood over you, would it avail. Gladly, most gladly, would I die here on the spot! without leaving this sacred desk, could my death be the means of turning you from this fatal course. But what folly is this! to talk of laying down my worthless life to save you. Why, my friends, the Son of God died to save you,—died in agonies,—died on the cross; and surely, that doom cannot but be terrible, to open a way of escape from which he did all this. And it is dreadful. The abyss, into which you are falling, is as deep, as the heaven from which he descended, is high. And will you then rush into it, while he stands ready to save you? Shall he as it respects you, die in vain? Will you receive the grace of God in vain? Shall those eyes, which now see the light of the Sabbath, glare and wither in eternal burning? Shall those souls, which might be filled with the happiness of heaven, writhe and agonize forever, under the gnawings of the immortal worm? Shall I, must I hereafter see some who are dear to me, for whom I have labored and prayed and wept, weltering in the billows of despair, and learning, by experience, how far the description comes short of the terrible reality? But I cannot proceed. The thought unmans me. I can only point to the cross of Christ, and say, There is salvation, there is blood, which, if applied, will quench the fires that are already kindling in your breasts. There is deliverance from the wrath which is to come.

I cannot, must not, however, conclude, without addressing a word, my professing friends, to you. And I hope you will bear with me, if in view of such a subject as this, I address you with apparent severity. An apostle teaches ministers, that they must sometimes rebuke professing Christians sharply; but I trust my sharpness will be the sharpness of love; and I know that I shall say nothing to you, half so severe as the reproaches which I have directed against myself, while preparing this discourse. We all deserve perdition, a thousand times, for our stupid insensibility to the situation of those, who are perishing around us. We profess to believe the word of God; but can you all prove that you believe it? Do you all act, as if you believed it? What, believe that many of your acquaintances, your children, are in danger of the fate, which has now been described! Dare you go to God, and say, Lord, I believe thy word, I believe that all thy threatenings will be fulfilled, and then turn away, and coolly pursue your worldly business, without uttering one agonizing cry for those, who are exposed to these threatnings? Dare you go and claim relationship to Christ, and profess to have his Spirit, without which you are none of his, and then make no effort, or only a few faint efforts, to save those, for whom he shed not tears only, but blood? 0, if you can do this, where are the bowels, I will not say of a Christian, but a man? Go, I may say to such, go, inconsistent, cruel, hard-hearted professors; go, slumber over the ruin of immortal souls; wrap yourself up in your selfish temporal interests, and say, I have no time to spare for rescuing others from everlasting burnings. Go, wear out your life in acquiring property for your children, and leave their souls to perish in the fire that never shall be quenched. Go, adorn their bodies, and banish from them, if possible, the seeds of disease; but leave in their bosoms that immortal worm, which will gnaw them forever. And when God asks, where is thy child? thy brother? thy friend? reply, with

impious Cain, I know not, I care not: am I his keeper? But I cannot proceed further in this strain. I would rather beseech, and melt, and win you by tenderness. Say, then, Christian, dost thou believe that Christ died to save thee from the misery, which has been imperfectly described? Dost thou believe, that if he had not loved thee and given himself for thee, the gnawing worm and the unquenchable fire would have been thy portion forever? 0 then, where is thy gratitude, thy love? Where are the returns, which he has a right to expect? Hast thou already made him a sufficient return for such inestimable benefits? Has he not reason to say, at least to some of you, Did I die for thee; redeem thee from sin, and death, and hell, that thou mightest crucify me afresh, by thy unkindness and unbelief? Did I watch and pray whole nights, that thou mightest neglect watchfulness and prayer? Did I purchase for thee divine grace, precious promises, and strong consolation, that thou mightest make light of them, or turn them into wantonness? And do I prolong thy forfeited life, that thou mayest live carelessly, unprofitably, or like the world around thee? No, I redeemed thee, that thou mightest be mine, wholly mine. I purchased for thee grace, that thou mightest grow. And I preserve thy life, that thou mayest live, not to thyself but to him who died for thee. I have revealed the knowledge of thy Maker, and taught thee the way of redemption, that thou mightest adorn the doctrine of God thy Savior in all things. And wilt thou frustrate these purposes by thy sloth and negligence? Thou wilt do it, then, to thine own eternal injury; for the fearful and the unbelieving shall have their part, with the abominable, in the lake, which burneth with fire, that never shall be quenched.

S. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him: even so. Amen. Revelation 1:7. An apostle, speaking of the Lord's supper, intimates that the church will continue to partake of it, and by partaking of it to show forth his death until he shall come again. This ordinance then may be considered as a chain, which connects the first and the second coming of Christ. Of this chain, as of the gospel, he is at once the beginning and the end. If we look back to the time of its institution, we see Christ at his table, surrounded by a little band of disciples. If we look forward to the period of its completion, we see him on the judgment-seat, surrounded by all the glories and hosts of the celestial world. If we look at its commencement, we see him expiring on the cross; if we look at its termination, we see him coming in the clouds of heaven. It is this coming, of which the beloved disciple speaks in our text. Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him: even so. Amen. In this passage there are three things which deserve our attention; —the coming of Christ; his being seen by all, and the manner in which different characters will be affected by the sight. A few remarks on each of these particulars will comprise the present discourse.

I. Let me lead your attention to the coming of Christ itself:

Behold he cometh with clouds. Of the greatness, the importance of this event I shall say nothing. To endeavor to enlarge your conceptions of it, by surrounding it with the pomp of language, would be like attempting to gild the noon-day sun. Everyone must perceive at once, that if we except the first coming of Christ to die for the world, inspiration has revealed no fact more momentous and interesting than that of his second coming to judge the world. But respecting the certainty of this event, it may be proper to say something more. I need not inform you, that for evidence of its certainty we must look to the scriptures alone: for it is a fact which lies far beyond the ken of human reason; a fact, which God alone could reveal. Reason might however, perhaps, venture to expect, that if God thought proper to reveal a fact of such momentous interest he would reveal it clearly, and with a frequency of repetition proportionate to its importance. In this expectation she would not be disappointed. There is perhaps no event yet future, which is revealed so clearly, or in so many different passages as this. And in revealing it, the Spirit of God seems to have avoided with unusual care, all metaphorical and figurative expressions, and to have chosen only the plainest and most simple language; language, which cannot be misunderstood, nor, without the utmost violence, perverted. A few out of the many passages in which it is thus revealed, you will permit me to mention. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him he shall appear a second time without sin unto salvation. The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel; who shall be punished with everlasting

destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. Such is the language of inspired men. Equally explicit is the testimony of angels. This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Still more explicit, if possible, is the language of our Savior himself. The Son of man, says he, shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him; then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations. And again, Ye shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

I shall mention but one declaration more, a declaration uttered in circumstances of peculiar solemnity. After he had been apprehended by the Jews, the High Priest, finding that he made no reply to their false accusations, said to him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. This, according to the customs of the Jews, was equivalent to the administration of an oath. And our Savior's answer was equivalent to an answer given upon oath. And what was that answer? I am, and hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. On hearing this testimony from his lips, we may reply with the High Priest, though in a different sense, what need have we of any further witness? We have heard from his own mouth. If the solemn declaration, the oath of the Son of God is true, then it is certain that he will come a second time in the clouds of heaven. He who does not believe this, believes nothing which the scriptures assert.

II. The next particular in our text which claims attention, is the fact, that Jesus Christ, at his second coming, shall be seen by all mankind. Every eye shall see him. This assertion teaches us, that he will come in a visible form; for though the word see, when used alone, often signifies merely to perceive, yet it never, so far as I recollect, has this signification when used, as it is here, in connection with the eye. The mind may be said, figuratively speaking, to see or perceive truth, and many other things, which are in their very nature invisible; but the eye can see nothing which is not visible. And as Jesus Christ will come in a visible form, so he will come, doubtless, in a human form. He will come arrayed with that glorious body which, as another inspired passage informs us, he now wears in heaven. Should this appear doubtful to any, we would refer them to the passages already mentioned, in which our Savior says, Ye shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven; an expression which must mean, if it mean any thing, that he will come in his human nature. The declaration of the angels is of the same import. Ye shall see this same Jesus come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. But they saw him ascend to heaven in a human form; they will therefore, see him coming in a human form. The language of St. Paul is, if possible, still more decisive. God, says he, hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man, whom he hath ordained, of which he hath given assurance to all men, by raising him from the dead. At the same time we are assured in other places, that God is Judge himself, that our God shall come and not keep silence; a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. And St. John, describing a view which he had in vision of the proceedings of the judgment day, says, I saw the dead small and great stand before God. These otherwise contradictory passages will appear perfectly reconcilable, if we recollect that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, God and man united in one person. His glorified body will be the temple, the vehicle, in which God will come to judgment, and this vehicle will be visible. Of its appearance we may, perhaps, form some idea from the description given by Daniel and St.

John. I beheld, says the former, till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow;—his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him; thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. Similar are the expressions of St. John. I saw one, says he, like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the breast with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were 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 was as the sound of many waters, and his countenance as the sun shineth in his strength. I need not remind you, that similar was his appearance. On the mount of transfiguration, when his human form assumed, for a time, some of that glory which it was destined to wear after his exaltation to heaven; a glory, however, which will be, doubtless, increased in a degree that is inconceivable, when he shall come, not in his own glory only, but in that of his Father. Of this glory the sublime language of St. John is suited to give the most exalted conception. I say, says he, a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face heaven and earth fled away. But the assertion in our text teaches us, not only that Jesus Christ will come in a visible form, but that all mankind shall behold him in this form. Every eye shall see him. The same truth is taught elsewhere.

He assured his disciples, that they should see him. He assured his enemies, that they should see him. He declared, that when he comes, he will gather before him all nations. And an apostle says, we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. And if he comes in a visible form, and all are assembled before him, all must, of course, see him. My hearers, meditate, a moment, upon this interesting truth. Let every one say to himself; I shall see this great sight. I shall see the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man, the Savior, the Judge, of whom I have heard so much. My body, when slumbering in the grave, will hear his omnipotent voice and come forth. My long closed eyes will open, and the descending Judge, and the judgment-seat, with all its splendors, will burst upon them. Such was Job’s expectation. Though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom mine eyes shall behold, and I shall see for myself, and not another. Let us attend,

III. To the manner, in which different characters will be affected by this sight. Were the scriptures silent respecting this part of our subject, we might still be sure, that all will not contemplate this spectacle with similar feelings, nor be affected by it in the same manner. The feelings, with which men regard any object, will ever correspond with their own character. Different characters will regard the same object with different feelings; opposite characters with opposite feelings. Now we know, that among mankind there are characters not only widely different, but diametrically opposite. We know, that even now these opposite characters regard Jesus Christ, his word, his institutions, his friends, with opposite feelings. We know, that the thoughts of his second coming affect different persons in a very different manner. Some desire it, others dread it; some think of it with pleasure, others with pain. Hence we might naturally conclude, that when the event shall arrive different characters will be differently affected by it. But we are not left to our own inferences and reasonings on this point. Our text plainly intimates, and other passages clearly teach us, that the sight of Christ’s coming in the clouds of heaven will produce widely different effects upon different characters. They teach us, first, that all good men desire this event, and will contemplate it with the most joyful emotions. This is intimated in our text, where the inspired writer, after predicting Christ’s coming, and his being seen by every eye, adds, Even so: amen,—that is, so let

it be; let the event take place, as soon as God pleases. In thus expressing his own feelings, he expressed the feelings of all, who, like himself, are faithful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Agreeably, Christians are described as those, who look for him; that is, who expect and desire his second coming. And St. Paul informs us, that the righteous Judge will, at the last day, give a crown of righteousness to all who love his appearing. In another passage, after predicting the second coming of Christ, he adds, wherefore beloved, comfort ye one another with these words. Now if good men expect and desire Christ's coming, if they love to think of it, if it comforts them to speak of it, then surely they will rejoice when they see it. Indeed, they cannot but rejoice to see him, whom they have followed by faith, whom they have loved with supreme affection; who comes to complete their salvation, to give them a crown of righteousness. Nor will this joy be checked by any guilty fears or anxieties; for in their Judge they will see their Savior, their Friend, their Head, whose love for them passeth knowledge, and who has said, whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father and the holy angels. But,

2. While all the faithful servants of Christ will contemplate him with joy unspeakable and full of glory, all of a different character will witness his coming with unutterable horror, anguish, and despair. All kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. These effects of his coming are still more forcibly described in a succeeding chapter. I beheld, says the apostle, and the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand! It seems to be clearly intimated, both in this passage and in our text, that the sight of Christ, at his second coming, will be terrible to all, or nearly all, who are then found alive in the world. We learn from other inspired passages the reason of this. It is because all, or nearly all, who are then found alive, will be wicked men. When the Son of man cometh, says our Savior, will he find faith on the earth? That is, will he find many, who believe in him, and expect his coming? a mode of expression, which forcibly intimates, that he will not. In another passage, he teaches us, that, at his second coming, he will find the world in the same situation, in which it was found by the flood, in the days of Noah, and in which Sodom was in the days of Lot. As it was, says he, in the days of Noah, and of Lot, so shall it be in the day, when the Son of man is revealed, or appears. They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded, and knew not, till the day in which Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. From these and other passages it is evident, that at the second coming of Christ, there will be very little religion, very few pious men found in the world. But it may be asked, how does this representation agree with the many predictions, which assure us that religion is yet to prevail, in a far greater degree than it ever has done, and that the knowledge of God shall fill the earth, even as the waters cover the sea? We shall find an answer to this question in the twentieth chapter of Revelation. We are there taught, that the great tempter and deceiver of mankind, who deceiveth the whole world, shall be bound for a thousand years; that is, during that period he shall not be permitted to tempt or deceive mankind, and in consequence religion will almost universally prevail. To this period, all the passages, which speak of the great extension of Christ's kingdom, refer. But after the expiration of this period, the great adversary, will be released for a season; in other words, he will be suffered to renew his temptations, the consequence will be a great and almost universal apostasy. Religion will be ridiculed and opposed, and its friends persecuted with peculiar rancor; the church will be compassed about with enemies, and on the very point of being

swallowed up, and then, in that critical moment, will be seen the signs of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. The sight will strike them suddenly and unexpectedly. It will come, as our Savior informs us, as a flash of lightning; or, as an apostle expresses it, the day of the Lord will so come, as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them. And who can doubt that such a sight, bursting in such a manner upon men immersed in worldly cares and pleasures, or engaged in opposing the cause of Christ, will throw them into an agony of consternation and distress?

Suppose, for a moment, that this event should take place now; that while I speak the trumpet should sound, and the fiery brightness, which will surround the Judge, should begin to shine through these windows. Can you doubt, that many of this congregation would be distracted with guilty fear and remorse; and that all sinners, in all parts of the world, would be affected in a similar manner? Some of you have seen into what wild alarm, what temporary distraction, an assembly may be thrown in a moment by an alarm of fire, or a cry that the house is falling. What then would be the effects produced by the sight of the final Judge, of the heaven's departing, of the world on fire! Less terrible was the sight of the flood to the guilty inhabitants of the old world; less loud, less agonizing was the cry which they uttered, than that which will burst from the lips of guilty mortals, when every eye sees the Judge coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

It is not, however, to those only who are found alive in the world, that this sight will prove terrible. All the sinful dead, whose bodies are in the grave, will then be roused; for all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. And 0, how different will be the appearance of these two classes! The former, with glorious bodies, resembling that of their Savior, will shine forth like the sun; the holiness, and the love, and the happiness of heaven, beaming in their countenances and sparkling in their eyes; while the latter, dark and gloomy as night, will express nothing but fear and rage, envy and despair. Then will the prediction be fulfilled which says, Ye shall see a difference made between the righteous and the wicked. Then the whole intelligent universe will see, that verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.

Permit me now, my hearers, to improve the view we have taken of this subject, by endeavoring to bring it home to your bosoms, your consciences.

1. Consider the certainty of this event. The passages, which have been quoted in this discourse, will, I doubt not, convince you all, that if the Bible is true this event is certain, as certain as if it had already taken place. It is the same in the sight of God, as if it had taken place. He sees it as plainly, as if it were already past; and this fact renders it not only certain, that it will take place, but impossible that it should not take place. So certainly then as the Bible is the word of God, so certainly will 'your eyes see the Lord Jesus Christ coming in the clouds of heaven. Are any of 'you then prepared to rely on the assumption, that the Bible is a forgery? Remember, that if you rely upon this you stake every thing dear upon it, and that should you be deceived you lose every thing, lose your souls, lose salvation, and render your perdition sure. My hearers, if there is even a probability, nay, if there is a possibility, that the Bible is true, it is madness to incur this risk. But why do we talk of possibilities, or probabilities? We know that the Bible is the word of God. We know that the Son of God has already come once, and we know that he will come again. Heaven

and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away.

2. Let us improve the subject, by making use of it to obscure the glare of worldly objects, and extinguish the fires which they are continually kindling within us. Let all, who are dazzled or fascinated by the pomp and splendor of the world, come and contemplate a scene, which stains the pride of all human glory, and throws far back into the deepest shade every thing, which men call great, or splendid, or sublime. What are the pompous triumphs, the gaudy pageants, the long processions, on which men gaze with eager delight, compared with the descent of the Creator, the Judge from heaven, surrounded by all the seraphic hosts, and bearing with him the final sentence, the eternal, unchangeable destiny of every child of Adam? Pause, then, for a moment, and contemplate, with the eye of faith, or, if you have no faith, with the eye of imagination, this tremendous scene. Look at that point, far away in the ethereal regions, where the gradually lessening form of our Savior disappeared from the gaze of his disciples, when he ascended to heaven. In that point see an uncommon, but faint and undefined brightness just beginning to appear. It has caught the roving eye of yon careless gazer, and excited his curiosity. He points it out to a second, and a third. A little circle soon collects, and various are the conjectures which they form respecting it. Similar circles are formed, and similar conjectures made, in a thousand different parts of the world. But conjecture is soon to give place to certainty—awful, appalling, overwhelming certainty. While they gaze, the appearance, which had excited their curiosity, rapidly approaches, and still more rapidly brightens. Some begin to suspect what it may prove; but no one dares to give utterance to his suspicions.

Meanwhile, the light of the sun begins to fade before a brightness superior to his own. Thousands see their shadows cast in a new direction, and thousands of hitherto careless eyes look up, at once, to discover the cause. Full clearly they see it; and now new hopes and fears begin to agitate their breasts. The afflicted and persecuted servants of Christ begin to hope that the predicted, long expected day of their deliverance is arrived. The wicked, the careless, the unbelieving, begin to fear, that the Bible is about to prove no idle tale. And now fiery shapes, moving like streams of lightning, begin to appear indistinctly amidst the bright dazzling cloud, which comes rushing down as on the wings of a whirlwind. At length it reaches its destined place. It pauses; then, suddenly unfolding, discloses at once a great white throne, where sits, starry resplendent, in all the glories of the Godhead, the man Christ Jesus. Every eye sees him, every heart knows him. Too well do the wretched, unprepared inhabitants of earth now know what to expect; and one universal shriek of anguish and despair rises to heaven, and is echoed back to earth. But louder, far louder than the universal cry, now sounds the last trumpet; and, far above all, is heard the voice of the Omnipotent, summoning the dead to arise, and come to judgment. New terrors now assail the living. On every side, nay under their very feet, the earth heaves, as in convulsions; graves open, and the dead come forth, while at the same moment, a change equivalent to that occasioned by death, is effected by Almighty power on the bodies of the living. Their mortal bodies put on immortality, and are thus prepared to sustain a weight of glory, or of wretchedness, which flesh and blood could not endure. Meanwhile, legions of angels are seen, darting from pole to pole, gathering together the faithful servants of Christ from the four winds of heaven, and bearing them aloft to meet the Lord in the air, where he causes them to be placed at his own right hand, preparatory to the sentence, which is to award to them everlasting life. Such, my brethren, is the scene which you will one day witness. And where now are the pomps, the honors, the riches, and

pleasures, of this world, which yesterday appeared so dazzling? Has not all their brightness faded, even in your estimation? Ought they not to appear, must they not appear, as less than nothing and vanity to him, who looks for, who firmly believes, that he shall see such a spectacle as this? Can you wonder that faith in such truths, the faith of the Christian, should overcome the world? Christian, if you would gain more and greater victories over the world, than you ever have done, bring this scene often before the eye of your mind, and gaze upon it till you become blind to all earthly glory. He who gazes long at the sun becomes unsusceptible of impression from inferior luminaries; and he who looks much at the Sun of Righteousness will be little affected by any alluring object, which the world can exhibit.

3. Shall we all see this great sight? and will it affect us according to our characters? Let us then inquire how it would affect us, should it now appear? You cannot but be sensible, that if you have lived a careless, irreligious life, if your sins are not pardoned, if you are conscious, that you have not faithfully served Christ, his coming would fill you with guilty apprehension, remorse, and despair. You would, you must feel just as a dishonest or unfaithful servant would feel, when summoned into the presence of a long absent master, to whom all his unfaithfulness was known. On the contrary, if you are the faithful servants of Christ; if you are looking and longing for his appearing; if you have the testimony of your own consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, you have had your conversation in the world; then you could witness his approach with joy, and lift up your heads triumphantly, knowing that your redemption was drawing nigh. 0, then, if any of you are not prepared to meet the Judge in peace, let it be your great care to become prepared. If any of you are prepared for this event, live as becometh those who expect it. Remember, that your Master’s words are, Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

Chapter 82

S. THE SIN, DANGER, AND UNREASONABLENESS OF DESPAIR.

THE SIN, DANGER, AND UNREASONABLENESS OF DESPAIR. And they said, there is no hope; but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart—Jeremiah 18:12.

THERE are two ways, my friends, in which the great enemy and deceiver of men endeavors, and alas! but too successfully, to effect their eternal ruin. In the first place, he labors, by a variety of artifices, to lull them asleep in false security and presumption. With this view, he leads them to pervert and abuse the gracious promises and invitations of the gospel; insinuates that God is too merciful to destroy his creatures; that his threatenings will never be executed, and that all will finally obtain salvation. If he finds any one who cannot be persuaded to believe these falsehoods, he suggests to them that religion is indeed important, but that it is unnecessary to think of it at present; that they have yet sufficient time for repentance, that they are less guilty than many others who have obtained mercy; and that it will be easy for them to become religious hereafter, and secure a title to heaven before death arrives. This method he pursues, principally with the young and thoughtless, and with those who abstain from gross vices, and pay some regard to the externals of religion. By these artifices he induces them to defer repentance to a more convenient season; robs them of their most precious opportunities, and leads them farther and farther from God and happiness. In the second place, when these artifices begin to fail, he endeavors to drive men to despair. This method he pursues with the aged, with the openly vicious and abandoned, and with such also as have long enjoyed the means of grace, often experienced, but resisted, the influences of God's Spirit. To such he whispers, that it is too late; that their sins are too great to be forgiven; that their day of grace is past; that God has given them up to a reprobate mind, and that there is no mercy for them. Hence he infers that it is in vain for them now to think of religion, or use any means to obtain it; that, since they must perish, it is better for them to plunge into sin without restraint, and enjoy all the happiness which the world can afford, Thus he tempted Judas to destroy himself. Thus he tempted those who said, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die; and thus also he tempted those whose language is recorded in our text. When the prophet, in the name of God, warned them of approaching judgment, and urged them to return from their evil ways; instead of complying, they despairingly exclaimed, There is no hope! We will, therefore, walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. This desperate resolution they executed, and destruction was the consequence. In a similar manner, there is reason to fear, the tempter deceives and ruins some at the present day. It is probable, however, that the number thus ruined is comparatively small. So clearly does the Sun of Righteousness shine upon us; so encouraging are the precious promises of the gospel, and so numerous the instances in which even the vilest of sinners have obtained mercy, that probably very few finally perish in consequence of despondency. The opposite extreme is by far the most ruinous; for presumption and false hopes destroy, perhaps, hundreds, where despair of obtaining mercy proves fatal to one. Still it is possible that there may be some among us, whom the tempter has entangled in this snare. It is possible, though unknown to us, that there may be at least one

person in this assembly, who is saying respecting himself, There is no hope; I have sinned so long, so often, and with so many aggravations, that I cannot be forgiven; my heart is so hard, that it cannot be softened; my mind so dark, that it cannot be enlightened; my sinful habits and propensities so deep-rooted that they cannot be eradicated; my attachment to sin and the world so strong, that it cannot be overcome. I fear that I am not one whom God intends to save; my day of grace is over; should I think of seeking religion, it would be now in vain; I will therefore think of it as little as possible, and devote myself to the pursuits and pleasures of the world, while I have opportunity to enjoy them.

Now, my friends, if there is only one person present, whom the great deceiver has entangled in this snare, it is our duty to attempt to deliver him from it; and could we succeed, we should be richly repaid for preaching, not only one, but ten thousand sermons. If there be one such person present, one who feels that what has been said describes his character, let him feel that this discourse is preached on purpose for him; that to him every word is addressed; and do you, my Christian friends, who have a hope of glory, pray that the spirit of God may single him out, and enable him to hear, to hope, and live; while we attempt to convince him, that it is at once sinful, dangerous and unreasonable, in the highest degree, to despair of God's mercy; to say that there is no hope.

I. To despair of God's mercy is sinful. The ancient divines were accustomed to call despair one of the seven deadly sins. That it well deserves this character is evident from its nature and effects. It is directly contrary to the will of God. He, we are told, taketh pleasure in them that fear him, and hope in his mercy. He must, therefore, be displeased with them that refuse to do this. It is also a great insult to the character of God. It calls in question the truth of his word; nay it gives him the lie; for he has told us that whosoever cometh to him, he will in no wise cast out. But the language of despair is, He will cast me out, though I should come to him. It calls in question, or rather denies the greatness of his mercy. He has told us that his mercy is infinite; that it is from everlasting to everlasting; but the language of despair is, My sins are beyond the reach of God's mercy, and therefore it is not infinite. It also limits the power of God. He has said, Is any thing too hard for me? With God nothing is impossible. But despair says, There are some things which are too hard for God; some things which it is impossible for him to perform. It is impossible that he should renew my heart, subdue my will, and make me fit for heaven. Thus despair limits or denies all God's perfections, and, of consequence, greatly insults and provokes him. Despair is also contrary to the Spirit of God. The three principal graces of the Spirit are faith, hope and love. But despair is opposed to them all. That it is opposed to faith in God's promises, we have already seen; that it is opposed to hope, is evident from its very nature; and a little reflection will convince us, that it is equally inconsistent with love. To sum up all in one word, despair includes in itself the very essence both of impenitence and unbelief. It contains in itself the essence of impenitence; for it seals up the heart in a sullen, obstinate, unyielding frame, so that those who are under its influence cannot breathe one penitential sigh, or shed a single penitential tear. This effect it has on the devils. This effect it will produce in all the wicked at the judgment day. Hence it is directly opposed to that broken heart and contrite spirit, in which true repentance essentially consists. It also contains in itself the very essence of unbelief; for it shuts up the heart against all the promises of the gospel; against all the invitations of Christ; against all the revelations which God has made of his mercy, and represents him as a severe, inexorable, arbitrary tyrant, whom it is vain to

endeavor to please. But unbelief and impenitence are every where represented as sins exceedingly great and provoking to God. How offensive, how provoking, then must be that despair, which includes in itself the essence of both these aggravated sins!

Again; despair is not only exceedingly sinful in itself, but the cause or parent of many other sins. As hope leads all who entertain it to endeavor to purify themselves, even as Christ is pure, so despair, the opposite of hope, leads all who are under its influence to wander farther and farther from God, and plunge without restraint into every kind of wickedness. This effect it had upon Cain. Instead of repenting and imploring pardon of God for the murder of his brother, he departed front the presence of the Lord, from all the religious privileges and instruction of his father's house, into the land of Nod; there by plunging into worldly and sinful pursuits, he endeavored to mitigate the anguish of his mind, and drive from it all thoughts of God and religion. A similar effect it had upon Saul. Despair of obtaining help from God led him to seek relief from witches and evil spirits, and finally to throw himself on his own sword. Equally awful were its effects upon Judas, whom it led to self-murder, as it probably has thousands since. The reason why despair should thus operate is evident. Take away from men all hope of obtaining any object, and they will never pursue it, but turn their attention to something else. So take away from men all hope of heaven; let them be fully convinced that it is not for them, that their day of grace is past, that their doom is fixed, and that repentance will avail nothing to alter it; and, of course, they will never repent; for they will feel no encouragement to do it; see no reason why they should attempt it. On the contrary, they will turn their attention to worldly and sinful pursuits, and endeavor by intemperance, or in some other equally dangerous way, to banish all thoughts of God and religion entirely from their minds. And when all their restraints are taken off; when they imagine that nothing will render their situation better, and that nothing which they may do can make it worse, the corruption of their hearts will have full room and liberty to operate, and will plunge them into every kind of wickedness.

IL Despair of God's mercy is dangerous. If it be sinful it must be so; for all sin is in its nature and tendency highly dangerous. But despair of God's mercy, is a sin which is dangerous in the highest degree. When a man gives himself up to this sin, he does, as it were, give himself up to the power and guidance of the devil; for he voluntarily throws away every thing which can protect or deliver him from the adversary. He throws away his Savior; he throws away God's mercy; he throws away the promises; he throws away the whole gospel of Christ; he throws away all hopes and thoughts of salvation, and consequently all endeavors to obtain it; for while he despairs of God's mercy, it is the same to him as if God had no mercy; while he despairs of Christ's ability or willingness to save, it is the same to him as if Christ had no power or disposition to save; and while he believes that the promises and invitations of the gospel are not for him to embrace, it is the same to him as if there were no gospel. All these things, therefore, the despairing sinner throws away; and when they are gone, what is there left? To what guide can he commit himself? Nothing remains, but a deceitful, malignant adversary, and a desperately wicked heart, both combined to mislead and destroy him. Yet to the guidance of these two fatal enemies every despairing sinner commits himself. Need any thing more be said, to prove that to despair of God's mercy, is dangerous in the highest degree.

III. Despair of God's mercy is no less groundless and unreasonable, than it is sinful and dangerous.

1. In the first place, it is unreasonable to despair of God's mercy, because he continues to you the enjoyment of life, and the means of grace. It is true that, with respect to some, the day of grace ends before the close of life, and their lives are preserved only that they may fill up the measure of their iniquities, and treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. But such persons are given over to a reprobate mind, and left to strong delusion, that they may believe a lie. God has said, Let them alone. His Spirit has forsaken them; conscience does not warn them; they seldom think of their danger, and are usually much more inclined to presumption than to despair. But we are now addressing those, who do think of their situation, whose consciences do warn and admonish them; and with respect to such we may generally say, that, while there is life, there is hope; for is not life a time of probation, a season of grace, an opportunity given us on purpose to make our peace with God? How unreasonable then is it to despair of mercy; while this season, this opportunity of obtaining mercy is afforded; unless you are determined not to improve it. The precious privileges which you enjoy, while this season continues, render despair still more unreasonable. What walls are these which surround you? Are they not the walls of God's house, a place where he has recorded his name, and respecting which he says, Wherever I record my name, there will I meet with you and bless you? What light is this which shines around you? Is it not the light of the Sabbath, of the day which the Lord has made, in which we have reason to rejoice and be glad? What volume is this before you? Is it not the word of God in which he reveals his grace and mercy to perishing sinners? What sound is this which now fills your ears? Is it not the sound of the gospel which brings life, and peace, and pardon, to all who believe and obey it? And will you then say, There is no hope, while the walls of God's house encircle you, while the light of the Sabbath shines upon you, while the word of God is before you, and while the gospel of salvation sounds in your ears? Do they not all conspire to prove, that, though you are prisoners, you are prisoners of hope; and that there is still hope concerning you, if you will not neglect or put it from you in despair?

2. The character of God, as revealed in his word, shows that it is unreasonable for you to despair of his mercy. It is true that the description which the Scriptures give us of his character, is most perfectly suited to lead you to despair of obtaining his favor by your own works, or of tasting his mercy while you obstinately persist in sin. But it is also true, that it is no less perfectly suited to excite hope in the breasts of all who see the impossibility of saving themselves; who feel the burden and fetters of sin, and have the smallest desire to escape from its power. This the psalmist well knew: They that know God's name, says he, that is, they who are acquainted with his character, will put their trust in him. They cannot despair or despond; they cannot but hope in his mercy. The fact is, that despondency, as well as presumption, arises from ignorance of God. Ignorance of his justice, truth, and holiness, leads to presumption; and ignorance of his mercy, love, and grace, leads to despair. If we would be kept from both these dangerous extremes; if we would at the same time fear him, and hope in his mercy, we must contemplate the different perfections of his character together, and not view them separately, as we are prone to do. This the method pursued by the inspired writers naturally leads us to do. They very frequently set before us God's justice and mercy, his greatness and condescension, in the same passage. When to deter us from presumption they declare, that God will by no means clear the guilty, they tell us in the same verse, that he is merciful and gracious, that we may not despair. When they tell us that God is high, they immediately subjoin, Yet hath he respect unto the lowly. When they inform us that he is a God of vengeance, they are careful to assure us in the same chapter, that he is good

to them that trust in him. When they describe him as the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, they add, He dwelleth with him who is of a humble and contrite spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and the heart of the contrite ones. While they declare that the soul that sinneth shall die, they encourage us to repent and turn from our sins by the assurance, that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live. Still farther to secure us from despair, they inform us, that God is love, that nothing is too hard for him, that his mercy endureth for ever, and that he is a sovereign God who can have mercy on whom he will have mercy. Surely then, the character of God renders it in the highest degree unreasonable to despair of salvation, unless we are determined to go on in sin, or to persist in seeking salvation by the works of the law.

3. The grand scheme of redemption revealed in the gospel, renders it still more unreasonable to indulge despair. This scheme God has devised and revealed, on purpose to glorify himself in displaying the unsearchable riches of his mercy and grace. Here he reveals himself as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the God of all grace and consolation, as a God who so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son to die for its redemption. By the sufferings and death of his Son he is reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to the penitent their trespasses. The mountains of guilt and transgression which interrupted the streams of his beneficence are removed, so that they can now flow and are flowing out to us in floods of enlightening, pardoning, and sanctifying grace. None of God's perfections now forbid Him to pardon penitent sinners; for in the scheme of redemption, mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other; God can now be just in justifying those who believe in Jesus. Nay, more, his justice, faithfulness, and truth, which once stood in the way of our salvation, now bind him to forgive and save all who confess, and repent of their sins. Surely then the gospel of Christ affords sufficient encouragement to animate the hopes of the most guilty, desponding sinner on earth, and render it in the highest degree unreasonable for any to despair of salvation who are not determined to reject it.

4. The person, character, and invitations of Christ, show in the most striking and conclusive manner, that despair of salvation is unreasonable. When God provided a Savior for us, he intended to provide one whose character should be a complete antidote to despair, as well as to all other evils. Accordingly, the person and character of his Son Christ Jesus are as perfectly calculated, as any thing possibly can be, to banish despair, and excite confidence and hope. He is at once the Son of God, and the Son of Man. He is allied to heaven by his divinity, and to earth by humanity; and consequently unites in himself every thing that is amiable, admirable, or excellent, in the nature of God and in the nature of man. Though he is the Son of the Highest, he is not ashamed to be called the friend and brother of the lowest; nay, he glories in the title of the sinner's Friend. While his infinite wisdom, knowledge, and power, render him able to save even to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, his no less infinite compassion, condescension, and love, render him as willing, as he is able to save. To all who believe, he is made of God wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. His blood, which speaks better things than the blood of Abel, cleanses from all sin. His Spirit can enlighten the most ignorant, subdue the most stubborn and sanctify the most polluted, and break the strongest fetter in which sin and the world ever bound the soul. The streams of his grace flow, free and uncircumscribed, as the light of the sun or the air of heaven. His language is, Let him that heareth come; and let him that thirsteth

come; and whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely; and whosoever cometh, I will in no wise cast out. In short, it is a faithful saying, a true saying, and worthy of universal acceptation and belief, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief; and for any one who believes this saying, for any one who contemplates Christ's character, and listens to his invitation, to despair of salvation, is as impossible, as for a man to walk in darkness, who, with open eyes beholds the light of the meridian sun. One glimpse of his person and character is life to hope, and death to despondency. How unreasonable, then, is it, with such a Savior before us, for any to despair, unless they are determined to reject him.

Lastly. That it is unreasonable to despair of God's mercy, is evident from the characters of many to whom it has already been extended. Look at Manasseh. He sinned against God above all that were in Jerusalem before him, so that he seemed to have sold himself to commit iniquity. In addition to this, he was a murderer, a man stained with many murders; for we are told that he shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other. But in his affliction he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and besought him and prayed to him; and God was entreated of him, and heard his supplications. Look at St. Paul. He was a blasphemer, and bloody persecutor of the people of God; one who breathed nothing but threatenings and slaughter against his church, and compelled many of them to blaspheme. Yet he repented and obtained mercy; and he intimates that mercy was showed him for a pattern and encouragement to those who should come after him, to believe in Christ. Look at the Corinthian church. Some of you, says the apostle to them, were fornicators, and idolaters, and adulterers, and thieves, and covetous, and drunkards, and revilers, and extortioners; but, he adds, ye are washed, but ye are justified, but ye are sanctified, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. Such, my friends, are some of the instances recorded in the Bible, in which the greatest and vilest offenders obtained mercy on repentance. Who then will say, that it is not highly unreasonable for any to despair unless they are determined not to repent? Who can reasonably say, there is no hope for me, when such characters as these, through repentance, faith, and patience, are even now inheriting the promises?

Permit me now to ask, my friends, whether any of you are saying this? Are there any present, who are deterred from seeking salvation by nothing but discouragement and despondency; any who are saying in their hearts, We would attend seriously to religion, did we not fear that it will be to no purpose? If any such there are, they are the very persons whom we now address. You have heard, my irresolute, desponding friends, how sinful, how dangerous, and how unreasonable it is to say, There is no hope. Why then will you say it? Why should you think that it will be vain for you to attend to religion? Will you say, I fear that, though God is merciful, there is no mercy for me? You have heard that there is mercy for the vilest, if they will repent. Will you say, I fear that I am not one of those whom God means to save? If you are determined to persevere in unbelief and despondency, you have reason to fear this; but if you begin sincerely to seek after God, you will have reason to hope that he means to save you; and if you repent and believe the gospel, you may be sure that he does. Will you say, I know not how to begin; if I study the Bible, it appears dark and difficult to understand; and when I listen to the preached word, it is the same? This is because you do not look to Christ for wisdom and instruction. He is able and willing to give us his Spirit to lead our minds into all truth. Will you say, I have often resolved and endeavored to be religious; but my resolutions have been broken; my endeavors have been vain; and I fear that,

should I make another attempt, it would avail nothing. But your resolutions and attempts were made in dependence on your own strength. It was therefore to be expected that they would fail; for Christ says, Without me ye can do nothing. But make another attempt depending on his strength, and looking to him for assistance, and it will not be unsuccessful. Will you say, My will is so stubborn, my heart is so hard, and my mind so entangled by the love of the world and the fear of man, that I dare not hope for success? But did not Christ come to deliver us from this world, to preach deliverance to the captives, to set at liberty them that are bruised? Has he not done this for thousands already; and is he not equally able to do it for you? Will you say, I have difficulties and temptations to encounter, such as no other person ever had; and therefore I fear there is no hope? Even if this is the case, it affords no reason for despondency; for Christ is able to remove all difficulties, and overcome all temptations. Have you not heard that nothing is too hard for him? Will you say, I know Christ is able to save me; but I have so often grieved his Spirit, so long neglected his invitations, that I fear he will now afford me no assistance? But is he not even now bestowing upon you many blessings notwithstanding this? Is he not preserving your life, permitting you to hear the gospel, and inviting you by his ministers, to come and receive salvation? If your unworthiness does not prevent him from bestowing these favors upon you, why should you fear that he will withhold his assistance in subduing your sins? Has he not said, Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out? And now, my desponding friends, what more will you say to justify your despondency? What more indeed can you say? What can you say of yourselves more discouraging than this, that you are entirely sinful, and guilty, and poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked? True, you are so, Christ knows that you are so; and his language is, I counsel thee to buy of me gold, tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed. Will you say, I have nothing to buy with? Christ bestows them without money or price. Permit me to remind you of the value of what he thus bestows. Let me bring down from heaven that reward which he offers to those who embrace him. In this world, it is pardon of sins, peace of conscience, peace with God, the restoration of his image, joy unspeakable, support under trials, victory over all enemies including death and the grave; in a word, all good things. In the world to come, it is perfect holiness, full enjoyment, everlasting life, an eternal weight of glory, an immovable throne, an unfading crown, a state of complete, never-ending, perpetually increasing glory and felicity. Such, my friends, are the rewards set before you. It is yet possible; nay, there is yet reason to hope, that you may obtain them. And are they not desirable? Are they not worth pursuing? Arise, then; we call upon you in the name of God, arise, and in the strength of Christ, pursue them. Lose no time in despondency. Say not, There is no hope. We have shown that you have no reason to say this. If you will persist in saying it, it is only an excuse; an excuse for neglecting that religion, which you are unwilling to embrace. It is not for want of encouragement, it is for want of a disposition, that you refuse to pursue the one thing needful. Let none then, after this, complain that there is nothing to encourage them. God has given them every thing necessary for their encouragement; every thing calculated to rouse them from despair. If then any persist in despair, and perish, God will be guiltless; their blood will be upon them. But while we are attempting to justify God, and leave sinners without excuse; and while we would do every thing in our power to encourage the desponding and support the weak, it is also necessary to guard against the perversions of such as would derive from it encouragement to hope for heaven while they continue in sin. It is possible that some present may be hardened in their presumption by the very means which have been employed to keep others from despair. They may say, since there is

so much reason to hope, and since it is so wrong to despair, we will hope for the best, and not despair of salvation, though we should continue a little longer in sin. If any are saying this, if any are thus poisoning themselves with the waters of life, I do most solemnly protest against this perversion, this abuse of the grace of God, and warn them of its danger. This is what the apostle calls making Christ the minister of sin, and turning the grace of God into wantonness; and the end of those who are guilty of it will be according to their works. They can derive no excuse for doing this from what has been said; for not a syllable has been uttered which tends, if rightly understood, to afford the smallest hope or consolation to those who persist in impenitence and unbelief. If any such still pretend, from what has been said, to hope in God's mercy, I would remind them of the words of the apostle; Whosoever hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure.

S. THE SINNERS MISTAKES EXPOSED AND REPROVED

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"These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Psalms 50:21-22 The doctrine of a judgment to come is no new doctrine. It is almost, if not quite, as old as creation. Though it is revealed with the greatest clearness in the New Testament, yet there are many intimations, and not a few explicit predictions of it in the Old. Indeed, it appears highly probable, that, under the ancient dispensation, mankind were favored with some predictions of this day, which are not recorded in the Scriptures; for St. Jude informs us, that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, who was afterwards taken alive into heaven, prophesied, saying. Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly of their ungodly deeds. To the same great day Moses seems to refer, when he represents God as saying, A fire is kindled in mine anger, which shall burn to the lowest hell, and consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. Another clear, and very explicit prediction of a future judgment, we have in the Psalm before its. Our God, says the Psalmist, shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heaven from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people; and the heavens shall declare his righteousness, for God is judge himself. Having inspired his servant thus to foretell an approaching day of judgment, God himself takes up the subject, and after a most solemn address to his professing people, turns to sinners, charges them with various crimes, and concludes with the words of our text, These things thou hast done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. In this passage we have,

I. A description of the manner in which God treats impenitent sinners, during the present life. While they are going on in a course of sin, he sits as a watchful spectator of their conduct, but keeps silence: These things thou hast done, and I kept silence. There is, indeed, one sense in which he is not silent. He is continually speaking to them in his Word, inviting, counseling and warning them to repent and flee from the wrath to come; nor does he fail often to speak to them in the same manner, by the voice of conscience. But, as a Judge, he usually observes the most profound silence. Scarcely ever does he openly manifest his displeasure against sinful individuals, or visibly punish them for their sins in the present life though he frequently sends his judgments on guilty nations. We are indeed told by the inspired writers, that his bow is bent to pierce, and his sword sharpened to cut off impenitent sinners, as soon as the day of grace shall have expired, and they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquities; but till that period arrives, the tokens of his anger are restrained, and nothing is done to show that he is more displeased with the wicked than with the good. The sun shines brightly over their heads, as it did upon Sodom an hour before its destruction; the rain of heaven descends upon them, and they are permitted to enjoy all the

blessings of providence and all the means of grace. Young sinners are suffered to rejoice in their youth, and to walk in the way of their hearts, and in the sight of their eyes; and those that are farther advanced in life are suffered to pursue the world, and to glory in their wisdom, their riches and their strength; so that, in this life, there seems to be but one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. Thus while sinners are sinning and treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, God as a righteous Judge keeps silence; but though silent, he is not an indifferent or inactive witness of their conduct. All their sins, all their abused mercies, all the warnings they receive in vain, are carefully recorded by him in that book of remembrance which will be opened at the judgment day.

If it be asked, why God thus keeps silence; I answer, because this life is a season of trial and probation. Men are placed in this world, that they may show what is in their hearts, and thus discover their true characters. In order to this, it is necessary that they should be left in some manner to themselves; left at liberty to act as they please. It is evident that if the good were always openly rewarded, and the wicked visibly punished here; if the thunder always rolled, and the lightnings always flashed to blast the sinner at the very moment in which he sinned, this life would not be a state of trial. Men would be so much under the influence of a slavish fear, that they would not act as they pleased; and, consequently, would not make a discovery of their true character. It is evidently no time to discover whether a servant is faithful or unfaithful, while he feels that his master's eye is upon him. If we would know his true character, let his master withdraw for awhile, and leave him to himself, and it will then be seen whether he is an eye- servant or not.

Precisely in this manner God deals with mankind. He sets before them in the works of creation, sufficient evidence of his existence and perfections; he lays them under obligations to love and thank him by the blessings of his providence; he clearly prescribes their duty, and gives them directions for its performance, in his word; he places conscience in their breasts, as an overseer, and monitor; and then, wrapped up in his own invisibility, sits silent and unseen, to notice and record, their conduct. His eyes run through the earth, beholding the evil and the good; he is present in all the scenes of business and amusement; he comes with sinners to his temple on the Sabbath; goes with them to their habitations when they return; is with them when they lie down; and when they rise up; and follows their steps through the day; but however they may provoke him, still keeps silence. Thus he is prepared to bring every secret thing into judgment, as he has told us he will do at the last day. Even now, this invisible witness is present. Even now he hears my words, and reads your thoughts; his adamantine pen is even now in motion to record them; and it will be found when he judges the secrets of men hereafter, that not one thought or feeling has escaped his notice.

II. We have in this passage the opinions which sinners form of God, in consequence of his thus keeping silence: Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself. We are not to understand the passage as asserting, that sinners suppose God in all respects to resemble themselves. They know that he is not like them, clothed with a body; that he is not mortal; that he far surpasses them in power, wisdom, and other natural perfections. But it is their opinions of his moral character, of his views and feelings with respect to themselves and their conduct, to which the assertion refers. In this respect every unawakened sinner supposes, or at least acts as if he supposed, that God is altogether such an one as himself. Feeling no immediate tokens of God's displeasure, he flatters himself that God is not displeased. Satisfied with his own character and

conduct, he imagines that God is equally satisfied. Feeling little or no abhorrence of sin, he takes it for granted that it is not hateful in the sight of God, and that of course he will not punish it.

Finding it easy to justify himself, and satisfy his own conscience, he fancies that it will be equally easy to satisfy God, and justify his conduct at his bar. But what most evidently shows that he thinks God to be such an one as himself, is the fact, that from what he should do, he infers what God will do. He says in his heart, I could not destroy so many millions as there are in the world, destitute of religion, and therefore God will not destroy them. I could not find it in my heart to punish any man with everlasting misery, and therefore God will punish none in that manner. I should save all men, were it in my power, and therefore God will save all, and me among the rest. Sometime or other, I shall be converted, if conversion be necessary, and if it be not, I am safe. That such are the thoughts and feelings of sinners is well known to all who converse much with them respecting religion; and in defiance of all God's declarations to the contrary, they will persist in supposing that He will do as they should do in like circumstances. When hard pressed, their hearts, if not their lips avow: —I can never believe that God will make any of his creatures miserable forever.

Now in reasoning in this manner they evidently take it for granted, that God is altogether such an one as themselves that his views and feelings correspond with theirs, and that he will do nothing which they would not do, were they in his place. They forget that God has said, My ways are not yours: as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts. They forget that God is the moral Governor of the universe, and, as such, is no less sacredly bound to punish the wicked, than to reward the good. They forget that he has most solemnly declared that, though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished, and that he cannot break his word. They forget, that God is not man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent; that what he has said is as certain as if it were already done; and fancy that it is as easy for God as it is for themselves to say and unsay, to do and undo, and to modify and change his purposes.

III. We have in this passage an account of the measures which God will employ to convince sinners that he is not such an one as themselves: I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. This he will do as is evident from the context, at the judgment day. He intends, as an apostle informs us, that every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world made to stand guilty before him. To produce this effect, nothing more will be necessary than to bring into view the sins which men have committed, and the duties which they have neglected: or in the language of the text, set them in order. This, God here declares that he will do; and that he is perfectly able to do it, is evident from what has already been said respecting the silent, but particular notice which he takes of human conduct. But what, it may be asked, is implied by setting the sinner's offences in order before his eyes? I answer, it implies, In the first place, giving the sinner a clear and full view of all the sins of his life, in thought, word and deed, in the order in which they were committed. Such a view no sinner has of himself in the present life. He is guilty of ten thousand, thousand sins, which he does not even suspect to be sins. Of his gins of omission, which are by far the most numerous, he scarcely thinks at all. Blinded by self-love, and the deceitfulness of his own heart, he views his character in a favorable light, and calls many things virtues, which God will convince him were sins. Ignorant of the spirituality and extent of the divine law, he has no conception how frequently, how continually, he violates its precepts. Of the sins of his heart, he is almost entirely

unconscious; though they are not only the most numerous, but perhaps the worst of which he is guilty. He does not consider that a wanton look is adultery, that covetousness is idolatry, and that hatred of his brother is murder in the sight of God. He does not consider that every waking moment, in which he does not love God with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself, he is breaking the two great commands on which hang all the law and the prophets.

He does not consider that as often as he eats or drinks, merely to gratify himself, and not to glorify God, he is violating a most important gospel precept. He does not consider, that, during every day spent in unbelief, he has treated God as a liar, crucified Christ afresh, and grieved the Spirit of grace. He does not consider that to him who knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. Nor does he think anything of the innumerable evil consequences which result from his conduct during his life, and which will continue to flow from it perhaps after his death; though he is accountable for them all. And as every sinner is thus guilty of innumerable sins of which he is scarcely conscious, so he very quickly forgets those sins which he knew to be such. The sins of each successive day efface the remembrance of the sins of the preceding day; the youth forgets the sins of his childhood; the man forgets the sins of his youth, and the gray-haired sinner forgets the sins of his manhood; hence the sinner never has any full view of his sins; and though he is every day increasing in guilt, and treasuring up wrath, he is not aware that he is more guilty now than he was formerly. But at the day of judgment he will have a clear view of the whole; then all his sins will find him out, and God will set them in order before him, to overwhelm him with amazement, shame and despair. All the duties he has neglected, all the sins he has committed, all his vain, foolish thoughts, feelings and desires, all his idle words, all his hidden works of darkness, all his wandering imaginations in the house of God, all the mischief which resulted from his example, all the unbelief, pride; wickedness and rottenness of his heart, will then be brought to his view at once, and he will, however reluctantly, be forced to behold them. In the next place, setting the sinner's offences in order before him, implies giving him a view of all their aggravations. All the mercies he received, all the afflictions which were sent to rouse him, all the opportunities, privileges, warnings and means of grace with which he was favored; all the sermons which he heard, and all the secret checks which he experienced from his own conscience, and from the strivings of God's Spirit, will then be set before him, to shew that he sinned willfully and knowingly, against light and against love, and that he is, therefore, without excuse. Thus it will appear that God would often have reclaimed him, but that he would not be reclaimed, and that he is consequently the author of his own ruin. In the third place, setting his sins in order before him, implies giving him a full view of their dreadful malignity and criminality. Of this sinners see nothing in this world. They do not see what an infinitely great and glorious Being that God is against whom sin is committed. They do not see what an infinitely precious, lovely, and all-sufficient Saviour they are rejecting. They do not see the holiness, justice and goodness of the law. They do not see what a heaven they are forfeiting, nor into what a hell they are plunging themselves by sin. They do not realize how short is time in comparison with eternity, nor how worthless the body when compared with the soul. But at the judgment-day they will be made to see all these things. Then they will behold every object in its true light. They will then see what a being God is, and the sight will convince them that the least sin committed against him is an infinite evil and deserving of everlasting punishment. Then, too, they will see what a Saviour Christ is. He will then come, not in his own glory only, but in that of his Father and all his servants the holy angels; and the folly, the madness and wickedness of rejecting such a Saviour, will, therefore, appear to be infinitely great.

Then, too, time with its engagements will seem exceedingly short and insignificant, for they will all be past; and eternity will appear long indeed, for it will be all to come. In a word, then, the nature and tendency of sin will be clearly seen. It will be seen that as one spark of fire, if placed in a favorable situation, and supplied with proper fuel, is sufficient to produce an universal conflagration, and destroy every thing that is destructible in the universe, so the tendency of the least sin is to produce universal disorder and misery, and destroy the whole created universe or turn it into hell. How terrible, how appalling, how overwhelming, then, must be the sight which will be presented to the sinner, when all his sins are set in order before him, with all their aggravations, all their malignity, and all their dreadful consequences! Suffice it to say, that the sight will blast him like lightning; he will feel utterly unable to support it, or to endure the abhorrent gaze of his offended God, and of holy beings, and will be eager to hide himself from it, and bury his shame, if possible, by plunging into the darkness of the bottomless pit.

IV. We learn from this passage what improvement careless sinners ought to make of these awfully alarming truths. They should be led by them to consideration: Now consider this, ye that forget God. It is owing to forgetfulness of God, and to the neglect of considering these important truths, that sinners live as they do. They consider not in their hearts, says Jehovah, that I remember all their wickedness. My friends, is not this the case with respect to some of you? Do not some of you forget God; forget his laws, and forget your obligations to obey them; forget that you have a Master and a Judge in heaven, who, while he keeps silence, notices and remembers all your sins; who will hereafter bring every secret thing into judgment, and set all your sins in order before you? If any such there be, you are the very persons whom God here addresses. He speaks to you as directly as if he called you by name. Thus saith the Lord God, consider your ways. Consider that I am a constant though invisible spectator of your conduct. Consider that for all these things I will bring thee into judgment. Consider how thou wilt feel, what shame, confusion and despair will overwhelm thee, when I shall set all thy sins in order before thy face, in presence of the assembled universe, and doom thee to depart accursed into everlasting fire. Such, O forgetful, careless and impenitent sinner, is the language in which the Creator, thy Judge now addresses thee, and he also tells thee,

Lastly, what will be the consequences of neglecting this warning: Consider this, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver. Lest the terrible threatening should be unnoticed or forgotten, if only once uttered, God, in different parts of his word, frequently repeats it. Speaking of sinners, he says, I will be to them as a lion and as a young lion; I, even I, will tear, and none shall rescue them. And again, I will be to them as a lion, as a leopard who watcheth for the prey will I observe them. I will meet them as a bear bereaved of her young, and will rend the caul of their hearts, and will devour them as a lion. My friends, what a terrible emphasis is there in these words. It is God, it is Jehovah, it is that very Being whom you fondly fancy to be altogether such an one as yourselves, who says this. I, he says, even I will do it; I who am omnipotent, and therefore can do it; I who am true to my word, and therefore will do it; I who am just, and therefore must do it. And if it is Jehovah the strong God, the mighty One, who threatens to do this, well may he add, that none shall rescue, that there will be none to deliver them. My friends, it is, indeed it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; of that God who is a consuming fire. Can thy heart, he says, endure; can thy hand be strong, in the day when I shall deal with thee? I, the Lord have spoken, and will do it. Yes, if you do not consider and repent, God will tear you in pieces as a lion. He will

send death to tear your souls from your bodies; he will tear your hearts with unutterable anguish, he will give you up to be devoured forever by the gnawing tooth of that worm which never dies, and by the merciless jaws of the great tormentor who goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; and there will be none to deliver, no Saviour to save, to interpose, to plead for you. Even the wrath of the Lamb, who is now willing to save, will be hurled against you. Even the rock of salvation, on which you now refuse to build, will then fall upon you and grind you to powder. Will you not then consider these things, ye who now forget God? Will you still think him altogether such an one as yourselves, and believe your own fancies, rather than his declarations? O do not, I beseech you, do not, be so mad. Do not my sheep, my flock, do not refuse to listen to the voice of your Shepherd, do not follow the dangerous path, where the bear waits to tear you in pieces. Rather flee to the great Shepherd. He who will then tear, now offers to save you, and place you where you will be safe and happy forever.

S. THE SLEEPER AWAKENED

THE SLEEPER AWAKENED

"What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God; if so he God will think upon us, that we perish not." Jonah 1:6 In the preceding verses of this chapter, we are informed, that God gave a commission to the prophet Jonah, to go unto Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and denounce heavy judgments against its inhabitants, on account of the sins, of which they were guilty. Important and honorable, however, as such a commission from the King of kings ought to have appeared in the eyes of Jonah, he was, for some reason or other, unwilling to undertake it. This unwillingness probably arose, either from a dread of the labors and fatigues which would attend the performance of his duty; from a reluctance to see the heathen enjoying those prophetic warnings and instructions, which had hitherto been exclusively confined to the Jews; or from an apprehension that the Ninevites would repent, and be received into favor; and thus he would not only be considered as a false prophet in foretelling their destruction, but the obstinate impenitency of his own countrymen in disregarding the multiplied warnings of their prophets, would be rendered more odious and inexcusable, by the ready submission and reformation of that idolatrous city. For these, or some other similar reasons, he resolved not to go to Nineveh, and supposing, in common with the rest of his countrymen, that the spirit of prophecy was confined to the land of Israel, he hoped to escape from its spring influences, by flying into a foreign country. But, like all who endeavor to frustrate the designs, evade the commands, or flee from the presence of God, he found his hopes miserably disappointed. He, who maketh the winds his messengers; sent a storm to arrest the fugitive prophet, and bring him back to the path of duty. A mighty tempest arose from the sea, which entirely baffled the seamen’s art, and threatened them with immediate shipwreck and death. But while the terrified mariners lightened the ship, and cried every man to his God for deliverance, Jonah, the cause of their distress, lay buried in sleep, ignorant of his danger, and insensible to the storm which soared around him. From this state of slothful security, he was roused to a sense of the horrors of his situation, by the pungent, alarming expostulation in our text: What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise and call upon thy God. My friends, this address of the shipmaster to the slumbering prophet, is equally applicable to all those of you who are yet in your natural, unregenerate state; for your situation is far more dreadful and alarming than his. Like him you are exposed to the storm of divine wrath, which every moment pursues and threatens to overwhelm you; like him you are asleep and insensible of your danger. To illustrate the resemblance between your situation and his in these two particulars, and to urge you without delay to rouse from your slumbers and call upon God, that you perish not, is my present design.

I. Like the prophet you are exposed to the storm of divine wrath, which every moment pursues and threatens to overwhelm you.

This, my friends; is a truth, which, however painful it may be for us to declare, and for you to hear, is too important to be concealed, and too plainly taught in the word of God to be either evaded or denied. We are there told, that mankind are by nature children of wrath, having no hope, and

without God in the world; that there is no peace to the wicked, but that God is angry with them every day; that his torso is in their house, and that he will rain upon them snares and fire, and a horrible tempest, which shall be the portion of their cup. We are told that they have been unmindful of the Rock that begat them, and forgotten the God of their salvation; and that therefore God and many similar instances which experience, and the sacred writings afford, you cannot imagine that worldly prosperity is any proof, that God is not angry. Whatever therefore your external situation may be, if you are still in an unconverted state; God views you with holy anger and indignation; his wrath abides on you, and his curse pursues you, nor will it cease its pursuit, till you are reformed or destroyed. In a word, my friends, this is your situation. You are embarked on the dangerous voyage of life in weak, frail, shattered vessels. On every side you are surrounded by rocks and quicksands, which your utmost skill can neither discover nor avoid. The clouds of divine displeasure frown dark and dreadful over your heads, and whether the approaching storm will burst this year, this day, or this hour, God only knows.

If those of you, to whom these observations are addressed, have thought proper to listen with any degree of attention, you have doubtless heard them, in many instances, with perfect indifference, or consummate contempt. To you, these awful denunciations of vengeance, probably, appear to be nothing more than the dreams of superstition, the mere phantoms and chimeras of a disordered imagination; and to be credibly assured that some trifling accident or calamity was about to befall you, would occasion more alarm and uneasiness in your breasts, than all the woes and threatenings which the Scriptures contain. What is the reason, perhaps some of you will disdainfully ask, what is the reason we can see nothing of all these terrible evils which await us? why do we discover none of these impending dangers, why hear nothing of all these storms and tempests, which we are told every moment pursue, and threaten to overwhelm us! I answer, because you are, in a spiritual sense, asleep, like the prophet; and like him insensible of your danger. This was the second point of resemblance between your situation and his, which we proposed to consider, and to this we shall now attend.

II. You need not be informed, that the inspired writers employ various figurative expressions to describe the character and situation of impenitent sinners. Persons of this description, are represented sometimes as foolish, mad, or infatuated; sometimes as blind and senseless; sometimes as dead in trespasses and sins, and sometimes as slumbering or asleep. To show the justice, beauty, and propriety of this last metaphorical expression, it would be easy to enumerate several particulars in which the state of unrenewed sinners resembles the situation of those who are asleep. Of these particulars, time will allow us at present to notice only the most striking.

1. Sleep is a state of insensibility. In many respects it resembles death. It entirely locks up the senses of those who are under its influence, so that they perceive nothing, and know nothing, of what is passing around them. Of their own situation, they are perfectly unconscious. It may be safe, or dangerous, or critical in itself, but to them it is still the same. The day may dawn, and the sun arise on others, but he who is asleep, perceives not his beams. It may be a season of hurry and business, and his labor may be wanted; but he knows nothing of it. Place a mirror before him; he sees not his own image. Describe to him the character of the sluggard, he hears you not. Urge him to rise without delay; address him in the most moving and pathetic manner; invite or command, entreat or menace him, ply him with the most powerful arguments, the strongest motives, the most awful threatenings, or the most magnificent promises. It is all in vain. The sound

may strike upon his ears, but while he continues asleep, it makes no impression. Place him in the midst of a delightful garden, where the morning hymns of the feathered choirs combine with fragrant odors, beauteous flowers, and blushing fruits, to leave no sense ungratified. It gives him no pleasure. Surround his couch with enemies and dangers, present a dagger to his breast, or poison to his lips; place him in a forest infested with wild beasts, or on the crumbling brink of a cataract; still he sleeps securely and quietly as before. In a word, his family and friends may be perishing around him for want of his assistance; his house may be wrapt in flames and threaten every moment to bury him in its blazing ruins; or, like Jonah, he may be exposed to immediate shipwreck and death, and yet far from knowing or suspecting his danger, he may be amused and delighted with fancies and shadows; for,

2. Sleep is a state of dreams and delusions. The nobler powers of the soul are then at rest, and imagination, a lawless, irreclaimable servant, embraces the opportunity to range and revel uncontrolled. Touched by her magic wand, everything assumes a new and delusive appearance, and the bewildered sleeper forms strange, false and fantastic ideas of himself, his character, his situation and pursuits. The beggar dreams that he is heir to a throne, or possessor of immense wealth; the miserable wretch dreams that he is happy; the naked fancies that he is clothed; the hungry, that he is feasting; the thirsty, that he has found a refreshing spring; the ignorant, that he has become learned; the simple, that he has grown wise; and the criminal that he is innocent. While they are thus deluded with regard to themselves, they are equally deceived in other respects. Though entirely unaffected with the realities around them, whether pleasant or painful, yet they are much engaged by their imaginary pursuits, and are rendered by them very happy or miserable. One imagines that he is flying from some impending evil, and another that he is following some flying good, and these fancied evils and blessings continue, so long as they are buried in sleep, to have all the force of realities on their minds.

Now, my friends, how exactly does this representation suit the character and situation of the unawakened sinner. He is,

(1.) In a state of spiritual insensibility, a state which so much resembles moral death, that the word of God often describes him as actually dead. His spiritual senses are chained up under the power of that strong man armed who keeps his goods in peace, even the god of this world, who blinds the minds of those who perish, and works in all the children of disobedience. The sinner has ears, but he hears not; he has eyes, but he sees not; he has taste, but he relishes not, the things of God. He knows nothing of the dangers of his situation; he is unconscious of what is passing around him; he sees none of the awful realities of the future and eternal world. The Sun of righteousness has arisen on the earth; but the sinner sees not his light, he feels not his warmth. The word of God, like a polished mirror, reflects most perfectly the sinner’s moral image, but he does not perceive it. Describe to him his own character, call upon him instantly to rise; tell him that life is the seed-time for eternity, that now is the accepted time and the day of salvation; that the night of death is fast approaching, and that he must be up and doing, or he will be miserable forever.

He hears, as though he heard not. Set before him all the powerful motives and arguments which the word of God affords; reason, expostulate, urge, command, threaten, beseech, and entreat him; it is still the same. Place him in the house of God, where the awakened Christian finds a foretaste

of heaven in communion with Christ and his members; set before him the bowers of paradise, the songs of angels, the golden crowns, the tree of life, and the water of life; invite him to partake of the gospel feast, spread with all the dainties which infinite wisdom, love and power, could provide; nay, set forth Christ evidently crucified before him, —all affords him not the smallest satisfaction; all is heard with the most perfect indifference and insensibility. And though his family and friends may, perhaps, be in danger of perishing eternally, for want of a good example, and suitable instructions from him; though he is surrounded by innumerable enemies, the weakest of whom could in an instant cut short the thread of life; though God, who has hitherto restrained them, is angry and threatens him with ruin, and that he is himself suspended as it were, by a single thread over the gulf which has no bottom, yet he is still unmoved, still the same.

(2.) The state of the unawakened sinner resembles sleep because it is a state of dreams and delusions. Imagination, passion and appetite deceive him; and though he is entirely unaffected with the things of his everlasting peace, and almost ignorant of their very existence, yet he is wholly engaged and swallowed up by the dreams and vanities of the world. He considers them as realities, and pursues or avoids them accordingly; and at the very moment that he sleeps on the crumbling verge of the grave, and that the storm which has pursued him so long is about to burst and blast him forever, he may, perhaps, be dreaming that he has acquired a great estate, and has nothing to do but eat, drink, and be merry; or that he has arrived at the summit of power and applause, and is surrounded by crowds of flatterers and dependents. The drunkard dreams that he has grasped the cup of felicity; he drains it to the very dregs; and finds too late that it is poison. The infidel philosopher dreams that he is about to become as a god, knowing good and evil; but wakes and finds that he has been eating forbidden fruit.

Thousands dream that they are pursued by some impending evil, such as poverty, contempt or pain, and in attempting to escape it, they fall into the hands of that God, who is a consuming fire. Others fancy that they are pursuing some fugitive good, but in the midst of their pursuit, stumble and fall to rise no more. Thousands and millions, who are in reality poor, and miserable, and guilty, and vile, and weak, and foolish, and sinful, and wretched, dream that they are rich, and happy, and innocent, and strong, and wise, and holy; and thus they are evidently in the broad road to destruction, yet fancy that God is their friend, and heaven their portion. In short, the life of every unawakened sinner is nothing but a series of dreams, and follies, and divers vanities, in which realities have no place. That this is, and always has been, the case, is evident from the word of God, and present experience. The inhabitants of the old world dreamed of safety and security, eating and drinking, and planting and building, till the flood came and destroyed them; so also it was with the Sodomites, who thought that Lot only mocked, when he threatened them with fire from heaven. And so our Saviour informs us it will be at the end of the world.

We are assured in passages too numerous to mention particularly, that mankind are blind to the danger which threatens them, that their feet stand in slippery places, in darkness; that when they promise themselves peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them; that madness is in their hearts, while they live, and that after that, they go to the dead. My friends, what a wretched, deplorable, and almost hopeless condition is yours, if you are still in an unconverted state. You are hastening, with a swift and increasing pace, to irreparable ruin; yet you know not your danger, and what renders your situation infinitely more dreadful is, that you do not wish to be told of it. The broad road in which you are walking, is so pleasant, and the society you there enjoy,

so fascinating, that you cannot bear to give it up, nor to be told that it will lead you to destruction. You love darkness rather than light, and it is this which renders your situation in a human view, altogether hopeless. Did you see the storm which threatens you, there would be some hope that you might escape it. Were you even willing to have it pointed out to you, your case would not be altogether desperate. But since you neither see it, nor wish to see it, we see no hope for you, but in the free, sovereign, unmerited mercy of God. He has commanded us to cry aloud and not spare; and though our arguments and calls can of themselves avail nothing, yet we must obey the command whether slumbering sinners will hear, or whether they forbear; and leave the event to him who sends us. In entire dependence, therefore, on his grace, and with a faint hope that he may now awaken some of you to a sense of your perishing, deplorable situation, I address each unawakened sinner here present in the words of the text: What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise and call upon thy God. And, my friends, well may we ask what you mean, to sleep thus, when your souls are at stake, when such blackness, and darkness, and tempest hang over your heads, and when God himself is angry with you daily, even that God who holds you prisoners in the hollow of his hand; whose eye is ever upon you, who surrounds you on every side, and whose persevering goodness alone keeps you for a moment out of everlasting woe. And have you then anytime to waste in sleep and security? Will you still say a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep? Will you still delay repentance and preparation for death, when you know not but death is even now at the door, and will, this night, require your soul? So long as you remain unreconciled to God, all his creation are at war with you, and wait only his permission to destroy you in an instant. You have, therefore, no security for a single moment, and we solemnly charge you, in the name of God, to rise without delay, and call upon him in the name of his Son, that you may not perish forever. Awake thou that steepest, arise, call upon thy God, if so be thou perish not. If you do not believe the word of God, we must leave you to sleep till you are awakened by the last trump; but if you do acknowledge this word to be true, you cannot, without renouncing all claim to rationality, defer obedience a single hour. The madman who scatters firebrands arrows and death as in sport, or the criminal who jests and trifles under the gallows, are the wisest of philosophers, compared with those who sport with the wrath of God, and amuse themselves with trifles. From those who are still in a state of slothful and dangerous security, we now turn to those whom God has been pleased to awaken. We would remind such, that though they will not again be permitted to sink into the same profound repose as before, yet there is great danger lest, while the bridegroom tarries, they should slumber and sleep. Let me, therefore, call on them to remember the often repeated injunction of our Lord to watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is. And permit me also to ask you, my Christian friends, whether you are not sinking into a drowsy frame; have you not forgotten your first love? If so, I would call upon you, in the name of perishing neighbors, relations, children and friends; and say what mean ye, O sleepers, thus to sleep while we are perishing around you. Arise, call upon your God, if so be he will have mercy upon us that we perish not. My Christian friends, will you obey this affecting call? Will you not cry earnestly and unceasingly to God, to open their hearts to receive the truth? I am willing indeed to hope that you do not neglect this, but I beseech you to abound more and more. Your prayers will not, shall not, cannot be lost. They may not, indeed, be answered immediately, but they will be answered, and they will bring down abundant blessings on your neighbors, families and friends. Redeem the time, then, from every thing, for this important duty. Remember that you are not your own, but God’s, and he has not sent you here to rest, but to labor in season and out of season.

Think of him who spent whole nights in prayer with strong cryings unto him that was able to save him from death; and who wept over rebellious Jerusalem when he foresaw her doom. My friends, look at these perishing immortals before you. They are now, as you were once, in jeopardy. Have you no tears to shed for them, no prayers to send up in their behalf? Will you remain careless, and asleep, while multitudes of your fellow creatures are going down to everlasting death?

Chapter 85

S. THE STUBBORN SINNER SUBMITTING TO GOD.

THE STUBBORN SINNER SUBMITTING TO GOD.

I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely, after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spoke against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.—Jeremiah 31:18-20.

THESE verses, my friends, may be considered as an epitome or abridgment of the book from which they are taken. The obstinate wickedness of the Israelites, the dreadful calamities which it brought upon them, and the happy effect of those calamities in leading some of them to repentance, and thus preparing them for pardon, are here briefly, but clearly and most affectingly described. In this description, my friends, we are deeply interested; for since the human heart, the nature and effects of repentance, the character of God and the methods of his proceedings, are ever essentially the same, it is evident that every thing which is recorded in Scripture respecting these subjects must be in a greater or less degree applicable to us. In our text each of these subjects is more or less distinctly brought into view. It describes three things, with which it is necessary that we should be acquainted, and which we propose particularly to consider in the following discourse.

I. We have here a description of the feelings and conduct of an obstinate impenitent sinner, while smarting under the rod of affliction. In this situation he is like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; wild, unmanageable, and perverse. Such, by his own confession, was Ephraim, when God began to correct him. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. Such were the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thy sons, says the prophet to her, have fainted; they lie at the head of the streets, like a wild bull in a net,—that exhausts his strength in fruitless struggle to free himself. Such too was Paul, when first arrested by conviction. From the language in which Christ addressed him, it appears that he felt disposed to struggle and resist, like a stubborn bullock that kicks at the goad, and thus wounds himself, and not his master. And such, my friends, by nature are all mankind. Man, says an inspired writer, is born like a wild ass's colt. His proud, wayward temper, fond of liberty and unwilling to yield, renders it hard for him to submit, and exceedingly difficult to subdue him. Hence his heart is frequently represented by the inspired writers, as being froward and perverse. To describe him in one word, he is stout hearted. He not only possesses this temper, but glories in it as a proof of courage, independence, and nobleness of mind; while to confess a fault, solicit pardon, submit to correction, or yield to the will of another, are viewed by him as marks of disgraceful weakness and pusillanimity. That such is the natural temper of man, must be evident to parents and all others, who are concerned in the education of children. How soon do they begin to discover a perverse

and stubborn temper, a fondness for independence, and a desire to gratify their own will in every thing! And what severe punishments will they often bear, rather than submit to the authority of their parents and instructors ! This disposition, so strong in us by nature, grows with our growth and strengthens with our strength; and to subdue it, is the principal design of all the calamities with which we are in this world afflicted by our heavenly Father. As the disease is constitutional, inveterate, and, unless removed, fatal, the afflictions which he makes use of as remedies are various, complicated and severe. Sometimes he afflicts sinners by taking away their property and sending poverty, as an armed man, to attack them. With this, among other punishments, he threatens the Israelites who in our text are spoken of as an individual: I will hedge up thy way, says he, with thorns, and make a wall that thou shalt not find thy paths; and I will take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will destroy her vines and fig-trees, and cause her mirth to cease. At other times he corrects us by depriving us of our relatives, who rendered life pleasant, by sharing with us its joys, or helping to bear its sorrows. To use the language of Scripture, he removes our friends into darkness, kills our children with death, or takes away the desire of our eyes with a stroke. If these afflictions do not avail, he brings the rod yet nearer, and touches our bone and our flesh. Then the sinner is chastened with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones are filled with strong pain; so that his life abhorreth bread and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, and his bones, that were not seen, stick out; yea, his soul draweth near to the grave, and his life unto the destroyer. All these outward afflictions are also frequently accompanied with inward trials and sorrows, still more severe. Conscience is awakened to perform its office, and fills the soul with terror, anxiety, and remorse. A load of guilt, a sense of God’s anger, fears of death and judgment, and the tumultuous workings of passion, pride, enmity, and unbelief, torture and distract the mind and render it like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. These are the arrows of the Almighty mentioned by Job, which enter the soul, the poison of which drinks up the spirits, as a fiery dart thrust through the body dries up the blood. To these terrible afflictions Solomon alludes, when he says, The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?

Now when God visits impenitent sinners with these afflictions, they usually murmur, struggle, and reluctate, like a stubborn bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, or a wild bull entangled in a net. This indeed is not always the case. Sometimes they continue stupid, careless, and unconcerned, because they do not realize that it is God who afflicts them; but like the Philistines, when punished for detaining the ark, suppose that it is only a chance that has happened to them, with which God has nothing to do. At other times, they flatter themselves that God is correcting them for their good, as he does his children, uot in anger but in mercy; and this groundless opinion, combined with a fear of provoking him to punish them still more severely, often produces a kind of selfish, slavish resignation to his afflictive dispensations. In addition to this, it may be observed, that, after a long series of very severe, and overwhelming calamities, sinners sometimes become so dejected and depressed, and their spirits are so much worn down by constant suffering, that they have no longer any strength to struggle or resist; but sink into a desponding, melancholy frame, and appear to submit to affliction because they cannot help it. But though their stony hearts are thus seemingly broken, yet they are not turned to flesh, but like the fragments of a broken stone remain hard and stony still. They feel something like sorrow for the sins which drew down afflictions upon them; but it is that worldly sorrow, mentioned by the apostle, which worketh death. But if we except these instances, which are rare, whenever an impenitent sinner realizes that it is

God who afflicts him; that he does it in anger, and that he will perhaps never pardon him, he will invariably, like Ephraim, repine and struggle, and rebel, under afflictions, and will not infrequently, like the persons mentioned in the Revelation, blaspheme God because of his plagues. This perverse and rebellious temper manifests itself in a great variety of ways, as persons' circumstances, situation, and dispositions vary. Sometimes it displays itself merely in a refusal to submit, and a sullen, obstinate perseverance in those sins which caused the affliction. Thus it was with those of whom it is said, They cry not when God bindeth them; that is, they were like sullen, obstinate children, who scorn to reform, or weep, or cry for pardon, when their parents correct them. Of such too the prophet speaks, 0 Lord, says he, thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a flint, they have refused to return. At other times, impenitent sinners manifest their rebellious dispositions under the rod by flying to the world for comfort, and plunging with increased eagerness into its pleasures and pursuits, instead of calling upon God agreeably to his command, and repenting of their sins. Thus it was with those who when once they were corrected, said, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. With others this disposition displays itself in a settled formal endeavor to frustrate the will of God by sinning against him with a high hand, in open contempt of all his inflictions and threatenings. Of such the prophet Isaiah speaks: Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria say in the pride and stoutness of their hearts, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stone; the sycamores are cut down, but we will replace them with cedars; as if they had said, God has taken away one idol, but we will set up another in its stead; he has punished us for one sin, and instead of renouncing it we will practice many. But the perverse unreconciled disposition of impenitent sinners most frequently appears in the increase of hard thoughts of God, and proud angry feelings towards him, as if he were severe, unmerciful, or unjust. What have I done? The unhumbled, corrected sinner often says in his heart, what have I done to deserve all these afflictions? Why must God needs punish me so much more than he does many others, who are as bad or worse than myself? Why did he take away that property which I had honestly acquired by so much care and labor, and which was necessary for the support of my family? What advantage can result from the death of the friend, the child, the wife, whom I have lost? Why can he not suffer me to enjoy at least a little peace, and not follow me with one affliction after another, as if he delighted in tormenting me? Or if I must be afflicted, why does he not sanctify my afflictions, and afford me those religious comforts and supports which I see many others enjoy? How can it be that he is either just or good, when his conduct appears so partial, and he suffers the world to be so full of misery! And, as if all this were not sufficient, I am told that, if I do not repent and believe, if I do not do something which I cannot do, I must not only be wretched here, but lie down in sorrow and be miserable forever. If this is true I will have nothing to do with such a being. Why did he create me? I did not wish him to do it, and all I ask of him now, is that he would take away my existence, and let me sink into nothing again, that I may at length find an end of suffering and sorrow. If this cannot be, if he must needs create me and keep me in being, why did he give me such a heart as I have? And if he dislikes it, why does he not take it away and give me a better?

Thus, my friends, does the proud, self-justifying heart of the afflicted, impenitent sinner, often rise against God, and quarrel with and condemn the Almighty; and when conscience is awakened to convince him of his guilt, alarm his fears, and lead him to think that there may possibly he a future state of endless punishment, and that he must submit and be reconciled to God, if he would avoid

it, he endeavors in every conceivable way, to banish this salutary conviction from his niind, labors to persuade himself that there is no danger, that all will be saved; or that, if some perish, he shall not be among the number. If he cannot persuade himself to believe this, and his fears still follow him, he begins to look round for some other way of escape; one moment he wishes there was no God, that he was not such a God as he is, or that he could deceive, escape from, or get above him. But the next moment he sees that all these wishes are vain. Now he hopes that the Bible may not be true; but something whispers that it is, and his fears return. Thus perplexed, and distressed, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, he struggles, wearies, and torments himself, and tries in every possible way to throw off his burden, escape from the heavy hand of God, and regain liberty and peace. A dreadful state of mind indeed; for woe to him that striveth with his Maker. My friends, do any of you know any thing of this state by experience? If so, you may perhaps listen with some interest to some observations on the second part of our text, in which we have a description of a penitent, humbled, broken-hearted sinner, confessing and lamenting his sins. What Ephraim was, when God began to correct him, we have already seen.

II. Let us contemplate the new views and feelings which, through divine grace, his afflictions were instrumental in producing. The person is the same; the character only is changed.

1. We here find the once stubborn and rebellious, but now awakened sinner deeply convinced of his guilt and sinfulness, and deploring his unhappy situation. It is good for man, says an inspired writer, to be afflicted, and to bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him; he putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope. This happy effect affliction seems to have produced upon Ephraim. We no longer see him in the seat of the scorner, and setting his mouth against the heavens. No; he sits alone, and puts his mouth in the dust. His murmuring, repining tongue is silent, or is employed only in confessing and bewailing his sins, he still complains indeed, but it is of himself and not of God. He acknowledges the goodness, condescension, and justice of God in correcting him. Thou, 0 Lord, says he, hast chastised me. The word here rendered chastise, signifies to correct as a father. He next reflects with shame, grief, and self-abhorrence on the manner in which he had treated his fatherly correction. Thou hast chastised me, and I was like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. His obstinate perverseness and impiety in rebelling and murmuring against the correcting hand of God, seems to have been the first sin of which he was convinced. This is very frequently the case with other penitents. Perhaps more are convinced of sin, and brought to repentance, by reflecting on their impious unreconciled feelings under affliction than by reflecting on any other part of their sinful exercises.

Such feelings have indeed a powerful tendency to show the sinner, what he is naturally very unwilling to believe, that his heart is enmity against God, and that reconciliation is indispensably necessary. Nothing can convince us of this truth, but our own experience of the enmity and opposition of our hearts. Let a man but be left to feel this for one hour, and he will never doubt again whether he is by nature an enemy to God. But though conviction of sin often begins, it never ends with this; but from this fountain the convinced sinner traces back the streams of depravity flowing through his whole life. Thus it was with Ephraim. From contemplating the enmity of his heart, while under the rod, he proceeds to look back to the sins of early life. Once he probably justified himself and gloried in them. But now he justly considers them as his shame and reproach. I was ashamed, says he, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. All

the follies of his childhood, youth, and riper years, which had drawn down the judgments of God upon him, rush at once upon his mind, and overwhelm him with shame, confusion, and grief. Wretch that I am, we may consider him as exclaiming, what have I done? To what a wretched situation has my inexcusable folly and wickedness reduced me!

How early did I begin to rebel against my Creator and Preserver; how soon begin to consider the Sabbath as a weariness, to neglect the word of God, to cast off fear and restrain prayer before him? How did I waste the season of childhood in vanity and folly! With what infatuated eagerness did I plunge into sinful pleasures and pursuits instead of remembering my Creator in the days of my youth! With what stupid idolatry have I worshipped creatures and the world, and feared their frowns and desired their smiles more than the anger or the favor of God. How have I wasted my time, abused my talents, misimproved opportunities, slighted divine calls and invitations and thus rendered the precious gift of existence a burden almost too heavy to bear. And when my indulgent heavenly Father, instead of cutting me off as I deserved, condescended to correct me for my good, how did my proud and stubborn heart rise and murmur against his dispensations. He has indeed nourished and brought me up and corrected me as a child, but, alas, in return I have only rebelled against him. What then do I not deserve? What punishment may I not expect? In all my afflictions he has punished me less than my iniquities deserve; and should he cut me off, and render me miserable forever, I must acknowledge the justice of his dispensations; for I have sinned; what shall I do, 0 thou Preserver of men? Such, my friends, were probably the reflections of Ephraim, and such will be the reflections of every afflicted sinner, when he is brought to contemplate his own character and conduct in their proper light.

2. In the second place, we find this awakened afflicted sinner praying. Convinced of his wretched situation and feeling his need of divine aid, he humbly seeks it from his offended God. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. This prayer nearly resembles those which we hear from the lips of other penitents in different parts of Scripture. 0 Lord, says the psalmist, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name. Draw us, and we will run after thee. Enlarge our hearts, that we may run the way of thy commandments. These petitions plainly intimate that those who utter them feel entangled, fettered, or imprisoned, and unable to get free. Like the apostle, they are brought into captivity by the law of sin, so that they cannot do the things that they would. Thus it was with penitent Ephraim. He felt the need of a thorough conversion; he longed to turn from sin and self and idols, to God with his whole heart; but guilty fears, unbelief, and remaining sin kept him back. He knew not that the great work was already performed; he considered himself as still a guilty, unconverted sinner; a body of death pressed him down, and filled him with desponding fears from which he could not escape. He felt that without divine assistance he could do nothing; and therefore, like a helpless captive, breathes a short, but fervent prayer for help. Turn thou me, says he, and I shall be turned.

Observe, for what he prays; not that his afflictions may be removed, but that they might be sanctified; not that he might be delivered from punishment, but turned from sin to God. Observe also how he prays. He pleads nothing of his own as a reason why he should be heard. He does not, like the proud Pharisee, thank God that he is not like other men. He mentions no good works, no worthiness, no resolution of amendment, in order to obtain the divine favor. His only plea is drawn from the character of the being whom he addressed, Turn thou me, for thou art the Lord my

God. As if he had said, Thou art Jehovah, infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness, and art able to turn me; thou art also my God, my Creator, to whom I ought to turn. To thee I surrender myself; I would be in thy hands as clay in the hands of the potter. 0 thoroughly subdue my stubborn heart, and fashion me according to thy will. In a similar manner and for similar blessings will every penitent sinner pray. Whatever his character may have been, as soon as he repents it will be said of him, Behold he prayeth. Though he once perhaps proudly fancied that ho could help himself, and felt not the need of prayer, he now feels the truth of God's declaration, 0 sinner, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help. He will also, like Ephraim, pray to be delivered from sin, rather than from punishment; and since the only way of access to God is through Christ, he will present all his petitions in his name, crying, Not for my sake, 0 Lord, but for thy Son's sake, pardon thou my iniquity, for it is great. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; draw me, and I shall run after thee; Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

3. In the third place, we find this corrected, mourning, praying sinner reflecting upon the effects of divine grace in his conversion. Surely, says he, after I was turned I repented, and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. It is worthy of remark, my friends, how soon the answer followed the prayer. In one verse, we find Ephraim calling God to turn or convert him. In the very next, we find him reflecting upon his conversion and rejoicing in it. And what were the effects of this change, thus suddenly produced by divine grace? The first was repentance. After I was turned, I repented. No man, my friends, truly repents, till he is converted or turned from sin to God; and every one who is really converted, will thus repent. He then begins to hate the sins which he formerly loved, and mourns over them with godly sorrow and brokenness of heart. And as no man can practice that which he hates, and for which he mourns, the real penitent will bring forth fruits meet for repentance, by confessing and renouncing his sins; making all the reparation in his power to those whom he may have injured, and diligently practicing every good work. The second effect of conversion in this case was, self-loathing and abhorrence.

He hated and abhorred, not only his sins, but himself for committing them. After I was instructed, says he, I smote upon my thigh. I was ashamed, yea, even confounded. The gesture, by which penitent Ephraim is here represented as expressing his self-abhorrence, is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures as indicating the strongest emotions of grief and holy indignation. Son of man, says Jehovah to the prophet Ezekiel, smite with thy hand, and stamp with thy foot, and cry, alas! For all the evil abominations of the house of Israel. In a similar manner penitent Ephraim expresses his abhorrence of his own former sins; and thus in the New Testament we find the humble publican smiting upon his breast in token of indignation against himself, while he cries, God be merciful to me a sinner. Still farther to express his grief and shame, the penitent adds to the most significant actions the most expressive words. I was ashamed, says he, yea, even confounded because I did bear the reproach of my youth. My friends, should a man make use of such gestures, and employ such language at the present day to express his self-abhorrence for sin, he would by many be thought insane; and I doubt not that there are some present, who do not believe that any person, unless he has been guilty of the blackest crimes, can sincerely adopt such language, or entertain such feelings respecting himself. But every real penitent does entertain such feelings respecting himself—his past conduct, and can with the utmost sincerity adopt the strongest expressions of self-abhorrence which language affords. Not only so, but he

finds all language far too weak to describe what he feels on account of his sins. Whatever men may think of him, and however exemplary his conduct toward them may have been, he does in fact consider himself as guilty of the blackest crimes; for in his view no crimes committed against a fellow creature can equal the rebellion, ingratitude and impiety which he has in his heart committed against God. Hence, like penitent Ephraim, he is ashamed and confounded when he reflects on his past conduct; and, like the repenting Jews, loathes himself for his iniquities and abominations. And now, my friends, consider a moment what a change is here. He who was once like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, wild, sullen, unmanageable, and perverse, his mouth filled with murmuring complaints, and his heart with pride, unbelief, and opposition to God, now quiet, docile, and submissive, sits like a little child at the feet of his heavenly Father, which he bathes with penitential tears, while with a broken heart and a filial spirit he looks up and cries, Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? My friends, is not this indeed a new creature? May not such a change be called being born again? What blessings are afflictions, when they are the means of producing it?

III. We proceed now to consider the third object here described, viz, a correcting, but compassionate and pardoning God, watching the result of his corrections and noticing the first symptoms of repentance, and expressing his gracious purposes of mercy respecting the chastened penitent sinner. In this description God represents himself,

First, as a tender father solicitously mindful of his penitent afflicted child. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? That is, according to a common mode of expression, is he not so? for since I spoke against him I do earnestly remember him. My friends, when God speaks against us, and seems to afflict us as an enemy, he does not forget us. On the contrary, he is then more mindful of us than at any other time. As a kind earthly father, after he has corrected a child for any fault carefully watches him to see what effect the correction produces; so our heavenly Father remembers and watches over us in seasons of adversity and affliction, to see if we show any disposition to return to him. He not only remembers, but earnestly and affectionately remembers us. How powerfully should this urge us constantly and affectionately to remember him at such seasons. In the second place, God represents himself as listening to his complaints, confessions and petitions. I have surely, says he, heard Ephraim bemoaning himself. So he does still. As an affectionate parent, after confining a stubborn child to a solitary apartment, sometimes stands at the door without, secretly listening to his complaints, that he may release him on the first symptom of submission, so when God puts us into the prison of affliction, he invisibly, but attentively listens to catch the first penitential sigh, and hear the first breathings of prayer which escape us; and no music, not even the halleluias of angels, is more pleasing to his ears, than these cries and complaints of a broken heart; nor can any thing more quickly or more powerfully excite his compassion. Agreeably, he represents himself, as strongly affected by the complaints of Ephraim: My bowels, says he, are troubled for him. My friends, what astonishing compassion and love is this, that the infinite Eternal Jehovah should represent himself as troubled and grieved for the sufferings of penitent sinners under those afflictions which their sins had brought upon them! Certainly nothing in heaven or earth is so wonderful as this; and if this language does not affect us and break our hearts, nothing can do it.

Lastly. God declares his determination to pardon him: I will surely have mercy upon him. He calls me the Lord, his God, and I will be his God and Father, and freely forgive all his sins. In the same

manner, my friends, will he deal with us, if we like Ephraim confess, repent of, and forsake our sins; for, says the apostle, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness; and then though our sins are of a crimson color and a scarlet dye, they shall be as wool.

Thus, my friends, have we seen a contest between God and an obstinate, impenitent, afflicted sinner, issuing, through the submission and repentance of the latter, in a perfect, happy, and lasting reconciliation. In a similar manner must we all be reconciled to God, if we would not remain his enemies forever, and perish eternally as such. Permit me then to improve the subject by asking, are there not some present whose feelings and character resemble those of Ephraim, while he was struggling under the rod, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke? You have all, at some period of your lives, been called to drink more or less deeply of the cup of affliction. What then were your feelings, when it was put to your lips? What are they now, when God corrects you? When your earthly prospects are blasted, your desires crossed, your hopes disappointed, your friends or property taken away, your health impaired, and every thing seems to go wrong with you, how do you feel? Above all, how do you feel, when your fears are excited respecting death, and judgment, and you see no way of escape? Are your minds never like the troubled sea, which cannot rest? Do your hearts never feel disposed to rise against God, as a hard master? Do you not at times feel much of a murmuring, repining, discontented temper, and wish that it were in your power to order events differently? In a word, when afflictions or fears of future misery press hard upon you, do you sometimes feel like a wild beast entangled in a net, or a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke? If not, have you not continued hard and impenitent under your afflictions, instead of endeavoring that they might he sanctified? If so, you are certainly striving with your Maker, and your character resembles that of Ephraim before his conversion; and unless like him you become reconciled to God, you must perish; for wo to him that striveth with his Maker. If you ask, How are we to be reconciled? You may learn from his example. If like him you bemoan your wretched, lost condition, hate, and renounce, and mourn over your sins; feel ashamed and confounded before God, and sincerely pray for sanctifying, pardoning grace, you will most certainly like him be pardoned and accepted, In no other way can a reconciliation be effected. In no other way can you possibly escape from the wrath to come.

You must be reconciled to God’s holiness and justice; for never, never can he be reconciled to your sins. Sin is the only ground of contention. Do but renounce sin, and all will be well. To induce you to do this and be reconciled to God, consider the representation which he gives of himself in our text. Notwithstanding all your sins, he earnestly and affectionately remembers you still. He is now, as it were, listening and waiting to hear your complaints, petitions, and confessions; and if he can but hear from you one truly penitential sigh, or see one really penitential tear from your eyes, he will be grieved and troubled for your sorrows, and hasten to answer, comfort, adopt, and pardon you. 0, then, let him not wait and listen in vain. If you feel desirous, but unable to return, cry unto him, Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; and when you retire from this house to your closets, let him have reason to say respecting each one of you by name, I have surely heard him bemoaning himself; therefore my bowels are troubled, and I will surely have mercy upon him. Thus there will be joy over you in heaven, as repenting sinners; you will feel in your own hearts those pure, refreshing joys, which result from reconciliation with God.

Chapter 86

S. THE TIMELY PRESENCE AND SALUTATION OF JESUS.

THE TIMELY PRESENCE AND SALUTATION OF JESUS. And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, peace be unto you. Luke 24:36. WHEN we are studying the character of a person of whom we know little, but whom we have particular reasons for wishing to know thoroughly, every part of his past and present conduct becomes, in our view, highly interesting. We wish to be acquainted with his whole history, even with the incidents of his childhood and early youth, that from what he was then, we may infer what he probably is now. And yet, to infer what any one is, from what he has been in former years, may often lead to very erroneous conclusions, respecting his character for man is a changeable being, and there are comparatively few persons, whose lives are all of a piece. The promising child, the amiable youth, does not always prove a valuable man: and, on the other hand, sometimes, though much less frequently, the man renounces the vices and follies of youth, and becomes, unexpectedly, an estimable character. To our Savior, however, these remarks are in no degree applicable. It is safe to infer what he is, from what he once was. If we can ascertain what he was at any former period, we shall ascertain what he is now: for inspiration assures us, that he is, yesterday, today, and forever, the same. And blessed be God, we may easily ascertain what he was during his residence in our world : for the inspired records of his life are before us, and they are sufficiently particular to give us a clear view of his sentiments, feelings and character. This fact renders these records particularly interesting to every one, who counts all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, his Lord; who wishes to be thoroughly acquainted with the Savior, to whose care he commits his soul, and on whom he founds all his hopes. Of this Savior, and of the manner in which he treats his disciples, we may learn something from the passage before us. It describes the first manifestation, which he made of himself to his church, after his resurrection. He had indeed previously appeared to individuals among them; but not until this occasion was he seen by them all. Now he stood at once, unexpectedly, in the midst of them, and said, Peace be unto you. In meditating on this passage, let us consider, I. The character of the visit, which Christ here made to his church; and, II. The time, when the visit was made. With reference to the character of the visit we may remark, that the visits which Christ makes to his churches, are of two kinds. He sometimes comes in anger, to chastise them. In this manner he threatened to visit some of the Asiatic churches. To the church at Ephesus he says, I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of its place, unless thou repent. And to the church of Sardis, If thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, that is, suddenly, and unexpectedly; and thou shalt not know at what hour I will come upon thee. At other times, he visits his churches in a gracious manner, to comfort, animate, and bless them. The visit mentioned in our text was of this kind. He came, not in anger, but in love; came in his own beloved and appropriate characters of Savior, Friend and Brother. This is evident, in the first place, from the language in which he addressed them; Peace be with you. This was the customary form of friendly salutation among the Jews, and the use of it by a visitor, was equivalent to an assurance that he came as a friend. Indeed it probably conveyed far more meaning to their ears, than it does to ours; for the word peace as used by the Jews, was a term of very extensive signification. It was considered as including all

blessings of every kind.

Hence, when they said to any one, Peace be with you,—it was the same as saying, may every blessing be yours; or, may happiness attend you. And though the salutation was doubtless used by many, as our customary expressions of friendship and civility too often are, in an insincere and unmeaning manner, yet we may be sure, that in such a manner it would never be used by our Savior. And while this language, as used by him, meant all which it seemed to mean; it was, in his lips, something more than the expression of a wish, something more than even a prayer, that peace might be with them. He had just returned from the invisible world; that world, which men naturally regard with dread. In these circumstances, by saying, Peace be with you, he did in effect assure them, that there was peace between them and the invisible world; between them and the God, who governs that world. Nor was this all. He had it in his own power to give the peace which he wished them to enjoy; for all power, in heaven and on earth, was now committed to him. In these circumstances the salutation, Peace be with you, was equivalent to an authoritative declaration, that Peace should be with them. He had said to them, just before his crucifixion, Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; and this dying bequest he now renewed and confirmed. We may remark further, that the three blessings, which the apostles usually asked for the churches, were grace, mercy, and peace. But the last of these blessings includes, or implies the two former; for to sinful creatures such as we are, there can be no peace, without grace to sanctify them, and mercy to pardon them. This our Savior well knew. Hence, when he said, Peace be unto you, he did in effect assure them of an interest in his grace and mercy. If farther proof that this was a gracious visit were wanting, we might find it in the context. We there learn, that at this visit, he enlightened the understandings of his disciples, increased their religious knowledge, banished their doubts, fears and anxieties, strengthened their faith, revived their fainting hopes, and filled them with wonder and joy. These surely were works of grace, and these, we may add, are precisely the works which he still performs when he makes any of his churches a gracious visit.

Let us now consider, II. The time when this gracious visit was made.

1. We may remark, that it was made at a time when the disciples were exceedingly unworthy of such a favor, and when they rather deserved to have been visited in anger. Since their last interview with their Master and Savior, which took place at his table, and in the garden of Gethsemane, they had treated him in a very unkind and ungrateful manner. Though repeatedly warned by him to watch and pray, lest they should enter into temptation, they had neglected the warning, they had yielded to temptation, they had proved unfaithful to their engagements, and in a most pusillanimous manner, had forsaken him, nay, fled from him in his greatest extremity. Nay more, one of them had, with oaths and imprecations, denied that he knew him. In addition to these sins, they had all been guilty of criminal and inexcusable unbelief. Though he had repeatedly forewarned them of his approaching crucifixion, referred them to predictions of it in the Old Testament, and at the same time assured them, that on the third day, he would rise again, yet they forgot his warnings, disbelieved his assurances, and were in consequence, plunged into the depths of despondency by his death. So obstinate was their incredulity, that they even refused to believe the testimony of those, to whom he has revealed himself on the morning of his resurrection. These were surely great sins; they must have been exceedingly painful and offensive to their Master; they rendered them most undeserving, not only of this gracious visit, but of ever

being again numbered among his disciples. Yet instead of renouncing them, instead of treating them as they had treated him, he comes to visit them, and the first sentence which he utters is, Peace be unto you. 0, if they had any feeling, how must this unmerited kindness from their injured Master have shamed them, and cut them to the heart! No reproaches or threatenings would have been one half so overwhelming, or so hard to hear. While contemplating his conduct, we may well exclaim with David, Is this the manner of men, 0 Lord? No; it is the manner of Christ alone.

2. This visit was made at a time, when the church was very imperfectly prepared for it, and when very few among them expected it, or had any hope of such a favor. It is true indeed, that a few individuals among them were in some good measure prepared for it. Peter had repented of his fall, and wept over it in bitterness of soul, and to him Christ had previously appeared as he had also to two others of the brethren, and to several of the female disciples. And some, who had not yet seen him, were so far convinced by their testimony, that their unbelief and despondency began to give way. But the great body of them appear to have been still incredulous, and by no means prepared for such a visit, or disposed to expect it. That they were so, is evident from the fact, that even after their Master had appeared among them, and spoken to them, they would scarcely believe the testimony of their own senses. He was obliged to expostulate with them, to show them his hands and his feet, bearing the scars of the cross, and to partake of food in their presence, before they would be convinced that it was indeed he himself. It is however possible, and perhaps not improbable, that this backwardness to believe was occasioned in part, by a conviction of their own great unworthiness. They could not but recollect how they had forsaken him when he was in the hands of his enemies, though they had but just before promised never to forsake him. And this recollection, with the feelings of conscious guilt, which it must have occasioned, might perhaps lead them to suppose, that even if their injured master were risen from the dead, he would not so soon favor them with a gracious visit, but would rather consider and treat them as persons unworthy to be his disciples. If they really entertained these feelings of conscious unworthiness, they were in some measure prepared for their master’s return to them; for he ever regards those who feel most unworthy of his favors, as best prepared to receive them. Indeed he confers them on none, except such as are sensible of their own unworthiness; for such persons only will receive them with thankful humility, and duly appreciate the goodness which leads him to bestow them.

3. The time when Christ made this gracious visit to his church was a time in which it was very much needed. The faith, and hope, and courage of its members were reduced to the lowest point of depression, and unless revived by his presence, must soon have expired. One member after another would have returned to his original occupation and the church would have been scattered and become extinct. In these circumstances, it seemed indispensably necessary to the continued existence of the church, that something should be done, and done speedily, to revive it. And this gracious visit from Christ, was precisely what it needed for its revival. The sight of their beloved Master, raised from the dead, standing among them, and addressing them in language which implied forgiveness, and expressed affection, revived their drooping spirits, banished their doubts and anxieties, rendered their faith stronger than it had ever been, and filled them with joy, and gratitude, and love. Nothing then could be more necessary or more seasonable, than this gracious visit.

4. This visit was made at a time when the church was employed in exerting the little life, which yet remained among them, and in using proper means to increase it. Though assembling at this time

was dangerous, so that they did not dare to meet openly, yet they did assemble, and they assembled in the character of Christ's disciples. This proved the existence of a bond of union among them, which drew them together. This bond of union consisted in sympathy of feeling. They all felt the same affections, the same apprehensions and anxieties, and the same sorrows, and all their thoughts centered in one object. This object was their crucified Master. Though they had forsaken him in a moment of temptation, yet they could not utterly renounce him. They could not give up all the hopes which he had excited, nor cease to feel the affection with which they had regarded him. His dead body, his grave, had still more charms for them than any other object, and they found a melancholy pleasure in thinking of him, in recollecting his actions and discourses, and in speaking of these subjects to those who could sympathize with them. These feelings had prevented them from leaving Jerusalem and returning to Galilee, and the same feelings now drew them together. And while they were together, those few to whom their master had appeared, and whose faith had in consequence revived were endeavoring to revive the faith and animate the hopes of their fellow disciples. They were assuring them, that they had seen him, and spoken with him, that they had not been deceived: and were also calling their attention to the promises and predictions, which he had uttered respecting his resurrection. Thus those who had any faith in exercise, were doing all in their power to encourage those who had none; and those who had none, or who then seemed to have none, were listening to their brethren, half willing to be convinced, but still fluctuating between hope and fear. And it was at the very moment, while they were thus employed, that their Master stood in the midst of them and said, Peace be unto you. Yes, when they who feared the Lord, thus spoke one to another, the Lord hearkened and heard it, and not only heard it, but appeared to bless them.

5. The gracious visit appears to have been made the very first time that the church met after Christ's resurrection. This circumstance is highly indicative of his affection for them, of his unwillingness to leave them mourning one moment longer than was necessary, and of his strong desire to be again in the midst of them. Since he had died for them, he loved them better, if possible, than before. They were endeared to him by the price which he had paid for them, by the agonies which they had cost him. Hence he longed to see them, to speak to them, to assure them of his forgiving, unchanging love, and turn their sorrow into joy. Should any father present, voluntarily encounter great hardships, sufferings, and dangers for the sake of saving his children from death or slavery, would he not earnestly wish, after their deliverance was effected and his own sufferings were ended, to see them again, that he might congratulate and rejoice with them; would they not now be dearer to him than ever; and would he not, when he met them, feel compensated for all that he had suffered? Similar, we may without presumption suppose, were the feelings of the man Christ Jesus, on this occasion.

We remark lastly, that this gracious visit was made on the Lord's day, or Christian Sabbath. And the next visit which he made to his church, was made on the next Lord's day. Thus early did he begin to put honor on the Christian Sabbath, and to intimate that it was designed to come in place of the seventh day, or Sabbath of the Jews. In a similar manner he has ever since continued to honor it. There has not, probably, a single Christian Sabbath passed, from that day to this, in which our Savior has not graciously manifested himself, if not to whole churches, yet to individual disciples. Nor will this day pass without similar honors. In the midst of some little band of his disciples, our Master will today stand invisible and say, Peace be unto you. My brethren, I doubt

not that every real Christian present will unite in saying, Would to God, that we might be thus favored. Would to God, that when this church shall approach his table he would come into the midst of it, and say, Peace be unto you. For those of you who are Christ's real disciples, know experimentally, that though our Savior is no longer visibly present on earth, he still favors his church with his real presence, and manifests himself to them, as he does not to the world; and that where two or three only assemble in his name, there he is in the midst of them. You also know, that without using an audible voice he can effectually speak peace to a guilty conscience, and a trembling, doubting heart; and make fainting love revive, and faith and hope grow strong. But the great question is, Will he thus favor us? Have we any reason to hope that he will thus favor us, on the present occasion? It may be remarked, in reply to this question, that in several particulars the present situation of this church strikingly resembles that of the disciples, at the time when they were favored with this gracious manifestation of their Master's presence. In the first place, we are, as they were, exceedingly unworthy of such a favor. This, I trust, you are all ready to acknowledge. There cannot surely be an individual present who will say, I am not unworthy of a gracious visit from Christ. To say nothing of our former sins, which were great, and numerous, and aggravated beyond all computation, have not the sins, which Christ has seen in us since our last approach to his table, been sufficient to render us forever unworthy of his presence? Have we not been unfaithful to our covenant engagements? Have we not practically denied him? have we not, though often warned, neglected to watch and pray against temptation? have we not suffered worldly-mindedness and unbelief to prevail in our hearts? In the second place, are we not, like the disciples, far from being suitably prepared for such a visit? We are accustomed to suppose, and with truth, that thorough repentance, and deep humiliation for sin, are proper and necessary preparations for the gracious presence of Christ. But have we not reason to fear, that there is little of thorough repentance, or of deep humiliation among us? And does not unbelief prevail extensively? Do not many of you as little expect to see the Savior coming to revive his work among us, as the disciples expected to see him among them, when they assembled on that evening? In the third place, it is certain that we greatly need such a favor. The disciples scarcely needed it more than we do. It seems as if nothing but our Master's returning presence can save us from the power of spiritual death. Unless he shall ere long thus favor us, the evils, which now prevail, will prevail more extensively and more fatally; iniquity will abound more and more; love will become more and more cold, and scandals and divisions will soon be seen. But on this point of resemblance we need not enlarge. No disciple of Christ among us need be told how greatly we need his gracious presence. To these remarks it is scarcely worth while to add, that we are now assembled in the character of Christ's disciples, and on the day which he delights to honor. Thus far then, we may trace a manifest resemblance between our situation and that of the disciples. But we can, I fear, trace it no farther. I fear that we do not lament the loss of Christ's presence, and lay it seriously to heart, as they did. We are ready indeed to acknowledge that it is an evil, and that it ought to be lamented. But do we suitably lament it? Do not many of us rather seek to console ourselves for his absence, by engaging more eagerly in worldly pursuits? And are those who have any life, using all the means in their power to revive and animate those who have none? In fine, is there among us any thing like that ardent, unappeasable desire for the presence of Christ; that preference of it to every other blessing, which we have reason to think the disciples felt? I fear not; and I cannot but suspect, that if he does not on this occasion favor us with his presence, it will be, not on account of our unworthiness, nor on account of our unpreparedness in other respects; but

because he sees that we are not suitably desirous of his presence, and that we are not exciting ourselves and each other to seek for it. If we are really deficient in this respect, it is indeed a great obstacle to the coming of Christ among us; for seldom indeed does he visit any church, until he sees that his presence is earnestly desired and sought for, and that he shall meet with a joyful reception. My brethren, should he not favor us with his presence on this occasion, let us consider this evil as the cause of his absence, and set ourselves to remove it without delay. Let all, who have any religious feeling, use all the means in their power to excite similar feelings in the hearts of their brethren. Let all beware, how they forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is. Remember that it was a private meeting of the church, at which our Savior thus appeared to them. Remember too, what Thomas lost by being absent from this one meeting. While all his fellow disciples were filled with faith, and hope, and love, and joy, he was left for a time under the power of unbelief and despondency. But should our Master, notwithstanding our unworthiness, condescend to favor us at this time with his gracious presence; should he come and stand in the midst of us, and say, Peace be unto you; what shall we do? My brethren, we need not tell you what to do. Your own hearts will inform you. Every one, to whom the Savior shall manifest himself, will feel ready to cast himself at his feet, to admire, and wonder at, and thank him for his goodness; he will feel more than ever sensible of his own unworthiness of such a favor; he will repent in dust and ashes, and his future life, like that of the disciples, will evince his sincerity and be spent in self-denying, and persevering labors in his Master’s service.

Chapter 87

S. THE WAY WHICH WICKED MEN HAVE TRODDEN.

THE WAY WHICH WICKED MEN HAVE TRODDEN.

Hast thou marked the old way, which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overthrown with a flood: Which said unto God, depart from us; and what can the Almighty do for them ?— Job 22:15-17.

WIDE, says our Divine Teacher, is the gate, and broad is the way, which leadeth to destruction; and many there be who go in thereat. Of this broad way Eliphaz here speaks. Inferring from the unprecedented afflictions of Job, that he must be a wicked man, he asks him whether he had duly considered the old way which had been trodden by other wicked men of former ages, who were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overthrown with a flood. My hearers, this is an important question, a question which may be very properly addressed to all, and from which the most salutary consequences may result. If any of you have not suitably considered the way which wicked men have trodden, you may even now be ignorantly pursuing it; nor can any be sure, that he has forsaken this way, unless he knows what it is. Permit me then to address this question to you,—Have you marked, have you duly considered the way of wicked men, and the end to which it leads? If you have not, let me request your attention while I endeavor, by the light of revelation, to trace this way, to show in what it consists, and what is its termination.

I. Let us consider the way itself. In tracing it, it will be proper to begin at its commencement. It was, you will observe, even in the time of Eliphaz, an old way, a way which had long been trodden. Indeed, it is almost as old as the human race, or as the world which they inhabit; for it was formed in the days of our first parents, at the time when they ate of the forbidden fruit. Then the wide gate, which leads into the broad way, was opened and alas, it has never since been closed. By carefully attending to the conduct of those, who first formed the way, and first walked in it, we may learn in what it consists. It is thus described by the inspired historian:

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food; and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise; she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." In this account of the conduct of the first sinner we see, in the first place, selfishness, or a preference of herself to God; for had she loved him supremely, she would have chosen to obey his commands, rather than to gratify herself. This must ever be the first sin; for so long as any creature prefers God to himself, he will choose to please God rather than to gratify himself; of course, he will avoid every sin, and no temptation will induce him to offend his Maker, while he loves him with all his heart. But so soon as any creature begins to prefer himself to God, he will choose to gratify himself; rather than please his Maker; and will of course commit any sin, which promises him self-gratification or self-aggrandizement. The second thing to be noticed in the conduct of the first sinner, is pride. She saw that it was a tree to be desired to make one wise; that is, she fancied, as the tempter had asserted, that it would cause her to become as a god, knowing good and evil. Now this wish was the effect of pride; and it was accompanied by the inseparable attendant of pride, discontent; discontent with the situation in

which God had placed her.— This sin is the natural consequence of selfishness; for as soon as we begin to prefer ourselves to God, we shall wish to put ourselves in the place of God, and to rise above the sphere of action which he has assigned us, and to grasp at those things which he has not thought proper to bestow. The third thing in her conduct, the third step in the way of sin, was sensuality, or a disposition to be governed and guided by her senses, and to seek their gratification in an unlawful manner. She saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes. Here was something to gratify two of the senses, those of tasting and seeing; and this gratification, though forbidden, she was determined to enjoy. The influence of sin, which had hitherto existed only in the passions of the mind, began to extend itself to the appetites of the body, and by this influence they were inflamed to such a degree, that they prompted her to disregard the dictates of reason and conscience, and the commands of God. The next step in the fatal way, was unbelief; a distrust of God's word, and a consequent belief of the tempter's suggestions. God had said, "In the day thou. eatest, thou shalt surely die." This threatening she now disbelieved. The tempter said, "God doth know that ye shall not surely die; but in the day that ye eat of it, your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." This falsehood she did believe. This disbelief of God's word, and belief of Satan's suggestions, were the natural consequence of sins already mentioned; for when the passions and appetites are inflamed by the influence of sin, they immediately blind the understanding in such a manner, that it can no longer discover the evidence which attends divine truth, nor the force of those arguments and motives, which should induce us to obey it. Every thing which is urged against a compliance with our sinful inclinations then appears weak and groundless; while those sophistical reasonings, which favor their gratification, seem powerful and conclusive. In this state therefore, the mind is completely prepared to disbelieve the God of truth, whose word opposes and forbids its sinful inclinations, and to believe the father of lies, who urges us to gratify them. And this in fact is the source of all the unbelief which prevails in the world; for the evidence attending God's word, is so convincing, that men never would, never could disbelieve, did they not first wish to disbelieve it.—But to proceed, God's threatenings being, thus disbelieved, and the lies of the tempter embraced as truth, every barrier, which opposed her progress, was removed; and the sinful propensities that have been mentioned, broke out in open, actual disobedience. She took of the fruit of the tree and did eat. Thus she made a full entrance into that way, which wicked men have ever since trodden. The first step, was selfishness; the second, pride; the third, sensuality; the fourth, unbelief; and the last, actual, open, willful disobedience. To the same result every one will come, who begins to tread in her steps. Selfishness, pride, and sensuality, will lead them in pursuit of forbidden objects up to the gate which opposes their progress in the broad way: a gate, which is secured by God's awful threatenings. Unbelief, by disregarding these threatenings, will draw back the bolts, and then actual disobedience will burst open the gate, and hurry them onward without restraint, in the broad way. And as the first sinner was unwilling to walk in this way alone, and became a tempter, by presenting the fatal fruit to her husband, and persuading him to eat; so all, who have since walked in it, have wished for companions, and enticed their relatives, friends, and acquaintances to follow them. But without insisting on this, let us trace the farther progress of the first sinners in their fatal career. Though they had disbelieved God's threatenings, they soon found, as sooner or later all sinners will find, that their unbelief did not render them false, or prevent their fulfilment, Before the close of the day, which they had stained by their disobedience, their offended Maker came to call them to an account; and from their conduct on that occasion, we

may obtain a further acquaintance with the way in which sinners walk.

They exhibited sullen hardness of heart, impenitence, and despair of forgiveness. They expressed no sorrow, or penitence, nothing like brokenness of heart. They made no confession of sin; they uttered no cries for mercy; they expressed no wish to be restored to the favor of their offended Judge.

They displayed a self-justifying temper. Adam attempted to throw the blame upon his wife; and she, in turn, endeavored to transfer it to the serpent.

They showed a disposition to reflect upon God, as the cause of their disobedience. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the fruit of the tree, and I did eat." In a manner precisely similar have sinners ever since conducted. They will not confess their sins; they will not repent of them; they will not cry for mercy; they will not seek the favor of their offended God. On the contrary, they excuse and justify themselves, and indirectly cast the blame of their sinful conduct upon Jehovah, by saying, the passions, appetites, and inclinations, which thou gavest us, have led us to act as we have done. This hard, impenitent, self-justifying temper, taken in connection with those things which were previously mentioned, constitute the old way, which wicked men have trodden. Of this we shall be convinced by examining the temper and conduct of successive generations of sinners; and making proper allowance for the different circumstances in which they were placed. Such, for instance, was the way trodden by that generation of mankind, which was destroyed by the flood. I mention this generation, partly because there is an evident allusion to it in our text; partly because their situation resembled our own, more nearly than did the situation of our first parents; and partly, because we have in the writings of Moses, and in the discourses of our Savior, a more particular account of their temper and conduct, than is given of any other generation in those early ages of the world. Now from this account we find that they were guilty of the same sins, that they walked in the same path, which has already been described. In the first place, they were guilty of selfishness and pride. Their sinful passions they displayed in their disregard of the rights of their neighbors, in their contests for superiority; in consequence of which the earth was filled with violence, as we have abundant reason to believe it would now be, did not human laws restrain, in some degree, the passions of men. In the second place, the persons who composed this generation, were sensual and earthly minded, governed by appetites and passions, rather than by reason, conscience and the law of God. This appears from the account given us of their alliances and connections, in forming which they seem to have regarded nothing but external appearances, choosing for their partners in life the irreligious, immoral and profane. That this was a distinguishing trait in their character, as well as that of the Sodomites, who lived some ages after them, appears from the account given of them by our Savior. As it was in the days of Noah, says he, so shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded, they married and were given in marriage, and knew, or considered not, till Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. This, my hearers, is a most accurate description of worldly minded, wicked men; of men completely under the control of their appetites and passions, and regardless of every thing but the present life, with its transitory objects and pursuits. From this account it also appears, that they were guilty of unbelief, impenitence, hardness of heart, and a consequent neglect of the day and means of grace, and the offers of salvation. To this unbelief and hardness of heart alone can it be ascribed, that they did not know, or as the word signifies, did

not consider, till the flood came and destroyed them; for they were most clearly, and for a long time, warned of its approach. God allowed them a reprieve of one hundred and twenty years, during which Noah, as a preacher of righteousness, reproved them for their sin, and warned them of the approaching deluge, and pointed out the only possible way of escape. In addition to their neglect of his warnings, they resisted the strivings, the influences of the divine Spirit; for we are told that Christ, by his Spirit, went and preached to them, and that God said respecting them, My Spirit shall not always strive with man; nevertheless his days shall be a hundred and twenty years— thus plainly intimating, that during that time, his Spirit should continue to strive with them. And to what cause is it to be ascribed, that though thus favored, thus warned, they did not consider, till it was too late. To their unbelief and hardness of heart—the two great causes to which it is still owing, that notwithstanding the preaching of the gospel, the offers of salvation, and the strivings of God's Spirit, men will not consider their latter end, nor fly to the Savior for refuge from the wrath to come. This account of the way in which antediluvian sinners walked, is the more deserving our attention, because our Savior informs us, that in the same way sinners will be found walking, when he comes to judge the world. Now if sinners trod this way four thousand years ago; and if they will be still found pursuing it at the end of time; we may fairly infer, that they have walked in it ever since the days of Noah, and that they are following it at the present day; an inference, which is abundantly verified by the history of the Jews and their heathen neighbors, by the writings of the prophets, and by the preaching of Christ and his apostles, and by the present character and conduct of sinners.

There is however a way, which many wicked men have trodden, that appears to differ very widely from this, though it is in reality the same—a modification of it produced by the influence of a religious education, or of an awakened conscience operating upon a selfish, sinful heart. This way it is necessary to describe particularly, lest those who are following it should be deceived, and fancy that they are walking, not in the old way which wicked men have trodden, but in the narrow path of life. To understand in what the way of which I am speaking consists, it should be recollected, that immediately after the fall of man, God was pleased to reveal a way, in which sinners might be reconciled, return to him, escape the punishment 'which they deserve, and regain his forfeited favor. This way consists in repentance towards God, and faith in a Mediator of God's providing, and reliance upon an atonement for sin made by that Mediator. This way of salvation was at first revealed to mankind in an imperfect manner, under a veil of types and shadows. The atonement, which Christ, the Lamb of God, intended to make in the fullness of time, was typically represented by the sacrifice of a lamb without spot or blemish. His human nature, in which, as in a temple, dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, was represented by a tabernacle, and afterwards by a temple, in which God manifested his presence in a sensible manner, and in which his worshippers might approach, while the mediatorial or priestly office of Christ was shadowed forth in the appointment of an order of men, who acted as mediators between God and man, presenting the sacrifices of men to God, and pronouncing the blessing of God upon men.

Now that modification of the way trodden by wicked men, which we are at present considering, consists in rejecting the Mediator, and the atonement which God has provided, and substituting something else in their place. In other words, it consists in presumptuously attempting to approach God in a way of our own devising, instead of that way which he has provided. The first wicked man who walked in this way, was Cain. While his righteous brother Abel, agreeably to God's

appointment, offered a lamb in sacrifice as an atonement for his sin, Cain presented nothing but a gift of the fruits of the earth, disbelieving the great truth, that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin; and showing, that he did not regard himself as a sinner, who needed an atonement. The consequence was such as might have been expected. The sacrifice of Abel, offered in faith and in obedience to the requisitions of God, was accepted; while the offering of the self-righteous Cain was rejected—a circumstance, which led him to murmur against God, to envy, hate, and at length murder his brother. In the way thus marked out and trodden by Cain, we find the wicked Jews in all ages of their history exceedingly prone to walk. Neglecting the temple where God dwelt, and the priests or mediators whom he had appointed, they erected high places and planted groves, in which they pretended to worship Jehovah, though in a way directly contrary to his commands; and like Cain, they hated and persecuted those who approached God in his own appointed way, and endeavored to convince them of the folly and sinfulness of their conduct. In the same way their descendants were found walking in our Savior's time. Instead of embracing him as the only Savior, approaching God through him as the Mediator, and relying on his atonement and intercession for acceptance, they depended on their own works, their religious ceremonies, their alms, fastings, prayers and moral duties. Being ignorant of God's righteousness, they went about to establish their own, and refused to submit to the righteousness of God. And because our Savior and his apostles assured them, that in this way they could never be justified or saved, they hated, persecuted, and put them to death. Soon after the death of the apostles, the Christian church began to apostatize from the faith, to forsake the way of life, and to walk in the way we are describing. They lost the power of Godliness, but multiplied its forms, and substituted ceremonies, as a ground of dependence for salvation. Hence the Christian church gradually degenerated into the Church of Rome. Neglecting Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and man, they prayed to angels, to the virgin Mary, and to departed saints, as mediators; and instead of relying on his merits and atonement, they substituted in their room penances, bodily austerities, superstitious observances, and the endowment of churches and monasteries, by which they vainly hoped to atone for their sin, and obtain the favor of God. In a way which is essentially the same, many walk at the present day. They depend for salvation on their religious services, their moral duties, their liberality to the poor, their orthodox sentiments, or on a profession of religion; while they neglect the atonement and intercession of Christ, the only sure foundation, the only way of access to the Father, and like their predecessors, hate, though they cannot persecute, those who warn them that their way is false, and their confidence vain. From what has been said, it appears that this way, though apparently different from that in which openly wicked men walk, is essentially the same; and that it conducts of course to the same end. Its principal characteristics are self-righteousness and pride, flowing from ignorance of God and of ourselves, attended by a disbelief of the gospel, impenitence, and a substitution of something else in the place of Christ, as a ground of dependence. Wicked men then, may be ranked in two classes; the one having no religion, the other a false religion. The first follow the tempter in his own proper shape, as an angel of darkness; the second are deceived, and led to him in the garb of an angel of light. The first walk openly in the broad road to destruction, without fear or remorse; the second follow the same road, but are so blinded by ignorance and unbelief, that they mistake it for the path of life.

Having thus marked the old way which wicked men have trodden, let us consider,

II Its termination. Our Savior informs us, that it leads to destruction. That it does so, we might infer from what has taken place in this world. It led our first parents out of paradise, out of a state of holiness and happiness into a state of sin and misery; out of the clear light of the knowledge and favor of God into a land of darkness and the shadow of death. It led Cain into the guilt of murder, the murder of a brother, and banished him from the presence of God, and constrained him to cry, My punishment is greater than I can bear! For walking in this way the antediluvian sinners were cut down out of time, prematurely, being overwhelmed by a flood; the men of Sodom were destroyed by a fiery storm from heaven; Jews were scourged by a long series of calamities, terminating with their complete destruction by the Romans. What calamities have since befallen the Romish church, and successive generations of sinners, I need not inform you. But if we would see the final termination of this old way, we must go into the sanctuary of God, and look through the glass of revelation into eternity. There we shall see that this way leads directly down to the gates of hell. We are there taught, that the souls of those who were destroyed by the flood, are now spirits in prison, the prison of God's wrath; and may therefore fairly infer, that the souls of other wicked men, who have since been cut down out of time, are in the same situation. We are there told, that there is no peace to the wicked; that destruction and misery are in their paths; that they are driven away in their wickedness; that they shall go away into everlasting punishment. In a word, all the inspired writers cry with one voice, Wo unto the wicked! it shall be ill with them; for the reward of his hands shall be given him. Indeed, it is evident from the very nature of things, that these declarations must be true; that such a way as we have described can lead to nothing but endless misery.

APPLICATION. — Having endeavored to trace the old way in which wicked men have trodden, to show in what it consists, and what is its termination; permit me, in applying the subject, to inquire,

1. Whether some of you are not walking in this way? Are none of you guilty of selfishness in preferring your own gratification to the glory of God and the happiness of your fellow creatures? Are none of you influenced by pride and discontent to murmur at the situation in which God has placed you, and to attempt to rise above it, by recurring to means which he has forbidden? Are none of you controlled by your sinful appetites, and passions, and inclinations, rather than by reason, conscience, and the fear of God? Have these evil counselors led none of you to desire, and to eat forbidden fruit; to gratify them in a way, or to a degree, which the law of God forbids? Do none of you disbelieve God's solemn declarations, that the soul who sinneth shall die; that the wicked shall be turned into hell, with all who forget him? Are none of you worldly minded, living a careless, irreligious life; acting as if your sole business was to obtain and enjoy what it affords? Are none of you excusing and justifying your conduct at your Creator's expense, saying in your hearts, the appetites, passions, and inclinations, which thou gayest me, cause me to conduct as I do? If you avoid open sins, are none of you neglecting repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; substituting your own works or merits in the place of his atonement; trusting to your own prayers rather than to his intercession, and thus, like the Jews, going about to establish your own righteousness? These things, you will recollect, constitute the old way, which wicked men in all ages have trodden; and if they are found in your temper and conduct, then you are walking in that way.

If you feel unable to determine with certainty what path you are pursuing, permit me to mention three things, which may assist you in determining where you are. In the first place, remember

there are but two ways mentioned in scripture, in one or the other of which every man is walking. One is that which has now been described, the old and broad way which wicked men have trodden, and which leads to destruction; the other is the narrow, good old way, marked out by the Son of God, in which patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs have walked, which leads to life. Now since there are only these two ways, it is evident that all who are not walking in the latter are pursuing the former. Inquire then whether you are in the latter, the narrow path. It is totally, and in every respect, unlike the former. Those who walk in it are supremely influenced, not by selfishness, but by that love which seeketh not her own; not by pride, but by humility; not by discontent, but by constant acquiescence in the will of God. Instead of indulging and seeking to gratify their appetites and passions, they deny, mortify, crucify them; instead of disbelieving God's threatenings, they believe them, as well as his promises; they are heavenly and not earthly minded; they condemn, instead of justifying themselves; they rely for acceptance and salvation, not on any work or merits of their own, but on the atonement and intercession of Christ alone; and in dependence on his grace live a life of self-denial, watchfulness and prayer, endeavoring to walk even as he walked. If this, my hearers, is not your character; if you are not walking in this path; then you are most certainly in the old way which wicked men have trodden; for there is no middle path. He that is not with Christ is against him.

Again. Remember that in the way of the wicked, all men naturally walk. This the scriptures abundantly assert. Says the prophet, All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. And again, The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, and behold they are all gone out of the Way. Since then all are naturally out of the way of life, and in the broad road to death, it is evident that if you have never forsaken this road, if a great change has not taken place in your feelings, views, character and conduct, you are in the broad road still. I do not say that it is necessary to know precisely the time and the manner, in which this change, this passing from one road to the other, took place. But I say that it is absolutely necessary that it should take place. And if you have never been convinced that you are in the broad road, convinced that it is a sinful and dangerous road, then you have not forsaken it. Says our Savior, Strive to enter in at the straight gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Now is it possible that a man should strive to enter in at the straight gate and still know nothing of it? Yet if you have not striven to enter it, you are yet in your sins.

Once more. We are taught, that the old way trodden by wicked men, is the way of the world, and a crowded way. Many there be, says Christ, who go in thereat. Says the apostle to the Ephesians, In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom we all had our conversation, and were by nature the children of wrath even as others. The narrow path, on the contrary, is trodden by a comparatively small number; "few there be," says our Savior, "that find it." If then you would know in which path you are walking, inquire whether you have many or few companions; whether you are walking with the world or contrary to it. If you find yourselves in a crowded road, then you are in the broad road. If you are walking with the majority of mankind, then you are most certainly walking in the old way, which wicked men have trodden.

2. Should any of you be convinced by these remarks that you are in this dangerous way, permit me to apply the subject further, by urging you to forsake it without delay. Consider, 0 consider, whither it leads, and whither it has led those who followed it in former ages. Consider too, what

God has done to turn you from it. He has clearly described it in his word. He has there traced it, as on a map, from its commencement to its fatal termination. All along the path he has set up way-marks with the inscription, This road conducts to hell; while a hand, pointing to a narrow path, which opens to the right, has written over it, This path leads to heaven. Lest you should be so occupied by the cares and business of the world, as to pass these way-marks without noticing them, he has placed at each of them a watchman to warn thoughtless travellers, and to call their attention to these inscriptions; and lest any should rush on without stopping to hear their warnings, he has placed the Sabbath, like a gate, across their path to compel them to stop till it be opened, and to hear the warning voice. To one of these gates, my impenitent hearers, you have now come. It has compelled you to pause a few moments, in your sinful career; and to pass away the time till the Sabbath is gone, you have come to the house of prayer. Here is a watchman appointed by your Creator. I stand to call your attention to the inscriptions which he has recorded; to the marks which he has drawn of the various paths in which men walk. Sinner, stop! I have a message to thee from God.

See it written with his own fingcr, This broad road leads to destruction! Look at the map which he has drawn. See here a way Opening out of the gates of paradise, leading on, broad and crooked, through the mazes of the world, and terminating at the iron gate of the bottomless abyss. See written on its margin, Destruction and misery are in this path; it leads down to the chambers of eternal death. This is the path of the openly irreligious. See close by its side another path, opened by the first murderer. See written on it, There is a way which seemeth right ‘unto a man, but the end thereof is death. This is the path of the self-righteous, the formalist, the hypocrite, and like the other, leads to death. Sinners, you have seen this path; it is yours ; it is the path in which you are now walking. You have also seen its end. Let it be yours then no longer. This day, this hour, forsake it, and enter that path which opens to the right hand. Here you may see it; and the straight gate, which leads into it, opens to every one who knocks. Close by its side stands a cross; rays of light darting from it, illuminate and mark out the path. Just within the gate stands an invisible guide, with extended hand offering to lead, to assist, to support you; while at the termination are the wide open gates of heaven, from which issue a flood of glory, which you will discover more and more clearly, as you approach them.. 0 then, enter this path. Strive, strive to enter in at the straight gate. Will you reply, I know not what to do. I am in utter darkness. I see not the gate, nor the way, nor the cross. Then cry earnestly for light. Let your heart be toward the king’s highway, and light will soon shine upon your steps. Above all, take not another step in the fatal road, which you have hitherto pursued. Pass not this Sabbath, this warning way-mark, lest you never see another.

Chapter 88

S. THE WICKED, FROM PRIDE, REFUSE TO SEEK GOD.

THE WICKED, FROM PRIDE, REFUSE TO SEEK GOD. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God.—Psalms 10:4. IN this psalm we have a full length portrait of a careless, unawakened sinner, drawn by the unerring pencil of truth; and so perfect is the resemblance, that were it not for the blinding influence of sin, every such sinner would discover in it, as in a glass, his own image. Two of the features, which compose this portrait, are delineated in our text. The first is an unwillingness to seek after God. The second is pride, which causes that unwillingness. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God. In discoursing on this passage, we shall endeavor to show—that the wicked will not seek after God—and that it is the pride of their hearts, which prevents them from seeking him. It will be understood, that by the wicked, we here intend careless, unawakened sinners.

I. The wicked will not seek after God. The expression implies, not only that they do not seek after him, but that they will not. It is the settled, determined purpose of their hearts, not to seek him; and to this purpose they will obstinately and unalterably adhere, unless their wills are subdued by divine grace. With a view to illustrate and establish this truth, we observe

1. That the wicked will not seek after the knowledge of God. This the scriptures plainly assert. The wicked say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. It is also evident from the experience of all ages, that no careless, unawakened sinner, ever used any means, or made the smallest endeavors to acquire a knowledge of God. Our Savior explicitly declares, that all who seek, shall find. But the wicked do not find the knowledge of God; therefore they never seek it. They will not study the scriptures with a view to become acquainted with God. It is true, they sometimes read the scriptures; but they read them either in a formal, careless manner, or to quiet the remonstrances of conscience, or to find arguments in favor of some false system of religion, which may encourage them in sinful pursuits, and enable them to indulge delusive hopes of future happiness. They never look into the Bible with a sincere desire to find God there; nor study it with that humble, docile, childlike temper, without which it will ever be studied in vain. And while many thus read the scriptures with improper views, or wrong feelings, many also, there is reason to fear, scarcely read them at all. From week to week, and from year to year, their Bibles lie on the shelf unopened, while they know little more of their contents than of the Koran of Mahomet. The wicked will not pray for the knowledge of God. It can never be said with truth of a wicked man, behold he prayeth. On the contrary, he invariably casts off fear, and restrains prayer before God. He may indeed, and, as we have already seen, often does, request God to depart from him, and like the evil spirits in our Savior’s time, he may cry, I beseech thee, torment me not. But never does he sincerely ask for divine instruction. Never does he cry after knowledge, or lift up his voice for understanding. If he did, he would infallibly obtain it; for every one that asketh, receiveth. Ye have not, says the apostle, because ye ask not. The wicked will not improve those opportunities for acquiring the knowledge of God, which our public and private religious institutions afford. It is true that many of them attend frequently, perhaps constantly, on the instructions of the sanctuary; but it is equally true, that custom, curiosity, a regard to reputation,

or a wish to pass away the time, and not a desire for divine knowledge, induces their attendance. That this is not an uncharitable supposition is apparent from their conduct. Often, while the most solemn and important truths are proclaimed in their hearing, their thoughts, like the fool's eyes, are in the ends of the earth; and they literally hear as though they heard not. If at any time they listen more attentively to the preached word, it is not with a wish to understand, believe and obey it. Their whole aim in listening often appears to be, to find some real, or apparent contradiction; some plausible excuse for disbelieving or neglecting what they hear. They watch, as the prophet observes of the Jews, to find some iniquity in the speaker. Their minds are full of cavils and objections against the truths delivered; and, no sooner do they leave the house of God, than they forget or banish all that has been said; or remember it only, that they may pervert, misrepresent, and deny it, and thus harden themselves and others in ignorance and sin. Nor is this all. Private religious conversation, and meetings for this purpose, afford opportunities for acquiring the knowledge of God, as favorable, and in some respects, perhaps, more so, than the public instructions of the sanctuary. But these opportunities the wicked will by no means improve. Seldom, if ever, is the instance known of a careless, unawakened sinner visiting a minister of Christ for the purpose of religious conversation, or attending a private religious meeting, unless it were with some improper motive. They can readily and cheerfully attend meetings of a different kind, and engage in conversation on subjects of a different nature, but they avoid places and circles in which religion will probably be introduced, as they would shun a place infected by the plague. We have no fear that these assertions can, with truth, he contradicted. Scripture, observation, and experience unequivocally testify, that careless, unawakened sinners will not seek after the knowledge of God.

2. The wicked will not seek after the favor of God. Indeed, it is perfectly natural, that those, who think the knowledge of God not worth pursuing, should scarcely consider his favor as worth seeking. Knowing nothing experimentally of his excellence and perfections, and ignorant of their entire dependence on him for happiness, they cannot, of course, realize, that the favor of God is life, and his loving kindness better than life. Hence they will not seek to obtain it, but prefer almost every thing else to the divine favor; and love the praise of men more than the praise of God. The way to obtain and secure the favor of God is as plainly marked out, and, at least, as easy to be followed by those who are so disposed, as the way to acquire any temporal blessing whatever. God has stated in his word, with the greatest possible clearness, both what will secure and what will forfeit his favor; both what will incur and what will avert his displeasure. Yet all the wicked daily practice those things which are displeasing to God, and entirely incompatible with the enjoyment of his favor; while, on the contrary, they totally neglect to cultivate those dispositions and perform those actions, which will secure his approbation. In fact, they think, they care nothing about it. How he shall avert God's displeasure, or obtain his favor, is no part of an unawakened sinner's inquiry or concern. He asks innumerable other questions, many of which are in the highest degree frivolous and useless; but never is he heard to ask, What must I do to be saved? He pursues other objects, the most trifling objects too; but never is he seen engaged in the ardent pursuit of this. He is exceedingly jealous of his own reputation and solicitous to acquire the good opinion of his fellow creatures, even of the meanest and most worthless among them, while he proportionably dreads their censures. But the wrath of him, in whom he lives, and moves, and exists, who can in a moment cut short his life, and destroy both soul and body in hell, he does not fear; nor does he consider his highest approbation as a worthy object of desire or pursuit. In the language of

inspiration, the wicked cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty; but none saith, where is God, my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?

3. The wicked will not seek after the likeness of God. That they do not at all resemble him, is certain, if the scriptures are true. That they do not wish or endeavor to resemble him, is equally evident. There is, indeed, in their view, no reason, why they should. There are but two motives, which can induce any being to imitate another, or to wish to resemble him. The first is a wish to obtain the approbation of the person imitated. The second is admiration of something in his character, and a consequent desire to inscribe it into our own. But the wicked can be influenced by neither of these motives to seek after conformity to God. They cannot be led to imitate him by a wish to obtain his favor; for this, as we have already seen, they have no desire to obtain. Nor do they discover any thing in his character, which they wish to transcribe into their own; for they have no knowledge of God, no desire to know him, no taste for the beauties of holiness. Christ, we are told, is the image of the invisible God, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. Yet they evidently, as the prophet observes, discover in Christ no form or comeliness; and when they see him, he has in their eyes no beauty, that they should desire to resemble him. And as it is with Christ, the image of God, so of course, it must be with respect to God himself. Since they have no wish to imitate the former they cannot, they will not seek after conformity with the latter. The truth of this conclusion is evident from their conduct. Though man is naturally an imitative being; and though the wicked imitate many things in the conduct of their fellow creatures; things too, which are, in many respects, foolish, ridiculous, and sinful, yet they never evince the least desire, or make the smallest exertion to imitate the inimitable perfections of God. On the contrary, they refuse to be reconciled to him, follow a course directly opposite to his, and daily become, if possible, more and more unlike him.

4. The wicked will not seek after communion with God. That there is such a thing, as the enjoyment of fellowship or communion with God, the inspired writers most unequivocally assert; and one of them, St. John, informs us, that to bring those, whom he addressed, to the enjoyment of this privilege, was the principal design of his epistle. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. That this fellowship with God and his Son is a blessed reality, and that it is productive of the purest and most exalted pleasures, all true Christians well know; for they often taste its sweetness, and rejoice with joy Unspeakable and full of glory. But for this joy in God, and the fellowship which produces it, the wicked will not seek; for they do not desire it; they have no conception of it, and while they Continue wicked, it is morally impossible that they should have.

Communion, or even a desire for communion with any being, always presupposes some degree of resemblance to that being, and a participation of the same nature, views and feelings. Irrational animals evidently cannot enjoy communion with men in rational pleasures, because they have no capacity for such pleasures; nor can they even desire to enjoy communion with us, because they have no conception of such a quality as reason, nor of the pleasures which it qualifies us to enjoy. But cause them to resemble us, endue them with reason, and they will, at once, desire and enjoy communion with us in rational pleasures and pursuits. For similar reasons wicked men cannot enjoy, or even wish to enjoy, communion with a holy God; for they resemble him as little, as the irrational animals do us; and, we have already seen, they will not seek to resemble him. As they

cannot know spiritual things, because they are spiritually discerned; so they cannot enjoy spiritual pleasures, because they are spiritually enjoyed. Not only have they no relish or capacity for such pleasures; they do not even know that such pleasures exist, nor can they form a conception of them, any more than an irrational animal can conceive of intellectual enjoyments. Of course, they will not seek after communion with God; and while the Christian, who has been made partaker of a divine nature, enjoys the most exquisite felicity in communion with his Maker and Redeemer, praying, Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me, they roam unsatisfied from creature to creature, still vainly crying, who will show us any good? Thus have I endeavored to illustrate and establish the assertion of the Psalmist. I proceed now, as was proposed, II. To the reason why the wicked will not seek after God, viz, their pride. In illustration of this, I observe,

1. That the pride of the wicked is the principal reason, why they will not seek after the knowledge of God. This knowledge it prevents them from seeking in various ways. In the first place, it renders God a disagreeable object of contemplation to the wicked, and a knowledge of him as undesirable. Pride consists in an unduly exalted opinion of one's self. It is therefore impatient of a rival, hates a superior, and Cannot endure a master. In proportion as it prevails in the heart, it makes us wish to see nothing above us, to acknowledge no law but our own wills, to follow no rule but our own inclinations. Thus it led Satan to rebel against his Creator, and our first parents to desire to be as Gods. Since such are the effects of pride, it is evident that nothing can be more painful to a proud heart, than the thoughts of such a being as God; one, who is infinitely powerful, just, and holy; who can neither be resisted, deceived, nor deluded; who disposes, according to his own sovereign pleasure, of all creatures and events; and who, in an especial manner, hates pride, and is determined to abase and punish it. Such a being pride can contemplate only with feelings of dread, aversion and abhorrence. It must look upon him as its natural enemy; the great enemy whom it has to fear. But the knowledge of God directly tends to bring this infinite, irresistible, irreconcilable enemy full to the view of the proud man. It teaches him, that he has a superior, a master, from whose authority he cannot escape, whose power he cannot resist, and whose will he must obey, or be crushed before him and rendered miserable forever. It shows him what he hates to see, that in spite of his opposition, God's counsel shall stand, that he will do all his pleasure, and that in all things, wherein men deal proudly, God is above them. These truths torture the proud, unhumbled hearts of the wicked; and hence they hate that knowledge of God, which teaches these truths, and will not seek it. On the contrary, they wish to remain ignorant of such a being, and to banish all thoughts of him from their minds. With this view they neglect, pervert, or explain away those passages of revelation, which describe God's true character, and endeavor to believe, that he is altogether such an one as themselves. In the second place, the pride of the wicked prevents them from seeking after the knowledge of God, by rendering them unwilling to be taught. Pride is almost as impatient of a teacher, as it is of a master. The proud man is ever vain of his knowledge, and is unwilling to confess, or even to think, that there is any thing of importance, of which he is ignorant, or that any person is capable of giving him instruction. But if he consents to seek after the knowledge of God, he must acknowledge his ignorance, he must submit to be taught, he must, as it Were, put himself to school and become as a little child. This his proud heart cannot brook; and therefore he will not seek the knowledge of God. In the third place, pride renders the wicked unwilling to use the means, by which alone the knowledge of God can be acquired. For instance, it renders them unwilling to study the scriptures in a proper manner. Every thing, which the Bible reveals, is suited to mortify pride; for in dictating it God had purposed in his heart to stain the pride

of all human glory. The description, which it gives, of the desperately sinful, guilty, and ruined condition of mankind; of our entire dependence on the sovereign grace of God; the mysterious, humbling doctrines and self-denying precepts, which it inculcates; the self-condemning spirit, which it requires, and the self-abasing way of salvation which it reveals, render it exceedingly disagreeable to the taste of the proud, wicked man. In addition to this, it commands him to renounce his proud dependence on his own understanding, to sit with a teachable, childlike temper at the feet of Jesus, and learn of him, who was meek and lowly in heart; to believe truths which he cannot fully comprehend, and which, perhaps, appear unreasonable to his prejudiced, blinded, unhumbled mind. These things the proud man cannot endure, and therefore will not study the scriptures.

Pride also renders the wicked man unwilling to pray. Prayer is an expression of wants and dependence, and a direct acknowledgment of a superior; and in addition to this, prayer for the knowledge of God includes a confession of ignorance, and a request to be taught. But this the proud man abhors. No wonder then that he will not pray for divine knowledge. No wonder, that even when he attempts this duty, he forgets its design, and, like the self-righteous Pharisee, instead of soliciting pardon, grace and instruction, proudly thanks God, that he is better than others. In an equally powerful manner does the pride of the wicked operate in preventing them from improving public and private opportunities for acquiring religious instruction. If the public instructions of the sanctuary coincide, as they ever ought to do, with the contents of God's word, the same pride, which leads the wicked to dislike and neglect the one, will prevent them from believing and obeying the other. And with respect to more private meetings for religious conversation and instruction, an attendance on them is still more offensive to the pride of their hearts. Indeed, since they are too proud to request divine illumination from God, it could scarcely be expected, that they will stoop to receive instruction from man. Even after the wicked man begins to be convinced of his ignorance of God, and of the importance of divine knowledge, he is unwilling to have it known, and is ashamed to confess to his Christian friends, or to the minister of Christ, that he is ignorant of religions truth. Such are the principal ways, in which the pride of the wicked operates to prevent them from seeking the knowledge of God.

2. The pride of the wicked will not allow them to seek after the favor of God. The proud always aim at independence. They wish to believe themselves, and to persuade others, that they are able to render themselves happy, without the assistance of any one. But to seek the favor of God, implies dependence on him for happiness; it implies imperfection, inferiority. Hence it is easy to see how the pride of the wicked prevents them from seeking the divine favor. The way in which alone God's favor can be obtained, is, if possible, still more offensive to pride. The very entrance upon the way, is a death-blow to it; for the Gospel casts down imaginations and every high thing, that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and requires us, if we would enjoy his favor, to bow our stubborn wills to his authority, to mortify our pride, and renounce our vain_glorious, self-righteous thoughts and feelings. It tells us, that God resisteth the proud; that every one, who exalteth himself, shall be abased; and that the proud in heart are an abomination to the Lord, while he gives his grace to the lowly, and will dwell in none but the humble and contrite heart. We can, therefore, be at no loss to know why the pride of the wicked will not suffer them to seek the favor of God.

3. Pride renders the wicked unwilling to seek after the likeness of God. Those, who have an exalted opinion of themselves, will not easily be persuaded to imitate others. They will rather expect others to imitate them. Besides, an attempt to imitate others, involves a confession, that they are our superiors; at least, that they excel us in those respects, in which we endeavor to imitate them. But pride hates a superior, and is unwilling to allow that it is excelled by any one.

4. The pride of the wicked renders them unwilling to seek after communion with God. The proud man never wishes to associate with those, who are above him. If he must have superiors, he wishes to be as far from them as possible, that the sight of their superiority may not mortify his pride. Hence the remark of proud Ceasar, when passing through an insignificant village—"I would rather be the first man in this village, than the second in Rome;" a speech, which, though admired by the proud and ambitious, nearly resembles that, which Milton has put into the mouth of Satan, after his fall:

Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven. This is the genuine language of pride; and therefore the proud man shuns the society of his superiors, and prefers that of his inferiors. He chooses to look down, rather than to look up, because, when he looks down, his pride is flattered by seeing others below him; but when he looks up, it is mortified. Hence he will not look up to God. He chooses rather to hold communion with irrational animals in the gratifications of sense, than to seek for fellowship with the greatest and best of beings, in the pure, exalted, and exquisite pleasures of religion. Thus clearly does it appear, that it is the pride of the wicked, which renders them unwilling to seek after God.

REFLECTIONS. I. How evident it is from what has been said, that salvation is wholly of grace; and that all the wicked, if left to themselves, will certainly perish! They do not seek after God; they will not seek after him; they are fully determined not to do it; the pride of their hearts supports the resolution, and they will infallibly adhere to it unless divine grace prevents. But if they do not seek God, they will not find him; and if they do not find him, they are undone forever. Their eternal destruction is therefore inevitable, unless God, of his mere sovereign, self-moved grace, seeks those, who will not seek him, subdues the pride of their hearts, and makes them willing. This he has done for all, who are saved. This he must do for all, who ever will be saved. Need any thing more be said to prove, that salvation is wholly of grace?

2. How depraved, how infatuated, how unreasonable do the wicked appear! and how evident it is, that if they perish, they will be the sole authors of their own destruction! God has given them all the powers and faculties necessary to enable them to seek and pursue any object. This is evident, because they do, in fact, seek and obtain many objects. God also commands them to seek his face; assures them, that none shall seek in vain; and at the same time warns them, that all, who seek him not, will be miserable forever. But the wicked neglect his warnings, disbelieve his promises, and pay no attention to his commands. When they hear him saying, Seek ye my face; instead of replying with the Psalmist, Thy face, Lord, will we seek—their proud hearts obstinately refuse to obey. They pursue the perishing vanities of time and sense through labors, dangers, and death itself; and wandering far from the way of peace, and neglecting the infinite beauty, the supreme good, the fountain of life and happiness, they madly rush on, with blind impetuosity, into the yawning gulf of destruction. They are therefore, evidently and incontestably, their own destroyers, and when they shall hereafter be sentenced to depart accursed from him whom they

now refuse to seek, should the whole intelligent universe be summoned to inquire what occasioned their fate, they would unite in a verdict of self-murder.

3. How foolish, how absurd, how ruinous, how blindly destructive of its own object, does pride appear! By attempting to soar, it only plunges itself in the mire; and, while endeavoring to erect for itself a throne, it undermines the ground on which it stands, and digs its own grave. It plunged satan from heaven into hell; it banished our first parents from paradise, and it will, in a similar manner, ruin all, who indulge it. It keeps us in ignorance of God, shuts us out from his favor, prevents us from resembling him, deprives us, in this world, of all the honor and happiness, which communion with him would confer; and in the next, unless previously hated, repented of, and renounced, will bar forever against us the door of heaven, and close upon us the gates of hell. 0, then, my friends, beware, above all things, beware of pride. Beware, lest you indulge it imperceptibly; for it is, perhaps, of all sins, the most secret, subtle, and insinuating. That you may detect it, remember, that he only, who seeks after God in his appointed way, is humble; and that all who neglect thus to seek him, are most certainly proud in heart, and, consequently, an abomination unto the Lord.

Lastly—This subject may be applied for the purpose of self-examination. Say, then, my friends, are there none present, who do not seek after God? Are you all seeking after the knowledge of God, by diligently and humbly studying the scriptures, by fervent prayer, and by a conscientious improvement of the public and private opportunities, with which God has favored you? Are you all seeking the favor of God as the one thing needful, avoiding every thing which will tend to displease him, and practicing every thing that tends to secure his approbation? Are you seeking conformity with God, aiming to be followers of him as dear children, and desiring to he perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect? Is communion with God the grand object of your desires, the principal source of your pleasures, the reward at which you aim, in the performance of religious duties? If this be the case with all present, you are indeed happy, and the preceding observations have no application to you. But if there be one person present, who is not thus seeking God, that person is a wicked person, one who is entirely under the influence of pride, and against whom all the dreadful curses, denounced by inspired writers upon the wicked are leveled. If there be one such person in this assembly, may God, by his Spirit, single him out, convince him of his wickedness, his pride, his guilt and danger, and bring him as a trembling inquirer after God, to the feet of Jesus, and as a humble suppliant for mercy, to the foot of the cross.

S. TITLES OF CHRIST

TITLES OF CHRIST

"Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end" Isaiah 9:6-7 In the preceding context the prophet, "rapt into future times" by the spirit of prophecy, and influenced by that faith which is the evidence of things not seen, not only foretells the incarnation of Christ, but speaks of that glorious event and of its happy consequences, as having already taken place: The people that walked in darkness, says he, have seen a great light. They that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. They joy before thee according to the joy of harvest; they rejoice as when they divide the spoil. But whence did all this light and joy proceed? I answer; the Sun of righteousness had arisen upon them with healing in his beams; for, says the prophet, unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end. That the wonderful child, whose birth is announced and celebrated in these triumphant strains, was no other than Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, it is needless to remark. And as this is the day which has been considered by many, as the anniversary of his birth, it may not be improper to employ the time allotted to this discourse, in meditating on an event, which is no less interesting to us, than it was to the ancient church, for unto us, as well as to them, this child is born; unto its, as well as to them, this son is given.

It may however be necessary, to remind you, that, if you wish to derive the smallest advantage from meditating on this passage, you must be in the exercise of a strong, and lively faith. You must sit at the feet of God, with the temper of a little child, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls; remembering that your minds are blinded and prejudiced against the truth, by the influence of sin; and, that what appears impossible to you, is possible with God; that what is, in your view, an absurd and unintelligible mystery, may be, in his sight, perfectly plain and intelligible. In a word, you must have the temper which the wise men of the east, the shepherds of Bethlehem, and the aged Simeon possessed. They were told, that Christ the Lord, the king of the Jews, the Saviour of men, was born; and when they hastened to see him, they found nothing but a helpless infant, born of obscure and indigent parents, and lying in a manger. Yet instead of making cavils and objections, as their own prejudiced understandings would have led them to do, they believed and worshipped.

Such is the wonderful power of faith. Thus does it triumph over every obstacle, and implicitly receive the word of God, however strange and incomprehensible it may appear. My friends, we warn you before hand, that if you do not exercise this faith, the present discourse will do you no good. You will say, it is impossible that a child born of a woman, can be properly called the mighty God, the everlasting Father. Thus the Saviour who is precious to them that believe, will be to you a

stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, as he was to the unbelieving Jews; and his gospel, which is to them that are saved, the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation, will appear in your view nothing but foolishness. O then, my hearers, if you wish to be saved, if you would not have the preaching of the cross prove a savor of death unto death, if you wish to profit by the glorious truths revealed in our text, pray fervently that God will increase your faith; and if you find unbelief prevailing, cry to God like the Jewish ruler, Lord, we would believe, help thou our unbelief. This being premised, let us now proceed to consider the names and titles of this wonderful child, whose birth is foretold in our text; whose birth Christians in different parts of the world, this day celebrate.

I. Our text informs us that this child shall be called Wonderful.

1. In the book of Judges, we read that, when Manoah inquired the name of an angel of the Lord who appeared to him, the angel replied, why dost thou ask after my name, seeing it is secret? The word there rendered secret, is the same which is here rendered wonderful. It was doubtless the Eternal Word; who is frequently called the Angel of the Covenant, that appeared on that occasion. The name which is here given him, signifies secret, mysterious, wonderful; and in each of these senses, it may properly be ascribed to Christ. He may be called secret, hidden, unknown; for we are told that no one knoweth the Son, save the Father. He may be called mysterious; for without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh. Even the angels are represented as desiring to look into it. He may also justly be called wonderful; for his person, his character, his office, his birth, his life, his death and resurrection, are all full of wonders. His person is wonderful; for he is Immanuel, God with us, and in him dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily. His character is wonderful; for it comprises every thing that is excellent in the divine and human Matures. His love is wonderful; for it passes knowledge. The riches of his grace are wonderful; for they are represented as being unsearchable. His birth is wonderful; for what can be more astonishing than that the eternal Word, who was with God, and who was God, and by whom all things were made, should be born of a woman, a weak and helpless infant. His life is wonderful; for it shows us God dwelling in flesh as a man; it shows us the great Lawgiver obeying his owls laws; it shows us one who was in outward appearance, nothing but a poor, despised mechanic, controlling the laws of nature, commanding the elements as his servants, banishing demons with a will, a word, and forcing death and the grave to yield up their prey. His death was wonderful; for we there see the Lord of life and glory, dying by the hands of his creatures; we see the Giver of the law, bearing the curse of the law; we see the most innocent and perfect of beings, the delight of heaven and the ruler of earth, treated both by heaven and earth, as the vilest of malefactors. His resurrection was wonderful; for what can be more so, than to see a dead person, having power to take his life again, bursting the fetters of death and the bars of the grave, ascending from the depths of the tomb, to the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high. These are but a part of the wonders which accompanied this wonderful child, but they are surely sufficient to show the propriety of the name given him in our text.

2. In the next place, we are told that the name of this child shall be called Counsellor. This name is also with strict propriety given to Christ. He is a counsellor, with respect both to God and to men. In the first place, he is a counsellor with respect to God. He is called the word and the wisdom of God; and with him the Father takes sweet counsel in reference to all his works. He consulted him with respect to the work of creation. Let us make man says he, in our image, after our likeness. He

consulteth him respecting his works of providence. Let us drive out the man from the garden of Eden; let us go down and confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. He consulted him respecting the great work of grace, the plan of redemption. Speaking of the man whose name is the Branch, the prophet says, The counsel of peace shall be between them both; that is, between this man and Jehovah. Thus clearly does it appear, Christ our Immanuel is Jehovah's Counsellor. Hence we find him saying, counsel is mine, and sound wisdom, I am understanding, I have strength. Hence also the apostle informs us, that in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In the second place, Christ is a counsellor with respect to men. He is the great teacher, guide and counsellor of his people; the light of the world, the Sun of righteousness. He that believeth in me, says he, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life; for I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light, and crooked things straight, before them; these things will I do, and not forsake them. He is also the great Advocate of his people, who pleads their cause for them in the court of heaven, and intercedes continually for the pardon of their sins, and the supply of their temporal and spiritual necessities; for, says the apostle, we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous.

3. The prophet informs us that the child whose birth he predicts, shall be called the Mighty God. On this awful name, my hearers, it is needless to insist. You are already acquainted with its import. It represents Christ, not only as God, but the mighty God. We shall only add a few of the passages which show that the prediction was fulfilled, that this name was given to Christ. St. John informs us, that the word was with God, and was God; that Christ is the true God and eternal life. Thomas, one of the disciples, calls him, my Lord, and my God. St. Paul, speaking of the Jews, says, of them as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. He also informs us that he is mighty, or able to save, even to the uttermost. Whether therefore you believe or not, that Christ is the mighty God, you must allow that he is called so, by divinely inspired prophets and apostles, who were commissioned to communicate to us every thing necessary to make us wise unto salvation, and who neither would, nor could deceive us. Whatever others may choose to think of Christ, to Christians he is the mighty God, and hereafter, when every eye beholds him coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, they will joyfully cry, while others weep and despair, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Even so Lord Jesus, come quickly.

4. This wonderful child shall be called the Everlasting Father, or the Father of eternity. Here again human reason will be ready to cry, we have already had enough, and more than enough of absurdity and contradictions. How can a child just born, be a Father, or everlasting Father, the Father of eternity? My friends, if you cannot answer this question, I suspect you would have been equally embarrassed with the question which our Saviour proposed to the Pharisees: How call David's son, be David's Lord? This question they could not answer; nor call any answer it, at the present day, in a satisfactory manner, who do not believe that Jesus Christ was God and man united. But those who believe this, can answer it with ease. They can reply, as God, Christ was David's Lord. As man, he was David's son. In another place Christ says, I am the root and the offspring, or branch of David; the root whence David sprung, and the branch which sprung from David. So in our text. As man, he was a child born; as God, he was the Father of eternity. But there is still another, and very important sense, in which he may be called the everlasting Father,

with reference to his divinity and humanity united. He, we are told, is the second Adam; that is, he is the covenant Lord and the spiritual Father of all his people, as Adam was the covenant Lord and natural Father of the human race. All the true people of Christ, the real subjects of the kingdom of heaven, have been born again; born into another family, and are heirs of a heavenly inheritance. Of this new birth Christ is the author, and therefore he is in a spiritual sense the Father, the ever living Father of the whole church in heaven and on earth. Hence the apostle represents him as the author or Father of eternal salvation. In the counsel, or purpose of God, he was from eternity the Father of his people; for he is represented as saying to them, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee. And as his love and his relation to his people were from everlasting, so they will continue to everlasting. With the utmost propriety, therefore, may he who was born of a woman, be called the everlasting Father.

5. The last title here given to this mysterious child, is the Prince of Peace. That our Saviour is a prince or king, the Scriptures every where inform us. Why he is called the Prince of Peace, it is easy to conceive. He is the author of reconciliation, and consequently of peace, between an offended God, and offending man. His kingdom, as established in the heart, consists in righteousness, and peace, and holy joy. His atoning blood speaks peace to the guilty, terrified conscience. He dispenses peace to his people in a sovereign way; his commands enjoin perfect peace and love between man and man, and his religion restores peace and rest to the tumultuous, agitated, distracted soul, by uniting its jarring powers and faculties to fear his name. Well, therefore, may he be called the Prince of Peace.

Having thus briefly considered the names and titles of this wondrous child, we proceed to consider,

II. For whom he was born. My friends, it was for mankind, for us. Unto us this child is born, unto us this Son is given. It has been observed, that when angels announced his birth to men, they said, Unto you is born a Saviour. But when prophets, when men speak of this event, they say unto us a child is born; for Christ took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Unto us also a Son is given. A Son of whom? His birth shows him to be the Son of man. His titles, which we have already considered, and his works declare him to be the Son of God. He was both; and he was given to us both by his Father and by himself. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman. Christ loved us and gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Nor was he given to us only that he might suffer and die for our redemption; for the apostle farther observes, that God gave him to be head over all things unto his church. This leads us to consider a

3. Prerogative, which is predicted in our text respecting this child, viz., that the government shall be upon his shoulder. In the Revelation the church is figuratively represented under the similitude of a woman, and this woman is represented as bringing forth a man child, who should rule all nations with a rod of iron. The same may be said of the child whose birth is foretold in our text. All power is committed to him in heaven and on earth; and God’s language respecting him is, I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion. I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces as a potter’s vessel. The establishment and unbounded extent of this

kingdom, are clearly predicted, and described in the prophecy of Daniel. In the days of these kings, says he, the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; but it shall break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Of this kingdom, our Saviour, who was born as a child and given us as a Son, is appointed Sovereign, and hence he is styled the King of Kings, and the Lord of lords. This kingdom, which is usually styled Christ's mediatorial kingdom, includes all beings in heaven and hell, who will all, either willingly or by constraint, finally submit to Christ; for God has sworn by himself, that to Christ every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue shall confess him Lord. Agreeably, we see that even the devils were subject to him while on earth, and even to his disciples, through his name; and that they were constrained, once and again, to prostrate themselves before him, and to confess that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God. In a similar manner will all wicked men and wicked spirits be compelled reluctantly to prostrate themselves before him, and confess him Lord at the judgment day; for we are told, that he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. Agreeably, our text informs us, that of the increase of his government there will be no end. He will go on conquering and to conquer, overturning heathen temples with their idol gods, until the trumpet of the seventh angel sounds. Then the mystery of God will be finished, and great voices will be heard in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. But in addition to this mediatorial kingdom of Christ, which is set up in the world, he has another kingdom, the kingdom of his grace, which is set up in the hearts of his people. Here Christ reigns supreme, enthroned in the soul, casting down proud imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of himself. This kingdom consists in righteousness and peace and holy joy, and of the increase of this kingdom also, and of the peace which accompanies it, there shall be no end. This kingdom is compared to leaven hid in meal till the whole be leavened. Thus effectually and imperceptibly, shall the gracious power of Christ work in the hearts of his people, till the whole soul feels its influence, and is transformed into the image of Christ; for he will! perfect that which concerneth us; he will not leave unfinished the work of his own hands. Their peace shall be as a river, and their righteousness as the waves of the sea. Even in heaven there shall be no end to the increase of their happiness; but their perpetually expanding souls shall be made capable through eternity of receiving larger and larger measures of glory and felicity, and shall be continually filled by Him in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead. Thus of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end.

APPLICATION. Is it true, that unto our sinful race a child is born, to whom belong the wonderful names mentioned in our text, and to whom the salvation and the government of the world is committed? Surely then, my friends, it becomes us to rejoice, and to commemorate this all-important event with the most lively emotions of thankfulness and praise. In this offering all mankind are called upon to join, since the gift is to the whole race of men; for all people, and nations, and tongues, and languages, may cry, Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God; the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end. And the song commenced in one part of the earth at the dawn of this day, ought to be echoed round the world as the same day dawns successively on its different climes. Even the blessed spirits of the just made perfect in heaven, may be considered as rejoicing

in the birth of the great Deliverer, who redeemed them from worse than Egyptian bondage, brought them into the glorious light and liberty of the children of God, and finally raised them to the blissful mansions which they now inhabit, and where the increase of their happiness will never end. Nay more, the blessed angels themselves, who sang glory to God in the highest, when they announced the Saviour's birth, may be considered as repeating the same song. Let it give intensity to our joy, that we may now celebrate his birth and his resurrection at once. And are there any in whose breasts these great events excite no joy; any who feel no interest in those things which excite, justly excite so deep an interest in all holy beings in heaven and on earth? Are there any who, instead of receiving with adoring wonder the great mysteries of Godliness, which we have been considering, regard them with indifference, or reject them as foolish? How plain is it they are entirely destitute of the temper of saints and angels; that they have never embraced Christ as their Saviour, and that they have neither part nor lot in his salvation. They cannot say, Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end; for they reject him. My friends, is this the case, with any of you Consider a moment your awful situation. That Saviour who is precious to others, has in your eyes no beauty that you should desire him. He who is to others the author of eternal salvation, is to you only a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence; a savor of death unto death, and not of life unto life. Will you still remain in this awful Situation? If not, be persuaded to accept the Saviour without delay. Remember that in order to make a gift your own, two things are necessary.

It must first be offered. It must next be accepted. Unless it is accepted, it is not yours. Unless you accept Christ therefore, you have no Saviour, no Advocate in heaven. Come then, accept hint as he is offered. Admire him as Wonderful; consult him as Counsellor; adore him as God; be born of him as your everlasting Father; and submit to him as the Prince of Peace. Possessed of all these titles, he offers himself to you, and in return he asks only for your heart. Come then, sinner, be persuaded tip accept him. As on the birthday of your friends, you present them gifts as tokens of your affection, so come now, on this birthday of the Saviour, and present yourself to him, who is ready and anxious to become your almighty, everlasting friend, in return for your submission, love and gratitude. This is the gift he most desires, this is the only return he asks for his boundless and innumerable mercies. Come then at this propitious moment, present yourself unto him, accept him as your Redeemer, and then you shall be of the number of those who can say, Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.

S. The characters whom CHRIST Loves

The characters whom CHRIST Loves "I love them that love me." Proverbs 8:17. are the words of Christ. He who is styled the Word of God in the New Testament, calls himself the wisdom of God in the Old. Under this character he is represented as standing in the public places of resort, and soliciting the attention of all who pass by: Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. The motives which he sets before them to induce a compliance with his call are numerous and powerful. In the first place, he claims their attention on account of the endless duration of his existence. I was set up, says he, from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When God prepared the heavens, I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the deep; when he gave to the sea his decree, when he appointed the foundations of the earth; then was I by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. In the next place, he claims attention on account of the dignity and excellence of his character: Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding; I have strength. By me kings reign and princes decree justice; even all the judges of the earth. In the third place, he urges them to listen to his instructions because of their excellence, plainness, truth and utility: Hear, for I will speak of excellent things; my mouth shall speak truth. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness they are all plain to him that understandeth. Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. In the fourth place, he urges them to love and obey his voice by promises on the one hand, and threatenings on the other: Blessed are they that keep my ways; for riches and honor are with me, yea durable riches and righteousness. I cause those that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures.

Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors; for whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death. Lastly, he urges them to love him on account of his long attachment to mankind, and his readiness to reciprocate affection; I was ever rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men: I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me. The love which Christ here professes to entertain for those who love him, is an affection of a peculiar kind, entirely different from that general love which he feels for all his creatures; and infinitely more desirable. There is a sense in which he loves even his enemies. He loves them with a love of benevolence, a love which leads him to mourn over them when they obstinately refuse to comply with his invitations. Thus we are told that, while on earth, he was grieved with the hardness of their hearts; and wept over rebellious Jerusalem, when he contemplated the miseries that were coming upon her. He also loves the holy angels with a love of complacency and delight because they bear the image and obey the will of his Father. But, the love which he entertains for his people, is an affection of a still more tender and peculiar kind; an affection, the nature and extent of which can be learned only from a consideration of the causes which produce it. To state these causes, or, in other words, to show why Christ loves those who love him, is the principal object of the present discourse.

1. The foundation of that love which Christ feels for all who love him, was laid in eternity. All who now love him, together with all who ever will love him to the end of time, were given to him by his Father before the foundation of the world; to be his peculiar people. God promised him in the covenant of redemption, that if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he should have a seed and a people to serve him; and that his people should be made willing in the day of his power. No sooner were this people given to him, than he loved them with a peculiar love; for he who calls the things that are not, as though they already were, can love creatures who were not, as if they were already in existence. Suppose, my friends, that when God promised a son to Abraham and Sarah, twenty-five years before his birth, he had given them a picture containing an exact likeness of this son. Would they not have immediately begun to love this picture of their future offspring; and would not their affection and their desire to see and embrace him have increased with every succeeding year?

Something like such a picture of his future spiritual offspring, Christ has possessed from the first moment in which they were promised him by his Father. Their names are all written in his book of life; and their image has been ever present to the eye of his mind from that period to the present time. Hence, long before they love him, nay long before they begin to exist, they are beloved by him with a strong and tender affection, or as the prophet expresses it, with an everlasting love. Their image has so long dwelt in his mind, and so long been the object of his affectionate contemplations, that they have become, as it were, a part of himself, and he can no more cease to love them than he can cease to exist. All who are thus loved by Christ, because they are given him of his Father, will sooner or later return his affection; for, says he, all that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For these he prays. I pray for them, says he, I pray not for the world but for them whom thou hast given me. These he will bring in. Other sheep, he said to his disciples, I have who are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice. These he will keep. My sheep, says he, never perish. My Father who gave them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. Thus he knows his sheep, loves them, prays for them, and resolves to bring them home to his fold, before they love or know him.

2. Christ loves those who love him, because he has done and suffered so much for their salvation. You need not be told, my friends, that we naturally love and prize any object in proportion to the labor and expense which it costs us to obtain it. How highly then must Christ prize, how ineffably must he love his people. How dear did their salvation cost him. He purchased them with his blood. To win their love and effect their redemption, he exchanged the height of glory and felicity for the depths of wretchedness and degradation. At an infinitely less expense he could have created thousands of worlds. Nor is this all. From the birth to the death of his people, he watches over them with unremitting attention. Every hour and every moment, they need and experience his watchful care.

He forgives their sins, alleviates their sorrows, sympathizes in their trials, heals their backslidings, wipes away their tears, listens to their prayers, intercedes for them with his Father, enables them to persevere, and accompanies them through the valley of the shadow of death. All this care and attention naturally tends to increase his love for them. If a shepherd becomes affectionately attached to a flock, which he has long fed, guided and protected; if a mother loves, with increasing tenderness, a sick child who, for a long period, needs her pity and care; with what an

inconceivable strength of affection must our great Shepherd love his sheep for whom he has done and suffered so much, and whom he feeds, guides and protects with such unceasing vigilance in their journey through the wilderness of this world? If his love was originally sufficiently strong to bring him from heaven to earth, and carry him through such an unparalleled series of toils and sufferings, what must it be now, when he has so much more cause to love them? If it was stronger than death, even before he died for them, who can conceive of its strength since he has arisen and ascended to heaven? For this, among other reasons, his love for them must be greater in degree, and of a different kind from that, which he entertains for the angels of light. He loves them, indeed, but he never died for them; he never sympathized with them in affliction; he never watched over them for years with unceasing attention, nor led them by the hand through such a world as this. He loves them; as a parent loves a child that enjoys vigorous and uninterrupted health; but he loves his people, as parents love a child that has often been sick, and at the point of death. He loves them, as the father in the parable loved his elder son who had ever been with him; but he loves his people as the same father loved the returning prodigal, who was dead and alive again; who after being lost was found. And perhaps we are warranted, from this parable and those which precede it, to conclude that there is more joy in heaven over one of our fallen race who repents, than over ninety and nine of these blessed spirits who need no repentance.

3. Christ loves those who love him, because they are united to him by strong and indissoluble ties. That a most intimate and lasting union subsists between Christ and his people, is evident from numerous passages of Scripture. This union is sometimes compared to that which subsists between the bridegroom and the bride. Fear not, says he to his church, for thy Maker is thy husband. Sometimes it is compared to the union between the branches and the vine. I, says he to his disciples, am the vine; ye are the branches. Sometimes it is shadowed forth by the connection between the head and the members. Christ, says the apostle, is the head of the church, and we are members of his body, his flesh, and his bones. In other places it is compared to the union between the soul and the body. Ye, says St. Paul to believers, are the body of Christ. And again, he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Lastly, this mysterious union is described in still stronger terms by our Saviour as resembling that which subsists between himself and his Father. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, says he, dwelleth in me and I in him. To the same purpose he prays, that all his disciples may be one; as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, that the world may know that thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. The expressions here employed to describe this union are the strongest which language can afford, and sufficiently show that it must be a union of the strongest and most intimate kind. The bond of this union, on our part, is faith; but the union itself is formed by the appointment of God, who has constituted Christ and his people one great body, and by the Spirit of Christ which dwells in the hearts of all believers. As the numerous branches of the vine are one with the root, because the same vital principle is common to both; or as the different members of our bodies are one because they are actuated by the same soul, so Christ and his people are one, because the same infinite Spirit dwells in them all and binds them together. Hence the afflictions of the church are called the afflictions of Christ; and hence we are told, that in all their afflictions he is afflicted, and that whoever touches them touches the apple of his eye. How strong then must be the love of Christ for his people! They are not only his brethren, his sisters, his bride, but his members, his body; and he consequently loves them as we love our members, as our souls love our bodies. Nothing can be stronger than the language of

St. Paul on this subject. No man, says he, ever hated his own flesh, but loveth and cherisheth it even as the Lord does the church; plainly implying that we may as soon cease to love and cherish our bodies, as Christ to love and provide for his people.

4. Christ loves those who love him, because they possess his spirit and bear his image; in one word, because they are holy. Similarity of character always tends to produce affection, and hence every being in the universe loves his own image whenever he discovers it. Even children become more dear to their parents, when they resemble them; and our nearest relations are beloved with increased affection, whose dispositions and opinions and pursuits correspond with our own. Especially does Christ love his own image in his creatures, because it essentially consists in holiness, which is of all things most pleasing both to his Father and himself. But all who love Christ bear his image. He has no children or friends who do not resemble him; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his. If any man be in Christ he is a new creature, created anew after his image in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness. And though the image of Christ in his people be at first imperfect, yet the love which they entertain for his person and character, constantly tends to increase the resemblance, since we naturally imitate those whom we highly love and revere. By contemplating his glory, as displayed in the gospel, they are gradually changed into the same image from glory to glory. They love what he loves; they hate what he hates; they pursue the same objects that he pursues. They are not of the world, even as he is not of the world. They learn of him to be meek and lowly in heart, and to cultivate that charity which seeketh not her own. Like him their principal concern is to glorify God and finish the work he has assigned them. Like him they pity, forgive, and pray for their enemies; and like him they are tenderly solicitous for the salvation of sinners. In a word, Christ, as the apostle expresses it, is formed in them. And as those who love Christ will obey his commands, and as he commands his disciples to be perfect even as their Father in heaven is perfect, so they are constantly aiming at a perfect conformity with this perfect pattern. That this conformity to his image and obedience to his commands, are pleasing to Christ and excite his affection, is evident from his own language. I have not called you servants, says he, to his disciples; but I have called you friends; and then are ye my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. The fruits of holiness thus produced by his people on earth, imperfect as they are, are on some accounts more pleasing to him even than those produced by the angels in heaven. Holiness in heaven is like flowers in spring or like fruit in autumn when they are expected; but holiness in a world so depraved as this is like fruit and flowers in the depth of winter; or like the blossoms and almonds of Aaron’s rod, which proceed from a dead and sapless branch. When the delicious fruits of southern climes can be made by the gardener’s skill to flourish in our northern regions, they are far more admired and prized, than while growing in rich abundance in their native soil. So when holiness, whose native land is heaven, is found in the comparatively frozen and barren soil of this world, which lieth in wickedness, it is viewed by celestial beings with peculiar pleasure and agreeable surprise.

Lastly; Christ loves those who love him, because they rejoice in and return his affection. It is the natural tendency of love to produce and increase love. Even those whom we have long loved on account either of their relation to us, or of their amiable qualities, become incomparably more dear to us when they begin to prize our love and return it. Hence it is easy to conceive that Christ loves his people because of their love to him. And if he so loved them before they existed, and even while they were his enemies, as to lay down his life for their redemption, how inexpressibly dear to

him must they be, after they become his friends! To this, the apostle alludes when he says, if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. It is indeed utterly impossible to conceive the immeasurable extent of his love to those who are thus reconciled to him. Well might the apostle say, it passeth knowledge. He feels none of those jealous fears respecting the sincerity of his friends, which men are prone to entertain, and which often interrupt their friendship for each other.

No; he knows that his people love him, and he knows how much they love him. He knows that he is precious to their souls, more precious than the air they breathe, than the light of heaven. He knows that they love him better than father or mother, husband or wife, brother or sister, son or daughter, yea far better than their own lives; and that for his sake they are ready to renounce and forsake them all. He knows that his love sweetly constrains them to live to his service, and that they rejoice when they are counted worthy to suffer pain and shame for his name. He knows that they look upon him as their Redeemer, their Friend, their Shepherd, their Physician, their Advocate, their Wisdom, their Strength, their Life, and their All; that the enjoyment of his presence and favor constitutes all their felicity; that they consider no earthly affliction comparable to his absence or displeasure, and that the weakness of their love to him is their constant grief and shame. He knows that they prefer him to themselves, that they wish for a heavenly crown only that they may throw it down at his feet; and that the principal reason why they desire heaven is, that they may see and serve and praise him, and ascribe all the glory of their salvation to him. And how then can he refrain from loving those who thus love him; whom he has himself taught to love him. With what unutterable emotion of mingled pity, sympathy, and love must he look down on those who are thus attached to him in the midst of a rebellious world, and who for his sake are denying themselves, taking up the cross and striving to follow him in defiance of all the inward and outward opposition which they are called to encounter? Hear what he says to such: I know thy works. I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee in the hour of temptation which shall come on all the earth, and I will cause thine adversaries to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Thus have I attempted to state the principal reasons why Christ loves those who love him. He loves them because they are given him by his Father; because he has done and suffered much for their salvation; because they are united to him in the most intimate and indissoluble. manner; because they possess his spirit and bear his image; and because they rejoice in and return his affection. Either of these causes alone would induce him to love them with a strength of affection, of which we can form no conception. What then must be the degree of love produced by all these causes united? He only can tell, who knows the Son even as the Son knows him. The love of Christ passeth knowledge. Its heights and depths, its length and breadth, are unsearchable by finite minds.

IMPROVEMENT. 1. This subject may enable everyone to answer the important question, does Christ love me? This is a question which all true Christians will frequently, and anxiously ask, and which many of them feel unable to answer in a satisfactory manner. When they consider the spotless purity of Christ, and his hatred of sin, and their own exceeding sinfulness and unworthiness, they are ready to exclaim, how is it possible that he should love us? O that he were on earth, that we might ask him this question, or that some kind angel would favor us with a

glimpse of his book of life, or assure us that we are the objects of his love. But these wishes are needless. Say not in your hearts, Who shall ascend up into heaven, to ask whether Christ loves us; for the answer to this question is near you even in your hearts. If you love Christ he loves you. If you are his friends, he is most certainly yours. Were he now on earth, and should you ask, Lord, canst thou condescend to love us? he would answer your question by another, and say as he did to Peter, Lovest thou me more than these worldly objects around you? Look into your hearts then, my friends, for an answer to this question. Can not some of you reply, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. Thou knowest that, notwithstanding our coldness, our ingratitude, and numberless imperfections, the desire of our souls is still to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name? If you dare not say this, can you not venture to say, we know that Christ is just such a Saviour as we need; the way of salvation by him is exactly suited to our circumstances; we know that his yoke is easy, and his burden light; and that it appears to us above all things desirable to obey his commands, and imitate his example; we know that we love all who love him and bear his image; and that it gratifies us to hear him praised and extolled; we know that his presence alone renders us happy, and that in his absence nothing affords us consolation? My friends, if you can truly say this, you need not wish for Christ to come and assure you of his love. He has already done it; he has done it in the words of our text; and you may feel more assured of it than if you had heard it asserted by a voice from heaven.. Unworthy as you are, he loves you infinitely more than you can conceive; and will continue to love you while eternity shall last. Away, then, with your doubts and anxieties. Dismiss every fearful anxious thought; listen not to the suggestions of unbelief, but believe the words of Christ, and open your hearts to admit the consoling enrapturing assurances of his love. Come to his table, as to the table of a friend, who will give you a cordial welcome, and not as to the table of a master of whom you are servilely afraid? Why should you hesitate or fear to do this? Do you not invariably find that, when you feel the fullest assurance of his love, you are most engaged in his service; and that, on the contrary, when you doubt it, your hands are weakened, and your hearts discouraged! If this be the case, it is at once your duty, your interest, and your happiness to believe, to be certain, that you love Christ, and that he loves you; and in proportion as you believe this, will be your progress in the Christian race. This St. Paul well knew, and therefore, when he wished Christians to be filled with the fullness of God, he prayed that they might. know the love of Christ. If any of you still doubt, and wish for more satisfactory evidence, the preceding observations may teach you how to obtain it. In proportion as your love to Christ increases, so will your evidence of his love to you increase. All your doubts arise from the weakness and inconstancy of your love. Labor and pray, therefore, that your knowledge of Christ may be increased, and his love shed abroad in your hearts.

Thus will you soon be enabled to say with Peter, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.

2. If Christ loves those who love him, then he will love those most who are most ready to return his affection, and to do all things, to suffer all things for his sake. My Christian friends, do you wish for a large share of Christ’s love; for a distinguished place in his affections? Then instead of shrinking from the cross, press it to your hearts, and like the first disciples rejoice when you are counted worthy to suffer for him. Afflictions, reproaches, and persecutions, are the honors and preferments of Christ’s earthly kingdom; for if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him; and the greater our sufferings, the brighter will be our crown, the more exalted our thrones. Every one who forsakes father or mother, wife or children, houses or lands, for Christ’s sake, shall receive a

hundred fold, and in the world to come, everlasting life. Be not contented then with giving Christ few and small proofs of your affection; but labor to love him as he has loved you, and be as willing to suffer for him, as he was to suffer for you. Should you love him more than all the saints and angels, his love would still infinitely surpass yours. Be persuaded then to give him all your hearts. Are you not sometimes ready to wish that you had a thousand hearts to give him, a thousand tongues to speak his praise, a thousand hands to labor in his service? And will you then withhold any part of what you already possess? No; give him all, for all is infinitely less than he deserves; and the more you give him, the more will you receive.

3. How happy are they who love. It has been often and justly observed, that to love, and to be beloved by a deserving earthly friend affords the greatest happiness which the world can give. What happiness then must they enjoy, who love and are beloved by the infinite fountain of love,-God's eternal Son, the brightness of his glory, the possessor of all power in heaven and earth; source of every thing amiable and excellent in the universe. What pure, ineffable, exalted delight must they find in communion with such a friend; and what indescribable benefits must they receive from his love! What can created minds conceive of, what can the heart form a wish for, beyond the friendship of such a being'? Nay, what creature could have dared to raise his wishes so high, had not God himself encouraged us to do it? O, it is too, too much; not too much indeed for God to give, but far too much for man to deserve. But in vain do we attempt to give you adequate ideas of the happiness resulting from the love of Christ. It is one of those things, which it is impossible for man to utter; and the joy which it produces is a joy unspeakable. If any would know it, they must learn it, not from language, but from their own experience, for language sinks under the weight of a subject, which it was never intended to describe. We can only say that, to love and be beloved by Christ, is the very essence of heaven.

4. The truths we have been considering afford most powerful motives to induce sinners to love Christ. Benevolent, pitiful, and compassionate as he is, he cannot, at present, my impenitent hearers, but view your characters with abhorrence and disgust. Even now he looks round about upon you with anger, being grieved for the hardness of your hearts. He knows that you do not love him, He sees that you do not comply with his invitations, or obey his commands. He seldom if ever, hears a prayer from your lips. He sees that you refuse to comply with his dying request, that you are even now about to turn away from his table, where his people commemorate his dying love. How then can he love you. How can he but be displeased and grieved, to see himself and the blessings he offers thus slighted and despised. Still, however, he waits to be gracious. He once more sends you terms of reconciliation. And what are the terms? He requires your love. Be his friends, and he will be yours. And can you hesitate respecting a compliance? Shall infinite loveliness offer to love perfect deformity, and shall perfect deformity refuse to love infinite loveliness? My friends, think again of his offers. Are they reasonable? Are they not more than reasonable? Even your fellow worms will not love you unless you return their love. And can you then expect, that your offended Creator and Redeemer, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will love you on easier terms; will love you while you persist in grieving, neglecting and provoking hint? My friends, you ought not to expect this. You cannot expect it. Will you not then comply with his terms? Look at him again. You will find his portrait, his likeness, the very picture of his heart in the gospel. Study it attentively. See what majesty and meekness, what dignity and tenderness; what glory and condescension, what grace and sweetness, there is in every feature. See infinite power,

unsearchable knowledge, unerring wisdom, boundless goodness, —see all the fullness of the Godhead, veiled in flesh and coming down from heaven to win your affections. This is he who says, I love them that love me. My friends, how can you forbear to love such a being. Methinks you could not but love him though hell should be the consequence. How then can you refuse, when heaven will be the reward.

Chapter 91

S. The condition of Men without the BIBLE

The condition of Men without the BIBLE

"If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also, which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." 1 Corinthians 15:16-18 is often pretended, by those who receive not the truth as it is in Jesus, that all the religious errors and mistakes, which prevail among Christian nations, are occasioned by the want of some infallible living teacher, to whom men might apply for instruction, in all doubtful cases; and from whose decisions there should be no appeal. But to suppose that errors and differences of opinion respecting religion are occasioned by this, is a mistake. This is evident from the fact, that while the apostles, who were inspired and infallible teachers, remained on earth, errors and mistakes prevailed among professing Christians no less than they do now. Some, for instance, were found in the Corinthian church who denied the resurrection of the dead. With a view to convince them that this opinion was erroneous, St. Paul here mentions some of the fatal consequences which would result from its being true. If the dead rise not, says he, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, our preaching is vain, your faith is also vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then also they that have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. My friends, the mode of reasoning, which St. Paul here adopts with respect to one important doctrine of revelation, I wish to adopt with respect to the whole of revelation. I wish to show you what would be our situation without the Bible; what would be the consequence, if it could be proved that the Bible is not a revelation from God. This, I suspect, is a subject to which you have not sufficiently attended. I suspect that some of you, who secretly hope, or at least wish, that the Bible may prove false, are not aware what would be the consequences, could your wishes be gratified. I suspect that others, who feel convinced of its truth, are not sufficiently sensible of the worth of such a revelation, and, of course, are not sufficiently grateful for it. Favor me then with your attention, while I attempt to show what would be our situation without the Bible; what the consequences of its being proved to be false.

I. If we had no Bible, or if the Bible could be proved to be false, we should be entirely ignorant of the origin of our race, and of the world which we inhabit. I need not remind you, that this is the only book which even pretends to give us any authentic or satisfactory information on this subject. Indeed it is evident from the nature of things, that nothing can be known by us respecting the formation of the world, except it be communicated by revelation; since no human being could then be alive to witness that event, or to transmit to us any information respecting it. Nor could the first individuals of our race know anything of the cause to which they were indebted for their existence, unless a knowledge of it were communicated to them by immediate revelation. Nay more, not only all the knowledge we have of the origin of the world, but all the information which we possess respecting the history of mankind for many ages, is contained in the Bible. No uninspired history, on which the smallest reliance can be placed, pretends to relate any event which occurred more than three thousand years ago, unless we except the history of Josephus, a Jewish writer, whose information was evidently derived from the Scriptures. If then we renounce the Scriptures, we must

be content to remain in total ignorance of the origin of the world, of its inhabitants, and of everything respecting them which occurred more than three thousand years ago. If it be said, that reason, unenlightened by revelation, might have inferred that the world and its inhabitants must have had a Creator, —I answer, it is true that, if the minds of men had not been blinded by sin, they might have discovered this truth; but it is certain that they never did discover it. On the contrary, whenever they have attempted, as they often have done, to account for the existence of the world and its inhabitants, they have run into the grossest and most ridiculous absurdities. For instance, one of the most acute philosophical authors of antiquity, writing on this subject, informs us, that an infinite number of atoms had existed from all eternity; that, some how or other these atoms were put in motion, and that while moving about they happened to come together and form a world, out of which plants, animals and men spontaneously sprung up. But perhaps some will say, these were the sentiments of men in the early and ignorant ages of the world. Since reason has been more cultivated, and learning has increased, men know better than to believe such absurdities. We will reply to this remark, by giving you a modern theory respecting the formation of the world; a theory, which has been invented, published and defended within a few years, by some of the most learned philosophers of the age. According to this theory, the sun had either existed from all eternity, or was formed, nobody knows how, and a comet made and put in motion in a similar way, passing by the sun, struck off a large piece of it by a blow of its tail, and by the same blow communicated to the piece thus struck off, a rotary motion, which caused it to revolve till it acquired a globular form.

All this happened many millions of years ago, and during this period, the new-made world, being made to revolve round the sun, collected all the particles of dust which came in its way, till it had acquired soil sufficient to support plants, animals and men, which sprung up upon it, one after the other. In a similar way, all other planets were formed. As to the moon, that was once a part of this world, and was blown out of it by a tremendous volcano, whose fires are now quenched. Indeed, others suppose that this world and all the planets were, in a similar manner, blown out of the sun. Such, my hearers, are the theories of those whom the world styles philosophers; such the absurdities into which grave and learned men are left to fall, when they renounce the Scriptures. And if we renounce the Scriptures, what can we do better than adopt some of these theories. Human reason unenlightened by revelation, can invent no better, no more plausible way of accounting for the creation of the world and its inhabitants. If you ask, why can not men without the Bible allow that there is a God, who created all things? I answer, —I am not obliged to show why they cannot. It is sufficient for me to show, that, without a revelation, they do not, and never have done this. This it is easy to show. It is easy to prove, by appealing to history and to facts, that no nation under heaven, either in the first ages, or the present day, has been able to form a rational, or even a plausible conjecture, respecting the origin of the world; much less to arrive at anything that could be called knowledge on this subject. Perhaps, however, the reason of this will appear from the next remark, to which I propose to call your attention, which is this:

II. If we had no Bible, or if the Bible could be proved to be false, we should have no knowledge of God, not even of his existence. What strange, absurd and contradictory opinions have in all ages been entertained, on this subject, by those who were destitute of revelation, we endeavored to show you on the last Lord’s day. Without a revelation, no man, nor body of men has ever been able to ascertain even the existence of one supreme, self-existent God; much less have they been

able to discover his moral character, perfections and designs. Even if it should be allowed that a few individuals have formed conjectures on this subject, which had borne some faint resemblance to the truth, yet it would be highly improper to dignify those conjectures with the name of knowledge. It is true that the existence, and some of the natural perfections of God might have been inferred from the works of creation, had not mankind been blinded by sinful prejudice and ignorance; for the apostle informs us, that the invisible things of God are clearly to be seen from the foundation of the world, being understood by the things that are made; and hence he concludes that the heathen are without excuse. But though the invisible things of God might have been seen and understood in the contemplation of his works, it is certain they never were seen or understood in any degree by those who are destitute of the Bible; for they have all been either atheists or polytheists; have either denied the existence of God; or believed in many gods. And even if men had discovered the existence and natural perfections of God, without a revelation, they must still have been entirely ignorant of his moral character, and of his design in creating the world; for, as we lately observed, no creature could have penetrated into his mind or into his heart, to discover what is there. To say all in a word; God alone knows himself, his designs, his will, or what will please him. He alone, therefore, can communicate a knowledge of these things to us; and this knowledge can be communicated only by a revelation, or, in other words, only by the Bible, since we have no other book that even pretends to be a revelation from him. Take away the Bible then, and you take away all knowledge of God, and leave us nothing but errors, dreams, and fables. And would this be a small evil? Surely, if any knowledge can be of importance to mankind, it must be a knowledge of the being who created them, and on whom they are of course entirely dependent. This will appear still more evident, if we consider that, without a knowledge of God, we cannot know what will please, or what will displease him; how he is to be worshipped, or whether he is to be worshipped at all. All these subjects, indeed every subject connected with God, is at once wrapped up in impenetrable darkness, if the Scriptures be false.

III. If we had not the Bible, or if the Bible should be proved to be false, we could not rationally, or even plausibly account for the existence and prevalence of natural and moral evil in the world. We see that there is, and for many ages has been, much of both. We know that, from the remotest period to which history extends, the world has been full of discord, wars, confusion and misery. And that whenever men have not been restrained by human laws, they have harassed and destroyed each other like wild beasts. We see that the malignant passions, by which these evils are occasioned, begin to appear in children at a very early age. And we know that all men are subject to pain, disease and death. Now how shall we account for these things? The Scriptures account for them in a manner which, if it does not satisfy us, is at least plain and intelligible. They teach us that death is the consequence of sin, and that all our distresses are to be traced to the same source. But if we reject the account which they give, we cannot form even a plausible conjecture respecting this subject; but must be content to live in darkness, uncertainty, and perplexity. If it be said, this is of little consequence; I answer, it is of the greatest consequence. A knowledge of the nature of moral evil, and of the causes of natural evil, is necessary to enable us to escape from either. This knowledge is therefore absolutely requisite to our happiness. But perhaps it will be said that the surest way, and indeed the only way to secure happiness, is to avoid what is wrong and do what is right, and that mankind might easily learn this without the Bible. To this I reply, by observing,

IV. That if we had no Bible, or if the Bible should be proved false, men could never know what is right or wrong, or even whether there is any such thing as right and wrong. The terms, right and wrong, always have reference to some rule. What agrees with this rule, is said to be right, and what disagrees with it, is said to be wrong. We must then have some rule, by which to judge, before we can decide whether any conduct is right or wrong. But if you take away the Bible, we have no rule by which to judge. If any deny this, I ask them where any rule is to be found, except in the Bible? If you refer me to human laws, —I reply, these laws differ widely in different ages and parts of the world. What is required by the laws of one age or country, is forbidden by those of another. Since these human laws differ among themselves, and are continually changing, they can never be a safe, unerring rule by which to decide what is right or wrong. Will you then refer me to human reason, or to conscience, for a rule? But the understandings and consciences of men differ as widely as do their laws. What seems reasonable to one, seems unreasonable to another. What one man's conscience approves, as a correct, praiseworthy action, another's conscience condemns as a heinous crime. But perhaps you will say, that is right which tends to produce happiness, while that which tends to occasion misery is wrong. But who can tell what does tend to produce happiness or misery? Every action draws after it a long train of consequences or effects. Some of these consequences may be productive of happiness, and others of misery; and unless we could foresee all future events, we cannot tell whether any given action will produce happiness or misery on the whole.

Besides, men are very far from being agreed in their opinions respecting happiness. One places it in one thing, another in something else very different. This rule is therefore insufficient in itself, and its application is impracticable. Will you then say, the will of God must be the only rule of right and wrong? True: but remember, that without the Bible we know nothing of God, and, of course, nothing of his will. If then we renounce the Bible, we renounce the only rule by which we call distinguish right from wrong, or prove that there is any such thing as either. The universe is left without a moral governor, and right and wrong, virtue and vice, holiness and sin, are mere names; there is no reason to expect that the good will ever be rewarded, or the wicked punished. Every man is at liberty to do that which is right in his own eyes.

V. If we were without the Bible, or if the Bible could be proved to be false, we should know nothing of a future state, or of the immortality of the soul. Reason, my friends, call never prove that the soul is immortal, or that the body will be raised again. This is evident from the facts, that she never has been able to discover either of these truths, and that even at the present day, many learned men deny them both. It is not long since the representatives of a numerous civilized nation ordered the words, death is an eternal sleep, to be inserted over the portals of their graveyards. Indeed, if there be a future state, an eternal world, into which the soul enters after death, no one but all inhabitant of that world call assure us of the fact; for it is not an object of our senses, nor can it be discovered by reasoning. All that men ever have done, all that they can do, without a revelation from God, is to conjecture, or at most to suppose it probable, that there is a future state, and that the soul is immortal. But these conjectures and surmises are of no use. They are too weak to build upon. In fact, they only serve to produce uneasiness and anxiety in the prospect of death; for while they lead then to suspect that there possibly may be a future sate, they can afford them no shadow of information respecting that state. They cannot tell us whether we shall be happy or miserable there. And if we reflect calmly on the subject, we shall find much more reason to fear

misery, than to hope for happiness in a future state. We find this world full of evils. We suffer much in passing through it; we find the causes of these evils and sufferings deeply rooted in our nature. We see most of those who die, appear to die in pain. Who then can assure us, or what reason have we to hope, that the other world will be less full of evil than this; that we shall not suffer there as much or more than we suffer here; that the seeds of sorrow and suffering, which are sown in our nature, will be eradicated; that those who die in pain will, after death, taste nothing but pleasure? My friends, without the Bible, we can have no reason to hope for happiness after death. The best we can rationally hope for, if the Bible be false, is to die like the brutes, to plunge into the gulf of annihilation. In fact, this is all which those, who reject the Bible, usually do hope for; and even their hope of this, if that may be called hope which seems more like despair, is not infrequently mingled with distressing fears of something worse. And as annihilation is the best fate we call rationally expect for ourselves, if the Bible be false, so it is the best which we can suppose to have happened to our departed friends. Yes, if the Bible be not true, you play well sorrow over their remains, as those that have no hope.

You will never see them again. Their minds, as well as their bodies, are dead. All that once pleased and delighted you, all that excited your admiration, or engaged your affections, is put out, like last night's lamp, quenched in everlasting night. This too, if the Bible be not true, is, for aught you can tell, the fate of all who have gone before us. They who have fallen asleep in Christ are perished. The good and the bad, they who while alive ravaged, and they who blessed the world; they who expired uttering the language of execration and despair, and they whose expiring lips poured forth the seraphic strains of that heaven which they saw opening to their view, have all sunk down alike into eternal darkness and insensibility. But why do I talk of heaven? If the Bible be not true, there is no heaven, —none for us, none of which we know anything. Life and immortality have never been brought to light. He who professed to reveal them, and who called himself the Saviour of the world, was an imposter; the Gospel of salvation, the only real glad tidings which ever vibrated upon mortal man, is a cheat; the apostles who preached it, and the martyrs who sealed it with their blood, were deluded; and all the apparent holiness which it has produced in life, and all the joy and triumph which its disciples have expressed at death, were nothing but the effects of superstition and enthusiasm. But this is not all; for,

VI. If the Bible be not true, we are not only deprived of all hope of a future life, but of all consolation under the afflictions of the present. To support us under these afflictions, we have nothing that deserves the name of consolation, except what is drawn from the Bible. We are there taught, that the Lord reigns, that nothing happens by chance; that all creatures and works are under the superintendence of an infinitely wise, just, and good being, who will bring good out of evil, who will make all things work together for good to them that love him, and cause their light afflictions, which endure but for a moment, to work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. We are taught, that as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; that in the person of his Son, our Saviour, we have a friend who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and that he is our surety for the fulfillment of all those exceedingly great and precious promises, with which the Scriptures are filled. When we turn from our own personal sorrows to contemplate the miseries of our wretched race, we are consoled by assurances, that the world shall not always continue in its present wretched state; that the dawn of a glorious day is at hand; a day, in which the knowledge of God shall cover the earth, even as the waters cover the seas; in

which the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and Saviour, who shall reign forever; a day in which men shall beat their swords into plough-shares and their spears into pruning hooks, and learn war no more; a day in which righteousness and peace and holy joy shall universally prevail. But if the Bible be not true, all these springs of consolation are dried up in a moment. Then all things are governed by chance, or by some agent of whom we know nothing, and who, for aught we can tell, may be feeble, unjust or cruel, and take delight in the misery of his creatures.

Then we have no ground to hope, that good will ever be brought out of evil, or that any of our afflictions will be productive of the smallest advantage, either to ourselves or to others. Then we have no Father, no Saviour, no friend above to pity our sorrows, to hear our complaints, to support us by his power, or to guide us by his wisdom. What is still more discouraging, we have no reason to hope that the situation of our wretched race will ever be ameliorated, or their miseries ever come to an end. Nothing can be rationally anticipated, but an endless succession of the same crimes, wars, revolutions and convulsions, which have so long filled the world with blood, and the hearts of its inhabitants with anguish; for there is not the smallest reason to suppose, that mankind are really wiser or better now, than they were thirty centuries ago.

If at present any appearances, which encourage us to hope for the prevalence of peace, are to be seen, they are occasioned solely by the influence of the Bible. But if this be false, its influence cannot long continue to operate. Men will burst its bands, and go on as before. Despair then, you, who sorrow, for you never will be comforted. Despair ye, who weep for the miseries of man; for there is no hope that they will ever end. Despair ye, who are looking with anxious eyes for the dawn of a brighter day; for no day is ever to dawn on this wretched world. There is no star of Bethlehem; no Sun of righteousness, to rise and shine upon it, with healing in his beams. No; it is destined to be shrouded for ever in seven-fold night; a night without a star, without a moon, without a morning. Rejoice then, ye wicked, for ye will never be punished. Despair ye good, for ye will never be rewarded.

Thus, my friends, have I given you a sketch, a very imperfect sketch, of what would have been our situation without the Bible; of the consequences which would result from its being shown to be false. And now permit me to ask those of you, who sometimes doubt for a moment whether the Bible is true; do you feel willing to encounter these consequences, to plunge into such a situation? Can you be content to sit down in total ignorance respecting the origin and end of our race and of the world we inhabit? Can you be willing, since it is possible there may be a God, to know nothing of his nature, his character, and his designs; nothing of what he requires, of what he does, or what he means to do with his creatures? Can you cheerfully consent to remain ignorant, whether your souls are mortal, or immortal; whether there is or is not a future state; whether if there is such a state, happiness or misery awaits you there? In a word, are you willing to sign away all your right and title to the information which the Bible communicates, and to the promises which it contains, to the happiness, to the life and immortality which it reveals? That some men are willing to do this; I cannot, doubt: for many have done it. Whether any of you would be willing to do it, whether any of you would secretly rejoice to be assured that the Bible is false, I shall not pretend to determine. If you would, how awfully depraved, how desperately wicked must be your hearts! Should you hear a man wish, that there were no such things as human law, you would not hesitate to pronounce him a desperate character.

You would conclude, that since he was an enemy to the laws, the law was an enemy to him; that he wished to perpetrate those crimes which the law forbids; and that he was, of course, a dangerous man, and a foe to the peace of society. So if any of you wish that the Bible were false, it is fair to conclude that you are enemies to the Bible, enemies to its author, enemies to his requirements, and enemies to the human race. You would deprive men of light, of peace, of hope, of immortality. You would reduce them and yourselves to the condition of the beasts that perish. If you would not do this; if you cannot consent to sign away all share in the contents of revelation, remember that the only alternative is to embrace it cordially, to believe and obey it sincerely and universally. If you receive it at all, you must receive it as a whole; for nothing can be more unreasonable, more disingenuous, or more dangerous, than to receive some parts, and reject others. You must also receive it not as the word of man, but as the word of God, as a book which speaks with all his authority, and from whose decisions there is no appeal. Which of these courses then will you follow? In what light will you henceforth regard the Bible?

It surely is time to come to some settled conclusion respecting a subject of so much importance. And yet many of you are evidently undecided. You will neither cordially receive the Bible as the word of God, nor openly reject it as the mere words of men. You do not even know your own minds on this subject. Sometimes you seem disposed to allow that the Scriptures are from God. But no sooner do you find yourselves pressed by its contents, than you begin to dispute, and to reason, and complain, as if you thought them a human fabrication. When I see you come, Sabbath after Sabbath, to hear the Bible explained and enforced, I cannot but hope that you regard it as divine. But when I see how little deference you pay to its authority, how little influence it has upon your conduct through the week, I am compelled to suspect that you think it not better than a cunningly devised fable. My friends, it is this indecision which ruins you. While you are delaying and hesitating in what manner to treat the Bible, time is rapidly passing away, and death is hastening on. How long, then, halt ye between two opinions? If the Bible is God’s word, then believe and obey it as such. But if not, reject it at once, and no longer come here to listen to the superstitions and conjectures of men. Remember the awful doom of those, who are neither cold nor hot, neither open infidels, nor firm, constant believers. Remember that no character is more hateful in the sight of God, or more contemptible in the opinion of men, than a double-minded man, who is unstable in all his ways, and who does not know himself what he believes or what he denies. To conclude. From what has been said, you, my friends, who believe and know the Bible to be true, may learn how highly you ought to prize it, and how great should be your gratitude to Him who has bestowed on the world this inestimable gift; and who has cast your lot in a land, where it is known, and given you satisfactory and infallible evidence of its divine original. Permit me to ask, whether you have not been, and whether you are not still, greatly deficient in this respect? Have you been duly sensible of the value of this gift, and of the blessings which it imparts, and of the dreadful situation in which we should be placed without it? Have you studied it, have you blessed God for it as you ought? If not, let what has been said prompt you to an immediate performance of these duties. Your Bible ought to be dearer to you than your daily bread, than the light of heaven, than the breath of life; for what would all these things, what would life itself be without it. O, then, praise, unceasingly praise God for the Bible; and remember that the most suitable and acceptable way in which you can express your gratitude for the gift of it, is to believe its doctrines, and to obey its precepts; to trust its promises, to be what it requires you to be, and hide it in your hearts, that you may not sin against its Author.

S. The final judgement

The final judgement

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Corinthians 5:10 a mind that looks beyond present appearances, to future realities; and with the eye of faith, sees things which are not, as though they were, how solemn, how interesting is the scene before us. In this assembly, we behold an assembly of immortals, an assembly of candidates for eternity; a part of that vast assembly, which will one day stand exulting in triumph, or sinking in despair, before the tribunal of an avenging God. In every individual here present, we contemplate an heir of glory or a child of perdition; a future inhabitant of heaven, or a prisoner of hell; an embryo angel, or an infant fiend. Whatever diversity there may be in other respects, how different soever may be your character, pursuits and situations in life, to one of these classes, my friends, you all belong; for you must all appear before the judgment seat, to receive according to the deeds done in the body; and after the irrevocable sentence is pronounced, must each of you depart accursed into everlasting fire, or enter blessed into life eternal. As there is no middle character between the righteous and the wicked in this world; so there will be no intermediate state between heaven and hell in the next; but one of these is the habitation finally appointed for all living. And do you feel no anxiety, do you consider it a matter of no consequence, my friends, to know which of these will be your lot? You are usually sufficiently fond of looking forward beyond the present hour, and anticipating the future scenes of life; especially when any important event is before you. With anxious eagerness and curiosity, you look forward from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, and from manhood to age; and perhaps not a single hour arrives, which has not been the subject of frequent anticipation. Come then, and exercise for a few moments, an employment of which you are so fond. Let not your thoughts be ever confined to this narrow circle of three score years and ten; but for once take a bolder range and anticipate scenes equally certain, far more instructive and infinitely more important, than any which this life affords. Come and look forward to the final consummation of all things, when Christ shall be revealed in flaming fire, to take vengeance on those who know not God, and who are disobedient to the truth; when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise; and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; and the earth, with the works thereof, shall be burnt up. Come and look forward to that tremendous day, far more terrible to the self-condemned sinner, than all the horrors of dissolving nature, and a world on fire; which will unalterably determine our final destinies; and bestow on each of us an eternal weight of glory, or consign us over to the mansions of despair. But the subject is too vast to be grasped at once by any finite intelligence. To assist our feeble faculties, let us consider it separately under the following particulars. The certainty of a future judgment; the Judge who will preside; the persons who will be judged; the things for which they will be called to an account, and the design of the whole transaction.

I. We are to inquire into the certainty of a future judgment, before which we all must appear, as the apostle asserts. Of this, my friends, we shall soon see there is no room for doubt. No proposition

of natural or revealed religion, not even that which regards the existence of a God, is accompanied with more convincing evidence than this. They are indeed truths necessarily and inseparably connected; for it is evident almost to demonstration, that he who created must govern, and that he who governs must judge the world. We cannot possibly suppose, that an infinitely wise being would create man, and then leave him to himself, or to the sport of blind accident. No, he must have had some suitable design in his creation; and the only design of a being infinitely holy, just, and good, of which we can form any conception, is his own glory as connected with the greatest possible happiness of his creatures. To accomplish this design, certain laws and regulations are necessary; and if his creatures disobey these regulations, all his perfections join in requiring that they should be restrained and punished. Experience however, abundantly shows that, in this world, no adequate punishment is inflicted, that there is little or no apparent distinction between the bad and the good; but that all things come alike to all; that there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. Hence it appears, that there must be a future day of recompense and retribution, when God will vindicate his own character, reward his faithful friends, and convince the assembled world that his righteous laws are not to be violated with impunity.

Omitting the arguments which might be deduced from the present life, as being a state of probation, and others equally cogent, we may observe, secondly, that the existence of natural conscience also proves the certainty of a future judgment. Wherever we see inferior courts and subordinate officers, we naturally conclude there is some superior power from whom their authority is derived, and by whom their proceedings will be ratified and sanctioned. In the same manner, when we see conscience summoning us to her bar and passing sentence on every thought, word and action, we cannot avoid concluding, that he who placed this monitor in our breasts, and from whom its power and authority are derived, will at some future period confirm her decisions by his own decree. But without insisting on these, and other arguments of a similar nature, the certainty of a future judgment is sufficiently proved in the word of God; and I hope, my friends, you are not so little acquainted with this word as to render it necessary to quote the numerous passages in which it is taught in the plainest terms. Certainly none who acknowledge its divine authority, (and to such only do we address ourselves; for how can we hope to be heard by those to whom God has spoken in vain?) can possibly doubt that God leas appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained. This brings us, as was proposed,

II. To inquire who will be the Judge on this solemn occasion; who is the man that God hath ordained; and this is no other than the man Christ Jesus, even he, who was born of the virgin Mary, who was crucified, and who rose and ascended to heaven, shall so come, in like manner; and before him shall be gathered all nations. This truth our blessed Saviour abundantly taught while on earth; and there seems in this appointment the same fitness and propriety, as in all other parts of the divine conduct. It is certainly highly fit and proper, that he who blade and redeemed should also judge the world, and that he, who humbled himself below all creatures should also be exalted above all, so that to him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess him Lord to the praise and glory of God the Father. Then will his exaltation be complete. Everything will then manifestly appear to be put under him. The glory in which he will then appear will be greater than he has ever yet assumed, greater than we could support the sight of, while clothed with mortality.

At the creation he was surrounded by hosts of morning stars, who sung together, and the sons of God, who shouted for joy; and at the dispensation of the law on Sinai; he was arrayed in all the majesty and terror which the elements could afford. But on this still more awful occasion, he will come, not in his own glory only, but in that of his Father, and the holy angels. Heaven will pour forth all her armies to grace his triumph, and spread around him all her ineffable glories in one unremitted blaze of splendor, before which the sun will fade away, and even archangels veil their faces; while, From his keen glance affrighted worlds retire,

he speaks in thunder and he breathes in fire. His countenance, like the pillar of cloud between the Israelites and Egyptians, will present a double appearance; and though clothed with the rainbow of peace toward his friends, it will lower on his enemies like a stormy sky; and while his eye, at every glance, pours upon the former a flood of joy, it will flash lightnings on the latter, which will scorch their inmost souls, and fill them with unutterable, inconceivable anguish. Then shall he come in the clouds of heaven, and every eye shall see him, and yours, my friends, among the rest. Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they who condemned him as guilty of blasphemy will find, to their eternal shame and confusion will find, that he uttered a solemn truth when he said, Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven to judge the world at the last day. Then shall his murderers find, that he whom they buffeted, scourged, mocked, and crucified, was indeed the Lord of life and glory, and they, with all who have since despised and all who are now despising his offered grace, will then be convinced by their own sad experience, that whosoever falls on this stone shall be broken, and that on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And remember, O sinner, that you too must see him. Remember that in the person of your judge, you will see the Saviour whose offers of mercy you are now slighting; whose commands you are disobeying, and whose institutions you are neglecting; and concerning whom you are saying, in your hearts, We will not have this man to reign over us. And O, that this remembrance might lead you to obey the Son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way, when yet his wrath is kindled but a little. But blessed are all they who put their trust in him; for they too shall see him. Yes, my Christian friends, you who now believe and rejoice in him, together with those who shall now confess him before men, shall see him who is so precious to your souls in that situation where you now desire and will then rejoice to see him, exalted to the throne of the universe, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named in heaven or earth. Now perhaps rivers of tears run down your eyes, because men keep not his law, and because his sacred name is profaned. But then his name shall be glorious, his law shall be magnified, and all tears shall be forever wiped from your eyes. In your judge, you will see the friend, whose love was stronger than death; the physician, who healed your wounds with his own blood; the shepherd who gathered you in his arms and carried you in his bosom; nay more, your head in whom you are all united and in whom you will judge the world. But it was proposed to consider,

III. The persons who will be judged. And these are the whole human race, for we must all appear. There will be no exceptions. In vain shall any call upon the mountains to fall on them, and the hills to cover them. Flight, resistance, threats and entreaties will alike be vain. There must appear rulers, with their subjects, parents, with their children; ministers, with their people; masters, with their servants; and blind guides, with their blinded followers. There will be present all who have lived in the world, from creation down to the present day; there our first parents will contemplate,

with various emotions, the long line of their descendants, while they, on the other hand, will behold their common father. There will be found the inhabitants of the old world, the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, the host of Pharaoh, with their proud king, and the ancient inhabitants of Canaan, with the Israelites, their rebellious and idolatrous successors.

There will be seen Noah and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Enoch and Elijah, Joseph and Moses, with all the other patriarchs and prophets, in a long succession. There will also be assembled the proud, cruel, hypocritical Pharisees, with the priests and rulers who with such inveterate malice persecuted him, who will then be their Judge. There Pilate, with Herod, shall appear before him, who once stood at his iniquitous tribunal, and receive the reward of his injustice and cowardice. There will be found all of whom we read in profane and sacred history; the Apostles and Martyrs, with their persecutors, the famous heroes and conquerors, who have so often deluged the world with blood, and were highly esteemed among men, but were all abomination in the sight of the Lord; the statesmen, the philosophers and great ones of the earth, with all that is noble, all that is vile among mankind.

Further, there will be present all who are now on the earth, they who now fill the mouths of men with their greatness, and think this world too narrow for their fame; they who are now envied for their beauty, wealth, honors, or accomplishments; they who now excite the love or hatred, the hopes or fears, the admiration or contempt of mankind, will then stand out in their naked characters. All disguises will then be stripped off, all human distinctions will be destroyed, and the only difference which will then be of any avail, is the grand, the eternal distinction between saints and sinners. The scoffers who are now asking, where is the promise of his coming, who have wasted their lives and abused their talents in neglecting or denying a future judgment, will find to their cost, that, verily there is a God who judgeth in the earth, and that while they have been following lying vanities, they have forsaken their own mercies and destroyed themselves, with all their disciples. But what is this, my friends, that we are doing? Have we forgotten that we too must be present on this solemn occasion, and that we shall be too much occupied with our own concerns to feel any curiosity respecting the affairs of others? Yes, every individual in this assembly, they who hear as well as he that speaks, must there make his appearance. As certain as you are now assembled in this house; as certain as you now behold each other; as certain as you now hear these words, so surely shall you all be assembled at the judgment seat of Christ; behold his face and hear the sentence, Come, ye blessed! or Depart, ye cursed! addressed to each of yourselves.

IV. It was proposed to consider the things for which this innumerable multitude will be called to give an account: —and these are, as we learn from our text, all the things done here in the body, whether good or bad. By the things done in the body, are intended not only external actions, but also words and the thoughts and intents of the heart. Of every idle word that men shall speak, says the Judge, shall they give an account in the day of judgment. God shall bring every secret thing into judgment, and will judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. The great rule by which these things will be tried, is the divine law; and how this law will be interpreted, our Saviour has himself informed us. He has declared, that every sinful desire, is no less a breach of its requirements, and no less exposes us to its dreadful curse, than the most open violation; and he will condemn, as breakers of the sixth command, not only all actual murderers, but all who have at any time indulged feelings of malice, hatred, envy, or revenge against their neighbors. Not only all

adulterers and adulteresses, but all who have not maintained the strictest purity in thought; word and deed, will also fall under his just condemnation.

He who has coveted, as well as he who has actually stolen his neighbor's property will be found guilty. Nay more, not only they who hate God and their neighbor, but they who do not love God with all their heart, soul, strength and mind, and their neighbor as themselves, must be condemned by the law of God. It is highly worthy of notice, that, in all the descriptions which our Saviour has given of the day of judgment, he represents himself as dooming sinners to the fire prepared for the devil and his angels, not for what the world call crimes, not for injuring their fellow creatures, or disturbing the peace of society; but for being unprofitable servants, for neglecting to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, to receive the stranger, and visit the sick. It is not so much against sins of commission, that threatnings are denounced in the word of God. He that believeth not shall be damned. Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Not only every tree that bringeth forth bad fruit, but every tree that does not bring forth good fruit, shall be hewn down and cast into the fire. These regulations may seem, and indeed must seem to the unhumbled heart, too rigid and severe; but, my friends, if the word of God be true; if Christ the Judge abide by his own positive declarations; by these regulations must every thought, word and action be tried. To this standard must the conduct of every individual be brought. In this balance must every individual be weighed. And do you feel no apprehensions of being found wanting? Have you never committed one sin, in thought, word or deed; and have you perfectly fulfilled all righteousness? If the world at large knows of nothing criminal in your conduct, will your families, will your own consciences, will the all-seeing and heart-searching God acquit you? Remember that cursed is he who continueth not in all things, written in the book of the law; to do them. If you have ever committed one sin, however small, if you have ever omitted one duty however trifling, you are exposed to this curse; and it will most assuredly sink you in everlasting perdition, unless you seek and obtain an interest in him, who has redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us. Suppose you were to be called in question for those things only which you have done or omitted since you carne into this house, could you hope to be acquitted? Have you indulged no wandering thoughts, no vain nor vicious imaginations; and have you felt perfect love to God and your neighbor during the short time you have been here present? If not, you must unavoidably perish, though the remainder of your lives were as pure as that of Adam before the fall, unless you earnestly apply to him, who is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins; for, whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. And if you cannot justify your conduct for one hour; if you have been guilty of sins since you came into this house, which, unless repented of, expose you to eternal death; how will you answer for a whole life of iniquity?

How will you answer for the follies of childhood, the vices of youth, and the sins of riper years? What account can you give of the talents with which you have been entrusted; of your time, your property, your reputation, your reasoning powers, and your opportunities of doing or getting good? All these things must be accounted for, to the last tittle; and not only your external improvement of them, but, the motives from which you acted, will be closely examined. Then all disguises will be stripped off; every action will be traced to its true source; every work of darkness shall be laid before the sun, and all the foolish, vain, wicked and abominable thoughts, wishes and desires, which are now so carefully concealed, will then be exposed to the view of angels and men. And how will you be able to bear this? Above all, how will you answer your long continued and

obstinate rejection of Christ; for slighting his offers of pardon and reconciliation, and for neglecting his word, his Sabbaths, and institutions? This is the sin of sins; it is the most provoking and inexcusable offence of which men can be guilty; it is the sin which will heat seven times hotter the furnace of God's wrath, and render the doom of those who are guilty of it, more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. We come now,

V. To consider the design of these solemn transactions, viz: That every one may receive the things done in the body whether they be good or bad.

We are not to consider this trial as a mere matter of form, a thing of no consequence. No, it is intended to convince the assembled world of the justice of the sentence which is to follow, by which the righteous will be called to inherit everlasting life, and the wicked doomed to depart accursed into everlasting burnings, prepared for the devil and his angels. By this sentence, every action however trifling, shall receive its just recompense of reward. Not a sin shall be committed, not a duty neglected, not a moment misspent, not a profane or idle word uttered, not a vicious thought or desire indulged, but shall aggravate the punishment of the finally impenitent. Yes, my friends, whether you know, whether you consider, whether you believe it or not, you are acting for eternity; and innumerable millions of ages hence, you will continue to feel the consequences of your present conduct in its minutest part. And while this consideration checks the sinner in his mad career, let it animate those of you who are Christians indeed, to run with new vigor and alacrity the race set before you; you too are acting for eternity, and your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord. Not a sigh shall you breathe, not a prayer shall you utter, not a tear shall you shed, not one good action shall you ever perform; but shall increase your future felicity. For even a cup of cold water given from love to the Lord Jesus shall, we are assured, by no means lose its reward. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; for in due time ye shall reap if ye faint not; and he that soweth bountifully in this world shall reap also bountifully in the world to come. There will doubtless be degrees, both in happiness and misery; and as among a number of vessels thrown into the sea, some may contain more than others, though all be alike full; so some vessels of mercy will be capable of containing more felicity than others, though all will be happy to the extent of their capacities; and in like manner some vessels of wrath will be capable of containing more than others, of those vials of divine vengeance, which will be poured out upon the wicked to all eternity.

Improvement. Must we all appear before the judgment seat of Christ? Then surely it becomes us diligently to inquire whether we are prepared for this all-important event. And suffer me, with that solemnity which such a subject demands, to ask each individual here present, if you should, this moment, be called to the bar of God, what sentence have you reason to suppose he would pass on you? Pause and reflect, and let conscience answer. And what does she answer? To some, I hope to many of you, she whispers peace and pardon through the blood of Christ, and an assurance that you are accepted in the Beloved. Yet even in this case, there is great danger of self deception; for though our own hearts condemn us not, yet God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. Many will come to the Judge in that day, saying, Lord, have we not eaten and drank in thy presence, and hast thou not taught in our streets? Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils; and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity. And so perhaps many here present can say, Lord, have we not eaten and drank at thy table; have we not called

ourselves by thy name; have we not read thy word, attended thy worship, and kept thine ordinances? But if you can say nothing more than this, the Judge will profess unto you, as he will unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity. If you are trusting to any works of righteousness which you leave done; any external morality and decency of conduct: or if, on the other hand, you are pretending to trust in the righteousness of Christ, without irritating his example and obeying his commands; your hope is vain, your faith is vain, you are yet in your sins. Faith without works, or works without faith, are alike, but a sandy foundation. Examine then, diligently, the foundation on which your eternal hope is built; and remember, that, not those who say unto Christ, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of our heavenly Father. But are there not also many here present, who have nothing on which to found a false hope; many whose consciences answer too loudly to be disregarded, that, were they now called to the judgment seat, they could expect nothing but the reward of the wicked? and that, if they die in their present state, they cannot see the kingdom of heaven? If there be any of you, who are sensible that this is their alarming situation; how long, let me ask, do you mean to remain in it? Will you waste days, months and years, thus every moment exposed to irretrievable destruction? Do you consider, ye who sit thus calmly and unconcernedly on the crumbling brink of hell, that the brittle thread of life, which ten thousand dangers threaten hourly to break, is all that preserves you from everlasting burnings? O, could the cloud be dissipated; which conceals eternity from your view; could you see the slippery precipice on which you stand, and the unfathomable gulf which even now yawns to receive you; if the sight did not at once drive you to madness, despair and death, how would you cry for mercy and deliverance; you would neither give sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till you had made your peace with an offended God.

I know, my friends, these truths are not pleasant. I know that death and judgment are subjects on which you do not love to dwell; but though they are unpleasant, they are important; and the time will arrive when you must make them the subject of your meditations. But why do you suffer them to be unpleasant? Why do you not so conduct as to make God your friend, and then the king of terrors will be viewed as the portal of paradise, and eternity will be the subject of your most delightful contemplations. Remember that, if the thoughts of death and judgment be unpleasant, it is an almost certain proof that you are not prepared for their approach. If this be the case, delay not your preparation for a single hour. God is angry with the wicked every day. Do not therefore risk the consequences of living another hour exposed to his just displeasure, but suffer me to urge, to exhort, to beseech you, with all possible earnestness, to flee from the wrath to come.

Secondly. Is the Lord Jesus Christ appointed to be the Judge of quick and dead? and does our final destiny depend on his verdict? Of what infinite importance then is it, to have him for our friend. If you were soon to appear at an earthly bar, where your lives, your characters or property were at stake, how earnest, how anxious would you be, and how careful to omit nothing which had any tendency to secure the favor of your Judge, and produce a favorable issue? And will you there remain entirely idle and unconcerned, where your eternal interests are at stake? When the Judge himself offer, to be your advocate; will you madly refuse acceptance? He is now willing to be your friend; nay more, he is beseeching you to be reconciled to God; and will you slight and despise his entreaties? Now his voice is love, his words are mild, his countenance beams with compassion, and his heart overflows with tenderness for perishing sinners. He now offers you a full and free pardon of your sins, and an interest in his righteousness, without money and without price. The

only condition on your part is thankfully to receive it. And now, will you receive it on these terms, or not? I call upon you to choose this day, this hour, nay, this very moment, whom you will serve. Will you have Christ to reign over you or not? Say that you will, say it sincerely, say it from the heart, and heaven is yours. But if you think proper to give a different answer, remember, I charge you remember, that you must give an account thereof in the day of Judgment. Then when the earth is wrapt in flames, when the atmosphere becomes like the blast of a furnace, when the ocean is but as oil to increase the conflagration, then you will feel the worth and the want of that friend you proudly reject. Then you will find that it is not a light thing to have despised a crucified Saviour. Then will the door of mercy be forever shut against you, and the Judge will then refuse to be your friend. Then will his countenance be like lightning, and his eyes like a flame of fire; his voice more dreadful than the archangel's trump, and his breath like a devouring flame, burning even to the lowest hell. What iniquity didst thou find in me, O sinner, will he then demand, that then wouldst not have me to reign over thee? Was not my yoke easy, and my burden light! Why then didst thou refuse to bear them? Why didst thou reject and despise my offers of mercy, and pour contempt on those blessings I died to purchase? Why grieve my Holy Spirit, why turn a deaf ear to all the warnings I sent thee in my word, my ordinances and providences? and why, when my faithful ambassadors besought thee for my sake to be reconciled to God, why didst thou refuse? Didst thou not hear what was thy duty? didst thou not live in a land of gospel light and liberty? wast thou not often told of this day, and did not conscience warn thee, that, for all thy sins God would bring thee into judgment? Was there nothing due to me for my goodness? Did I not love, did I not die for thee? Was I not, for thy sake, scourged, mocked and crucified? Did I not, for thy sake, exchange a throne in heaven, for a manger on earth; and the praises of angels for the blasphemies of men? Why then hast thou despised my name, and cast my laws behind thy back? And what answer, O sinner, are you prepared to make to questions like these. Will you dare offer to your Judge those vain and frivolous excuses with which you now quiet your conscience and deceive yourself? Will you dare come to the bar of God, and tell him that he was a hard master; that his law was too severe, that his word was unintelligible, that you could not learn your duty, that you were unable to repent and believe? Consider, O consider well what answer you are prepared to give, and see that it be such an one as you dare rest your hopes upon, and defend at the bar of a heart searching Judge. Consider all these things, ye who are now forgetting God, lest he tear you in pieces as a lion, and there be none to deliver; and let this consideration rouse you from your lethargy to lay hold on the hope set before you. Do not stand lingering and delaying as did Lot, in Sodom, but suffer me to hasten you as the angels did him; for the wrath of God is upon the state in which you now are, and the fiery storm of divine vengeance is ready every moment to burst upon your heads. O then fly, fly quickly, fly immediately; escape for your lives; look not behind you, but hasten to the mountains pointed out, even to Christ, the eternal Rock of ages, lest ye die. As sure, O sinner, as thy soul liveth, as sure as God lives, there is but a step between thee and death. But flee now unto Christ, and your soul shall live.

Here, my friends, I had intended to have done; but I know not how to leave you; I know not how to desist. Who can behold his fellow creatures, fellow immortals, running headlong the broad road to destruction; eternal, irretrievable, destruction, without endeavoring to arrest their progress, and pluck them as brands out of the burnings? If you be not firmly resolved to perish, if you be not bent on death, if you be not in love with hell; I entreat, I beseech, I implore you, for the sake of your own immortal souls, and by all your hopes of future happiness, to hear me. And yet what more shall I,

what more indeed can I say? If the joys of heaven cannot allure, nor the torments of hell terrify you; if the dying love of the Lord Jesus will not melt; nor the dread of his anger subdue your hearts, how can we hope that any other motives will be more successful?

Yet hopeless as is the attempt, fain would I bring some new argument, some more powerful consideration to lead you to prepare for what is before you. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, fain would I persuade you to escape their pains; fain would I urge you, not utterly to destroy yourselves, not to plunge yourselves into remediless ruin, wretchedness and despair; wretchedness which will be dreadfully aggravated by the reflection that you were warned of its approach, and might once have avoided it. Whatever you may now think, it is not a light thing to dwell with devouring flames; it is no trifle to inhabit everlasting burnings; it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. O, that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter end. But enough; words are vain, and vain are all human efforts. We cannot force you to be wise, we cannot compel you. But I call heaven and earth to witness this day against you, that life and death have been now set before you; that you have been warned of your danger and the remedy; and if you perish, your blood must be upon your own heads. And now, my friends, what are your resolutions, what answer will you return to him that sent me? Some of you will perhaps adopt the language of the rebellious Jews, and say, As to the word which thou hast spoken unto us this day, we will not regard it; but will certainly do whatsoever goeth out of our mouths. If this be your determination, we may pity you, we may weep for you, we may pray for you, but we cannot help you. You must do as you please. But if there be any of a different purpose, any who tremble at the word of the Lord, let them retire from the house of God to their closets, and there throwing themselves at the feet of the compassionate Jesus, let them confess their sins, and implore that that blood, which cleanseth from all sin, may be applied to their souls, and they shall, most assuredly, find mercy.

S. The glory which is due to JEHOVAH

The glory which is due to JEHOVAH

"Give unto the Lord, ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; bring an offering, and come before him; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." 1 Chronicles 16:28-29 A Thanksgiving Sermon. sacred song, from which these words are selected, was composed by the sweet psalmist of Israel, in honor of the most interesting and joyful event, which occurred during the whole period of his eventful life. The event to which we allude was, the triumphant removal of the ark of God’s covenant, the symbol of his presence, from the state of obscurity in which it had remained for many years, to a suitable place in the royal city. To the psalm which David composed on this occasion, no higher or more appropriate praise can be given, than is contained in the remark, that it was in all respects worthy of the occasion which called it forth. He seems to have been inspired, while penning it, with a double portion of that Spirit which dictated all his psalms, and which causes them to resemble the songs that are sung by saints and angels before the throne. Sing unto the Lord, he exclaims, all the earth, show forth his salvation from day to day: Sing unto the Lord, Sing to him sacred songs, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Remember the marvelous works which he hath done; his wonders and the judgments of his mouth. Declare his glory among the heathen, his marvelous works among all nations; for great is Jehovah and greatly to be praised, he is to be feared above all gods; for all the gods of the people are vanity and a lie, but Jehovah made the heavens. Glory and honor are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place. Then follow the words of our text. Give unto Jehovah, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto Jehovah glory and strength; give unto him the glory due unto his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship Jehovah in the beauty of holiness. The duties which all the kindreds of the people, or, in other words, all nations, are here called upon to perform, are precisely the duties for the public performance of which, this day is set apart, and for which we are now professedly assembled. Of these duties the first mentioned, and that which virtually includes them all, is, to give unto Jehovah the glory which is due unto his name. He who rightly performs this duty will perform, not only the appropriate duties of a day of public thanksgiving, but every other duty which God requires of his creatures; for the whole preceptive part of the Bible is contained in this one command, Give unto Jehovah the glory which is his due. To skew what it is to do this, is my present design. With this view I remark, that every being has a right, and may justly claim, to be regarded and treated, by all who know him, in a manner suited to the nature and character which he possesses, to the relations and offices which he sustains, and to the works which he performs. For instance, human nature, or the nature of man, is of a higher order than that of the brutes. All who possess this nature have, therefore, a right to be regarded and treated in a corresponding manner. Should we in any instance, disregard this right, and treat a man as if he were a brute, we should be guilty of injustice, we should not give him that which is his due. Similar remarks may be made respecting character. If any being possesses a lovely character he has a right to be beloved; if a venerable character, be has a right

to be revered; if he is faithful and true, he has a just claim to our belief and confidence. There are also offices and relations, which give those who sustain them aright to claim particular services and affections from others. A man who sustains the relation of a father, has a right to the filial affections of his children. A man who sustains the office of a sovereign, has a right to the obedience of his subjects. Finally, there are various works which entitle those who perform them to be regarded with suitable affections. One who performs any admirable work has a claim upon our admiration. And the man who performs an act of kindness, has a right to expect grateful returns. To apply these remarks to the case before us. Jehovah possesses a nature and character peculiar to himself; he sustains various offices and relations, and he has performed many works which he alone could perform. On all these accounts something is due to him from his creatures. And when we regard him with such affections, and yield him such services, as his nature, character, offices, and works deserve, then we give unto him the glory which is due to his name.

1. Let us inquire what is due to Jehovah on account of his nature. The nature of any being is that, the possession of which constitutes him what he is. Thus the possession of human nature constitutes a man. The possession of angelic nature constitutes an angel, and the possession of a divine nature constitutes God. Now the nature of Jehovah is divine. In what it consists, or what is its essence, we cannot indeed tell. We only know some of its properties. We know that it is uncreated, self-existent, independent, and eternal. It could have no beginning; for there is no cause which could bring a divine nature into existence. It can have no end; for there is no cause which can put a period to the existence of divinity. And as Jehovah possesses a divine nature, so he alone possesses such a nature. He is not only God, but God alone.

There is no God before him, none beside him. In a word, he is the only being of the same kind who now exists, who ever has existed, or who ever will exist. In this respect he differs widely from all other beings. Of those who possess human nature, and angelic nature, the number is great. Of course, whatever is due to human or angelic nature must be divided among a great number of individuals. Whatever is due to angelic nature must be divided among all the angels. But with respect to Jehovah the case is different. He has no partners in the divine nature. Of course, there are none to share with him in what is due to that nature. All that is due to divinity is due to him alone, without division. Here then is a being who deserves something which is due to no other being in the universe, who may justly claim to be regarded with affections to which no other being has any title. He therefore who does not give something to Jehovah, which he gives to no other being, does not give unto him the glory which is his due.

If it be asked, what must be given to Jehovah, which is given to no other being? I answer, one thing, which must be given to him alone, is, religious worship and adoration. Many other things indeed are his due, which we shall have occasion to notice; but this is due to him, considered simply as a being who is by nature God over all. And the religious worship which is paid him must be suited to his nature. He is by nature a spirit, and must therefore, as our Saviour informs, be worshipped in spirit and in truth. He is also a most holy Spirit, and must therefore, to use the language of our text, be worshipped its the beauty of holiness, in the exercise of all those holy affections which constitute moral beauty and excellence. The man who thus worships Jehovah, the man whose body, soul, and spirit, all bow down before him in humble prostration, whose understanding acknowledges that he is God alone, and whose heart adores him as God alone, gives unto him the glory which is his due on account of his nature.

2. Let us next inquire what is due to Jehovah on account of the character which he possesses. We have already seen, that every being may justly claim to be regarded with affections, suited to his character. Now the character of Jehovah is absolutely perfect. It is the very standard of perfection. We may safely challenge the whole created universe to mention or conceive of, a single beautiful, amiable, admirable, or venerable quality, which he does not possess in an infinite degree. Indeed it is certain that no language has even a name for any excellent, moral or intellectual quality, which is not found in the character of Jehovah. And it is worthy of remark, that there is, in his character, something which is suited to excite every proper affection of which the human soul is capable. Are we, for instance, capable of feeling veneration and awe?

There is something in God's character which is suited to excite these emotions. Are we capable of feeling admiration? There is in his character everything to admire. Are we capable of love? In his character there is sufficient to raise the flame of love to the highest pitch of intensity. Are we capable of exercising confidence? His truth and faithfulness may well lead us to confide in him. Are we capable of hope? His mercy is well suited to excite it. And can it be necessary to remark that, if any being can deserve praise, he who possesses such a character as this deserves it. Is it not most evident that he is worthy to be feared, and venerated, and admired, and loved, and confided in, with all the heart and soul and mind and strength? Now to regard him with all these affections, and to express these affections in fervent humble praise, extolling him as infinitely great and powerful and wise and good and merciful and true, is to give him the glory which is due to his character. Of him who thus offers praise, God says, He glorifieth me.

3. Let its inquire what is due to God on account of the relations and offices which he sustains. The first and principal relation which he sustains with respect to its, is, that of a Creator to his creatures. And what relation can be more sacred, or invest him who sustains it with so many rights as this? What is not due from us to him who is at once the Former of our bodies, and the Father of our spirits? That you may be prepared to answer this question, suppose yourselves standing by the throne of God, with your eyes fixed on empty space. You are told, that in that space, God is about to exert his power. He speaks, —and suddenly a shapeless mass of dead, unorganized matter appears, where before there was nothing. He speaks again, and this shapeless mass assumes the form and countenance of a human body, with all its limbs and organs of sensation. He speaks once more, and an immortal spirit, endued with rational faculties, comes into existence within that body, and the newly created being awakens to conscious existence, and begins to exert its limbs and faculties. Suppose God should then reveal himself to this being, and say, I am thy Creator. I called into existence that matter which now forms thy body; I gave it its form, its members, its senses, and I breathed into it that living, conscious, intelligent spirit, by which it is actuated and controlled. In these circumstances what should be the feelings and conduct of such a creature?

What return would God have a right to expect from him? What return would you expect him to make? Would you not expect to see him fall at his Maker's feet, and to hear him say, Lord I am thine, wholly and forever thine; all that I am, all that I can ever acquire, is thine. To thee I consecrate my existence, my body, my soul, with all the powers of both. To thee alone it belongs to prescribe the manner in which I shall employ them, the thoughts and feelings which I shall exercise, the words which I shall utter, and the services which I shall perform. Speak Lord, and appoint me my duty, for thy servant heareth, and is ready to obey? Language like this, and feeling

corresponding with this language, you would surely expect from such a creature, in such circumstances. And should he, instead of realizing these expectations, pay no regard to his Maker, deny that he had any right to his affections and services, and live only to please himself, you would feel that he was very far indeed from rendering unto God that which was his due, that he was ungrateful and criminal in the highest degree. My hearers, what you would expect from such a creature, God expects and demands from each of us. And he has a perfect right to demand it, nor can we give him the glory which is due to him as our Creator, unless we cordially comply with this demand to its utmost extent.

Another relation, which God sustains with respect to us, is that of a Preserver. It is now almost universally acknowledged by philosophers, as well as by divines, that preservation is equivalent to a continually repeated act of creation, and that to keep any being or thing in existence, requires a constant exertion of the same power, which first gave it existence. Hence it follows, that God does in effect repeat the act of our creation, and renew the gift of existence every moment. Every moment then our obligations to his goodness increase. They are greater today than they were yesterday; and they will be greater tomorrow, than they are today. No man who forgets, or who is not suitably affected by these truths, can be justly considered as giving unto God the glory which is due to his name. From the relations of Creator and Preserver in which Jehovah stands to his creatures, it results, that he must sustain with respect to them, various offices, important and honorable.

He must necessarily be the universal Teacher, Master, Sovereign and Judge. Now we consider each of these offices as honorable, even when possessed by men only, and as entitling those who fill it to peculiar regards. What then is due to Jehovah, who sustains them all with respect to the whole intelligent universe? and who is perfectly qualified to perform the duties of them all in the most perfect manner? Considered as an infinitely wise, omniscient, and infallible Teacher, he may justly claim, that all his instructions should be received with the utmost docility and the most profound submission. Considered as a Master, every service is due to him which he may choose to require of us. Considered as the rightful Lawgiver, Sovereign and Judge of the universe, he has a perfect right to demand unlimited submission to his authority, and obedience to all his commands. If then we would give him the glory which is due to his name, we must acknowledge that he fills all these offices, and must regard and treat him in a corresponding manner.

Lastly; let us inquire what is due to Jehovah on account of the works which he has performed. It has been already remarked, and will be readily allowed, that every being is entitled to all the praise, which his works deserve. The historian, the poet, the orator, the painter, the sculptor, the architect; are all admired, applauded, and honored, in proportion to the real, or supposed excellence of the works which they produce. This admiration, applause and honor, are universally considered as their due, and while the debt is readily acknowledged, it is paid with cheerfulness, and often with rapturous enthusiasm. Thousands of volumes have been written, and ten thousand times ten thousand tongues have been eloquent, in praise of the natural and acquired abilities, which some of the works of men have displayed; nor is it pretended that the authors of these works have received more praise and honor than was their due.

O then, what praise, what honors, are due to him, of whom it may with such truth be said, Among the gods, O Lord, there is none like thee, neither are there any works like unto thy works! As all the

nations of the earth are less than vanity, in comparison with Jehovah, so all the works of men appear to be less than nothing and vanity, when compared with his. There is one class of his works indeed, toward the performance, or even toward the imitation of which, no man, nor angel, can make the smallest approach. You will perceive at once that I refer to his works of creation. Men may modify and combine and alter what is already created, but they can create nothing, not even a particle of dust; nay they cannot even originate a single new idea. If any doubt the truth of this assertion, let them try to form an idea of a sixth sense, or of any objects with which such a sense would make us acquainted, and they will soon find that the attempt is vain. How wonderful, how inconceivable, then, must be the powers and operations of that eternal, infinite, all-creating mind, which, before any worlds and creatures existed, could form an idea of all the worlds and creatures which now exist, of all their various parts, and of all the numberless relations and connections which subsist between them! What infinite wisdom and knowledge were displayed, in originating all these ideas, in causing them to stand as it were before the eye of his mind, in forming the whole complicated plan of such a universe as this! And when this plan was formed, what infinite power was required to execute it, to bring out of nothing into existence so many millions of systems and suns and worlds and creatures as now exist!

Consider, too, the variety which marks and adorns God's works of creation. Among all the countless objects which God has formed, probably no two can be found which, in all respects, perfectly resemble each other. While all the individuals of each particular species have a general resemblance, no two men, no two animals, no two plants, nay, no two leaves, are exactly alike. Yet who would have thought such a diversity possible, had he not witnessed it? who would have thought it possible that the few features which compose the human countenance could be so infinitely diversified, that no two individuals of the human race should perfectly resemble each other? That each individual should differ from all others in the tones of his voice, is perhaps still more wonderful. So far as we can discern, a similar difference exists between the minds of different individuals. As no two bodies, so probably no two souls are exactly alike. Parents who have numerous families, and instructors who have many youth under their care, often notice this diversity with surprise. My hearers, reflect a moment upon these facts. Recollect that God has been constantly employed, for more than five thousand years, in forming new men, animals, and plants; and yet, so far as we can discover, has never formed any two which are exactly alike. What an idea does this fact alone give us of the inexhaustible riches of the divine mind! And could we pass from this world to all the worlds which God has made, we should probably find every where new proofs of this truth, everywhere find new varieties of being, new forms of material and intellectual existence. From the consideration of God's works of creation, let us proceed to his works of providence, or those works which he performs in preserving, guiding, and governing the universe which he has made. His works of this nature also display infinitely greater wisdom, skill, power, and goodness than all the works of men. We admire the ability displayed by a commander, who regulates, without confusion, all the motions of a numerous army; by a monarch, who skillfully manages all the concerns of an extensive and populous empire. But what is this, compared with the wisdom, knowledge, and power, which are exhibited by Jehovah in the preservation, control, and government, of all his innumerable hosts, and his almost boundless empire! He must every moment see everything which takes place in the universe; every feeling, thought, word, and action of each of his creatures, and every motion of each particle of matter.

He must not only see all these things, but he must never forget them. He must not only see and remember them, but direct and overrule them all, in such a manner, as shall cause them to work together for the accomplishment of his own purposes, and for the good of those who love him. He must also foresee; and be able to foretell, everything which will take place, with the time and the manner in which it will occur. In fine, he must be continually working in every place; and the past, and the future, heaven, earth, and hell, all time, and all space, with all which they contain, must be constantly present to his view. And O, what a mind must that be, which, without effort, and without confusion, can attend at once to such an infinite variety of objects and events, and direct and control them all in the wisest and best possible manner!

Equally wonderful is the display of moral excellences which God's works of providence exhibit. We admire the bounty of a man who feeds a hundred poor families from his table. But God every day feeds the whole family of man, together with all the inferior animals, besides bestowing on them numberless additional blessings. We admire the magnanimity and generosity of an earthly monarch, who forgives rebels and traitors, when they lie at his mercy. But God has forgiven millions of the worst of rebels, adopted them as his children, and made them his heirs. We extol the condescension of a sovereign, who, on one day in the week, orders his palace gates to be thrown open for the admission of petitioners. But the ear of the King of kings is every moment open to the petitions of the meanest slave who crawls upon his footstool. We justly admire and venerate St. Paul, who was the instrument of converting and saving some thousands of immortal souls. But God, as the sole efficient agent, has converted and saved many millions of our race, and is still daily converting and saving more.

There is another point of view in which the superiority of the works of God to those of men appears, if possible, still more evident. He is the real author of all the admirable and excellent works which men perform. He gave them all the abilities by which these works are performed, prompted them to attempt the performance, and then crowned their attempts with success. All the writers, who have enlightened the world, were but as a pen guided by him. All the great men, who have delivered their countrymen from oppression, were but a sword in his hand to cut off oppressors. All the inventors and improvers of useful arts, were indebted to him for all their inventions and improvements. And all the good men, who have blessed the world by their example, and their exertions, owed all their goodness, and all their success to him. He is also the author, the dispenser of all the happiness which has ever been enjoyed on earth or in heaven. He gave us senses capable of being gratified, and provided for them their appropriate gratifications. He gave us our intellectual faculties, and placed before them objects in the contemplation and acquisition of which they might find pleasure. He made us capable of affections which it is delightful to exercise, and gave us relations and friends towards whom those affections may flow out. And all religious enjoyments, all the happiness of heaven proceeds directly from him. In fine, he is constantly doing good, doing it on the largest scale, doing it not merely to individuals, families and nations, but to whole worlds and systems at once.

Now, if we would give God the glory which is due to him on account of his works, we must acknowledge that he performs all the works which have been mentioned, and, with suitable admiration, and affection, render unto him the praises and thanksgivings which such works deserve. But what creature, or what combination of creatures, can give him all the praise and thanksgiving which such works deserve? If we praise the sculptor, who merely forms the image of

a man, how can we sufficiently praise him who created not only the sculptor himself, but ten thousand thousand other forms, glowing with life, and radiant in beauty! If we admire the painter who skillfully delineates a landscape, or a human countenance, what admiration is due to the divine Artist, who spreads out his canvass over the whole earth, and, with colors dyed in heaven, makes it all one grand landscape, in which all that is beautiful, and all that is sublime, are exhibited in contrast, or harmoniously blended! If we extol the historian, the poet, the orator, the philosopher, how can we sufficiently extol him who created and gave them all their powers. If we admire the astronomer who discovers the motions of the heavenly bodies, how shall we sufficiently admire him who lighted up the firmament with suns and planets, and guides Arcturus with his sons.

If we applaud the man who preserves the life of a single fellow creature, what applauses are due to that God who daily preserves all creatures arid all worlds in being. If no praises are thought too great for the patriot, who delivers his country from temporal bondage, what praises are sufficient for him who offers to a ruined and enslaved world, deliverance from sin and misery, and death and hell? never, never, can any creature, nor all creatures combined, give God the whole glory which his works deserve; not though they should spend an eternity in praising him. All they can do is, to give him all that they have, to acknowledge that he alone is worthy to be praised, that all glory and honor are his due, and to combine all their powers, and all their affections and exertions in forming one refulgent unequalled crown, not to be placed on his head, for it would be unworthy, but to be cast at his feet. When all creatures shall unite in doing this, when they shall all fear, and admire, and love, and serve, and obey, and thank, and praise, Jehovah, with their whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, then, and not till then, will they obey the command which calls upon them, to give him the glory which is due to his name. This is done in heaven. There every heart is filled to overflowing with all holy affections; every tongue is loud in his praise; every crown is cast at his feet; saints, angels, and archangels are all prostrate before him. And thus it ought to be on earth. Thus it would be, were not men alienated from God by sin, and blind to the glories of his nature, his character; and his works. We have not exhibited, nor even mentioned, the tell thousandth part of his glories, nor of his just claims to receive glory from his intelligent creatures. But we must leave the subject, all imperfect and unfinished as it is, and conclude with a few inferences and reflections.

1. Does God require nothing more of his creatures than the glory which is due to him on account of his nature, character, offices, and works? O, then, how reasonable, how just, are his requisitions. He merely requires the payment of a just debt, a debt far more justly due, than any debt which was ever paid by man to man, by children to their parents, by subjects to their prince. How unreasonable then, is it to complain of his requisitions! How ungrateful, cruel, and unjust to refuse to comply with them! How inconceivable the guilt which men thus incur!

2. Is all the glory which has been mentioned due unto God’s name, and ought it, in strict justice, to have been ascribed unto him by men, ever since man began to exist! How immeasurably great then is the debt which our world leas contracted, and under the burden of which it now groans! During every day and every hour, which has elapsed since the apostasy of man, this debt leas been increasing; for every day and every hour all men ought to have given unto Jehovah the glory which is due to his name. But no man has ever done this fully. And a vast proportion of our race have never done it at all. Now the difference between the tribute which men ought to have paid to God, and that which they actually have paid, constitutes the debt of which we are speaking. How

vast then, how incalculable is this debt! For more than five thousand years every individual of the human race has been adding to it. Can we then wonder if its constantly increasing weight should finally sink our world down to hell ?

There is another point of view in which our contemplation of tile debt may assist us to compute its magnitude, or rather convince us that it is, beyond computation, great. Compare the blessings which have descended from heaven to earth, with the returns which have ascended from earth to heaven. The difference between them composes the debt under consideration. And O, how immeasurable is this difference! That you may be convinced it is so, look first at the blessings which God has sent from heaven to earth. As soon as the world was created, see the windows of heaven opened above it, and all the fullness of the Godhead gushing forth, and pouring down upon it in a torrent, a flood of blessings, rich, various, inestimable blessings. Without cessation or diminution this flood has ever since continued to flow, as if all heaven were to be poured out upon earth, while, in its descent, the deluge divides into as many streams as there are individuals in our world; a constant stream falls upon each. My hearers, were God's blessings waters, they would long ere this have risen more than fifteen cubits above the summits of the highest mountains. Now look at the returns which men have made for all this deluge of blessings. From a comparatively small number of families and individuals scattered here and there, see a few clouds of incense, a few imperfect offerings, praises and thanksgivings slowly ascending to heaven. And is this all? Yes, my hearers, this is all, all the returns which men have made to God for blessings without number and without measure; and for the unspeakable gift of his Son. Need anything more be said to show, that the debt which our world owes to God is great beyond all finite calculation? In this debt every nation participates. In this debt our own country largely shares. Of this debt every individual present owes a part. So far as the blessings you have received exceed the returns which you have made; so far as each of you has failed to glorify God to the utmost extent of his powers, so far you are indebted to him. Well then may each of us be represented as owing God a debt of ten thousand talents. And is not this debt sufficiently large? Will any one present proceed to increase it by still neglecting to give God the glory which is due to his name? Will any one still refuse or neglect to apply to that Saviour, through whom alone the remission of his mighty debt can be obtained? Rather let all, without delay, apply to him for this purpose, and then proceed to present their bodies and their souls as living sacrifices to God, continually offering those praises, thanksgivings, and spiritual services, which are acceptable through Jesus Christ.

Finally; is all this glory due unto God's name? Then there is no reason to fear that saints and angels in heaven will not have sufficient employment to occupy them through eternity. What God is he will be unchangeably and eternally. What God does shall be forever. He will therefore forever continue to deserve all the glory which he now deserves; and to ascribe unto him this glory in ceaseless praises and thanksgivings, will constitute the employment, and the felicity of saints and angels through endless ages. Nor will this employment ever become wearisome. New glories and new works of wonder will still burst upon their astonished sight, and excite in their bosoms new emotions of wonder, admiration, gratitude and love; and these emotions it would pain them not to express in new songs of thanksgiving and praise. Christian, is this to be thine eternal employment and felicity? Is thine ear destined to hear, and thy tongue to join in the songs of heaven? Is thine eternity to be one long endless day of thanksgiving? If so, abound more and more in this blessed work; be jealous for the honor of the Lord your God, and with increasing diligence and fervor and

constancy, give unto him the glory which is due to his name.

Chapter 94

S. The guilt and consequences of prental unfaithfulness

The guilt and consequences of prental unfaithfulness

"For I have told him, that I will judge his house forever, for the iniquity which he knoweth: because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever." 1 Samuel 3:13-14 words compose a part of the first revelation which was made by God to his prophet Samuel. This eminent servant of Jehovah was directed to begin his ministry by denouncing God’s judgments against a sin which, it seems, was but too common then, as it is now; the sin of neglecting the moral and religious education of children. It was this sin which drew down the most awful threatenings upon the house of Eli. Eli was in many respects an eminently good man; but, like many other good men, he was in this particular grossly deficient. His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. We may be ready to think this a small and very pardonable offence; but God thought otherwise, and he made Eli to know that he did so in a most awful manner. Behold the days come, said he, when I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart; and all the increase of thy horse shall die in the flower of their age. And as for thy two sons, they shall both die in one day. These awful threatenings, addressed to Eli, were farther confirmed by the ministry of Samuel. I have told Eli, that I will judge his house forever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. Therefore have I sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of his house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever.

It may perhaps appear strange to some of you, my friends, that we have chosen such a subject as this for a day of public fasting and prayer. But we are not without hopes that, before we have done with the subject, you will be convinced that we could not have chosen one more important, nor more suitable to the present occasion. We are assembled this day for the purpose of humbling ourselves before God, for our personal and national sins, and praying for public and private prosperity. Now I firmly believe, that no sin is more prevalent among us, more provoking to God, or more destructive of individual, domestic, and national happiness, than that to which we propose to call your attention. Could we trace the public and private evils, which infect our otherwise happy country, to their true source, I doubt not we should find that most of them proceed from a general neglect of the moral and religious education of children. And if our civil and religious institutions should ever be subverted; and this nation should share the fate of many other once flourishing nations of the earth, our destruction, like that of the house of Eli, will have been occasioned by this very sin; a sin, which is the parent of innumerable other sins, and which, consequently, directly tends to draw down upon those nations, among whom it prevails, the judgments of offended heaven. Surely, then, no subject can be more important, or more suited to the purposes for which we are now assembled. In farther discoursing on this subject, we propose to consider the sin mentioned in our text, the punishments denounced on those who are guilty of it, and the reasons why this sin is so provoking to God, as it evidently is.

I. We are to consider the sin here mentioned. Eli's sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. It is not said that he set them a bad example. It is evident, on the contrary, that his example was good. Nor is he accused of neglecting to admonish them; for we are told that he reproved them in a very solemn and affectionate manner, and warned them of the danger of continuing to pursue vicious courses. In this respect he was much less culpable than many parents at the present day; for not a few set before their children an example positively bad; and still more entirely neglect to admonish and reprove them. But though Eli admonished, he did not restrain his children. He did not employ the authority with which he was clothed, as a parent, to prevent them from indulging their depraved inclinations. This is the only sin of which he is accused; and yet this was sufficient to bring guilt and misery upon himself, and entail ruin upon his posterity. Of the same sin those parents are now guilty, who suffer their children to indulge, without restraint, those sinful propensities to which childhood and youth are but too subject; and which, when indulged, render them vile in the sight of God. Among the practices which thus render children vile, are a quarrelsome, malicious disposition, disregard to truth, excessive indulgence of their appetites, neglect of the Bible and religious institutions, profanation of the Sabbath, profane, scurrilous, or indecent language, willful disobedience, associating with openly vicious company, taking the property of their neighbors, and idleness which naturally leads to everything bad. From all these practices it is in the power of parents to restrain their children in a very considerable degree, if they employ the proper means; at least, it is in the power of all to make the attempt, and to persevere in it so long as children remain under the paternal roof; and those who neglect to do this, those who know, or who might know, that their children are beginning to practice any of these vices, without steadily and perseveringly using all proper exertions, to restrain and correct them, are guilty of the sin mentioned in the text. Nor will a few occasional reproofs and admonitions, given to children, free parents from the guilt of partaking in their sins. No, they must be restrained; restrained with a mild and prudent, but firm and steady hand; restrained early, while they may be formed to habits of submission, obedience, and diligence; and the reins of government must never, for a moment, be slackened, much less given up into their hands, as is too often the case. Nor will even this excuse those parents who neglect family religion, and the religious instruction of their children, and who do not frequently pray for the blessing of heaven upon their endeavors. If we neglect our duty to our heavenly Father, we surely cannot wonder or complain, if he suffers our children to neglect their duty to us; nor, if we do not ask his blessing, have we any reason to complain should it be withheld. In this, as in all other cases, exertion without prayer, and prayer without exertion are equally vain. To sum up all in a word, every parent who is not as careful of the morals, as he is of the health of his children; every one who takes more care of the literary, than of the moral and religious education of his children, is certainly guilty of the sin mentioned in our text. How much more criminal, then, are those parents who set before their children an irreligious, or vicious example; who join with the great enemy of their peace in tempting them to sin, and thus, instead of restraining, inflame and strengthen their sinful propensities. The parent who starves or poisons his children, is innocent in the sight of God, compared with once who thus entices them into the path of ruin.

Having thus briefly considered the sin mentioned in our text, I proceed to notice,

II. The punishments denounced against those who are guilty of it. It will soon appear, that these punishments; like most of those with which God threatens mankind, are the natural consequences

of the sin against which they are denounced. In our text these punishments are denounced in a general way. I have told Eli, that I will judge his house forever, for the iniquity which he knoweth. The particular judgments here alluded to, are described more at large in the preceding chapter, to which this passage evidently refers. God there declares to Eli,

1. That most of his posterity should die early, and that none of them should live to see old age. The increase of thy house, says he, shall die in the flower of their age, and there shall not be an old man in thine house forever. Now it is too evident to require proof, that the sin, of which Eli was guilty, naturally tends to produce the consequence which is here threatened as a punishment. When youth are permitted to make themselves vile, without restraint, they almost inevitably fall into courses which tend to undermine their constitutions, and shorten their days. It is indeed a well known fact that, in populous towns, comparatively few live to become aged, and that a much larger proportion of mankind, especially of the male sex who are most exposed to the influence of temptation, die in the flower or meridian of their days, than in the country where parental discipline is less generally neglected, and youth are under greater restraints. If parents wished that their sons should drag out a short life of debility and disease, and die before they reach half the common age of man, they could not adopt measures better calculated to produce this effect, than to cast loose the reins of parental authority, and suffer them to follow their own inclinations, and associate with vicious companions without restraint. We may, therefore, consider the premature death of ungoverned children, as the natural consequence, as well as the usual punishment, of parental neglect.

2. In the second place, God declares to Eli, that such of his children as were spared should prove a grief and vexation, rather than a comfort to him. The man of thine, whom I shall not cut off, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart. How terribly this threatening was fulfilled in the case of Eli, you need not be told. Nor was it less terribly fulfilled in the family of David. Though he was in many respects an eminently good man, yet with respect to the government of his children he was grossly deficient. We are told respecting one of his children, that his father had not displeased him at any time, saying, Wherefore hast thou done? We may then conclude that he was equally culpable in his treatment of his other children. And what was the consequence? One of his sons committed incest with his sister, and was in revenge barbarously murdered in cool blood by his brother Absalom. This same Absalom afterwards rebelled against his father, compelled him to fly for his life, and was cut off in the flower of his age, and in the midst of his sins. A third son rebelled against him in his old age, and endeavored to wrest the sceptre from his feeble hands. How keen were the sufferings which this conduct of his children occasioned, we may infer from his bitter lamentation on account of the death of Absalom.

O, my son, my son Absalom! would to God I had died for thee, my son, my son! Well therefore might it be said of him that his children were to consume his eyes, and to grieve his heart. The fact is, this part of the threatened punishment, like the former, is the natural and almost inevitable consequence of the sin, against which it is denounced. If parents indulge their children in infancy and childhood, and do not restrain them when they make themselves vile, it is almost impossible that they should not pursue courses and contract habits, which will render them as bitterness to their fathers, and a sorrow of heart to those that bore them. If such parents are pious, their hearts will probably be grieved, and their eyes consumed with tears, to see their children rebelling against God and plunging into eternal ruin.

If they are not pious, and care nothing for the future happiness of their children, they will still probably have the grief of seeing them idle, dissolute, undutiful, bad husbands, bad fathers, and bad members of society; for it can scarcely be expected that he, who is a bad son, will act his part well in any other relation of life. Especially will such parents usually meet with unkindness and neglect from their children, if they live to be dependent on them in their old age. It is in this, as in almost every other instance, the case that, as a man sows, so he must reap. They that sow the seeds of vice in the minds of their children, or who suffer their to be sown by others, and to grow without restraint, will almost invariably be compelled to reap, and to eat with many tears the bitter harvest which those seeds tend to produce.

3. In the third place, God forewarns Eli, that his posterity should he poor and contemptible. They that despise me, says he, shall be lightly esteemed; and it shall come to pass that every one that is left in thy house shall come and crouch to another for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread. Here again we see the natural consequences of Eli's sin in its punishment. Children who are not well instructed and restrained by their parents, will almost inevitably in such a place as this, contract habits of idleness, instability, and extravagance, which naturally lead to poverty and contempt. Were we well acquainted with the private history of those individuals among us, who are idle, intemperate, unstable and despised, we should probably find that in almost every instance, they were the children of parents who neglected to restrain them when they made themselves vile.

Lastly; God declares that none of the methods thus appointed to obtain the pardon of sin, should avail to procure pardon for the iniquity of his house; I have sworn unto Eli, that the iniquity of his house shall not be purged away by sacrifice nor offering forever. This awful threatening conveyed a plain intimation that his children should die in their sins; and, of course be miserable forever. This too was the natural consequence of his conduct. He had suffered them to follow without restraint those courses which rendered them unfit for heaven, until their day of grace was past, and the door of mercy forever closed against them. They were now given up to a hard heart and reprobate mind. They could not now be brought to repentance; and, of course, no sacrifice or offering could purge away their sins. My friends, it is still the same, and there can be no room to doubt, that there are thousands now in the regions of despair, and thousands more on their way to join them, who will forever curse their parents, as the authors of their misery. My friends, the terrible punishments denounced against this sin sufficiently show that it is exceedingly displeasing in the sight of God. Let us then inquire as was proposed.

III. Why it is so? To this we answer, it is so,

1. Because it proceeds from very wicked and hateful principles. Actions take their character in the sight of God principally from the motives and dispositions in which they originate. Now there is scarcely any sin which proceeds from worse principles and more hateful dispositions than this. For instance, sometimes it proceeds from the love and the practice of vice. Openly vicious and profligate parents, who do not restrain themselves, cannot, of course, but be ashamed to restrain their children. Such parents, whatever their children may do, dare not reprove them, lest they should hear them reply, Physician, heal thyself. In other instances, this sin is occasioned by secret impiety and infidelity. Those who live without God in the world, who think his power of no consequence, and feel not the force of those motives, which the Scriptures present to us, will be disposed to view the sins of their children with a favorable eye, and consider them as merely the

common foibles of youth, which require little censure or restraint, and which they will renounce voluntarily. Even if such parents sometimes restrain the grosser vices of their children, they will give them no religious instruction; they will never pray for them, for they never pray for themselves; and without religious instruction and prayer, little or nothing effectual can be done. But in religious parents, this sin almost invariably proceeds from indolence and selfishness. They love their own ease too well to employ that constant care and exertion, which are necessary to restrain their children, and educate them as they ought. They cannot bear to correct them, or put them to pain; not because they love their children, but because they love themselves, and are unwilling to endure the pain of inflicting punishment, and of seeing their children suffer; though they cannot but be sensible, that their happiness requires it.

There is also much unbelief, much contempt of God, and much positive disobedience in this sin. Parents are as expressly and as frequently commanded to restrain, to correct, and instruct their children, as to perform any other duty whatever. Great promises are made to the performance of this duty; awful threatenings are denounced against the neglect of it. Yet all these motives prove ineffectual. The commands are disobeyed, the promises and threatenings are disbelieved and disregarded, and thus parents honor their children more than God, and seek their own ease rather than his pleasure, as Eli is said to have done. It appears, then, that this sin proceeds from open wickedness, which renders parents ashamed to restrain their children; or from impiety and infidelity, which causes them to think it needless; or from indolence and selfishness, which make them unwilling to do it. Now these are some of the worst principles of our depraved nature; and therefore we need not wonder that a sin, which proceeds from such sources, is exceedingly displeasing to God.

2. This sin is exceedingly displeasing to God, because, so far as it prevails, it entirely frustrates his design in establishing the family state. We are taught, that he at first formed one man and one woman, and united them in marriage, that he might seek a Godly seed. But this important design is entirely frustrated by those parents who neglect the moral and religious education of their children; and therefore God cannot but be greatly displeased with a sin which renders his benevolent measures for our happiness unavailing.

3. God is greatly displeased with this sin on account of the good which it prevents, and the infinite evil which it produces. He has taught us; that children properly educated will be good and happy, both here and hereafter. He has also taught us that children, whose education is neglected, will probably be temporally and eternally miserable. At least, it will not be owing to their parents, if they are not. He also compels us to learn from observation and experience, that innumerable evils and miseries do evidently result from this sin; that the happiness of families is destroyed; that the peace of society is disturbed; that the prosperity of nations is subverted, and that immortal souls are ruined by its effects. Now the anger of God against any sin, is in proportion to the evils and the misery which it tends to produce. But it is evident that no sin tends to produce more evils, or greater misery than this. It is the fruitful parent of thousands of other sins, and entails ruin upon our descendants to the third and fourth generation. With no sin, therefore, has God more reason to be angry than with this.

Lastly; this sin is exceedingly displeasing to him, because those who are guilty of it break over the most powerful restraints, and act a most unnatural part. He knew that it would not be safe to

entrust such creatures as we are with the education of immortal souls, unless we had powerful inducements to be faithful to the trust. He, therefore, implanted in the hearts of parents a strong and tender affection for their offspring, and a most ardent desire for their happiness, that they might thus be induced to educate them as they ought. But those who neglect to restrain their children, do violence to this powerful operative principle, and may be said to be like the heathen, without natural affection. It is true they may have a kind of blind fondness for their offspring, like that of the irrational animals; but it does not at all resemble a virtuous, enlightened affection, and is altogether unworthy of a rational, and still more of a Christian parent; and, therefore, instead of prompting them to seek the real happiness of their children, it is but too often made an excuse for neglecting it.

Thus, my friends, have we endeavored to describe the sin mentioned in our text, with its punishment, and the reasons why it is so exceedingly displeasing to God. And now let us improve the subject,

1. By inquiring whether the sin does not greatly prevail among ourselves. But inquiry is needless. It most evidently does. I am inclined to believe that it is the greatest and most provoking sin among us. And, my friends, you must allow that the speaker has had sufficient opportunity to form something of a correct opinion on this subject. He has resided in this place three years as an instructor of youth, and almost nine years as a preacher of the gospel. In this capacity he has had free access to families of every class, in all circumstances, and he has had very considerable opportunities of witnessing the manner in which children are treated; he has felt disposed to avail himself of these opportunities, and he is constrained to declare thus publicly, that he has found but comparatively few families in which there is not a gross and evident neglect of the moral and religious education of children. He has but too often witnessed in his parochial visits attempts to restrain children, while he was present; attempts, which were evidently unusual, and which were of course unsuccessful, and which only proved that the children, and not the parents, ruled. But it is needless to mention these circumstances. Our streets, and the vicious conduct of but too many of our youth are open witnesses against many among us, that their sons make themselves vile and they restrain them not. You well know that it is almost impossible to walk our streets, without having the ear wounded by profane and indecent expressions from lips which have but just learned to speak. You need not be told, at least many of you need not, that there are many haunts of intemperance and every kind of wickedness in this town, to which boys resort to learn and practice the vices of men; where they soon learn to glory in their shame, and to get rid betimes of the troublesome restraints and reproaches of conscience. You need not be told, that our annual days of fasting are, by many of the young, considered and treated as days set apart for sinful and almost riotous amusement, and that the language of their conduct seems to be, We are determined to fill up the measure of our national sires, as fast as our parents empty it. In fact, I suspect that there is more sin committed on our days of fasting, than on almost any other day of the year. But it is needless to enlarge. My very soul sickens to think of the dreadful proofs of youthful wickedness and profligacy, which I almost daily hear or witness. Surely, if it be true, that a child trained up in the way he should go will not depart from it, but few, very few indeed of the rising generation are thus trained. I would not, however, be understood to mean, that all, or even a large proportion of the vicious children in this town are the children of this society. I do not now particularly recollect any one that is so. But, my friends, are there not many, even among us, who

are grossly deficient in this respect, many whose sons make themselves vile, many who suffer their children to associate with vile companions and they restrain them not? Are there not many, who have already suffered some of the punishments with which the house of Eli was visited? Are there none, who have reason to fear that their children were cut off by an untimely death, the consequence, at least in some degree, of a neglected education? Are there none, whose children survive only to consume their eyes and grieve their hearts by their misconduct, and cause them bitterly to lament the consequences of their neglect now, when it is too late to repair it? It is indescribably painful to tear open the bleeding wounds of such parents, if such there are; but it must be done, if it be only to bring them to repentance and the enjoyment of pardon. It seems that if any sin calls for repentance, this especially does; and it becomes all of us, who are parents, to humble ourselves before God for our innumerable deficiencies, and to beg that he will not visit our sins upon our children. It may perhaps be too late with many to reform now. The children have become too old to be controlled; they have left the paternal roof, and perhaps gone to the world of spirits. The mischief is done and cannot be remedied. My friends, if anything can convince you of the need of an atonement, it must be this. Suppose a parent, by neglect or by bad example, has ruined his children; they die in their sins, and go to the judgment seat. After their death, suppose their criminal parent is brought to repentance, what can clear him from guilt? what can wash away his sin? He has destroyed an immortal soul, the soul of his own child; a soul which God committed to his care, and of which he will demand an account. Now what account can such a parent render? What atonement can he make to God for destroying one of his creatures! to that God who declares that he will require blood for blood, life for life, of everyone who unlawfully takes away the life of a fellow creature? Will his tears, his repentance restore the dead to life, or save the soul which he has ruined? No; nor would it avail should he offer thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil; for God expressly declared that the sin of Eli’s house should not be purged with offering nor sacrifice forever. What then can take away the guilt, and procure the pardon of such a parent? Is there any way, or must he perish? There is a way. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; and surely such a parent needs it all, nor could anything short of this precious atoning blood, make satisfaction for this irreparable mischief which his neglect has occasioned.

If then there be any present, who are guilty of this sin, any, who fear that by their bad example, or their neglect, they have occasioned the ruin of an immortal soul, we would point them to Christ for relief and pardon. By his blood even those who have destroyed others may themselves be saved from destruction, if their repentance be sincere; for he has declared that all manner of sin and blasphemy, not committed against the Holy Ghost, shall be forgiven to the penitent. But if any, who are guilty of this sin, do not repent and apply to the Saviour for pardon, the oath of God stands against them, that their iniquity shall not be purged forever. My friends, let all who are parents think of this, and beware of this ruinous, this aggravated, this almost unpardonable sin. Chasten thy son, says the wise man, while there is yet hope, nor let thy soul spare for his crying; for he that spareth correction hateth his son, but he that loveth him will chasten him betimes. Thou shalt scourge him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.

2. If there are any children or youth now present, whose parents do not restrain them, and who make themselves vile by indulging in vicious or sinful practices, they may learn from this subject, what will be their fate, unless repentance prevent. Children and youth, I am now speaking to you. You are deeply interested in this subject. Remember the character and the fate of Eli’s sons. They

made themselves vile, and God slew them. Remember that a quarrelsome temper, disobedience to parents, idleness, neglect of the Sabbath, and the Bible, profane and indecent language, falsehood, and every kind of vicious indulgence, render you vile in the sight of God, and are the high road to poverty and contempt in this world, and everlasting wretchedness in the next. Remember too that, if your parents do not forbid, and punish you for these sins, that will not excuse you in the sight of God. Eli did not restrain his sons, and yet God destroyed them. But if any of you, who have religious parents, pursue such courses in defiance of their admonitions, your doom will be still worse. There is no more certain forerunner of ruin in this world and the next, than habitual disregard to the counsels and warnings of such parents. We are told that Eli's sons hearkened not to their father, because the Lord would slay them; and if any children present refuse to obey their parents, it gives reason to fear that God intends, in like manner, to destroy them.

Chapter 95

S. The iniquity of the fahters visited upon their children

The iniquity of the fahters visited upon their children

"Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation." Exodus 34:7 this passage we have a part of the name of Jehovah, as proclaimed by himself. In the preceding chapter we find Moses praying for a manifestation of those attributes in which the divine glory essentially consists. I beseech thee, said he, show me thy glory. This request God answered by saying, I will make all my goodness to pass before thee; and will proclaim before thee the name of the Lord. This promise he fulfilled. The Lord, says the inspired penman, descended in a cloud, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, Jehovah, Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands; forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; and by no means clearing the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation. On hearing this adorable name, thus proclaimed, Moses made haste, and bowed his head, and worshipped; thus expressing his cordial acquiescence in all that God had revealed respecting his character, and the maxims of his government. Everyone who possesses the temper of Moses, will feel disposed, on hearing this name, to follow his example. But it is more than probable that all present do not possess his temper; and that some, on hearing that part of God's name which has been read as our text, will rather feel disposed to ask, how can it be just, how can it be made to appear consistent with our ideas of perfect rectitude, for God to visit the iniquity of men upon their posterity; or, as the expression evidently means, to punish children, and children's children, for the sins of their parents? To answer these questions by stating the true import of the passage, and showing that the method of proceeding, which it describes, is perfectly just, is my design in the present discourse. With this view, I remark,

1. That this passage has no reference whatsoever, to God's treatment of mankind, in a future state. It does not mean that God will punish children in a future state for the sins of their parents; but the visitation or punishment which it threatens, is exclusively temporal. This is evident from a passage in the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, where God, speaking of the death to which his law dooms transgressors, says, The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. In another passage, he says, The fathers shall not die for their children, neither shall the children die for the fathers; but every man shall die for his own sin. The same truth is clearly taught in the many passages which assure us, that, at the judgment day, God will reward every man according to his works. Not, you will observe, according to the works of his parents, but according to his own works; nor is the smallest intimation to be found in the Bible, that, in dispensing eternal rewards and punishments, God will pay any regard to the conduct of a man's ancestors, whatever it may have been. I remark,

2. That God never visits children even with temporal judgments for the sins of their parents, unless they imitate, and thus justify their parents' offences. This, he himself declares, in the most positive

and unequivocal manner. The impious Jews, while suffering the just punishment of their own offences, made use of this proverb; The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge; that is, our fathers have sinned, and we, their children, are punished for it. They thus justified themselves by insinuating that the calamities which they suffered were not the consequence of their own conduct, and at the same time, accused God of injustice. The ways of the Lord, said they, are not equal, or equitable. For this impious and groundless complaint, God severely reproves them, declares that they shall no more use this proverb, and shows, in the clearest manner, that they had no cause to use it. He assures these murmurers that, if a wicked man has a son who seeth all his father's sins, and considereth and doeth them not, but executeth God's judgments, and walketh in his statutes, he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, but shall surely live. With this assurance, the divine conduct, as described in the Old Testament, corresponds. Hezekiah, Josiah, and many other pious men were the children of exceedingly wicked parents; but as they shunned the sins of their fathers, and were supremely devoted to God, they enjoyed his favor in a very high degree, and were visited with no marks of displeasure on account of their progenitors.

There is, however, one apparent exception to these remarks, which must be noticed. It is evident from facts, that even pious children often suffer in consequence of the wicked conduct of their parents. If a father be idle, or extravagant; if he squander his property by gaming, or intemperance, or destroy his reputation by scandalous crimes, or ruin his constitution by sensual indulgences; his children, and perhaps his children's children, may suffer in consequence; nor will any degree of piety always shield them from such sufferings. Those sufferings ought not, however, to be considered as punishments inflicted by God; but merely as the natural consequences of their parents' misconduct; and even these consequences, though painful, will be overruled for their benefit; for all things work together for good to them that love God. It must, however, be added, that the sinful example and conduct of wicked parents has a most powerful tendency to prevent their children from becoming pious, to induce them to pursue vicious courses, and thus to bring upon them divine judgments. Such parents seldom, if ever, give their children good advice, or a religious education, but suffer them to grow up, almost without restraint, with a bad example in its most influential form, ever before their eyes. Hence, wickedness often descends in families from generation to generation, becoming more deep and inveterate as it descends, till long delayed vengeance overtakes the guilty race, and blots their very name from the earth. I remark,

3. That our text describes God's method of proceeding with nations, and civil or ecclesiastical communities, rather than with individuals. I do not say that it has no reference to individuals, but that it refers principally to nations, states and churches. It seems designed to teach us that God often visits one generation with national judgments, on account of the sins of preceding generations; or in other words, that in punishing a nation, at one period of its existence, he has respect to sins of which it had been guilty during former periods. For instance, when he doomed the Canaanites to destruction, he had respect not only to the sins of that generation which was destroyed, but to all the sins of which the nation had been guilty, from the commencement of its political existence. This is evident from his informing Abraham that the Canaanites could not be immediately destroyed, because their iniquity was not then full; but that after four generations should have passed away, their measure would be full, and their destruction would be effected. In a similar manner he dealt with the Amalekites. That nation made a cruel, treacherous, and

unprovoked assault upon the Israelites in the wilderness. God then declared that he would punish the nation of Amalek for that offence; but the punishment was deferred for some hundreds of years, and was then inflicted with awful severity; and the destruction of the Amalekites which then took place, was expressly stated to be on account of the sin committed so many years before, by a preceding generation. By similar maxims God was governed, in his dealings with the Jews. The Babylonish captivity was designed as a punishment, not only for the sins of that generation, which was actually carried away, but for the sins of the preceding generation. And so the present dispersion of the Jews, with all the calamities which, for eighteen hundred years, have overwhelmed that devoted people, is a continued expression of the divine displeasure against the sin of which their fathers were guilty, in crucifying the Son of God, of whom they said, His blood be on us and on our children. Our Saviour himself said to that generation, by whom he was crucified, Fill ye up the measure of your fathers, that upon you may come all the righteous blood, shed from the foundation of the world: from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. That we may perceive the justice, wisdom and propriety of this method of proceeding, it is necessary to consider the following things.

It is indispensably necessary to the perfection of God's moral government that it should extend to nations and communities, as well as to individuals. This, I conceive, is too evident to require proof; for how could God be considered as the moral governor of the world, if nations and communities were exempt from his government? Again, if God is to exercise a moral government, over nations and communities, by rewarding or punishing them according to their works, the rewards and punishments must evidently be dispensed, in this world; for nations and communities will not exist, as such, in the world to come. In that world, God must deal with men, considered simply as individuals. Further, it seems evidently proper, that communities as well as individuals, should have a time of trial and probation allowed them; that if the first generation prove sinful, the community should not be immediately destroyed, but that the punishment should be suspended, till it be seen whether the nation will prove incorrigible, or whether some succeeding generation will not repent of the national sins, and thus avert national judgments. Now it is evident, that if God thus waits upon nations, as he does upon individuals, and allows them a season of probation, a space for repentance, he cannot destroy them, until many generations of sinners are laid in their graves.

Besides, by thus suspending the rod, or the sword over a nation, he presents to it powerful inducements to reform. He appeals to parental feelings, to men's affection for their posterity; and endeavors to deter them from sin, by the assurance that their posterity will suffer for it. In connection with these remarks, we must recollect, what has been already stated, that God never punishes a generation for the sins of its ancestors, unless it imitates their conduct, unless it is guilty of similar or more aggravated offences, and thus justifies the wicked conduct of preceding generations. Besides, as sinful nations, like individuals, if they do not reform, usually become worse, it will ever be found that the last days of a nation, are its worst days, and that the generation which is destroyed, is more abandoned than all preceding generations. I will only add, that when God forsakes or destroys a nation, for its national sins, he does not inflict more upon that generation which is destroyed, than its own sins deserve, though he punishes them more severely than he would leave done, were it not for the guilt which has been accumulated by the generations which have preceded it. From these statements and considerations, I conceive that

not only the justice, but the wisdom and propriety of the divine proceedings, must appear evident to every calm and unprejudiced mind. If doubts respecting it still remain, permit me to attempt their removal by the following statement.

Suppose that from the commencement of our existence as a nation, some other nation had without provocation treated us in the most hostile and injurious manner, interrupting our commerce, murdering our fellow-citizens, and finally, forcibly seizing, and unjustly retaining a part of our territory. Suppose the generation by whom these acts of hostility were committed, to be all laid in their graves, and a new generation to succeed, who, instead of making any reparation for the injuries we had sustained from their fathers, should repeat the same injuries, and retain the territory which they had unjustly acquired Should we not feel that we had just cause of complaint against this new generation; that they were, in effect, accessories in the crimes of their fathers, and deserving of the punishment due to those crimes? And supposing war, in any case, to be just, should we not feel it just to make war upon that nation, at any succeeding period of its existence, so long as its offences were repeated, and the territory which it had unjustly acquired was retained? My hearers, God's visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, implies no more than is involved in this supposition. Who then will deny his method of proceeding to be just? My hearers, the subject we have been considering, would, at any time, be interesting and instructive, but there is something in our present situation, which renders it, at this time, peculiarly so. As a community, we are just entering on a new mode of political existence. We are now separated from our parent State, and have no further concern in its sins or its virtues, except what results from our connection with it, as members of the Union. But though we have no other concern with the sins of which it may hereafter be guilty, it is evident from our subject that we are still deeply interested in the sinfulness and guilt contracted by that State, during the period of our political connection with it. In that sinfulness we shared; in accumulating that guilt we assisted, and should God visit our parent State for its sins, we must expect to share in the visitation, unless previous repentance and reform prevent. Had the State, at the period of our separation, been burdened with a debt which it was unable to discharge, we must have been charged with our proportion of it; and the same remark will apply to the debt which is due to divine justice. It becomes us, then, to look back and inquire of what sins the State was guilty during our connection with it. With respect to the primitive fathers, or first settlers of the State, it was intimated in the morning, that they were, in a very uncommon degree, devoted to God. No other nation can boast of such ancestors, to no other nation has so small a share of guilt been transmitted by its founders. But it is too evident to require proof, that our immediate ancestors have sunk very far below the standard of their forefathers. The progress of those vices which principally tend to draw down divine judgments upon a people, has been constant, rapid, and highly alarming. Dissipation, intemperance, profanation of the Sabbath, neglect of divine institutions, and profane language have burst in upon us like an overwhelming flood. The prevalence of perjury, or false swearing, is, if possible, still more alarming. To say nothing of the little regard paid, in many cases, to oaths of office, how terribly have our commercial transactions, for some years, been polluted by this crime! Of what palpable perjuries have great numbers of our fellow-citizens been guilty, both at home and in foreign lands; and how largely have those who employed them, participated in the guilt! We may think little of this, and flatter ourselves that customary oaths are trifles; but be assured, my hearers, that when God is, on any occasion, called to bear witness to a transaction, he witnesses it; and woe be to the wretch who calls upon the God of truth to bear witness to a lie. God will not hold him guiltless who taketh his

name in vain; nor will he field a nation or community guiltless in which this sin prevails. Even you, my hearers, would think it the greatest of insults should a man impudently call upon you to testify to the truth of a known lie. With what feelings, then, must the God of truth hear himself so frequently called upon to bear such testimony? But to return from what is, perhaps, a digression; —if these and other sins have grossly prevailed, in our parent State, and in this part of it, during the period of our political union, then, unless we repent of these sins; and much more, if we persist in them, we may be certain that God will, sooner or later, visit upon its the iniquity of our fathers. We shall commence our separate existence with our measure of iniquity partly filled, and our own sins will soon fill it to the brim. In the second place, this subject will teach us not only to reflect upon the past, but to look forward to the future. If God in his dealings with civil communities, visits the sins of parents upon their children, then he will visit our sins upon our children. We shall suffer for them in the world to come, and they will suffer for them in this world. We often speak of acting for our posterity, of providing for their happiness; but in no way can we promote their happiness so effectually, as by abstaining from sin; in no way can we do more to destroy it, than by continuing in sin. We profess to have been actuated, partly at least, if not principally, by a concern for their interest, in seeking the separation which has taken place. But what will it avail for them to be a separate State, if we indirectly separate them from the favor and blessing of heaven? What will it avail to bequeath to them our civil and religious privileges, if the bequest, in consequence of our sins, is accompanied with heaven's curse? A measure of iniquity nearly full is a terrible inheritance to bequeath to posterity. Yet such an inheritance we shall certainly transmit to them, unless a more general reformation, than there seems any reason to expect, should prevent. May God have mercy upon our posterity, for I fear we shall have none. In the third place; this subject may be interesting and instructive to many of us, not only as members of the community to which we belong, but as individuals. Are there any present, who are descended from along line of irreligious ancestors; who can scarcely find, among their progenitors, one devoted servant of God? Surely, such have reason to tremble, lest a curse should be entailed upon a race, which has been so long estranged from God. Are there any whose immediate ancestors have lived without God, in the world? Let such remember that if they would not be visited for the sins of their fathers, they must forsake their fathers' sinful ways. Are there any, who, while their parents remain strangers to God, have been led to know and serve him themselves? What reason have such to bless and adore the sovereign mercy, which, instead of leaving them under the load of derived and personal guilt, has visited them with salvation. Are there parents present, who know not God? It surely becomes them to lay this subject seriously to heart, lest they should treasure up wrath for their descendants. Let me entreat such parents to reflect how soothing, how delightful it must be to be able, in their expiring moments, to bequeath to their children, and their children's children, the blessing of a pious father; to be able, with dying Jacob, to say, The God of my fathers, the God who has fed me all my life long, the Angel who redeemed me from all evil, bless my children, and be their God. Surely, if there be a delightful spectacle on earth, it is that of a dying father, who after having guided his children in the way of peace by his principles and example, expires while the blessing which he bequeaths to them, trembles on his lips. On the other hand, what sight can be more dreadful than that of a dying sinner, —his own gloomy prospect rendered tenfold more dismal by the reflection that his own children are involved for time, perhaps for eternity, in the consequences of his transgressions.

S. The safety of Religion

The safety of Religion "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely." Proverbs 10:9. term walk, as used by the inspired writers, signifies a course of conduct. To walk uprightly, then, is to pursue a course of uprightness, or integrity. Our text assures us, that he who pursues such a course walketh surely. He walks safely, for he is safe while pursuing such a course; and safety, or eternal salvation, will be the end of it. He may therefore walk confidently, or with an assurance of present safety, and of final salvation. If any proposition of a religious nature be demonstrably true, it is this. It is demonstrably true, that God is righteous. It is demonstrably true, that, possessing this character, he must regard the righteous with approbation and complacency; or, as an inspired writer expresses it, The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; for he cannot but approve of his own character; he cannot but love his own image in his creatures. And it is demonstrably true, that those whom he loves and approves must be safe here, and happy hereafter. We may, therefore, consider it as a most certain and well established truth, that he who walketh uprightly walketh safely. But here a question arises, and a difficulty occurs. What is it to walk uprightly? It is well known, that various opinions are entertained respecting this question, and that different persons answer it in a very different manner. Now how shall we ascertain which of these various opinions is correct? And unless we can ascertain which of them is correct, of what service is our text? What does it avail us to know that he who walketh uprightly, walketh safely, unless we can ascertain what it is to walk uprightly? My hearers, if I am not greatly deceived, our text will assist us in surmounting this difficulty. If it is true that he who walketh uprightly walketh safely, then it must be true that he who walks safely, walks uprightly. If then we can ascertain which is the safe course, we shall ascertain which is the upright course. If we can ascertain who walk safely, we shall ascertain who walk uprightly. It will, therefore, be my object in the following remarks, to show which is the safe course, or who walk safely.

Every religious course, whether right or wrong, safe or unsafe, includes two things; first, the doctrines which are believed; and secondly, the precepts which are obeyed by those who follow it. In other words, it includes sentiments, and conduct or practice. It will be proper to consider these two things separately. Let us then inquire, I. What sentiments are safe, or what we may safely believe. In answer to this inquiry we may remark,

1. It is safe to believe that the Scriptures are a revelation from God, and that those who wrote them were inspired. This, it is presumed, no infidel will deny. No infidel will pretend that we expose ourselves to any evil, or danger, in a future state, by believing the Scriptures to be the word of God, even though it should prove that they are not so; for believing them does not lead to the neglect of any duty, which infidels regard as necessary to the attainment of future happiness. Allowing then, for argument’s sake, that they should prove not to be a revelation from God; those who believed that they were so, will still stand on as safe ground, as those who rejected them. It is then safe to believe the Scriptures. But it is not safe to disbelieve them; for if they are the word of God, all who do not receive them as such, will perish. And no one will deny that it is possible they may be the word of God. No one can, with the least shadow of reason, pretend, that it is not

probable they are so. A book which thousands of the learned and the wise, after a thorough examination, have received as a revelation from heaven, must, surely, have at least probability in its favor. Its claims must be supported by proofs of no common strength. Taking the infidel, then, on his own ground, it is by no means safe to reject the Scriptures. He who rejects them is far from walking safely.

2. It is safe to believe in the immortality of the soul, and in a future state of retribution. This assertion requires no proof; for it is impossible that any future evil or danger should result from believing these doctrines, even if they are not true. If the soul is not immortal, if there is no future state, they who believed, and they who disbelieved these doctrines, will alike cease to exist at death. On the other hand, it is not safe to disbelieve these doctrines. Even those who disbelieve them must allow, that they may possibly be true; nay, that there is some probability of their truth. And if they are true, the consequences of disbelieving them will be terrible; for he who does not believe that his soul is immortal, will take no care of it; and he who does not believe in a future state of retribution, will make no preparation for it, and will, of course, die unprepared. He then who disbelieves these doctrines does not walk safely.

3. It is safe to believe that men are naturally destitute of holiness, or, in other words, wholly sinful. No one; it is presumed, can point out any danger, either present or future, to which a belief of this doctrine exposes men. The Scriptures caution us against every danger to which we are exposed; but they never intimate that there is any danger of entertaining too low an opinion of ourselves. On the contrary, they give us this caution, Let no man think of himself more highly than he ought to think. It must, I conceive, be acknowledged by all, that we are far more disposed to form too high, than too low an estimate of our own characters; that we are more in danger of being too proud, than we are of becoming too humble. Even then if we were not wholly sinful, it would be erring on the safe side to believe that we are so. But it is by no means equally safe to embrace the opposite opinion. Most awful threatenings are denounced in the Scriptures against all who do not repent of, confess, and renounce their sins. But he who does not believe that he is entirely sinful, will not feel that repentance, nor make those confessions, which a belief of this doctrine would produce, and which the Scriptures require. Besides, if it is true that men are naturally destitute of holiness, it follows, that he who disbelieves this truth, mistakes something for holiness which in fact is not holiness; and a mistake respecting this point must be fatal. If a man thinketh himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. And is there not, at least, some probability, that the doctrine is true, even its enemies themselves being judges? Do not the inspired assertions, that men are dead in trespasses and sins, that if one died for all then were all dead, that the heart of the sons of men is full of evil and madness, deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; I say, do not these, and other similar assertions, with which the Scriptures abound, seem to mean that men are entirely sinful? Do they not make it at least probable that they are so? Now if there is the least probability that such is the fact, it is safe to believe it, unsafe to deny it. To believe it, if false, can do no harm. To disbelieve it, if true, will be fatal.

4. It is safe to believe that a moral renovation, or change of heart, is necessary to salvation. No harm can result from believing this doctrine, even if it is not true. But much harm, fatal harm must result from disbelieving it, if it is true. The man who does not believe that a new heart is necessary will give himself no concern respecting its attainment. He will live and die without it. Of course, if it is necessary to salvation, he will not be saved. And is it not possible that it may be necessary?

Nay, is it not probable? If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. Do not these, and the numerous other passages of the same import, which are found in the Scriptures, seem to teach that a great moral change or renovation is necessary? Do they not render it probable that it is so? Surely then, it cannot be safe to disbelieve it? He who disbelieves it cannot walk safely.

5. It is safe to believe in the proper divinity of Jesus Christ. Some may deny this assertion, on the ground that if Christ is not God, to worship him as such, will involve us in the guilt of idolatry. But whether he is or is not God, it is certainly our duty to worship him. We are commanded to honor him even as we honor the Father; and we are told that when the Father brought him into the world, he said, Let all the angels of God worship him. If it is the duty of all the angels to worship him, much more, we may conclude, is it ours. We may add, that though prophets, apostles, and angels always checked and reproved those who attempted to worship them, our Saviour, even during his state of humiliation on earth, frequently received worship from men as his due. Nor among all the cautions which are given us in the Scriptures, is there the least intimation that we must beware of loving and honoring Christ too much, or that there is any danger of placing him too high. Indeed, it would be strange if there were such intimation, for why should we be cautioned against worshipping one who is worshipped in heaven, and who shares with his Father the praises of its inhabitants? In fine, if it is safe to obey God, to imitate the apostles; to utter the language of heaven, then it is safe to worship Jesus Christ. And if it is safe to worship him, it cannot be unsafe to believe that he is God. You cannot suppose that any man will be condemned at the judgment day, for thinking too highly of his Saviour, or loving and honoring him too much. But if Christ is God, it is by no means equally safe to disbelieve that he is so. If the doctrine of his proper divinity is true, it must be a fundamental doctrine, a doctrine the belief of which is necessary to render us Christ's. This, Dr. Priestley, the great apostle of Unitarianism, has acknowledged. If you are right, said he to a distinguished clergyman in this country, who believed our Saviour's divinity; if you are right, we are not Christians at all, and I do not wonder in the least at the bad opinion you entertain of us. And is there not at least a probability that those who believe Christ's divinity are right? Do not many inspired passages appear to assert it in the most unequivocal terms? And since no evils can result from believing it, even though it should not prove to be true, while the most terrible evils will be the consequence of disbelieving it, if it is true, is it not the safer and wiser course to believe it? Does not he who believes it walk safely?

6. It is safe to believe that Christ has made an atonement for sin, and that we must be justified by faith in him, and not by our own works. From a belief of these doctrines rightly understood, no evil or danger can result, even if they are not true. It has indeed been asserted, that these doctrines are unfavorable to morality, but the assertion is groundless; for all who believe that we are justified by faith in Christ, believe that this faith will produce good works, and that a faith which does not produce them, cannot be genuine. They believe that good works are as necessary to our salvation, as if we were actually justified by performing them. In fine, they believe that without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. This being the case, it is impossible that their reliance on the atonement and righteousness of Christ should make them negligent of moral duties. Nor can it be shown, that the belief of these doctrines occasions any other evil, or exposes them, either here or hereafter, to any danger.

It is then safe to believe them, even if they are not true. But it is very unsafe to disbelieve them if they are true. A mistake respecting the terms of acceptance, the way of salvation, must be fatal, if any mistake can be so. Those who make the mistake, incur the guilt, and expose themselves to the fate of the Jews, who, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, went about to establish their own righteousness, and thus failed of salvation. One of the most zealous advocates of the doctrine, that we are justified by our own works, after writing a large volume in support of it, concludes with this remarkable concession, "Nevertheless, since we are prone to estimate our good works too highly, and fancy that they are sufficient for our justification, when in fact they are not so, the safer way is to renounce all dependence on them, and rely on the righteousness of Christ alone."

Finally; It is safe to believe that all men will not be saved, and that without repentance, faith and holiness none will be saved. To prove this, little need be said. If the doctrine that all men will inherit salvation is true, those who deny, are as safe as those who believe it. If it is not true, those who trust in it trust to a lie, and will utterly perish in their own deceivings. And even its warmest advocates must allow, that there is at least a possibility of its proving false. No man then walks safely who ventures his soul, his all, upon its truth.

Thus have I attempted to show who pursue a safe, and who an unsafe course, so far as doctrines, or sentiments are concerned. I shall now proceed, as was proposed,

II. To pursue the same inquiry with respect to practice. In attempting this, however, we cannot descend to particulars. The precepts of revelation, are so numerous, that it is scarcely possible, in a single discourse, to mention them all. Nor is it necessary to our present design. It will be sufficient to remark, that, with respect to practice, all who are called Christians, may be divided into two great classes. Of these two classes, one is distinguished by a strict, the other by a lax interpretation of the divine precepts. The former suppose that these precepts are to be understood and obeyed in their plain, obvious sense. The latter contend that, understood in this sense, it is impossible to obey them; and that it is therefore, necessary to explain away much of their apparent meaning, and bring them more nearly to a level with the inclinations and pursuits of mankind. The former suppose, that we must obey them, though obedience should displease our friends, draw upon us contempt and reproach, and expose us to sufferings and losses. The latter seem to think, that we are to obey them so far only as is consistent with our temporal interest and convenience. The former consider the salvation of the soul as the one thing needful, and religion as the great business of life. They suppose that it is our duty to be continually under its influence; and whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God. The latter contend, that we are not required to be so very religious, that there is no need of feeling much concern respecting our spiritual and eternal interests, and that we are not forbidden to indulge in what the world calls innocent amusements. Hence a corresponding difference is found to exist between the conduct of these two classes, The latter allow themselves in many things which the former consider as forbidden, sinful, and dangerous. The latter are conformed to this world; the former are not so. Hence they have in all ages been censured and ridiculed as precise, superstitious, bigoted, and morose; while the other class has been complimented for its liberality, and freedom from narrow views and prejudices. Now the question before ns is, Which of these two classes pursues the safe course? Which is most dangerous, —to have too little religion, or too much? And on which side are we most tempted, and most prone to err? My hearers, the bare statement of these questions renders an answer needless. You all know, that we are naturally prone, not to go beyond our duty,

but to fall short of it. You know, that all the temptations to which we are exposed exert their influence on the same side. There is nothing to tempt us to be too religions.

There are a thousand things which tempt us to rest satisfied with too little religion. On this side, then, our danger lies. On this side only do we need a guard. Besides, how can any man be too religious? How can any man go beyond the precepts which require him to love God with all his heart; to do everything to his glory; to renounce everything which causes him to sin; though dear as a right hand or a right eye; to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; to deny himself, take up the cross, and to be holy as God is holy? How can any man be more humble, prayerful, thankful and heavenly-minded than the Scriptures require him to be? And even if it were possible to do more than our duty, could any harm result from doing it? Would God punish a man for being too religious, for loving him too well, and serving him too faithfully? Did you ever hear of a man who, on his dying bed, repented of having paid so much attention to religion, or who expressed any fears that God would be displeased with him, on account of his zeal and devotion? Did you ever hear of a man's saying, in such circumstances, Were I to live my life over again, I would be less strict and scrupulous than I have been, in obeying the divine commands? On the contrary, do not even the most pious, reproach themselves, in a dying hour, for their deficiencies; and say, were we to pass through the world again, we would strive to be more faithful and more devoted to God? Surely then, there is no danger of being too religious. Surely the strict course is the safe course. Even if those who pursue it go farther than is absolutely necessary, yet their salvation is sure. In a word, they are safe, even if their opponents are right. But the same cannot be said of the opposite course. If the former are right, the latter are fatally wrong. Though it is not easy to conceive of a man's having too much religion, we can easily conceive of a man's having too little. Though it is impossible to believe, that any one will be punished for going beyond what God requires of us, it is very possible that many may be punished for falling short of it. He only, then, who walks strictly, walks safely.

Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum. He that walks uprightly, walks safely. Of course, every one who walks safely, walks uprightly. The safe course is the upright course. Which is the safe course, we have attempted to show, with respect both to sentiment and practice. We think no one will assert, we are sure no one can prove, that the course which has been described is not safe. And if it is safe, it is right; for rectitude and safety are inseparably connected. Will you not all be persuaded then, to adopt this course? Will you not embrace sentiments which, even allowing they are not true, can expose you to no danger, but which, if true, cannot be rejected without exposing you to destruction. Does any one reply, The course which you have described, though it may be safe, is not pleasant.

If it does not lead to unhappiness hereafter, it must render those who walk in it unhappy here? I answer, all who have made trial of it, deny this assertion, and those who have not, make it without any knowledge of the subject. But allowing for a moment, that this course is attended with some present unhappiness; can this afford the shadow of a reason for exposing ourselves to everlasting wretchedness? No man, who really believes that he has an immortal soul, that he is an accountable creature, will assert that it does. Indeed, every man who pays any regard to the dictates of wisdom or prudence, will say, It is folly, it is madness, to incur the smallest risk of everlasting wretchedness, for the sake of any temporal advantage whatever. If there is only a bare possibility that the threatenings of God's word will be executed, nothing shall tempt me to pursue a

course which may bring them upon my head. Whatever I lose, I will not place my soul at hazard. If any course is safe, I will pursue it, cost what it may.

It has probably already occurred to you, my hearers, that the course which we have now described is the same which has often been recommended to you from this place. It is a course which we can recommend to you with full confidence. We are tinder no apprehensions that any of you will complain of its in the other world, or at the judgment day, for having recommended this course. We are under no apprehensions that you will then say, we required of you more than God requires, or represented the way to heaven as narrower than it really is. If you have then any cause of complaint, it will be that we did not press you with greater earnestness and importunity to walk in this way. To you, my Christian friends, who are pursuing the course which has now been described, the preceding remarks are unnecessary. You need no additional arguments to convince you, that the course you have adopted is both right and safe. It may, however, sometimes afford you pleasure in a dark hour, to reflect, that the system of doctrines and practice which you have adopted, includes every thing which is valuable in all other systems, together with many distinguishing excellencies peculiar to itself. If any are safe, you are so. If any religious system is right, yours is right. But if yours is right, all others are wrong. Hold fast your confidence, then to the end. Be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

S. UNIVERSAL LAW OF FORGIVENESS.

UNIVERSAL LAW OF FORGIVENESS.

If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. Luke 17:3-4. ON hearing this passage read, you will probably conclude, that the duty of forgiving those who injure us, is to be the subject of discussion. That is, indeed, an important subject, and a subject, to the consideration of which our text would naturally lead us. I do not, however, at present propose to discuss it. I wish to make a somewhat different use of this passage. I wish to set before you the proof, which it indirectly exhibits, of our Savior's readiness to forgive, again and again, those who trespass against him. It may, I conceive, be very satisfactorily shown, that he regulates his own conduct by the rule, which he here gives to us, that he is quite as ready to forgive, as he requires us to be, and that however frequently we may have trespassed against him, he will, if we repent of our trespasses, forgive us. And it is highly important, that his people should entertain a deep, heartfelt conviction of this truth; for many of the evils under which they groan, result from the want of such a conviction, or from their not having just and adequate views of the boundless extent of his pardoning mercy. They believe that it is great, but are far from seeing how great it really is.

They believe that he can forgive them once, twice, thrice, and they find that he docs so. But when, after being often forgiven, they are betrayed into new offences, they not unfrequently begin to think that he must be weary of forgiving them, and that it will be little better than an insult to ask him to forgive them again. Hence they dare not implore his forgiveness, dare not approach him with confidence, but remain at a distance, unpardoned, oppressed with conscious guilt, and a prey to gloomy, desponding, apprehensions. They have no courage to attempt the performance of difficult duties, no strength to resist temptations; their comfort is gone, their religious progress is interrupted. Thus a sin, which, had it been immediately repented of and confessed, would have been pardoned, becomes the occasion of many sins, and perhaps of a long course of declension. Now all these evils would be prevented by adequate views of our Savior's readiness to forgive, Of course, it is highly important, that all his people should possess such views. I shall therefore, endeavor to show, that if we trespass against Christ seven times, or any number of times, in a day, and as often turn unto him in the exercise of unfeigned repentance, he will freely forgive us, and restore us to favor. But before we proceed to establish this truth, it will be necessary to make some remarks with a view to illustrate its import, and prevent dangerous mistakes. And,

1. It must be carefully kept in mind, that the rule, which our Savior here gives us, relates not to what men would call crimes, not to those gross public offences, which transgress the laws and disturb the peace of society; nor even to gross injuries, but to trespasses only. We cannot suppose him to mean, that if a man should attempt seven times in a day to murder, or rob us, or to steal our property, and when detected, should say, I repent,—we must forgive him, and suffer him to go at large unpunished. It would be perfectly evident in such a case, that the offender did not repent,

and that his professed repentance was all a pretence. The word, trespass, seems to mean offences of a different kind, and of a more private nature; such offences as a man may be led into repeatedly by misapprehension, or sudden passion, or an unhappy temper. These causes may, it is evident, lead men to offend, and to offend often, those whom they really love. They may lead a relative, a friend, a Christian brother, or one, on whom we have conferred favors, to speak reproachfully, to treat us unkindly, to withhold such acts and expressions of kindness, as we had a right to expect, and in various other ways to wound our feelings. Now offences of this nature, are what our Savior means by trespasses, and such trespasses, however often they may be repeated, we are to forgive, if the offender expresses sorrow and asks forgiveness. It is to offences of a similar nature, committed against Christ by his disciples, that we refer in the present discourse.

He, it will be recollected, sustains with respect to his people various offices and various relations. He is their master, their teacher, their shepherd, their guide, their advocate, their benefactor, their brother, and their friend. He has therefore, a right to be regarded and treated as such. He has a right to expect their obedience, their confidence, their gratitude and love; in a word, their supreme affection and regard. He has also a right to expect, that they will follow him wherever he leads the way; that they ‘will be contented and satisfied with all his dispensations, and that his honor and interest shall lie near their hearts. Whenever his people forget and overlook these rights, when they cease to regard and treat him as he deserves; when their love and gratitude grow cold; when their confidence in him declines, and they indulge doubts and suspicions respecting his faithfulness; when they murmur, repine, or become discontented with his allotments; when they feel little concern for his cause; in short, when they neglect to do what will please him, or indulge in any thing, which they know will grieve or offend him, then they are guilty of trespassing against Christ; for all offences of this nature are directly against him. They are not, strictly and literally speaking, direct violations of the moral law; nor are they committed directly against God the Father, though he is, of course, offended whenever he sees his Son treated unworthily; but they are, in the strictest sense, trespasses against Christ, considered as sustaining all those offices and relations, which were mentioned above. They are trespasses against one, who has condescended to become our brother, benefactor and friend; and he might justly be provoked by them to withdraw and hide himself from the offenders, and to suspend all further bestowal of his favor, all his kind interpositions on their behalf.

Now these trespasses against Christ include all the sins, into which his people are most liable to fall, and almost the only sins, into which they are liable to fall frequently; for Christians will not sin willfully, nor will any Christian be frequently guilty of gross and open offences. But any Christian may trespass against Christ, we cannot say how frequently, in some of the ways, which have just been mentioned. He may daily, and many times in a day, grieve his Savior, by the want of right feelings towards him, or by the exercise of those which are wrong. Many times in a day he may forget him, or think of him without gratitude, confidence and love; at all times his affection for his Savior falls very far short of what he deserves. Now these are the trespasses which, however often repeated, Christ will always forgive, as soon as we turn to him in the exercise of repentance: and should we grieve and offend him by such trespasses seven times, or seventy times seven in a day, and continue thus to multiply our trespasses for years, still, every new exercise of repentance on our part, would be followed by a new act of forgiveness on his. But let no bold presumptuous offender infer from this truth, that Christ will, in like manner, forgive known, willful, deliberate sins.

Let no one suppose, that he may be daily or frequently guilty of fraud, or intoxication, or profaneness, or of any willful transgression, and yet escape punishment by saying at night, I repent. It is most evident, that such a man does not repent, that he is not a disciple of Christ, that he has no part nor lot in the matter. This leads me to remark,

2. That in the rule which our Savior here gives, he requires us to forgive an offending brother on his professing repentance, or on his exhibiting external evidence that he repents. As we cannot search the heart, this external evidence is all which we can justly require or expect; and where this evidence is given, we must charitably hope that the repentance is sincere. But our Savior, it must be recollected, can search the heart. He therefore cannot, and ought not, to be satisfied with any professions or external evidences of repentance, or with any thing indeed but repentance itself. In this respect therefore, the rule before us, considered as adopted by our Savior for the regulation of his conduct, must be slightly varied. We must forgive, when offenders seem to repent. He will forgive, when they really do repent. We remark,

3. That the word, forgiveness, may be used in two senses somewhat different. It may be used to signify either an official act, or the act of a private individual. Considered as an official act, forgiveness is the remission of deserved punishment, or of that punishment, to which transgressors are legally doomed. In this sense, forgiveness can be granted only by one, who has authority to do it. It cannot be granted by a private individual. No private individual, for instance, can forgive or pardon a murderer. No such individual has any right to say that a murderer shall not be punished. But forgiveness, considered as the act of a private individual, is something different. It consists in laying aside all feelings of revenge, and ill will, and displeasure, towards the offender, and in restoring him to the name place in our favor and friendship, which he held previous to his trespass. Now it is more especially, though not exclusively, in the latter sense, that we use the word forgiveness in the present discourse. What we mean to assert is, that Jesus Christ, not in his judicial character, but in his private capacity as an individual, will forgive every penitent, however frequently he may have trespassed against him. In other words, he will entertain no feelings of displeasure towards the penitent offender, will regard him with no coldness, but will restore him to his favor, and receive him with as much affection as if he had never offended him. Not only so, but he will continue to act as his Savior and Advocate, and intercede for him, that he may be forgiven by his Father. This view of the subject will be found to meet exactly the case and the wants of one, who feels conscious that he needs forgiveness, but who is ashamed or afraid to ask it. Ask such a man the cause of his guilty fears and apprehensions, and he will reply, I have sinned against God, I have transgressed his law, and am justly condemned to die. Remind him, that God is ready to forgive every sinner, for whom Christ intercedes, and that Christ is equally ready to intercede for all who trust in him, and he will reply, I am ashamed to ask Christ to intercede for me; I have trespassed against him so often, have so often been forgiven, and abused his kindness afresh, and my whole treatment of him has been such a series of distrust, ingratitude, and want of affection, that it seems as if it must be impossible for him to pardon me again, and as if I ought not to ask it. But let such a man be convinced that his much injured Savior has adopted his own rule with respect to forgiveness, and that he will receive with unabated kindness every penitent, however numerous his trespasses may be, or however frequently he may have been previously forgiven; I say, let him be convinced of these truths, and his difficulties will vanish; he will again repent, and again be forgiven. And when he has thus obtained his injured Savior’s forgiveness, he

will through his intercession obtain forgiveness of God.

Having thus shown what is meant by the assertion, that our Savior regulates his conduct towards his offending people by the rule, which he has given us in the text, and that he is therefore as ready to forgive, as be requires them to be,— we proceed, II. To show what reason we have for believing this assertion. We have reason to believe it,

1. Because the relations, which Jesus Christ has taken upon himself, require that he should regulate his conduct by this rule. By assuming our nature, he has become, in the sense of the text, our brother. Agreeably, we are informed that he is not ashamed to call us brethren. He taught the same truth, when he said to his disciples, I ascend unto my Father and to your Father; for they who have the same father are brethren. He is also said to be the first-born among many brethren. Now if Jesus Christ has condescended to take upon himself the relation of a brother to his people, we may be assured, that he will faithfully perform all the duties of that relation. He has thus in effect bound himself to do it. And since he has taught us, that one duty of a brother is to forgive the trespasses of a penitent brother, however numerous they may be, or however frequently he may repent, we may be sure, that if we are penitent, he will forgive our trespasses, though they should be as numberless as the sands of the sea, and though they may have been repeated after frequent pardons.

Again. By assuming our nature, Jesus Christ is become a man. Of course, he has brought himself under obligations to obey all the laws and precepts, which God has given to man. Agreeably we are informed that being made of a woman, he was made under the law; that is, was made subject to its authority, and placed under obligations to obey it. That it was incumbent on him to obey all other divine precepts, as well as those of the moral law, appears from the reply which he made to John the Baptist previous to his baptism. John had said to him on this occasion, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? Jesus answered, Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. As if he had said, it is incumbent on me to obey every divine precept, and observe every divine institution, and since baptism is a divine institution, I must be baptized. Now if it was incumbent on Jesus Christ, considered as a man, to obey every divine precept, it was of course incumbent on him to obey those precepts, which require us to forgive the trespasses of a penitent brother. And if it was incumbent on him to regulate his conduct by these precepts, we may be perfectly sure, that he has done it, and will do it, since he invariably does what is right.

Once more. When Christ came into this world, as the Savior of lost men, he undertook to be their teacher and guide. As such, it was evidently proper that he should teach them, not only by precept, but by example. Accordingly we are told, that he has left us an example, and that we should walk in his steps. But if he has set us an example, it must be in every respect perfect. It must be a perfect example of forgiveness, as well as of other duties. And that it may be so, it is necessary, that he should exhibit the same readiness to forgive, and to repeat forgiveness, which he requires of us. If he requires us to forgive a penitent brother, though he should trespass against us seven times, or even seventy times seven, he will forgive as frequently those, who trespass against him; for it is impossible to suppose, that in this, or in any other respect, he will suffer himself to be excelled by any of his disciples.

2. We have reason to believe that our Savior has adopted the rule before us, for the regulation of his conduct, because he has, in fact, always acted in conformity with this rule. However frequently any of his disciples may have trespassed against him, they have invariably found him more ready to forgive, than they were to repent. As it respects yourselves, those of you who are his disciples know, that this has been the case. You know, that after you have spent years in grieving and offending him and wearying his patience in ten thousand ways, after you have been a thousand times forgiven, and have then trespassed again; after you had treated him with such unkindness, ingratitude and neglect, as no human friend or relation could have borne, he has still been just as ready to forgive you, when penitent, as if you had never offended him before. And those of you, who have been his disciples for many years, know that he has forgiven you more than seventy thousand times seven trespasses. You have therefore ample reason to believe, and all his disciples have similar reasons for believing, that he regulates his conduct, in this respect, by the rule under consideration. In passing to a practical improvement of what has been said, permit me to remark, that I am well aware of the manner, in which those who are disposed to convert the bread of life into poison, may abuse this subject. I am aware, that from the Savior's readiness to forgive those who trespass against him, they may draw encouragement to repeat their trespasses. Such men there were in the days of the apostles; men, who turned the grace of God into wantonness, and continued in sin, because grace abounded. But the apostles did not therefore conceal the grace of God, neither should we. We are not to conceal truths, which will be beneficial to Christ's real disciples, because his enemies may abuse them. And none but his enemies will abuse the truth which has now been exhibited. To all his real friends it will, if believed, prove most salutary. Nothing tends more powerfully to melt their hearts, to make them ashamed of their sins, to bring them to deep repentance, and to increase their confidence in the Savior, than just views of his readiness to forgive, and to renew his forgiveness, as often as they renew their trespasses. Such views I have now endeavored, my Christian friends, to give you. In improving what has been said, allow me to place before you the Savior as he appears in the light of this subject. See him adorned with every possible excellence and perfection, uttering the kindest invitations, and bestowing freely the richest blessings; blessings, which cost him labors, privations, and sufferings, the greatness of which we can never estimate. See him, in return for these blessings, treated with the most cruel unkindness, ingratitude and neglect; wounded in the house of his friends by those, who have eaten at his table, and trespassed against, on every side, by multitudes in ten thousand ways. See him still forgiving all these trespasses, repeating his forgiveness a thousand and ten thousand times, maintaining, as it were, a contest with his people, which shall exceed, they in trespassing, or he in pardoning. See him invariably gaining the victory in this strange contest, and constraining each of his disciples in turn to exclaim, 0 who is equal, or like to thee, in forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin ! Christian, can you contemplate the spectacle without emotion? Does it excite no shame or sorrow in your bosom? Does it not cause your heart to glow with admiration, and gratitude, and love to your Savior, and with indignation against yourself? And does it not, at the same time, inspire you with confidence to come and seek forgiveness afresh? You expect soon to approach your Master's table. And you will surely wish to meet with a kind reception. You surely will not wish to come borne down with guilty fears, and harassed by jealousies, doubts and suspicions. Believe what you have now heard, and your wishes will be gratified. Believe what you have heard, and you will repent, you will be forgiven, there will be peace between you and your Savior, and you will approach his table with confidence. Let no one

say, I have already been forgiven so often, that I dare not, cannot ask forgiveness again. Let no one offend his Savior by suspecting that he is less ready to forgive than he requires us to be. It is a false humility, or rather it is concealed pride and unbelief, which prevents us from asking forgiveness and leads us to say, I am too unworthy to be forgiven. 0 then, my brethren, indulge not these feelings, but rather turn at once to Christ, receive his forgiveness, and love much, because much is forgiven. And while you receive your pardon, remember what it cost him to procure it. Remember, that it is wet with his own blood, and let it be wet with your tears, tears of deep contrition and repentance.

2. If Christ is so ready to forgive every penitent offender, then nothing can prevent any offender from obtaining forgiveness, but his own refusal to repent. And 0, how great will be the guilt, how terrible, and yet how just, the punishment of every one who fails to obtain forgiveness. The guilt of such a man will be in exact proportion to the greatness of the mercy, against which he has sinned. But there can be no mercy greater than that which Christ displays. Consequently, there can be no guilt greater than that of those, who sin against this mercy. My impenitent hearers, cease, 0 cease, I beseech you, to incur this aggravated guilt. If you repent, you will find the Savior no less ready to forgive you, than he is to forgive his penitent disciples. His language to you is, though you may have not only trespassed, but sinned willfully against me a thousand and ten thousand times; though you may have spent many years in neglecting and offending me, yet I am still ready to forgive you; I wish to forgive you, but I must not, I cannot forgive any, who refuse to repent. My hearers, how is it possible that any man can retain a good opinion of himself, or refrain from despising himself, while conscious that he is insensible to such goodness; that he is not affected by the invitations of a Savior so ready to forgive; that he is refusing to accept of forgiveness and salvation on terms so reasonable, so easy?

How is it possible, that he should not say to himself; surely I must be devoid of all sensibility; I must be a stranger to every ingenuous feeling; I must be incapable of gratitude; I must have a heart of stone, or I could not hear, without emotion, of goodness so unbounded, or refuse to seek forgiveness, when it is offered on terms like these. My hearers, will any of you, can any of you, persist in refusing to comply with these terms! Will you leave this house unpardoned, when the Savior is present and ready to forgive, in a moment, every one who will return to him, saying from the heart, Lord, I repent. It should seem impossible, that any one can choose to go away unpardoned, rather than comply with these terms; and yet it is but too probable, that many will do it. What is still worse, it is but too probable, that some will take encouragement from the Savior's mercy to delay repentance, and repeat their trespasses with hopes of impunity. But if any are tempted to do this, let them recollect, that our Savior cannot regulate his conduct by the rule before us, at his second coming. At his first appearing, he came, not as a judge, but as a Savior; and it was proper that, in this character, he should display unbounded readiness to forgive. But at his second appearing, he will come, not as a Savior, but as a judge; and in that character, he will be constrained to proceed according to the strict rules of justice. Those therefore, who now refuse mercy will then have judgment without mercy. 0, then, seek the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, and sink to that world, where the sound of pardon will never break in upon the wailings of despair.

Chapter 98

S. WHY THE WICKED ARE SPARED FOR A SEASON

WHY THE WICKED ARE SPARED FOR A SEASON "For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" Genesis 15:16

These words were addressed by Jehovah to Abraham, when he first promised to give his posterity the land of Canaan. While giving him this promise God informed him, that it would not be fulfilled till after the lapse of a considerable number of years; and assigned the reason of this delay in the words of our text. In the fourth generation, says he, thy seed shall come into the land again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. As if he had said, The putting of your posterity in possession of the land of Canaan, will be attended with the destruction of its present inhabitants, the Amorites; but they are not yet ripe for destruction; for the measure of their iniquity is not yet full. But when their iniquity is full, your posterity shall return hither, and the Amorites shall be destroyed. This passage, taken in connection with its attending circumstances, teaches us the following important truth; God waits until sinners have filled up a certain measure of iniquity, before he executes the sentence by which they are doomed to destruction; but when this measure is full, execution certainly and immediately follows. To explain, establish and improve this remark is my present design.

I. In explanation of this remark, I observe,

1. That God is under no obligation to suspend the destruction of sinners until the measure of their iniquity is full, or even to suspend it for a single hour. The life of every sinner is already forfeited. By the very first sin of which he is guilty, he transgresses the law of God; and that law pronounces sentence of death on every transgressor. Its language is, the soul that sinneth shall die. This sentence God may with the most perfect justice execute, at any moment, on every sinner. Hence the prophet, speaking in the name of his countrymen says, It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed. This is the same as if he had said, Justice dooms us to be consumed; we deserve to be consumed; it is mercy alone which spares us. This is equally true of all sinners. There is nothing but the sovereign, unmerited mercy of God, which keeps any of them one moment out of everlasting burnings. But God is not obliged to exercise this mercy. He may, if he chooses, adhere rather to the strict rules of justice. He may execute the sentence of a just law, whenever he pleases. He cannot, therefore, be under the least obligation to delay the punishment of any sinner, for a single moment. As in human governments, when a criminal is capitally convicted and sentenced, the supreme executive may order execution to take place immediately, or defer it for a week or a month; so God may take the sinner’s forfeited life this moment, or grant him a reprieve for one or for many years. Such a reprieve he usually grants, as he did in the case of the Amorites. We remark,

2. That when we say, God waits until sinners have filled up a certain measure of iniquity before he destroys them, we do not mean that he waits upon all, till they have filled up the same measure. In other words, we do not mean that all sinners are equal in sinfulness and guilt at the hour of their death. To assert this would be contrary to fact and daily observation. We very often see youthful

sinners, and those not of the worst stamp, cut down and hurried to the retributions of eternity; while others, apparently much more guilty, are suffered to become old and hardened in sin; and to fill up a much larger measure of iniquity. It is therefore evident, that God does not allow all sinners to live till they have filled up the same measure of iniquity. In this, no less than in other respects, he acts like a sovereign. He determines with respect to each particular sinner, how long a season of probation shall be granted him, how large a measure of guilt he shall be allowed to fill up, before sentence of death is inflicted. But when the measure; be it greater or smaller, is full, the sinner's destruction immediately follows. I remark,

3. That every impenitent sinner is constantly filling up the measure of his iniquity; and thus constantly ripening for destruction. This is evident from the fact, that all the feelings, thoughts, words and actions, of the impenitent, are sinful. They are so, because none of them proceed from that supreme love to God, which the law requires. They are so, because none of them are prompted by a desire to promote the glory of God; at the promotion of which we are commanded to aim in every thing we do. Agreeably, the Scriptures assert, that the ploughing of the wicked is sin, and that even the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. Since then, impenitent sinners are constantly sinning, they are constantly filling up the measure of their iniquities. There is not a day, not a waking hour, or moment, in which the dreadful work does not advance towards its completion. Hence the apostle, addressing impenitent sinners, says, Not considering that the goodness of God, that is, his goodness in sparing thy life, is designed to lead thee to repentance, thou, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works. Now sinners treasure up wrath, when they fill up the measure of their iniquities; for since God will recompense very man according to his works, it follows, that those whose sins are most numerous and aggravated will suffer in the greatest degree the wrath of God.

4. Though the measure of every impenitent sinner's iniquity is constantly filling up; it fills much more rapidly in some cases, and at some seasons, than at others. Some sinners appear to sin with great eagerness, boldness and diligence; to sin with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, as if they were determined to see how much guilt they can contract in a short space. Others, who are apparently much less vicious and abandoned, fill up the measure of their sins with equal rapidity, in consequence of enjoying and abusing great religious privileges, opportunities and means of grace. Indeed, it may be laid down as a general rule, from which there are no exceptions, that the measure of every impenitent sinner's guilt fills rapidly, in proportion to the light, the conviction, and the means of moral improvement against which he sins. As the productions of the earth ripen most speedily where they enjoy in the greatest degree a rich soil, frequent showers, and the genial beams of the sun, so sinners ripen most speedily for destruction, when they are favored in the greatest degree with religious privileges and opportunities. When a sinner is visited by some dangerous disease; is brought apparently near to death; is in consequence awakened, alarmed, and led to promise, that should his life be spared, he will devote it to God; and when, on being restored to health, he forgets his promise, and returns to his sinful courses, he adds very largely to his former guilt; more perhaps than he could have done in whole years of uninterrupted health.

Similar remarks may be made respecting those who lose their possessions, their children, or near friends, without deriving any spiritual advantage from the loss. There are, perhaps, no threatenings

in the Bible, more terrible than those, which are denounced against such as do not repent when under the stroke of God's correcting hand. To some who were guilty of this conduct, God says, Surely, this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die. But never do sinners fill up the measure of their guilt more rapidly, than when they sin against conviction; against the remonstrances of an enlightened conscience, and the influences of the Spirit of God. Sinners who are guilty of this conduct, who stifle or lose religious impressions, do more perhaps to fill up the measure of their iniquities, than they had previously done during the whole course of their lives. This, of all sins, approaches most nearly to the sin against the Holy Ghost, that sin for which there is no forgiveness. Having thus endeavored to illustrate, we proceed.

II. To prove the assertion, which was drawn from our text.

1. The truth of this assertion may be proved from other passages of Scripture. St. Paul informs us that the conduct of the Jews tended to fill up their sins always for, he adds, wrath is come upon them to the uttermost. By the mouth of the prophet Joel, God says, Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe, for their wickedness is great. And, using the same figure, St. John informs us that he saw an angel seated on a cloud, having in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple of God, and said to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle and reap, for the time is come for thee to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the great wine-press of the wrath of God.

These passages are of the same import with the remark drawn from our text. The angel with the sharp sickle, represents the instruments which God employs to execute his judgments upon sinners. This angel remained inactive until he received a command to thrust in his sickle and reap; and the reason assigned for this command was, that the harvest of the earth was ripe; or, as the prophet expresses it, that the wickedness of men was great. In other words, the measure of their iniquity was full; and of course they were ripe for destruction. Then, and not till then, they were cast into the wine-press of the wrath of God; a figurative expression, denoting the prison and the punishment which await impenitent sinners, when death shall remove them from the world. The same truths appear to be taught by the parable of the barren fig-tree. This tree was sentenced to be cut down, on account of its barrenness, but a reprieve of one year was granted, at the expiration of which period, if it still remained barren, the sentence was to be executed. So sinners are sentenced to die by the divine law, but they are spared for an appointed time, till all means have been used with them in vain, and the measure of their iniquity is full. Then mercy ceases to plead for them, and death cuts them down, as fit only to serve for fuel to the fire of divine wrath. The axe, says John, is laid at the root of the tree; every tree, therefore, which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire. My friends, every impenitent sinner is a barren tree. The axe of divine justice is laid at its root, and at the appointed time the sentence will go forth, Cut it down! why cumbereth it the ground?

2. The truth of the remark under consideration is further proved, by the history of God's dealings with sinful nations and individuals. Thus in the days of Noah, the longsuffering of God waited while the ark was preparing; but when the appointed limit of one hundred and twenty years was reached, when the guilty inhabitants of the world had filled up the measure of their iniquity, the flood came and swept them all away. Another instance of the same kind we have in the history of

the Israelites who came out of Egypt. They murmured, rebelled; and provoked God in various ways; but were still spared, till they reached the borders of the promised land. Then, just as they were ready to enter it, they rebelled again; and this last act of rebellion filled the measure of their iniquity to the very brim. In consequence, they were turned back into the wilderness, and all above twenty years of age were doomed there to perish, and never to see the land which they had despised; nor could any intercession prevail with God to revoke the sentence. Many similar instances may be found in the history of succeeding generations of the Jews, and of some of their kings; and one, still more striking, occurred in the time of our Saviour. He declares that the generation then living, were filling up the measure of their fathers. Soon after this, it became full; and the nation was destroyed without mercy. I proceed, III. To make some improvement of the subject,

1. From this subject you may learn, my impenitent hearers, why God spares sinners long after their lives are forfeited, and why he spares you. It is because the measure of your iniquity is not yet full. You may, as former generations of sinners have done, encourage yourselves in a sinful course on account of his delay. As the wise man expresses it, Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, your hearts may be fully set in you to do evil. You hear, indeed, the threatenings of God's violated law denounced against you, but you do not yet feel their execution; and like those of old, who asked, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things remain as they were, you may be asking in your hearts, Where are any proofs of God's anger against us to be seen? All things pursue their course. The sun shines brightly over our heads; the showers of heaven descend upon us; the earth produces food in abundance for our support, and sickness and death do not invade us. It cannot be that God is angry, while he thus loads us with favors. But remember, just in this manner were former generations of sinners favored, and just in this manner they encouraged themselves in sin. For one hundred and twenty years before the flood, the sun rose daily, and pursued his accustomed course; the earth brought forth its fruits in abundance, and nothing in nature foretold the impending rain. Thus too it was in Sodom; they ate, they drank, they married and were given in marriage, and knew not till the flood came and swept them all away. Remember our Saviour's declaration, that God causes his sun to shine, and his showers to descend on the evil and unthankful, no less than upon the righteous. Remember, that the wretch who is doomed to be blasted by a thunderbolt, just hears the thunder roll, and sees the vengeful lightnings spending their fury at a distance. He little thinks that the cloud which he sees, thus distantly rising, bears his fate in its bosom. Careless and thoughtless, he pursues his way, while the cloud rises, condenses, blackens, and passes over his head. At length, the destined, fatal moment arrives; the bolt falls, his blackened corpse lies prostrate on the ground, and his naked soul stands trembling before the tribunal of God. So you, my impenitent hearers, now hear the thunder of God's threatenings murmur at a distance. Its flashes daily [to] strike some of your fellow sinners, the measure of whose iniquity is full; but as yet, they strike not you. The measure of your guilt is, however, fast filling up; the last drop which it can contain will soon fall into it, and then death, who is now kept at a distance, will instantly find you out. God says respecting sinners, Their feet shall slide in due tune. Till that due, that appointed time arrives, your feet will seem to stand firm; but then they will slide in a moment, and terrible will be your fall.

Meanwhile, no sinner can form even a probable conjecture, how near the destined moment of his fall may be. He cannot see the measure of his iniquity. He cannot know how large a measure God

may spare him to fill up. He cannot know how many more sins are wanting to fill it. All respecting it is darkness and uncertainty. One thing, however, is certain; that the measure of every sinner's guilt fills much faster than he is aware. Who, says the Psalmist, can understand his errors? That is, who can know how often, or how greatly, he offends? Was there ever a spendthrift, or a man careless of his affairs, whose debts did not increase far beyond his expectations? Much more does the guilt of careless sinners increase beyond all their erroneous calculations. Hence the inspired writers inform us, that the ruin of sinners is often most near, when they imagine it to be at the greatest distance. While they are promising themselves peace and safety, says an apostle, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, and they shall not escape.

And, my hearers, have not many of you, judging even by your own imperfect knowledge, and erroneous standard, reason to fear that your measure of iniquity is nearly full? Reflect a moment, how many days and years you have spent in constantly neglecting and offending God. Think of the sins of childhood, of youth, and of riper years; think of your sins in action, in word, in thought, and in feeling. Think of your sins of omission, as well as of those of commission; how many things you have left undone which you ought to have done. Remember, too, what privileges, opportunities and means of grace you have enjoyed; how many sermons; warnings, and invitations you have slighted; against what light and conviction you have sinned. For many years you have been in a situation peculiarly favorable for filling up the measure of your iniquity. Many, perhaps most of you have been visited with afflictions. Some of you have been brought near to death; some of you have lost property, children and friends; and you have all seen sufficient to convince you of the transient, unsatisfying nature of every temporal object. All of you have lived in a day when religion is reviving, and its influences greatly extending, not only around you, but through the world. Many of you have felt the power of divine truth; your consciences have been awakened; you have been, in a greater or less degree, alarmed; the Spirit of God has invited you, and you have seen many of your relatives, friends or acquaintances, yield to his influence.

Consider all this, and you will, I think, find great reason to fear that the measure of your iniquity must be nearly full. Certainly, if it is not so, your appointed measure is exceedingly large, and, of course, your punishment will be proportionally great; for the cup of wrath which every sinner must drink, will be in exact proportion to the measure of guilt which he has filled up. To those of you who are far advanced in life, these remarks apply with peculiar force. It is certain that according to the course of nature, you cannot have many years to live; it [is] equally certain, therefore, that your measure of iniquity must not only exceedingly large, but nearly full. And O how harrowing, how terrible is the thought, that you have spent a long life in doing nothing but filling up the measure of your iniquity, and of course in treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Should death come, and find you impenitent, better, far better would it be for you to have died in infancy; nay, infinitely better had it been for you never to have been born.

Perhaps the younger part of my impenitent hearers may abuse these remarks. Perhaps you may infer from them that your measure of iniquity is very far from being full; and that you may therefore safely spend a few more years in the practice of. But remember, the young die, as well as the old. Remember that God may have determined to spare you, only till you shall have filled up a comparatively small measure of iniquity. It is a very ancient remark, a remark which has been verified by the observations of many centuries, that God sometimes makes very quick work with sinners. Or, to use the language of inspiration, he finishes the work and cuts it short in

righteousness. And should you live to old age, you may not become religious. You may live curly to fill up the measure of your iniquity. The young, then, as well as the old, have reason to tremble and to repent.

2. From this subject, my hearers; you may learn the indispensable necessity of an interest in the Lord .Jesus Christ. Though you are constantly adding to your sins, to diminish them is beyond your power. You cannot take one drop from the cup of your iniquities. You cannot even refrain from filling it; for while you continue to neglect the Saviour, you are constantly adding sin to sin; your actions, words, thoughts and feelings are all sinful. Yet you must cease to commit new sins, and those which you have already committed must be blotted out, or you will perish forever. Christ alone can enable you to do either. His blood cleanses from all sin; he is able to cast all your iniquities into the depths of the sea; and he can renovate your hearts, and render you holy, so that you shall no longer treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. To him, then, every motive urges you to fly without delay. The delay of a single hour may be fatal. There must arrive a time when the cup of your iniquities will be filled to the brim; when the addition of a single drop will cause it to overflow. With respect to some of you, that time may have arrived. A neglect of this warning, the loss of this Sabbath, may be the additional drop, which shall cause the measure of your iniquities to overflow. Then it will be forever too late. Then Christ himself cannot save you, will not plead for you, but will assent to your condemnation. Now, then, while it is an accepted time and a day of salvation, look to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

3. There is an important sense in which many of the preceding remarks are applicable to Christians. Those of you who have been such for any considerable time, have often, when contemplating your sins, and especially when in a religious declension, been ready to conclude that God would visit you with some severe temporal affliction, as a mark of his displeasure. But instead of this, you have found him returning to you in mercy, healing your backslidings, and putting the song of salvation into your mouths. Having often found this to be the case, you may begin to conclude that it will always be so, and thus you may be insensibly led to become careless and slothful, to think lightly of sin, and not to guard against the first symptoms of declension. But if so, God will, in a terrible manner, convince you of your mistake, and make you to know experimentally that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake him. He remembers, though we are prone to forget, how often he has displayed the sovereignty of his mercy in pardoning us, when we deserved correction; and sooner or later, when the measure of your backslidings shall be full, he will, by some severe temporal affliction or spiritual trial, bring all your sins to remembrance, and teach you that even his children shall not offend him with impunity. It is to his professing people that he says, Because I have purged thee and thou wast not purged, that is, because I have often healed thy backslidings, and cleansed thee from thy sins, and yet thou didst return to them again; —therefore thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee. And permit me, my brethren, to remind you, abuse the present instance of God’s sovereign that should we mercy, we shall have reason to expect some such token of his displeasure. We had often forsaken him, and he had as often restored us. But, unmindful of this mercy, we again forsook him, and departed from him farther than before. Yet he has once more restored to us the joys of his salvation, and visited us with his free Spirit. And now if we forsake him again after this, it will be strange indeed, if he does not visit our iniquities with stripes and our

backslidings with a rod.

S. Waiting for Death

Waiting for Death "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." Joshua 14:14 are the words of Job. The resolution which they express was formed by him when he was in the most wretched state, to which a good man can be reduced. The overwhelming weight of his afflictions, combined with the sudden and surprising manner in which they assailed him, lead previously extracted from him some passionate wishes for a speedy dissolution; and even in this chapter, he cries to God, O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave! But in our text he seems to correct himself, and resolves, whatever might be his afflictions, to bear them patiently, till God's appointed time for removing him from this world should arrive: All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come. My friends, we are all like Job, mortal; like him we may be assailed by severe afflictions, and tempted to wish impatiently for death; but we ought, like him, to check these impatient wishes, and resolve to wait till our change comes. In meditating on this passage I propose, To consider death as a change.

To show that there is a time appointed for us to continue on earth, at the expiration of which, this change will take place.

To state what is implied in waiting all the days of this appointed time.

I. We are here led to consider our death as a change. The word is very impressive and full of meaning. It strongly intimates Job's belief in the immortality of the soul, and in a future state of existence. Were it not for this belief, he would have described death by some other name. He would have called it the end of his being, the termination of his existence. But he speaks of it only as a change; thus plainly intimating that he expected to live after death, though in a different manner. But though death is not the extinction of our being, it is a change; a change so great and important, that perhaps no other figurative expression can be found, more strikingly descriptive of it. In the first place, it is the commencement of a great change in our bodies. To this Job alludes in the context; thou destroyest, says he, the hope of man; thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away. What this change is, I need not inform you. Suffice it to say, that so great is it in itself; so loathsome and shocking in its consequences, that it irresistibly impels us, as it did Abraham, to bury the bodies of our deceased friends out of our sight, however dear they were to us while animated with life; a change, which may well occasion us to say, with Job, to corruption, thou art our father, and to the worm, thou art our mother and our sister. In a word, it is the fulfillment of the sentence, Dust thou art and to dust thou shall return. Look at the body while glowing with health and vigor; look at it again after the animating spirit has fled; look at it when it becomes food for worms; look at it when nothing but a little dust remains; and you will see what a change death occasions in this respect.

2. Death is the commencement of a great change in our mode of existence. Until death, our spirits are clothed with a body, but after death, they exist in a disembodied state, the state of separate spirits. Indeed, death essentially consists in the separation of the soul from the body. Did it produce no other change than this, it might well be called a great change. While in the body, our

mode of existence resembles that of the irrational animals around us. Like them, we hunger, and thirst, and are weary; like them, we need daily supplies of food and rest to support life: and our existence, like theirs, is measured by days and weeks, seasons and years. But after death, our mode of existence will resemble that of angels. We shall no more hunger, nor thirst, or be weary; we shall no more require food or sleep, nor will our existence be measured by the measures of time; for with us time will then have ended.

We shall have entered on eternity, on that ocean which has no shore, landmarks, or divisions, to inform us how far we have proceeded. There, a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. This change in our mode of existence, will be accompanied by a corresponding change in our mode of perception. Here we perceive objects only through the medium of our senses. While in the body, our souls are like a man in prison, through the walls of which a few openings are made, to permit him to discern what passes without. But at death, the walls are thrown down, and the prisoner bursts forth into open day. Then we shall see without eyes, hear without ears, and feel without touch. So far as the nature of the objects which we shall then perceive requires it, the soul will probably be all eye, all ear, all feeling; and its perceptions will, of course, be incomparably more clear and distinct than they now are.

3. At death a great change will take place, not only in the mode, but in the objects of perception. We shall in effect experience a change of place. It is true that, in strictness of speech, spirits cannot be properly said to remove from one place to another, because place has relation to matter, and with matter, disembodied spirits have no connection. Still, as we have no method of designating place, but by referring to the objects which mark that place, and as at death we shall be introduced to an entirely new class of objects, it may without impropriety be said, that death occasions a change of place. At least, it removes its from one world to another. Our bodies, while they bind us to this world, separate us, like an interposing veil, from the world to come. But at death the veil will be rent. The stroke which separates our souls from our bodies, will separate us, at once and forever, from this world and all its perishable objects, and introduce us to a new world, and to new objects of perception. The world to which we shall then be introduced is spiritual and eternal; of course we shall there perceive nothing but spiritual and eternal objects. There will be no color, no sounds, no shapes, nothing that we can touch; yet every object will appear incomparably more real, substantial and durable, than any of the objects which we now perceive. As we now perceive all material, so shall we then perceive all spiritual objects. Of course, we shall then most clearly, constantly and forever perceive God, the Father of spirits and of the spiritual world. This is the first object which will burst upon the aching sight of the soul when it leaves the body. In a moment it will find itself in the presence of the great Sun of the universe, whose beams, like a torrent, pervade immensity and eternity. Still, moon and stars will all have vanished. Earth and its objects will appear to have been suddenly annihilated, and God, God alone, will rush in upon the mind, and fill every faculty, occupy every thought. Above and below, behind and before, wherever the mind can turn itself, or whithersoever roam, it will still find itself in the immediate presence of God; nor, if I may so express it, call the eyelids of the soul ever close for an instant, to shut out the dazzling refulgence of his glory. As companions in admiring, or in shrinking with despair from these glories, the soul will perceive itself to be surrounded by myriads of created spirits, of opposite characters, and will quickly find, that the same God who, to holy spirits, is a refreshing, animating light, is, to the unholy, a consuming fire; that what is heaven to the one, is belt to the

other.

4. At death a great change will take place in our employments, and in the mode of spending our existence. While we dwell in these frail, dependent bodies, they necessarily engross much of our attention, and much of our time; and a large proportion of our exertion is directed to the supply of their wants, the preservation of their health, and the promotion of their comfort. It is well if much time is not wasted in pampering and indulging them, in making provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof: In addition to this, another portion of our time and exertion is directed to the bodies of our dependants; to the wants and concerns of our relatives, and to the general interests of the community. But at death, all these employments will cease. We shall no longer have bodies to provide for, families to care for, or social and relative duties to perform: nor will any part of our existence, as much of it now is, be lost in sleep. Of course all our employments will be of a spiritual nature.

We shall be constantly engaged in thought, in reflection, in meditation, in the most intense exercise of feeling; and our feelings and meditations must of course be pleasant or painful, according to our characters. Here, our attention is diverted from ourselves by a thousand objects, so that after a long life, men often die ignorant of their own character. But there, our attention will be turned to ourselves. Then, if not before, we shall be made to know ourselves, and shall be our own constant companions. Here, we can fly from uneasy thoughts, from the reproaches of conscience, froth guilty fears, to scenes of business and pleasure. But in the world to which death removes its, there will be no buying and selling, no planting or building, no places devoted to business or amusement, no possibility of escaping from ourselves for a single moment. What a change is this, to the thoughtless unreflecting part of mankind!

5. At death, a great change will take place in our state and situation. This world is a world of trial. While we remain in it, we are in a state of probation. Our days are days of grace. We enjoy seasons and offers of grace; we hear the gospel of grace, and are permitted and invited to approach the throne of grace. But at death, this state of trial and probation terminates, and we enter on an unchangeable state, a state of reward and retribution. Then the Sun of righteousness sets; the day of grace ends, the door of mercy is shut, and Christ exchanges, with respect to us, his character of Saviour, for that of Judge. Death, then, is not only a great change, but in a most important sense, our last change. Everything in the other world is, like that world, unalterable. Death stamps our characters as he finds them, and sets upon them the seal of eternity, and while he fixes the seal, the unchangeable God exclaims, Let him that is unjust, be unjust still; and let him that is filthy be filthy still; and let him that is righteous be righteous still; and let him that is holy be holy still. But though death will thus stamp our characters and fix them unalterably, yet there is,

6. One sense in which it will produce in them a great change; a change however, not of kind but only of degree; a change not from bad to good, or from good to bad, but from good to better, and from bad to worse. While men remain in this world, there is a mixture of imperfection in the characters of the good, for they are here renewed but in part; and on the contrary there are many appearances of goodness in the characters and conduct of the wicked. They may have kind relative and social affections, together with what are called amiable, natural dispositions. They may feel religious impressions, in a greater or less degree; and by the influence of a pious education, of conscience, of human laws, and of a regard to the opinions of others, they may be

induced to live a moral and even apparently a religious life. But at death, all the imperfections which here mar the characters of the righteous, and all the fair appearances of goodness which adorn the characters of the wicked, will be forever removed. To him that hath, says our Saviour, shall more be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have. Then the graces of the Christian, which had previously been opposed, and fettered, and thwarted by various causes, connected with their situation in this world, will rise at once to the perfect standard of heaven; while the various passions and propensities of the wicked, which here only bud and blossom, will, in consequence of the removal of all restraint, bring forth their ripe but deadly fruit; so that while, from the death bed of a Christian there will rise up an angel, with an angelic song in his mouth, from the death bed of the sinner there will start up a fiend, with the blasphemies of hell bursting from his lips.

Hence we may add, lastly, that at death we shall experience a great change with respect to happiness and misery. We shall bid a final adieu to one or to the other; we shall feel in a higher degree one or the other, as soon as we leave the body. How great, how happy was the change which the beggar Lazarus experienced, when he was freed in a moment from his wounds, and from his wants, and carried by angels from the rich man's door to the mansions above. How great, how terrible was the change which the rich man suffered, when he was torn from his wealth, his habitation, his banquets and gay companions, and the next moment lifted up his eyes being in torments. Similar changes take place whenever the righteous and the wicked die. It is true that, even in this life, holiness tends to produce perfect happiness, and sin to occasion perfect misery. But with respect to both, the tendency is here opposed in various ways. The bodily infirmities and the outward trials and afflictions of the righteous, their remaining sinfulness and ignorance, the prevalence of sin in the world around them, and anxiety for the salvation of their friends, cause them, while in this tabernacle, to groan being burdened. But from all these evils, death frees them in a moment. It removes them from all that they hate or fear. It brings them to all which they love or desire, and of course renders their happiness complete. On the other hand, many causes conspire to prevent the wicked from being completely wretched, and even to give them something like happiness in the present life. They love this world, and in some degree they enjoy it. They find a sort of pleasure in the gratification of their appetites and passions; in the success of their enterprises; in the accumulation of property, and in the society of their sinful companions; and they contrive, in various ways, to avoid those things which would disturb their false peace. They can without much difficulty banish reflection, quiet their consciences, and maintain a delusive hope that all will be well with them at last. But at death, all these sources of enjoyment will be dried tip. They will be torn from all that they loved, deprived of every gratification, and separated from all their present pursuits and employments. Their false hope will be succeeded by despair; conscience will become a wakeful, immortal worm to gnaw them forever; a distinct and vivid recollection of their sinfulness, folly and madness will fill them with agonies of shame and remorse, while the constant sight of that infinite, eternal Being whom they have disobeyed and slighted, together with the sense of his anger, will scorch and blast them like a consuming fire. Such is the change which takes place at death.

II. There is an appointed time allotted to each of us on earth, at the expiration of which the change will take place. This is a truth which our text plainly intimates, and which is fully confirmed by other passages of revelation. We are told that the number of our months is with God; that he sets us

bounds which we cannot pass; that man has a day which he must accomplish; that our times are in God's hand, and that he has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of our habitation. Indeed, we must allow that God has set to every man an appointed time, or deny the providential government of the universe. For when we consider the important influence which the continuance or termination of a life often has over the concerns, not only of individuals but even of nations, we cannot fail to perceive, that if we take such an event out of God's hands and counsels, we do in effect deprive him of the government of the world, and reduce him to the condition of a mere spectator. Indeed, had he not given men an appointed time on earth, he could not foresee and predict as he often has done, the day and hour of their death. Man then has an appointed time to continue on earth, at the expiration of which the change of which we are speaking will take place. This leads us to inquire, III. What is implied in waiting all the days of our appointed time. This evidently implies,

1. Waiting till God shall see fit to release us, without voluntarily hastening our death, either in a direct or indirect manner. There have been frequent instances in which persons who were weary of life, but who did not choose to die by their own hands, have thrown themselves in the way of danger, or exposed themselves to infectious disorders, or refused, when ill, to use any means for their recovery, with a view to hasten the approach of death. For all these indirect methods of suicide, as well as to direct acts of violence upon our own lives, the resolution in our text is evidently opposed; and since it is not lawful to wish for what it is not lawful to attempt, it is equally opposed to all impatient, passionate wishes, that death would hasten his approach. Waiting all the days of our appointed time for this change, implies,

2. An habitual expectation of it. No man can be said to wait for an event which he does not expect, nor can we be properly said to wait all our days for death, unless we live in habitual expectation of it. This expectation must be sufficiently strong to influence our conduct, to make us live in some measure as frail, dying creatures, who have such a change before them, ought to live; to induce us, in the words of the apostle, to weep as though we wept not, to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, to buy as though we possessed not, and to use the world as not abusing it; knowing that our time is short, and that the fashion of this world passeth away. He, who, instead of this, seldom thinks of, and perhaps never realizes his mortality, who lives as if he expected to live here forever; who weeps for worldly afflictions, as if he had lost his all; who rejoices in temporal prosperity, as if it were eternal; who buys and grasps worldly objects, as if he were never to lose them; call with no shadow of propriety, be said to wait till his change shall come.

3. Waiting for this great change implies habitual care to preserve and maintain such a frame of mind, as we should wish to be in when it arrives. This I presume none will deny. A man who is waiting for the arrival of any person, or for the occurrence of any event, always takes care to be ready and prepared for it.

Much more, then, may it be expected that he who is waiting for such a change as we have been describing, a change which can take place but once, and which in its consequences is to last forever, will take measures to prepare for it; to acquire and maintain such a state of mind as he would wish to be found in at its arrival. Whatever preparation is necessary he will take care to make. Whatever work is to be performed, he will be careful to have done; or at least to have it in such a state that he can, at any moment, if called, give it up into his master's hands, without

incurring the charge of indolence or unfaithfulness. But what, it may be asked, does all this imply? What is the necessary preparation, what is the frame we ought to be in at death? My friends, let your own reason answer, and if reason is at a loss, let revelation assist her.

It is abundantly evident from what has been said of this change, what preparation is necessary for it, what frame of mind we ought to cultivate. If at death our bodies are to return to their dust, then our bodies ought evidently not to engage all our attention. If we are at death to be removed from this world to another, then we ought to think more of that world than of this. We ought to obtain all the information respecting it which is in our power; we ought not to lay up all our treasure, nor even the chief part of our treasure here, but if possible to lay up treasure and secure friends, in the world to which we are hastening; and where we are to live forever. If we are at death to leave all worldly employments, and to spend our time, or rather our eternity, in spiritual employments, with spiritual objects; we ought to acquire a relish for such objects and employments.

We ought to be able to spend time happily in solitude, in religious contemplations, in prayer and praise; for if we cannot spend a day, or even an hour, happily, in these employments on earth, how can we spend a happy eternity in them, beyond the grave? Above all, if at death we go into the immediate presence of God, and if that presence will be a source of infinite, eternal happiness or misery to us, according to our characters, we ought to acquire that character with which God is pleased, the character of a penitent believer in Christ; a character in which that holiness which is the essence of God's moral perfections, decidedly predominates. In a word, we must, like the apostle, count all things else as loss, that we may win Christ, and be found in him, not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is of God by faith, looking and waiting for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. In this way alone, can we obtain the pardon of our sins and the favor of God; in this way alone become meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

He who has made this preparation, he who has lived like a pilgrim and stranger here on earth, looking not at things seen and temporal, but at things unseen and eternal, whose treasure and whose heart is in heaven, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, and who is daily uttering the language, anticipating the employments, singing the songs, and breathing the spirit of heaven; he is in the proper frame, the very frame in which every truly wise man would wish to be found when death comes.

Lastly. Waiting for our change may be justly considered as implying some degree of desire for it. This desire will not of course be impatient; or prompt a wish to control the will, or alter the purpose of God respecting us.

Still, he who is waiting for such a change as the Christian will experience at death, cannot but wait with some degree of desire. His treasure is in heaven. How can he but desire to possess it? His heart is in heaven. How can he but desire to be where his heart is? His nearest, friends and relatives are in heaven, friends and relatives to whom he is bound by everlasting bonds. How can he but desire to join them? Perfect freedom from all the evils which now afflict, perfect holiness and happiness await him in heaven. How can he but desire to possess them? Above all, his God and Saviour, he of whom he can say, whom have I in heaven but thee, and what is there on earth which I desire beside thee? this God, this Saviour is in heaven; and how call he but desire to be with them? He will, he must desire it, but he will desire it patiently, submissively. If we hope for that

we see not, their do we with patience wait for it.

Having thus shown what is implied in waiting for our change, I will state some reasons, why we should wait for it in this manner.

1. As a reason why we should so far wait for our change, as not to desire it impatiently, or hasten it by violence, I shall only mention one passage of Scripture. Wo unto you that desire the day of the Lord, to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is as darkness, and not light. As if a man fled from a bear, and a lion met him; or as if he fled into the house, and leaned upon the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness and not light, even very dark and no brightness in it! I need not tell you that by the day of the Lord, is here meant the day of death. Let this passage be a warning, should you ever be tempted to hasten its approach. As a motive which should induce us to wait for this change in the manner above described, I would mention,

2. The perfect reasonableness of so doing. It is reasonable that we should wait for death on account of its certainty and importance. It is reasonable that we wait habitually and constantly for it, because it may come at any moment. It is reasonable that we should wait all the days of our appointed time, for if we fail in this respect, if we are not found waiting when death cones, we lose all. It is only those who endure to the end that will he saved. It is only to him who is faithful unto death, that Christ promises a crown of life. So perfectly reasonable indeed is this duty that I shall add but one more reason for performing it, viz:

3. The command of Christ, with its attending promises and threatenings. Stand, says he, with your loins girt about, and your lamps trimmed. Be ye like servants who wait for their Lord, that when he cometh ye may open to him immediately for ye know not at what hour the Son of man cometh. Blessed is that servant whom he shall find so doing. My brethren, through the great change we have been considering, you must all pass. Your bodies must be changed. In a few years, of all the bodies which now fill this house, nothing but a few hands full of dust will remain. Your mode of existence will be changed. Some disembodied, but still living spirits, will pass into a new and untried state of being. Your place of residence will be changed. The places which now know you will soon know you no more. Another assembly will fill this house. Other inhabitants will dwell in your habitations. Other names will glitter over the marts of business, and yours will be transferred to the tombstone. And when this world has lost you, another will have received you. After you are dead and forgotten here, you will be alive, and capable of exquisite happiness or misery elsewhere. After you are removed from all the objects which now affect you, a new world, new objects, new beings will rise upon you, and affect you in a manner far more powerful than you are or can be now affected.

Above all, when this world and all that it contains sink from your view, God, that Being of whom you have heard so much, and perhaps thought so little, that being who formed and now invisibly surrounds and upholds you, will burst in upon and fill your mind, fill it with delight inconceivable, or agony unutterable, according to the state of your moral character. And as it affects you the moment after death, so it will continue to affect you forever; for neither his character nor yours will ever change. Long after all remembrance of you shall have been blotted from the earth, during all the remaining centuries which the still may measure out to succeeding generations of mortals, you will still be battling with delight, or writhing in agony, in the beams of Jehovah’s presence. And even after this world shall have ceased to exist, when sun and stars are quenched in endless

night, you will still continue the same individual, conscious being that you now are, and will still bear, and through eternity will continue to bear, that stamp of moral character with all its consequences, in which you are found, and in which you will be unchangeably fixed by death.

Choose, then, now, my hearers, what you will be; for now you have an opportunity. And in making a choice, remember that it is for eternity. Remember, too, that the temper, the employments, the associates which you choose on earth, you choose forever. Say, then, what shall be your employment on earth? Shall it be spiritual and heavenly, or sinful and earthly? Shall it consist in the service of God, or of sin? Who shall be your associates on earth? shall they consist of the servants of the neglecters of Christ? What shall be your temper and spirit on earth? Shall it be the spirit of the world, or the spirit that is of God? In a word, what will you be through eternity? A spirit of light, or a fiend of darkness?

If you hesitate in your choice, pause a moment, and look back to those who have passed through the great change before you. Think of the patriarchs who died before the flood. They have been perfectly happy for more than four thousand years, yet their happiness has but just commenced. Think of the sinners who died before the flood. For more than four thousand years they have been completely wretched, and yet their misery has but just commenced. So, my hearers, there will come a time when you will have been happy or miserable for four thousand, or four times four thousand years, and yet your heaven or your hell will be but beginning. Who then can pretend to describe or conceive the greatness, the importance of the change which is before you, or the consequence of the choice which you have to make?

If you make the choice, and adopt the resolution of Job, and wait all the days of your appointed time, till your change come, that change will be a happy one, and you will be able at Christ's second coming to say, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. But if you make a different choice, if you compel Christ still to say of you, 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; your change will be unutterably dreadful. Fear will come upon you as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; then you will call on God but he will not answer; you will seek him early, yet you shall not find him.

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