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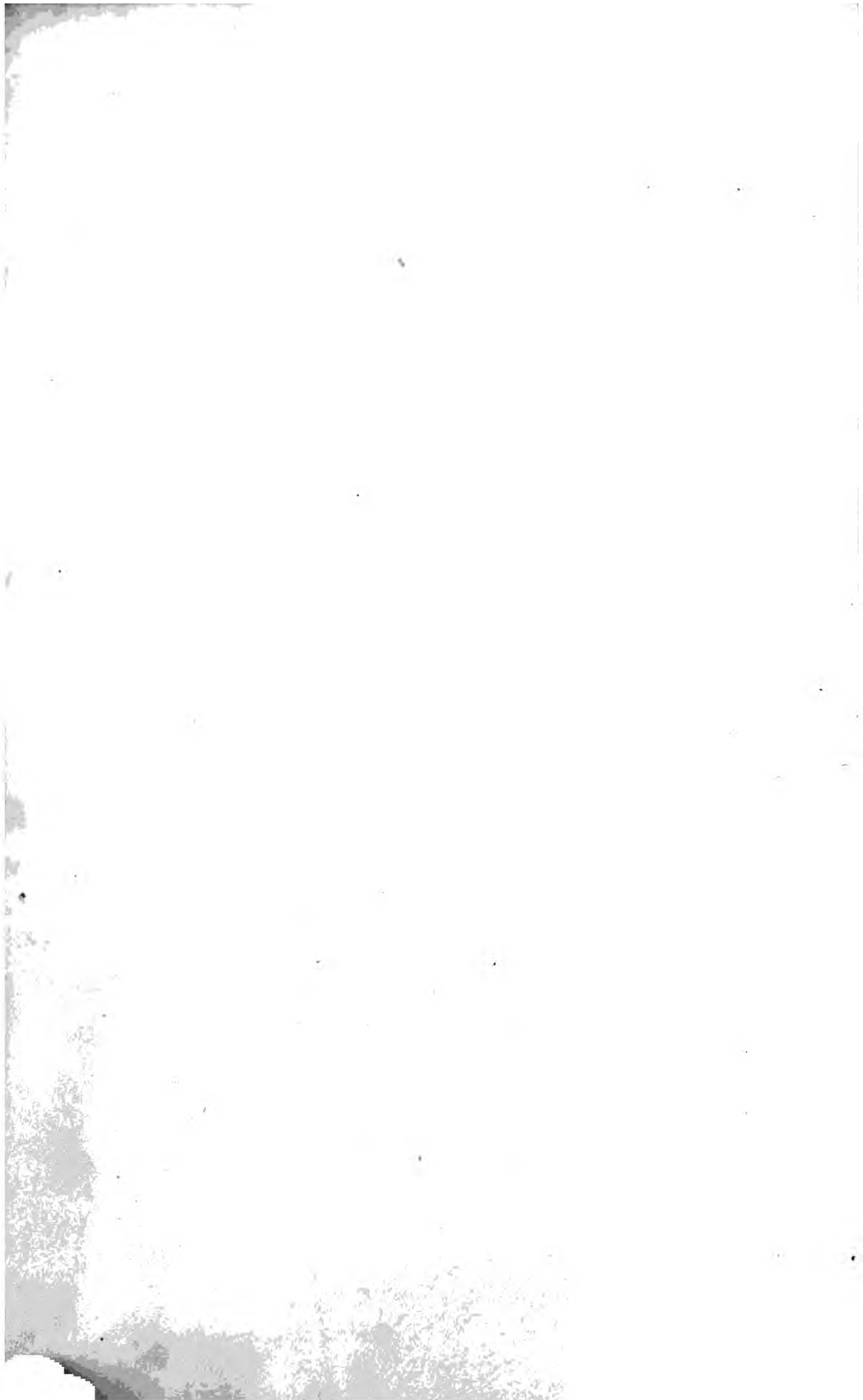
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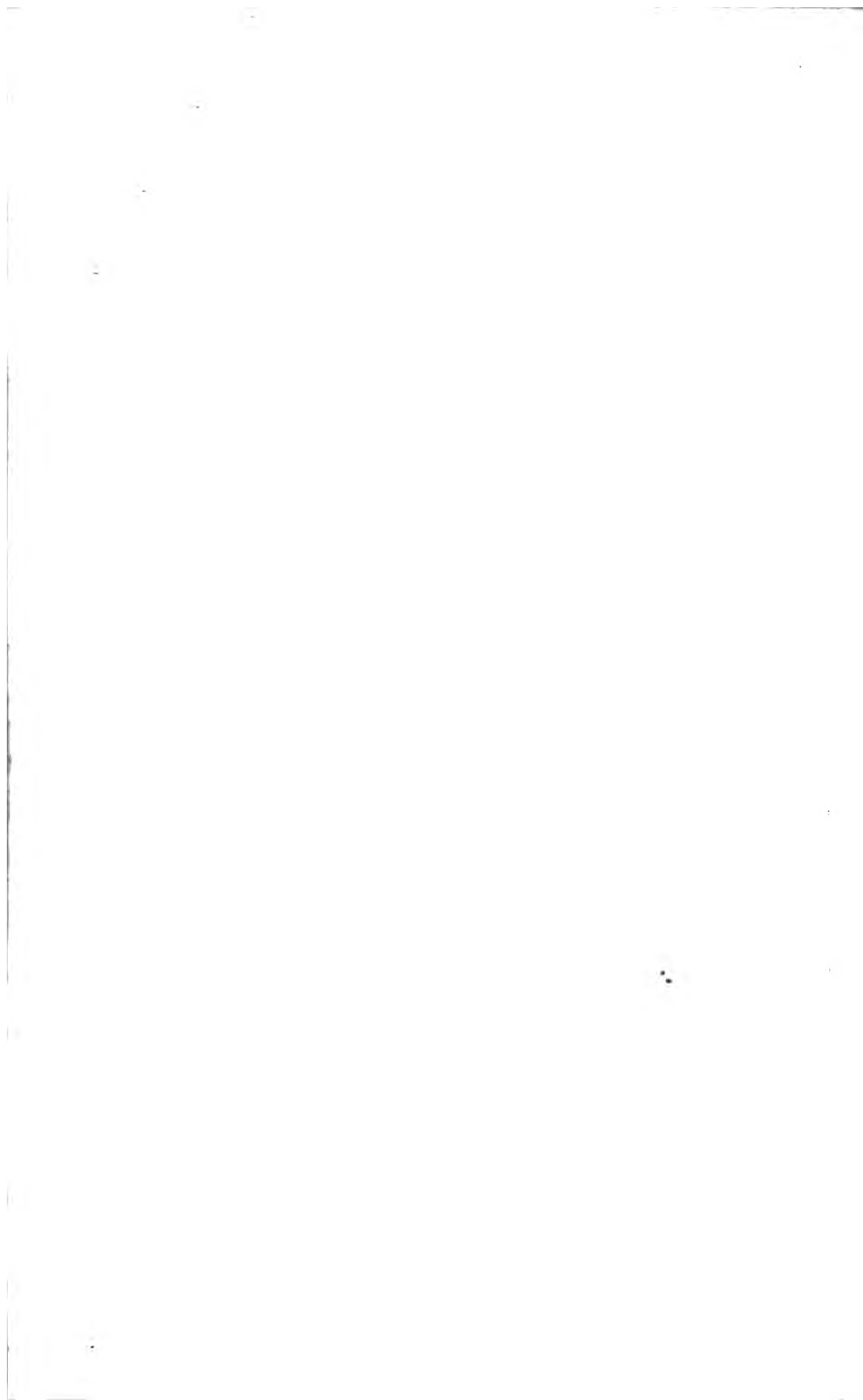


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TWENTY-FOUR

S E R M O N S,

ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

PUBLISHED FOR THE BENEFIT OF A CHARITY SCHOOL.

BY THE REV. BRIAN HILL, M. A.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Author has solicited Subscriptions for the Publication of the following Discourses, in the hopes of raising a Fund for the support of a Charity School in the Village of Weston, where he himself resides. They have been delivered, in the same Village, to Congregations, of which the poor and unlearned form no inconsiderable part, and, occasionally, in other places, where, it is believed, they have, in general, been favourably received; on which account the Author has been encouraged to lay them before the eye of the Public; and he humbly hopes they will, under the blessing of God, prove useful to those, who shall think it worth their while to give them a perusal.

Weston, December 1, 1821.



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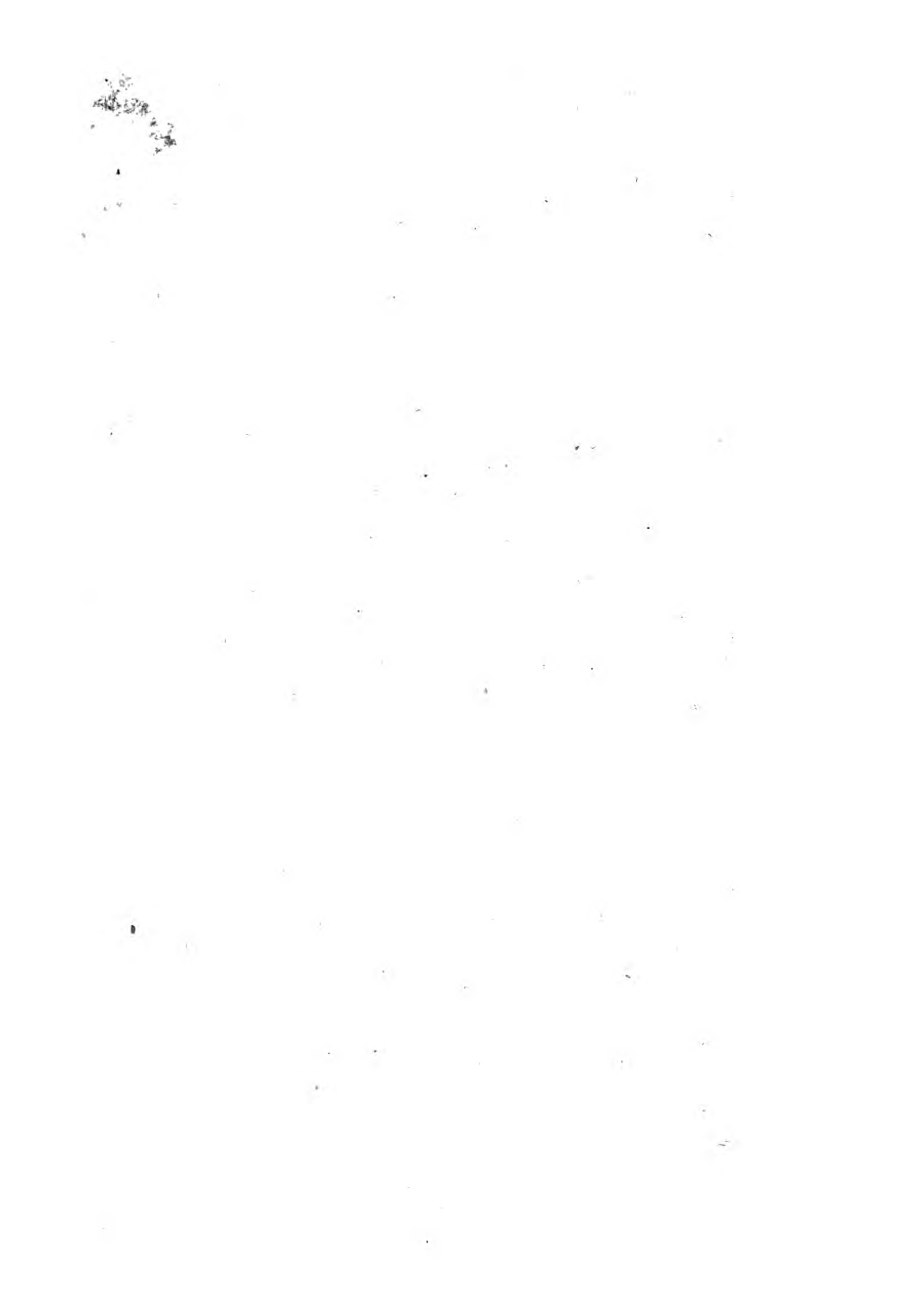
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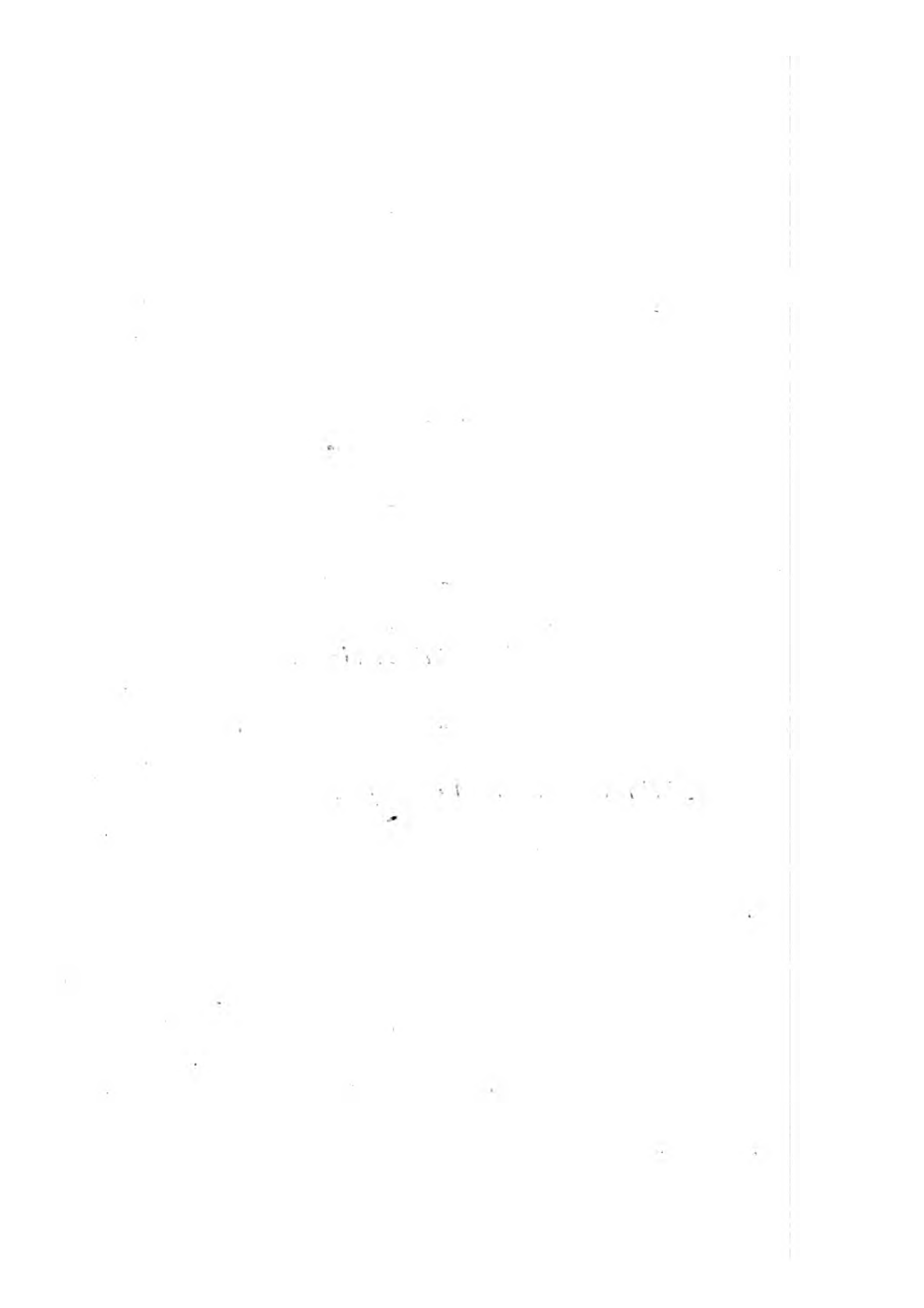
THE

BLESSINGS ATTENDANT

ON A

MERCIFUL DISPOSITION.

B



SERMON I.

MATT. V. 7.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

I RECOMMEND the Christian Religion, because it will make every man happy, who receives it. It will enable him to mend a wicked world, and to diffuse a happiness, similar to that which he himself possesses, among multitudes of his fellow creatures, labouring under the calamities of poverty and distress, or under the more exquisite miseries of mental sorrow. There is no comfort, which the religion of the Gospel does not afford; no distress, which it does not alleviate; and therefore it is worthy the attention of all, who value present and eternal happiness. “Blessed (says our text) are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

In discoursing upon these words, I shall set before you,

- I. The inducement we have to be merciful;
- II. Mention some particulars, wherein that gracious disposition consists; and

III. Explain the nature of that reward, which is here promised to those who are found in the exercise of it.

First, then, I am to set before you the inducement we have to be merciful. This arises from considering the mercy, which God has already shewn, and which he still continues to shew, to us. If we meditate upon the infinite perfections of our Creator, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and can delight in nothing but what is holy, just, and good, how must we poor sinful creatures be astonished at his long suffering and forbearance! Why is it, that we do not at this time lift up our eyes in torments, but that God is gracious, and “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”^{*}? Should I ask, are you sinners? You will not, I think, say “no.” Some of you are, I fear, great transgressors. You are living in continual opposition to God’s holy law, and, though frequently exhorted to change your course of life, are regardless of every admonition. But, “thinkest thou this, O man, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But, after

^{*} 2d Peter, iii, 9.

thy hardness, and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"*? Consider, now, how many sinners like thyself have been cut off in the midst of their wickedness; some, without a moment's time to call for mercy, and others, stupid and insensible as the brutes which perish. Why art thou spared? Is it not because God is merciful; and is not the consideration of such goodness sufficient to stop thy mad career? Or, wilt thou fly in the face of thy best friend, and still abuse thy most gracious benefactor? Wilt thou challenge the Almighty to do his worst, and expose thyself as fuel to the devouring flames? Stop, my friend, and do not thus so wildly rush upon destruction.

But, it is not the notorious sinner alone that I would have mindful of the mercy of God. There is not a man upon earth, let him be ever so holy, who has not reason to say, "It is of the Lord's mercies" I am "not consumed, because his compassions fail not."† If we consider only our sins of omission, we shall see reason to wonder at the divine patience; and, to prove this, let it only be considered, how forgetful we are of God, how irreverent in his sacred presence, and how neglectful of him, who is our greatest friend and benefactor.

* Rom. ii, 3, 4, 5.

† Lam. iii, 22.

1st, We are forgetful of God. He is our Creator, and "in him we live, and move, and have our being."* He preserves us alive, feeds us by his bounty, and guards us by his providence; yet, who thinks of these things? Are not our minds almost continually occupied with trifles, unnecessary even to our present happiness? But, suppose that God should forget us, as we forget him, and, only for a moment, withhold his sustaining hand. Then, as it is said *Job xxxiv. 14*, "If he gather to himself his spirit, and his breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust." We must acknowledge, that while we, times without number, have been regardless of God, he has been regardful of us, and may reckon it as a great mercy, that we are still living to repent of our folly, and implore his pardon.

2ndly, We are irreverent. It becomes us, surely, not only to acknowledge that God is ever present, but to conduct ourselves in such a manner as to prove, that we verily believe, that to him all desires are known, and that from him no secrets are hid. Can we believe that he is holy, just, and good, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and yet cherish it in our hearts? What arrogance! What presumption! But, what do I say of *cherishing*

* Acts xvii, 28.

iniquity. Can we presume to harbour one distant wish for that, which is contrary to his most Holy Will? Yet, have not anger, lust, covetousness, and other unlawful dispositions been frequently in our hearts? But, still we are spared, still we live; certainly as monuments of the loving kindness of our God.

3rdly, We are neglectful. God is infinitely good, and bestows his goodness upon mankind through his son Jesus Christ our Lord. Without him we are in a miserable situation; our enjoyments are uncertain, and we have no hope beyond the grave; but the Gospel, by which life and immortality are brought to light, not only alleviates the sorrows of the life, which now is, but secures us that which is to come, and invites all, who hear the joyful sound, to become partakers of the blessings which it confers; yet, by how many have these glad tidings been considered as idle tales! God has sent his own son into the world for our salvation; his son has died that we may live, and his spirit has been sent forth to strive with men, by signs, and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Ghost: but neither the might of the Father, the love of the Son, nor the influence of the Spirit, make a due impression upon us. We are very busy about temporal concerns, which appear to be innocent; yet are they not

so, if they occupy so much of our time, as to make us neglect the great salvation. Oh! if God were to neglect us, as we have neglected him, who could be partaker of his Redemption from sin, and death, and hell? Well may we say, considering our sins of omission only, "Lord have mercy upon us miserable sinners."

But, now, seeing we live, that we are favoured with innumerable blessings, and are still invited to become partakers of everlasting life, what shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits? Must we not be impelled by the motives of love and gratitude to devote ourselves to his service, and reckon it our honour and happiness to be animated by those tempers, which shone brilliantly in the life of Christ our Saviour, and which he recommends to all those, who call upon his name and profess themselves to be his disciples. Having, then, such a motive to be merciful, let us see in what that holy disposition consists.

1st, It may be observed in the forgiveness of all injuries. As Christ went about doing good to all mankind without distinction, as he suffered for the salvation of the world, and prayed for his bitterest enemies, yea, for his very murderers, so must the Christian. "How oft (says Peter) shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?" "I

say not unto thee (replied Christ) until seven times, but until seventy times seven"*—that is, forgive him without any restriction; for never canst thou forgive to thy fellow creature the half, no, nor the ten thousandth part of what thy God has forgiven thee. We may not, without such a temper, use our daily prayer, in which we say "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." How can the man, who does not pardon his brother from his heart, take such words into his lips? Surely, it becomes every one, who bears the name of a Christian, to examine himself concerning this matter, lest he should be asking for curses instead of blessings, from Almighty God; for, to say "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," while we harbour the smallest portion of ill-will to any person living, is as much as to say, "Lord, we do not pardon our enemies, therefore, do not thou pardon us."

2ndly, The temper of mercifulness consists in the communication of good. As the Christian considers that he owes his very being, as such, to Christ, and, as, without him, he is weak and helpless, but, by him, strong and powerful, he desires that the life of Christ may be manifested in him, prays that all selfishness

* Mat. xviii. 21, 22.

may be overcome, and that the glory of God may be displayed in every action; while, at the same time, he says most sincerely "It is by the grace of God alone that I am enabled to glorify his holy name." Hence, with much cheerfulness and alacrity he will imitate the example of his blessed Master, by going about doing good, and never rejoice more than when he has an opportunity of shewing his love to him who hath loved him, and given himself for him. But, if he be sincere in his religious profession, he must serve his Lord faithfully, devoting to him his Time, his Talents, and his Possessions.

1st, His Time must be devoted to God. Every man has his calling in life, and is commanded not to be slothful in business; yet, one reason why he is commanded to be diligent is, that he "May have to give to him that needeth;"* for, if he love not his neighbour, and do not to all men as he would they should do unto him, he can know little of the love of God. Many complain of want of time, who, if they would take more pains to redeem it, would find many opportunities for benevolent purposes. They might then visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and wipe away many a tear from the mourner's eye.

* Eph. iv. 28.

Suppose we were to enter into an examination of our conduct for one week only, I am afraid we should find many, too many, lost moments, which, summed up together, would amount to hours at the week's end; and if this should be the case, through self-indulgence of any kind, we certainly ought to reform our conduct. Surely, we must confess such a reformation to be just and necessary, unless we can prove that we can be too grateful to God, or that it is possible to live too much to his glory.

2nd, Our Talents must also be devoted to God. These are very different in different persons, yet ought they to be employed to the same purpose in order to display the manifold wisdom of God. Whenever a man determines to dedicate these to the Lord, he affords a strong proof that the pure religion of the Gospel has taken possession of his heart, because, it is naturally the wish of man to please himself, and to appear amiable in the eyes of his fellow creatures. Some worldly object is the desire of every unregenerate man. If he be possessed of a fine genius, or a great capacity, then he seeks admiration for his wit and understanding. If he be of a plodding mechanical turn, then his excellent inventions and curious machines are to gain the applause of the artist,

and to add riches to his store ; or, if he have a great memory, and have read much, he must then be praised by the learned, or astonish the ignorant with his profound erudition. But, all these, and various other talents, which might be named, will the Christian lay out to the glory of God. He will consider that he is born to promote the happiness of Society, and therefore he will exercise his genius in devising plans conducive both to their present comfort and to their eternal happiness. Were many, who are ambitious to obtain dignity and honour, equally ambitious of doing good, we should soon see a pleasing difference in the dwellings of the poor, both with respect to their fortune and their morals, which degenerate through the indolence and neglect of those whose peculiar duty it is to guard against and repress sin and wickedness of every description. But, as some may be ready to think they are under no obligation to attend to these things, upon the supposition that they can do very little for the benefit of mankind, I think it incumbent upon me to desire, that they will, nevertheless, do all they can. They know it is their duty to do unto all men, as they would they should do unto them, and if they would but turn their attention to the matter, I am

persuaded they would not only prove themselves Christians, but also turn bad times into good ones.

3rd, Our Possessions must also be devoted to God. As he ordereth the course of all events by his providence, making poor, and making rich, it would be heathenism to maintain, that we do not hold our goods by his bounty; and then, surely, we must allow, that they ought to be spent to his glory. "One great reason (says the pious Mr. Law) for devoting all our "estate to right uses is this: because it is "capable of being used to the most excellent "purposes, and is so great a means of doing "good; if we waste it we do not waste a trifle, "but that which might be made as eyes to the "blind, a husband to the widow, and a father "to the orphan, so that if we part with our "money in foolish ways, we part with a great "power of comforting our fellow creatures," and, I may add, of *proving ourselves to be the Disciples of Jesus Christ.*" "If there be "nothing so glorious as doing good, then "nothing can be so glorious in the use of our "money, as to use it all in works of love and "goodness, making ourselves friends, and fathers, and benefactors to all our fellow "creatures, imitating the divine love, and

“ turning all our power into acts of generosity,
“ care, and kindness to such as are in need
“ of it.”

“ If a man had eyes, and hands, and feet,
“ that he might give to those that wanted
“ them; if he should either lock them up in a
“ chest, or please himself with some needless
“ or ridiculous use of them, instead of giving
“ them to his brethren that were blind and
“ lame, should we not justly think him an in-
“ human wretch? If he should rather choose
“ to amuse himself with these things, than to
“ follow the precepts of Christ by giving them
“ to those that wanted eyes and hands, should
“ we not justly reckon him mad? ”*

“ Now money has very much the nature of
“ eyes and feet. If we either lock it up in
“ chests, or waste it in needless and ridiculous
“ expences upon ourselves, whilst the poor
“ and distressed want it for necessary uses; if
“ we consume it in the ridiculous ornaments of
“ apparel, while others are starving in naked-

* In this quotation from Mr. Law I have omitted a few words. He speaks of man *entitling himself to an eternal reward* by acts of charity; and, again, of *purchasing for ourselves everlasting treasures in Heaven*. But such bliss is not to be purchased by money, neither have we any *title* to it, but by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Yet, without such devotion and holiness as are here recommended, we have no reason to expect an admission into the Kingdom of God.

“ness, we are not far from the cruelty of him,
 “ who chooses rather to adorn his house with
 “ hands and eyes, than to give them to those
 “ that want them. If we choose to indulge
 “ ourselves in such expensive enjoyments, as
 “ have no real use in them, such as satisfy no
 “ real want, rather than to act like the Dis-
 “ ciples of Christ, by disposing of our money
 “ well, we are guilty of his madness that ra-
 “ ther chooses to lock up eyes and hands than
 “ to give them to those that want them.”

“ For, after we have satisfied our own sober
 “ and reasonable wants, all the rest of our
 “ money is but like spare eyes and hands; it
 “ is something, that we cannot keep to our-
 “ selves without being foolish in the use of it;
 “ something, that can only be used well by
 “ giving it to those who want it.”

Thus you see, what great obligations are laid upon the Christian, and “ if ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them;” * for † “ without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

3rdly, I shall now speak of the reward promised to the merciful. “ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

The very mention of mercy is sufficient to convince us, that after we have done all, we

* John xiii, 17.

† Heb. xii, 13.

are unprofitable servants. We have no good deeds to boast of, but many sins of which we ought to be ashamed; and the reason is, because selfish principles defile our best actions, so that while the Holy Spirit works by us, we must be constrained to say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise." Yet, it is not unlawful to have respect to the recompense of reward, which is of such a nature that it will fill a holy soul with the most ravishing delight, and cause him to esteem all he suffers for the sake of Christ and his members, as light and momentary afflictions, in comparison of the eternal weight of glory, which is promised him hereafter. That which constitutes the chief joy of the Saints in Glory, must be, I conceive, their complete conquest over sin, and a full restoration to the image of God, which has been lost by the fall. Every one, who has known any thing of the Redemption of Jesus Christ, and has had the love of God shed abroad in his heart, will long that his love may be perfected, and carefully walk in all the Commandments of the Lord, that he may not fail of enjoying that Divine Vision, which is promised to the pure in heart.

But, it is proper to observe, that the most holy Christians will always be noticed as the

most humble. All they can do for Christ is so little, in comparison of what he has done for them, that they never presume to speak of the merit even of their most laborious performances. Of this our Saviour takes particular notice in his description of that awful day, when God shall render unto every man according to his works. “ When the Son of Man
“ 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 he shall separ-
“ ate them one from another, as a Shepherd
“ divideth his sheep from the goats, and he
“ shall set the sheep on his right hand, and
“ the goats on his left; then shall the King say
“ to them on his right hand: Come ye blessed
“ of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared
“ for you from the foundation of the World;
“ for I was an hungered, and ye gave me
“ meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink;
“ I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked,
“ and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye
“ visited me; I was in prison, and ye came
“ unto me. Then shall the righteous answer
“ him saying, Lord, when saw we thee an
“ hungered, and fed thee, or thirsty, and gave
“ thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger,
“ and took thee in, or naked, and clothed
“ thee? or, When saw we thee sick, or in pri-

“son, and came unto thee?—And the King
“shall answer and say unto them: Inasmuch
“as ye have done it unto one of the least of
“these my Brethren, ye have done it unto
“Me.”* Then follows the awful doom of
those, who, for neglecting these things, are
appointed to have their portion with Satan and
his Angels in the unquenchable flames of Hell.
Surely, these words of our Saviour should be
seriously meditated upon by every one, who
bears the name of a Christian, lest, in that day,
when God shall bring all things into judgment,
he shall be found to have taken up a mere pro-
fession, a dead faith, unproductive of works,
and be driven with the hypocrites from the
presence of God into that place of torment,
where there is weeping and wailing and
gnashing of teeth. Let then every man care-
fully examine his conduct, and, if he presume
to expect mercy, let him give all diligence to
“add to” his “faith virtue; and to virtue
knowledge; and to knowledge temperance;
and to temperance patience; and to patience
godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness;
and to brotherly kindness charity. For, if these
things be in you, and abound, they make you
that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful
in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”†

* Matt. xxv. 31—45.

† II Pet. i. 5—8.

SERMON II.



THE

OBLIGATION

LAID UPON

THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

TO

GIVE UP EVERY THING

FOR HIS SAKE



SERMON II.

MATT. viii. 18, 19, 20.

18. *Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.*

19. *And a certain Scribe came and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.*

20. *Jesus saith unto him, the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests: but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.*

THE power of Jesus Christ to perform miracles was so generally known at the time, in which the events recorded in these verses occurred, that great multitudes assembled about him, expecting to receive some benefit from his gracious hands; but, as the motives of all, who attended his steps, were not equally good, and as he knew many were induced to follow him only out of idleness and vain curiosity, he thought proper to change his station, and therefore he gave commandment to his Disciples to depart unto the other side of the Lake of Gennesareth, on the borders of which he had been teaching; and “a certain Scribe,” who doubtless had heard of his fame, “came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee

whithersoever thou goest ; and Jesus said unto him, the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.”

In discoursing upon these words, I design to speak

I. Of the determination of the Scribe ;

II. Of the Answer given to him by our Lord.

I. I am to speak of the determination of the Scribe. A Scribe was a person employed in copying out the Books of the Law, and, as printing was not then known, the office was a very honourable one, and the person who bore it kept company with those who were most esteemed in the country. Hence it is, that we often read in the New Testament of the Scribes, Pharisees, and Rulers of the Jews, at the time that our Saviour made his appearance upon Earth. These, for the most part, were leagued together against him ; for, conceiving from some expressions in the Prophets, to which they gave a wrong explanation, that he was to be a temporal Prince, who should deliver them from the yoke of a foreign power, they were offended at him, when they observed the meanness of his birth, and heard him deliver those lessons of heavenly instruction, which were directly contrary to the proud and

arrogant notions which they had conceived. As, however, his miracles were so striking and so public, the Scribe in question, it seems, was pretty well convinced that Jesus was the person whom Moses and the Prophets did say should come in the fullness of time to be the Saviour of Israel; but, still entertaining the idea that He would be raised to a state of royal grandeur, he conceived that his salvation would be wrought by some signal victories, and that a portion of the honor, which attached to the Prince, would belong to all the subjects of his dominion, therefore he saith, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest."

Now, the disposition of this Scribe is precisely that of many Christians. They admire Christ, and are ready to follow him to certain lengths, persuading themselves that nothing very difficult will be required. I will give you two or three instances of this disposition.

1st, The admirers of Christ are ready to follow him in all the ceremonies of his religion. Being fully convinced of the truth of the Scriptures, and understanding that it has been the common practice of the Church, from the earliest ages, to admit her members by the rite of baptism, they are careful to conform to her regulations, and thus to dedicate their children unto God. After this, when reason begins to

dawn, and they are capable of knowing the difference between right and wrong, they are told, that God is favourable to the good, but full of anger against the wicked. They are informed of the kindness of Jesus Christ in dying for sinners, and of the good thoughts which he puts, by his spirit, into the hearts of those who give themselves up to him. These truths are explained and enforced by parents and teachers, according to the capacity of their young hearers; then they are taught the Catechism, which contains a summary of the Christian Faith; in due time they are confirmed by the Bishop, and receive the Holy Communion; and, to obtain further information, join the congregation from Sabbath to Sabbath in the House of God. Notwithstanding the too general indifference which prevails concerning serious things, yet are there still not a few who have been so religiously educated, and who entertain such a sense of what is decent, orderly, and respectable, that they would be ashamed to neglect the service of God, or to refuse to their children, or any other young persons committed to their care, those advantages which I have just enumerated. Thus, then, there are many who will attend Christ in the ceremonies of his religion, and in the ordinances of his worship.

2. The admirers of Christ will speak good of his name. They will acknowledge him to be God over all, blessed for ever; omnipotent, and omnipresent, the foundation of their hope, and the object of religious adoration. They will express their obligations to him for leaving the glory, which he had with his Father before all worlds, and condescending to take upon him our nature, so as to become man for our salvation. They will speak readily and clearly of his life and doctrine, of his actions, his miracles, his death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and glorification. They will be strenuous advocates of his atonement, and desire to make mention of his righteousness, and of that only; and they will farther consider him as the author of every gift of grace, and the channel through which they are conveyed to sinful men. Of these things, and of what may, in any other way, relate to the office and work of Christ, they will be ready to speak as occasion may require; and for this faith they will contend earnestly against those, who have the boldness to oppose it; for this is the common Faith of the Church of Christ, and ought to be defended by every one, who bears the Christian name.

3. The Admirers of Christ will follow him in the observance of moral duties. Riot-

ing and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness, lying and stealing, and every other vice, which interrupts the peace of society, they will carefully avoid. They will honour the king, and respect the magistracy. They will be good members of the community to which they belong, and will so conduct themselves in private life, as to prevent their behaviour from incurring the censure of those about them. They will boast too of the excellency of those regulations, by which they profess to be governed, and challenge the world, as they justly may, to produce any system of laws so well calculated for the good of society, as those Commandments, which are given under the Christian dispensation. Thus, then, in all these things will Christ have many admirers, who, when they consider what he has done for the world, will be ready to say with the Scribe of whom I have been speaking, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." But, let us consider our Lord's answer to the same Scribe—"Jesus saith unto him, the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." The sense of this passage may be given in the following words.

"Dost thou, O Scribe, form thy judgment concerning me by the miracles, which thou

hast seen, and by the applause which has followed them, and dost thou suppose that this state of things will always continue, so that upon me, and upon my followers, only praise and commendation will be bestowed? If so, thou art greatly mistaken. The breath of popular applause, which is now in my favour, shall soon pass away, and I shall be, as it was foretold concerning me, ‘despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.’* While the birds of the air, and the beasts of the earth, find secure habitations to shelter them from storm and tempest, it will not be so with me. I shall be exposed to poverty, and to scorn; and the time will presently come, when those, who now appear to be my best friends, shall forsake me, and I shall seem deserted by all the world. Consider then, O Scribe, ere thou determinest to follow me whithersoever I go, whether thou canst keep close to me in adversity, as well as in prosperity, and whether thou wilt be ready to suffer, as well as to reign, with me.”

In applying this part of our subject to the case of my hearers, I would observe,

1. That there are many admirers of Christ, who, though they are ready to follow him in all the ceremonies of religion, because such an

* Isa. liii. 3.

adherence is honourable in the sight of men, are, nevertheless, afraid to live up to the spirit of what they profess, lest their zeal should be called enthusiasm, and lest, by acting constantly under the influences of the Divine Spirit, they should differ so much from the manners of the world, that the world should exclude them from their company. It is well known, that two cannot walk together, unless they are agreed, so that he, whose heart is not changed, whatever his outward profession may be, can never be a fit companion for him, who is born again of the Spirit, and whose soul thirsteth after God, as the hart after the water-brooks. Every person ought seriously to consider, that with him, "to whom all desires are known, and from whom no secrets are hid," no hypocritical service can be acceptable, that with him the mere bended knee, the flattering lip, and the demure countenance are of no avail, and that, whatever estimation a man may gain by these things in the eyes of his fellow mortals, yet, if he be not a worshipper of God in spirit and in truth, he will not be numbered with the righteous in that day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. These matters, I say, should be seriously considered by all, and therefore, Brethren, I beseech you to examine yourselves, and see,

whether in following Christ in the profession of his religion you are come into the actual possession of it. The ceremony of Baptism, as you learn in your Catechism, is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” The sign has passed upon you; are you then partakers of the grace? In other words. Are you dead to sin, and alive unto righteousness, and resolutely determined so to live the remainder of your days? Think, how, by confirmation, if you have indeed submitted thereto, you have ratified the vows, which your god-fathers and god-mothers have made for you, and how, by repeated declarations every Sabbath Day, and particularly at every Sacramental Service at which you have been present, you have dedicated yourselves in the most solemn manner to God. Would you know clearly and accurately the obligations which are laid upon you? Read the several Services of the Church, as they are written in the Book of Common Prayer, and you will be convinced, that more than half of those persons, who regard the form of religion, are inattentive to its power, and follow their Saviour very carelessly, if, indeed, they may be said to follow him at all.

2. The admirers of Christ, I have said, will speak good of his name, by setting forth

those doctrines, which he has taught. But, will they live according to those doctrines? They know, that the Father receives sinners through the merits of his Son, and sanctifies them by his Holy Spirit. But, do they indeed come unto God by Christ, and do they walk in all the ways of his commandments? If they do, they will find, that the same reproach which was cast upon the first Disciples will fall upon them, and they will, as their Master was before them, be treated with scorn and desision. As then Christians are to expect such treatment in the world, are you, Brethren, prepared to follow Christ in his humiliation, as well as in his exaltation? Can you submit to the coolness of some, the contempt of others, and, it may be, to evil treatment, and to personal injury? We know how some are alarmed even by a mere name, insomuch that if a man, by becoming a little more serious than his neighbours, should happen to be called a Methodist, many a friend, so far as worldly friendship goes, will turn his back upon him, and, without ever enquiring whether his doctrine and practice are agreeable to the word of God, will not hesitate to declare that he is little better than a madman, or enthusiast. Now, as the love of praise is deeply implanted in the human breast, it requires no small de-

gree of resolution to bear up against the ridicule of the world ; and, indeed no resolution but that, which arises from the power of divine grace in the soul, can carry a man through all the difficulties he has to encounter in his Christian progress. But, more than cruel mockings have been, and may yet be, the portion of the Christian. He may meet with bonds and imprisonment, with scourges, with torture, and with death. "Turn or burn" was once the language, with which the adversaries of truth addressed the followers of Jesus ; and in those days many, who had appeared zealous believers, while it suited their ease and convenience, were ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, and, through cowardice, denied the Faith. Alas ! how many of these characters would appear, if times of trial were to return again ! May God grant us grace, my Brethren, and enable us to endure the great fight of afflictions, wherewith he shall be pleased to exercise us.

3. The admirers of Christ are ready enough to follow him to the exercise of Moral Duties ; and though they will, upon many occasions, be exceedingly active in the service of the Lord ; yet, they must, to prove their sincerity, go farther than all that. They must learn to be passive, and do, not their own will, but the will of Him to whom they have engaged to

yield themselves in subjection. This, I conceive, is the most difficult lesson the Christian has to learn ; for, in active duties there is often a great deal of pride and self-complacency, but in those of which I am now speaking, there must be a continual act of self-denial. We must be contented to see our wishes unaccomplished, our plans frustrated, and our counsels disesteemed. This, or that man shall be listened to, but our advice shall be disregarded ; and when we think, that we are acting for the glory of God, we shall often find that God will not be glorified in our way, and that, instead of the praise, which we sought, we must be contented with shame and reproach. A Christian, who determines to follow Christ entirely, must apply himself very closely to the difficult work of self-examination, and must watch the various motions of pride, anger, envy, malice, lust, and divers other passions, which are constantly knocking at the door of his heart, and pleading for admittance.

And, now, my Brethren, do you, in the face of all these difficulties, determine to follow Christ withersoever he goeth ? or, do you hesitate, saying—“ there is no necessity to follow him so closely ?” But, if you follow not him, whom will you follow ? Shall it be the devices and desires of your own hearts ? What ! while

you read in your Bibles that “to be carnally minded is death,”* and that “he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption,”† will you follow the customs of the world? What! When the Word of Truth styles those those who do so “Adulterers and Adulteresses,”‡ and tells them, that “the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” We read in our Bibles but of two ways. The one is the broad road, which leadeth to destruction, which is trod by many; and the other is the narrow road, which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it. Now, God has mercifully told you this, that you may use more diligence, yea “all diligence to make your calling and election sure.”§

As you came here, my Brethren, I hope, to be exhorted and instructed, I presume, that as many of you, as have paid any attention to what I have been saying, are determined at this moment to follow Christ, or not to follow him entirely; or, in other words, to strive, or not to strive, to enter in at the strait gate. Be not deceived: the character of the Almost Christian is a very common one, but he is not in the less danger on that account; and, therefore, instead of regarding what others are, and saying—“What is to become of the multitude

* Rom. viii. 6. † Gal. vi. 8. ‡ James iv. 4. § 11 Pet. i. 10.

who seem worse than ourselves?" Let us take care that we are the Christians, whom God will approve, and let us pray most earnestly to be delivered from every error and delusion. If we thus run, we may confidently expect to obtain the glorious prize of Eternal Life, which is given to all that seek it through Jesus Christ our Lord.

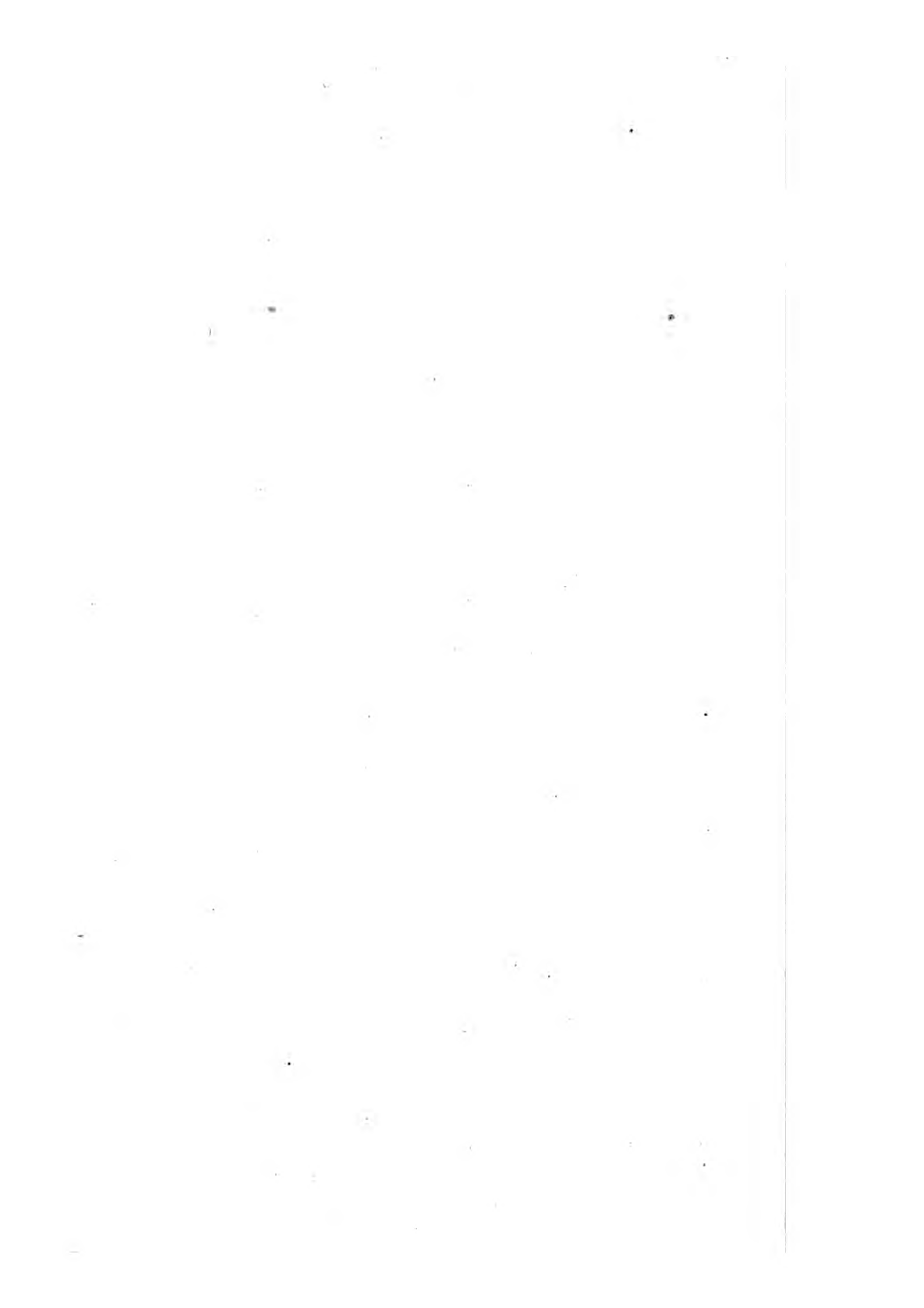
SERMON III.



SIN AND DANGER

OF

UNBELIEF.



SERMON III.

*ROM. iii. 1—8.

1. *What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?*

2. *Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*

3. *For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?*

4. *God forbid. Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar: as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.*

5. *But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man,)*

6. *God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?*

7. *For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory, why yet am I also judged as a sinner?*

8. *And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) let us do evil that good may come, whose damnation is just.*

THE Apostle having declared, in the conclusion of the foregoing chapter, the unprofit-

* This and the following discourses upon this chapter, are selected from an Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans, which was delivered by the Author from time to time to his little congregation. The reason of his choice is founded upon a belief that, what is here presented to the Reader exhibits the foundation, upon which the Christian ought to place his hope, and on which the superstructure of holiness may afterwards be immovably established.

ableness of circumcision to those who only regarded the external rite, and were not desirous of obtaining the circumcision of the heart, and aware of the objections, which the Jews, who entertained a vain opinion, that no circumcised person, however immoral he might be, would go to Hell; the Apostle, I say, aware of the opposition, which would be made to his sentiments, thus fairly proposes the opinion of his adversaries, whose answer, he imagines, would be to this effect: "You have said, he is not a Jew, who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; yet how will you deny, that the Jews were God's favourite and peculiar people, and how will you presume to affirm, that circumcision, which was an ordinance instituted by God himself, is of no avail? What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much, answers the Apostle, every way; but chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. The ceremony of circumcision was designed to intimate, that the carnal nature, which every man has, was to be subdued, mortified, and finally destroyed; therefore, when a child was presented to the Lord, to be dealt with according to this law, the parents were supposed to enter into a solemn

engagement to provide him with those means, which would be most conducive to the desired end. It was their business to make him acquainted with the word and will of God, to instruct him in the nature of divine worship, to explain to him the signification of the various ceremonies, which were from time to time imposed, to guard him from the idolatry practised by the surrounding nations, and, in short, to teach him to surrender himself, with full purpose of heart, to the God of Abraham, and to walk before him in holiness and righteousness all his days. The child, agreeably to the divine institution, might claim these privileges as his right, and as he might have recourse, whenever he pleased, to the oracles of God, that is, to the Sacred Word, which was revealed to the Priests and Prophets, he could not be at a loss to know the path of duty, nor be destitute of counsel and direction in any cases of difficulty that might occur. By faith and prayer he might understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, and be capable of knowing and declaring, as far as it was lawful, "the deep things of God."* Much advantage then had the Jew, and much profit was there of circumcision. Now, as the Apostle intimates, the oracles of God might

* 1 Cor. ii. 10.

be made good, notwithstanding the infidelity of the people ; for what if some of those highly-privileged persons, into whose hands they were committed, did not believe their report respecting the manifestation of Jesus Christ, and the salvation to be obtained by him, shall their unbelief make the faith or fidelity of God, in making such promise, of none effect ? “ God forbid,” continues the Apostle, that we should so think, “ yea let God be true and every man a liar,” as it is written, that thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. Faith, as a plain man once defined it, is—“ taking God at his word ;” and whoever considers how much that gracious act of the mind is insisted on in the Sacred Writings will not hesitate to affirm, that it must be of great price. For want of this, though blessings should be showered down in abundance on every side of us, and though innumerable privileges should compass us about, we are prevented from receiving any of them, and are in danger of famishing in the midst of plenty. We have no inclination to open our mouths to take in the feast which is provided for us. I will embrace this opportunity of mentioning a few instances, wherein the want of faith is particularly displayed.

I. There is much unbelief, even among Christians, respecting the inspiration and veracity of that book, which they call their Bible. If this were not the case, we should not see them so eager, as we find they are, to gratify their curiosity by listening to the predictions of every upstart prophet, and every pretender to a new revelation. In this day of wonders, several such have arisen, and the world, ever gaping after something strange, has gone after them. But, are the pretensions of such characters tried by the touchstone of truth, I mean, by the word of God? Does the man, who listens to their voice, enquire how far they are authorised by the Supreme Governor of the World to foretel those events, which are in the dispensation of His hand alone? Were the Scriptures regarded, as they ought to be, they would be considered as the fountain of truth, and every man fearing God, and working righteousness, would examine those sacred records with all diligence, that he might be instructed, as far as was proper for him, in all good and useful knowledge. That sort of unbeliever, of whom I am speaking, does not imagine there is a sufficiency of information in the Word of God to afford him satisfaction, and therefore he applies his mind to almost every study except that of Divinity, and thus loses

the gratification, which is afforded to the Children of God, who are permitted to handle the Word of Life, and to become acquainted with those precious things, which “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man,”* but which God revealeth by his Spirit to those that love him. But,

II. Even among those, who pretend to hold the Bible in reverence, unbelief is too plainly discovered. Were it not, would the threatenings of God be so lightly esteemed? Consider with what awful solemnities the law was introduced, and how positively it is said respecting the several duties, which are commanded, and sins, which are forbidden,—this thou shalt do, and that thou shalt not do. Consider farther, how jealous God is of his honour, and how he has declared by the mouth of his beloved Son, whom he has commanded us to heart†, that “One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.”‡ You cannot deny, if you take any pains in searching the Scriptures (and believing them to be the word of God, you must be very culpable if you do not search them) that great purity, and great holiness are required; nor can it be unknown to you, that it is written,

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

† Mat. xvii. 5:

‡ Ch. v. 18.

“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them.”* And again, “The unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.”† And again, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”‡ Yet, with these threatenings sounding in your ears, and pronounced too by the God of Truth, ye are wonderfully easy while ye multiply transgressions, and think, that somehow or another, without repentance, and without amendment, ye shall escape the damnation of Hell. But, is this to act agreeably to the revealed will of God? Is it not rather a daring insult against the righteous Lawgiver? Is it not reproaching him with falsehood? than which a more horrible crime cannot possibly be conceived. Happily, the wholesome laws, which have been enacted by our Government from time to time, operate to the prevention of much vice and immorality. Many a person refrains from seizing upon his neighbour’s property, because he knows that imprisonment, transportation, or something worse, will be the consequence; and others, from the commission of murder, because that horrid wickedness is generally detected, and the punishment of death is sure to follow. Yet, why will per-

* Gal. iii. 1. † 1 Cor. vi. 9. ‡ Luke xiii. 3.

sons, who are afraid to transgress the laws of man, be so presumptuous as to transgress those of God? Because they believe not his word. They neither conceive their deeds to be open to his all-seeing eye, nor do they suppose that he will enter into judgment with them for all the things done in the body. They imagine the description of the worm which never dies, and of the fire which is never quenched, to be mere bugbear threatenings, and daringly sin with a high hand, till sad experience convinces them, that every word of God is true, and the power of his indignation the most insufferable of every pain. Oh! may the Lord induce your hearts to believe what he has spoken, that, while the day of grace lasteth, you may repent of your iniquities, and flee from the wrath to come.

III. Unbelief not only makes us indifferent to the threatenings of God, but disinclines us also to receive his promises. When Satan has long held dominion over a soul, he is unwilling to let his captive go free. When, therefore, a man becomes sensible of the greatness of his sins, trembles under an apprehension of the Divine displeasure, and would take shelter under the wings of mercy, it is often suggested to him, "Thou hast sinned too long, too heinously, and too obstinately to expect par-

don. It is too late now for thee to seek a new Lord, or to hope for a better service; besides, thy dispositions are rooted so deeply, as to become a second nature, insomuch that it will be quite impossible for thee to addict thyself to holiness in such a manner as to perform any thing like a steady, uniform obedience to the will of God." But, all these, and other thoughts of a similar nature, proceed from the father of lies, and, though they are suggested in direct opposition to what God has spoken, yet do they too often prevail to keep the soul long under bondage. Christ has said "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."* And, as God has promised to "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him,"† and assured those, who earnestly desire his great salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, that "Sin shall not have dominion over" them,‡ nothing but unbelief can prevent the vilest transgressor from applying such exceeding great and precious promises to his own comfort. He cannot prove, from any part of the Scripture, that God will reject him, while he humbly implores for mercy in the way of divine appointment; for, through the merits of his Redeemer, he may claim admission to all the blessings of the covenant of

* John vi. 37.

† Luke xi. 13.

‡ Rom. vi. 14.

grace; neither can he make it appear that his corruption is unconquerable, for Christ can "subdue all things to himself,"* and will, with a divine power, eradicate evil from every heart in which the grace of his spirit is implanted. Believe ye then the promises of God, and ye shall prevail against every enemy.

The Jews, as I have said, did not believe what God had declared concerning them. Though the divine oracles had promised them a Saviour, and though they had spoken of the manner in which their redemption should be effected, yet was there much ignorance among them concerning the way in which they should be accepted of God. They were to be received, not as the righteous persons, which they arrogantly supposed themselves to be, but as sinners, and therefore it was the Apostle's endeavour to prove, that they were all transgressors, and, as such, they were to expect justification only through the Redeemer. To prove this important point of doctrine he thus proceeds, v. 5, "But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous, who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man);" that is, as any person unacquainted with the nature of the Gospel would argue upon this subject.

* Phillip: iii. 21.

But, continues he, "God forbid" that I, the servant of Christ, should so imagine, "for then, how shall God," if he be unrighteous, judge the world? "For if the truth of God," as the unbeliever will also argue, "hath more abounded through my lie," or my idolatry, "to his glory," that is, to the glory of his free grace, "why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say), let us do evil that good may come;" but this is not our sentiment, nay, so far from it, that we scruple not to say, that they who maintain so horrible a thing are persons "whose damnation is just."

Let this short paraphrase suffice at present to give the sense of the passage; and, as I shall have occasion to speak more fully upon the doctrine of Justification, when I come to treat of the concluding part of this chapter, I shall finish this discourse by exhorting my hearers to pay a more serious attention to the things which belong to their peace.

I. As the oracles of God are in your hands, consider that it is no less your privilege than your duty carefully to examine them. As the Bible is not a trifling book to be read merely for the amusement of an idle hour, pains should be taken to become acquainted with its con-

tents, so that the harmony and connexion of its several parts may be regarded and understood. It is true this will require more time and attention than the vain and frivolous are disposed to bestow, but, since the subject treated of is of the highest consequence to every individual, and since, according to the judgment of God, he must be saved or damned, be happy in Heaven or miserable in Hell, he must surely allow, that it is reasonable to lay aside his folly for a while, that he may have an opportunity of enquiring into those things whereby he may be made wise unto salvation. He will imagine, perhaps, that because there are so many opinions in the world, his time will be wasted, and his labour lost. But, this excuse will suit none but the careless. Christ, surely, has not invited us to search the Scriptures in vain, nor can we suppose that he spake falsely, when he said, "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."* If we only employ the same degree of diligence in the pursuit of divine, as of human, science, we shall not fail of discovering the path of salvation. The Spirit of Truth will be our director, and we shall be prevented from turning aside till we reach the gates of Glory, which will be opened to receive us. Let us

* Matt. vi. 22.

then "use all diligence to make" our "calling and election sure,"* then we may be satisfied that our labour shall not be in vain. But.

II. If any are not disposed to be thus diligent and inquisitive, let them, at least, avoid finding fault with those that are so. It is a practice but too common with the men of the world to abuse the professors of godliness for maintaining doctrines, which are supposed to be full of absurdity. They are "slanderosly reported" to hold tenets, which are derogatory to the honour of God, and which encourage licentiousness among men; and their adversaries, who hate all vital godliness, neither regard candour nor truth, when they endeavour to represent the Gospel of Christ in an odious point of view. As an object, seen at a distance, cannot be discovered in all its beauty and proportion, so neither can religion. It must be closely and accurately examined, before we can ascertain the harmony of its parts, and the symmetry of the whole. Instead, therefore, of censuring the zealous Christian, whose love to God and man is conspicuous in continued acts of piety, because his doctrine does not altogether correspond with our notion of things, let us put on that charity, which

* 11 Pet. i. 10.

hopeth all things, and allow, that he may have truth and reason on his side, though we have not yet been able to discover the manner in which he has arranged his ideas, so as to reflect, in his opinion, the highest glory upon God.

Finally, my Brethren, whatever differences may subsist among those, who call themselves the disciples of Jesus Christ, I earnestly recommend you to agree in dedicating yourselves to God, and to unite your prayers for the gift of Divine Grace, that you may be sanctified in "Spirit, soul, and body."* This, I believe, Christians of all denominations will approve as a safe and commendable mode of procedure, and, I am much mistaken, if it will not lead to a stedfast hope, and unshaken confidence. But, let the dedication be made with full purpose of heart, and let the petitions, which are offered up to Heaven, spring forth from the ardent desire of the soul. Say with David, and appeal to the Searcher of Hearts that he knows you speak with sincerity, "Whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."† Say with Paul, "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,"‡ viz. to the day of Christ's appearing ;

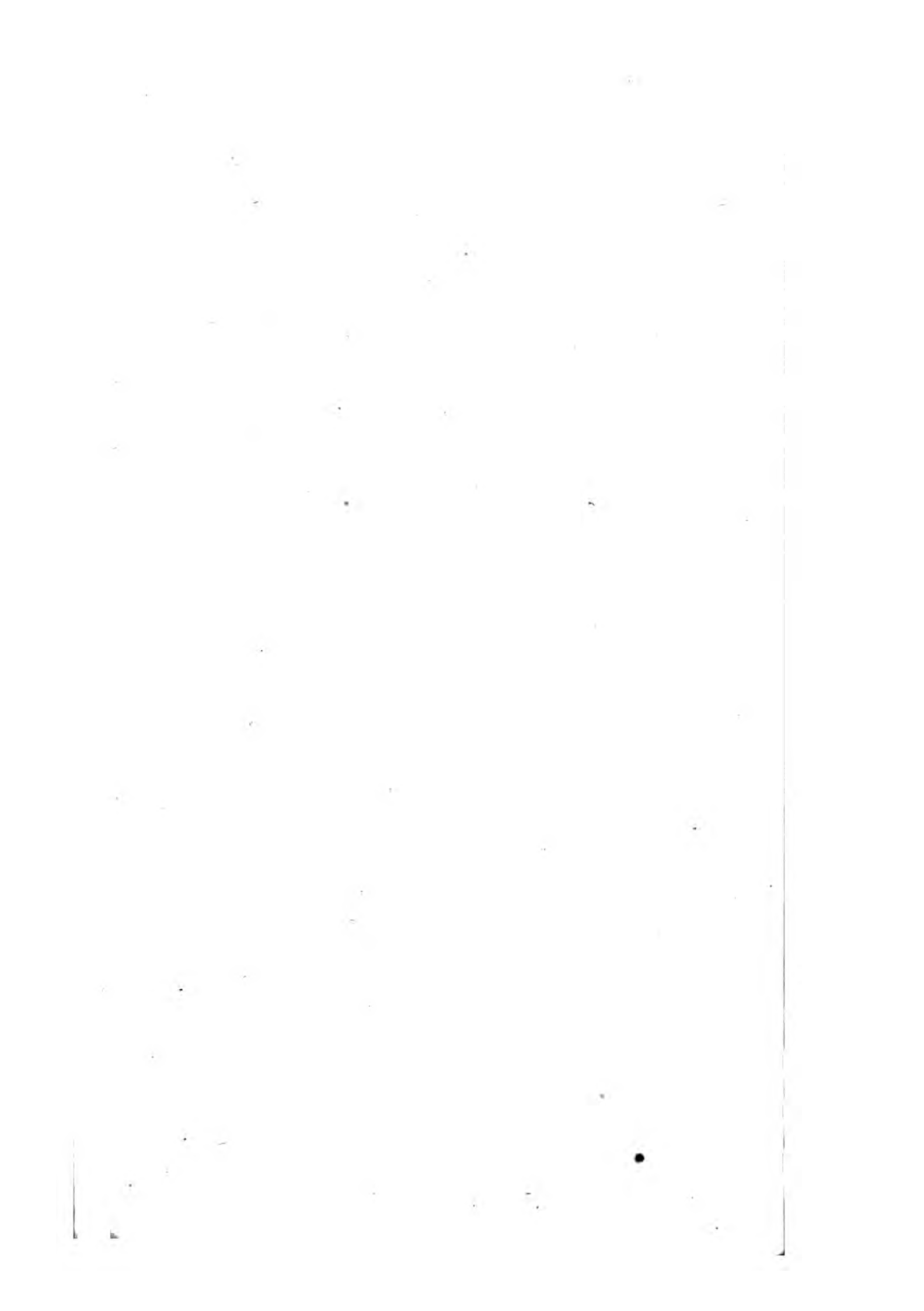
* 1 Thess. v. 23.

† Ps. lxxiii. 25.

‡ II. Tim. i. 12.

and say with Peter, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."* If thou canst say this, O Christian, from what thou dost feel, I can venture to pronounce thee happy; and though the light of Divine Truth may now shine but faintly on thy soul, yet shall it increase more and more till it arrives at the full splendour of the perfect day. That it may thus shine upon all my hearers, may God of his infinite mercy grant for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed equal honour, might, majesty, and dominion, now, henceforth, and for ever.

* John xxi. 17.



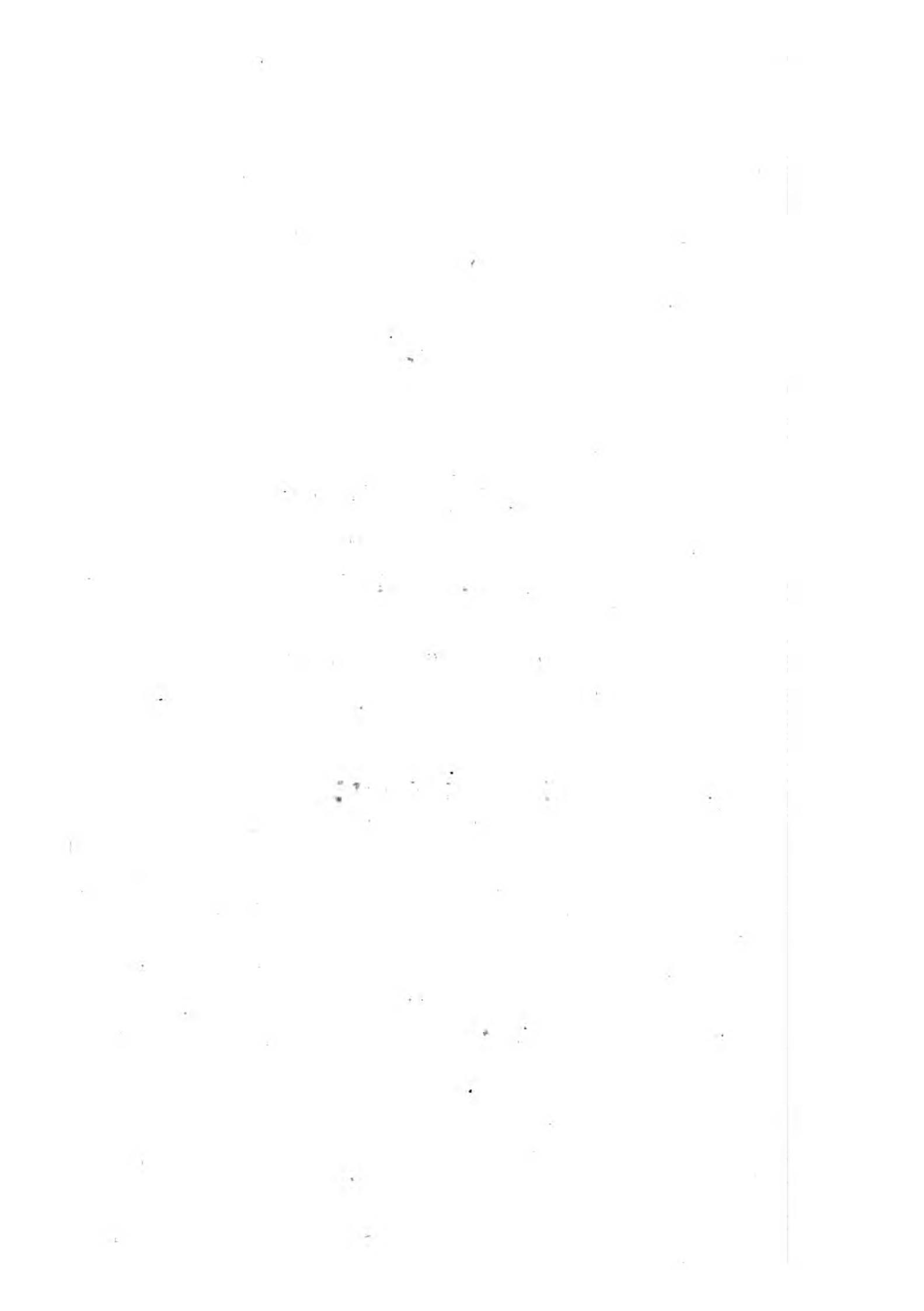
SERMON IV.



CONCERNING THE NATURE

OF

ORIGINAL SIN.



SERMON IV.

ROM. iii. 9, 10, 11, 12.

9. *What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;*

10. *As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one.*

11. *There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God.*

12. *They are all gone out of the way, they are become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

I TOLD you, in a former discourse upon this chapter, what were the particular privileges, which the Jews enjoyed above other nations. "To them were committed the oracles of God." They "were instructed out of the law," and had received many great and precious promises concerning the Saviour, who was to come "in the fulness of time" to take away their sins. "What then," continues the Apostle, "are we" Jews, who have these advantages, "better than they," viz. the Gentiles? "No, in no wise: for we have before proved, both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." A bold charge, we may imagine,

against a proud self-conceited people. But, the Apostle was not to be intimidated by any dislike, which men might testify against his doctrine, therefore he goes on to prove his position by the infallible word of God. "It is written," says he, "there is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way; they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." And then he proceeds to mention more particular instances of general and universal depravity.

As all men are included under the names of Jew and Gentile, and as there is but one way of salvation for all, viz. justification by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I shall endeavour, in this discourse, to exhibit that corruption of human nature, on which the Apostle so much insists, and which must be known and felt by every one, before he can entertain any value for the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus. I shall include what I have to say on this subject at present under the following heads.

I. I shall shew, that, there is a constitutional and radical defect in every child of Adam, which preventeth him from doing that which is good. "There is none righteous, no, not one."

II. That, because of this defect, none understandeth, nor seeketh after God; and

III. As the necessary and lamentable consequence thereof, that “all are gone out of the way; they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

1st, I am to shew, that there is a constitutional and radical defect in every child of Adam, which preventeth him from doing good. This is what Divines call *Original Sin*; and they, who labour under this dreadful evil, are said by Saint Paul, in another of his Epistles, to be “by nature children of wrath.”* To understand how this defect took place, we must advert to the situation of our First Father in Paradise. He was created in the image and likeness of God,† and in him did God breathe “the breath of *lives*.”‡ So it is in the Hebrew not simply *life*, but *lives*, by which, I conceive, we are to understand that which is natural, and that which is spiritual, or that which belongeth to us, as mere animals, and depends upon the breath, which passeth through our nostrils; and that which is of an angelic nature, and is supported by constant communications from the spirit of

* Eph. ii. 3.

† Gen. i. 26.

‡ Gen. ii. 7. נשמת הים.

God. The former of these is properly distinguished by the name of *soul*, and the latter by that of *spirit*.* Adam thus formed was

* In II Thes. v. 23, St. Paul says, "I pray God your whole *spirit*, *soul*, and *body* be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." These three parts of man (if I may be allowed so to call them) are distinguished in the Greek by the words *πνευμα*, *ψυχη* and *σωμα*, and in the Hebrew by *נשמה*, *רוח*, and *נפש*. *נשמה*, or in Regimine *נשמת* signifies, according to Parkhurst, "the *soul* or *spirit* of man *breathed* into him at first by Jehovah Aleim, and supported by communication with the Divine Light and Spirit, as his *natural breath* by communication with the material light and air," (see Gen. ii. 7.) where the original stands thus: *נשמת רוח חיים*—*the breath of the spirit of lives*. The peculiar signification of this word, as distinguished from *רוח* is strongly marked in the Book of Job. Thus, chap. xxxii. 8, "There is a spirit (*רוח*) in man, and the inspiration (*נשמת*) of the Almighty giveth them understanding." And xxxiv. 4, "The spirit (*רוח*) of God made me, and the breath (*נשמת*) of the Almighty hath given me life." Again, xxxiv. 14, "If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his *spirit* and his *breath*, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. So also we read, Is. xiii. 5, "Thus saith the Lord God, the Lord, he that created the Heavens, and stretched them out, he that spread forth the Earth and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth *breath* unto the people and *spirit* to them that walk therein. "*רוח* pl. *רוחות* air in motion, a breeze, breath, wind," is a more general name for every kind of spirit, and is used sometimes to signify the *spirit of God*, sometimes the *spirit of man*, once Eccles. iii. 21. the *spirit of a brute*, and sometimes, joined with *רעה*, an *evil spirit*. I would call it, for distinction's sake, the perceptive and rational faculty, which receives and judges of that, which is conveyed to it by the senses, but which cannot attain to deep spiritual knowledge except it be enlightened by the *נשמת*, the *breath* of the Almighty. See above, Job xxxiii. 8.

As every idea we can form of spirit must be very inadequate to the thing itself, to talk of the division or parts of spirit must appear to many readers like holding a notion which is totally unintelligible; but, though we cannot exhibit a just delineation of that which we have never seen, yet, I think the passages cited will afford a proof,

the head of the human race ; the stock of all future generations, who had in him their life or lives, and who were, by the appointment of God, to stand or fall by his obedience or transgression. This indeed is not particularly expressed in the book of Genesis, where the creation of mankind is spoken of, but it is plainly mentioned in other parts of the Sacred Writings, and is also fairly inferred from the nature of the Redemption, which is granted us through Jesus Christ. Thus we read, chap. 5, v. 12, of the Epistle, in the explanation of which I am now engaged, " By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men:" and are told, v. 19, " As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so, by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." To the same effect is that also which is written

that what has been advanced is not contrary to Scripture ; and if the reader will take the trouble to examine Whitby on 1 Thess. v. 23., and Bishop Bull's Works, as quoted by Parkhurst under נִשְׁמָה, he will perceive, that the doctrine is not new, but was maintained by several of the primitive Fathers, as well as by the more enlightened Heathens ; and though I may seem to dissent in some measure from the latter in ascribing the name of *Reason* to the *lowest* faculty of the soul, yet we are perfectly agreed as to the existence of the two powers, or parts, or whatever they may be ; only as *Reason*, in our language at this day, generally signifies the *natural* powers of the understanding, I thought it would appear more intelligible to consider it as descriptive of them. נִשְׁמָה is, according to Parkhurst, " a living creature ; a creature or animal that lives by breathing."

1 Cor. xv. 22, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." So that Adam and Christ are heads of their respective generations: the one bringing in sin and death, and the other righteousness and life, to the human race. Now, the death, which Adam brought in, causes that *constitutional and radical defect*, which I am endeavouring to prove; for it is the loss of man's *life*, not only of his natural life, by which he becomes subject to corruption, but also of his spiritual life, whereby he becomes deprived of the image of God, and sinks into the misery of a fallen creature. He is now "sensual," as Saint Jude speaks, "not having the spirit," and unless he regains it, he must be miserable for ever. Again; that the defect, of which I am speaking, has actually taken place, is further evident from this, that our Saviour says, John iii. 3, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God;" and when Nicodemus asks, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" we find our Lord insists still more strongly upon his point: "Jesus answered, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water, and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the

flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. 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 that is born of the spirit." Now, the communication of this spirit, by which the new creature is formed, is a transfusion of life from Christ into the soul ; or, rather, it is a participation of Christ himself, who is "our life ;"* and, agreeably to this, we find it written, Eph. ii. 1, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Hear our Lord speaking to the same effect, John v. 24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." Thus is Christ the life of every true believer, and thus, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive ;"† but, till the quickening spirit is imparted, the state of death continues, the image of God is wanting, and the soul, in all its actings, is incapable of doing good, and is led, more or less, by the spirit of disobedience, to self exaltation, and other transgressions of the

* Col. iii. 4.

† 1 Cor. xv. 22.

divine law. This is the judgment of Him, who always spoke truth. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine; ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing."* From what has been said, I think it appears, that what is written in the 9th Article of the Church of England is agreeable to the word of God. "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, as the Pelagians do vainly talk, but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into the world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh, called in the Greek *Φρόνημα σαρκός*, which some do expound the wisdom, some the sensuality, some the affection, some the desires of the flesh, is not subject to the law

* John xv. 5, 6.

of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe, and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess, that “concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.” So much for the doctrine,—but I shall not proceed without making some observations upon it.

First, I shall take this opportunity of noticing an objection, which is usually made against this scriptural truth. “It is very hard, (say some), and does not seem to be worthy of a God, who useth his creatures agreeably to the law of justice, to make the whole human race suffer for the sin of one man.” Now, not to say, that whatever the righteous Lord ordains must be good, though we cannot discern the reason of it, yet it appears to me, that to the objection just mentioned such an answer may be given, as shall fully vindicate the honour of God, and shew the rectitude of his proceedings. In the first place, I would observe, if Adam, who came perfect out of the hands of his Creator, could not remain firm during the appointed time of trial, it is not probable that any of his posterity would be more steadfast; and, supposing life or death to depend upon the success or failure of obedience, it seems likely that all would plunge themselves into *remediless* ruin; I say *remediless*, because

the promise of a Saviour was a mere act of grace, proceeding from the bounty of the Creator. But, secondly, since to fallen Adam a gracious declaration was made, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, and since a similar declaration is made through Christ to all his posterity, no man will perish by the sin of his first parent, but by his own deliberate choice, consisting in a refusal of the most gracious offer that ever was, or, as far as we know, could be made to a set of wicked and rebellious creatures. But, what, it may be asked, will become of the Heathens, and of children dying unbaptized, to whom the offer has never been made? To this I answer—1st, If the Heathens have no light they have no sin, for so our Saviour has decided John ix. 41. 2nd, If they have light, the rejection of which will render them inexcusable, it must come from the Father of Lights; and we know, from the 1st chapter of this Epistle to the Romans, that "that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it to them." But, does not this concession of the possibility of salvation to the Heathens depreciate the value of divine Revelation? By no means; for the latter exceeds the former as much as the noon-day splendour does the twinkling of a star;

neither will it quench the flame of missionary zeal; for, who that possesses it, will be so cruel as to withhold the clear light of truth from him, who only gropes his way, and is in danger of falling at every step?

Concerning the happiness of unbaptized children, I think the Scripture is less decided, and though I cannot reconcile their damnation with any ideas that I have formed of the goodness and love of God, yet I am afraid of maintaining their safety, independently of divine authority. But though the Sacred Writings say little upon this subject, I think they say sufficient to satisfy every humane and sincere inquirer. Jesus Christ is in some sense "the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world." This is in them, I conceive, a seed of life, which, if they were to come to years of understanding, might be penetrated by the beams of a brighter Sun than that which adorns the firmament, and spring up, and grow as a plant of righteousness. It is a seed, not yet choked by the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of the world, and which, under proper culture, may produce its fruits to the praise and glory of Him that formed it. It is generally agreed that Baptism is that to the Christian, which Circumcision was to the Jew. It is a public

act of divine appointment, and gives to the person, who undergoes the ceremony, what may be deemed a legal right to all the privileges of that community, of which he is made a member. But, though Circumcision and Baptism were both of divine origin, yet it seems very probable, or, I should rather say, almost certain, that, even while the ceremonial law was in full force, a child might be saved without the former; and so I conceive it may without the latter. I found this opinion upon the command given to the Jews to circumcise their children on the eighth day, and not before; and, as we may suppose many infants would die before that time, we can hardly imagine, that a merciful God would have directed the ceremony to be so long deferred, if it had been indispensably necessary to salvation; neither can we believe it possible, that Job and Jeremiah, both too impatient under the calamities of life, would have wished to have perished in the womb, had it been the current opinion of their day, that uncircumcised infants were consigned to the vengeance of the Almighty. The Fathers of the primitive Church only performed the rite of Baptism at the feasts of Easter and Pentecost.* Surely, then, they did not think that

* See Christian Observer, vol. vi. p. 73. 74.

an infant would perish, if it were cut off before the ceremony had taken place. Notwithstanding this, I conceive it to be a duty incumbent upon all Christians to embrace the earliest opportunity of presenting their offspring to the Lord, and intreating him to pour down his blessings on their heads, that he would receive them into his family, give them grace to fight against the world, the flesh and the Devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants to their life's end. As Christ says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," no pious parent will consider the baptism of his child as an insignificant ceremony, but endeavour to procure a pious minister, pious sponsors, and a pious congregation, to present with him their prayers to the Throne of Grace upon that occasion.

It will be thought, perhaps, that what I have said above of a *seed of life* being implanted in the heart of *every man* that cometh into the world, is a contradiction to that doctrine which I have before maintained, viz. that original sin is the defect of a principle of life and righteousness; but what I mean is only *a capacity to receive*, or, at best, only a very small spark, which will remain undistinguished till blown into a flame by the breath

of the Spirit of God. Through him is proposed to every one of us a method of recovering, not only the Paradise which Adam lost, but even a higher state of happiness, which Adam could not attain to. To this Christ has led the way, and, by assuming our nature, has shown the possibility of carrying it through every temptation, difficulty, and danger, to the highest summit of glory at the right hand of God. This is done, not by human power, but by divine, so that the feeblest and weakest believer who accepts of the salvation of the Gospel, and commits himself to God through Jesus Christ, is sure of gaining a complete victory over all the enemies that attempt to oppose his progress.

2nd. As we are fallen creatures, "by nature the children of wrath,"* and without the image of God, let the knowledge of our condition induce us to seek a better state. This we shall find, as has been observed, through Jesus Christ; but, to remain satisfied with what we are, would be no less absurd than if a man, labouring under a disorder which preyed upon his very vitals, were to refuse making application to a Physician who offered to heal him, without any fee or reward. To understand that Christ is able to save, and actually to come

* Eph. ii. 3.

to him for Salvation, are very different things; and it is much to be lamented, that so many who hear the mercies of God proclaimed through Him from sabbath to sabbath, are deaf to the call, and manifest no sort of anxiety to recover the divine favor, without which they never can be happy. But this indifference is one of the natural consequences of the fall; and this leads me to the second head of my discourse.

II. "There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God." By the loss of the spiritual life the sensual has gained such an ascendancy, that many persons seem to think they have nothing to do here, but to eat, drink, and be merry. One goeth to his farm, another to his merchandize, and a third to some other occupation. They contrive to be very busy, and fancy they are going on very prosperously, and so indeed they may, for this world; but, if we speak to them concerning the work of Christ, and his salvation, or if we ask them to tell us what is their hope of Glory, confusion and amazement seize them, and it is evident, by their wish to change the subject as soon as possible, that they think our questions at least troublesome, if not impertinent. One cannot be much conversant with the world, without beholding an almost uni-

versal indifference to serious things. The most, as St. Paul says, have, “the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.”* To prevent, however, this blindness from being fatal, they are exhorted by the Ministry of the Word to pray to God, that he would open their eyes, and so enlighten them, that they may perceive the way, which leadeth to everlasting life. Though we preach to men “dead in trespasses and sins,”† yet we are authorised to suppose, that the power of God will accompany our word, and cause them to hear; therefore we address ourselves confidently to every sinner, and say, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”‡ Though there be a disposition in all to seek their own, and not the things of Christ, yet we venture, with great hope of success, to adopt the prophet’s words, and say, “Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found, and call ye upon him while he is near; let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, for he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”§ We are more earnest in our ex-

* Eph. iv. 18, † Eph. ii. 1. ‡ Eph. v. 14. § Is. lv. 6.

hortations, because it is written “ Ask, and ye shall have ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you ; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”*

Will ye not now, with such encouragement, seek the Lord ? Will ye not beseech Him to open the eyes of your understanding, that ye may see the wonderful things of his law ? If ye will not, ye must walk in darkness, and stumble and fall ; and if ye perish, remember, it will be because ye neglected and refused that great Salvation of which ye were invited to partake. But, as a farther inducement to make you anxious to obtain recovery from the fall, I wish you to consider

3rd. That sinners in their natural state “are altogether become unprofitable” ; for, wanting the principle of goodness, nothing really good can proceed from them. They may, indeed, be in some measure useful in their generation, by employing the talents and faculties wherewith they are endowed, for the general advantage of mankind, but they cannot promote the knowledge of God, nor communicate that information with which the creature, who is an heir of immortality, should be acquainted, and

* Matt. vii. 7, 8.

which alone can afford him solid happiness and satisfaction amidst this changing scene of things. When the head of the wisest man is laid upon the bed of death, and when those who knew him, admired his wisdom, and commended his schemes and projects, are in a similar situation, their contrivances for this world will afford them little consolation: On the contrary, if they have any sensibility of conscience at that awful hour, they will be filled with bitter reflections, that for the momentary enjoyments of this frail and transitory life, they forgot their God, and neglected to make provision for their immortal souls. They will remember then, perhaps, that while they boasted of their patriotism, their bravery, and their independence which, exercised upon Christian principles, are virtues highly commendable, self-love was the spring of all their actions, and, that to please God, and to live to his honor and glory, was the last thing they thought of. But, while men know not how much they are alienated from the life of God, they will care little about the recovery of the Spirit of Christ, which is the only source from whence that, which is really good, can proceed. Of "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works" God is the Author, and whenever we do that which

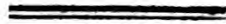
is pleasing in his sight, he must work in us "to will and to do of his good pleasure."*— This doctrine, though very plainly expressed in the Scripture, I know, is objected to, on the supposition that it makes man a mere machine; and indeed it does, and this is a point that I particularly wish to enforce, for what can be more suitable to the dignity of the creature, than that he should be an instrument in the hand of his Creator to fulfil his will, especially of such a Creator, as the God of the Christians, who is infinitely wise, holy, just, and good. The sin and folly of man consist in this, that he chooses to follow the desires of his own heart, rather than to become this machine; and all God's controversy with the self-willed rebel is to make him yield to that grace, which is designed to conquer and subdue him. Happily, we know that Christ, whose will is one with the Father's, "is able to subdue all things unto himself;"† we therefore earnestly recommend you to draw near unto God by him, and to beseech him to put his laws into your minds, and to write them in your hearts, that so you may be filled with all the fruits of righteousness, and be marked as the peculiar people of God, whom he hath

* Phil. ii. 13.

† Phil. iii. 21.

purified to himself, and made zealous of good works. That this may be your case, my Brethren, may God of his infinite mercy grant for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON V.

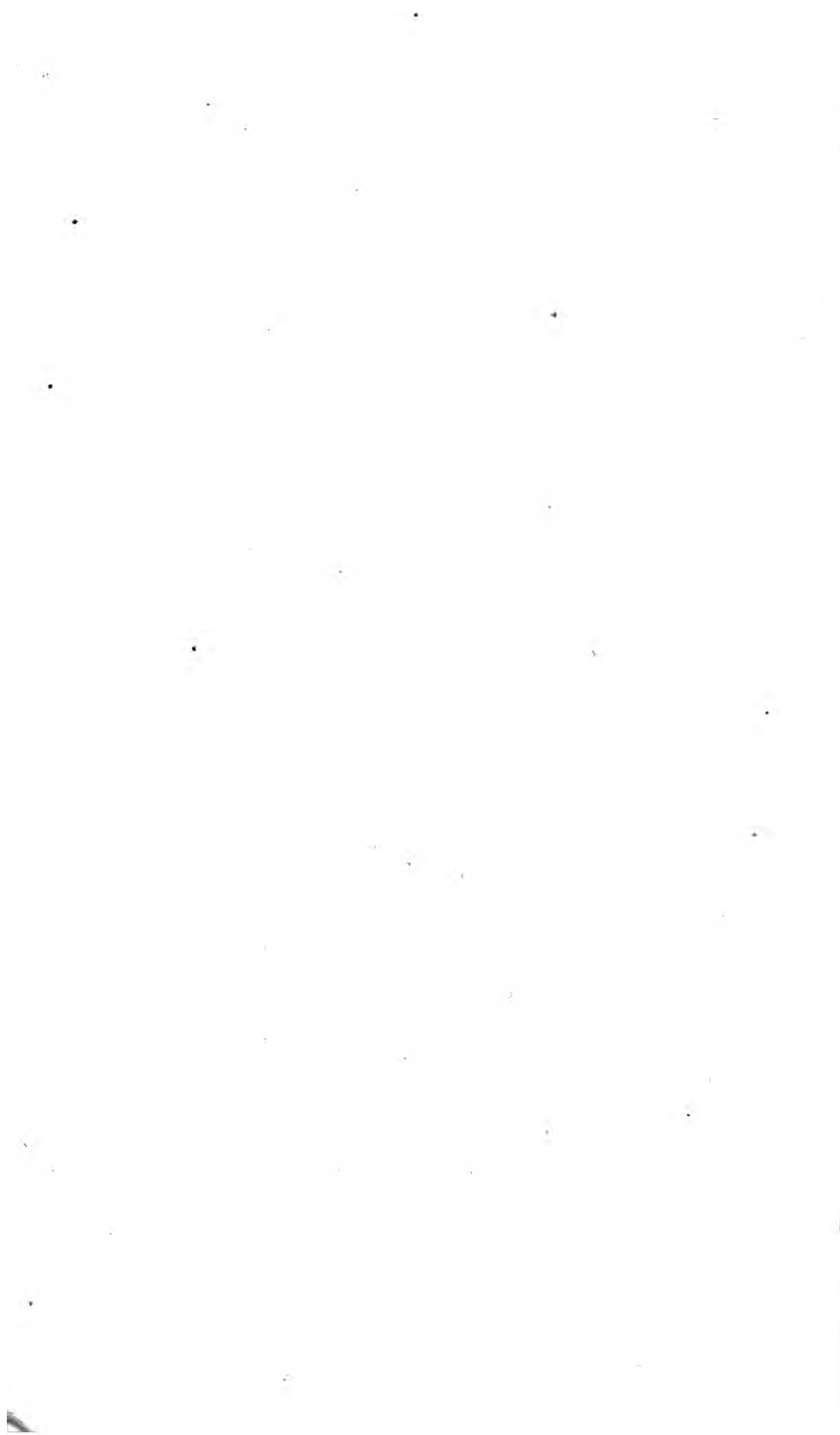


ON THE

UNIVERSAL WICKEDNESS

OF

MANKIND.



SERMON V.

ROM. iii. 13—20.

13. *Their throat is an open sepulchre ; with their tongues they have used deceit ; the poison of asps is under their lips.*

14. *Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.*

15. *Whose feet are swift to shed blood.*

16. *Destruction and misery are in their ways.*

17. *And the way of peace have they not known.*

18. *There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

19. *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them, who are under the law ; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

20. *Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight : for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

IN my last discourse upon this chapter, I endeavoured to point out to you the source of that evil, which is found in man, and to shew how agreeable that doctrine, which the Church of England calls *original sin*, is to the description of the fall, which is given us in the Sacred Writings. I informed you that we were, as the Apostle speaks, “ by nature the children of wrath ; ”* and that there was in all the de-

* Eph. ii. 3.

scendants of Adam a radical defect, or a want of that principle of holiness, which constitutes the spiritual life, and enables a man to maintain a steady and uniform obedience to the divine will. In consequence of this constitutional evil the world has in every age been filled with wickedness; and though, by the mercy of what some call restraining grace, and others natural conscience, the floods of iniquity have in some measure been restrained, yet, more or less, a disposition to act independently of God, and to break in upon that beautiful order of things, which he has established, is manifest in all in such a manner as to render them guilty creatures; therefore it behoves them to be humbled on account of their transgressions, and to intreat the Lord to receive them into his favour through Jesus Christ, to create in them a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within them.

In the verses, which I have just read, and which are quoted from different passages in the Old Testament, we have a very lamentable representation given us of human nature, which, in its present state, is exceedingly corrupt, destitute of the Image of God, and polluted with every crime. We are not, however, to suppose, that the several individuals, of which the mass of mankind is composed,

are addicted to the same vices, or wicked in the same degree; only that there is in all a certain obliquity and want of rectitude, which makes it necessary, that they should confess themselves to be miserable sinners, and plead for salvation, on no other ground than the mercy of God through Jesus Christ. But, let us proceed to a more particular consideration of the human character, as it is represented by the Apostle. He begins his description of the fallen sons of Adam by saying, v. 13. "Their throat is an open sepulchre." As an uncovered grave sendeth forth the most horrid and pestilential vapours, so doth the heart of an unconverted sinner. From thence, according to the declaration of our Saviour, "proceed evil thoughts, murders, fornications, adulteries, thefts, false witness, blasphemies," all of which are more pestiferous in their nature, and more fatal in their effects, than any plague or pestilence that has ever arisen from the most corrupted carcasses. This is the fountain of all uncleanness. From this polluted source flows all the evil, which is afterwards mentioned. Hence it comes to pass, that many "with their tongues have used deceit." Who will affirm that this is not commonly done? How few are the people, even among those, who profess and call themselves Christians, upon

whose word you can confidently rely, and of whose integrity you have no cause to entertain suspicions! Say, my friends, are you all free from deceit? Do you desire to deal fairly and honourably with all mankind, and to take no advantage of their ignorance? Solomon, who well knew the human heart, tells us what was the iniquity of traffic in his day. "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer, but when he is gone his way then he boasteth."* And is not the same iniquity practised at this day in every fair, and in every market? Do not many make their bargains in buying and selling, as if they thought the persons, with whom they deal, would over-reach them, if they could? How often too, after a promise of speedy payment, is money withheld from those to whom it is due, by which many an honest man becomes a bankrupt, and his family is involved in ruin? Examine yourselves, my Brethren, and see, whether, in all your transactions with your fellow creatures, the language of deceit has never come forth from your lips. Have you avoided, not only direct falsehood, but even equivocation, and have you been always desirous, notwithstanding what you might suffer by it in your interest, or reputation, that the truth, and the truth only,

* Prov. xx. 10.

should be spoken? Though I do not wish to bring a charge against any man, which I am not able to prove, yet I cannot help observing, that we may all, perhaps, upon a very strict inquiry, such as ought to be made in the presence of God, find reason to say,—“ Lord enter not into judgment with us thy servants for our transgressions in this matter.”

Again; the Apostle, describing the corruption of the human race, says—“ The poison of asps is under their lips.” Such is the deadly hatred of some, that, by their malicious speeches, they will seize upon, and destroy, all those who have the misfortune to offend them. Of these Saint James speaks, when he says—“ The tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison;” then it follows—“ therewith bless we God even the Father, and therewith curse we men;” * for where corruption rises to such a height, the “ mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” It cannot be denied, that there are persons among those, who have been baptized into the Christian faith, yea, and among those, who sometimes mix with the congregations, who assemble on the Sabbath to worship God, whose lips, when they have been excited by the least provocation to resentment, have poured forth the very language

* James iii. 7. 8.

of hell. Do I speak to any one here of that description? to any one, who dares permit the curse to go forth from his mouth? Sinner, I must tell thee, that thy state is dangerous, and very alarming, and if thou dost not speedily repent, the vengeance, which thou hast called for on others, will fall on thine own head.

From the disposition to curse proceeds next the inclination to destroy. The feet of fallen men are "swift to shed blood." As a proof of this, let the desolations of war, which have cut off multitudes, from generation to generation, on the face of the earth, bear witness. Very few years elapse without the sword being drawn. Indeed in one nation or other, either in private tumults or in general wars, it is drawn always. I enter not into the political causes of these contests, nor am I disposed to speak of their justice or injustice: it is sufficient to my purpose to notice their frequent recurrence, which clearly evinces, that there is much evil in the world, and that men are very different from what they ought to be. As things are now, not the love of God, not the love of man for his sake, nor any general desire to do unto all men, as we would they should do unto us, prevails. No; very much the reverse of this is observable in many, for, "destruction and misery are in their ways."

To gratify pride and ambition, and to indulge the flesh with its affections and lusts, is the natural desire of the unconverted heart; and, as this gratification and indulgence cannot be enjoyed, without the depression of some, and the spoiling of others, it is not to be wondered at, that fraud and violence so often call for the interference of the civil magistrate, and will not be restrained, but by the most powerful and coercive measures. Now, all the deplorable evils, which I have mentioned, the deceit of the tongue, the venom of the lips, the cursing and bitterness of the mouth, and the murderous disposition, proceed from this, that men "have not known the way of peace," and because "there is no fear of God before their eyes." Were the religion, which the Bible inculcates, to be universally embraced, and its precepts strictly attended to, none of the foregoing evils could find a place in the world; for the design of Revelation is to make a man give up his own will, and submit himself to the influences of the divine spirit, that God may work in him to will and to do of his good pleasure: and this surrender of a man's self to the Lord should be entire; there should be no wish to follow our own pleasure in the least thing whatever, because the Commandment of Christ is, "Be ye per-

fect, even as your Father, which is in Heaven, is perfect.”* It is the duty of a man to act with the fear of God before his eyes, not only in religious exercises and solemn engagements, but in all the common concerns of life. “Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”† Think, in every business you are to undertake—Is this transaction that which God will approve? Can I, through the whole of it, keep a conscience void of offence? Is there nothing in it that can in any way be injurious to my neighbour, interrupt the peace of my soul, or prevent me from approaching the Throne of Grace with confidence? If men would take care to preserve that purity of heart, which our Saviour inculcates, and to which he annexes the blessing of enjoying the vision of God, none of those shameful vices, which are a disgrace to human nature, would be found among us; and not only the more atrocious acts of wickedness would disappear, but even the smallest disposition to commit them would be checked, and every amiable and gracious temper would supply its place. If men, I say, would take care to preserve purity of heart, matters would be thus with them—but, how stands the case? Have they been always

* Matt. v. 48.

† 1 Cor. x. 31.

careful to avoid every appearance of evil? and have they constantly loved God with all their hearts, and their neighbours as themselves? I propose this inquiry, lest some, who have been happily restrained from deceit, cursing, murder, and other gross violations of the divine law, should suppose, that they are righteous enough, and arrogantly claim the favour of God, as the due reward of their obedience. But nothing was farther from the Apostle's design than this: he declares in the verses immediately preceding the text, and which were the subject of my last discourse, "We have proved," or charged, "both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written there is none righteous, no not one; there is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God: they are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one; then follow the words of the text, which lead to this conclusion,

Verses 19, 20. "Now we know, that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God; therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

The doctrine of man's fall and depravity is so positively maintained in the Scripture, that our Reformers, when they composed our Liturgy, did not imagine there was a person disposed to offer up his supplications to the Father of Mercies, who would not acknowledge the fact : our church service therefore is entirely designed for the use of sinners, and opens with such sentences, taken from the Bible, as may serve to impress our minds with the deepest humility and self abasement. Such, for instance, are these : " I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."* " Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out my transgressions."† " I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."‡ " Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord ; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."§ " If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ; but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."|| Then, after the repetition of one or more of these passages, follows a suitable exhortation

* Ps. li. 3. † v. 9. ‡ Luke xv. 18, 19. § Ps. cxliii. 2.
 || 1 John i. 8, 9.

from the Minister, who concludes with beseeching the people to join him in the confession, which runs in this form—"Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things, which we ought to have done, and we have done those things, which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us; but, Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders." I have thought proper to repeat these words, though they are so well known, because too many say them by rote, without thinking of their signification; for, if they were spoken from the heart, we should not find those, who use them, entertain an high opinion of their goodness, nor would they manifest an indisposition, at other seasons, to acknowledge their transgressions, and to implore the mercy of God, without which they never can be happy. They consider not, with any degree of seriousness and concern, that, if they are "miserable offenders," they must be guilty before God, and must lie under the sentence, which saith "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the Book of

the Law to do them.”* I deny not, that there are some, who excel more in works of piety and charity than others; but still, as the very best are not found without some sin, and as, weighed by the hand of God in the balance of perfection, all will be found wanting, it is certain, that by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified in his sight, and therefore every man living should humble himself under the mighty hand of God, and cry out, with unfeigned humility and self-abasement, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”†

One of the greatest difficulties, which the Ministers of the Gospel have to contend with, is to make a person of a pharisaic spirit assent to this doctrine. As we tell him, there is but one way of salvation for all sinners; for the least, as well as the greatest; for him, who has offended but in one point, and for him, who has offended in many, or in all; he too hastily supposes, that we depreciate the value of good works, and hold out encouragement to sinners to continue in their evil courses; but, though we must say, as, I trust, it has been proved, that the word of God reduces all to the level of sinners, who are to be saved by grace, yet great advantage will undoubtedly be derived by those, who have been accustom-

* Gal. iii. 10.

Luke xviii. 13.

ed to restrain their evil propensities, and who have in many instances endeavoured to live according to the precepts of God's law; for, as the Gospel, which we preach, is a dispensation of holiness, and as the example of Jesus Christ should be regarded by all his disciples, every person, who calls himself by his name, should endeavour to attain the highest degree of purity possible, and that must certainly be much more difficult for those, who have been accustomed to give a loose to their passions, and to work iniquity with greediness, than for others, who have lived a regular and moral life. The latter, indeed, will find it necessary to guard against a spirit of self-righteousness, and none can live without being obliged to struggle against tempers, which often shew themselves in one form or other, long refusing to yield to the obedience of Christ.

To conclude. Since the Scripture speaks so positively of the guilt of the whole world, let every man be diligent in the painful, but necessary work of self-examination. Let him scrutinize any single work that he has done, and consider with what temper it has been conducted from beginning to end: let him then say, if he can, "This work, O Lord, thou knowest is perfect in all its parts, and, supposing my salvation to depend upon this,

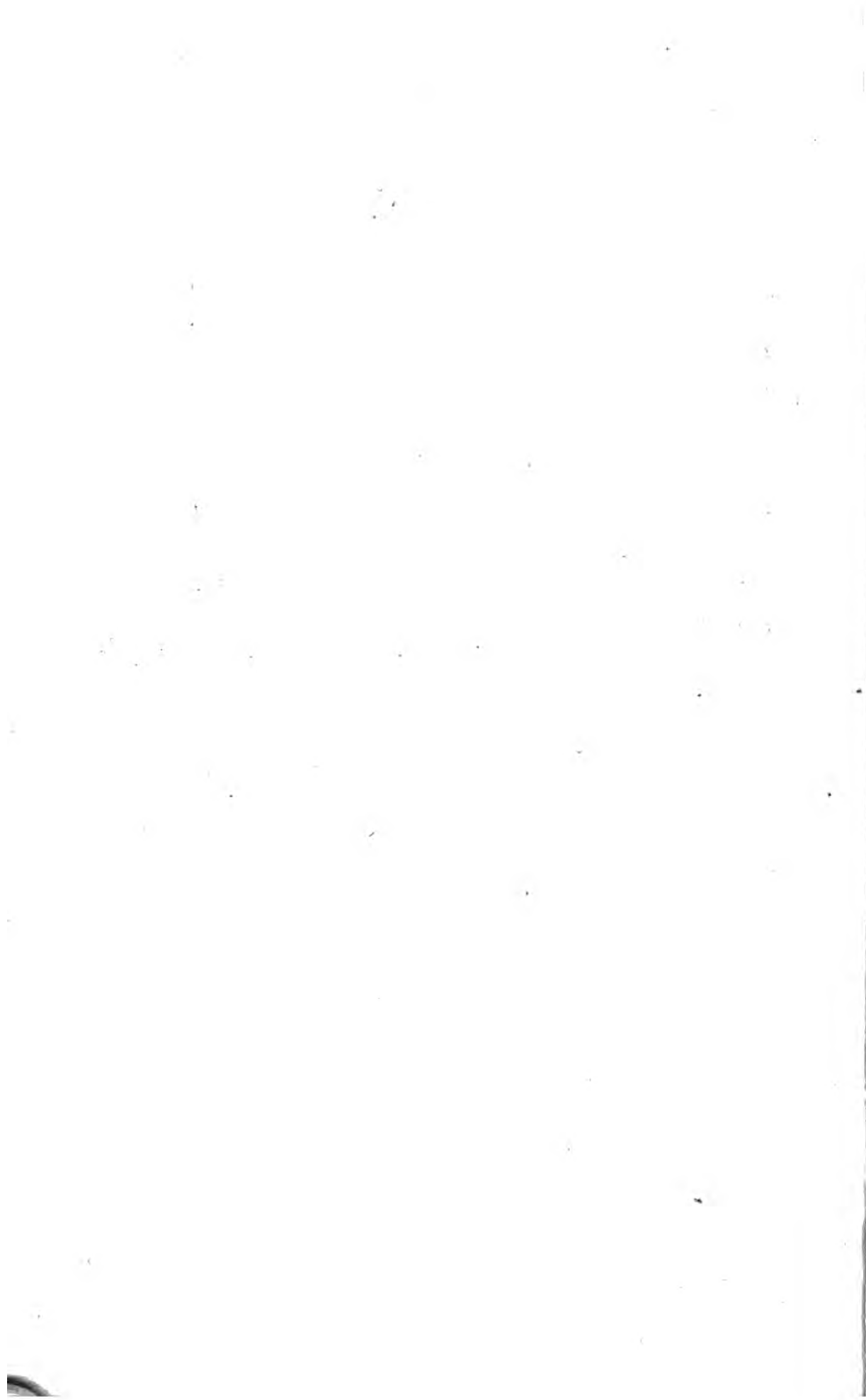
here I claim the reward of my performance ; yea more, supposing that the least failure has occurred in any part of the transaction, I consent to the forfeiture of the reward, and not that only, but even to damnation." Would you venture to say this respecting any one action of your life ? Rather you will say, even of your most holy things, as you are directed in the Communion service, " Lord, accept this, as my bounden duty, not weighing my merits, but pardoning my offences through Jesus Christ." Mercy in his name will be the prevailing desire of your soul, and you will not cease from beseeching the Lord with great earnestness to pardon your numerous transgressions, and to justify you through Him, whose glorious title, among many others, is, "*The Lord our Righteousness.*" * See, then, that you obtain this pardon before you die. Be not satisfied with thinking well of Christ, and of ascribing to him the glory of saving the human race, but take care that he is *your* Saviour, not only from the guilt, but also from the power of sin, and when you confess that it is not by works of righteousness which you have done, but by his mercy that you are received into favour, still remember that " without holiness no man shall see the Lord." † Be

* Jer. xxiii. 6.

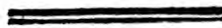
† Heb. xii. 14.

careful, therefore, to keep a conscience void of offence, and pray sincerely with the Church in her excellent thanksgiving, " We beseech Thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we may shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory world without end.

Amen.



SERMON VI.



ON JUSTIFICATION

BY

FAITH.



SERMON VI.

ROM. iii. 21—26.

21. *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the Prophets.*

22. *Even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference.*

23. *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*

24. *Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

25. *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.*

26. *To declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.*

IF you have paid attention to my two last discourses upon this chapter, you will recollect that I set forth the fall and depravity of the human race, and that I maintained, agreeably to the Apostle's declaration, that "there is none righteous, no not one," and that by the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified in the sight of God. What impression this doctrine has made upon your minds I know not, but certain I am it ought to lead

every one of you to some such serious inquiry as the following : " Since the curse of God is pronounced against every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the Book of the Law to do them, how shall I escape it ? Can I, by any artifice, elude the justice of God, or may I suppose that he will falsify his word to save such a rebel as I am ? Can I restore the divine law that obedience, which I have withheld from it ? Will my penitential tears wash away the past transactions of my life ? Or my firm resolutions to amend my ways carry me to that degree of purity which the perfect God requires ? " The more earnestly such inquiries are made by any sinner, who has not paid much attention to the gospel method of salvation, the more will he find his difficulties increase ; and the more he strives to render to God the obedience which is due to him, the more will he perceive his debt accumulate. His fallen nature, ever desirous of indulgence, will, in one instance or other, shew its power ; and pride, or passion, or covetousness, or envy, will mingle with, and defile the very best of his performances. If blest with a tender conscience, he may weep in secret over his sins and defects ; but, still, he will sin again, and be constrained to cry out, " Lord, save, or I perish. Lord, have mercy

upon me, and deliver me from the power of thy wrath." Would to God, my Brethren, such a cry were uttered from your hearts; for then would the Gospel, which I have the honour to deliver to you, be "glad tidings of great joy;" then would you listen, with the most earnest attention, to that method of saving sinners, which God has revealed; and with the most unfeigned gratitude, with wonder, love, and adoration, acknowledge his wisdom and goodness, and accept of his salvation.

The sum of the matter is this. You have broken the law of God in numberless instances, and the sentence pronounced by divine justice, for any thing you can do to avert it, must be executed upon you. "But," says the God of Mercy, "I will not insist upon your destruction. I will save you, and yet preserve my justice, truth, and holiness, inviolate; I therefore commission my Apostle thus to make known my mercy unto you."—"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the Prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by the faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of (or, failed of attaining) the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace,

through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

In discoursing upon this passage, I purpose taking the following particulars into consideration:

I. The meaning of the term **Justification**,

II. The nature of the redemption, which is given in Christ Jesus.

III. In what sense we are to understand the righteousness of God; and then,

IV. I shall conclude with an application of the subject to the state of my Hearers.

1st. I am to consider the signification of the word **Justification**. To justify is a term belonging to courts of judicature, and is used to imply the acquittal of any person from a crime wherewith he is charged. It is, indeed, generally used, when, upon a proper investigation of the circumstances of the case, and upon a careful examination of the witnesses, the supposed criminal is found to be *not guilty* of the offence, upon which he is pronounced by the Judge to be a just or righteous man. Now,

as it happens that all the persons, who are arraigned before the Bar of God are really guilty (for "there is none righteous, no not one"), we must understand the Apostle's expression with some degree of latitude, and must carefully examine the whole of what he has written on this subject, that we may ascertain, as accurately as possible, his precise meaning. What is said in the beginning of the fourth chapter of this Epistle will, I think, help us to this explanation.—"To him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness, even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works; saying, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Hence we may understand that justification signifies an acquittal from guilt. It is the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. It amounts to a declaration from the judge of all the earth, that the sinner shall be accepted, as though he were really a just man. But, if the Lord be thus pleased to justify *the ungodly*; if, in this respect, he act contrary to the common laws of equity, which

only justify the *righteous*, how, it may be asked, does he proceed with rectitude? and how can he be a God of truth, since he has affirmed in the most positive manner, that sin shall not go unpunished? To give a satisfactory answer to these questions, I am led to the second head of my discourse, in which I engaged to set forth the nature of the redemption, which is given us in Christ Jesus; for as it is written, v. 26. "God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus;" and v. 24, "We are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

The history of Jesus Christ is, or should be, well known to all, who profess and call themselves Christians; and every one, who has but paid the smallest attention to the word of God, and the doctrine of our Church, will, I presume, allow, that the salvation of sinners is effected through the merits of the Redeemer; but, though there be a general knowledge among Christians of this important and comfortable truth, yet many mistakes are apt to arise among them prejudicial to the glory of the Saviour, as well as to their own happiness. One of the principal of these arises from the notion that they must do something to render themselves deserving of the mercy of God, forgetting, or not regarding the signification of this expression, "we are

justified freely by his grace." Salvation is offered to the greatest of sinners without money and without price. He has only to believe, that God, who has appointed the method of his redemption, will accomplish it, consistently with his honour and glory, and to acquiesce in that method, though he may not be able to describe exactly how the thing is brought about; but, the matter is briefly this, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life."* "I believe (replies the sinner) and this is my salvation." That this faith will work by love, and produce good works is certain; but, still, we must carefully distinguish between faith itself and the fruits thereof, which must, according to the order of things, follow that gracious act of the Soul, which accepts the mercy of God through Jesus Christ. So much for the freeness of our justification, which is given us, says the Apostle "through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ."

2d. The word here used signifies the Redemption of a captive from captivity, and denotes the spiritual redemption of men by the blood of Christ from the bondage of sin and death. It was observed before, that, in order that the truth, justice and holiness of God might be preserved inviolate, it seemed necessary that sin

* John iii. 36.

should not go unpunished ; and it doth not ; for Christ, the beloved of the Father, the Son of God, the Word, which was in the beginning with God, and which was God, took our nature upon him, and in the person of man, upon whom, as Isaiah writes, “the Lord laid the iniquities of us all,” offered up “ a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice and oblation for the sins of the whole world.”* Upon this “ great mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh,”† depends our salvation. Relying with confidence upon this astonishing exhibition of divine love, we shall see the power of Satan defeated, and ascribe a glorious victory to the arm of the Lord. Pleading this sacrifice no past transgressions may be brought against us to condemnation. They are pardoned, yea, as the prophet Micah speaks, chap. vii. 19. they are cast “ into the depths of the sea,” never more to be remembered ; and since our adorable Redeemer has not only died for our offences, but is risen again for our justification, proving thereby that he hath conquered death, and him that hath the power of death, that is, the Devil, Believers in Jesus overcome the fears of dissolution, by which others are held in bondage, and look forward to a better state with a hope full of immortality. “ O Death !” say they

* Communion Service. † 1 Tim. iii. 16.

now, “where is thy sting. O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Thus have we redemption through Jesus Christ; and in this way of saving sinners is manifested.

3rd. The Righteousness of God, that is, his perfect justice and equity in pardoning sinners, and receiving them again into his favour. In consequence of what Christ has done and suffered, Believers may be said to have a *claim* upon the divine mercy; and as the Redeemer is stiled by the prophets “the Lord our Righteousness”† we plead, through him, a *right* to all the blessings of the covenant of grace. He has made the purchase of them, and (to speak with reverence on such a subject) it seems that God cannot now in justice withhold them from any, who in the name of Christ, pour out their supplications in faith before the throne of mercy. “Whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”‡ And again, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.”|| Ask then boldly, and you shall have. The Lord will receive you graciously and love you freely.

* 1 Cor. xv. 55, 56, 57. † Jer. xxiii. 6. ‡ Mat. xxi. 22.

|| Mat. xviii. 20.

I shall not enlarge upon the doctrinal part of my text, but conclude what I have to say at present by the following considerations; and,

1st. Let us consider the condition of sinners without Christ. They are, as I think has been proved in a former discourse, the degenerate children of a cursed parent; frail, mortal, creatures, acting, for a little while, a busy part on the world's stage, and then suddenly disappearing. They are seeking, by divers employments, to amass wealth; and by various amusements, to live in pleasure. When we see them in public, listen to their conversation, and observe their countenances, where the several passions of the soul display their power, we often think them happy, and are disposed to envy their state, because, at the moment of our observations, they seem to feel no care, nor even to anticipate the hour, when their boisterous joy shall be interrupted. But, let them live as they will; let them be ever so prosperous, or ever so happy, it is not in their power to blot out the hand writing, which exhibits this awful sentence "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law to do them"* Neither can they promise themselves, that they shall see the accomplishment of any of their favourite

* Mat. xviii. 20.

schemes, since death, who is neither to be bribed by gold, nor soothed by eloquence, in one instant may plunge his fatal dart into their bosoms, and bring them down to the grave. After death cometh the judgment; a judgment awful and tremendous; a judgment from the searcher of hearts; a judgment which none can evade, and which will be inflicted by the hand of the Lord God Almighty. My dear Brethren, it is our duty to direct your thoughts to that scene which you must behold, when your soul is separated from your body, and we are charged to tell you, however unpleasant our message may be, that "he that believeth not shall be damned;"* and that "he that believeth not the Son of God hath not life,"† "but the wrath of God abideth on him."‡ When we see you busily engaged in your farms, your merchandizes, and your other occupations, we cannot but call upon you to pay some attention to more important concerns, and though we know that it is very right and proper for a man to be diligent in his lawful calling, yet we know also, that he will make a most wretched bargain, who, in gaining the whole world, shall lose his own soul. Once more, then, let me earnestly entreat, by that which is most valuable to you, even by your

* Mark, xvi. 16.

† 1 John, v. 12.

‡ John, iii. 36.

own happiness, that you will think of salvation, and so think of it, as immediately to be in earnest to procure it, that you may not perish, but have everlasting life.

2nd, Let us consider how salvation is to be procured. Some of my hearers are, I hope, demanding—How shall I appear before the Lord? They, who have sinned with a high hand, will imagine, perhaps, that the day of grace is past, and that the long suffering of the Almighty will be no more extended to them. They think, and the enemy of their souls will not fail to press the thought strongly upon their minds, they think, I say, if they are pardoned, sin will not receive its due reward, and that, should the same degree of happiness be granted to them as to others, who have not been such great offenders, God would act unjustly. Long will they sometimes dwell upon such unpleasant thoughts, and would fall into despair, as the natural consequence, unless they were directed to Jesus Christ, the friend of sinners, who bore their sins “in his own body on the tree”* of the Cross, thus suffering “the just for the unjust, that he might bring” them “to God.”† Let their sins be ever so numerous, aggravated, or long persisted in, we are authorized to tell them, that “the blood of

* 1 Peter, ii. 24. † iii. 18.

Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin,"* and that whosoever will may wash in that fountain and be clean. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."† Upon Christ, as I have said, the Lord laid the iniquity of us all. Come then, O sinner, to this Saviour; put thy trust in him, and thy faith shall make thee whole. Others, it may be, though indeed it is to be feared there are not many so well intentioned, have been endeavouring to walk agreeably to all God's Commandments, and well knowing that he requires the most perfect purity, and the most exact obedience, are fearful they are not sufficiently holy to deserve his favour; and that they certainly are not, neither can they be so, for though they should exert themselves with all the diligence of which human nature is capable, now and then a thought will intrude, which will prove their weakness and frailty. Though, then, they should strive to be ever so holy (and far be it from me to prevent them from such a strife), yet they must take care not to make their works their Saviour, but only Jesus Christ, through whom,

* 1 John, i. 7.

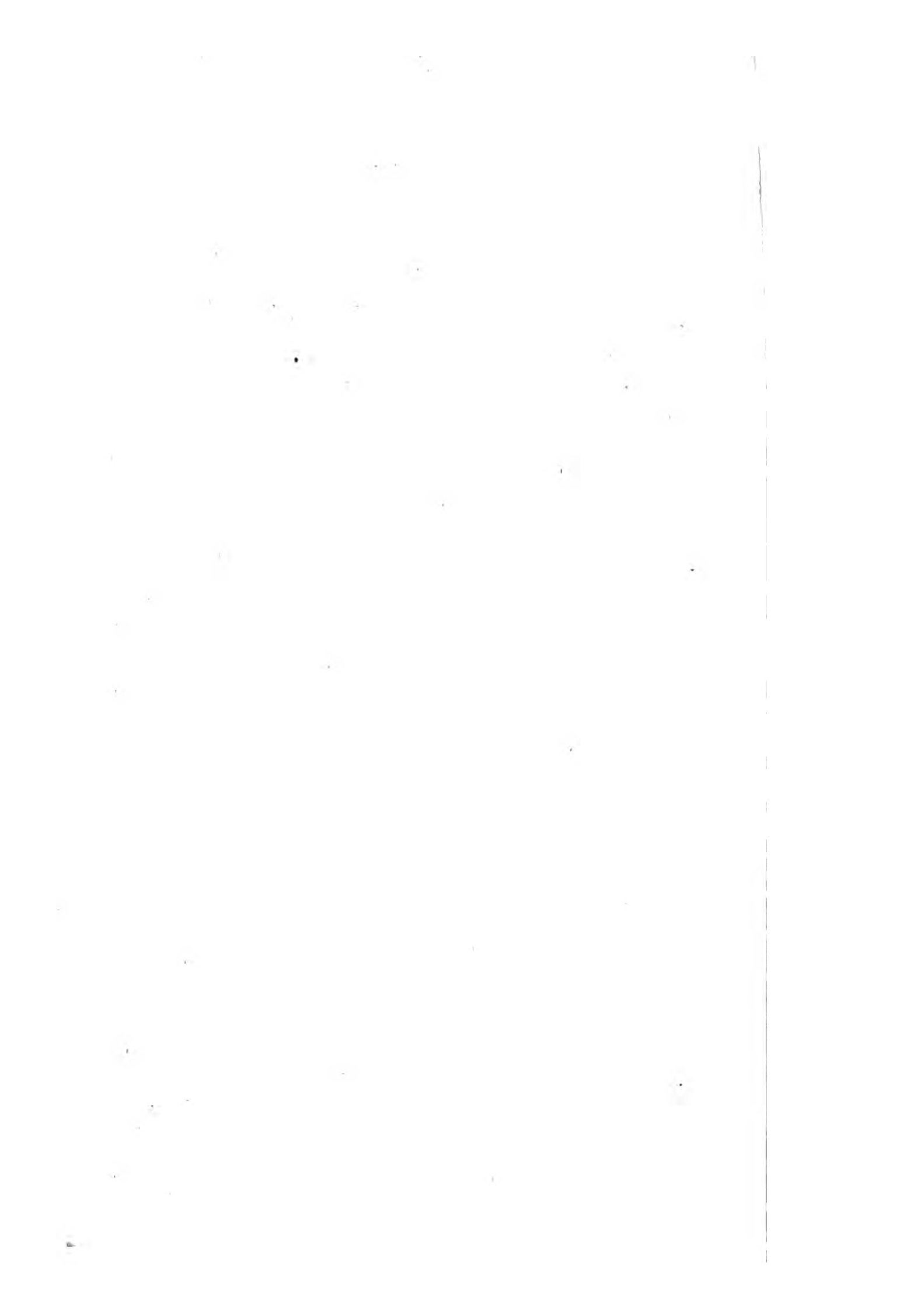
† Isaiah, i. 18.

with all their imperfections, the Father will graciously receive them.

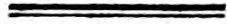
Lastly, let us all be thankful for the Redemption of our souls by Jesus Christ; let us accept of his salvation, and let us live to his praise. As pure Love induced the Lord of Glory to assume the likeness of sinful flesh, in which, for our benefit, he suffered and died, let us not be wanting in returns of love for such wonderful grace, and such undeserved mercy; and that we may in any measure glorify and serve him, as we ought, let us pray for the influences of the Holy Ghost to inflame our hearts with zeal, and to excite in our souls every generous temper and every kind affection. If we think of the horrible miseries of the damned, and of the unspeakable happiness of the redeemed: if we reflect, that without Christ the former must have been our everlasting portion, but that by him we have a *claim* and *title* to the latter, how can we withhold our gratitude from him, and how can we avoid saying with the enraptured Psalmist?—" Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name; bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruc-

tion, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies."* That such may be the disposition of your hearts may God, of his infinite mercy grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

* Psalm ciii. 1-4.



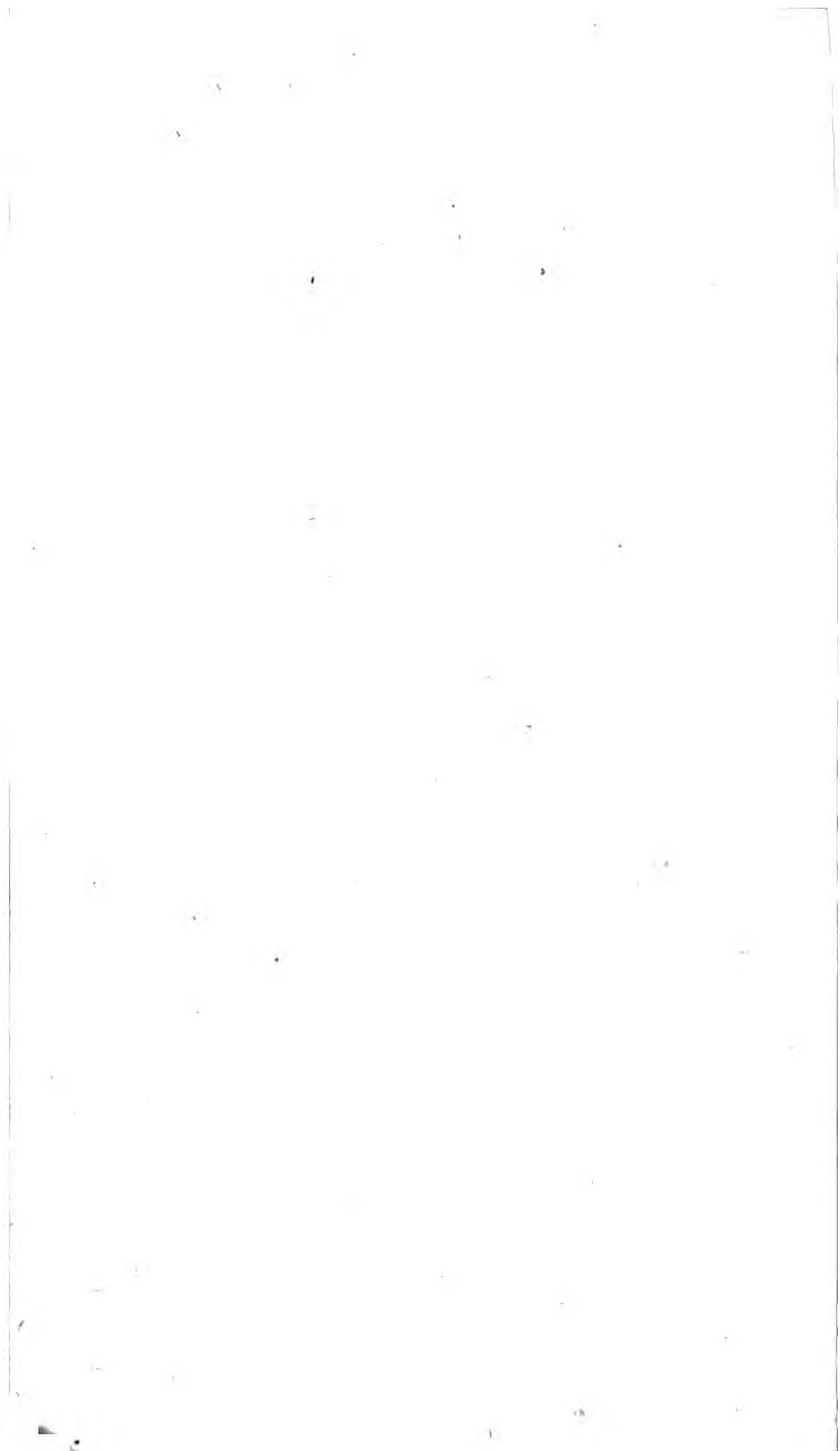
SERMON VII.



ON THE FREE GRACE

AND

LOVE OF GOD.



SERMON VII.

ROM. iii. 27—31.

27. *Where is boasting then? It is excluded By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith.*

28. *Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*

29. *Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also.*

30. *Seeing it is one God, who shall justify the circumcision through faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.*

31. *Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law.*

“**E**XCEPT ye be converted, and become as little children,” saith our blessed Lord, “ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.”* A child has imbibed no prejudices, he submits to his teacher, and becomes wise by his instructions. Thus should we be disposed to learn; thus should we listen to the teaching of the Sacred Word, and be diligent in obeying whatever is commanded us. It is because men, in general, are of a disposition contrary to this, that they are obliged to have line upon

* Mat. xviii. 3.

line, and precept upon precept ; and that the inspired writers, instead of simply declaring—“ Thus and thus saith the Lord ”—condescend to plead, and argue with them, in order to beat them off from their fond fancies, and to prove, that the word, which they deliver, is highly worthy of acceptation. How much the Jews were inclined to adulterate the word of God, and to deceive themselves, has been shewn in some preceding discourses, wherein I mentioned the high value which they placed on the mere ceremony of circumcision, as if that alone were sufficient to merit eternal life ; and also how much they were disposed to boast of works of righteousness, which they had done, while it was well known to the Searcher of Hearts, that they wanted that internal purity, without which no work can be acceptable in his sight. The same sort of arrogancy, which attached to the Jew, belongs also to the Gentile, or to men of every nation ; for pride, since the fall, seems to form a part of our constitutions, and to manifest itself, more or less, in every human character, so that we are ready to boast upon occasions, when humility would best become us, and to exalt ourselves before God, when it is proper for us to lie, covered with dust and ashes, in the deepest self-abasement, at the footstool of

his mercy. It is to lower this towering pride, to bring down this lofty spirit in man, that Saint Paul in this Epistle, and particularly in that part of it now under consideration, dwells so much on the doctrine of justification, and argues his point in such a manner, as to leave the proud transgressor without any other plea than this before the Throne of Grace, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This being the case, he justly demands—"Where now is boasting?" Where is the man, who will presume to plead his meritorious services before God? Such boasting "is excluded." "By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith; therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." This, Brethren, should be our conclusion, from what has been already said upon the sinfulness and depravity of man; but, as a notion of some desert is not easily rooted out of the human heart, I shall mention one or two instances of it, which very commonly occur, and at the same time endeavour to prove to you the fallacy of such a conceit.

It is not denied, I believe, by the generality of Christians, that we are saved by the merits of Christ; but then they suppose they must do something to deserve those merits; and if we ask what they have done, they will tell us,

perhaps, that they have offered up their prayers to heaven with great regularity, and have bestowed their property with a liberal hand to support and comfort the weak and wretched. Be it so. Happy for the world if so much has been done. These acts of prayer and charity ought to be found in every Christian; but before we allow them to be meritorious, we must diligently consider their nature and their end.

1st. With regard to Prayer; what is it but the expression of want? It is a petition from an inferior to a superior, to request that which the former has not, and which he cannot have, unless the latter is pleased to bestow it upon him. Were a beggar to come this day to your door, and plead his poverty and wretchedness, you would, I suppose, readily relieve his wants. Were he to come to-morrow, and say, he is still indigent, possibly your compassion might be again extended towards him; but were he to repeat his visits day by day your patience would presently be exhausted, and you would drive him from your door, as a very bold and impertinent fellow. Can it, in any sense, be said that such a petitioner *merits* your favour? I think not; and how, then, can you merit the favour of God by begging daily at the throne of grace, where, if you receive not, it is because you ask amiss; but, if you receive, your

obligations to love and gratitude are increased, so that unless you become every day more devoted and more holy, you will have prayed to little purpose, and have much to answer for before God. But, besides that prayer in its very nature excludes all idea of merit, where is the person, who always comes before God with that humility, reverence, and devotion, which it is proper for a creature to maintain in the presence of his creator? Do vain thoughts never intrude themselves? If they do, can the petitioner then be said to have the true spirit of prayer, and a true sense of the majesty of Him before whom he bows? Alas! in many instances the very prayers, of which some so idly boast, will turn to their condemnation, and they will find abundant reason to beseech the Lord to pardon the iniquity even of their most holy things.

2nd. Works of charity are considered by some as meritorious acts. They know that these are much commended in the Scripture, while every kind of cruelty and oppression is severely condemned; hence they reflect with pleasure on the abundance which they have bestowed, and upon the kindness and humanity, which they have shewn to various objects of distress: and so far is well; but, if they arrogate to themselves a right to the property,

which they possess, and bestow any part of it without a regard to the will of God, whose stewards they are, they will incur a degree of guilt, not of merit, in the distribution. "This estate (says one) I received from my ancestors, and this fortune I raised by my own industry and diligence; it is surely then, to all intents and purposes my own, and I may bestow it as I think proper." But, before you come to this conclusion, think who blessed your ancestors, and who gave you the power of increasing your store. Did you create your own capacity, and give yourself that understanding, which maketh the wise man to differ from the fool? Did you form yourself with strength of body, and sound health for labour? Did you make the sun to shine, the rain to descend, and the winds to blow, that you might gather the fruits of the earth in their due season? No.—What power have you then to boast of? What claim to any thing that is not the gift of God? But, still you think that what you have is your own, and if you give a portion of it in charitable purposes, you may spend the rest as you please. In this you are mistaken. As all you have is the gift of God, it should be all devoted to his glory. I do not mean that you should give it all away, for then you would become a beggar yourself, and a burden to

your neighbour, but that, when you have made a decent provision for your own household, without pride, and without ostentation, you should consider the poor and destitute, and be liberal towards them without regard to friend or enemy: I say without regard to friend or enemy; because the charity, which gains some persons high reputation for benevolence, is often a mere selfish act. They bestow their gifts upon those whom they may happen to like; while from others, who may have had the misfortune to offend them, they turn away, though the latter may be objects most worthy of their compassion, and most like him, who said, "in as much as ye have done it to one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me." Christian charity will regard the will of God in all things; and if, in any instance, we give with the hope of being commended, or select such objects as the Lord will not approve of; if we hoard through covetousness, or spend for the sake of vanity and indulgence, we misuse our talent, and for that we must give an account at the day of judgment. Will any charitable man now say, that in the disposal of his property he has always regarded the will of God? Has he been strictly honest in the acquirement of every farthing which he possesses, and has *all* been laid out with a similar regard to his master's

will? I say *all*, for he, who is dishonest in the least, shews that he wants that reverential love, which should be the governing principle of all his actions. It will thus appear, I think, from what has been said of Charity, that he must be a bold man, who will think of pleading it before God as a meritorious act. Rather, when we consider how little we have bestowed aright, and how much we have bestowed amiss, we shall think it necessary to confess our failings before God in this commandment, and earnestly beseech him to have mercy upon us miserable sinners.

“Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith:” for seeing we are such wretched sinners, so polluted in our very best deeds, so unworthy of God, and so justly liable to punishment, we cannot hope, for our own sakes, to obtain the divine favour; but, from the mere principle of self-love, from the absolute necessity of the case, are obliged to accept the offer of pardon through Jesus Christ; of whom we read such glorious things in the Word of Truth, and of whose love, and design to save sinners we have such indubitable proofs, that we must, with Saint Paul, and all true believers, come to this conclusion; that “A man is justified by faith without the deeds

of the law ;” and since, as was before proved, all have sinned, and failed of attaining the glory of God, the method of salvation is the same to Jew and Gentile, to the circumcised and the uncircumcised, for Christ is the only way to the Father, and “there is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”*

To this doctrine, though clearly stated, and fully proved, the Apostle was aware that some persons would make an objection to this effect.—You say, that by the deeds of the law shall no man living be justified ; “Wherefore then serveth the law ?” Why was it promulgated with so much solemnity from Mount Sinai ? Why has it since been so frequently enjoined, and why enforced by such awful sanctions ? To this he answers, We do not “make void the law through faith ; God forbid,” that we should do such things, “yea, we establish the law :” for, as it is written in the Epistle to the Galatians, “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith,”† The law, which demands perfect obedience, is designed, in the wisdom of God, to answer a most important end. It is given to shew us our weakness, our defects, and our transgressions. It

* Acts iv. 12.

Gal. iii. 24.

saith peremptorily, "do this," that is, obey every precept fully and perpetually, "and thou shalt live" by me; but if thou dost fail in one tittle, though it be only in thought, thou must lose thy reward, and not that only, but thou wilt be guilty before God, with this awful sentence of condemnation against thee, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the Book of the Law to do them."* We must then say, "If there had been a law given, which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law; but the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."† Seeing, then, that such is the divine constitution of things, let us endeavour to improve the subject before us by considering,

I. The love of God.

II. The returns we should make for his love.

1st. Let us consider the love of God. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."‡ Having fallen in Adam, and having farther estranged ourselves from God by wicked works, he might, without any impeachment of his justice, have left us to experience the

* Gal. iii. 10.

† iii. 21, 22.

‡ John iii. 16.

wretchedness of our own sin and folly, have given us up to the power of the deceiver, and have suffered us to groan eternally in inextinguishable flames. But, glory be to his holy name, by the riches of free grace, or, as St. Paul speaks, "according to the exceeding riches of his grace,"* he beheld our misery, he pitied us in our low estate, and his own arm was stretched forth to accomplish our salvation. When the sacred writers speak of this love they seem to be at a loss for words to express the feelings of their hearts. It is a "Love, which passeth knowledge."† It has a "breadth, and length, and depth, and heighth,"‡ which no created understanding can attain to; and when redemption is spoken of, all creation is summoned to sing aloud in the Redeemer's praise. Thus we find the Lord speaking by the Prophet Isaiah concerning his people Israel, the figure of all true believers. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye Heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest and every tree therein, for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel."|| So great

* Eph. ii. 7. † iii. 19. ‡ 18. || Is. xlv. 22, 23.

and wonderful is this love, and the mode in which it is manifested so surpassing all the powers of human contrivance, that the humble christian is sometimes tempted to think, that the glad tidings revealed in the Gospel are too good news to be true ; but, the Lord's ways are not as our ways, neither are his thoughts as our thoughts. "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards those that fear him ; and as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."* Considering, then, the exceeding great love of God our Saviour towards us miserable sinners, let us be careful,

2nd. To make suitable returns for this love. "What," says the object of Christ's redemption, "shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord ;"† that is, I will receive his gift, and glorify the gracious Giver. Knowing the sinfulness of my nature, and my inability to perform that which is good, I will beseech the Lord to create in me a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within me. I will seek from him the grace of heavenly love, that I may adore him for his mercies, and that I may feel a delight in serving him with all the faculties wherewith he

* Ps. ciii. 11, 12.

† xvi. 12.

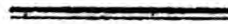
has blessed me. I will request him to open my eyes, that I may see the wonderful things of his law, to unstop my ears, that I may listen to his holy commandments, to loose my tongue, that I may speak his praise, and to give strength and activity to all my members, that they may be ready instruments to perform his will. I will consider myself no longer as my own property, but as belonging to him, who has purchased me by his blood, and as bound, by every tie of gratitude and affection, to dedicate myself to his service; and in this purpose I will, through grace, abide, whatever may be the consequence; for "who," says our Apostle, "shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"* No. These are designed to wean my heart from the love of those sins, which crucified my Saviour: these are ordained to try my faith, my patience, and my other graces, and to bring me to a greater conformity to his likeness. Be it then my steady purpose, my unalterable determination, to dedicate myself to the service of God through Jesus Christ. In pain and sickness, in adversity and tribulation, as well as in the more prosperous conditions of life, shall he still be my hope and my confi-

* Rom. viii. 35.

dence; yea, though he slay me, yet will I trust in him, for sure I am, that these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for me "a far more exceeding and eternal weight weight of glory."

O may the Lord enable us all to see the greatness of his salvation; may he, by his spirit, so shed abroad his love in our hearts, that we, in return for all his benefits, which are not only greater than words can express, but even far beyond what imagination can conceive, "may perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

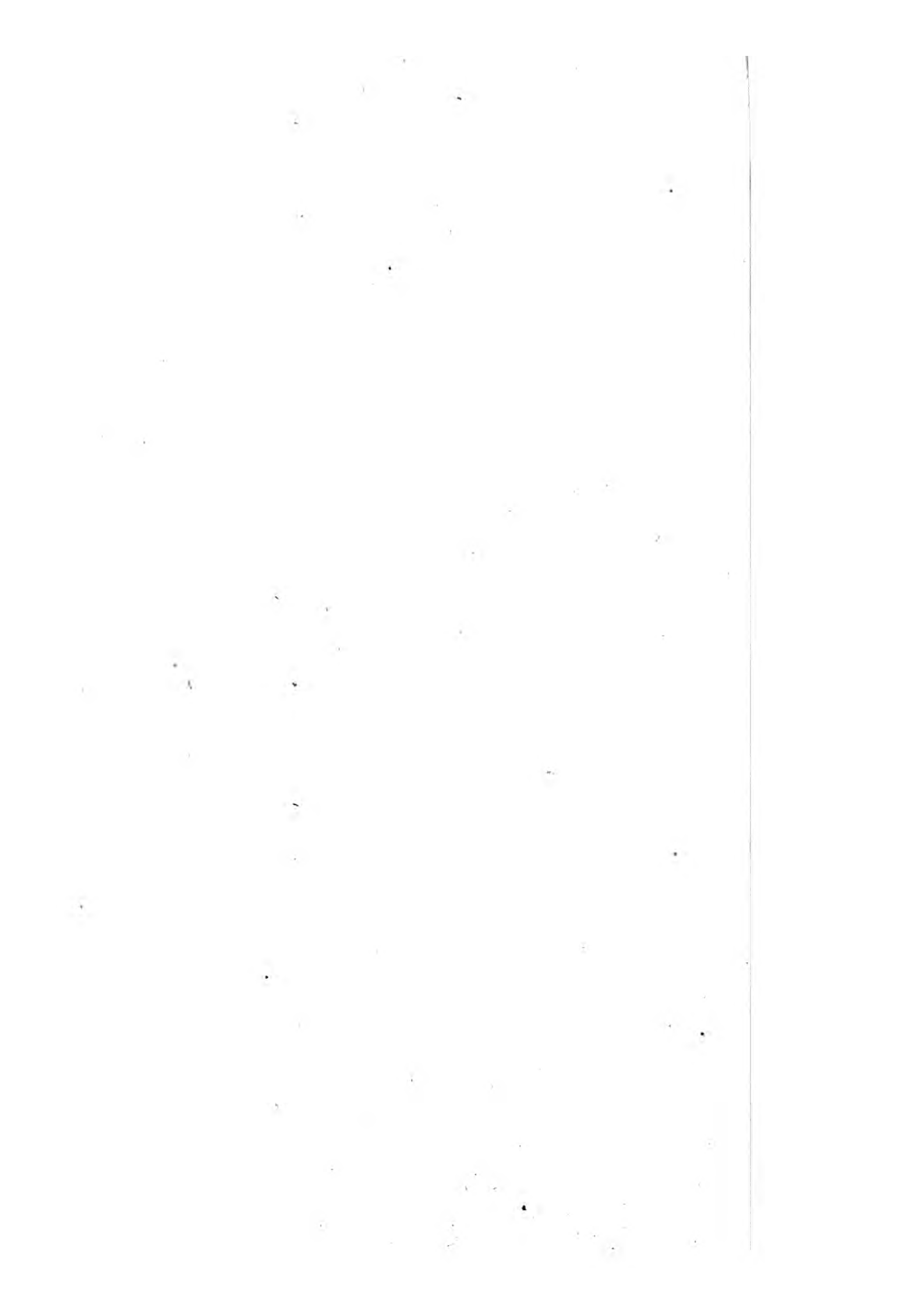
SERMON VIII.



THE OBLIGATION

LAID UPON CHRISTIANS TO PERFORM THE

WILL OF GOD.



SERMON VIII.

MATTHEW, vi. 10.

Thy will be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven.

WE, who are Christians, take up the Bible, as a revelation from God. It directs us what we are to believe, and what we are to do. If any of those things, which are matters of Faith, seem, at first view, unreasonable, we are not on that account to reject them; and if those things, which are matters of practice, seem too hard for flesh and blood to perform, we are not immediately to pronounce them impossible. In the first instance, clearer evidence and maturer judgment may shew us the folly of hasty decisions; and in the latter we shall learn, that the assistance of the Holy Spirit is granted to overcome our natural attachment to the things of this life, and to enable us to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.

It has been observed with great propriety, that the Christian's path is beset with many dangers, therefore he is exhorted to be cau-

tious, watchful, and diligent. Should he endeavour to establish his salvation by Faith only, he may then be liable to fall into the error of those, who put away a good conscience concerning faith, and thereby made shipwreck*; or, should he strive to fulfil the righteousness of the law, he may be like those Jews, who went about to establish their own righteousness, and did not submit to the righteousness of God.† Yet, great as the dangers that attend our path may be, I make no doubt but that all who are *sincere* will escape them.—Such a disposition makes a man desirous of knowing the worst of himself; it induces him to search the Scriptures with all diligence, and to pay as much respect to those passages which condemn, as to those which justify, his faith and practice; it inclines him to give up his heart to God, that every lofty imagination may be brought down, that every self conceit may be eradicated, and that every sort of wickedness, however subtle and insinuating it may be, may not any longer usurp a place therein.

Let us now inquire into the meaning of the text; “Thy will be done in Earth as it is in heaven.” I shall divide the subject into the following heads, and consider,

I. What is the will of God;

* 1 Tim. ii. 19.

† Rom. x. 3.

II. The means by which it is to be done;
and

III. The measure of the performance.

1st. I shall endeavour to shew what is the will of God. In order to be acquainted with this, I need only refer you to the words of Christ, which he returned to the lawyer, when he tempted him, asking, "Which is the great commandment in the law? And Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment: and the second is like unto it—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Upon these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."* Our duty, it is true, is branched out into a variety of particulars; but, if once the heart be given to God, it will be needless to speak at large concerning the things which a man should do, and which he should leave undone; for every person, who reads his Bible, knows that he ought to cleanse himself from all filthiness both of the flesh and spirit. But, if you want a rule of conduct, read the ten commandments, and as a comment upon them, our Saviour's Sermon upon the mount, and observe how he spiritualizes all the precepts of the law, shewing that it is

* Mat. xxii. 36—40.

not the mere *act* of sin, but the *thought*, which constitutes a man a transgressor in the sight of God. For, says he, “whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment,”* and whosoever shall look upon a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.”† See also the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, which contains as beautiful a compendium of Christian practice as can be found in the Bible. But, when we read these, and other portions of God’s word, which positively command us to be holy in all manner of conversation and godliness, and when we strive to fulfil the divine law, we find another law in our members warring against the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin, which is in our members; so that, however desirable a state of conformity to the divine will may appear, there seems to be an insurmountable barrier to the attainment of it, and many a one has been constrained to cry out, through the prevalency of his corruptions, in the words of Saint Paul, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But he adds, to the inexpressible comfort of all believers, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”‡ And this leads me

* Mat. v. 22.

† v. 28.

‡ Rom. vii. 24, 25.

to the second part of my discourse, viz.—the means by which the will of God should be performed.

It should ever be remembered by those, who are anxious to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ, that they are described in the Sacred Writings, as weak and helpless creatures, that this point is strongly insisted on, and that various proofs of it are given by the description of divers characters in the word of God. Bearing this in our minds, though we may well be shocked at so degrading a view of human nature, yet we shall be convinced, that our depravity will not remain as an obstacle to our recovery, but that means of restoration will be granted to us, in the same manner as they have been afforded to other fallen creatures before us. Hear how Saint Paul, who scrupled not to declare himself the chief of sinners, speaks upon this subject: “When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” These words are to be found in the Epistle to the Romans, chapter 5, v. 6, and in the 8th verse are other words exactly to the same purpose: “God commended his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” It appears very clear from these two passages, that the love of Christ is independent of, and prior to, all goodness

in us. It is a manifestation of his extreme tenderness and pity to his poor lost creatures, whose redemption he undertook to effect, when every other means failed. We may state it then, as an undoubted truth, that all transgressors, however great and aggravated their sins may have been, are encouraged to obtain salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. But, this is not all. Observe how the Apostle goes on in the 9th verse, "Much more then, being now justified by his blood," all past transgressions being remitted, "we shall be saved from wrath through him:" "we *shall* be saved." So then there is a part of salvation yet to follow; for, adds he, verse 10, "if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved through his life." This life I conceive to be the same as that which the Apostle speaks of in the 8th chapter, which thus begins: "There is, therefore, now no condemnation," because they are justified, "to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk, not after the flesh, but after the spirit; for the law of the spirit of life" (that life by which we shall be saved) "in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death; for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God send-

ing his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." It appears then, that the means by which we are to perform the will of God is the spirit of Jesus Christ, through which we shall be able to bring the carnal desires of the flesh into subjection, to obtain victory over the world, and to perfect "holiness in the fear of the Lord."* Hence we find many injunctions and exhortations to pray for this spirit, which God promises to give to those that ask for it; for he is so infinitely good and gracious, as to provide a method of recovery for all; and if any perish, it is because they will not come to Christ for life, and will not ask wisdom of God, who, as Saint James saith, "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." Hear what Saint Paul says to the Ephesians, chap. 3, v. 14—17: "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in Heaven and Earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Hear him to the Galatians :

* II Cor. vii. 1.

“Walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh ; for the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance : and they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.”* And also to the Philippians : “I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.”† It is then the duty of all Christians to pray, that God would grant them, through Jesus Christ, his Holy Spirit, and that he would so work in them “to will and to do of his good pleasure,”‡ that henceforward they might “yield their members’ instruments of righteousness unto God,”§ and be sanctified “wholly in spirit, soul, and body.”|| But, I must endeavour to shew,

3rd. The measure according to which we must perform the Will of God.

Our text says, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Our rule of conduct, then, in obeying the divine will, must be conformable to the service of the Angels of God, and the spirits of just men made perfect ; and they obey cheerfully, universally, perfectly. “Be ye perfect as your Father, which is in Heaven is perfect.”** “Ye shall be holy,

* Gal. v. 16, 22, 23, 24. † Phill. iv. 13. ‡ Phill. ii. 13.
§ Rom. iv. 13. || 1 Thess. v. 23. ** Matt. v. 48.

for I, the Lord your God am holy.”* But here we are disposed to say, “This is too much—If such are the rigorous demands of the law, who then can be saved?” But, let us not be frightened from our duty by a false representation of things. Let us take care, that self-deceit and self-indulgence, to which all men are dreadfully prone, do not obtain dominion over us, and that we do not form a scheme of salvation for ourselves, which a strict and accurate investigation of the Holy Scriptures will force us to abandon. “To the law and to the testimony”† then; let us search the scriptures, and by their decision let us abide.

In order to shew how much is required of us, I shall first select some of the passages, which treat of our *progress* in holiness, and secondly some others, which treat of our *perfection*.

Among the passages which treat of our *progress* in holiness, consider the following. The first shall be taken from the 9th chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, where the christian life is compared to a race. “Know ye not,” says the Apostle, “that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize; so run, that ye may obtain: And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate

* Lev. xix. 2.

† Is. viii. 20.

in all things; now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible; I, therefore, so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air, but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away.* Saint Paul, who made this declaration, was a great Apostle, and highly favoured of God; yet he was not contented with his present state, therefore he speaks to the same effect in his Epistle to the Philippians: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things, which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things, which are before, I press towards the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."† In the 1st chapter of the second Epistle of Peter we find an exhortation to the same purport. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these

* 1 Cor. ix. 24-27.

† Philip. iii. 12-14.

things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; but he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."* Now, does it not appear very clear from these passages, to which many others of a similar import might be added, that we must be growing in grace, and increasing in holiness, and is it not necessary, that we should "exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of" us "should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin? For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."† But, if we are to go forward, it must be to some mark. We must have a rule, whereby to measure our conduct, and that rule can be nothing less than the will of God, who desires that his creature should be holy as He is holy.

Observe how strongly this doctrine is inculcated in the word of God. "I beseech you Brethren," says St. Paul in the 12th chapter to the Romans, "that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service; and be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed

* 11 Pet. v. 9.

† Heb. iii. 13, 14.

by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Again, Eph. iv. 11, 12, 13: "He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edifying the body of Christ, till we all come, in the unity of the Faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." So to the Colossians; chap. iv. 12.—"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." In the second Epistle to Timothy, chap. iii. 17, the design of Revelation is said to be for this purpose, "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Just in the same language is Saint Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians, Epistle I. chap. iii. 12, 13, "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love, one towards another, and towards all men, even as we do towards you, to the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his Saints." And at the conclusion of this Epistle,

he writes; “ Abstain from all appearance of evil, and the very God of Peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” Now I desire it may be observed, that these are only a few, out of a great many passages, which exhort a man to cleanse himself “ from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.”* We may then infer, that whoever proposes to himself any degree of obedience short of the whole law of God, is not living as a Christian, is not guided by the sacred word, and it will be well if he does not deceive his soul to perdition. But you will ask, perhaps, “ If God requires nothing less than perfection, who then can be saved?” In answer to this question, I shall not endeavour to explain away the force of any of the foregoing passages, because they are too plain to admit of any other sense than what is obvious at first view; but I would observe, that our salvation is begun as soon as we believe in Jesus Christ, and receive him for our Saviour, and our Lord; and I make no doubt, that if God should be pleased to give death his commission to remove any of us from

* II Cor. vii. 1.

this transitory state immediately upon such a faith, we should be placed in a condition of happiness far superior to that we now enjoy. Thus it happened to the penitent thief, to whom, as he was expiring on the cross, Christ said, "Verily I say unto thee, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." But, as the Bible reveals to us a day of judgment, in which every man shall be rewarded according to his works; and, as our Saviour has told us that in his Father's house are "many mansions,"* I also maintain, that the more a soul is transformed into the image of Christ, the higher will be its degree of glory on its departure from the body; and hence our Saviour tells his Disciples, "Ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."†

If ye are partakers of Christ, the same mind will be in you that was in him. It was his meat and drink to do the will of his Father; it was that in which his soul delighted. Now, "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," and one spirit wills one thing. What then can we think of the religion of that man, who does not desire that every thought may be

* John xiv. 2.

† Matt. xix. 28.

brought into the obedience of Christ, and that he may be perfect even as his Father, which is in heaven is perfect? But, "O, how weak, how frail, how prone am I to wander!" cries every zealous Christian.—Granted.—You have the more need then to watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation, and the more need to cast yourself upon the mercy of Jesus Christ, that his strength may be perfected in your weakness. You are reminded again and again of your being without strength, and of your insufficiency even to think a good thought, not to make you negligent and idle, but to make you rely entirely upon the power of God, that he may work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure, that you may not claim to yourselves any merit in your salvation, but ascribe all to Christ, to whose perfect image you are predestinated to be conformed.

If you still say, it is not necessary to be so very strict, then allow me to ask, Where have you found in the Bible, that any defective measure of holiness is allowed to the servant of Christ? Where have you found it written, that, having attained so far, you need not be anxious about farther progress? Saint Paul, as was before observed, did not think he had gone far enough, and I much doubt if any of us have gone so far; and I am sure we read of

some, who put away a good conscience concerning faith, and thereby made shipwreck.* But, I would ask the objector—What induces thee to complain of the severity of the divine law? “What is required of thee, O man, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Dost thou complain, that it is painful to fulfil the social and relative duties of life, to do good to the community at large, and to ameliorate the condition of every individual, as far as thy power and ability extend? Had the precepts, which Christianity inculcates, their due weight with mankind, those horrid scenes of slaughter and desolation, which have lately been represented upon the theatre of Europe, could never have taken place; for, as a celebrated writer observes, “If Christian nations were nations of Christians there could be no war.”† All the sorrows that men experience arise from setting up their own wills against the will of God, and all the plans that they can devise, without submission to his pleasure, can never produce the happiness they are in quest after; for every variation of their schemes will be only a variation of their troubles; but the Christian, I mean him who is really so, as well as by profession, is the happy man. He casteth his

* 1 Tim. i. 19.

† SOAME JENYNS.

care upon God, for he is assured that his God careth for him,* and though he may be far from understanding that complicated scheme of Providence, by which the Lord of the universe operates for the general and final happiness of his Creatures, yet he is satisfied, that infinite wisdom arranges and directs the whole, and as there is a promise that all things shall “work together for good to those that love God,”† he is comforted under all his tribulations, and rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

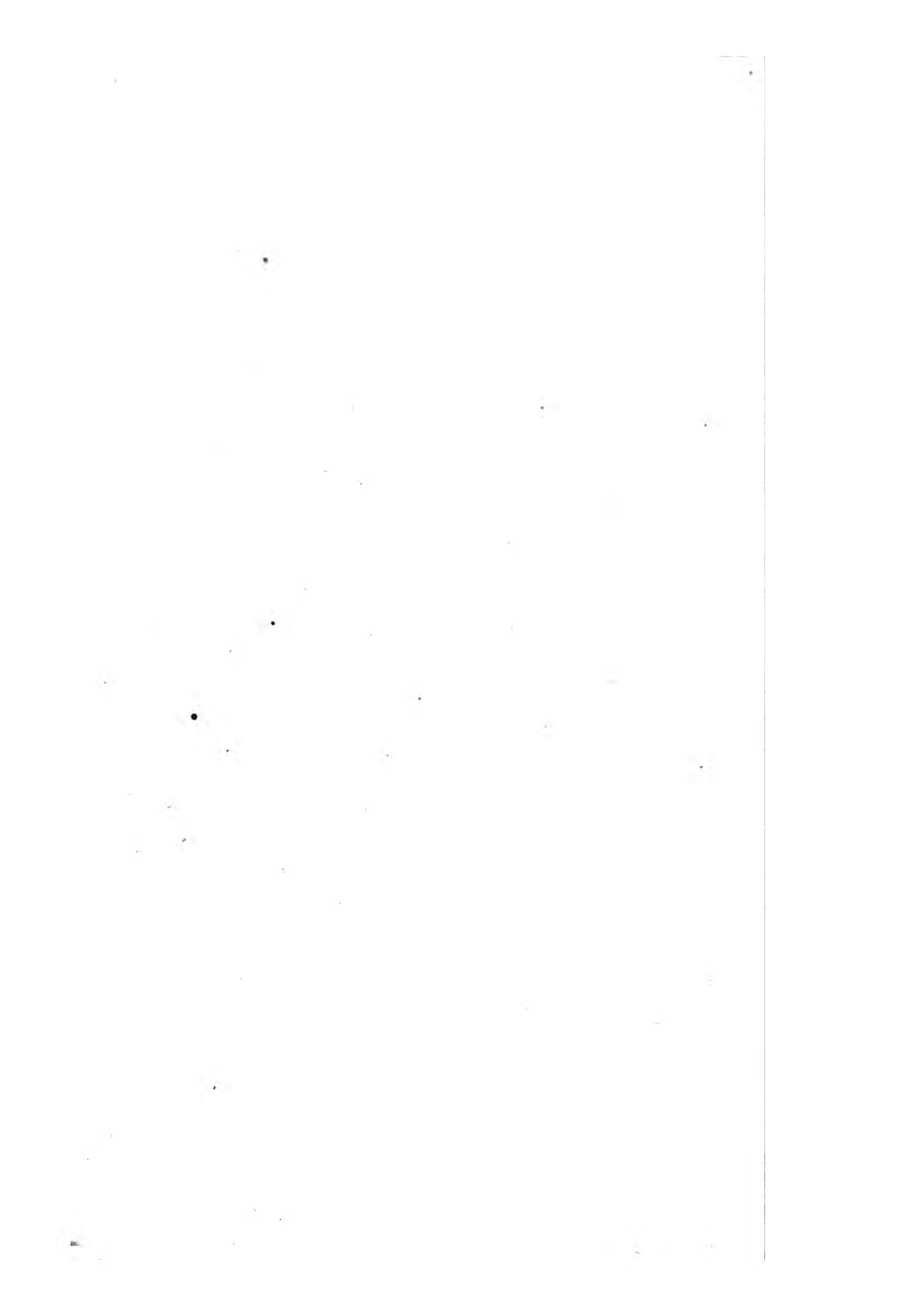
Examine yourselves then, my Brethren, and prove yourselves. See that your desire to fulfil the will of God be constant and abiding, and take care that you do not merely avoid gross transgressions, but study to approve yourselves the servants of Christ in all things. By these means shall ye be able to “make your calling and election sure,”‡ for, “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”||

* 1 Peter v. 7.

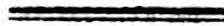
† 6. Rom. viii. 20.

‡ 1 Peter i. 10.

|| 6 Heb. xii. 14.



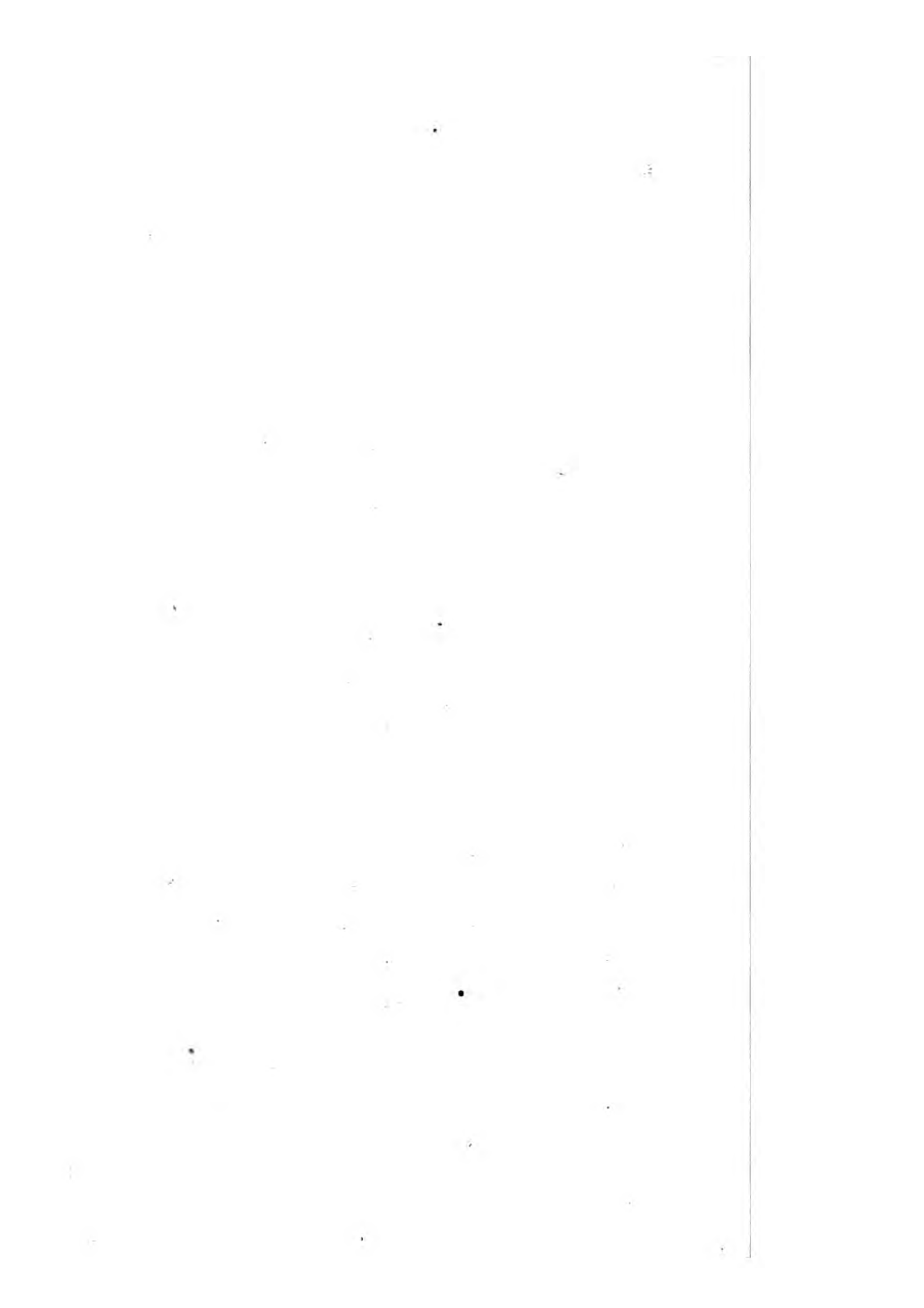
SERMON IX.



ON THE CHASTENING

OF

THE ALMIGHTY.



SERMON IX.

JOB, v. 17.

Behold! happy is the man whom God correcteth, therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.

IT is written in this instructive book of Job, that man is born to sorrow, as the sparks fly upward; that is, it is as natural, and as much to be expected, that man should be a sufferer, as that the sparks of the kindling fire should mount aloft into the air: and as we are almost daily spectators of the one, so are we of the other; and whoever imagines he shall be able entirely to escape from the tribulations, wherewith the children of men are afflicted, will e'er long find himself greatly mistaken. It is satisfactory, however, to reflect, that there is a divine Providence, which ruleth over all things; and every Christian, who reads his Bible with attention, will easily be convinced that God's mercies are over all his works, and that nothing can happen independently of the will of the Most High; and though God cannot be the

cause of sin, yet it may be said, even the evil, which he permits, will be eventually productive of some advantage; for "all things," however distressing they may be for a season, shall "work together for good to them that love God."* As the entertainment of this idea is truly worthy of the disciple of Jesus Christ, who seized every opportunity of inculcating it upon the minds of his followers, and is well calculated to support us under the various sorrows and calamities to which all are subject in this mortal life, I shall make it my business to prove—

I. That the providential care of God extends to all his creatures;

II. That *that*, which men call evil, is the operation of his hand;

III. That all the sufferings, which any persons endure, are designed for their good; and from thence,

IV. I shall take occasion to exhort you to endure the chastening of the Lord, and to esteem yourselves happy under his correction.

1st. I am to prove, that the providential care of God is extended to all his creatures; and for this purpose I desire you will attend, first, to the words which are written in the 6th Chapter of Saint Matthew, where, in order to prevent

* Rom. viii. 28.

his disciples from being improperly careful about the things of this mortal life, our Lord says, "Take no thought," that is, no anxious thought, as the word signifies, "for your life, what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them: are ye not much better than they? Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature? And why take ye anxious thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more cloth you, O ye of little faith?" We may also remember, that our blessed Lord says in another place, addressing himself to those of his followers, who were likely to be exposed to great danger in defence of the Truth. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear

ye not therefore ; ye are of more value than many sparrows,"* The holy Psalmist too speaks to the same effect, Ps. xci. " He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord ; he is my refuge and my fortress ; my God, in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers ; under his wings shalt thou trust. His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee ; only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked." Would you know in what particular instances this protecting care has been shewn ? Consider the condition of the Israelites, when God inflicted his plagues upon Pharaoh and his people in the land of Egypt. While the latter were enduring the most grievous calamities, the former, who dwelt among them, escaped from the affliction. Thus it is written, Exodus viii. 21, 22, concerning the plague of flies.

* Matt. x. 29—30.

“The houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground wherein they are, and I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there, to the end thou mayest know, that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth.” Thus also we read in the next chapter concerning the murrain, which took place among the cattle. “Behold,” said Moses unto Pharaoh, “the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle, which is in thy field, upon thy horses, upon thy asses, upon thy camels, upon thy oxen, and upon thy sheep. There shall be a very grievous murrain, and the Lord shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt, and there shall nothing die of all that is the children’s of Israel. And the Lord appointed a set time, saying—to-morrow the Lord shall do this thing in the land. And the Lord did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died, but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one.” There is yet another remarkable instance of that distinction, which the Lord made in his dealings towards the Egyptians and the Israelites, which deserves our notice. When Pharaoh had repeatedly hardened his heart, and refused to let the children of Israel go, “the Lord said unto Moses—stretch out thine hand towards hea-

ven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand towards heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They saw not one another, neither any rose from his place for three days, but the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.”* We may then be assured, from these instances, that the Lord does at all times extend his providential care towards those who fear him, so that every Christian, who feels a liberty in offering up his petitions to the throne of grace, may confidently use the words of the holy Psalmist, and say, “Keep me as the apple of the eye: hide me under the shadow of thy wings.”* But, though we are thus encouraged to expect the protecting hand of the Almighty to be our shield and our defence in the day of trouble, we have no right to suppose we shall not have our share of those sorrows, which are the common lot of all men; nor, indeed, that we shall have a less share of them than those who do not make the Most High their confidence. Nevertheless, to maintain the faith and hope of the Christian under all his trials, it is proper to observe, that, while he suffers, he has the great comfort of looking to the Lord, as his deliverer in due time, and

* Exod. x. 21—23.

† Ps. xvii. 8.

of being assured, that an eternal weight of glory shall shortly be his recompense; but the ungodly has no such hope, no good reason to suppose, that the Almighty will interfere in his behalf, and still less to look for happiness beyond the grave. His prospects are dark and gloomy, and no wonder then, if he should be given up to melancholy and despair. Having thus introduced the two different characters of the righteous and the wicked to your consideration, and led you to observe how each will be affected by the same calamity, I proceed to show,

2d. That what men call evil, is the operation of God's hands; I say, what men call evil, because I would make a distinction here between the evil of punishment, and the evil of sin. The former is inflicted, agreeably to the law of righteousness, by the Judge of all the Earth upon the offender, because of his transgressions. The latter cannot, in any sense, be attributed to God, because he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and abhorreth the thing which is evil. But, the evil of punishment, I say, comes from the hand of God. Accordingly he saith by the mouth of his Prophet Amos, ch. iii. 6, " Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it." And, again by Jeremiah, ch. xviii. 11,

“Speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying—Thus saith the Lord, behold I frame evil against you.” And also by Isaiah, “I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things.”* And to shew more particularly that every penal evil arises from the same source, we read in the Scripture of divers kinds of affliction, which the Lord reserves in his own hands, to be applied, as occasion may require, to the children of men. Thus, Ezekiel, xiv. 21, he calls the sword, the famine, and the pestilence *his* four sore judgments, with which he would cut off from Jerusalem both man and beast; and we also find him speaking after this manner to Pharaoh. Exodus, ix. 13, “Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews—Let my people go, that they may serve me; for I will at this time send all *my* plagues upon thy heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, that thou mayest know, that there is none like me in all the earth. So also, Lev. xxvi. wherein the rebellious Israelites are threatened with heavy calamities, the Lord claims to himself the right of appointing the punishment. “If ye walk contrary to me and will not hearken

* Isaiah, xlv. 7.

unto me, I will bring seven times more plagues upon you, according to your sins. I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate. If ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary to me, then will I also walk contrary to you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins; and I will bring a sword upon you that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant; and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send a pestilence among you, and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy."

It clearly appears, from the foregoing passages of holy writ, to which many more of a similar kind might, if necessary, be added, that no adversity happens to chance, but only according to the will and appointment of the Lord, and therefore, as he is infinitely wise and good, and never willingly afflicts the children of men, we must needs say

3rd. That, whatever sufferings any undergo, they are designed for their good. Indeed, we have reason to affirm, that to as many as hope for salvation, through the merits of Jesus Christ, every correction is a mark of the most tender compassion and regard. Hence we

find that comfortable exhortation in the 12th chapter of the Hebrews: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him, for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." What are the things, which hinder the word from taking root in our hearts, and producing fruit to the praise and glory of God? They are the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things, which entering in choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. Now, the Lord, when he sends affliction, shews us, that none of those things, which we have been anxious to procure, can give us ease, but, on the contrary, they have been occasions of our sorrow. He enables us to perceive, that our table is become a snare to us, and the things which should have been for our wealth an occasion of falling. We look on the one side, and on the other, and we find none to comfort us; and what can we do under such circumstances, but confess, as many have done before us, that all here is vanity and vexation of spirit, and that there is no rest, nor joy, nor peace to be found, but in the Lord, who is the support, and friend, and comforter of all those, who put their trust in him, and rejoice in his salvation. Matters being so, let me from hence take occasion,

4th. To exhort you to endure the chastening of the Lord, and to think yourselves happy under his correction.

Among the various troubles, by which the Faith of Christians is exercised, I shall mention a few of the most common, that so the application of this discourse may be rendered useful to some, if not to all, of my hearers. Here,

1st. Let us consider that affliction, from which very few, who live so long as twenty or thirty years in the world, are exempt; an affliction, in several cases, very grievous, and with which some, from the peculiar circumstances in which they are found, are almost overwhelmed with sorrow. The affliction I mean is the loss of relations and friends, some of which by lingering diseases, and others by a more sudden stroke, are taken away from our sight, and their pleasant conversation, their friendly counsel, and their seasonable support, is gone with them for ever. What have you lost, my mourning fellow pilgrim? Is it a parent, whose fostering care, and tender regard have long engaged your affections, and demanded the warmest returns of love and gratitude? Did you see him or her advanced in years, and, labouring under infirmity, at last sinking into the arms of death, from whose grasp it

was not in your power to rescue them? Or have you been obliged to separate from the dear partner of your bed? From the husband, of whose kindness and affection you had the fullest proof, and from whose labour and industry you have been indebted for a comfortable subsistence; or from a wife, with whom you enjoyed much domestic happiness, and to whose care and attention you are able to ascribe many comforts of your life? Again, have you lost a child, one young and playful, in the study of whose amusements you amused yourself; or one arrived at that time of life, when he or she could lighten your labours, and contribute much to the comfort of your declining years? For these you weep, as well you may, yet by all the floods of tears you shed you cannot recal their departed spirits. It was the will of God they should be taken away, and return to you no more. Or, it may be, you have parted from some other dear relation or intimate friend. But, say now, my afflicted Brother or Sister! has not the Lord dealt graciously with you? Your heart was too much attached to the comforts of this life, and now he has taken them away, that you might seek comfort from him. But, you feel disposed to say, "Why so soon Lord?" "Why must I be singled out as the object of thy corrections,

while others, apparently much more worldly than myself, are living in uninterrupted tranquillity, and in the midst of their families and friends? And is it for you then to find fault with the dispensations of the Almighty? Are you, to whom no heart but your own is known, and that very imperfectly, the proper judge of the manner in which you are treated? Yet, mark those prosperous families, as you esteem them, but a little longer, and you will soon see that their happiness is of short continuance, and that when their time of trial arrives, the severity of it will be according as they are affected towards God; very grievous, if they have not been seasonably disciplined to bear his yoke, but comparatively light, if their will has betimes been broken and moulded into submission to the Will of God. What, then, if your mourning begin early in life! It is to be regarded only as a preparation for succeeding sorrows, and the method, the best adapted that can possibly be, for weaning your hearts from the love of this present evil world, and preparing you to meet your God. Remember then, that happy is he whom the Lord correcteth by these means, and despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.

2nd. Let us consider the distress arising from the loss of property, and from the pinchings

of poverty. It has been ordained ever since the transgression of our first parents, that man should earn his subsistence by the sweat of his brow, and though few are the real wants of mankind, yet great pains are continually taken by one and another to increase the store, and to add not only to the conveniences, but to the luxuries of life. By these means every sense is gratified in various ways, and as the carnal and spiritual life are directly opposite to one another, it comes to pass, that the mind is so totally occupied in providing for the body, that God is forgotten, and the things which concern a future state are either entirely disregarded, or so lightly thought of, that they make no more impression than the passing dream. Persons of this description generally conceive they have too much to do to attend the house of God, or to look into their Bibles, and as for private prayer, it is a thing with them totally out of the question. But, how often does it happen, after a labour of many years, after rising early, and late taking rest, and eating the bread of carefulness, that some unexpected event takes place, which deprives them of all the sums that they have amassed, and leaves them as poor and destitute as many persons, whom they lately thought almost beneath their notice. Thus do riches make to

themselves wings, and fly away, and, when they are gone, what is left to comfort their late possessor? Alas! nothing but the design of beginning the toil again; but, e're he can fill his purse a second time, he drops into the grave, and then all his thoughts perish. Yet, to many a one is the loss of property a great mercy. "Have I," he will say, "acted the part of a wise man in placing my supreme happiness in the enjoyment of those things, which perish in the using? Is there nothing more solid, and more durable, to engage my attention? Ought I not to have sought a treasure in Heaven, which cannot be broken in upon, and may I not yet have that treasure if I diligently seek it? Yes, I may, and I will therefore, by the grace of God, spend the remainder of my days to a better purpose, and endeavour to secure that of which even death itself cannot deprive me." When once this happy direction is given to a man's pursuits, the losses, which deeply affect some, and drive others to despair, little move him, for he is assured, that the wise Disposer of all events cannot do wrong, and that it is better for him to live in a state of dependence for his daily bread, than to possess abundance, by means of which his heart might be too much attached to the love of this present evil world. His

language, under all his earthly disappointments, is that of patient Job—"The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."

3rd. We may consider the removal of health as another correction applied by the hand of the Almighty to check the sinner in his mad career of wickedness, and to keep the souls of the godly in a spiritual frame. Short as the allotted time of three score years and ten is, and rarely as it happens, that even that period of years is attained to, yet to the young, and to the lively, the hour of dissolution appears so distant, that each one feels disposed to say to himself, "Soul! thou hast many years of enjoyment before thee; now is thy time for it: eat, drink, and be merry." And what scenes of happiness, what seasons of uninterrupted gratification does the imagination of a sanguine youth set before him! Then sickness seizes his frame, and in one short hour all his future hopes are blasted. The grave opens, as it were, before him, and the judgment, of which he would not think while in health, demands his most serious attention. A prospect of recovery allows him again perhaps the expectation of realizing the schemes he had in view before his seizure, and with a full restoration, it might be, that all his indifference to eternal

things would return. God, who knows all hearts, perceives his disposition, and, in mercy to his soul, refuses the health, which he so ardently desires. He has pains, which baffle the physician's utmost skill, and he has infirmities, which remind him daily of his latter end. He sees others, much farther advanced in years than himself, strong and hearty, and he is disposed to murmur under a dispensation, which he conceives to be particularly severe. But, as by these means his heart becomes weaned from the love of those things, which he once foolishly fancied would constitute his supreme delight, he begins to understand the design of his chastisement, and to turn himself to the Lord, who has appointed this cross for his benefit, and who, perhaps, will not remove it but with his life, when he shall bid an eternal farewell to suffering, and be welcomed into those mansions of rest and ease, where sorrow, pain, and sickness shall be known no more. Blessed is the man, who is taught by the loss of health so to number his days, as to apply his heart unto wisdom.

There are other afflictions of various kinds, which may come under the general idea of crosses, vexations, and disappointments, to which men are subject in this mortal life ; and I believe there are few, if any, who are not

placed in difficult and trying circumstances of one kind or other. All these things, Brethren, are to be regarded as preachers in your ears, saying—"This is not your rest. Fix your hearts upon other joys and seek a more enduring substance." They are admonishing you to look up to Him, who governs all things according to the counsel of his will, who only wounds to heal, and kills to make alive. They caution you not to kick against the pricks, but seasonably to submit, to repent, and to be saved. Oh! how foolish to contend with infinite power! Think of this in time, O ye people! while the day of grace remains. Accept of the mercy, which the gospel offers you through Jesus Christ; and remember, that for this end the Captain of your Salvation was made perfect through sufferings, that you might be enabled patiently to bear your respective crosses after Him, and thus to enter with Him into glory. Blessed indeed is the man, whom God correcteth, therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Lord.

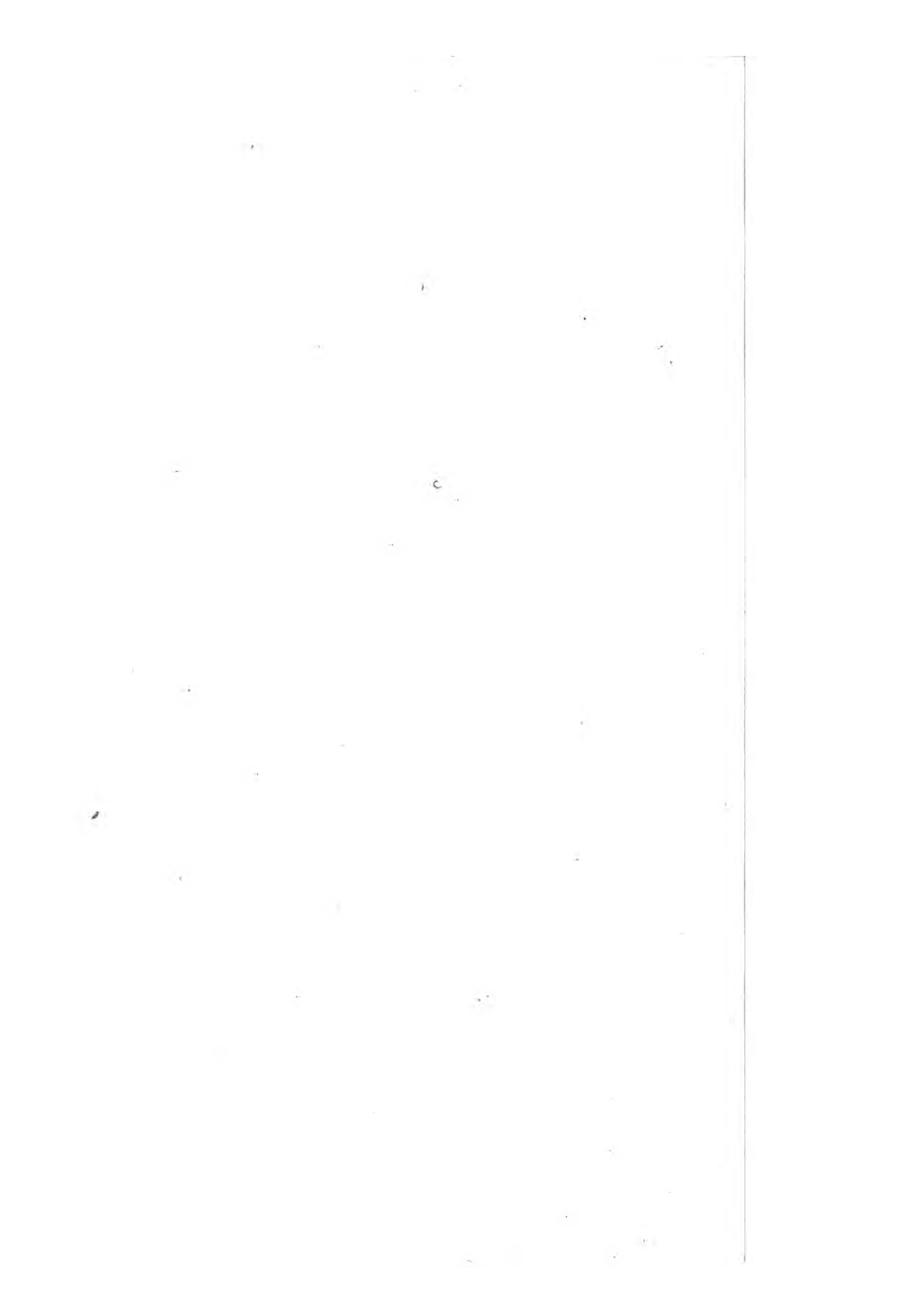
SERMON X.



ON THE TESTIMONY

OF

CONSCIENCE.



SERMON X.

II CORINTHIANS, i. 12.

For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.

THE words, which I have just read, contain sentiments which ought to be cherished by every Christian, and in discoursing upon them, I intend to observe the following things :

I. That the principle, by which all, who belong to Jesus Christ, are actuated, is the grace of God.

II. That thereby are produced simplicity, and godly sincerity, for the regulation of our conversation with the world.

III. That, acting with these dispositions, we may rejoice in the testimony of our consciences. I am to shew,

1st. That the principle, by which all, who belong to Jesus Christ, are actuated, is the grace of God. Grace is a word of very extensive signification in the Holy Scripture, and

usually means all the favour, freely bestowed by God upon his sinful and undeserving creatures. On this account, as it would take up too much time to speak of all the bounties of Providence, we must confine our observations to some particular senses, in which the phrase is to be considered ; and here I would chiefly direct your attention to the two following things.

First, I would have you meditate upon the grace of God, which bringeth salvation. Every thing that was done upon the part of our Creator, in order to recover the lost and ruined race of Adam from the miseries of the fall, was a display of sovereign mercy, a mercy so great, that the more any one discovers of the plan of redemption, the more is he convinced of the wisdom, the goodness, and the love of God, and consequently the more does he feel disposed to praise Him for all the great and wonderful things, which he has done for him ; but as he does not at every instant meditate upon this display of grace, and as, in the common course of life, circumstances continually occur to call his attention to things of a very different nature, he feels what Saint Paul so bitterly complains of in the 7th chapter to the Romans, that when he would do good evil is present with him, and if he have any

proper sense of religion, he will also exclaim with the same Apostle, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* Such being his sensibility of misery, and such his cry for help, he will,

Secondly, Seek that spiritual aid, which is also in the Scriptures distinguished by the name of *grace*; for, as the power to avoid sin, and to do good is not in the possession of any natural man, and as God can give it, or withhold it, as he pleases, the sinner will be constrained to say, "If I perish, it is because I follow the devices and desires of my own heart, and if I am saved, it is because the Lord inclines my soul to seek his favour, and convinces me, that he only should be the object of my desires. Nothing is there deserving the name of good, that I have not received. No; it is by the grace of God alone, I am what I am." It is,

2d. By this grace that Christians are enabled to entertain simplicity and godly sincerity for the regulation of their conduct in the world. By simplicity I understand that, which, in another place, is called the *single eye*.† It is the looking to Jesus, as the one desirable object, as the chief of ten thousand, and altogether

* Rom. vii. 24.

† Mat. v. 22.

lovely. Godly sincerity means nearly the same thing, and we may consider the two expressions as designed to fix upon our minds the great importance of that, which is enjoined. Let us then endeavour to improve the present opportunity, by looking into our own hearts, and seeing whether we possess the gracious temper, which is signified by these expressions.

As the world is but one great market, and as all are the sellers and buyers of some or many of the various commodities, which are continually passing through different hands, almost every day affords us an opportunity of proving whether the fear of God be the ruling principle in our hearts, or whether, excluding that, we act merely with fleshly wisdom, and make the consideration of our own interest the sole regulator of our conduct. This we may do, and yet maintain an honourable character among mankind; for reputation is what every prudent man holds dear, and will not, for the sake of a moderate profit, be content to part with. But, still the wisdom, which engages him to act thus fairly in commerce, is very different from that with which the godly man transacts his business. The former thinks only how he shall enrich himself; the latter, though neither unthankful for the good things of this life, nor averse from receiving the pro-

fits, which arise from lawful merchandise, considers, in the first place, whether the business he is about to undertake be such as God approves of; and if there be any thing, in the whole train of it, inconsistent with the gravity and dignity of a professor of godliness, he will sooner lose his advantages than hazard his soul. Now, let us ask our consciences—"Is it in this spirit that we constantly hold our dealings with our fellow creatures? Do we set the Lord always before us, and are we ever attentive to that golden rule—*Do unto all men, as you would they should do unto you?*"* Possessing such a temper we shall be sensible, that it is a high privilege to have permission to draw near unto God, and we shall fall down upon our knees to implore his blessing upon every undertaking. Having done that, instead of the care, the trouble, and the anxiety, with which the men of the world are harassed, we shall feel our minds light and easy. If the Lord please to prosper our diligence (for diligent every faithful servant of God will be) we shall thank him for our abundance, and if it please him to order matters otherwise, so that misfortune and poverty shall ensue; yet still we shall say—"It is well: it is good to be afflicted. Riches might prove a snare. The

* Matt. vii. 12.

Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away ; blessed be the name of the Lord." " Though" as the prophet Habakkuk says, " the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Thus, whether the event of our labour be prosperous or otherwise, we shall act with simplicity and godly sincerity in the world. But, again, there will be many opportunities, besides those arising from business and traffic, for Christians to exercise the same temper.

The generality of people are like the Athenians, and the strangers among them, concerning whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that they spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing ; and whether what they hear, and what they report be true, is with them a matter of little consequence. They heard the story, and they think it lawful to repeat it as often as they please. But, who knows not, that the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is seldom reported in common conversation ? Who is not aware that, through misrepresentation, through forgetfulness, or from want of knowing all the

circumstances of the case, matters are stated very differently from what they really are in fact, and that thence arises no small degree of injury to many individuals, and very frequently to the community at large? But, if the simplicity and godly sincerity, which I am recommending, were more generally the motives of human conduct, how much of this mischief would be avoided! Men would think before they spoke; they would turn a deaf ear to many a tale of slander, and rather close their lips in perpetual silence, than utter one word that might be injurious to an innocent character. As, happily, godly Christians have much better things to think about than the faults and follies of their neighbours, their conversation is to the use of edifying, and, whether men will listen to them or not, they take care, upon all proper occasions, to introduce those subjects, which are of the greatest importance; subjects, which concern the welfare of the soul, which instruct us how to live peaceably in a world full of hatred, and point out to us a scene of future enjoyment, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. It is a great mercy to have the love of God so shed abroad in our hearts, that we can delight to speak of heavenly things, that we can be telling of his loving kindness from day

to day, and can say with the Psalmist, " Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee,"

Again; not only in commerce, not only in conversation, but in his general deportment, in his retirement, and even in his very silence, will the Christian display simplicity and godly sincerity. Mankind are associated in families, where each individual has his station to maintain, with temperance, with decency, with sobriety, with diligence, with kindness, and with caution. All the graces of Religion, every thing that is lovely and of good report, should continue to form his character; and all without ostentation or parade. He should be as humble as he is good; as meek as useful in the place, which it is his lot to fill. With all these virtues, he should not aim at obtaining human favour, though he will not despise it; but, setting the Lord continually before him, think only what he requires, and endeavour in all things to be conformable to his holy will and pleasure. If such be our conversation, then,

3d. We may rejoice in the testimony of our consciences. Though it is upon the ground of what Christ has suffered, that the Christian hopes to obtain the pardon of his sins; and

though it is upon the ground of what Christ has done, in rendering a perfect obedience to the law of God, that we may lay in a claim to eternal life; yet, as Jesus is only the author of eternal salvation to those that obey him, and as the Scripture says, *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord*,* we must see, that we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and that we hate evil, and every appearance of it. If then, after careful examination, after comparing our lives, our manners, our dispositions, day by day, with the requisitions of the divine law, we find in ourselves a respect for all the commandments, and an increasing reverence for sacred things, together with a love for, and a desire to keep company with, the children of God, however despised they may be in the world, there is every reason that we should ascribe it to the grace of God, and thence we may conclude, that he is preparing us for the enjoyment of his heavenly kingdom. Having this hope, what shall move us from our steadfastness? I trust nothing; for though all manner of evil shall be spoken against us, yet he, in whom we trust, if not now, will ere long appear publicly in our defence, and put our adversaries to shame and confusion.

Christians! what charge have your enemies

* Heb. xii. 14.

to bring against you? I have spoken of the part which you have to bear in worldly traffic; and though to the strictest honesty you may add the greatest caution, yet you will not at all times be able to escape the tongue of slander. Even *your* integrity will be called in question, and so busy will some be in raising evil reports against you, that your very friends perhaps will be staggered, and think you are not entirely innocent. "What a cheat! What a hypocrite!" it will be said; "who could have suspected such things!" Now, as charges of this sort, however undeserved they may be, cannot but occasion a great deal of pain, what comfort will you feel in making your appeal to the Searcher of Hearts, and saying, "Lord! Thou, who knowest all things; thou, to whom all hearts are open, all desires are known, and from whom no secrets are hid, dost know, that I am most wrongfully accused. As then my conscience acquits me of any intentional guilt, to thee I commit my cause, and I beseech thee, for the glory of thy name, and for the honour of that Religion, which I openly profess, that thou wilt make my innocence clearly to appear." Having thus committed your cause to God, you may be contented, or rather may rejoice; and though the world, for a little time, may

think you obstinate and hardened, yet will you, e're long, find that true, which is written, Psalm xxxvii. 7. "The Lord shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day."

Again; does your character suffer in any other way? No doubt it does. There are, as I have observed before, many busy bodies and tale tellers in the world. Some of their reports you hear, and some you do not; but, if they were all to be collected together they would paint you as black as the very Devil. Perhaps, though there is nothing of which you entertain a greater abhorrence, you are represented as guilty of falsehood and slander. Nothing is more easy than to misrepresent words spoken with the best intention, and to impute that to unkindness, which is only the fruit of benevolence. You are astonished, it may-be, that any such construction could be put upon your words and actions. Nevertheless, such reports as are injurious to your character shall prevail, and that so generally, that when you attempt to vindicate yourself, you shall hardly obtain a hearing. But, though men may not listen to your defence, if your heart be right with God, he will, and what reason will you have to rejoice in the testimony of your conscience,

that you do not deserve the blame, which is cast upon you.

I have said also, that the Christian will find occasion to exercise his simplicity and godly sincerity, not only on account of the reports which are spread abroad by those unconnected with him, but also in his retirement and silence. Are you a child? Do you make conscience of being dutiful to your parents, and carefully attentive, so far as their commands are agreeable to the will of God, to do every thing that they desire? I say, so far as their commands are agreeable to the will of God; for they may require those things, which are not so, and when you do not comply with what they think reasonable, they will charge you with the want of filial affection, and complain, perhaps, to their friends and neighbours, that your strange notions of religion have had no better effect than to fill you with obstinacy and perverseness. How little, children! if you are serious Christians, you deserve such a charge to be brought against you, God knoweth. He knows also your sighs, your tears, your prayers, and that will be your comfort in all your tribulation. You have companions of your own age; brothers, sisters, and friends living under the same roof with you, in whose pleasures

you were once accustomed to join, whose sins you could formerly look upon with indifference, and could pass over without reproof. But, that you cannot do now, because you have a different spirit from them. You think religion is of more importance, and so you tell them ; but they are displeased with you ; and because your practice, if right, condemns theirs, their endeavour is to prove that you are wrong. Hence, from this cause, as well as others, which I have mentioned, will your character suffer ; and you will have no friend, perhaps, but God, to whom you can appeal, and plead the integrity of your heart. Are you a servant ? As such you will be in danger of suffering in a two-fold respect ; for if those, under whose authority you are placed, are religious characters, it will be said, that you put on the mask of godliness merely to please them. If they are worldly minded, then, if you are not so diligent as they expect you to be, though that expectation may not be founded in reason, and if, through mistake or inadvertence, you do any thing, which they disapprove of, they will say as Pharaoh did to the Israelites, “ Ye are idle, ye are idle,”* “ Ye read and pray, but ye cannot work.” And this will be said, however faithful, laborious, and diligent you

* Exod. v. 17.

may be in that state of life, to which it has pleased God to call you.

Upon the whole then, a moderate degree of experience will prove to the sincere Christian, that, however he may desire it, it is impossible to please all parties; and if he be faithful, in a little time he will gain the victory over that fear of man, which is apt to operate too strongly upon the minds of young professors of godliness. He will learn, that the friendship of the world is of small value, but that the favour of God is highly precious; and being satisfied that God knoweth all his ways, is acquainted with all his desires, and ready to hear all his prayers, he goes to him in his sorrow and distress, and finds, in pouring out his heart to him, a sweet peace, which passeth all understanding; yea, and as he grows in grace, and advances in years, he finds it an increasing peace. "What," says he, as he draws near the gates of death, "can that world, of which I was once too fond, do for me now? What advantage, were I its greatest favourite, could it afford me? But I neither am, nor ever have been, its favourite; and it is well. I would not be attached to that, which I must shortly leave. How happy then am I, that God, by his grace, has taught me to look for something better, and more enduring; and, I trust,

that as he has supported and blessed me under many trials, he will not at last forsake me, but perfect his own work, and receive me, through the merits of my Redeemer, to his everlasting kingdom." That we may all obtain victory over the world, and be enabled at the hour of our departure to rejoice in the testimony of our consciences, may God, of his infinite mercy, grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

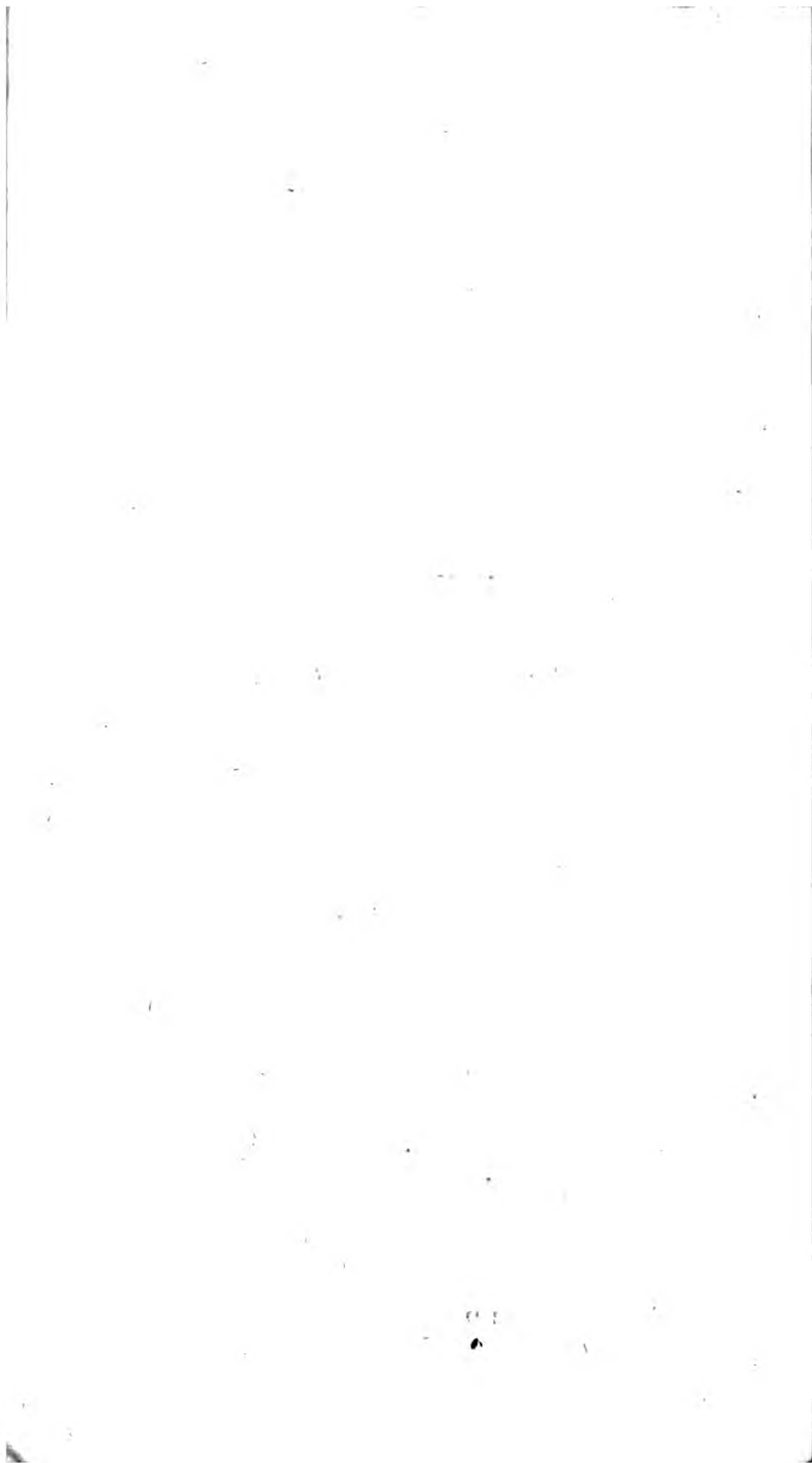
SERMON XI.



ON GOD'S OPERATION

IN CONJUNCTION WITH

THE WILL OF MAN.



SERMON XI.

II TIMOTHY, ii. 7.

Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

MANY and fierce have been the controversies, to which the subject, that I propose to consider at this time, has given occasion ; yet, nothing, I assure you, is farther from my intention than to introduce among you a disputatious spirit. My design is rather to convince you, there is much less ground for difference than is generally imagined, and to lead you from that uncertainty of mind, which usually attends the study of human opinions, to the firm persuasion of truth, which has been established upon the declarations of Him, who has been pleased to reveal his will for our instruction, edification, and comfort.

The text may be divided into two parts, suggesting,

I. The Duty of consideration.

II. The Blessing, which will attend it, viz. that the Lord will give an understanding in all things. Let me then speak,

1st. Of the duty of consideration. Man is a Being capable of receiving impressions from various objects, which are without him ; and these impressions, which are called senses, are seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling ; but more deeply seated than these there is an understanding, where the several senses meet, and are arranged, so that he can recollect them at his leisure, without confusion, and can meditate upon them, with satisfaction or disgust, according as he finds them good or evil, pleasurable or otherwise. What would be his condition, if he were left to follow their impulse, and to embrace whatever can contribute to the increase of his enjoyments, may be easily conceived from the well known licentiousness of certain characters, who seem to think themselves created only to gratify their passions, and arrogantly ask—" Who is Lord over us ?" But, happily, man is not left without control. God has required his creatures to regulate their lives by certain laws, which he has appointed. He has shewn them the reasonableness and advantage of a strict conformity thereto, has encouraged them to persevere in the paths of holiness and righteousness, and has opened to them a prospect of a glorious immortality, which will abundantly repay them for all the pains and labours they may

endure in the world below. Moreover, as this view of immortality, which God has been pleased to reveal, is brought to light by the Gospel, a vast field of contemplation lies open to the believer, in which there is an amazing display of the wisdom, goodness, and love of God, sufficient to rejoice his heart, and to induce him to open his mouth in never ceasing songs of praise. On the other hand, to the rejecters of this gospel, and to the contemners of this grace, revelation is made of another state most melancholy, and most deplorable; a state of banishment from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; a state of weeping, and wailing, and exquisite misery; in short, a state of condemnation, where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched. How to avoid this state of torment, and to obtain that state of glory, of which I have just been speaking, we have given us, by the mercy of God, very particular directions, and so clearly and distinctly are the two roads, leading to life, and to destruction, marked, that it is impossible for any one, who is not most stupidly careless and inattentive, to mistake the one for the other. We have, nevertheless, authority to say, that "broad is the way, which leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat."* But why so?

* Mat. vii. 13.

The reason is just given. It is through inconsideration, and such inconsideration, as must be deemed a crime of no small magnitude, for never did any system of religion, nor, indeed, any system whatever, abound with such objects to arrest attention, and to excite emotions of wonder, gratitude, and love, as the Christian dispensation. It is a scheme most undoubtedly worthy of all acceptation. It ought almost continually to occupy our thoughts, and to be the subject of our daily conversation. Consider then, my brethren, the important things, which the Scriptures offer for your contemplation; and

1. What is the nature of your Souls, or of your whole Being. You were created holy and happy: you were endowed with capacities for the enjoyment of God; and, blessed with his favour, you might have lived for ever. In this state of felicity was the first man, and great were the privileges which he might have been possessed of; but, he sinned, and lost his happiness. With sin Death entered into the world, and death was not Adam's portion only, for it passed upon all men. Here we are now in a world of misery, subject to sorrow, need, sickness, and many other adversities. Here we cannot help perceiving, that there is something materially wrong, and that it is desirable we should be placed in a better

condition; beyond the reach of those misfortunes, by which the enjoyments of human life are perpetually embittered. But, what is the remedy, which can afford relief under such circumstances? It is the Gospel of Christ, by which life and immortality, the prospect of which was almost entirely obscured by the fall, are again brought to light. Hereby we learn, how the image of God, which was lost in Adam, is restored in Christ, and how the gates of Paradise, which were closed by transgression, are again opened by him to all Believers.— Consider,

2. Who Jesus Christ is. Consider his Person, his Undertaking, his Work, his Suffering, his Death, his Burial, his Resurrection, his Ascension, his Glorification, and how, being now exalted to the right hand of the Father, he gives repentance, and intercedes for every sinner, who, being convinced of his deplorable state by nature and practice, comes to him, pleading the merits of his blood, and desiring to make mention of his righteousness, as his sole title to the blessings of the Covenant of Grace. Search the Scriptures, and especially that part of them called the New Testament, and you will find that they treat much of this precious Saviour, and never suppose you can know too much of him, whom to know is

eternal life. Indeed, the more you know, the more you will desire to know; for the love of God, which is manifested through Jesus Christ, has a height, and depth, and length, and breadth, far beyond what the utmost powers of the human mind can reach. It affords to the redeemed sinner here a subject of sweet meditation, and will also afford him a song of praise throughout eternity; for so speaks the highly favoured John concerning those, whom he beheld in vision, as already fixed in a state of glory. * "I heard ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice—worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." What a subject for consideration then is our adorable Redeemer! How should our thoughts dwell on him! How should we feel affected on account of his love; and how should we delight to hear of his precious name! Consider,

3. The nature and offices of the Holy Ghost, whom you are taught in the Scriptures to regard as one God with the Father and the Son, proceeding from both, and sent forth to render the salvation, which has been wrought, effectual to the happiness of every penitent sinner. To him it pertains to take of the things of

* Rev. v. 11 12.

Christ, and shew them to us. He works in us the grace of humiliation on account of sin : he brings us to deep repentance : he sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts, and causes us, if we be Christians indeed, to exhibit in our tempers, and in our practice, every amiable virtue that can adorn our conversation, and prove the excellency of that Religion, by which we profess to be regulated. The same blessed Spirit is also the comforter, the strengthener, the enlightener, and the director, of the people of God ; so that, under his guidance, they shall pursue their course steadily and safely to the end of their days.

We should be disposed to say, if experience did not teach the contrary, that no Christian, having such subjects for his consideration, could fail of being serious, and of giving attention to matters, which are so interesting, and so important ; but we know that the case is otherwise, and that, though warnings, threatenings, promises, exhortations, and every method of instruction that can be devised, are made use of for the benefit of mankind, yet, for the most part, they pay them little or no regard ; though, at the same time, they are eager in the pursuit of pleasure, and busily employed in accomplishing various schemes, which, even supposing (which is seldom the case) that their

desires and expectations are crowned with complete success, cannot afford them solid and durable happiness. Now, who is to be blamed for such inconsiderate conduct but themselves? They will not listen to what is likely to do them good, but, on the contrary, give heed to what is likely to do them harm. So shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways. They shall have their heart's desire; but, withall, God shall send them leanness into their souls.*

But, there are others, who, we may hope, are better disposed, who will not only *hear* about eternal things, but also *think* of them, with the most serious and devout attention. This is every man's duty, and what, I presume, every man may do. You may, at this hour, or when you leave the Church, either employ your thoughts in meditating upon what you have heard, or about your farm, your merchandize, or your other temporal affairs. If you think about the latter you may enter into such schemes and contrivances as shall conduce to your worldly prosperity; but, if you think of the former, you may then be able to make a much greater advantage of your meditations. You may discover the means of obtaining the favour of God, and learn how to live a peaceable, holy, and happy life, rejoicing in Christ

* Psalm cvi. 15.

Jesus, and looking forward to future times, with a hope full of immortality. But, it must be remembered,

2d. That while you give that consideration, which it is your duty to do, to serious things, you are to look to the Lord for the blessing of a right understanding. That is to be obtained,

1. From the study of his Word. The Scriptures were written by men under the influence of the Holy Ghost, who were directed to reveal the mind and will of God; and that they have done so clearly, that no one, who walks by their light, can be in danger of missing his way. Consult what they have delivered, and you will find them all conspiring to enforce one truth; but consult the opinions of other men, not so inspired, and what diversity and confusion will you discover! One points this way, another that, while many contend fiercely, and even unto blood, for the maintenance of doctrines and customs of merely human invention. But, it may be objected: "That diversity of opinion, of which you speak, does not arise solely from human invention, but from the various interpretations, which are given of the sacred word, and, seeing this is the case, are not we as likely to go astray as others have done before us? This depends upon the disposition of the mind. "If thine

eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."* "If thou be pure in heart, thou shalt see God."† If thou hast "the wisdom that is from above, it is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated; full of mercy, and good fruits; without partiality, and without hypocrisy."‡ If, when men read the Scriptures, their minds are clouded by pride, passion, or prejudice, it is not to be wondered at, if they should have no clear discernment of the truth; but, sure I am, if they desire to be instructed, reformed, and thoroughly sanctified, they will have no cause to complain of the obscurity of the word, for their steps will be directed into "the path of the just," which "is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."|| But,

2. Though it be asserted, that the Scriptures are able to make that man wise unto salvation, who searches them with the simple and pure desire of obtaining the knowledge of God; yet are we authorised to say, that something further is necessary, and that is the gift of the Holy Spirit, or a certain divine influence upon our hearts to make them receive, and hold fast that which is good, and thus to abide in us as a root of perpetual and abundant gladness. Accordingly we find it thus written Prov. xvi.

* Matt. vi. 22. † Matt. v. 8. ‡ James, iii. 17. || Prov. iv. 19.

1. "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord:" and this did the holy men of old, who were influenced by the spirit of true humility, most readily acknowledge. So Nehemiah, speaking of the work which he had to do at Jerusalem, says, "it was that which God put into his heart;"* and Ezra, adverting to the same prosperous circumstance relative to the captive Jews, declares, that "the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."† David also speaks to the same effect, as you may perceive by consulting 1 Chron. xxix. 17—19, where you will find the following words:—"I know also, my God, that thou rulest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things; and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here to offer willingly unto thee. O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee. And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all

* Nehemiah, ii. 12 and vii. 5.

† Ezra, vi. 22.

these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision." But, the passage of Scripture which sets forth this doctrine most clearly, is to be found in the 36th chapter of Ezekiel, in which we have a glorious promise concerning what the Lord designed to do to his people in the latter days. The words are as follow:—"I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land; then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you; a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them."

From what has been said we may come to this conclusion, namely, that while it is our duty to attend to the instruction, which the Lord giveth, and to consider seriously the important truths, which he has revealed, we are to look to him to give us a right understanding of them, and to make them effectual to our salvation. "My son," says Solomon, "if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee, so that thou incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her, as for hid treasures,

then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God ; for the Lord giveth wisdom, and out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”* To the same effect is that which is written, Jeremiah xxix. 13, 14, where the Lord, declaring what would be the disposition of his people after their return from the Babylonish captivity, says, “ Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you, and ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” See also Deuteronomy, xxx. 1—6, where you will find it written “ It shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice, according to all that I shall command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity and will have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. If any of them be driven out to the uttermost parts of Heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather

* Prov. ii. 1—6.

thee, and from thence will he fetch thee ; and the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land, which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it ; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers, and the Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul." Under the persuasion, that it is our duty to wait upon the Lord, and to pray, read, hear, meditate, and use every other means of grace, we ought also to expect God's blessing on those means to make them effectual to our salvation. For this cause did Saint Paul address himself in the following words to the Philippians, chap. ii. 12, 13 : " Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." And for the same reason he says of himself, when comparing his ministerial labours with those of the other Apostles, " By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."* (†)

* 1 Cor. xv. 10.

(†) Being much perplexed, when I was a young man, concerning the subject of this discourse, and finding that Christians called Calvinists, and Christians called Armenians, were equally earnest in maintaining their respective

Now, brethren, my advice, in the conclusion of this matter, is—that you will not perplex yourselves about the manner, in which God operates upon your hearts, but rather follow the counsel of St. James, who commands you to “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”* “Of his own will,” saith that Apostle, “begat he us with the word of truth; wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear.”† And again, “Submit yourselves to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.” “Humble yourselves in the sight of God, and he shall lift you up.”‡ In the last place, carefully remember the words of Saint Paul, which are written for your instruction, 1 Thess. v. 21—24, “Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil;

tenets, I determined to leave the writings of uninspired men, and to search the Scriptures. In pursuance of this plan, I set down under one head, 1st, The texts, which speak of *God's operation alone*; 2nd, Those that speak of *free will*; and, 3rd, Those also that speak of *God's operation with man's consent*. The result of my enquiry was, that Calvinists and Arminians had both of them scripture on their side, and that the wisest part I could take would be to wait upon the Lord, to obtain that influence and instruction, which he never fails to give to those that seek him with all their hearts.

* James i. 21.

† 18, 19.

‡ iv. 7—10

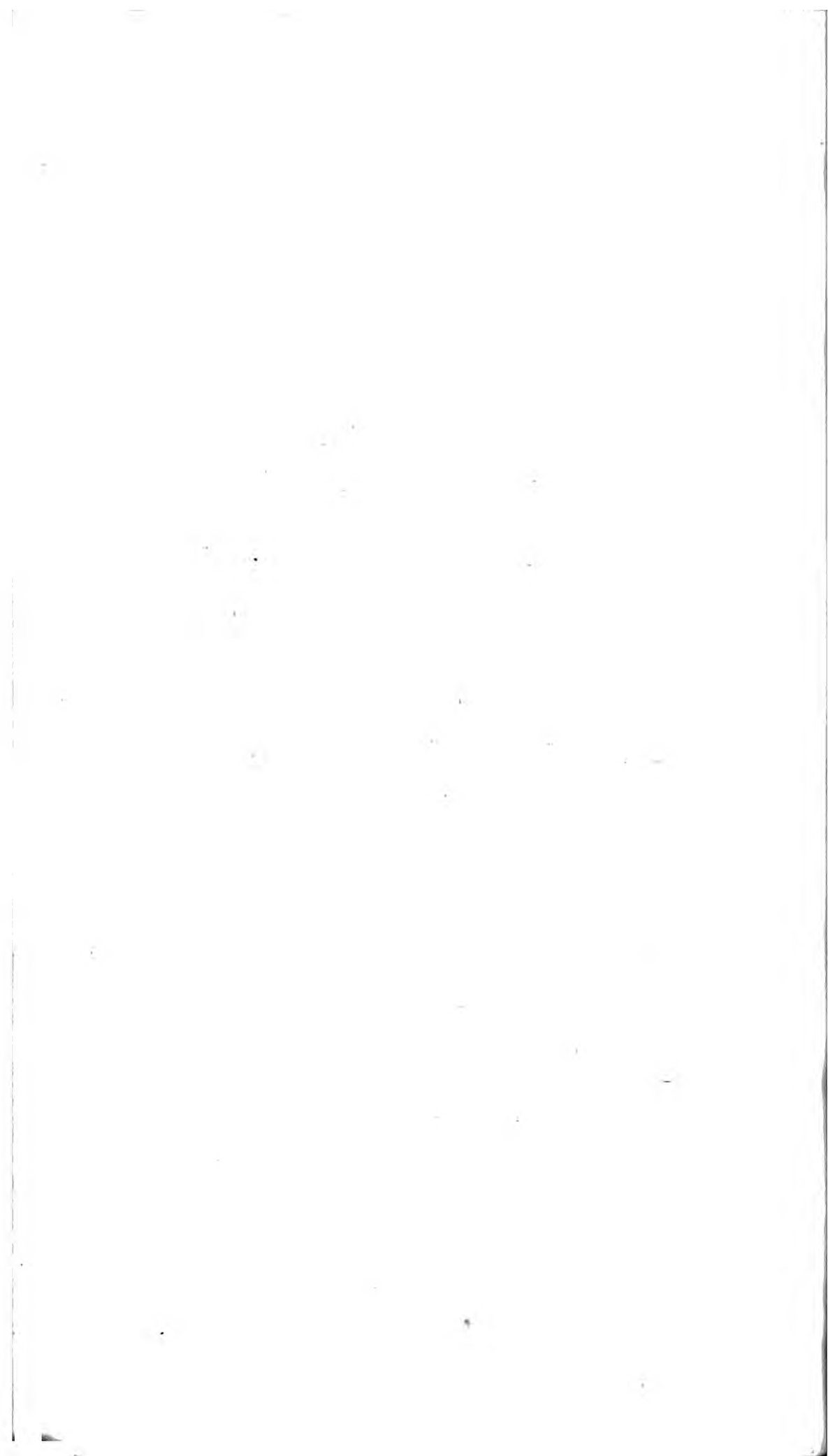
and the very God of peace sanctify you wholly ; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he, who hath called you, who also will do it." Now, consider what I say, and may the Lord grant you understanding in all things.

SERMON XII.



ON THE

DAY OF JUDGMENT.



SERMON XII.

REVELATIONS, XX. 12.

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the Books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life; and the dead were judged out of those things, which were written in the Books, according to their works.

WHAT an awful consideration is it, that we are all, in a few years, to stand before the judgment seat of Christ! And more awful is it still to think, that if we are not allowed, after the examination of our deeds, to have our inheritance with the Saints in Heaven, we must be thrust into hell with the Devil and his Angels! It is truly wonderful, that persons, who have ever heard of these states, and have been told by an authority, which they cannot contradict, however they may wish to dispute it, that one or other of them must be their portion; it is truly wonderful, I say, that such persons can be easy, while they are in any suspense about their future condition; and the wonder will be greater, when it is known, that many, if they will only allow themselves

a few minutes' reflection, must be conscious, that their practices are of such a description, that they cannot, in their present state, enjoy the favour of God; for, as surely as the Bible is true, they must, dying as they now live, (and who knows that he shall not die this very hour?) be cast into the place of torment, a place, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.

It is with the hope of saving you, my Brethren, from that miserable condition, that I now preach the Gospel to you, and I request your patient attention, while I take occasion, from the words of the text, to mention a few things to you respecting the general judgment.

“ I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things, which were written in the books, according to their works.”

In speaking upon these words, I shall state,

I. The Fact, that the dead, small and great; that is, all mankind, high and low, rich and poor, shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

II. That there is an account kept of all their deeds, good and bad.

III. That they will be judged according to the works, which they have done.

1st. I am to state the Fact, that the dead, small and great, shall stand before the judgment seat. That sacred book, which many, I hope indeed most of you are in possession of, and which is called, on account of its superior use and excellency, The Bible, states this in the clearest terms. You may ask, perhaps, whence has this Bible its authority? Who wrote it? How do we know it is true? Perhaps, as some people say, it only contains a parcel of fables, invented by artful and designing men to impose upon the weak, and to enrich themselves at their expense. Though I am persuaded there are few, if any, among you, who will have the hardiness so to speak, yet as your careless and wicked lives too evidently declare, that you sometimes harbour such thoughts, I request you to take into your consideration the few things which I am going to mention. Consider,

1. By what sort of characters the Bible is most esteemed. Is it not by those, who, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, choose to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world? Is it not by those, who prefer the divine to any human favour, and who, sooner than transgress any one of God's

commandments, will readily incur the loss of ease, property, friends, and even of their very lives? Is it not by those, who, after the example of Jesus Christ, go about doing good; who, by their extensive charities, prove their disinterestedness, and, by their unremitting labours, that pity and love for the suffering bodies, and ruined souls of men, are the ruling principles of their hearts? With great truth did Saint Paul, who was a most zealous and indefatigable servant of the Lord, say, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."* The Christians of his day were held in no esteem, but counted as the offscouring of all things. Speaking of the treatment he met with in the prosecution of his favourite design, he gives the following account of it. "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one, thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the Heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold

* 1 Cor. xv. 19.

and nakedness; besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."* Now, if this Apostle had not been fully persuaded, that what he preached was the very truth of God, he must have been a fool and an idiot to have undergone all these sufferings, and to have exercised all these labours; so must all the other Apostles, who shared with him in his persecutions, and in his diligence, and so must all other sincere Christians, who have lived in the successive ages of the world, who, though they never ceased to promote the good cause, which they wished to defend, sought neither glory nor profit, but took up their crosses daily, bore the evil report of men with patience, and very often sealed with their blood those glorious truths, which they had spoken with their lips. Surely, now, if there had been the least ground for suspecting that our religion was false, the persons of that character, which I have been just describing, would have sought it out, and would have been glad to have been exempted from such a continuance of trials and sufferings. But, the more they searched, the better were they satisfied, that what they held fast was the word of God, and therefore they endured the cross, despising

* II Cor. iv. 24-28.

the shame, and now enjoy the fruit of their labours by reigning with Christ in glory.

2. Consider by what sort of characters the Bible is disesteemed. Are they men fearing God, and working righteousness? Are they persons strictly honest, sober, chaste, and temperate? Do they go about doing good? Do they shew a noble disinterestedness in all their actions, choosing rather to suffer themselves, than to do any thing, which may be injurious to their fellow creatures? Few, if any, will you find among those, who reject the authority of the Bible, of this description. They are not such persons, as you would apply to, if you were in deep affliction, or if you wanted them to draw from their purses any thing that might afford you relief. As, therefore, they are averse from those things, which the holy Scriptures recommend, you have good ground to suppose, that the reason why they abuse them is, that they speak unwelcome truths. They will not allow that immorality and selfishness, in which the worldly man desires to live. Let us then suppose, or rather let us take it for granted, that, as the Bible is a book, which good men love, and wicked men hate, it bears upon it the stamp of divinity, and that, as it is so declared, we maintain upon good authority, that there shall be a day,

wherein every one shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ; I proceed then now to state,

2nd. That there is an account kept of all the deeds of those who shall be judged, both good and bad. So says Saint John in the words of our text. "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened." What books? Those, we may suppose, in which are recorded all the thoughts, designs, and actions of a man's life, from the hour of his birth to the day of his death. "Let us endeavour," says an excellent writer,* "to retain in our minds the impression, that perhaps, among the first objects that may meet our eyes, when we open them upon the eternal world, may be that tremendous book, in which, together with our great and actual sins, may be recorded, in no less prominent characters, the ample page of omissions, and neglected opportunities, of which indolence, indecision, thoughtlessness, vanity, trifling, and procrastination concurred to frustrate the execution." As the matter is important, let us dwell a little upon the several particulars here enumerated, as crimes, which may be recorded against us in the book of judgment. I shall take notice,

* Mrs. H. More.

1. Of our omissions. It is a part of our confession, when we meet to worship God on the Sabbath day, that "we have left undone those things, which we ought to have done." We have not loved God with all our heart and mind, and soul, and strength, nor our neighbour as ourselves. We have not been so devout, so prayerful, so watchful, as we might have been. We have not been sufficiently careful to avoid all appearance of evil, nor have we, in all that we have done, regarded the glory of God as our chief end.

2. We have not wanted exhortations and admonitions to induce us to be more attentive to our duty, and more diligent in the practice of it. In this happy country (happy indeed if it knew its privileges!) there are none so ignorant and uninstructed, who may not learn, if they please, the things belonging to their peace. Every Sabbath, at least, the Church doors are opened to them, and they are not merely admitted, but invited to come in. Yet, alas! how many stay away! and, if spoken to respecting the folly, the danger, may I not rather say, the *indecenty* of their conduct, what frivolous excuses do they make for it; and how do they appear to insult the Searcher of Hearts, who, though he forbear, with much long suffering, to punish them instantly, will

make them feel, in the day of accounts, the greatness of their guilt, as well as the folly of their perverseness. Besides the benefit resulting from public instruction in the House of God, great are the advantages, which the Christian has of learning, almost every day, something which may strengthen his faith, confirm his hope, and regulate his behaviour. Though not indeed in all, yet is the word of God in many families, and if they would only allow a small portion of their time to give attention thereto, much might they learn, and much might they profit; but, alas! does not the Bible, in some of your houses, lie day after day, and perhaps week after week, on some dusty shelf, or in some corner, neglected and almost forgotten? It is a sad thing that those, who have the way of salvation stretched out, as it were, before them, will not walk therein. But, surely, they who are guilty of such negligence, shall give an account thereof at the day of judgment.

3. One of those crimes, for which we shall be answerable at the great day of accounts is—Indolence. There are many, who rise early, and late take rest, that they may eat the bread of carefulness; and but few, who are so diligent, that they may obtain the bread which endureth to everlasting life. Indolence about the

business of every man's lawful calling may justly be ranked among the number of our sins, for we are all bound to labour, and ought to assist one another; and of this the upright Christian is so sensible, that, while he is fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, he will take care not to be slothful in business. As the man of the world will often say to serious Christians, as Pharaoh did to the Israelites, "ye are idle, ye are idle," it should be their concern to have the evil spoken *falsely* against them, and very diligently should they employ themselves in every sort of labour, whereby they can be useful in their generation. Are we all as diligent as we should be, diligent in business, and diligent also, as we are commanded, to make our calling and election sure? If not, let us reform our conduct, while working time is allowed us.

4. Indecision is to be reckoned among the number of our sins. Indecision is the halting between two opinions. It is the thinking about doing good without ever practising it. It is what makes a man favourable to religious characters and religious associations, and yet keeps him from forming any lasting and useful connection with them; for, before he can bring his mind to the determination of giving up all for Christ, worldly considerations are

allowed to have their weight, and he goes on balancing the advantages and disadvantages of a religious life, from day to day, till the whole time afforded him to make his choice is lost, and he is called to answer for his wavering before the bar of God. But, while many thus entertain thoughts about Religion to no good purpose, there are others who scarcely think about it at all; and therefore,

5. Thoughtlessness is to be regarded as another crime, which will bring us into condemnation. This is the sin, which the Lord imputed to the Jews by the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider."* The goodness of our Creator affords every man a vast field for reflection; and subjects of the highest importance, upon which his thoughts might dwell, are continually presented to him.— Judgment and Mercy, Life and Death, Heaven and Hell, Time and Eternity, might, in succession, or together, engage his attention; but these he will not regard; he turns from them, and refuses to harbour the serious impressions which might, through grace, prove the salvation of his soul.

6. Vanity, though not much accounted of by

* Is. i. 3.

man, is what shall not pass unnoticed at the day of judgment. This consists in too high a conceit of our own abilities, and is exhibited, sometimes in an ostentatious display of talents, sometimes in the boast of personal strength or beauty, sometimes in external decorations, and sometimes in other ways, just as the desire of excelling our neighbours leads to the gratification of our wishes. The vain person would have his fellow creatures approve and admire him, while to obtain the approbation of his God is deemed a matter of little consequence. To all such the words, which were spoken by our blessed Lord to the Pharisees, will be found very applicable. "Ye are they, who justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts."*

7. The next thing to be considered, for which we must give account, is—Trifling—that is, giving up the time, which should be allowed for the consideration of the most important things, to those, which are of no importance. We complain of the rapidity, with which time takes its flight, and of the shortness of the space, which is granted us for the purpose of working out our salvation, yet, for such a complaint there would be no just cause, if we would be careful to make a good use of

* Luke xv. 16.

the little time we have. Who cannot remember many hours, which he has thrown away, perhaps, in the pursuit of pleasure, perhaps in idleness, or more frequently, perhaps, in such visits, and in such conversation, as have no tendency to improve the mind, though they may be supposed innocent, because they do not particularly corrupt it. Yet, we should well consider the admonition given by Saint Paul—"Let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt,"* and think how much good we lose, by not improving the opportunities, which are afforded us for our edification.

8. The last sin I have to mention at present, as bringing us in guilty before God, is Procrastination, that is, the deferring till to-morrow the things which ought to be done to-day. It is more easy to convince sinners of the necessity of reforming, than to persuade them to begin the important work. If they are young, they think there is time enough before them, and that there is no occasion yet to devote themselves to a religious life. If they are of a middle age, they ask leave first to dispatch the business they have in hand, and then they promise to be careful about their souls. If they are advanced in years before they are converted to God, then old habits

* Coloss. iv. 6.

become so rooted, that they are still disposed to defer from day to day what should be done ere another minute passes away. It has been somewhat coarsely said, that "Hell is paved with good resolutions;" but, if we consider how many only think about repentance, without ever actually repenting, and allow temptations, against which they promise to stand firm one day, to overcome them the next, we shall be satisfied there is too much truth in the observation. Oh! that being so convinced we might none of us harden our hearts, but, to day, while it is called to day, listen to the gracious voice of God, who, with much long suffering, has hitherto spared and preserved us, not being willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved. Yet, we should remember with fear what is written in the Book of Proverbs—"He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."* Having thus mentioned a catalogue of offences, of which, it is to be feared, we are all of us in some respects guilty, I proceed to state,

3rd. That in the great day of accounts all men will be judged according to their works. If we carefully examine ourselves agreeably to

* Prov. xxix. 1.

the rules, which are given us in the word of God, we must be constrained to say, "If thou, Lord, shouldest be extreme to mark what is done amiss, who can stand before thee? Enter not into judgment with thy servants, for, in thy sight shall no man living be justified. Thy law is so holy, and thy requirements are so exact, that our obedience must necessarily be imperfect; on which account, availing ourselves of the advantages, which result from the Christian Dispensation, we look to Jesus, as our Redeemer to save us from the curse of the law. He is the Lord our Righteousness, and whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." True it is, that through Christ we obtain the remission of sins that are past, and are received into the divine favour. But, shall we, on account of such grace, be less desirous to live in holiness than we were before? It neither ought to be, nor can it be, if we are such Christians as our Judge will approve at the last day; for Christ came to "purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works;"* and unless there be in us a spirit of universal obedience, and a desire to conform in all points to the pattern of our Redeemer, we shall have reason to fear he will not own

* Titus ii. 14.

us in the day of his appearing. But, in order to excite this spirit in us, and to render our obedience chearful, uniform, and active, we are allowed to look for a recompense of reward; and though we may not lay claim to the blessings to be enjoyed hereafter in the way of merit, because they are all purchased for us, and freely given to us, yet we shall find, I apprehend, that our state of happiness hereafter will be proportioned to our growth in grace here, for our Lord tells his disciples, that they, having followed him in the regeneration, shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. We know also, from what is elsewhere spoken, that in his father's house are many mansions, prepared, as we may suppose, for the reception of the redeemed, according to their different stages of advancement. Having such a prospect of reward, my Brethren, let us be stedfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; and if we feel some gratitude towards him for his goodness, let us pray that this heavenly disposition may be more firmly rooted in our hearts; let us more studiously avoid every vice, and more diligently practice every virtue. Let us not shun enquiry, neither let us be backward in endeavouring to discover our duty in every minute particular, through the apprehension

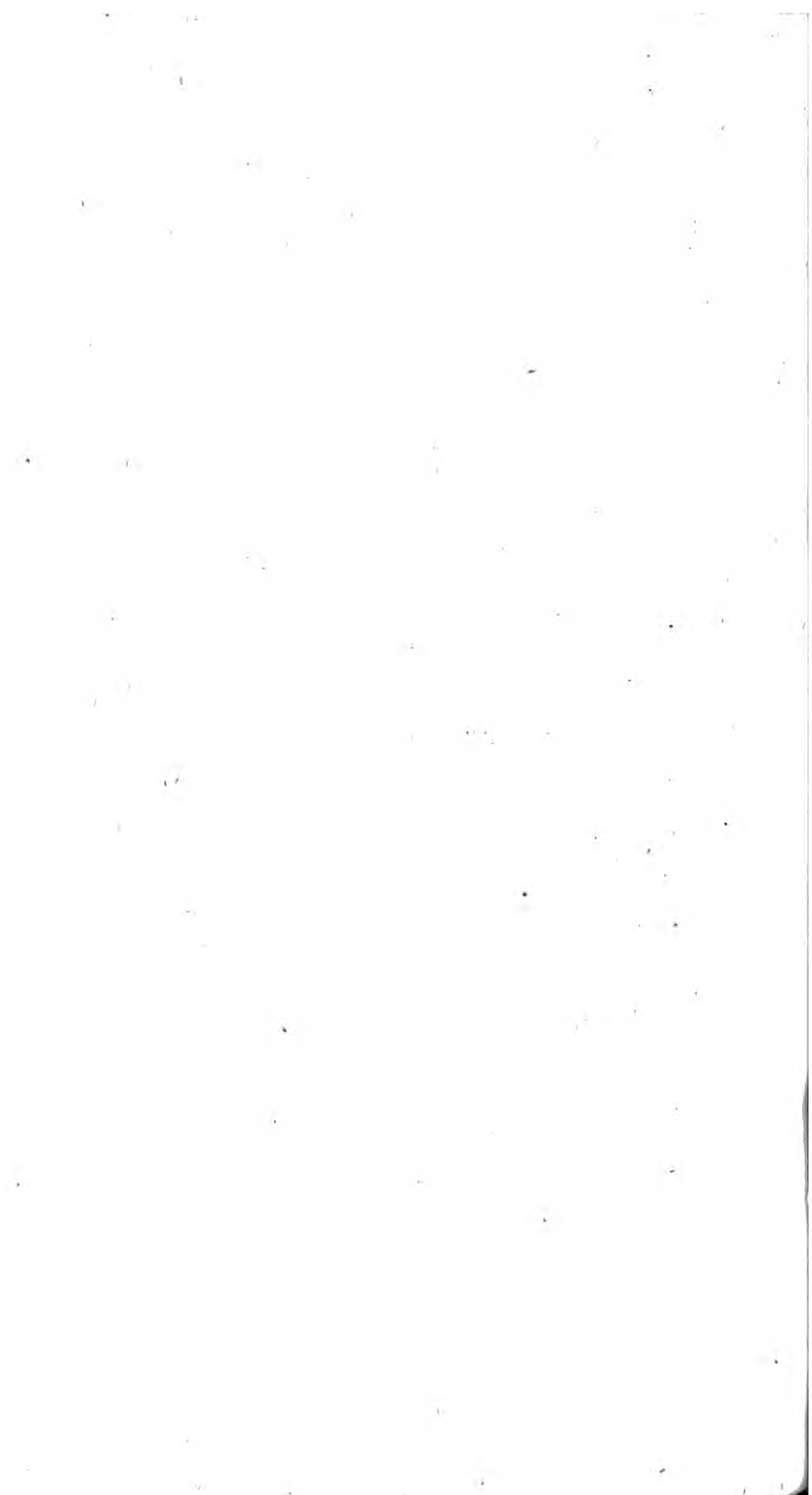
that we may think it necessary to give up some of our wonted indulgencies ; but, let us beg God daily to cleanse our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, and to enable us to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.

Are there any who will say, upon the consideration of what has been now spoken, " Alas ! you impose upon us a hard task. Situated as we are in the midst of business, and being so connected with the world, it is hardly possible to be so scrupulous and exact, as you say, we ought to be." But, consider, what will it profit, if you gain the whole world, and lose your own souls ? Only be willing to become the servants of God, and the difficulties, which now frighten you, will speedily vanish. Give up your hearts to God, and the strictest obedience will then become pleasant. Hesitate not a moment about the choice, which you should make, because, as surely as you are now alive, you must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and, if you die impenitent and unreformed, must have your portion with the workers of iniquity, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. May the Lord incline you to attend to the things, which have been spoken, and make you his obedient servants to the end of your lives.

SERMON XIII.



AGAINST RASH JUDGMENT.



SERMON XIII.

MATTHEW, vii. 1.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

THE Christian Religion does not only enjoin a particular set of doctrines, but is designed, as Saint Paul informs us, to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. It obliges him to live soberly, that is, in the constant habit of temperance and moderation; righteously, strictly observing the laws of equity and justice towards his neighbour; and godly, having a constant regard for all the will of God. It becomes him to add to his faith virtue, not merely avoiding wickedness, but so ordering his conversation, that he may in all things adorn the Gospel of God his Saviour. The Christian, who thus understands the nature of that admirable religion, by which he is bound, will gladly attend to the explanation of any of the divine precepts, and not be slack in examining how far he acts in conformity to the same, saying

with David—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

With such a temper I hope it is, that you, who are come here to worship God this day, are disposed to listen to the word of the Gospel, and will seek improvement from the portion of Scripture, which I have chosen for my text, which, unless I am much mistaken, will be found very applicable to many among us; yea, I think I may add without offence, to all; for, in some degree, we are every one of us too prone to transgress in this respect.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged." It is hardly necessary to observe, that these words do not apply to magistrates, whose office and duty it is to distinguish between good and evil, to examine and weigh evidence, to pronounce sentence of punishment on the wicked, and to see that the righteous are properly rewarded. This, as must be plain to every common understanding, cannot be the meaning of them; but we are to regard them as passing censure on those rash and hasty decisions, which men too frequently make on the conduct and motives of their neighbours, and which are often the cause of much discord and mischief in the

* Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

world. To make this clear, it will be proper to mention a few instances of that rash judgment, which our Lord here condemns.

1st. I would observe, we are apt to judge wrongly of men's conduct towards ourselves. Depraved as the world is, and vicious as the conduct of many is, yet there is a certain degree of character which we all wish to maintain; for we are so linked together in society, and so mutually dependent upon one another, that if we lose that jewel, we cannot avoid feeling degraded in the opinions of men, and that being the case, we shall frequently have reason to fear that our worldly circumstances will also suffer by it. Yet, even with such consequences in view, is there any topic of conversation more common than that, which runs on the faults and follies of our neighbours? And when it comes to our ears, that any thing which we have said or done has been considered worthy of blame, how readily have we taken offence; and if the person, who spoke to our discredit, happened to be among the number of those, whom we esteemed our friends, how disposed have we been to attribute to him the worst of motives, and determined either to resent the injury, or to withdraw from him all further acquaintance. Yet a little experience will convince every prudent man, that his judgment concerning such reports is often rash and in-

considerate. What he ascribes to no better motive than that of malice may be the effect of the most pure and disinterested benevolence, for there can be no want of charity in lamenting the follies and indiscretions of a friend, whether they be supposed or real. Besides, it most commonly happens, that a relation at second hand differs in many particulars from what it was at first, so that we never ought to come to a decision respecting the purpose of it, till we have seen the relater, and heard from his own mouth the reasons, which induced him to speak after such a manner.— But, should we find, after all our deliberation and care not to judge rashly, that we have really some ground for complaint, what should we do? Our Saviour shall give the answer, and his words, I hope, will carry with them sufficient authority to enforce obedience: “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”* We may judge wrongly of him, if we suppose he will not listen to us, when we plead our own cause, and be more ready, when kindly argued with, to acknowledge his transgression, than he was to commit it. Perhaps, when an explanation takes place, it will be found that we ourselves are much to blame, and that we

* Matt. xviii. 15.

have the greatest reason to thank our friend for his report, since it leads us (it must do so if we are humble Christians) to examine our hearts, and carefully to avoid in future all that conversation or practice, which is in any way disgraceful to our holy profession.

2nd. We form rash judgment respecting the conduct of mankind towards others. The various transactions relating to exchange and commerce, and the promises and contracts which are made between different parties, are continually before our eyes; but, if we have no particular concern in them, we perceive but a very small part of them, and, in very few instances, do we come to know all the circumstances of any negotiation, which is carried on between man and man. Yet, scanty as our knowledge of these matters is, we frequently judge, as if we knew every thing relating to them, and presume to speak freely, not only of those parts, which are before the eye of the public, but also ascribe such motives to the actors, as no worthy or honest character would for a moment entertain. We say, "there is selfishness, knavery, hypocrisy, at the bottom of the transaction, and that time and circumstances will bring all to light. So it has done in many instances, and so it will again." Undoubtedly it will; but till it does,

our business is to suspend our judgment, lest we should condemn the innocent, and incur the displeasure of him who seeth all hearts, and who will render unto every man according to the strictest rules of justice. We may easily call to mind, if we will only take a little pains to consider the matter, the numerous mistakes we have already made, and be convinced, that we have often imputed blame where none was deserved. Let us therefore hope for the best, and even in cases, which afford strong ground of suspicion, let us suppose that the conduct of the suspected may be vindicated, though we cannot so much as guess at the manner in which his innocence will be made to appear.

3rd. We form rash judgment respecting the conduct of men towards God. Hence arise the most serious differences between Churchmen and Dissenters, between this and that sect, and between men and men of the same denomination. While, with but a very scanty knowledge of our own hearts, we confess that we are far from perfection, we vainly expect others to be without fault, and when men discover in any religious professor something which they disapprove of, then the cry is—“ This is the way of them, they are all a set of hypocrites ; there is no sound principle of religion in their hearts, no veneration for, nor

love to God, no real charity and benevolence towards men." Nay, do they not sometimes, without even making such a discovery, venture to use the same language; and for no other reason, than because a friend or neighbour appears more serious and concerned than the multitude about the salvation of his soul, do they not presume to infer, either that he is insincere, or under the influence of some strange and unaccountable delusion? Is it not from such a hasty judgment as this, that a great number of religious people are called *Methodists*? A word which, it is well known, is generally used to express the disapprobation and contempt of those persons to whom it is applied. But, before any of you join in this censure, it will be prudent to inquire what a *Methodist* is. Does he learn his Religion from the Bible? What is the nature of his Faith, and what is the course of his practice? Is he one who prays, or who lives without prayer; who is kind or unkind, benevolent, or selfish, disposed to do good, or to do evil? And should you find upon the whole (upon the whole, I say, for where will you find the man that liveth and sinneth not?) that it is his desire to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself, you will act the wisest part to lay aside your reproach, and to follow him so

far as he is a follower of Christ. God, remember, seeth the heart; and if it should be found, at the great day, when all secrets shall be revealed, that your despised fellow creature has more faith and piety than yourself, he will be acquitted, and you condemned, and be given up to sorrow, and shame, and confusion of face.

Perhaps the persons, whom you have loaded with opprobrious names, have chosen to frequent places of worship, where you have not thought it proper to go, and to listen to preachers, whom you have not thought it expedient to encourage; and what if they did? Are not those beams of the sun, by which the eyes of man are enlightened, the same in every place; and is not that food, by which his life is supported, of the same nature, by whosoever it may be administered? Never shall I blame you for forsaking my ministry, while it is clear that any other is of equal, or of greater advantage to your souls; and, as it is plain, from what we read in the Scriptures, that God has been pleased to make use of different instruments to perform his work, no doubt some will prosper more under the preaching of this man, and some under the preaching of that; while all, loving the Lord Jesus Christ, and being members of his body, shall form but one Church in union with him, and in communion with one

another. Oh! that the time may speedily come, when all divisions among sincere Christians shall cease, and universal harmony prevail. "Judge not that ye be not judged." As a farther inducement to make you attend to this precept, allow me to suggest the three following considerations :

1. Consider, that you have to deal with a God, who sees and knows all things; then, day by day, examine yourselves and ask—"What has my God seen in me, which is not agreeable to his holy will? Dare I say—"I have not transgressed—I am innocent? Alas! No. Iniquities prevail against me; my sins are more numerous than the hairs of my head, and perhaps in every deed, which I have performed, and in every imagination, which I have conceived, there has been something wrong; something omitted, which ought to have been done, and something done, which ought to have been left undone." What, then, if God should be extreme to mark in you what has been done amiss, would you not be speechless and confounded at his judgment? O! then, judge not your brethren too severely; for, know this, that, "with whatever measure you mete it shall be measured to you again."* Consider,

* Matt. vii. 2.

2. How much diligence you ought to use to make your calling and election sure. Whoever meditates seriously upon the nature of his soul, as formed for an eternal existence, and of the nature of his body, which is composed of such frail materials, that it is continually subject to disease, and must speedily be turned to corruption ; whoever thinks, moreover, that he has no certainty, even of a single day, in the land of the living ; who believes, that there is a Heaven, into which the righteous shall enter, and be happy hereafter ; and a Hell, into which the souls of the wicked shall be cast, and be most miserable in unquenchable fire. Whoever meditates, as seriously as he ought to do, upon these things, will not find time or inclination to turn his thoughts to the concerns of other people, but be so occupied in securing his own happiness, that from morning to night, and from night to morning, in the hours of wakefulness, yea, and in the hours of sleep too (for that, which fully engages the mind by day, is usually the subject of our dreams by night), he will only desire to obtain the favour of the Lord, that he may have hope in his death, and be delivered from the wrath to come. But, though I say such a serious character will have no time or inclination to busy himself with the affairs of his fellow crea-

tures, I do not mean to affirm, that he will have no regard for their spiritual welfare, or that he will forbear to admonish them against continuing in those practices, which he cannot but regard as sinful and improper; but then he will do this in the spirit of Christian love and compassion, beseeching them, with much intreaty, to be reconciled to God; for he loves his neighbour as himself, and would keep him, if possible, from being cast into that place of torment, which is reserved for the unrighteous. Consider,

3. That there is but one thing absolutely needful; and to obtain this for ourselves, or to communicate it to others, will not only be sufficient employment for us, but will, if our hearts are rightly disposed, be a most delightful occupation. While thus engaged for the benefit of our fellow creatures, men subject to like passions and frailties as ourselves, we shall find, with all their faults, that there is some good principle upon which we may work. We shall be able to trace, among all the ruins of the fall, the foundation of that edifice, of which God was the original builder, and we shall think ourselves honoured, if we are admitted to labour, under the great architect, for its reparation. In forming our judgment of men, let us remember, that they are the crea-

tures of God, and as such, however now defiled with sin, the objects of his love and care, and redeemable by Jesus Christ. We should remember what we ourselves were and are, and if there be any good dwelling in us, who it is that has made us to differ. We should also think (and highly pleasant will be the thought) that as we ourselves were turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, so also may others; and that there is no heart too hard for divine grace to soften it, no will so perverse, which Almighty love is not able to subdue. Yes, brethren, let us judge all men capable of salvation; and let us hope that the time will come, when those that are now last shall be first; those that are now despised shall be honourable; those that are now polluted shall be purified; and those, who are low among mankind, shall be exalted to a high degree of glory.

Let us judge ourselves, that we be not judged of the Lord. May the God of all grace cleanse our hearts, and make us fit to enter into his heavenly kingdom.

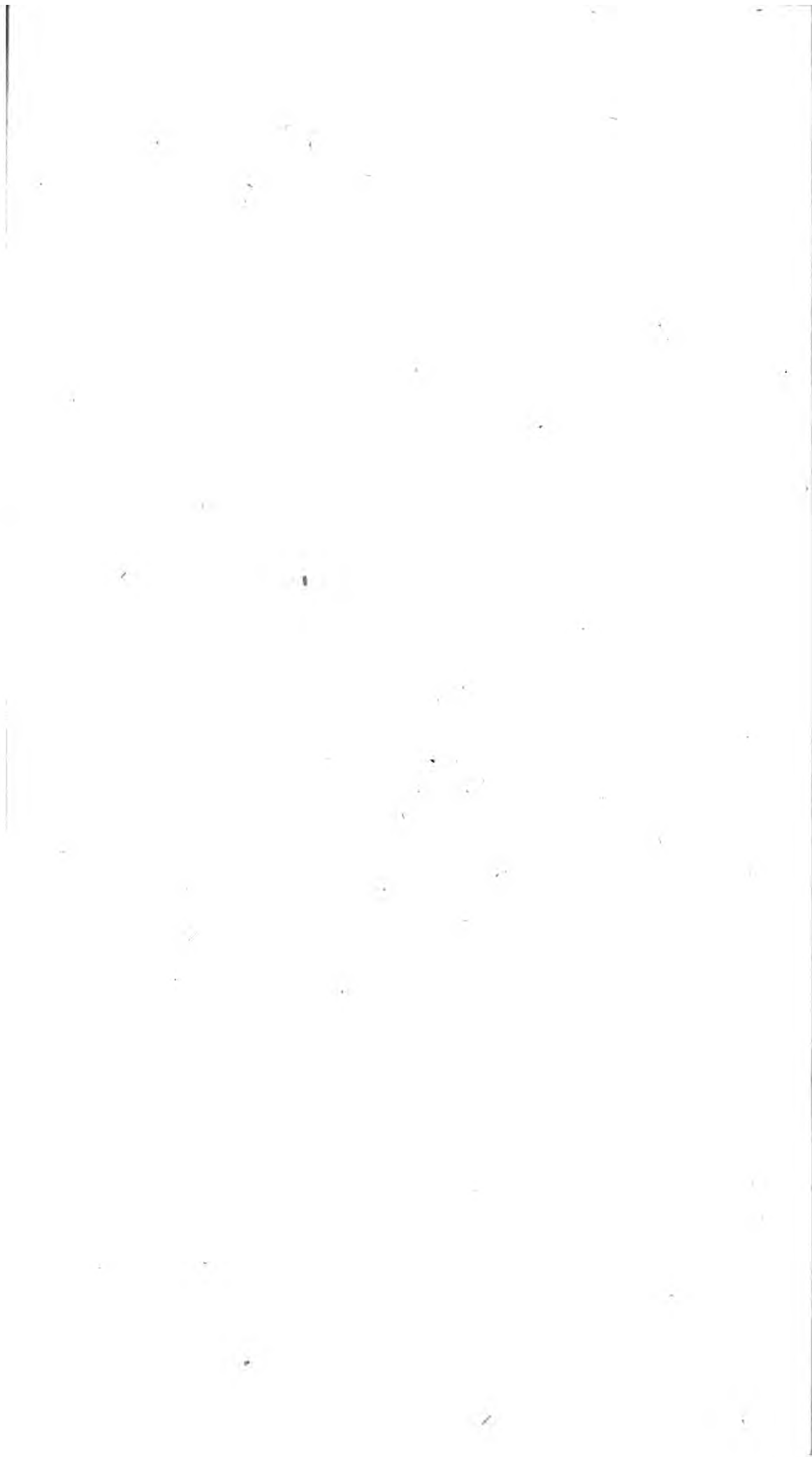
SERMON XIV.



THE

HISTORY OF BALAAM

IMPROVED.



SERMON XIV.

NUMBERS xxii. 34.

And Balaam said unto the Angel of the Lord, I have sinned, for I knew not, that thou stoodest in the way against me. Now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again.

THESE words are the conclusion of a very remarkable story, which, upon a cursory examination, presents many difficulties to our vices; yet, if we examine it closely, we shall discover a train of instruction, which it seems intended to convey to the mind of every sincere enquirer.

We learn in the beginning of the chapter, that the children of Israel having conquered Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, came forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab, which greatly excited the fears of Balak their king, who expected nothing less than utter destruction from them. Anxious to know what would be his fate, he consulted a Prophet, Balaam, the son of Beor, who spake, as seems clear from the history, according to the word of the Lord. At least he had done so formerly, and upon this occasion he made a

fresh profession of his integrity ; for though Balak, with the view of inducing him to curse his enemies, offered him the rewards of divination, and promised to promote him to great honour, yet he nobly said, like a faithful servant of God, “ If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God to do less or more.” Excellent resolution ! In order to confirm him in it, “ God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him—If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them, but yet the word, which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. And the anger of the Lord was kindled because he went.” What ! Was the Lord angry with Balaam, because he obeyed his word ? No ; but Balaam began now to ponder on the rewards of divination. He began now to think of the great honour, to which Balak promised to promote him, and his resolution began to fail ; and though he might not intend to speak in direct opposition to what the Lord should command, yet he was in hopes he might somehow or other evade the precept, and thus comply with Balak’s wishes. That this was really the intention of the Prophet, we learn from Saint Peter, who tells us,

that "Balaam the son of Bosor loved the wages of unrighteousness," and from Saint Jude, who speaks of some, that ran "after the error of Balaam for reward." Thus, then, pondering upon the advantageous offers made him by the king of Moab, as he was going, or *when* he went (so the word may be rendered) with this thought in his mind, the anger of the Lord was kindled against him.

Here let us make a few reflections before we proceed. Whoever professes to be the servant of God ought to obey his master's will in all things. As God can order nothing but what is holy, just, and good, a strict obedience to his commandments is our most reasonable service, and we may be sure, that in every business we undertake by his command, he will enable us to go through with it. Moreover, our duty is so clearly defined, that we cannot easily mistake it; for the whole is comprised in these two precepts: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and thy neighbour as thyself;" which is as much as to say, "Thou shalt fix thy affections on the centre and source of all happiness, and live in the sweetest concord and harmony with thy fellow mortals upon earth." What can be more desirable than conformity to these precepts? The service of God is indeed perfect

freedom. But, however we may be convinced in our judgments concerning the truth of what I have just observed, do we not commonly turn our thoughts from the Creator to the creature, and expect more satisfaction from worldly pleasures, than from the good things, which God hath prepared for those that love him? Do we not act from selfish principles, and, if we consider the benefit of our neighbour, is the attention we pay him noble, generous, disinterested, and regulated by our master's golden rule—"Do unto all men, as you would they should do unto you?" As the conscience of every man, who is acquainted with the Scriptures, will tell him what he owes, in a general way, to God and his neighbour, I need not be particular in the definition of his duty. It is enough that I bid him take heed to his ways, and see that his heart is right with God. Let him remember that there is One, from whom no secrets are hid, and that if he cherish a desire contrary to his will, he will, like Balaam, find the anger of the Lord kindled against him. But, let us proceed with the history.

As Balaam, intent upon rebellion, proceeded on his journey, behold "the Angel of the Lord stood in the way, for an adversary against him. Now, he was riding upon an ass, and

his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field, and Balaam smote the ass to turn her into the way. But the Angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. And when the ass saw the Angel of the Lord, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; and he smote her again. And the Angel of the Lord went farther, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand, or to the left. And when the ass saw the Angel of the Lord, she fell under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote her with a staff."

We may reap very profitable instruction from these verses, in as much as they shew to us God's gracious dealings with sinners, and the efforts he uses, if I may so speak, to reclaim them from their folly and perverseness.

When a man acts the part of Balaam, and determines to gratify his own will, he walks in the way that leadeth to destruction, and did not the Lord, by some providential interference, restrain him, he would shortly complete his ruin. It is possible, and indeed very probable,

that he will begin his career, through inconsideration, fancying, perhaps, that the schemes, which he has planned for himself, are salutary and beneficial; therefore he will seek their accomplishment by every means in his power. Or he will, with less integrity, endeavour to attain his favourite object, flattering himself, that the evil attending the pursuit of it is trifling, and framing excuses to silence the whispers of his faithful monitor. To exemplify this doctrine, we may adduce a variety of instances recorded in the Scriptures, and which are brought to our recollection by daily experience. Our first parents had a command given them, and they knew they should incur punishment by disobeying it; but they cast their eyes upon the forbidden fruit, and then they longed to taste it. But, did not conscience check them? Yes, undoubtedly, and happy had they been had they listened to its dictates, but that they refused to do. This emboldened the Tempter, who argued the case with them, and seemed for a while to argue in vain; for the woman declared her respect to the commandment in these terms—"God hath said ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it lest ye die."* No, said the serpent, this is false; "ye shall not surely die." Again Eve felt the re-

* Gen. iii. 3, 4.

monstrances of conscience, for she did not eat immediately, but having learnt, that she might know good and evil, she *would* know them. She would not be stopt by the gentle admonitions, which had been given her; but ate, and fell immediately.

The Israelites in general shewed a singular obstinacy and perverseness, insomuch that they are denominated a rebellious and stiff-necked people. Again and again did God display signs and wonders before their eyes; and again and again did they reject the evidence, which these afforded them, of the omnipotence of Jehovah. Sometimes, indeed, we hear of a temporary repentance, and of amendment taking place after some particular judgment. But, this was of short duration; for they did, and *would* transgress, till they brought upon themselves swift destruction.

The misery, which every sinner experiences, he brings upon himself, and must justify God in all his proceedings against him. He knows that punishment is necessarily connected with transgression, and that, whenever he deviates from the path of duty, he will become a sufferer. Disorder is the infringement of order, and arises from men pretending to arraign the wisdom and goodness of God. Let me apply this consideration to my hearers. You have

all some favourite object in view, no matter what, and you are bent upon obtaining it. But, are you sure that it is agreeable to the will of God? Has nothing ever suggested to your mind, that you are desiring an unlawful enjoyment? Men in general are apt to imagine that every thing is lawful, which does not imply a direct breach of any particular commandment; and indeed they may, in some cases, be right; but, the Apostle tells us there are many things, which are lawful, but not expedient;* and if we, with the full bent of our minds, resolve to obtain those, which are inexpedient, we shall certainly be spending our time for that which profiteth not, and which, it is probable that God has, in his mercy, put out of our reach. If we have a just sense of the providential dispensations of the Lord, and consider that he has caused all things to work together for good to those that love him, we shall not undertake any affair, without asking his direction respecting the lawfulness of it, and his blessing respecting the issue. If we proceed in a contrary method, and lay down plans for ourselves, without following the leadings of Providence, we shall certainly fall into difficulties; and hence indeed it is, that Christians are so often entangled and confounded in their

ways; for they fancy they are following the will of the Lord, when, in truth, self-will is the idol of their hearts. You may ask—how may it be known, in things apparently good, whether we are following the Lord's will, or our own? The case is not difficult. You have the word of God to instruct you in your duty, and though you have but a little light at first, yet, if you pray for more, it shall be granted. Follow the light you have, and you shall not go astray. Though you may not walk so fast, nor so confidently as those, whose light is clearer; yet, remember that God requireth according to what a man hath, not according to what he hath not. The day star must first dawn, then arise, and afterwards attain its full splendour. "But Satan," you say, "will cast a mist before our eyes, and prevent us from seeing the truth." Then pray, and watch the guidance of providence. Every thing in this world is created for a particular purpose, and, I doubt not, made subservient to the grand plan of Redemption. If you should, peradventure, deviate from the right way, and set your face toward that, which is not good, God will rectify your mistake, and turn you back into the road that you have forsaken. Something or other, which will at the time perhaps appear of little consequence, will be given,

as a kind intimation from the Lord, that you are in the wrong way, and, if attended to, be a timely preservation from greater evil. When the beast that Balaam rode turned aside into the field, it should have led him to inquire, "Why is this check? Why, if I am going to deliver a message from the Lord, and have undertaken my journey at his express command, am I thus prevented from proceeding? Such an inquiry was natural, and the admonition should have excited his gratitude rather than his indignation. Many such warnings have we all received. Who cannot remember the time, when his wishes have been disappointed, and who, that reflects upon God's dealings with his creatures, does not observe the means he uses to keep them submissive and happy? Were a man never to eat or drink, but when urged to it by hunger or thirst, many of the diseases that prey upon our constitutions would be unknown. When men feel that satiety which intimates to them, that they have had enough, they should stop, and rest assured that it will be best for them so to do. Perhaps no bad consequence would immediately follow from greater indulgence; but then they would act contrary to a known law, and a given rule, and subject themselves to evils by an act of folly imputable to themselves

alone. There is, in all cases, a positive law that we are not to touch that, which is evil, nor, in any instance, to deviate from the known will of God. Happy are they, who wait upon the Lord, and believe his word. He will guide, preserve, and evermore defend them.

It is a melancholy fact, that the greater part of those, who will assent to the foregoing observations as just, are not careful to observe the warnings of God, and thereupon to amend their ways. A present gratification has so many charms to captivate the senses, that we will not admit the idea of future pain being the consequence. We *will* follow the imaginations of our own hearts, and desire this, that, or the other, though doubtful as to its tendency, because we will not set ourselves seriously to inquire how far we are acting agreeably to the will of God, lest a bitter ingredient should thereby be mingled with our cup of pleasure. But, God, who is rich in mercy, and willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live, causes us to eat the fruit of our own ways. He makes our table to become a snare, and that which should have been for our welfare to become an occasion of falling. He suffers us to become embarrassed and distressed by the things of our own choosing, and frequently lets us meet with hurt

and damage, as a chastisement for our folly and presumption in forsaking his ways. Had Balaam attended to the first admonition, he would have escaped the evil, that afterwards befel him; but, as he rejected it, it was necessary, that he should undergo a severer punishment. "The ass thrust herself against the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall." We are apt to complain of the miseries of this life, and to suspect that God is unjust; but, indeed, we bring all our miseries on ourselves, and ought to admire his goodness for annexing a present punishment to sin, that we may learn righteousness, and escape a more terrible punishment in a future world. Consider the evils you have suffered, and are now suffering. Is the trial severe? Does it very nearly affect you? Be assured you need it. Nothing short of what you undergo could break the force of self-will, and make you dissatisfied with worldly enjoyment. "Lord! what wilt thou have me to do?" should be the constant language of your heart. Till it is, regard it as a mercy, that God repeats his corrections, however severe and distressing they may be.

But, there are some, upon whom even severe afflictions make no impression. Persons of this description prepare for themselves punishment of the most awful kind. Balaam, as the history

instructs us, rejected the second warning. He smote the ass again, and then she fell down under him. There seemed but a step between him and death. Such an accident, unless God had still manifested his mercy, might have deprived him of life, but he was spared, as a monument of the long suffering of his God. Oh ! let me intreat all perverse and obstinate sinners that hear me this day, to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, and not to create for themselves unhappiness and woe. You are as surely bringing destruction upon you by sin, as you would death by drinking a draught of poison. If every transgression shall receive a just recompence of reward, what punishment must a collection of transgressions bring ! Transgressions too of the most heinous nature—rebellion, ingratitude, and presumption ! My brethren ! if you prefer pleasure to pain, beware how you trifle with God. You have been already chastised. Go now, and sin no more, lest a worse thing befall you ; for, as the Lord said to Israel, so does he now say to all that walk in their own perverse ways : “ If ye will not be reformed by these things,” viz. the plagues I bring upon you for your iniquity, “ but will walk contrary to me, then will I also walk contrary to you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.”* Of what ex

* Levit. xxvi. 23.

tent and force may be the punishment, which God designs for any of you, I pretend not to say, only this may be observed in general, he will shew himself the conqueror, and add sevenfold to the sevenfold vengeance, till he has humbled you under his mighty hand.

Balaam, having gone the length of perverseness that you have heard, was preserved from further punishment by a striking instance of divine grace, though he still continued to shew his madness and obstinacy. We read, v. 28, that "the Lord opened the mouth of the ass; and she said unto Balaam, what have I done to thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said to the ass, because thou hast mocked me. I would there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, am I not thine ass, which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day—was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said—nay." Here we perceive the folly of all wicked men; for, first, they deny the providence of God, and, secondly they abuse it. First, they deny providence; for when any event happens contrary to the common course of things, or different from their expectations, they do not stop to inquire why it should be so, or with what design the Governor of the World has permitted, or commanded it to take place. And because they

are thus thoughtless and ignorant, they next abuse Providence, arrogantly taking upon themselves to arraign the proceedings of God ; and supposing themselves injured, they vent their rage against every thing, that turns out contrary to their wishes. Refractory by nature, as a wild ass's colt, they are like a bull in a net, or a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. They spend their strength in unavailing fury, and sink at last, unsubdued in spirit, but exhausted with labour and fatigue. Are any of you the impatient sufferers I am describing ? Consider, I beseech you, against whom you are fighting. Not against human power, but divine : not against man, but against God. It is hard to kick against the pricks. The contest is unequal. Yield to him, who fights against you, and I will venture to affirm, you will have no reason to repent of it. He is a generous conqueror, and displays his clemency to all that lay down their arms, and cast themselves on his mercy and protection.

Balaam, I have said, was prevented suffering further punishment by a striking instance of divine mercy ; for it is written, v. 31, 32, 33, " Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand, and he bowed down his head, and fell

flat upon his face. And the Angel of the Lord said unto him, why hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? Behold! I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me. And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times. Unless she had turned from me; surely now also I had slain thee, and preserved her alive."

Act as we will, God will overcome at last; for though Satan may long blind our eyes, yet we shall become so miserable by following our own ways, that we shall long to be brought into a more happy state. This will be the case if we are not given over to a reprobate mind; and then will be the time of God's love to us, when he will prove, beyond contradiction, that every evil has been the effect of our own sin, and every disappointment the production of his love. We shall then know, that unless such and such events had happened in direct opposition to our most sanguine wishes, the consequences would have been fatal to our happiness, and acknowledge, upon the retrospect of past transactions, the truth of what Christ assures us, that not even a sparrow falleth to the ground without our heavenly Father's knowledge. I trust there are some here, whose eyes the Lord has opened to perceive his wonderful mercy towards them; and that if his Angel had not

stood in the way to prevent the execution of their plans, they might have been suddenly cut off, and have fallen into the pit of destruction. We see enough here to convince every serious mind, that all things are conducted with the most consummate wisdom; and may, even from our scanty information, conclude, that nothing here happens by chance or accident; but, hereafter, when the particular reason of every event shall be revealed, and we shall be able to trace the several links in the chain of providence connecting the end with the means, we shall see much indeed to excite our wonder and astonishment. There is no one, who is not liable to accidents, and who has not met with them at one time or other. Some are hurt, and some are unhurt. Some are killed, and some are preserved alive. We, to whom the Lord has been merciful in preservation, know but little how much we are indebted to him for it. Had we arrived sooner at such a place, or left it a few minutes later than we have done, who knows what accidents might have befallen us? We might have lost our lives by the overturning of carriages, the falling of horses, the violence of our fellow creatures, or by some of the other means that occasion a premature death, unless God had watched over us for good. He is our preserver, as well as

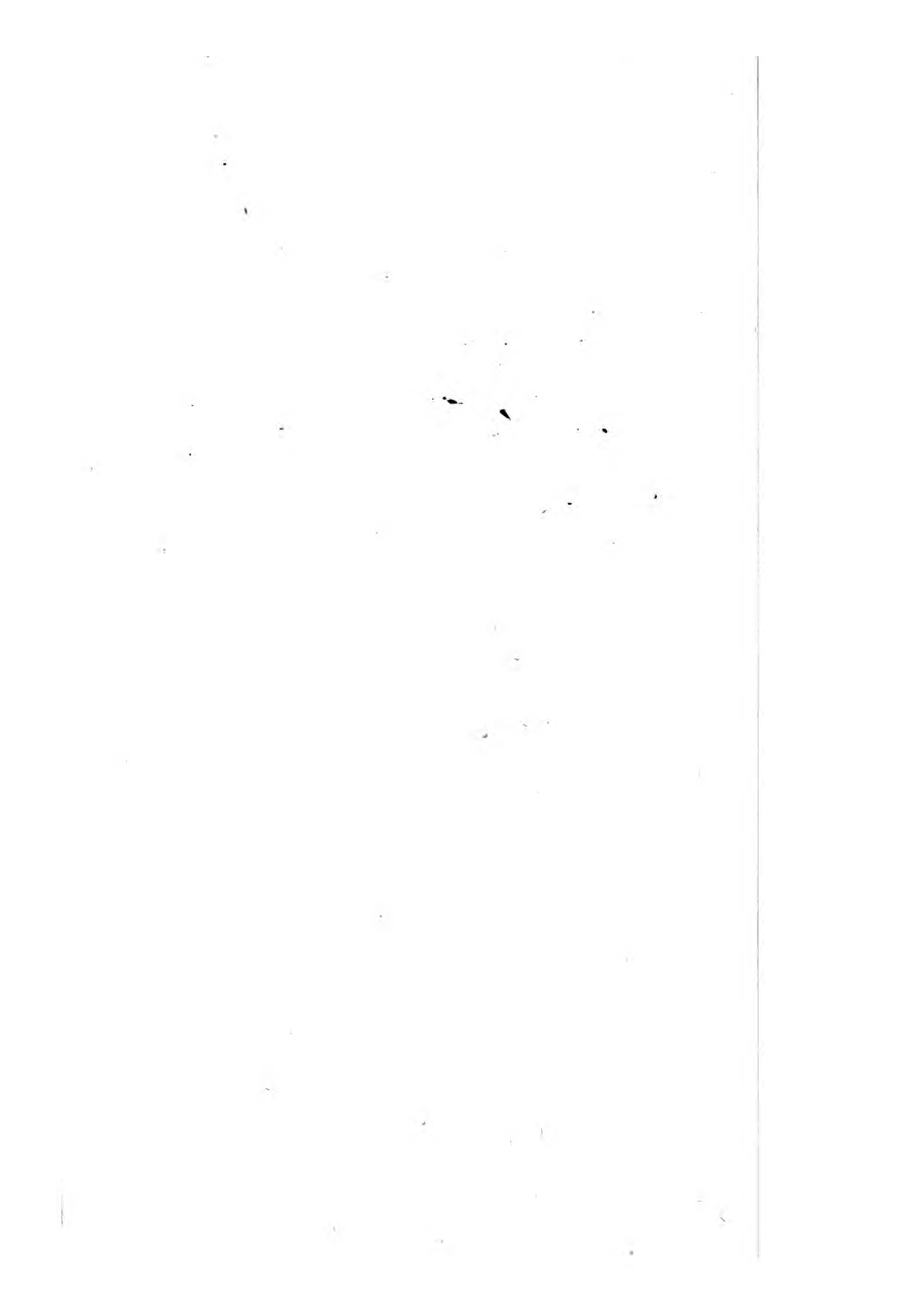
our creator ; and it is not owing to our care, but to his providence, that we are all here alive at this day.

When we reflect on the singular goodness of God towards us, and consider how much folly and perverseness have marked our conduct towards him, we shall be constrained to take up the words of Balaam, at last convicted and penitent, and say—" I have sinned, for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me. Now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again."

The proof of repentance is to do works meet for repentance. We must renounce entirely the things that have occasioned our misery, and turn unto God with all our heart and mind, and soul, and strength ; not that we have strength in ourselves, but we must seek it from God. We must depend wholly upon him, and beg that he will guide and govern us ; and guide us he will, for he has promised it, not only through the dangers and difficulties arising from outward obstacles, but through the intricate paths of heresy and error ; for the spirit of truth shall lead us into all truth, and cause us to find more peace and happiness in the ways of God's commandments, than in all the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. Yea, we shall, like Moses,

esteem even the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. Let us then confess our sin, and turn unto the Lord; for if we say, we have no sin, the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* That we may all be thus pardoned and cleansed, may God, of his infinite mercy grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

* 1. John, i. 8, 9.



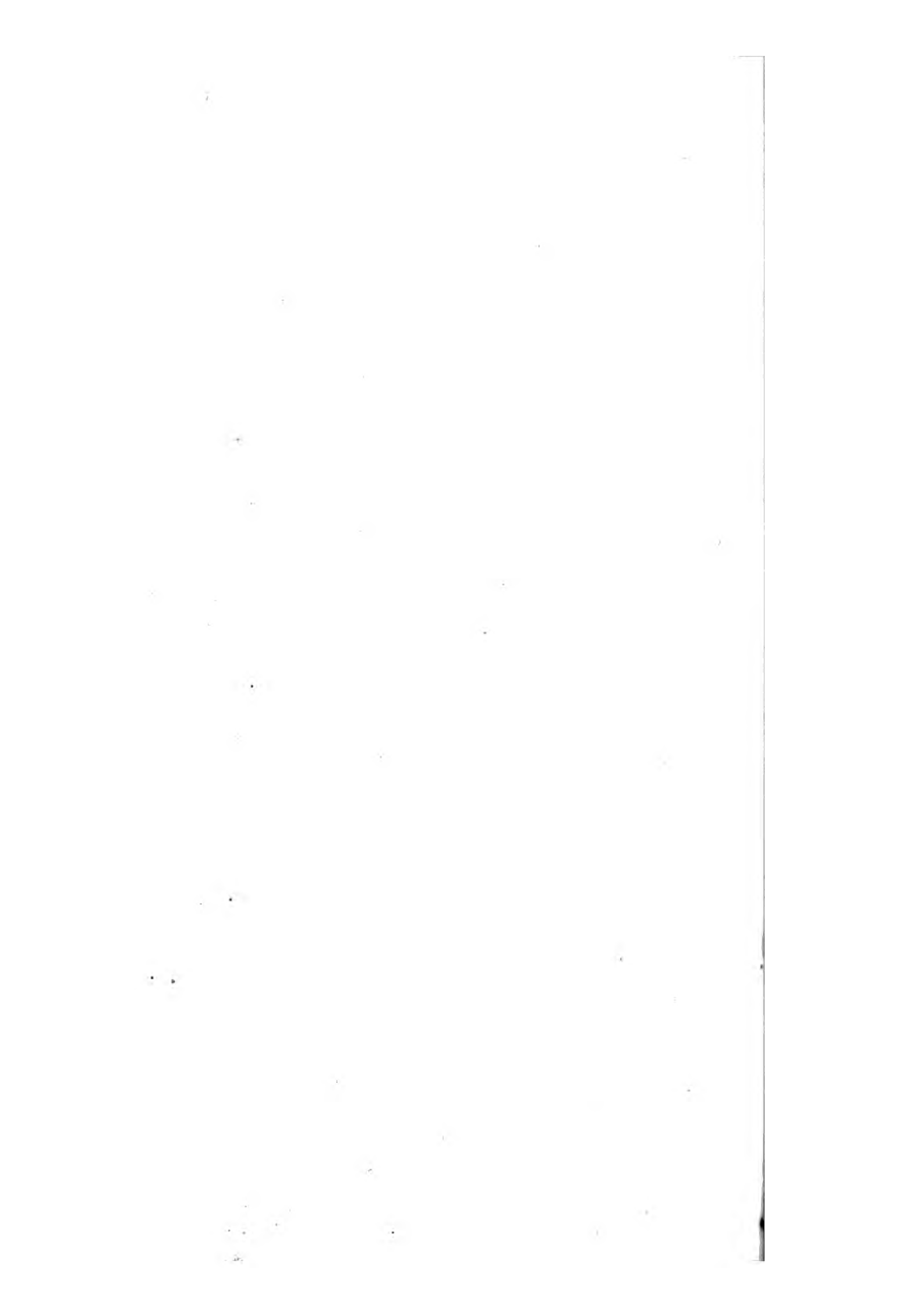
SERMON XV.



ON THE

DEDICATION OF THE HEART

TO GOD.



SERMON XV.

PROVERBS, xxiii. 26.

My Son, give me thy heart.

WE are to consider these words as a demand from one, who has every right to make it; and if we enter into an examination of that right, we shall find submission on our part not only just and reasonable, but highly conducive to our welfare.

In discoursing upon this portion of Scripture, it is my design to set before you,

I. The Authority and Character of Him, who says—"My Son, give me thy heart."

II. The nature of the demand itself.

III. The assent, which we should give to the requisition.

1st. I am to set before you the Authority and Character of Him, who says—"My Son, give me thy heart."

As it is our duty to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, we cannot be at a loss to know, that he is the person who makes this demand; for,

having created us for his pleasure, and having displayed infinite goodness and wisdom in his work, it is fit that we should acknowledge his power, and give him the glory, which is due to his name. This Creator, of whom we speak, is the high and lofty one, who inhabiteth eternity, before whom all things are naked and open. It is he, who sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and all the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers in his sight. He giveth unto all life, and breath, and all things; and orders and preserves whatever he has made by a continual act of power. We ought to consider, with more frequency and solemnity than we usually do, how near the Lord is to every one of us; and that in him we live, and move, and have our being. We ought more constantly to remember the right which he has to our services, and the advantage, which must accrue to us by surrendering ourselves entirely to his holy will and pleasure. But, we rebel, and find it hard to kick against the pricks; whereas, if we were to yield, we should perceive no pricks pressing against us; for goodness and love, which are ever flowing from God, can harm no one; and we should find, upon making the trial of submission, that all the pain, which we formerly felt in resisting, was a misery of our own creation. Are there any, who

imagine, that the things, which are forbidden, can afford them greater satisfaction than those which are commended? Oh! how do they wrong the great Author of their being, and act again the part of our first parents, who plunged themselves into misery, because they would not believe the word of the Lord. True it is, that the Lord withholdeth no good thing from those that love him, and that he is ready to bestow upon all his creatures, who have only a disposition to receive his blessings, even more than they are able to ask or think. Now, it is this great, this powerful God, who says "My Son, give me thy heart," and if we now consider,

2d. The nature of this demand, we shall perceive, that it is the most kind, and the most reasonable that can be imagined. It is, first, the most kind, because it breathes forth the spirit of a Father—"My Son." Parents! Do you not love your children? Do you not labour to provide for them? Do you not carefully protect them, and study, by all means, to promote their welfare? Think then, that as you regard your offspring, so does your heavenly Father regard you. Think, that, as they will enjoy what it is in your power, though perhaps greatly limited, to bestow upon them, so your God and Father, whose power is without limit, will bestow all good things upon

you; that is, all that is proper for you, all that will prove conducive to the happiness of your soul. Our blessed Lord, who was well acquainted with the human heart, and understood what motives would be productive of the most powerful effects, reminds his disciples of that relationship concerning which I am speaking, and assuming it, as a generally received opinion, founded on the law of nature, that a child has a right to demand of its parent the things it wants, says—"Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. What man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?"*

3d. This demand is also most reasonable. Seeing the advantages of having God for our Father are so great, and our obligations to serve him so many, and so powerful, to whom else should we give our affections? Is there any creature in heaven or earth that is so highly

* Mat. vii, 7.-11.

worthy of our regard? Judge for yourselves, Brethren, in this matter, and common sense will tell you the truth of that which is written in the Proverbs of him who is stiled the wisest man: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."* If there can be any who suppose that the God of Heaven is a tyrant, who delights in vengeance, and governs, merely to shew his power, independently of his goodness, they have formed a notion of Him which is not to be found in the Bible; and then, verily, it might be said—"It is not reasonable to serve him." But, as things are, our happiness and duty are so connected, that every sensible and understanding man is urged, by the powerful motive of self-interest, to dedicate himself to the Lord, and to say—"He shall be the God, whom I will serve:" And this is the third thing upon which I proposed to speak, viz.—

The assent, which we are to give to the requisition, "My Son, give me thy heart."

When the great God condescends to address himself to a man, we must believe that the man has ears to listen to, and a heart capable of understanding, the things that are spoken; and as he is very frequently and earnestly called upon to be attentive and considerate, we must

* Proverbs, i. 7.

also suppose him capable of applying his mind with great diligence to that, which is laid before him ; and farther, that he can receive what God is pleased to offer, and use it as the power which works out his salvation. Supposing these things, when such a proposal as that, which is contained in the text, is made to us, we should immediately say—" Take, Lord, what thou dost ask for. Take our hearts, which thou hast created, and which therefore ought to be dedicated to thee. Take them, defiled as they are, but cleanse them by the operation of thy Holy Spirit, and make them fit habitations for so sacred a guest." But, as this is a matter of great importance, it will be useful to be more particular. Let us then distinctly mention a few instances, in which the dedication of our hearts to God may be said to consist.

The first I shall notice is—a determination to receive the Truth of God, without murmuring or disputing. We take the Bible, as a revelation of the divine will, whereby are made known to us those things, which we cannot discover by our own natural reason. By this are we brought to some acquaintance with the author of our being, and are instructed concerning the nature of our souls. We learn that they were created holy and happy ; we

learn also, that they fell from that blessed condition, and yet farther, that they may be restored by Jesus Christ, who is exhibited as a Saviour full of mercy and pity, inviting all wretched creatures to return unto God by him. Wonderful things do we meet with in that sacred Book concerning God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, at which those, who understand them not, cavil, and presume to say, "We will not receive them." Hence human ingenuity has been set to work, and strange perversions of the sacred text have been given. But, surely, he, who giveth his heart to God, will not venture to declare, that a doctrine is not true, because he cannot comprehend it; but he will diligently read, pray, and wait, till he receives the knowledge of the truth, as it is laid down, not in certain books and passages, which he has selected from others, because particularly favourable to his own preconceived opinions, but from the whole of that, which is usually taken by the Church as a revelation from God, and till he perceive a beauty and harmony in the system that are worthy of him that gave it.

2. In the dedication of our hearts to God, we must determine to deny ourselves; that is, we must keep the body, with all its affections and lusts, under a spiritual dominion; and

though this will be difficult, and the occasion of a continual struggle, yet it is what we engage to do, as Christians, in our baptismal vow, and is what we must do before we can obtain an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. But, what are those affections of the body, which we must deny? Hear Saint Paul give a catalogue of them in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians, v. 19, 20, 21, where he says—“The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness;” and there are people who think, if they can abstain from these, they are little short of perfection. But, the Apostle does not stop here, but proceeds to mention other works, which strongly shew the selfish principle, which is in man; as, for instance, “idolatry,” which is the setting the heart on any thing in preference to God, “witch-craft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like.” Now if any one would read over this catalogue of evil deeds and tempers, and if he would pause, as he should do, after the mention of every one of them, inquiring with self-application—“Am I guilty, in any degree, of this sin?” he would probably find, that not in one instance only, but in many, he is in the habit of transgressing

daily, and not only so, but that forbidden acts and dispositions are so ingrafted into his very nature, that he cannot divest himself of them, without being renewed in the spirit of his mind, so as to become what the Scripture calls "a new creature." "How," said one,* who by conversion to God became an eminent Saint, "is so great an alteration possible, or practicable? How shall I do to leave on the sudden radicated and habituated customs, which, from a continuance, have been made natural to me, and which are closely riveted to the very frame of my being?" To do this he found his own efforts quite unequal; nevertheless, deriving strength from God, the difficulty soon vanished. "When," says he, "the light of heavenly truth shone in upon me, I found my soul purified and prepared thereby to receive and entertain it. When the spirit of God had descended upon me, and I was thence become a new creature, begotten again unto a lively hope, presently all my doubts were settled, all obscurities were made plain to me; the light shone in, after a wonderful manner upon my former darkness. Things appeared easy to me, which before looked difficult and discouraging, and what seemed heretofore impracticable I was now convinced

* Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage.

was possible to be done." Does any one say, "O that I could be such a Christian"! Give thy heart to God, and such thou wilt be. All that thou hast to do is to make the surrender. The Lord will teach, bless, and sanctify thee wholly. What cannot his strength, which is omnipotent, effect? What cannot his love, which seeks thy salvation, accomplish? But, again,

3. In the act of dedication, we must not only give up all our evil practices, together with all our vicious and irregular desires, but enter upon what is to many a still harder task, and that is, we must give up all conceit of our own goodness. When men have reflected upon their ways, and compared their lives with the pure and strict law of God, and have discovered that, to say the best of themselves, their obedience has been very imperfect, they often think to make the Lord amends for that lack of service, of which, in a course of years, they have deprived him; and so set themselves hard to work for the performance of the most difficult duties. But, in this exercise they lay claim to powers which do not belong to them, and endure great toil to no profitable end. All power, it should be considered, belongeth to God, and that the most effectual, and indeed the only way to become strong in the Lord,

is to confess our own weakness and inability to do the least good thing. We must learn that our duty consists in waiting upon the Lord to receive his grace, and that when we become willing to let it operate on our hearts, every work of holiness, which we are capable of performing, must be ascribed, not to ourselves, but to him, and his name must have all the glory. Very good is that prayer, which we use in the beginning of the communion service—“Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of thy holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord;” and there is no doubt, but that, if it were used in sincerity, and with earnestness, great and blessed effects would follow; but, as so many use it, without thinking what they ask for, or rather while they are thinking of, and wishing for other things, it is no wonder that they understand not their words, and are destitute of that humility, which God expects from all those, who prostrate themselves before the throne of his grace. How, my Brethren, do your hearts stand affected towards God? Can you readily adopt the Psalmist’s words, and say—“Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire in comparison of thee.” Can you lift up your voices in sincerity to the

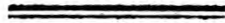
Lord, and ask him to set up his throne in your hearts? For this you pray, whenever you utter the words "Thy kingdom come;" for never can you desire that the kingdom of Christ should be established generally, unless it is first established in your own heart. Look well to yourselves, and see that you desire not any forbidden thing. If your eye be single, that is, if you have the simple desire of serving God, and living only to his glory, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye be evil, if you long to touch and taste of the fruit of that tree, concerning which our Lord has told you, as he did our first parents in Paradise, "Ye shall not eat thereof," your whole body will be full of darkness, and you will not be able to find the path of salvation. Though you may boast of your privilege in belonging to any particular Church, and though you have been baptized into the Christian faith; though you may have read much in your Bibles, so that you are become eloquent in the Scriptures, and though you may have also much zeal in defending the truth, and be able to refute the arguments of scoffers and unbelievers; though you may do all this, and ten times as much, yet, if you have not given your hearts to God, with all your wisdom and knowledge, you will not be wise unto salvation; and it

shall come to pass, that many a poor creature, whom ye perhaps have despised, by waiting upon the Lord in a humble, submissive, and teachable frame of mind, shall gain that state of happiness, which you, with all your labour and conceit, have not been able to acquire.

Considering that the holy Scriptures were given, not only for the use of a few generations of men, who lived in those days, in which God inspired his servants to make known his holy will, but for all persons, who should receive them in all ages, we have a right to suppose, that our heavenly Father is now speaking to every one of us individually, and saying, "My Son! give me thy heart." O! how gracious, how condescending are his words! Who is there that does not answer, "Lord take my heart, fill it with thy Holy Spirit, and make it the place of thy residence?" Who is the man, that desires to set his affections on any worldly object? What folly, what infatuation, it is to imagine that any thing but God, who is all goodness, can procure real and durable happiness to the soul! The world, indeed, the flesh, and the devil, are all contending for our hearts, and all would have them their willing slaves. But, come, my Brethren, burst your chains, and be free. Determine now, if you have never done so before, to be the servants

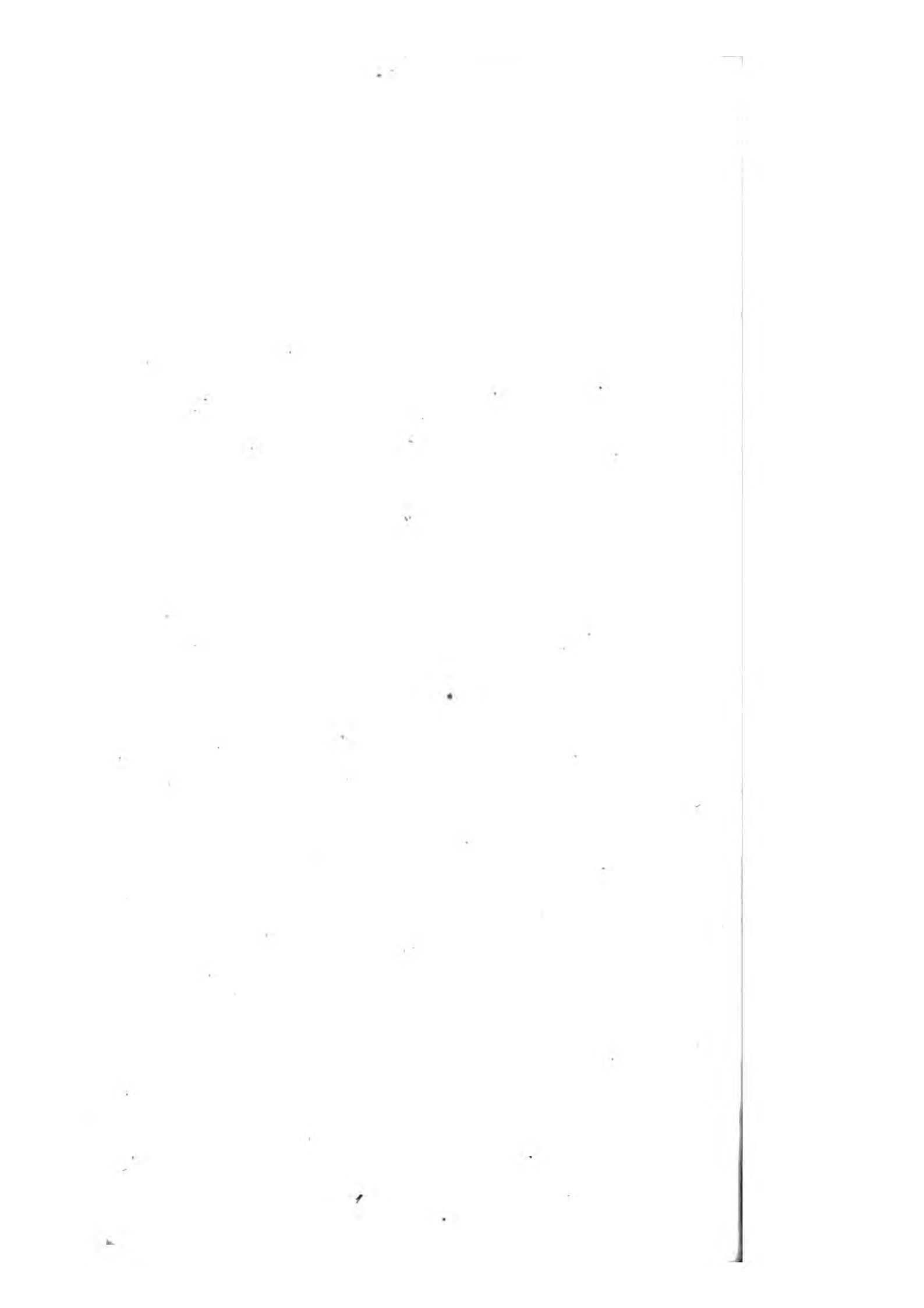
of the Lord, and of him only. Know that his service is perfect freedom, and that it is in his power to set your feet at liberty, and to enable you to run in the way of his commandments. Trust to his word of promise, and experience will prove to you, that he is the best master that can be served. A *Master* do I say? He is more than a *Master*. He is a *Parent*, who desires your welfare, and who will, if you commit yourselves, with filial confidence to him, make you supremely happy. You shall, even here, be put in possession of a peace, which passeth all understanding, and when you leave this world, wherein you live but as strangers and pilgrims, and go home to the mansion, which your Father has prepared for you in heaven, you shall enjoy an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away, which, that you may all do, may God, of his infinite mercy grant, for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XVI.



ON THE

OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.



SERMON XVI.

PROVERBS, XV. 3.

*The Eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil,
and the good.*

“**T**HE fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* But, we do not commonly entertain this fear, because we do not cultivate just notions of him, who should be the object of it. When the name of God is mentioned, most men conceive him to be a Being far off in the heavens, who, if he at all concern himself with the things that are on earth, does it only in the general way of an overruling Providence, but that it is beneath his dignity to take notice of every particular circumstance, which occurs either to man, or to other creatures. But, such an idea, which excludes us from an especial protection, is not only uncomfortable, but also unscriptural; for thus speaks Christ, who, as he came forth from God, was eminently qualified to reveal his mind and will :

* Proverbs, ix. 10.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father; but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.”* Indeed, to affirm, that it is beneath the dignity of God to notice particulars, is to detract, as much as possible, from the glory of his character; for where is *not* God? Of him speaks the holy Psalmist in these words—“Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up to heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold! thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say—surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me: yea, the darkness hideth not from thee.”† Though none by searching can find out God, or know the Almighty to perfection, and though the more we think of his omnipresence, and of his universal power, the more we become confounded, yet we should entertain such thoughts of his being, as I am about to mention. We should be sensible, that if he were to withdraw to himself his spirit and his

* Mat. x. 29—31.

† Psalm xxxix. 7—12.

breath we should perish; that all the happiness, we are capable of enjoying, depends upon his favour; and all the misery, we are capable of feeling, upon his displeasure. We cannot hide ourselves from him. We must be blessed with his smile, or moan under his frown. I shall endeavour to improve the subject, which the words of the text present to our consideration, by suggesting a few thoughts to the evil and to the good, respecting their conduct before God.

1st, Then, let the evil man think, as soon as he awakes in the morning, and let him continue so to think morning after morning—“Every thought that I shall entertain, every word that I shall speak, and every action that I shall perform, shall be noted down in the book of God’s remembrance, and all be brought forth at the day of judgment.” Let him so *think*—did I say? Oh! that he *would* think! but there is the difficulty with the wicked to bring him to serious meditation. Sometimes, however, and O that it might be at this time! God is pleased in mercy to touch the sinner’s heart, and to make him thoughtful and serious. He is pleased to convince him of his folly, and also of his danger! Think then, my friends, if conscience tell you your hearts are not right with God, that every thing which shall enter your imagination must be under his

inspection. What is it then that you are proposing to do? Are you in the pursuit of some scheme of pleasure and gratification? Hear what Solomon says, Eccles. xi. 9.—“ Rejoice, O young man! in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” Thou art joined, perhaps, with companions that have no fear of God before their eyes; and thou knowest that the thing, which is the object of thy pursuit, if it be not positively sinful, has at least no tendency to bring thee to a better acquaintance with thy God. But, whether he be pleased or not is, alas! no matter of thy concern. What real satisfaction canst thou derive from the gratification of thy desires, if the ruin of thy soul should be the consequence? But, let me suppose thou art engaged in occupations that appear more laudable. Thy business is concerning what thou shalt eat, what thou shalt drink, and wherewithal thou shalt be clothed. Thou art thinking about thy farm, and about thy merchandise; how thou mayest secure a plentiful crop, and bring what thou hast to dispose of to the best market. Thine own wants, and those of thy family, are supposed to justify all this care, and

that thou dost well to be diligent; and so thou dost; but in all the transactions of this world there is great need to keep in mind that admonition given by our blessed Lord, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness."* Unless there is a religious principle rooted in the heart, men are apt to forget, that they are rather the stewards, than the possessors, of all that they have, and that the poor and afflicted of every description have a large demand upon them. They consider not, that wealth and power are entrusted to them, that they may protect and comfort the distressed, and that it becomes them, not merely to *relieve* those who demand their charity, but to study their wants, and to *prevent* their application. While a man is numbering his notes, and calculating upon their increase, one should think he could derive little satisfaction from his good fortune, as it is commonly called, when he reflects— "The eye of God is upon me, while I am spending these sums. A part he has seen me lay out in the purchase of more lands, or more goods; another part for this and that gratification; another laid up in store for future use, and another—how much! rather, how little! applied to those works of benevolence, in which he has told me that he takes pleasure,

* Luke xii. 15.

and in which it is his command that I should abound." Oh! Brethren! what will your possessions, be they great or small, profit you in that day, when God shall come to judge the world in righteousness, if you have disposed of them without considering the wants of your fellow-creatures, and without a desire to perform the will of God. The same may be said of every occupation, in which a man can be engaged. As God seeth all things, every secret work shall be brought into judgment, and there is a day coming when many strange scenes shall be made manifest. Then the hypocrite shall be distinguished from the sincere, and each one stand forth in his true character. The proud, the malicious, the revengeful, the covetous, the secretly unclean, and many others, shall at that day, if not sooner, be ashamed and confounded. Think of it, Brethren, and know, that it is impossible to escape the scrutiny of him, "to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." You may deceive me; you may deceive others, from whom, by keeping up a fair appearance of good conduct, you hope to derive some benefit; and, by neglecting to look into your hearts, you may even deceive yourselves, but you cannot deceive God. No—he sees and knows all your pretences and vain excuses.

It will not do with him to plead ignorance, while you have opportunities of becoming wiser, nor to promise repentance some time hence, when he requires you to repent *now*. He does not allow you to do nothing, because, from the lowness of your station, you can do little; but bids you do what you can for his glory, and the good of mankind; and if you do it not, he will bring you into judgment for your idle slothful conduct. Say you, as I have heard it said sometimes, "*I would* be better, if *I could*." Verily you *can* be better, if you *will*; for, if gain were the object in view, you would be far more active than you are in the service of God. Oh! beware of pleading those excuses before him for your negligence, which he will not accept at the day of judgment. Remember his eyes are upon you. You *must* be pure in heart, or you cannot expect to see his face with joy. But, let us consider,

2d, That the eyes of the Lord are also upon the good, what is the conduct they will pursue, and what will be the satisfaction they will derive from the persuasion, that they are continually in the divine presence.

The prayer of every one, who is truly humble and penitent, is similar to that of David, who cried aloud, "Create in me a clean heart, O God! and renew a right spirit within me."*

* Psalm xli. 10.

And then he prays farther, "Search me, O God! and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."* Having determined, through grace, to have no will of his own, but to be guided only by the good spirit of God to do that, which is pleasing in his sight, he searches the Scriptures, to discover what things are forbidden, and what are commanded; and without delay, without hesitation, without conferring with flesh and blood, or being swayed by any human considerations, immediately applies all diligence in performing the work, which is given him to do. But this, it must be allowed, will not be effected without great difficulty, nor without many a severe trial; for he has both to fight against the propensities of a corrupt nature, and also against many adversaries of his salvation, who will exert their utmost endeavours to move him from his stedfastness; and as he will sometimes feel his infirmities press hard upon him, and will see others apparently more advanced in the divine life than himself, he will be apt to question the truth of his profession, and imagine that one, who is yet so far from perfection, cannot, with propriety, be ranked among the children of God. But then he will be able to say, on the other

* Psalm xli. 23.

hand—"Thou, O Lord, who seest and knowest all things, art acquainted with my most secret desires. Thou perceivest, that I hate sin, that I struggle against it, and would be totally delivered from its dominion. My supplications, and tears, and groans, are noted in the book of thy remembrance, and therefore I trust, that, defiled as I am, thou wilt have mercy upon me. What thou hast asked, O Lord! is my heart, and to thee have I given it. O! cleanse it by the inspiration of thy holy spirit, that I may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name through Jesus Christ my Lord." Thus the sincere Christian takes comfort under his infirmities, considering that the eyes of the Lord are upon him. Again, when those, that are his enemies, speak unkindly of him, when they spitefully use him, and persecute him, then does he most particularly glory in the Lord; then does he rejoice in the God of his salvation. As it happened to Jesus Christ, so does it happen to all those, who will live godly in him, that all manner of evil shall be spoken falsely against them. What a comfort does the upright man then derive from the assurance that God seeth him, and will one day fully vindicate his character; and though those, who hate him without just cause, seem to prosper for a while, so that

many would think them the favourites of Heaven, and the man, whom they despise, to lie under the frown of the Almighty; yet he learns to wait patiently upon the Lord, and prays, in confidence that his supplications reach, and are graciously received at the throne of grace. Many portions of scripture are applicable, and highly encouraging to the persecuted christian, but none more so than the 37th Psalm, which seems to be recorded on purpose to afford him support. The language of it is this—"Fret not thyself because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity; for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass; and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day." The whole is to the same effect, and has proved a comfort to many, who, like their Redeemer, have endured the cross, despising the shame, and, upheld by the mighty power of God, have triumphed over all their foes.

Were I to dwell upon all the charges, which

are brought against sincere christians, I might detain you many hours, and I know not whether you would be most surprised at their absurdity, or at their falsehood ; but I shall not enter into particulars, as every day's experience may convince you, that to please all men is a thing utterly impossible, and that you cannot be a favourite of the world, while you are determined to keep a conscience void of offence towards God. That none of the opposition and mortification you meet with may move you from your stedfastness, see that you are well rooted and grounded in the truth, and remember what Jesus Christ said to his disciples in the last exhortation which he gave previous to his sufferings, " In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* Besides the passage, which I have quoted from the 37th Psalm, the Scriptures, if you read them diligently, will furnish you with many exceeding great and precious promises suited to every time of need ; and you will moreover derive much comfort from the histories of those Saints, whose lives are recorded, because you will see how they were supported in weakness, and how confidently they could appeal to the Searcher of Hearts, that with simplicity and

* John xvi. 33.

godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, they had their conversation in the world. But, sometimes you think—"Is it not presumption in me to suppose, that the great Lord of Heaven and Earth can have a perpetual regard for such a poor creature as I am?" Think again, that it would rather be presumption to imagine he can be absent one moment from any of his creatures; for in him, as was said before, "we live, and move, and have our being." He has told us, in order that we may know that we are personally and particularly attended to, that the very hairs of our heads are all numbered, and what then can make us imagine that we are forgotten or overlooked, but that want of faith, which he always reprehends. May it please the Lord then to increase our faith, and, since we may not reasonably doubt of his protection, let us avail ourselves of it, and beseech him to cover us with the shadow of his wings from every impending evil. As we live in troublous times,* there is the more necessity for this, and as some of us have relations and friends, who

* This discourse was written during the French Revolution, when most of the inhabitants of Great Britain had friends and relations engaged in the contest. But troublous times are not past, the minds of men are yet in a state of ferment, and only the mighty power of God can shield us from those evils, with which they threaten us.

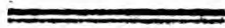
are exposed to great peril and danger, we shall find comfort from the consideration, that the eyes of the Lord are upon them also, and that he can defend them from every weapon, which may be lifted up for their destruction. May they know, that it is the hand of the Lord, which wards off the deadly blow, and may they return thanksgiving to him, to whom alone it is due. A thousand may fall at their side, and ten thousand at their right hand, but the evil shall not come nigh them. Knowing in whose hands the disposal of all events is lodged, we are to consider the desolations, which have lately taken place in the earth, and which, alas! are still continuing, not as accidental circumstances, depending upon the will of any restless and ambitious character, but as the judgments of the Almighty, designed for the punishment and correction of a world, which lieth in wickedness; and as we know not what circumstances may arise in the course of events, to put our faith and patience to a severe trial, we may comfort ourselves with the thought, that we never can be withdrawn from the sight of God, who will, if we continue to depend upon him, cause all things to work together for our good. "Hitherto," does he say to the wicked oppressor, "shalt thou come, but no further."* "I know thy

* Job xxxviii. 11.

abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears; therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.”* These words were spoken to the good King Hezekiah, concerning the proud Sennacherib, King of Assyria, and they are recorded to convince us, that all events are in the hand of the Lord, and that we may trust him in the worst of times, and under the most threatening circumstances, to confound our adversaries, and to prove, that those who wait upon him shall not be ashamed. May we then remember at all times, that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good, and may we be in that state, in which we can rejoice in his presence, and confidently hope in his salvation.

* Is. xxxvii. 28, 29.

SERMON XVII.

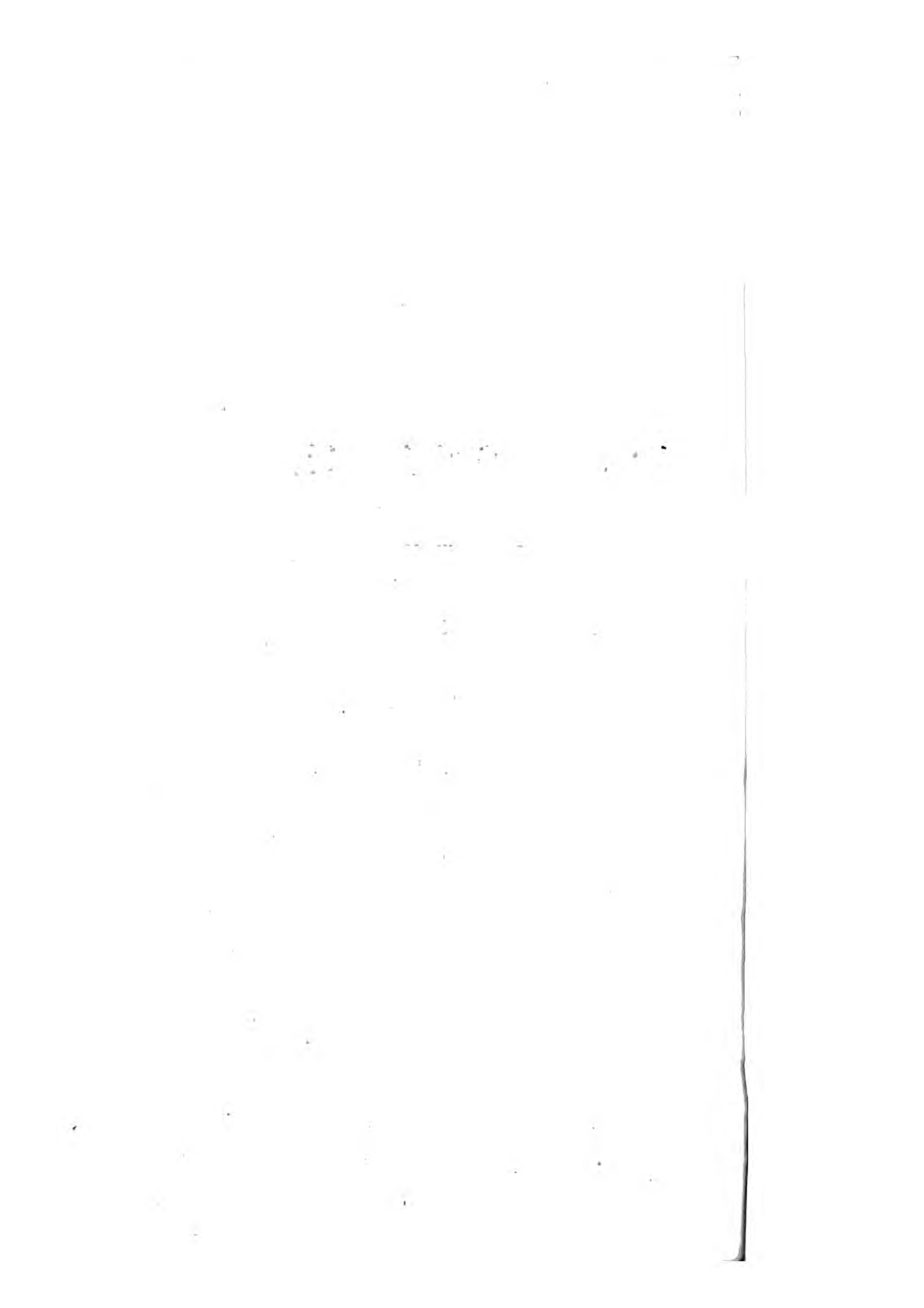


AN EXHORTATION

TO ATTEND

THE HOLY COMMUNION.*

* This Discourse has been already published in the form of a small Tract.



SERMON XVII.

LUKE, xiv. 17.

Come, for all things are now ready.

OBSERVING that on the last Sabbath-day, as well as upon many former occasions, the greater part of the congregation, who usually attend this chapel, turned their backs upon the table of the Lord, as if the participation of the Holy Communion were an ordinance, in which they had no concern, I have thought it expedient to embrace the present opportunity of setting before such persons the folly, as well as the wickedness, of their conduct, and to desire them to consider their ways, and the advantages, which they may reap, if they will consent to be the disciples and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

With the hope of convincing you, who refuse to partake of the Holy Communion, how much you are acting against your own interest, I will take into consideration some parts of the service, which is used upon that occasion, by which you will perceive how justly blameable your conduct is.

Let us begin with the notice given by the Minister on the Sabbath preceding that upon which the solemn ordinance is to be administered.

“ Dearly beloved,—On Sunday next, I purpose, through God’s assistance, to administer to all such as shall be religiously and devoutly disposed, the most comfortable Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, to be by them received in remembrance of his Cross and Passion ; whereby alone we obtain remission of sins, and are made partakers of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

What is there in this invitation, which can discourage or alarm ? Rather, What is there wanting to prevent it from being cordially embraced ? It holds out a declaration, indeed, that all men are sinners, but this is no more than what is generally acknowledged ; it holds out also an assurance of pardon, acceptance, and everlasting life, and is that to be slighted ? Is that to be treated contemptuously ? Some of you are poor, and, having scarcely sufficient to provide for your subsistence, well know what the cravings of hunger are.—Now, should any substantial householder publicly declare, that it was his intention to set out a table covered with plenty of good and wholesome victuals, of which all that chose might be partakers, would you make any excuse for

not accepting the invitation? Would not you long for the happy hour to arrive, when you might eat and be filled? Yet, our Lord may invite you to a far better feast than any man can give, and you regard him not. You do not only refuse to come, but you entertain no sense of his kindness, nor ever speak with gratitude of his condescending bounty. Others of you are oppressed with sickness of various kinds, and some, perhaps, with such pains and infirmities, as the power of man is ineffectual to remove. Suppose an able physician should stand up and say, "Come ye distressed and languishing people, hearken unto me; I am in possession of a remedy far superior to any thing you have yet made trial of, a remedy that is suited to your particular case, and which is capable of removing your malady so entirely, that your constitution shall be restored, and you shall never hereafter feel any pain or sickness whatever." Would such a physician proclaim his skill in vain? You know he would not. You would flock to him in crowds, and earnestly intreat him to exercise his healing power upon you. Yet, Jesus, a greater and better physician, who offers to cure the worst of sicknesses, shall call without being attended to. You will have no virtue from him. You rather choose to perish, than to accept the help, which he freely offers you.

Again : suppose a case still more deplorable. There are many of your fellow creatures under confinement on divers accounts ; fast bound are they in misery and iron, chained down, perhaps, in some deep dungeon, excluded from the cheerful light of day. Suppose, I say, that you were in such a wretched condition, and that you were suddenly to hear the voice of one exclaiming, " Prisoners, you are free : " that you were to perceive your chains falling off, and the light bursting in ; that you knew the doors were thrown wide open, and that you had nothing to do, but to walk abroad, and be at large. Would you refuse your liberty upon such a gracious offer ? Would you cling to your fetters as dear companions that you did not wish to get rid of, and say, " let me still remain in the darkness, to which I have so long been accustomed. " Surely not. Yet, Christ offers deliverance from a worse imprisonment, from heavier chains, and from the horrors of a deeper dungeon ; but you regard him not ; you will not believe his word, and will not allow him to be your benefactor and your friend. Once more ; you may suppose yourselves in a situation even worse than any of the foregoing. There are those, who, having been tried for capital offences, and convicted, are delivered up into the hands of the executioner, that they may undergo the

dreadful sentence of the law. Imagine yourselves one of those unhappy persons, that your hands were bound, the cap drawn over your eyes, the platform just ready to drop, and that you were to be launched in one moment into eternity, there to stand before the judgment seat of an angry God. Imagine, that in that instant you heard a murmur and bustle among the crowd, and a messenger from the King declare "Stop the execution of that criminal; loose him, and restore him to his family and friends, for I have brought a pardon."—Would you refuse such grace? Would you say to the messenger, "Let the King, your master, keep his pardon to himself; I will not have it, but here I will die, and rush, with all my sins upon my head, into that eternity which is just before me?" No, you would not say so; yet, while the ministers of death are prepared to take hold of you; and damnation itself awaits you, and you hear the voice of Jesus, saying, "Save him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom;—here am I with pardon, life, and salvation;" you will not listen, you spurn his mercy, and choose to perish in your sins.

"And do we really lose all these benefits," you will perhaps say, "by refusing to come to the sacrament?" In answer to such a ques-

tion I would observe, that it is not the sacrament itself that has power to save you, but that glorious Redeemer, who is represented in it, whose dying love you there commemorate, whose grace you there implore, and whose spirit to sanctify and govern you, you therein obtain ; and as an assembly of real communicants is the most solemn that can be conceived, and the presence of Christ is undoubtedly among them, you debar yourselves of that, which is most likely to be conducive to your spiritual welfare, and too plainly declare that you have no part in him, who so kindly invites you to accept of his salvation. O ! how lamentable is it, that so many called christians should derive no *comfort* from “ the *most comfortable* sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ.” “ Hear what *comfortable words* our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn unto him.” “ Come unto me, all that travail, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.”* “ So God loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”† Hear also what St. Paul saith, “ This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”‡ Hear also what St.

* Matt. ix. 28.

† John, iii. 16.

‡ 1 Tim. i. 15.

John saith—"If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins."* These sentences are read to the people as often as the Lord's Supper is administered, and can any thing be more encouraging? But, you will observe, at least some of you, "We apprehend that it would be presumption in us to partake of the Supper of the Lord, and we are afraid to do it, because it is said, "the danger is great if we receive the same unworthily; for then we are guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ our Saviour; we eat and drink our own damnation, not discerning the Lord's body; we kindle God's wrath against us; we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases and sundry kinds of death." But, in one sense, no person is worthy, and if our demerit is to stand in the way of our being partakers we must all keep far off. Such is the language in which we utter our humble confession in the presence of God, first, in the Prayer, which is used immediately before the Consecration of the Elements, and, secondly, in another Prayer near the conclusion. In the first prayer the words spoken by the priest, and the people with him, are the following: "We do not presume to come to this thy table,

* John, ii. 1, 2.

merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not *worthy* so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table ; but thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy :” and in the, other prayer the words are these, “ Although we be *unworthy*, through our manifold sins, to offer thee any sacrifice ; yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service, *not weighing our merits*, but pardoning our offences through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Who then is worthy ? Verily those, who are sensible of their unworthiness ; those, who have nothing to say, but “ God be merciful to us sinners ;”—those only, who are convinced they have no righteousness of their own to render them deserving, but who are certain that if ever they are so happy as to obtain the remission of their sins, it must be “ by the merits and death of Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood.”

But, I suspect there is another reason, which keeps many away from the sacrament, and which they will be ashamed to own. When the table of the Lord is spread, and the people are about to be partakers, the minister addresses them in the following words : “ Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours,

and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort." Now, when I see persons, who have been invited only once or twice, leave the church when the sacrament is administered, without becoming partakers of it, I charitably hope, that it is owing to some scruple of conscience, or to want of proper information concerning the nature of the sacred service, which makes them appear to disesteem it, and that they will shortly be of a better mind; but, when invitation passes after invitation for the space of a year, or two, or longer, I am constrained to entertain a different opinion, and to say to myself, when the pew doors open, and the congregation walks out, "There goes the man, there goes the woman, who do not truly and earnestly repent them of their sins, who are destitute of christian love and charity, who have no intention to lead a new life, nor to follow the commandments of God, nor to walk from henceforth in his holy ways."

All spiritual communicants, you know, say, "Here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee;" and you think, that if you join with them, it

will be entering into an engagement to be better persons than ever you were before, that you must renounce sin and wickedness of every description, and walk in the paths of godliness all the days of your lives.—Are you afraid of this? Will you presume to call yourselves Christians, and yet not act as such? What, on a future day, if you go away, shall the godly who remain think of you? What shall the congregation at large think of you? Nay, what will you think of yourselves? Can you bear the thought of being marked as reprobate characters, as persons in whom there is no faith, no love, no piety, no repentance? Will it satisfy you that your case is common, and that the multitude is of the same mind? Alas! do you not read that “broad is the way which leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat?” How can the carelessness of other people prove an excuse for your own? Rather, will not their contempt of Christ, and his invitation, since you knew it, and took no pains to avoid it, increase your condemnation? But, let me ask, What should hinder you from determining henceforth to lead a new life; for, “What is required of thee, O man, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Thou art to believe, and love, and to obey, from a principle of love;

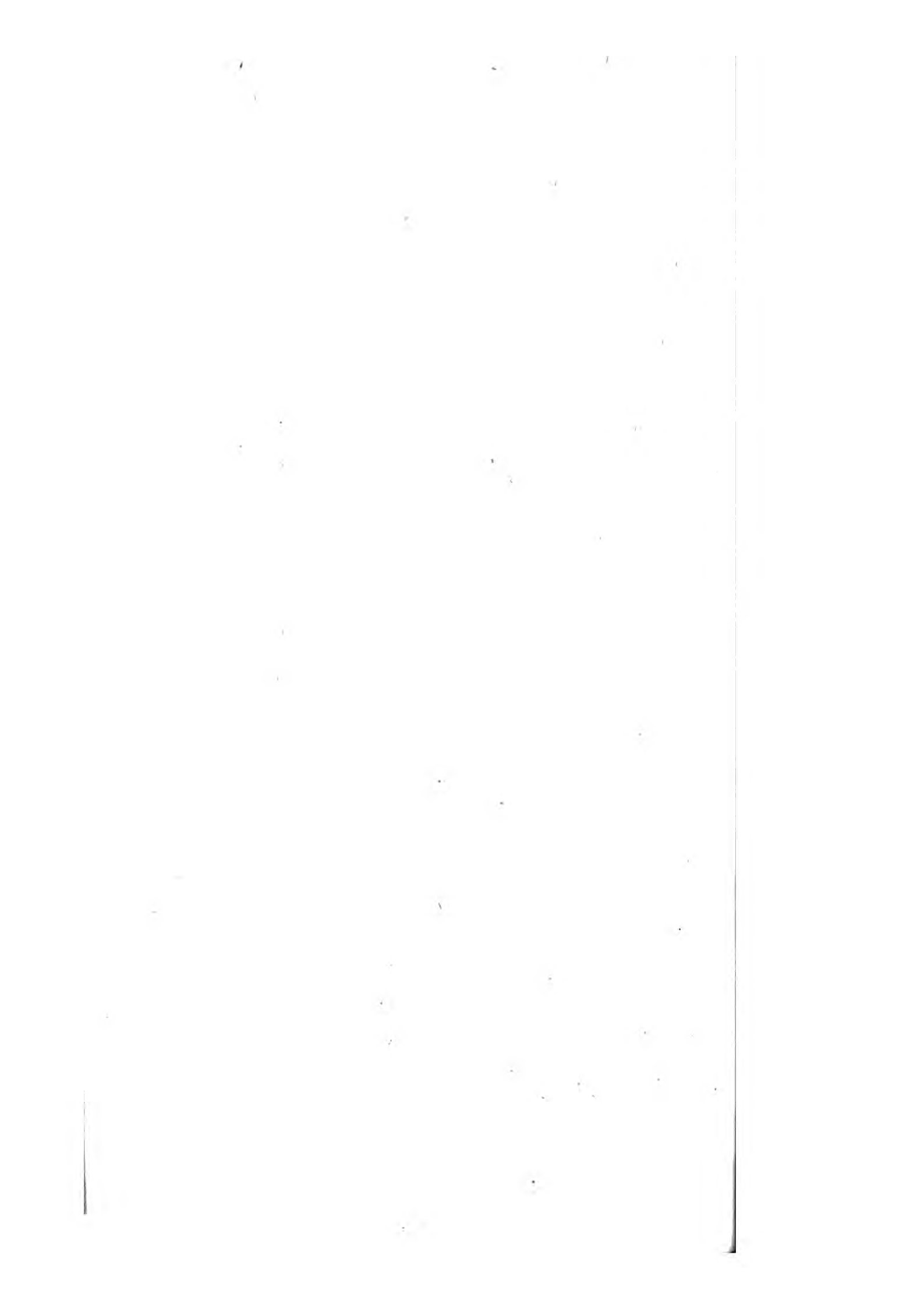
and if thou canst doubt of the satisfaction which arises therefrom, ask the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they will tell thee that, when they were the servants of sin, they had hard labour, much uneasiness, and poor wages; but, when they renounced that slavery, and renewed their covenant with God in Christ, they found his yoke was easy, and his burden was light; they counted his service to be perfect freedom, and could run in all the ways of his commandments.

Come then, my brethren, all things are now ready, and nothing is wanting to make you completely and eternally happy, but your own consent. The Holy Spirit is ready to work a conviction of these truths in the heart of every one, who is not obstinately determined to quench his good motions; Jesus Christ is ready to give remission of sins to all, who by faith truly turn unto him; and the Father is ready to embrace you in the Son of his love, as his own dear children. In order to confirm and strengthen you, the table of the Lord will be again spread, and, if your lives are so long spared, another invitation will be given, and another opportunity afforded you, of joining yourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, and taking him to be your king and governor, your protector, redeemer, friend, advocate, and sanctifier.

Now, I beseech you, think seriously of what I have set before you. Here is nothing to alarm or distress you; nothing but what you must allow to be just and reasonable. What can be more comfortable than to meditate upon the love of a dying saviour? What more honourable than to renounce the dominion of Satan for ever, and to avow that you are, and will be the servants of the Lord Almighty? Indeed, my friends, you can hardly conceive what privileges you forfeit by continuing in sin. Hear the testimony of a Heathen, lately converted to the Christian faith, upon this subject, and take care that such do not stand up against you in judgment at the great day. His instructors having good reason to hope that his heart was changed, and understanding that he desired to have a share with Christians in the blessings they enjoyed, allowed him to see the celebration of the Lord's Supper before he actually partook of it. "I shall never forget (said he) what I felt when I was admitted a spectator at the Holy Communion. Oh! how grieved did I feel, that I had spent so much time in sin: I could have sunk into the earth for shame." Oh! that such a godly shame might cover the negligent among you. Oh! that you might blush for your past misconduct, and immediately repent and reform.

If you should want any further information

respecting the nature of the solemn engagement, I shall be ready at any time to give it; but I would recommend you at present seriously and deliberately to read over the service of the Church, which is used at the administration of the Sacrament, and, I trust you will be convinced, if your heart be upright, (and if it be not, the invitation to be a partaker will not be addressed to *you*) that it will be the wisest thing you can do to join yourselves with the more serious disciples of Christ at the next festival, so that you may live in peace with God, and with all the world;—besides that, possessing in your own hearts a peace, which passeth all understanding, you will be ready and desirous to depart, whenever it is the will of the Lord, that you may sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the Redeemed in the Kingdom of Heaven for evermore.



SERMON XVIII.

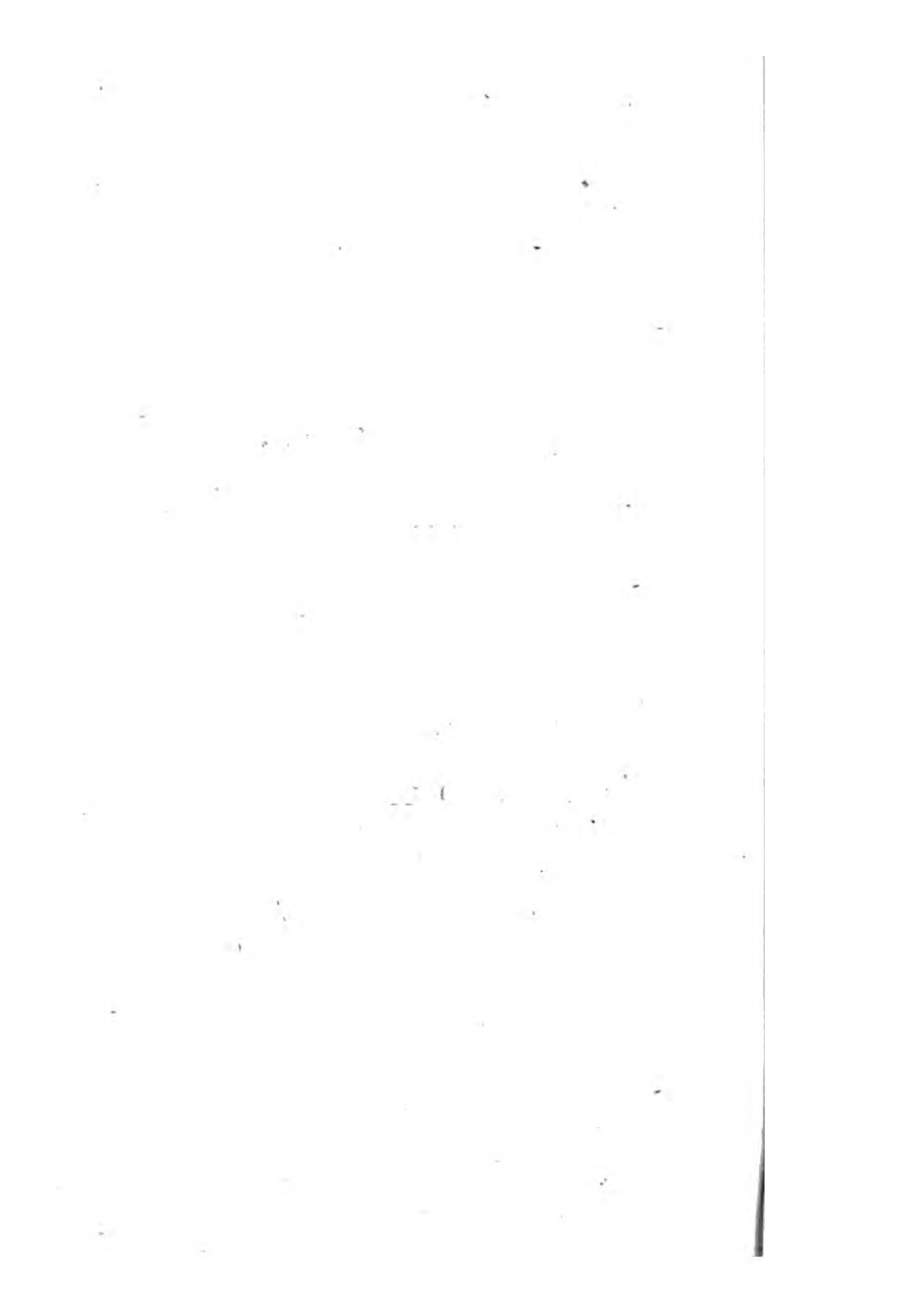


ENCOURAGEMENT

FOR

THOSE WHO HAVE ATTENDED THE

HOLY COMMUNION.



SERMON XVIII.

ECCLESIASTES, ix. 7.*

Go thy way; eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God now accepteth thy works.

THE gratification, which I felt in seeing an unusually large number of communicants at the table of the Lord, on the last Sabbath, has induced me to preface my discourse on the present occasion, with the portion of Scripture, which I have just read; for the religion, which I recommend, and by which you, who have taken the pledges of your Redeemer's love, profess to be bound, is no melancholy thing, but a source of great joy and comfort. In order to make this appear, let us consider the three following particulars.

- I. The character of its Author.
- II. What are the blessings, which He confers.
- III. The sentiments and conduct of the man, who receives His blessings.

* This Discourse was preached on the Sunday after the administration of the Sacrament.

1st. Let us consider the character of the Author of our Religion, that is, of God.

God, says Saint John, is love. He is not only a lover of some pious persons, but *love* itself; and this love I conceive to be nothing else than benevolence flowing forth from a boundless ocean in copious streams to every creature, which has a capacity to receive them. "Thou lovest all things that are made," says Solomon in his Book of Wisdom, "and abhorrest nothing, which thou hast made, for never wouldst thou have made any thing, if thou hadst hated it."* Now, this divine love, we should remember, is both infinitely wise, and infinitely powerful. By his wisdom he directs the affairs of all creatures in all worlds, and by his power he puts all his plans into execution. He knows the exact time and season when to send adversity or prosperity; when to wound, and when to heal; when to kill, and when to make alive. Being the Lord of Hosts, millions of intelligent creatures are ready to execute his commands, and to become ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. The idea of such uncontrollable dominion, were it not combined with that of unbounded goodness, would be most horrible; but we know that the God, whom we wor-

* Wisdom, xi. 24.

ship, is not an arbitrary tyrant, who is disposed to torment, for the mere gratification of a capricious disposition, but one, who is full of compassion, very pitiful, and of tender mercy. What then, my brethren, may we not expect from such a God, and what blessings are there, which we can suppose he will withhold from us? Let us consider,

2nd, Some of the chief of those, which he is pleased to confer.

1. To him we are indebted for all the good things of this temporal life. In him we live, and move, and have our being. He gives us health, and strength, and various faculties, whereby we can derive enjoyment from the things, which are round about us. The grass, which feeds our cattle, and the corn, of which our bread is made, are caused to grow by his all bounteous power and goodness. Some animals are provided for our use, and others for our sustenance, and from some, as from the sheep, we obtain warm and durable clothing. The trees of the forest afford us timber for the construction of our houses, for the formation of our ships, and for a variety of beneficial purposes; while every shrub, and every flower has something peculiar in its nature, whereby it either furnishes medicine to heal our sickness, or gives sustenance to a numerous race of creatures that are destined to feed upon it.

The earth itself too, besides the profusion of vegetables wherewith it furnishes us, contains rich treasures beneath its surface. From thence we dig our iron, which is so serviceable in supplying us with implements of husbandry, and with various useful articles. Thence also do we derive our more precious metals, as silver and gold, which become so useful for the purposes of commerce. Nothing, in short, can we behold, or which may not be discovered by that ingenuity, which the Creator has implanted in man for the purpose of accommodating himself with the necessaries and conveniences of life, which will not mark the beneficence of the giver, and his design in adapting it to those particular uses to which it is applied. But, great as our temporal blessings are, infinitely greater are those, which are eternal; and it is upon those chiefly that I design to speak; but as they have a length and breadth, and depth and height surpassing all human comprehension, I shall mention only three, and these are Knowledge, Hope, and Peace.

First. Knowledge. We could have known nothing of our own world, nor of him, who made us, had it not been for what the Scriptures reveal of these matters. Therein we learn how man was first created after the

image of God, in righteousness and true holiness ; how, by his own fault, he fell into sin, and lost that image, and how, by the free grace of his Maker, he is again restored to it. Seeking to be independent, he let go the hand which supported him, and he felt his weakness ; thinking to find a way to happiness, in which he was forbidden to go, he averted his eyes from the light, which should have directed him, and he was involved in darkness. Though the history of the fall be given in few words, it is long enough to make us acquainted with the nature of it. Thus it is written, Genesis ii. 15, 16, 17, “ The Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it, and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it ; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. The man knew good, and thinking to be wiser than his Maker, who he supposed had withheld something desirable from him, would know evil also ; so he had his desire, and lost his happiness. Having shewn such perverseness, rebellion, and ingratitude, he had nothing to expect but the punishment, which was threatened ; a punishment, which truth

had declared ; and which justice required ; and this had lain on fallen men for ever, had not God, out of his tender compassion, opened a door of *hope*.

The seed of the woman, it was promised, should bruise the serpent's head, or, in other words, that Jesus Christ should overcome all the subtilty, malice, and power of the Devil ; and from time to time were holy men of God and Prophets inspired to declare to the successive sinful generations of Israel, that a Saviour would be revealed, in the appointed season, to take away the sins of the world. Accordingly, when the son of God appeared in the form of a son of man, Saint Matthew, after having given a particular account of several circumstances relative to his birth and infancy, says, " All this was done, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet," saying, " Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted, is, God with us."* By this great mystery of Godliness, as Saint Paul calls it, " God manifested in the flesh,"† was contrived a method of saving the fallen race. The wages of sin was death, and death passed, not upon Adam only, but upon all his posterity, veri-

* Matt. i. 22, 23.

† 1 Tim. iii. 16.

tying that declaration "In Adam all died,"* yea and even Christ, inasmuch as he was a partaker of our flesh and blood, was subject to the same sentence; but then, by means of that divine life, which he possessed, he shewed himself a conqueror, for having first raised his own body to be the first fruits of them that sleep, he communicates the same energy to his members, loosing for them also the bonds of death, by which it is not possible, after what he has done, that they should be held. Jesus Christ, having died for our offences, and so having put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, is now risen again for our justification; and we are fully assured that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This affords a hope, which maketh not ashamed, a hope full of immortality. Hence proceeds.

3. Peace. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."† Before, being sinners, we were at enmity with him, who hateth iniquity with a perfect hatred; now we are at peace, and our peace, in order to mark its superiority, is called "the peace of God," yea a "peace which passeth all understanding."‡ Moreover, as Christ is the cause of this, he is distinguished

* 1 Cor. xv. 22. † Rom. v. 1. ‡ Phill. iv. 7.

by the name of "the Prince of Peace,"* and claiming to himself, as he justly may, the power of dispensing it, he says to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."†

Seeing then, that God has been pleased to give to man the knowledge of his fallen state, to give him hope of complete recovery through a Redeemer, and to comfort him with the peaceable assurance, that he will with Christ freely give him all things, what further proof can you want of the benevolence of his nature? If what has been spoken be not enough to satisfy you in this matter, hear his own most kind and condescending intreaties. "Why," says he, addressing himself by his prophet Ezekiel to the house of Israel, "will ye die? Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."

As many of you, as have attended the Holy Communion with sincerity of heart, have avouched this compassionate Lord to be your God. You have confessed your sin before him; you have received the pledges of your

* Is. ix. 6.

† John xiv. 27.

‡ Ezek. xviii. 31, 32.

Saviour's love, and you have testified before the world, that you consider yourselves no longer as your own, but as bought with a price, and under an obligation to serve God with your bodies, and with your spirits, which are his. Having then begun to live a life of faith, whatever you do, being a labour of love, will be accepted, and though imperfection and defilement will still cleave to your best duties, yet you shall find an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and the blessing of the Lord shall be continually upon you; yea, what is written, Deuteronomy xxviii. 4—6, shall be your portion. "Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep; blessed shall be thy basket and thy store; blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out." Such are the blessings, which attend the devoted Christian. I am now to mention

3rd .The sentiments and conduct of the man, who shall receive them. He, who is a Christian indeed, and not by profession only, will say, upon the recollection of his mercies, what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits? I will give him all I can, and indeed all he demands, and that is my heart. I will beseech

him to cleanse it by his Holy Spirit, that it may become a temple fit for so sacred a guest; and that he would vouchsafe to direct, sanctify, and govern my soul and body in the ways of his laws; and in the works of his commandments. I will, through grace, keep a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man; and, as my works are now accepted through the merits of my Redeemer, I will cast all my care upon God, who careth for me. I will eat my bread with joy, and drink my wine, or my water, if I have nothing better, with a merry heart."

If such are your sentiments, my Brethren, most sincerely do I congratulate you upon your happiness; yea, and I also congratulate your relations, friends, neighbours, and all other persons, with whom you have any connexion. To have so many just and honourable characters among us in these bad times is an acquisition of no small value. Ye are the lights of the world, ye are the salt of the earth. Ye are, I trust, fulfilling the design of providence in seasoning that portion of the mass of mankind among whom ye are placed, so as to check the general corruption, which prevails. As many as were witnesses to the solemn manner, in which you dedicated your lives to the Lord on the last Sabbath, are to believe, that now, at least, if you did not so before, you will per-

form your public and private duties in the most exemplary manner; that you will fear God, honour the king, and study to promote the general welfare of society. As husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, servants, or as bearing any other relationship to those that are round about you, the inhabitants of that dwelling, which it is your lot to occupy, will expect from you a uniform course of temperance, regularity, kindness, and piety; so that while you are blessed and happy yourselves, you may, by the propriety of your conduct, bring blessing and happiness to them also.

But, some, perhaps, who have narrowly watched the conduct of that part of mankind, who are usually called religious, will say, "Undoubtedly this is a fine picture you have drawn of the Christian, who, if we may believe his own professions, has solemnly devoted himself to the service of God; but, in truth, we see little in him, that corresponds with the character you have given, and he is, for the most part, sad and gloomy. So he may be, and for this two reasons may be assigned. First, when a man entertains false notions of the nature of God, he perceives his justice, but is unacquainted with the extent of his love. In that case, thinking the staff of vengeance is lifted up to strike him, he cannot but tremble. Or, secondly, he

is unsteady in his Christian profession. Like the Jews, when some of their kings countenanced the worship of their idol Baal, he halts between two opinions, and is the double-minded man mentioned by Saint James, who is unstable in all his ways. Now he serves God, and now Mammon. At one time he attaches himself to the world, and at another thinks of cleaving to Christ. He can appear religious, and in some degree is so. He has a respect for the people of God, and can talk with them of the things that pertain to salvation; but, as the faithful monitor in his own breast will tell him, that his heart is not right with God, he will entertain a fear, that, after all his labors, he shall come short of the kingdom of heaven. Such a one must be sad and gloomy, and through such false professors it is, that the Truth is often evil spoken of

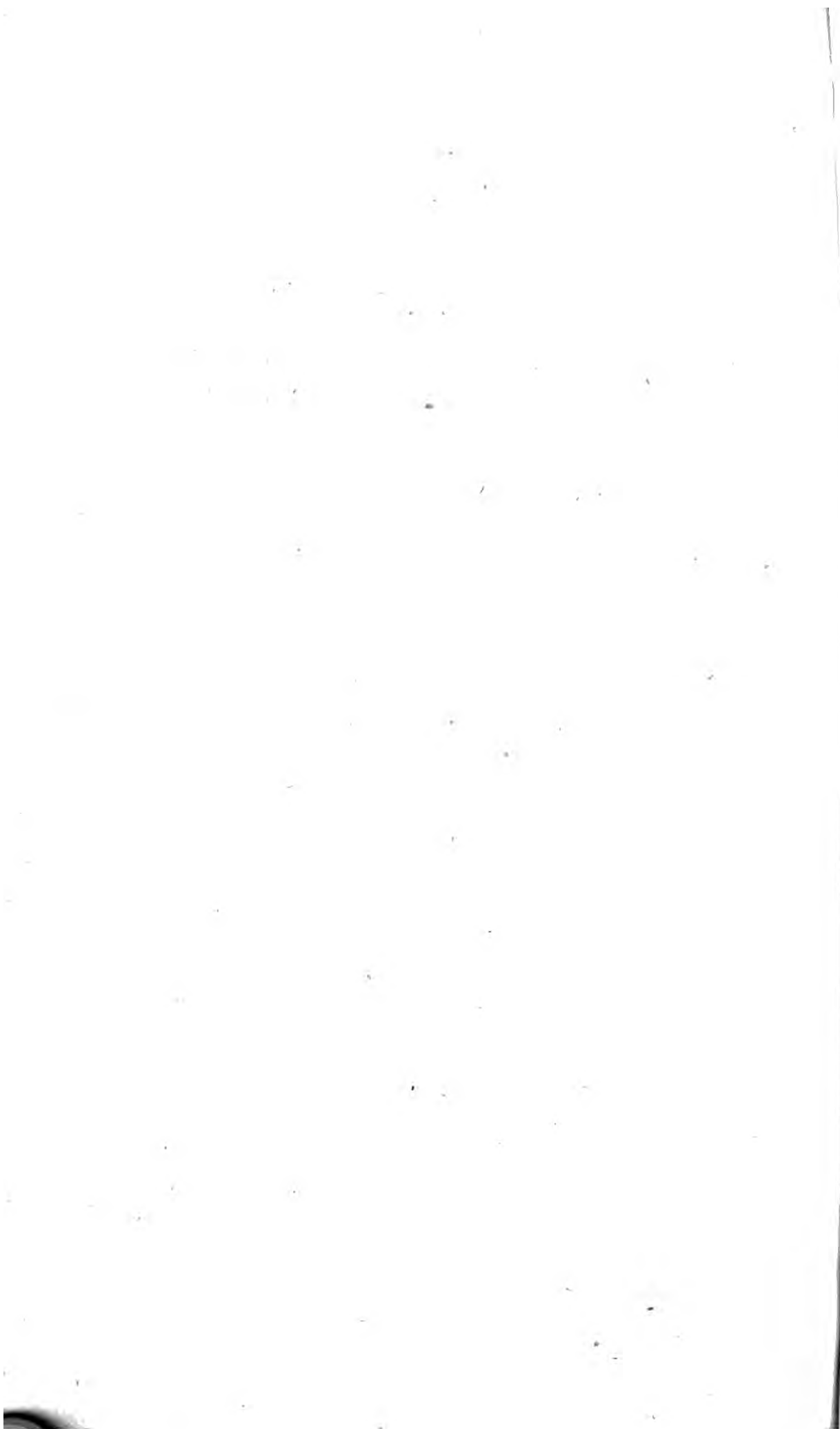
Very different from this was the character of Saint Paul, and also of many of those believers to whom he addressed his Epistles "Rejoice in the Lord always, says he, and again I say rejoice,"* yea he makes mention of joy unspeakable and full of glory, and thanks God for enabling him and his fellow soldiers in the Christian warfare, always to triumph in Christ.

Go ye on then my Brethren, thus rejoicing,

* Phill. ix. 4.

thus triumphing, and though you should meet with some trials, and find many enemies yet to conquer, be not discouraged ; your difficulties shall soon be over. Those light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for you an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.



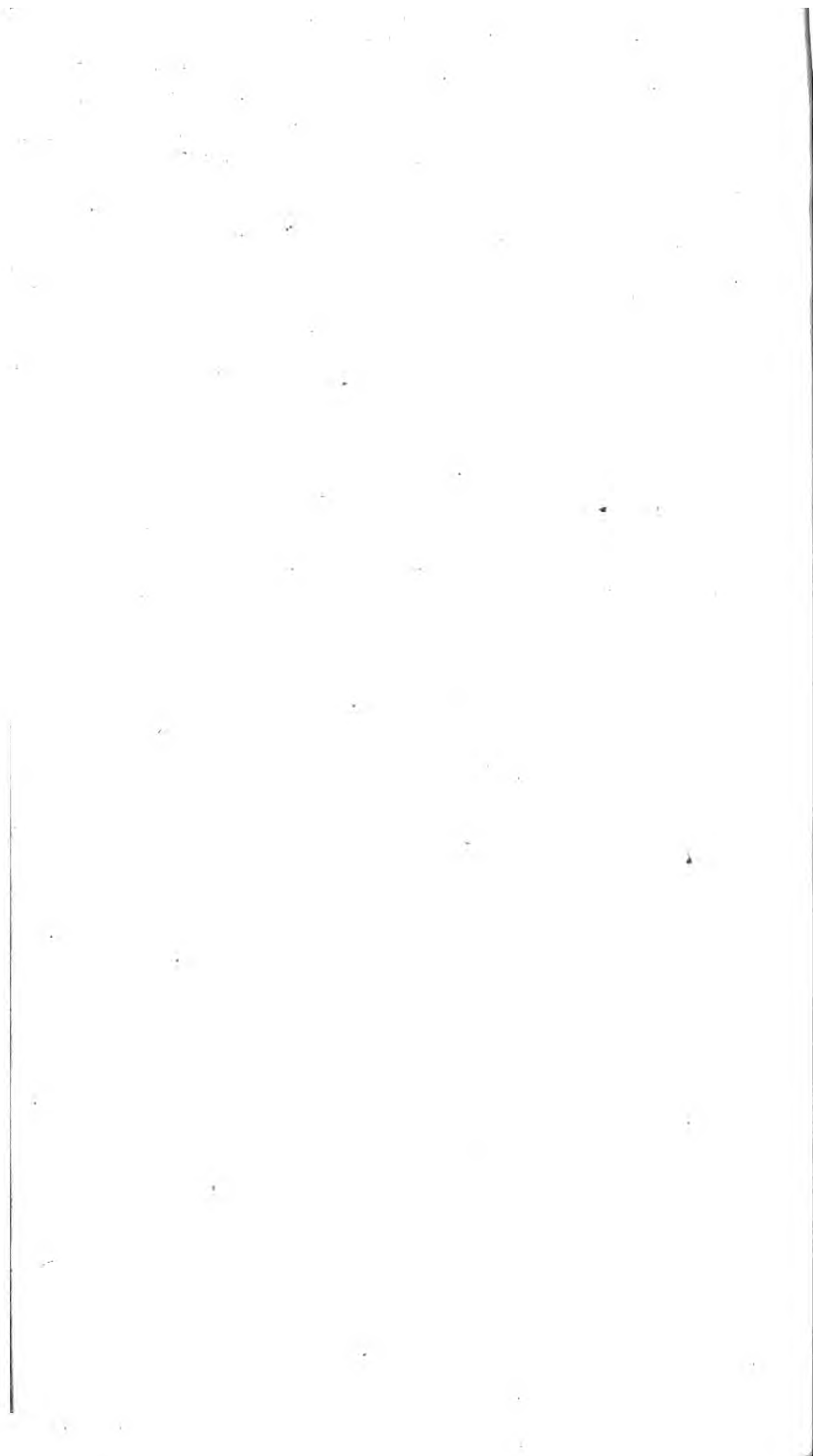


SERMON XIX.



ON

A FORGIVING TEMPER.



SERMON XIX.

PROVERBS, xv. 1.

A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.

IF those admirable precepts, which are contained in the Bible, were more strictly attended to, how much better would the world be, and how much, of course, would the happiness of mankind be increased! But, while men complain bitterly of the miseries of human life, they are continually adding to them by their own folly and perverseness, acting, generally, from the impulse of the moment, without considering how much advantage they might gain, if they were to be governed by the wholesome restraints of religion; would they allow these to operate upon them, they would soon be convinced that what God enjoins cannot possibly do them harm.

The words, which I have chosen for my text, were written by a wise man, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. He was one, who

had much knowledge of his own heart, and of the hearts of men in general, and was therefore well qualified to describe the various dispositions of his fellow creatures; and this he has so done, throughout the several parts of the Book of Proverbs, that every one, whose eyes are not blinded by the thickest cloud of prejudice, must be obliged to subscribe to the truth of what the Prophet Jeremiah asserts—“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;”* and if he be thoroughly convinced, that such is the real state of things, and that his own heart is not exempt from the general corruption, then, as a Christian who wishes to imitate his Saviour, who did no sin, and in whose lips no guile was found, he will make it his earnest endeavour to cleanse himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.†

Besides the careful avoidance of all those sins, which are a disgrace to his high and holy profession, such as drunkenness, profaneness, lewdness, dishonesty, and the like, the man, who fears God, will be diligent to adorn the Gospel, by exhibiting in his life and conversation every gracious and amiable temper, which is likely to recommend the doctrine which he holds, and which cannot fail of affording the

* Jeremiah, xvii. 9.

† II Cor. vii. 1.

clearest proof to every considerate person, that not a zeal to gain converts to an opinion, but only a wish to render men happy, is the reason, whether by preaching, by writing, or by conversation, he is desirous of making his fellow creatures acquainted with the Gospel, which is verily the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*

Seeing, then, we should all be persons eminent for morality, virtue, and every thing which deserves the name of goodness, let us take into consideration the precept contained in the text. Let us inquire, if it be generally attended to, and if not, in what manner we may avoid transgression upon any future occasion.

“A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger.” Could any person, who goes much abroad into the world, suppose that these words were contained in a book, which is generally acknowledged to be our rule of life, or, who, indeed, without going much abroad, has ears to listen to what is passing just around him, could entertain such a belief? Do we not often feel in ourselves, and perceive in others, the most direct violation of the precept, as if men thought, that to shew anger, and to pour out opprobrious language was the most effec-

* Rom. i. 16.

tual way of accomplishing their desires? Now, as I wish, as much as lies in my power, to put a stop to railing, I shall endeavour to convince you,

I. Of the folly of it ;

II. Of its impiety.

1st. I shall endeavour to convince you of the folly of it. I apprehend it is not possible, while we live among men of such various and perverse dispositions, as are to be found in every neighbourhood, to avoid giving offence in some way or other ; and whether it be done wilfully, or with the best intention in the world, abuse generally follows the provocation. Abuse to this is as generally returned ; and oh ! what oaths and curses are uttered, what spite and malice, what slanders, what threatenings are manifested upon such occasions ! And all this too is brought out with an air of triumph, as if it were a glorious thing to return railing for railing, and that person is supposed to have the most spirit, who has most to say. But, let me ask, what good does this do ? Certainly none to the person railed at, and as certainly not any to the railer. We are all dependant upon one another, and there is no one, who may not sometimes happen to be in such a condition, as to be capable of receiving assistance from his neighbour. Why then should we do that, which will make him our

enemy, and which will deprive him of the inclination, whenever he has the ability, to do us good? Besides, if we are displeased at him, and are sure that we have right on our side, before we make use of any harsh and severe expressions, let us consider, whether the object we have more immediately in view can be gained thereby. Suppose the person, upon whom your rage is vented, to be a wife, a child, a servant, or one in any other inferior capacity; they will probably, from motives of fear, obey you at *the moment*, but you will not be likely to scold them into a *habit* of obedience; for they will neither love nor respect you, unless they are bound by a very strong religious principle, which, it is too well known, is only the case with a few. On the contrary, they will not perform their duty in future with near so much diligence and steadiness, as a kind and tender conduct on your part would have secured. You think, perhaps, you have to deal with persons of a perverse and obstinate temper. It may be so, yet I do not imagine harshness is the way to mend it, but, on the contrary, that method, which will convince them of your sincere desire to do them good, and prove to them that you will be their friend as long as they are disposed to commit themselves to your protection; and if you doubt of

the wholesomeness of this advice, at least make the trial, and I am much mistaken, if you will not find fair and gentle means the most effectual to accomplish your wishes.

Again; as inferiors, perhaps, you are saucy and impertinent to those, who are set in authority over you, and are determined not to put up with their revilings. Hence it comes to pass, that many are always going about from place to place, and can never fix with satisfaction and content; while others, who are, perhaps, on the whole exposed to greater provocation, and meet with severer treatment, are able, by their meekness, gentleness, and patience, to appease the wrath of those that blame them, and can contrive to live with a tolerable degree of comfort among persons, who, if they were opposed and contradicted, would become very violent and outrageous. Thus you may perceive, that a contentious temper is also a foolish one, as the wrathful, by his fury, usually fails of obtaining the ends for which he is most desirous. But, I am to shew,

2nd. That such a conduct is not only foolish, but also impious. This it is, as being expressly contradictory to what the Christian Religion enjoins. So writes St. Paul to the Colossians, ch. iii. 12, 13, "Put on, as the elect of God,

holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any ; as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." So likewise St. Peter, 1st epistle, iii. 8, 9, "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, and love as brethren ; be pitiful ; be courteous. Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but, contrariwise, blessing ;" for you are to imitate Christ, " who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, but committed himself to him, who judgeth righteously."* Oh ! that the men, who neglect to follow this wholesome advice, would but consider how they provoke the Lord to pour out his indignation upon them ! While they think themselves at liberty to resent the insults of others, they are insulting him every moment, and offering such high affronts to his Sacred Majesty, that, if he were not long suffering, and of great mercy, he would consume them in a moment. What ! Are the commands of God to be considered only as vain words, which may be disregarded, as it suits our convenience, and shall the world perceive, that while men profess themselves to be guided by the spirit of Christ, they bear a less resem-

* 1 Peter, ii. 23.

blance to their master than many Heathens, who never so much as heard of his name! I say, than many Heathens, for there are those among them, who, influenced by a noble spirit of benevolence, scorn to resent injuries, but rather endeavour to overcome evil with good. Now, as I wish you, my brethren, to adorn the Gospel of God our Saviour in all things, by such a conversation as becomes it, let me intreat you, especially such as are of a hasty spirit, to suppress the first motions of resentment, which you find rising in your bosoms; and this you may do with more success than perhaps you imagine possible.

1. By determining never to speak hastily. For want of better subjects of conversation, the voice of scandal is too much listened to, and men hear from those, who are as much disposed to make mischief, as to listen to it, that in a variety of instances their conduct has been censured. They believe the report, and are alarmed at the thought, that their reputation has been injured, and, without due consideration, seek their supposed enemy, and pour out those grievous words, which stir up anger. I say this is done commonly without due consideration, and I have discovered, I think I may safely say, in nine instances out of ten, that those, who are the first to find fault are the most

to blame. A patient hearing of those words, which seem likely to occasion the breach, and an allowance of time to explain matters, which appear unfavourable, will be a happy method of preventing the most deadly quarrels, such as begin only in words, but which proceed to the infliction of personal injuries by one or both parties concerned, and terminate at last in bloodshed and murder. Think then before you speak, and be not hasty in reproaching your brethren; but

2. A more effectual way to avoid that fault, against which I am speaking, is to take care that the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus; that is, a spirit of divine love, which will teach you to bear injuries with patience, and make you desire to do good to your most bitter enemies. O ye, who can entertain a disposition of hatred, or a thought of revenge against your fellow creatures, remember Him, whom you call your Saviour; him, who shed his blood on the cross for you, enemies as you were by wicked works, and rebels against his crown and dignity. Remember him, and when you feel enraged against any, think that it was He, who said—"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them, which despitefully use you and persecute you."* Oh!

* Matt. v. 44.

how often have I heard, and your consciences will tell you I may have heard it from some of you, curse returned for curse; whereas how much more seemly would it have been, and how much more becoming the Christian character, had you replied in words like these—“God grant, that the curse which thou hast pronounced may never fall upon my head, nor upon thine either; but may he, of his infinite goodness and tender mercy, bless thee, and turn thy heart.” What is the curse of God? What can be more awful and tremendous? Who can wish it to fall upon his fellow creature? Surely none can do it, who is not moved, by the instigation of the devil, to speak the very language of hell. But again,

3. What may serve as an inducement to make you suppress the rising of indignation, is the consideration, that it proceeds most frequently from the hateful disposition of pride. It does so, I say, most frequently; indeed I may venture to affirm, always, when there is no desire to do good to the person against whom it is directed. Why do smooth words please, and harsh ones displease us? Is it not because we love to be praised, and hate to be censured? Is it not because we would be thought more wise, learned, ingenious, rich, or honourable than our neighbour chooses to

esteem us? We judge of ourselves partially, but his judgment is more impartial; and as he, with his eyes open, cannot fail of seeing faults, which we, with our eyes shut, cannot discern, it pains us to think, that we are not such deserving creatures, as we esteem ourselves, and that the world should behold us in all that deformity and ugliness which cleave to us, through that thin veil of hypocrisy, by means of which we endeavour to conceal ourselves from their view. Take your Bibles, my brethren, and see what manner of persons ye ought to be in thought, word, and deed. Consider, that there is one, to whom all hearts are open, all desires are known, and from whom no secrets are hid. Think, that his eye is upon you every moment, and that he can discern every the least stain of sin. Imagine, I say, what a polluted creature you must appear, in his sight, and then you will not think the vilest character that can be given you to be worse than you deserve; and though indeed crimes, which you abhor, may be laid to your charge, yet you will be disposed to acknowledge, upon the whole, that you are very guilty creatures, and will, if rightly disposed, not quarrel with your reprover, even for his unjust accusations, since every thing which leads us to the needful, though painful task of self examination,

cannot fail of proving beneficial in the end, as it will induce us to join the holy Psalmist in his prayer. "Try me, and prove me, O God, and see that there is no way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

4. Another reason why we should abstain from angry expressions is, that we may prevail on our adversaries to embrace the gospel of Christ. When they perceive that the religion of Jesus is productive of so much happiness, even in this world of sin and wretchedness, and that the Christian is able to keep his mind in a state of composure under the most aggravating provocations, they will believe, that it has indeed a power to change the heart, and will desire to be delivered from the perpetual agitations to which they are subject, and which sometimes arise even from the most trifling circumstances. It must be allowed, indeed, that this subjection of temper, and this tranquillity of mind, do not always immediately take place in those persons, who are converted unto God, but that, to the no small concern of the persons themselves, and to the grief of their serious friends, they will be provoked (and the adversaries of religion will, with peculiar malice, endeavour to make the provocation effectual), to use passionate expressions; yet, every one, who regards them with a disposi-

tion of candour, and who have the charity to admit that certain allowances ought to be made for the infirmities of human nature, will be sure to mark the influence, which the Gospel has over them, and as they will perceive them become day by day more humble, more placid, more pious, and more affectionate, they will be convinced of its mighty transforming efficacy, and nothing but the most inveterate and unwarrantable prejudiced, will prevent them from acknowledging, that it is indeed worthy of all acceptance.

Much do I wish, my Brethren, that you were all partakers of the spirit of Jesus Christ, for I would have you happy here, as well as hereafter. Pray then that God would have mercy upon you, and turn your hearts; and if you have lived, as it is certain some of you have done, without thinking of the obligation which is laid upon you, to act according to the precepts which are given you in the Bible, be persuaded to try a different line of conduct. In the relation perhaps of husband or of wife, you have indulged a spirit of contradiction; you hardly feel a wish to please one another, and your house presents a continual scene of discord. Now, it is only disobedience to the will of God, which produces all this unhappiness. Entertain that forgiving temper, which he re-

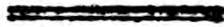
quires, and be as mutually kind and obliging, as you have been formerly unkind and dis-obliging, and all your miseries will be turned into comforts. "O Sir," some of your will perhaps say, "you know not what a character I have to manage; to make my partner kind and tractable, is, I believe, impossible." But, have you tried all the methods of reconciliation already recommended, and have you withal besought the Lord to influence his or her heart? If you have not, much remains to be done. I remember reading an account* not long since of a furious ill-tempered husband threatening to cut his wife's throat if she persisted in going to hear a certain pious minister, though the vicar of the parish in which she lived. In a short time his threats prevailed with her to stay from church; but conscience telling her that it was wrong to desert a faithful minister of Christ, whose discourses had proved a blessing to her soul, she determined, whatever might be the consequence, to go again. When her husband saw her dressed for church, he bid her go at her peril. "I shall not," he added, "cut your throat, as I once intended, but shall heat the oven, and put you into it as soon as you return." It happened, by the Providence of

* The chief circumstances of this remarkable account are now collected in a tract called "The Persecuting Butcher."

God, that the Minister preached that day, on the fate of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were cast alive, by order of king Nebuchadnezzar, into a burning fiery furnace, and the poor woman was so edified and comforted by what she heard, that she felt ready to lay down her life for the sake of her Lord and Saviour. As she drew near the house, she saw the oven flaming hot; but oh! what was her astonishment when she entered the door! She found her husband upon his knees, praying earnestly to God; he embraced her with affection, and intreated her forgiveness. The lion was turned into a lamb, and during the remainder of the years that they lived together, she enjoyed the society of a loving and pious husband. Need I, after such a narration, expatiate on the advantages of meekness, gentleness, patience, and prayer? I think not, and that there is no occasion for me to detain you by pointing out, in a more particular manner, the comfort and happiness, which must result from the exercise of those graces in all the relative situations of life. Be Christians yourselves, not in name only, but in the spirit of your minds, and then you will be most likely to produce a happy change in those about you; and if you are sincere and zealous in your profession of the Gospel, we may hope, in a little

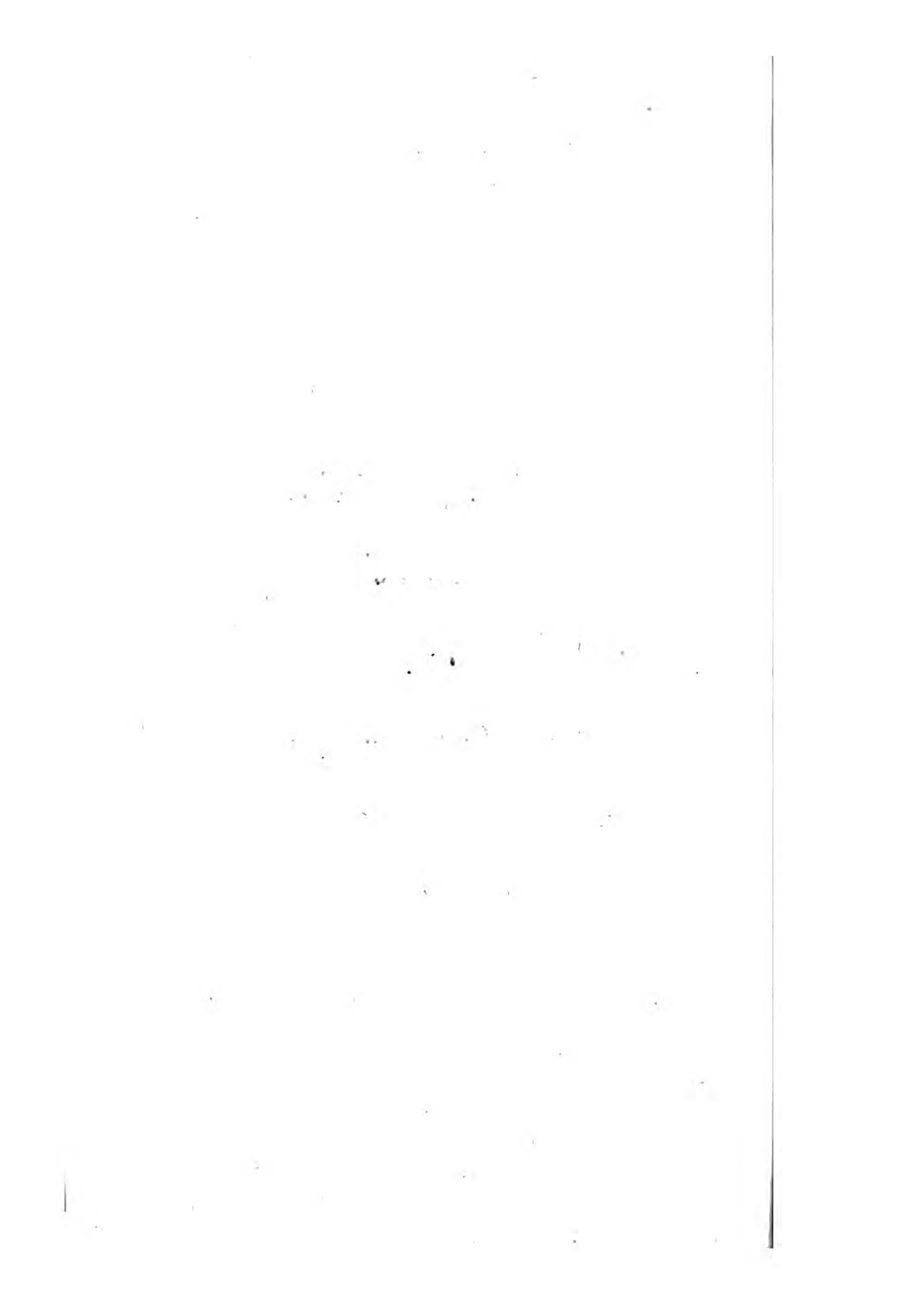
time, to see a more general reformation, and entertain the pleasant thought, that every habitation will be at once an house of prayer and an house of peace. I will conclude with the words of Saint Paul, which are written for our instruction in the twelfth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, v. 14. to the end, "Bless them, who persecute you; bless and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one towards another. Mind not high things; but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

SERMON XX.



ON

THE SIN OF LYING.



SERMON XX.

EPHESIANS, IV. 25.

Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another.

THE Christian Religion requires nothing less than the entire dedication of ourselves to God. Christ hath loved us, and given himself for us, that we might be given up to him, and follow his steps in the paths of righteousness and holiness all the days of our life. He came to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works, and whoever has neither piety nor zeal, we may be very sure, whatever name he may call himself by, and however highly he may conceive of his knowledge and wisdom, by which many are puffed up, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

That we may clearly discern between good and evil, and rightly understand what we should follow, and what we should avoid, the Lord has been pleased to give us in his holy word a variety of precepts for the regulation

of our conduct, and while we pretend to have any respect for Him, regard for our own souls, or love towards our fellow-creatures, we should study the Scriptures to know his will, and endeavour most exactly to perform every thing, which he has commanded.

It is my design to improve the present opportunity by enforcing a duty, which is, I am sorry to observe, too little regarded by many, who bear the Christian name, that is, the duty of speaking truth upon all occasions. In doing this I shall mention,

- I. The inducements, which men have to transgress this commandment.
- II. The impolicy of their conduct.
- III. The danger to which they expose themselves by their perseverance in this vice.

“Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another.” In discoursing upon these words, I am to mention,

1st. The inducements, which men have to transgress this commandment, or, in other words, to tell lies; a vice so odious and detestable, that to charge a man with it is commonly thought to be the greatest insult that can be offered him; and indeed, if the charge can be proved, nothing more disgraceful can attach to a man's character, since, with very

few exceptions, it shews a total want of principle, or what is commonly called *a bad heart*, which must be taken away and another implanted in its stead, ere its possessor can be deemed worthy of the regard of the virtuous and honourable.

Of lies there are various kinds, some of which are apparently more abominable than others. I say *apparently*, for, in fact, every kind of falsehood, as it proceeds from a disregard to the commandments of God, is equally displeasing in his sight. But, of these various kinds I shall here mention only a few, and endeavour to shew both the danger and impolicy of such deceits. The first sort of lying, that I would particularly call upon you to avoid, is that to which some children are much addicted, and of which many others of riper years, especially if they are placed under authority, are no less guilty. I mean the denial of any crime or misbehaviour, with which they are justly charged. "You have done so and so," says the accuser; "the action, you well know, is wrong, and I request you to make me acquainted with all the circumstances of it, and the reasons which induced you to do that which you have done." "The charge is false," replies the accused. "I have committed none of the faults of which you complain, but am

quite innocent." Now, it may happen that a child, or grown up person shall, by persevering in his lie, for a time prevent detection; but what will he get by it? First, a guilty conscience. To that God, who created him, and who has power in one moment to destroy him, are all desires known, and from him no secrets are hid. He marks those deeds of wickedness which escape the eye of man, and one day will bring the sinner to account for them; yea, and that day may not be so far distant as the transgressor is willing to suppose; for often does it happen in this world, that hypocrisy is detected, and then the guilty person becomes covered with shame and confusion. The liar then, besides exposing himself to the vengeance of Heaven, becomes harrassed, whenever he reflects upon what he has done, with the dread of discovery on the part of man, and is never at rest from the apprehension that something or other may occur, that shall bring the truth to light; and then again, when the discovery is actually made, he not only incurs the pain of present punishment, or is driven from some desirable situation, but he loses that, which is by far the most valuable of any thing that he possesses: I mean his character, which being once stained with the black mark of lying, can scarcely ever be clean again; for, however he

may in future boast of his integrity, the remembrance of what he formerly did will be retained, and foul suspicion will still light upon him. But, perhaps the persons who are addicted to that sort of falsehood, concerning which I am now speaking, will endeavour to justify themselves by saying, "They who are placed in authority over us, are of such violent tempers, that we dread their displeasure, and as we cannot avoid doing things, sometimes either through ignorance or inattention, or by mere accident, which, as soon as they are known, will provoke their passion, we consider it most prudent, either to conceal the matter, or, if taxed with the fault, to deny it altogether." This excuse might pass, and might be admitted too as a mark of discretion, but for this one thing. The God who created you, redeemed you, and preserves you, requires that you should speak the *truth*; and if you do not, is it not plain that you stand more in awe of man than you do of him, and that you do not believe he has power to protect you, when threatened by those who would lift up their hands against you. Let me here bring to your recollection the memorable story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, which is written for your instruction in the book of Daniel. These three holy men were commanded by king Nebuchadrezzar, who

was an idolater, to fall down and worship a golden image, which he had set up, upon pain of being cast alive into a burning fiery furnace. They, being servants of the true God, would not be guilty of such wickedness; and the king, hearing of their refusal to obey his commandment, was exceedingly provoked, and in great rage and fury ordered them to be brought before him. Then spake he, and said unto them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! ye do not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?" Had these men been fearful, like those whose conduct I am reproofing, they would not have answered as they did, but would have said, they either had worshipped the image, or intended to do it, endeavouring, at least for the present, to avoid the dreadful punishment which awaited them. Animated, however, by that noble courage which arises from the fear of the Lord, they were guilty of no evasions, but thus spoke out the truth. "O Nebuchadnezzar! we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O King! But, if not, be it known unto thee, O King! that we will not serve thy Gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast

set up." What was the consequence of this noble declaration? "Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of wrath, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, therefore he spake, and commanded, that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated; and he commanded the most mighty men in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace." Into that dreadful place they were accordingly cast, and who could have expected any thing, but that they would have been consumed in an instant? But, the Lord, in whom they trusted, marvelously interposed in their behalf. The raging flames, which destroyed the persons, who executed the King's sentence, had no power to injure *them*. They came out unhurt; there was not "an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them."

Now, surely, though you have no reason to expect that such a miracle will be wrought for your preservation, yet you should remember that the same Lord, who saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in their bold profession of the truth, is the very God you worship; that he is just as powerful as he ever was, and

will, therefore, in the way that seems best to his infinite wisdom, defend you from any evil which seems likely to befall you for strictly attending to his commandments. But I must proceed to speak of liars of another description.

2nd. I think it proper to warn you against the sinful conduct of those, who are given to falsehood in their dealings with their fellow creatures. In this respect all those who buy and sell, without having the fear of God before their eyes, will be likely to incur censure. "The love of money," it is justly said, "is the root of all evil;"* and that many unfair means are used to add a little to the store is a melancholy fact, which no one can deny. "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone away then he boasteth."† This remark is made by Solomon in the 20th chapter of the book of Proverbs; and though it was set down near three thousand years ago, yet we perceive, from what passes every day, that the worldly man is not improved. Of the seller does Solomon entertain no better opinion than of the buyer; thus, in the same chapter, v. 23, he also writes—"Divers weights are an abomination to the Lord, and a false balance is not good." But, weights and balances are not found in all the transactions which take

* 1 Tim. vi. 10.

† Prov. xx, 14.

place between man and man, nor, where they are, will false ones be commonly used, through fear of detection, and the consequent shame; nevertheless, the defect of the honest principle may, from other circumstances, appear equally clear. When the value of a commodity is over-rated by him, who has it to dispose of, and when he passes it off to the purchaser without mentioning its faults, he is as certainly guilty of lying in the sight of God, as if he were to call that, which he knows to be abominably bad, exceedingly good. But,

3rd. It will be useful to notice yet another sort of lying, which, because it may not be evidently injurious to our neighbour, is commonly overlooked, as a matter of little consequence. What I allude to, is that want of correctness, which is frequently observable in the common conversation of many persons. They tell their story in a very pleasant manner, and with great fluency of speech, insomuch that if you are a stranger to their character you believe, that they have told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; but, presently, when you hear another discoursing about the same matter, you will find that the first narrator, by adding some circumstances, and omitting others, has made the state of the case appear entirely different. Now, I will do the

inventors of such false tales the justice to allow, that they may not be actuated with any design of injuring their neighbours by what they say ; but, then, what do they design ? Surely nothing that is good ; but usually, I believe, their purpose is to set themselves off to advantage, and to make the persons, with whom they hold their conversation, suppose, that they have obtained more correct information, seen more extraordinary things, and performed more laborious and noble exploits than the rest of their fellow creatures. Liars of this description, I am sorry to say, are but too commonly met with, and it would be well, if all the mischief lay with themselves, and they had nothing to answer for, but their own pride and presumption ; but, unfortunately, their misrepresentation of things is productive of incalculable evil, and, for their sport, many an innocent character has been made to suffer most severely. Did such persons only consider, how soon the laugh, which is raised at the expence of truth, is succeeded by contempt, the principle of self love, independently of any religious consideration, would make them conduct themselves in a very different manner.

4th. I must not omit to mention that sort of falsehood, which is but too commonly practised by persons, who wish to excite compassion,

and by which they very often succeed in obtaining their ends. With languid appearance, and with feeble voice, they talk of pains, which they have never felt, of sickness which they have never experienced, of disappointments, which they have never met with, and of losses, which they have never suffered. None, they would make you believe, were ever repulsed with so much unkindness; none were ever so hardly used, so that they must, without your charitable relief, speedily perish through misery and want. Having no time, and frequently no opportunity, to inquire into the character of such importunate beggars, you bestow your bounty upon them, and ere long you discover, by some means or other, that you have administered to the support of those who are no objects of charity, and have robbed the really poor to contribute to the encouragement of idleness and vice; yet, acting from motives of Christian compassion, you did well. They, however, who imposed upon you, will have to answer for their sin at the day of judgment.

It might be easy to enlarge upon this subject, and to mention yet several other sorts of falsehood, to which persons destitute of an upright principle are addicted; but, as it would take up too much time to expose all the shifts

and evasions of sinful men ; and as almost any person can, upon a little reflection, perceive what is the honourable line of conduct, which he ought to pursue towards his neighbour, I shall not detain you by the enumeration of further particulars, but conclude what I have to say upon this subject by pointing out to you the danger to which you expose yourself by neglecting to speak truth. We find it written, Proverbs vi. 19, "The Lord hates a false witness that speaketh lies." Again, chapter xix. 5, "He that speaketh lies shall not escape." And verse 9, "He that speaketh lies shall perish." If you are acquainted with the Scriptures, you may recollect how Ananias and Sapphira, for telling a lie, were punished with immediate death ; and, I assure you, there are not wanting examples inflicted in later times upon others, who have dared to appeal to Heaven to testify to the truth of that, which they have known in their consciences to be false. I will mention a remarkable instance, that you, if guilty of lying, may tremble, and repent before it is too late.

In primitive times there lived a Bishop of exemplary piety, whose name was Epiphanius. Among his many virtues, he was particularly distinguished for his compassion to the poor, and for his readiness to relieve every distressed

object, whose case was laid before him. Now, it happened that two men, who were greedy of gain, and had no fear of God before their eyes, determined to practice a trick upon him, for they did not doubt of being able to impose upon the good man's credulity, and to obtain their ends. Their scheme was this. One of them was to feign himself dead, and the other was to wait upon the benevolent Bishop, pretending great affliction and deep poverty, and to request him to advance a sufficient sum to pay the expences of the funeral. The plan succeeded. The worthy Bishop was moved, and paid the money into the hands of the impostor. Elated with joy, away he hastened to his companion to inform him of his success. He spoke, but received no answer. He spoke again, and still no answer was returned; nor could there be, for the man was actually dead, and the story of his awful departure is left upon record, as a warning to all such presumptuous sinners. O beware of falsehood—It is, as you perceive, no light matter, but a sin, which will plunge the soul of him, who dies impenitent and unpardoned, into Hell. Consider the terrible condition of such sinners, and flee from the wrath to come.

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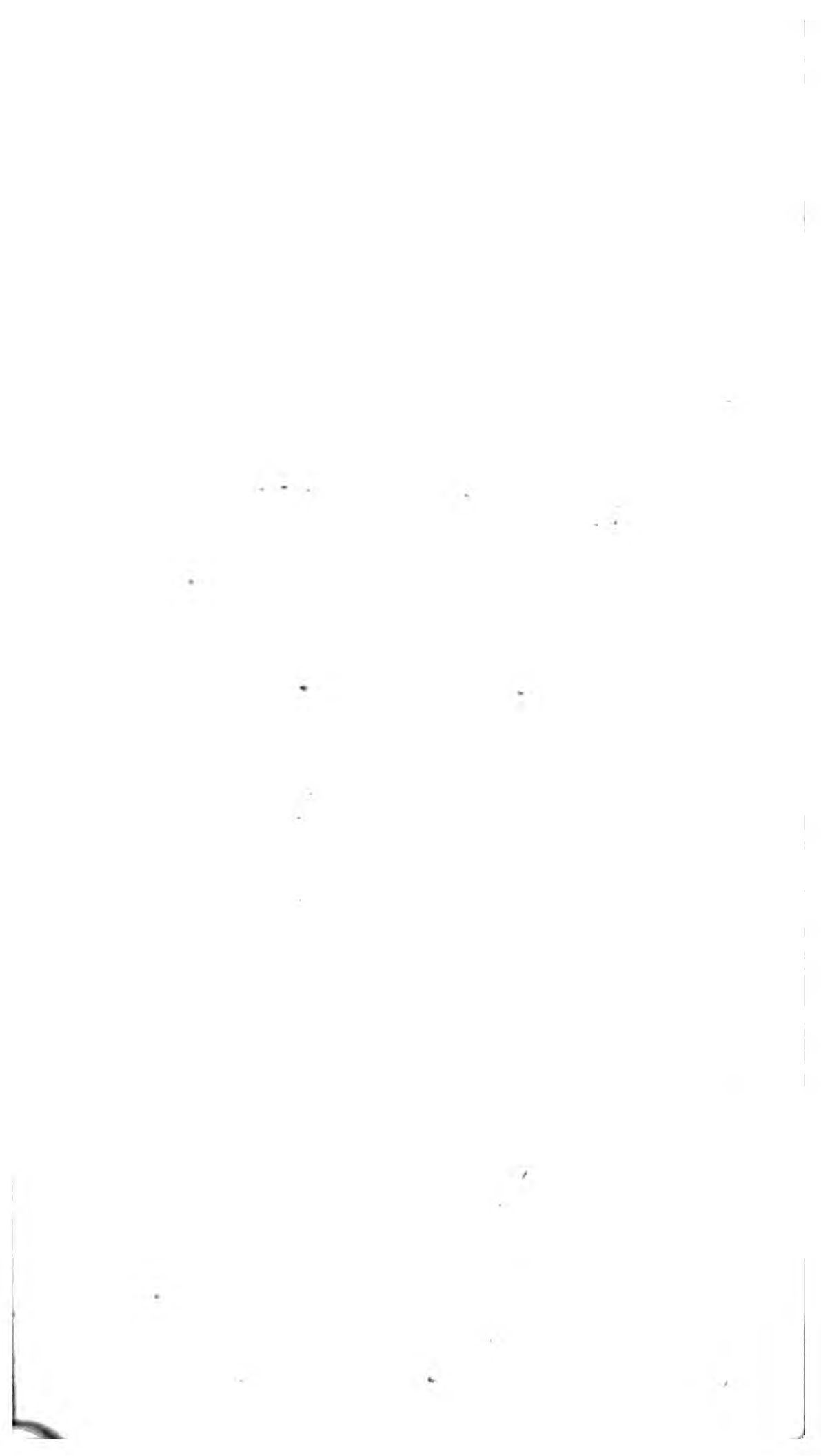
SERMON XXI.



EXAMINATION

CONCERNING

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.



SERMON XXI.

CORINTHIANS, XIII. 5.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith. Prove your own selves.

AMIDST all the business and bustle of the world, it must be allowed by every reasonable man, that there is but one thing absolutely needful, and that is the care of the soul, which shall still exist, and be happy or miserable, when the few years of this short life are passed away. Many, indeed, are ready to acknowledge this important truth ; but very few, comparatively, do more. They eat, they drink, they buy, they sell, they marry, and are given in marriage, as if such things were their sole concern ; and they would even think a friend troublesome, and impertinent, if he were to suggest to them the propriety of becoming more thoughtful and serious. But, what folly is it to make provision for time only, and to neglect eternity ! for, what shall it profit a man, if he

gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Even indifference in this matter, is highly culpable; therefore I hope you will give me your attention at this time, while I exhort you, from motives of self-interest, as well as of duty, to use all diligence to make your calling and election sure, There is no better way of doing this effectually, than by observing the exhortation given in the text.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. In discoursing upon these words, I shall endeavour to shew,

I. What is *the Faith*?

II. Lay down some rules for self-examination.

1st. I shall endeavour to shew what is *the Faith*. By *the Faith*, then, we are to understand that doctrine, which the Bible, more particularly that part of it called the New Testament, sets before us. It is the revelation which God has made concerning man, and in which he is so highly interested, that it becomes him to receive it cordially, and to assent to the whole, and every part of it. It shews him his origin, as he was created in righteousness and true holiness, his fall from that state into sin and misery, and his recovery by Jesus Christ; for the Scriptures most strongly and explicitly declare, that there is no other name

given under Heaven but that, whereby men may be saved, and for that reason has he been pleased to say, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they, which testify of me."* Every word of God most deservedly demands our assent to its truth; but as some, who have not much leisure, may imagine it will require a great length of time to read and understand the whole Bible, it is proper to observe that, *the Faith*, which is made necessary to salvation, may be attained by the most unlearned, and that he, who, because of his humble station, is obliged to gain his bread by the sweat of his brow, cannot fail of knowing the truth, if he will only pay as much attention to it, as to the common concerns of life. "What shall I do to be saved?" said one, upon a certain occasion, to Paul and Timothy; to whom they returned this short answer,— "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."† Do thou the same, whether learned or unlearned, and a similar blessing shall attend thee. But you will say, perhaps, Is this all that is required of us? This is no more than what the very devils believe, and yet who will allow them to be in a state of salvation? There is certainly good ground for this inquiry. Hear, therefore, what is written in

* John v. 39.

† Acts xvi. 30, 31.

the 10th chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. "The righteousness, which is of faith," that is God's method of justifying sinners only through faith in Jesus Christ, speaketh on this wise, "Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into Heaven, that is, to bring down Christ from above, or who shall descend into the deep, that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead? But, what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that is the word of faith, which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for, with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation; for the Scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed; for there is no difference between the Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him; for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." We may collect from hence, that the Christian faith consists in receiving Jesus as our Saviour, in trusting in him, and in proclaiming his name, as the sole foundation of our hope. Whoever does this cannot fail of being desirous of becoming acquainted with the nature of his work, of partaking of his

spirit, and of walking in his steps. "Henceforth," will such a person say, "I am determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified; gladly will I suffer with him here, that I may reign with him hereafter, and never will I be ashamed of the gospel of Christ; because I know it to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Now, my brethren, examine and prove yourselves, whether ye be in this faith, and that ye may do so in an advantageous manner, I shall, as I proposed,

2nd. Lay down some rules for self examination. At the head of these it is proper to mention, that you must determine upon the work. Serious reflection, to a person unaccustomed to it, must at first occasion trouble and pain, and there are few, who can be persuaded to withdraw their thoughts from scenes of pleasure, and from worldly schemes, to ruminare on things pertaining to a future and eternal state. The prospect, bright as it is to many, presents to their eyes nothing but gloominess; so they will turn away from it, and endeavour totally to forget it. But, not so the man, who can lay claim to prudence. He will reflect, will observe the things that are passing around him, and mark the shifting scene of which he is the constant spectator. "In the course of a few years," will

he say to himself, "how many of my relations, friends, and neighbours, have been carried to the silent grave; the young, as well as the old, the strong, as well as the weak, and several of them in the very midst of business, with the prospect of living as many years as I conceive it may be my lot to enjoy! But, whither are they gone? Will no one come back to tell me what they are doing beyond the grave, and whether they are happy or miserable? No;—tidings of this kind are not likely to reach my years; yet, with all this uncertainty, I must follow them, and I know not how soon. *Here* my place, which I have occupied but, as it were, for a moment, shall contain me no more for ever. *There* I shall be, perhaps, in a vast world, amidst innumerable spirits; but in what condition? In Heaven, of which I have heard, enjoying uninterrupted bliss, or in Hell, of which I have also heard, agonizing in the most exquisite torments?" Oh! that you would be wise, and entertain such thoughts, as they would lead you, most probably, to embrace that faith, which saveth the soul. Now, examine yourselves whether ye be in that faith; and this I would advise you to do.

1. By inquiring whence you have derived it. In a country, where the Christian is the established religion, people are apt to content

themselves with some general notions of God and their duty, without examining particularly into the nature of their profession, and to be satisfied, if they believe, as many others do, though the persons, whose faith they follow, may never have taken any pains to understand what is the condition of their souls, and after what manner their God, who is angry with the wicked, can, agreeably to the rules of equity and justice, pass by the transgression of the sinner, and admit him to a place among the Saints in the kingdom of Heaven. Hence it comes to pass, that those Ministers, and other pious people, who, with a view to the everlasting welfare of their friends and neighbours, have at any time asked them to give a reason of the hope that is in them, have frequently been shocked at discovering their ignorance, and perceived that they were not only without the knowledge of the truth, but entertained notions contrary to truth, notions reflecting dishonour upon the character of God, and highly prejudicial to the happiness of their own souls. This being too commonly the case, I think it proper to ask—Do you embrace the faith, which you call your religion, as the opinion of other persons, born and educated in this Christian country, or do you receive it as that system of divine truth, which is given in

the word of God? Have you paid attention to the hearing and the reading of that word, and by comparing one passage with another, and diligently considering the whole, have you been able to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, that you have received the right doctrine, even the very truth of God? Without such a diligent search, so much are deceit, ignorance, and prejudice found among men, you will be more likely to walk in the way of error, than in the way of truth. Therefore in this particular examine and prove yourselves whether ye be in the faith; and see,

2. Whether you have that faith, which worketh by love. The Devils believe, as well as you, and probably understand the nature of the Christian salvation better than you; but, wanting love, they remain Devils still. See, then, that you love God with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. Love him for your creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but, more especially, let your love be fixed on him for the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. If you have attentively read your Bibles, and compared all your thoughts, words, and actions with the purity and perfection which the holy God demands, you cannot fail of being sensi-

ble, that you have in many instances done those things, which you ought not to have done, so that there is no spiritual health in you, and that, should justice take its course, you would come under condemnation. Thus, conscious of your sinfulness, you will gladly embrace the method of salvation offered to you in the Gospel. "But for this," you will say, "God would not have favourably regarded me; but for this, I must have endured his frown, and borne the weight of his indignation; but for this, I must even now have been in torments." Can you then think of what God has done for you, and not love him? Indeed, if you love him not, it is because you know him not, and not knowing him, you will entertain strange notions concerning him, and feel no desire to keep his commandments. But if you know God, as he is in himself altogether lovely; if you are sensible of his kindness towards the children of men, and are convinced that you yourselves are the objects of his pity and compassion, you will then perceive a sacred flame of love kindled in your souls, or, as Saint Paul expresses it, "the love of God shed abroad in your hearts,"* which must excite you, in the first place, to shew forth your gratitude towards him, and which must next overflow in

* Romans v. 5.

the desire of doing good to men. Thus influenced, you will love your neighbour as yourself, and desire to do unto all men as you would they should do unto you. And is this really your wish, or, to put the question closer, is it really your *practice*? Can your friends, your acquaintance, the poor and afflicted, come forward and say, “We see in this man the genuine fruits of Christianity. He is faithful, kind, compassionate, and, upon all occasions, ready to do us every service that lies in his power.” Here we are all placed in a world full of wretchedness and misery, and if we do not find in ourselves an active disposition to mend the condition of our suffering fellow creatures, but are wrapt up in selfishness, then, however orthodox our notions, however regular our attendance on sacred ordinances, and however exact our conformity to all the ceremonies of religion, we may justly suspect, that we have not the faith of the Gospel; and that we are not those Christians, to whom the Lord will say at the last day—“Well done, good and faithful servants.” Surely, St. Paul leads us to form this conclusion, from what he has written in the 13th chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity,” which is nothing else but the prin-

ciple of divine love, of which I have been speaking, "I am become as sounding brass, or tinkling cymbal; and though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing; and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Examine, then, and prove yourselves, and see that ye have that faith of which I have been speaking.

3rd. If you are in the faith, you will be found in the exercise of all good works, and be endeavouring daily to cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, that you may perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. You will have considered, whether the ways of the world are such as God would have his children to walk in, and when you have reflected, that wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and that many go in thereat, you will beware how you follow a multitude to do evil, be searching the scriptures diligently, and be praying earnestly, that you may be kept in the narrow way which leadeth to everlasting life. Such a conduct may, indeed, subject you to the scorn and derision of the profane, the careless, and the formal, who will say,

you are too strict, and too scrupulous, and perhaps apply to you some opprobrious name, but, let men say what they will, nothing should abate your diligence to be found walking in the truth, and to abound in all godliness and virtue; for in so doing, you are complying with the admonition and advice of Jesus Christ, and his apostles, who bid you ask, seek, knock, run, strive, and fight; yea, and to carry on the contest at every hazard, that so you may at length obtain the prize of glory, which is promised to every one that overcometh.

Now, examine and prove yourselves, Brethren, whether ye be in the faith. Ye say, ye believe in God the Father, who hath made you, in God the Son, who hath redeemed you, and in God the Holy Ghost, who hath sanctified you, and all the elect people of God. And hath He really sanctified *you*? Do *your* consciences bear witness, while I am speaking, that you are holy persons? Are you so holy, that you have given up your hearts to God, that they may become the temples in which he will condescend to take up his sacred residence? I thus propose the question, because I wish you to remember, that, while it is your duty to strive to be complete in all the will of God, you must depend upon him to work in you to will and to do of his good pleasure. As there are some

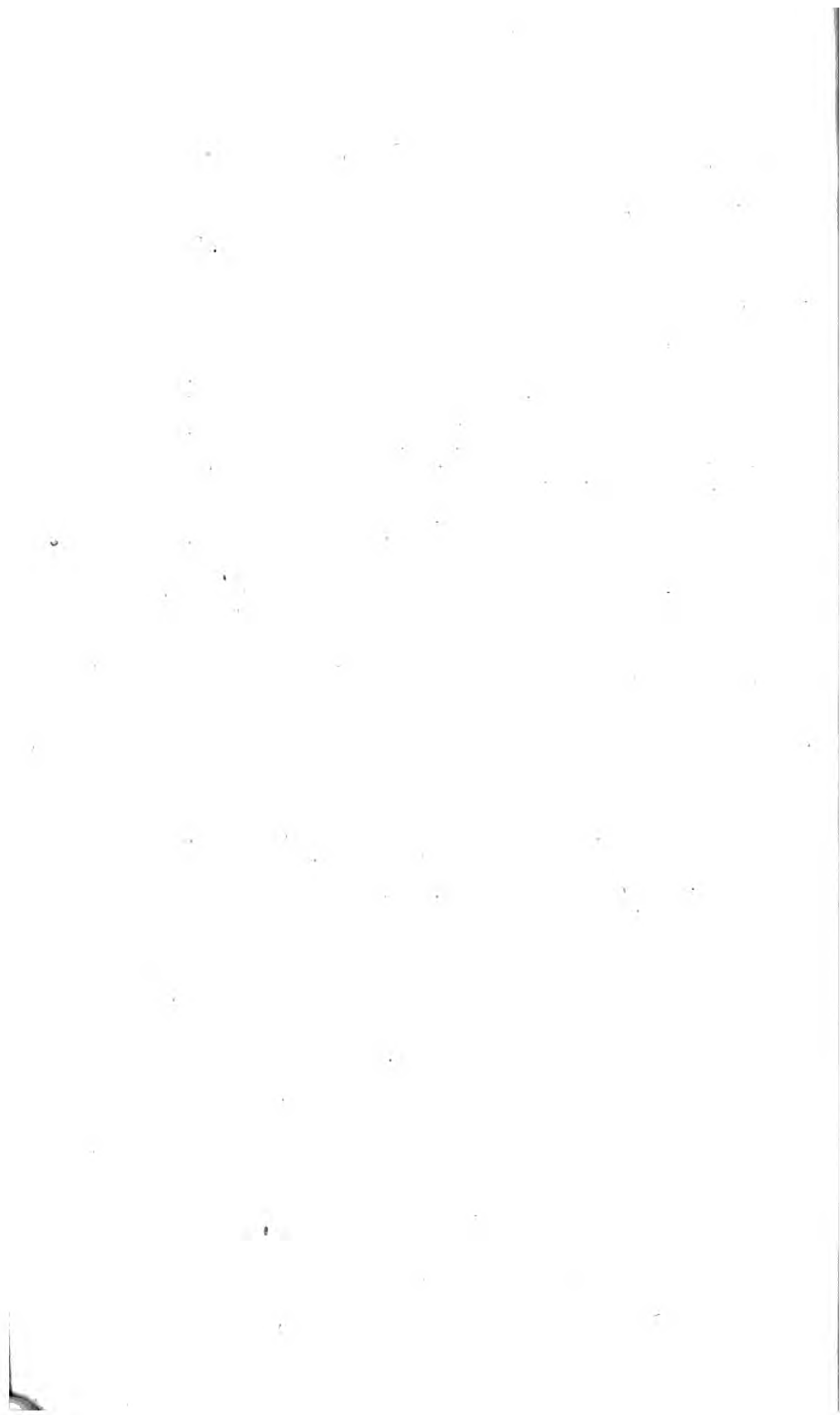
who, concerning faith, put away a good conscience, thinking it enough to believe that Christ died for sinners, though they are not careful to maintain good works; and as, again, there are others, who ascribe more than is due to their own industry and diligence, and would claim heaven itself as the reward of their merit, it should be your care to avoid both these extremes, and you should pray to be directed to, and kept in the way of truth, which you shall be, if, with all your heart, you seek the guidance of the good spirit of God.

Do you never say, "Suppose I should not be in the right way. Suppose, that instead of walking in the narrow path, which leadeth to heaven, I should be going along the broad road which leadeth to hell," Justly may you suppose the possibility, or rather the probability, of so fatal an error, if you have never stopt to consider your condition, but have been generally occupied, either with the pleasures of life, or with the cares of the world. There is but one thing indisputably needful; and, to divert your attention from that, it is not necessary that you should be intemperate or profane, or, in any way, be given up to work iniquity with greediness; neither is there any reason why you should congratulate yourself, that you are less vicious than many of your friends and ac-

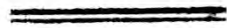
quaintance, while, with your fairer show of morality, you are not earnestly serious and devout. Hear the advice which is given by Solomon, and which is recorded purposely for your instruction. Proverbs ii. 1—5, “ My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee, so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding: yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding. If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her, as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. Alas! how few are so diligent in their search for truth! Hence it comes to pass, that there is so much shameful ignorance among us, and that there are many, who are unable to give one sound scriptural reason to any inquirer concerning the hope that is in them. I trust, however, there are some, who, because they have in good time applied their hearts unto wisdom, having sought for it, agreeably to our Saviour’s advice, as a pearl of great price, or as treasure hid in a field, are rooted and grounded in the truth; who, relying upon the merits and intercession of Christ, have confidence in God, and who, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, are entertaining

deadness to the world, and lively affections towards heavenly things; such are, even now in this world of sin and sorrow, filled with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Persevere, my brethren, with the same diligence, with which you have begun your course, and think not that you have attained, or are already perfect. You must not grow slack. You must not be weary, nor faint in your minds. There are yet many things, which God is pleased to reveal to those that love him, remaining to be discovered. You have yet trials to experience to prove your stedfastness, and yet conflicts to endure, before you may say, "I have fought the good fight: I have finished my course."* You have, indeed, fought already, but all enemies are not yet subdued, therefore follow your Leader, "conquering and to conquer," and may that Almighty Power, by means of which you have hitherto acted so valiantly, shortly bruise all enemies under your feet!

* II Tim: iv, 7.

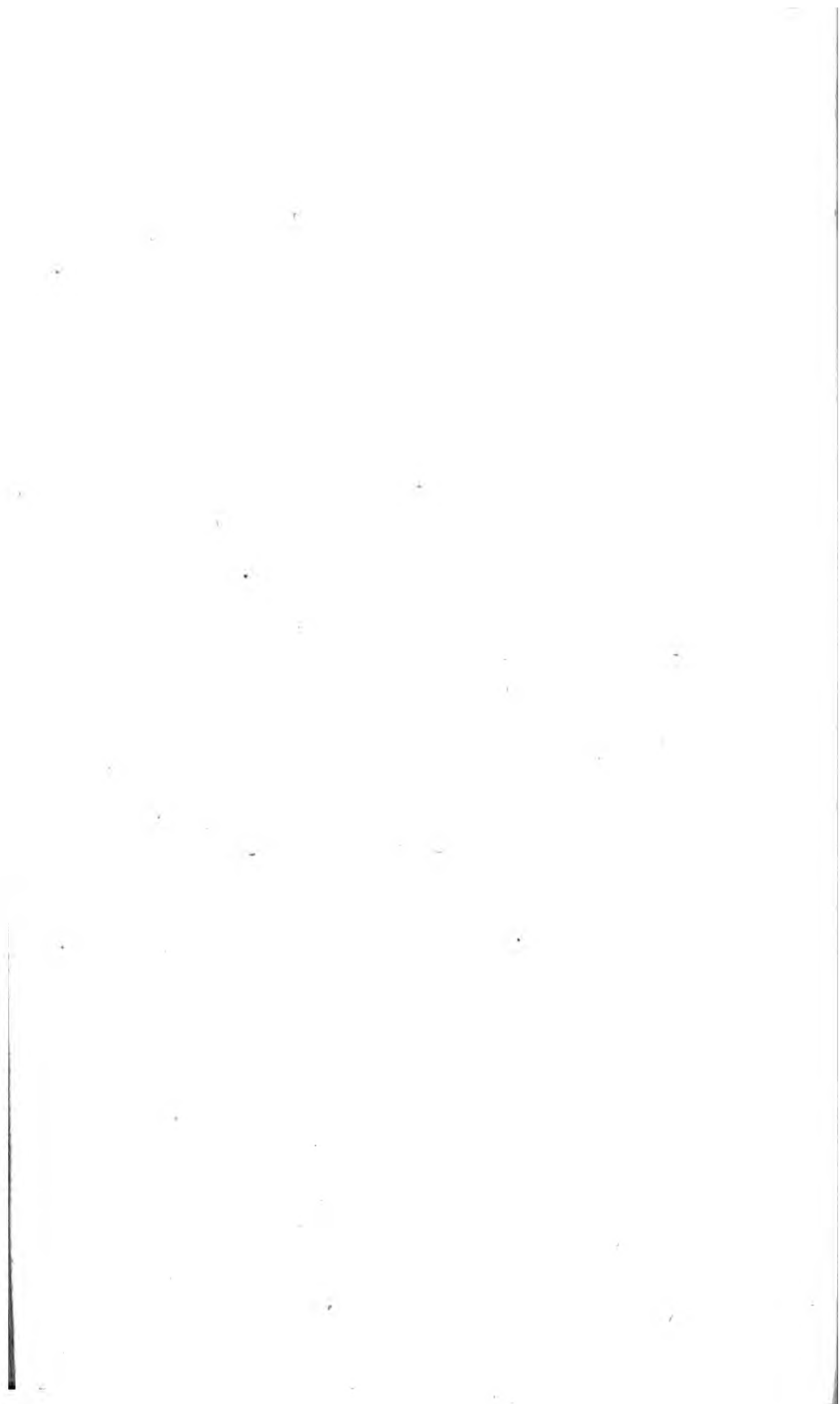


SERMON XXII.



ON THE

MERCY OF GOD.



SERMON XXII.

EZEKIEL, xviii. 32.

I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God, wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

THESÉ words are addressed to the House of Israel, who were a stiff-necked, and rebellious generation. Highly favoured had they been in receiving instructions from Heaven, and well did they know, that to walk according to the commandments of the Lord was the most effectual way to secure happiness. Yet, with this knowledge of what was right, they were perpetually doing the things that are wrong, and because they found pleasure in following the devices and desires of their own hearts, they insisted upon indulging themselves, whatever might be the consequence. But, the merciful God, who willeth not the death of a sinner, allowed them not so to do, without sending his messengers, the Prophets, to apprise them of their danger, and to exhort them, with the most affectionate intreaty, to avoid that misery, which perseverance in

wickedness would inevitably bring upon them. The great God of Heaven and Earth, though he might have consumed them in a moment, yet spared them from day to day, and most plainly shewed, by his forbearance and long suffering, as well as by the various methods which he used to reclaim them from their evil ways, how greatly he desired their salvation.

As the most powerful incentives to duty are love and gratitude, I shall make it my business to shew, from what the Scriptures reveal on the subject, what is the disposition of God towards his reasonable creatures; and I hope thereby to induce you to think more seriously than you have been accustomed to do, and not to fly in the face of your most gracious benefactor. With a view then to convince you of the benevolence of our Creator towards the children of men, consider his various dispensations of goodness in creating, preserving, and redeeming them; in instructing and guiding; in reproving and correcting them, and in bringing them, in despite of all the opposition of Satan and his agents, to a state of the most inexpressible happiness and glory. Consider,

1st. The regard which God has shewn towards mankind in the work of creation. See the dignity of their creation, and mark well the high and particular honour which is conferred

upon them. Thus ran the words in the book of Genesis concerning this wonderful operation of the Divine power and goodness, "God said let us make man in our image and in our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowls of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."* Thus man, you perceive, was made in the image of God; and it seems, from the manner of the expression "Let us make man," as if the whole Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had entered into a consultation for the performance of the amazing work. Such a creature, so dignified and so exalted, we may well suppose to have been the object of his Maker's particular regard; that he continually looked upon him with an eye of favour; and that he had blessings innumerable to confer upon him, to make his happiness everlasting. Yet blessed as man was, he did not continue so, and we must ascribe his fall to his not choosing to obey the only injunction that was given him. He ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, concerning which God had said "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."† Then happiness forsook him; then he became subject to mortality,

* Gen. i. 26.

† Gen. iii. 3.

and liable to all those evils of pain, sickness, and sorrow, which fail not sooner or later to bring the body to dissolution. Having thus freely chosen death, or in other words, having been guilty of that disobedience which infallibly leads to it, justice seemed to demand that the offender should perish without remedy; yet no sooner had the first act of transgression past, than the merciful God shewed his unwillingness to let the sinner perish, and therefore he immediately provided a way of recovery for every one who should be disposed to take the advantage of it. A gracious promise was given, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head; that is, that Christ, who was signified by that seed, should destroy the power of Satan, who had used the body of the serpent as an instrument for that temptation in which he had unhappily succeeded. The care of God for the fallen race appeared afterwards on various occasions; but I do not intend to take notice of any in particular, till we come to the appointment of the priesthood, which was established with such particular attention, and which was arranged, in the several circumstances pertaining to it, with such minute exactness, that the great God appeared to take infinite pains, if I may be allowed so to speak, to convince us that his purpose of saving man

by a Redeemer was the chief desire of his soul. For every sin committed by the people, from the highest to the lowest, whether prince or slave, clergy or laity, an adequate sacrifice was appointed; and whenever the rite was performed according to due order, then it was declared that the atonement was made, and that the offender was forgiven. But, though the people did thus, according to divine appointment, seek the remission of their sins, yet did they, through the great wickedness of their hearts, turn the grace of God into licentiousness, and abusing his loving kindness, exceedingly multiply transgressions. They seemed to argue after this manner: "Seeing God doth pardon the sins which we commit day by day, why should we lay ourselves under a continual restraint? Why may we not give way to indulgence? Surely it will be enough to bring our victims to the altar and pour out their blood, agreeably to the order which has been given for that purpose? Thus shall we avow in the face of the world that we own the Lord to be our God." But such an hypocritical service was so far from being acceptable, that nothing could be more insulting to the Divine Majesty; yet, amazing mercy! they were still spared, that they might repent and live. The Lord was pleased to send righteous men and pro-

phets among them, to plead with them, and to beseech them to turn unto the Lord with all their hearts. Hear how, among others, the prophet Isaiah addresses them, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me; saith the Lord, I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination to me; the new moons and sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies I cannot away with. It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons, and your appointed feasts my soul hateth. They are a trouble to me; I am weary to bear them; and when ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear; your hands are full of blood."* But mark what follows: "Wash you, make you clean; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

* Isaiah i. 11—15.

If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.”* Can there possibly be a stronger display of the divine compassion than that which is exhibited in the words which I have just cited? How gracious are they! how condescending! how replete with loving kindness and tender mercy! But after all that can be said or thought of these expressions, and others of a similar kind, we have still to contemplate an instance of the love of God which surpasses every thing that has been mentioned. I will set it before you in the words of Saint John: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that all who believe in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.”† So gave he him. How? Really in a manner, that were it not revealed from Heaven, would exceed all credibility. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is this only begotten Son, left the glory which he had with his Father, before all worlds, and taking upon him our nature from the womb of the Virgin Mary, became man for us men, and for our salvation. For as he suffered, bled, and died, for us also he rose again, and having conquered death and him that had the power thereof, he has given us an assurance that justice is satisfied, and we may safely trust him, while we plead his merits and

* Isaiah i. 16-19.

† John iii. 16.

rely upon his strength, to conduct us through all our tribulations, to the mansions of eternal glory. "O death!" may we now say, "where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* Do you ask "Is there yet any farther proof of the Lord's gracious disposition towards mankind?" Yes, there is. He not only appointed his Son to be the Saviour of the world, but also appointed holy men, and endowed them with special gifts and talents, for the purpose of declaring that salvation to the ends of the earth; and by signs, and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, has he given the most convincing proofs of the power and godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Go," said Jesus to his disciples, when he spoke to them after his resurrection, "and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo! I am with you always to the end of the world."† Agreeably to this order, the disciples did go forth preaching every where, and after them were raised up other gifted men, who proclaimed the

* Matt. xxviii. 19,20.

† 1 Cor. xv. 55-57.

glorious gospel far and wide, and who have left upon record such directions, admonitions, and exhortations, that no one, who is desirous of becoming wise unto salvation, can fail of obtaining the knowledge he aspires to. The Bible, that rich treasury of sacred instruction, is in many hands; and, blessed be God, such pains have lately been taken to circulate that precious book among the Heathen, that it is to be hoped we shall ere long see the fulfilment of that glorious prophecy, "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."*

But, again, we have something further yet to declare concerning the compassion of our God. We have not only the words of those men, who were inspired to direct us in the way in which we should go, but we have the same Spirit by which the inspiration was given, the same Teacher that taught them, and we have only to pray that God would be pleased to grant us that same spirit, and we shall find him to be our enlightener, our guide, and our comforter through every step of our pilgrimage here below. He will take of the things of Christ and, shew them to us, and, by his witness within us, we shall know to whom we belong,

* Isaiah xi. 9.

and rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.

Surely, from all that has been said, the designs of mercy, which God entertains towards his creatures, must very clearly appear. Why, then, do any perish? Jesus Christ, in his expostulation with the unbelieving Jews, makes us acquainted with the true cause. "Ye will not," says he, "come to me, that ye might have life."* Fallen man, most wretched in his choice, prefers things temporal to things eternal, and, sooner than lose his present gratifications, will run the risk of being deprived of all happiness for ever. O sinners, why will ye die? "But, what sinners are they," you will perhaps ask me, "who will die? All men are in some respects transgressors, and though none are perfectly good, yet a distinction should be made between the better and the worse." Certainly it should; and I would make it between him that repenteth, and him that repenteth not; between the man who offers some service only to God, and him who yields unto him his whole heart. *That*, with the many imperfections which must unavoidably cleave to the best of men, the Lord will graciously accept; but, without that, the

* John 7. 40.

Word of Truth allows us not to speak favourably of the sinner's state, nor to flatter him with the hopes, that he shall escape that death, which is the wages of sin.

I need not, I presume, tell the drunkard, the swearer, the unclean, the Sabbath-breaker, the unjust, the liar, the malicious, the revengeful, and other sinners of a similar description, that they, who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Of that, if they know any thing of the holy Scriptures, they are perfectly well assured. But, their hope is, they shall not continue such sinners to the last. Yet, this hope, if we may form a judgment from the general practice of mankind, is a very delusive one, for very few, who are once confirmed in habits of sin, have resolution to leave them off. This being the case, allow me to embrace this opportunity of exhorting you, who have not yet repented of your evil deeds, now to flee from the wrath to come, and to meditate, with due seriousness, upon what I am going to offer for your consideration.

1. Consider whether any scheme of happiness, which you propose to follow, can afford you as much satisfaction as obedience to the law of God. Can you suppose, after what has been stated, that God is willing to deprive you of any thing, which can be conducive to your wel-

fare, and that it will not be much better for you to restrain your irregular desires, of what kind soever they may be, than to indulge them? Do you not say in your hearts, though I believe you would shudder to speak it with your lips, "O God, the sin which I commit is preferable to thy law, and though thou hast told me it is not so, yet, verily, I do not give credit to thee; so I will go on in the ways, which I have chosen, and set thy power and authority at defiance." What horrid profaneness! Sinner! hast thou never been guilty of it? yet thy gracious God spares thee, and invites thee to be converted and live.

2. Consider what advantage you gain now by all the sins you have committed in former times. Let me suppose, that instead of attending the service of God on that day, which is appointed to be kept holy, you have, especially in the days of your youth, employed the leisure, which it afforded you, in scenes of pleasure and amusement. You had an enjoyment, I will grant, for a few hours, and then you were so merry and gay, that you could not bear to entertain one serious thought about futurity. But that season is past now, and what have you got by it? Not one advantage, but, on the contrary, much loss; the loss of good instruction, the loss of the divine blessing, and, if you die impenitent, the loss of your precious souls.

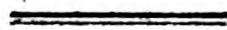
Alas! that rational creatures should be so weak as to prefer things temporal to things eternal. But, again, what has been said of sabbath breaking may be said of every other sin, to which men have been accustomed to addict themselves. The sot, who spends his time and money at the alehouse, when he comes to reckon up his gains at the end of the week, or month, or year, will find little to console him, but much, if he would think seriously, to distress and alarm him. Say, idler! what good dost thou now possess in consequence of having wasted thy precious time? What profit, swearer! has accrued to thee from the multitude of thy oaths and curses? and what, unclean wretch! from all thy indulgence and filthiness? Should I propose a similar question to the covetous and to the extortioner, I shall be told, perhaps, "Those sinners, whose pleasures pass away with the moment of gratification, are fools indeed, but surely you will allow us to be prudent men, since by our care and diligence we have filled our purses, and have the prospect of enjoying a comfortable subsistence in our declining years." But, my friends! I entreat you, as well as others, to consider,

3. What advantage you will gain by transgressing any one commandment of the Lord, upon your death-bed. Your last week, your last day, your last hour must come. No wisdom, no

wealth, no supplication can reverse the sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." The reflection of a single moment must tell you, if you are not as irrational as a brute, or as senseless as a stone, that nothing can be of any value at that awful season, but a sense of the divine favour, founded upon the hope of mercy through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Seeing, then, that none of those things, in which you now take so much delight, can afford you any comfort, when you most stand in need of it, O! why will ye pursue them and sell your souls to the devil, and suffer him to cheat you with so poor and so perishable a recompence.

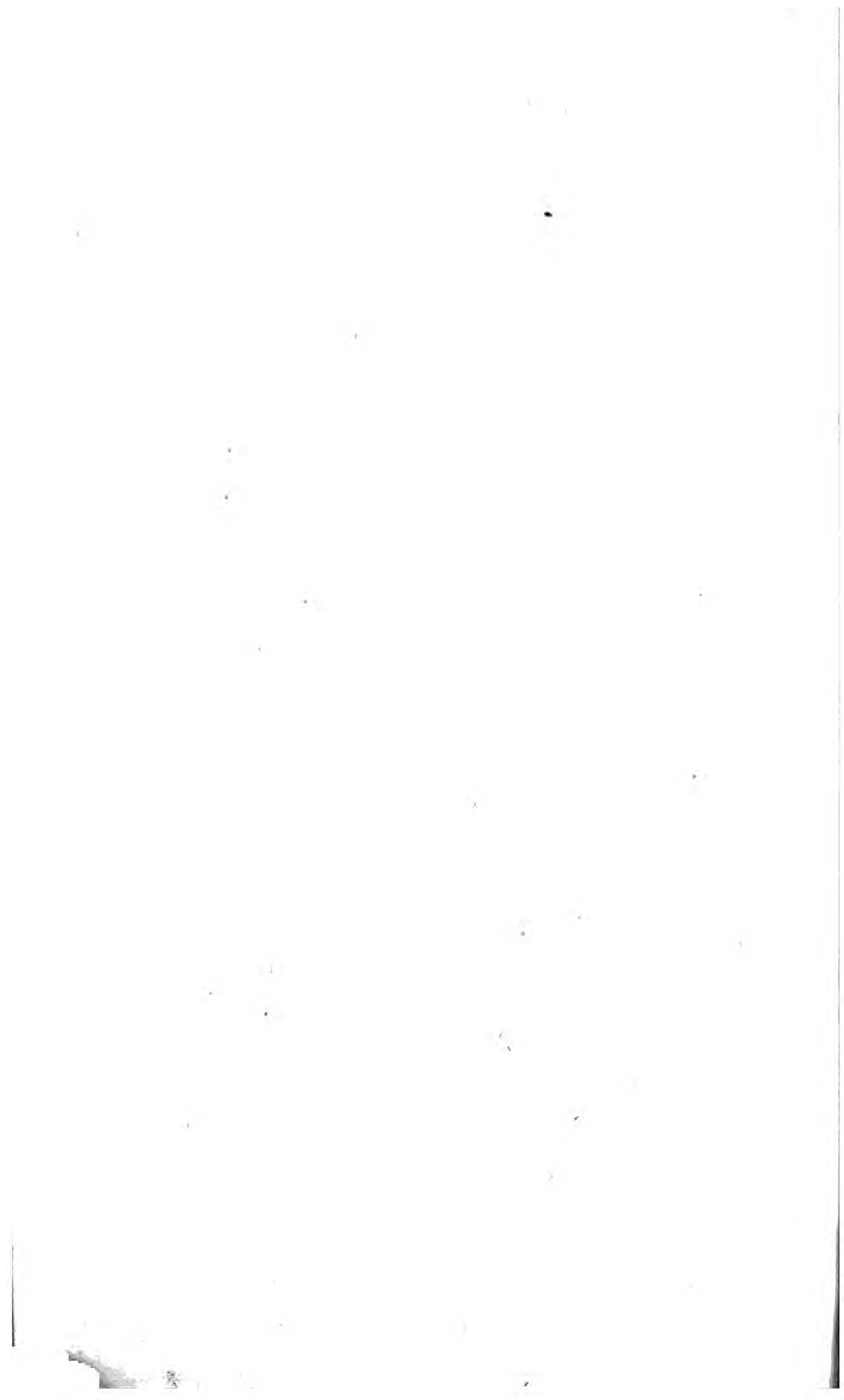
To conclude. Seeing God is so gracious, so full of compassion, so unwilling that any should perish, I desire, all persons, who bear the name of Christians, to consider whether they have rendered to him that love, gratitude, and obedience which he has a right to demand. Even indifference, under such a display of mercy, must be deemed a crime, and much more the allowance of any deed, or word, or thought, which is not perfectly pure and holy. Let us, then, beseech the giver of all grace to create in us clean hearts, and to renew right spirits within us. Let us praise him, not only with our lips, but in our lives, and walk before him in holiness and righteousness all our days.

SERMON XXIII.



ON THE

CHRISTIAN'S PROGRESS.



SERMON XXIII.

HEBREWS, VI. 1.

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.

WE find the Apostle, in the preceding chapter, blaming the Hebrews for their ignorance concerning certain divine truths, with which they ought, by means of the instruction which was afforded them, to have been acquainted. What he particularly adverted to was the Priesthood of Christ. "Of him," says he, "we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing; for when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need 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 unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe; but strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those that by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil; therefore," continues he, in the

words of the text, "leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection," which is an exhortation, I suppose, not less needful for Christians of the present, than for those of former ages, for we are all apt to be too supine and indolent, and to remit that diligent search after divine truth, which we are commanded to make, and which is absolutely necessary, if we would grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We are led by the text to consider

1st. What are the principles of the doctrine of Christ?

2nd. What is it to go on to perfection?

The principles of the doctrine of Christ are those general truths of Christianity, which are contained in the Catechism, and with which every member of our Church is supposed to be acquainted. They consist in the belief, that there is one only true God, the creator of heaven and earth, and the rewarder of those that diligently seek him; and that, being infinitely holy and just, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with complacence, he will render unto every man according to his works, and by no means spare the guilty. They instruct us also to regard Jesus Christ as our Saviour, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified,

dead, and buried, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead, and ascended into heaven, from whence he shall come again to judge the quick and the dead ; and futher direct us to believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who enlightens, sanctifies, and governs all the elect people of God ; that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are Three in One, and One in Three, a Holy Trinity, in which none is greater or less than the other, none is before or after the other, but the three Persons are co-equal together, and co-eternal. We likewise reckon it among the principles of the doctrine of Christ, that we should believe in the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven. All this we profess to believe as contained in the Bible ; and very right it is to give our assent to these truths, and to any others which may be collected from the sacred word ; but these, after all, are but the principles of the doctrine of Christ ; and are not of themselves sufficient to save our souls ; no, we must leave them, and go on to perfection. We must leave them, not so as to reject them, as instructions of no value, but only so as not to rest in them. They are a good foundation, upon which to

raise our superstructure ; but we must add to our faith virtue, or we shall never be the better for all our knowledge : I therefore beg your attention, while I state some of those acquirements, which we still ought to seek after.

The first that I shall mention is Resignation to the Will of God. This, much more than active obedience, argues the progress of the soul ; for a Christian, in performing works of righteousness, whether they be such as belong particularly to the ministerial office, as preaching, praying, or visiting the sick ; or whether they consist only in those acts of benevolence and mercy, which every disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ will, according to his ability, be found in the exercise of ; such works of righteousness I say, as they afford employment to an active character, will be gratifying, and his own will coinciding in those things with the Will of God, he will be borne forward by the tide of Love. If, moreover, his labours to do good be crowned with success, and there be many who are disposed to receive benefit, as eagerly as he is inclined to give it, he will be ready to imagine that he has made considerable advances in the Christian course, and that he shall go on to the end of it, without meeting with any unpleasant obstacles in his way. But, it is not by so smooth and easy a path that the

Lord is usually pleased to lead his chosen people. Often, by means of sickness, confinement, or poverty, he will take from them the power of performing their favourite exercises; or he will permit such a combination of circumstances to occur, that they shall be removed from situations of usefulness, and shall seem to themselves to exist but as mere cumberers of the ground. To say, as Job, under *such* severe trials, "The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away, yet still blessed be the name of the Lord," is not easy; it requires much faith, and a firm persuasion that a God of infinite goodness and mercy cannot do wrong. We see this character of the advancing Christian beautifully exhibited in the history of Joseph, who, being in the dungeon, and apparently forgotten by God as well as by man, was, whatever he might have conceived of the matter himself (and it is natural to suppose, that, as a frail mortal, he was sometimes subject to desponding thoughts,) nearer the condition of honour and dignity, to which it was fore-ordained that he should be advanced, than when he was diligent in performing his filial and fraternal duties in his father's house, and among his ungrateful brethren; and this history concerning him is undoubtedly left upon record, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might

have hope ; for times will arrive, when we shall be ready to ask, “ Can these be the dealings of God ? Can he, who never willingly afflicts the children of men, allow me, (if indeed his mercies are over all his works), to be thus exercised and forgotten, as a man out of mind ? Once, in my prosperity, I said, I shall never be moved ; but where are his former loving kindnesses, and where shall I turn to behold the light of his countenance, which sometimes, as I conceived, shone so bright upon me ? Were these the days of error and delusion, and did I, in the heat of imagination only, fancy that my God beheld me with an eye of favour ?” Search the Scriptures, O Christian ! and ask those who have more experience than thyself in the ways of the Lord, and thou wilt discover that thy case is no uncommon one, but, rather, what is experienced more or less by all thy fellow pilgrims ; and this state of darkness and distress is represented, not only in the solitary instance of Joseph, but in that of David, and others. It is also shewn in the history of the whole people of Israel, whose going forth from Egypt was at midnight, the time of the greatest darkness, and whose journeys through the wilderness from station to station, by the space of forty years, were attended with many calamitous circumstances, inducing them frequently to

disbelieve the promises of God, and almost to abandon themselves to despair. Now, that state of resignation with which the Christian should meet such trials, which will prove his growth in grace, may be shewn from what we find Isaiah L. 10. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

2. Another mark of the soul's advance, is its desire of being more and more transformed into the image of Christ. It would know him, not only as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world, but so as to be united to him, and found in him; and it desires to experience the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, and to be made conformable to his death. Every thing that Christ was, so far as his example was imitable, it would be; and will never be satisfied with any short attainments. To be accepted, it is not sufficient to believe only upon the name of the Son of God; but to be actually blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, our faith must be accompanied with an attractive power. We must put him on,* as the Scripture speaks; we must be really members of his body, and par-

* Romans, xiii. 14.

takers of his spirit. Let us take care that we deceive not ourselves with a vain profession, but let us examine ourselves, and see that we have the proof of our advancement,

1. By learning to die with Christ. These are his own words, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* To this command did those, who believed in him, pay a scrupulous attention; therefore was Saint Paul enabled to say, "I am crucified with Christ."† Now, as by the death of our bodies we understand a separation from that principle or world, in which we have been accustomed to live, we may conceive that the mortification, which the Scriptures recommend to Christians, is very similar in its nature; and, therefore, we may say, that it consists in the withdrawing of our minds from worldly affections; and though, while we are in the body, we must necessarily seek proper supplies for its sustenance, and have some communication with our fellow creatures upon earth, yet are we not to claim a propriety in any thing, but to sit so loose to all our enjoyments, as to give them up with cheerfulness, when the Lord thinks fit to demand the sacrifice. To convince us of this he says, in the verses immediately preced-

* Luke ix. 23.

† Gal. xii. 20.

ing that in which the bearing of the cross is inculcated, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me ;*" and in another place, "He that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple."† Now, my brethren, inquire if there be any beloved lust, which you are unwilling to give up, any gratification of the senses, which you are in the habit of enjoying, to part with which you feel reluctance. I am not supposing that you are grossly vicious and profane, as those reprobates, who have no fear of God before their eyes, nor yet that you are indifferent about religious duties, but I am presuming that you may profess the Christian religion, and entertain a certain respect for the worship of God, while yet you want that growing conformity to the image of Christ, which it becomes you to seek after. Inquire, then, if you love the world and the things thereof, what is the hook which connects you with them, and know, that what are in many cases lawful enjoyments, and even commendable duties, may assume the name and character of sinful attachments, if they draw your affections from God, whom you ought to love supremely, and concerning whom you should be able heartily to express yourself

* Mat. x. 37.

* Luke xiv. 33.

in the words of the Psalmist, "Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon Earth that I desire beside thee."* If you are sincere Christians, I shall not find it difficult to bring you to this acknowledgment. "O Thou, who art the Searcher of all hearts, well dost thou know that mine has been too much taken up with the love of this present evil world." Yet, would I hope, you have been struggling for deliverance, and praying for victory. Looking back to times past, you can declare, "Several things, which I once highly prized, have lost their value with me; I have met with so many crosses and disappointments; I have been deprived of so many friends, and perhaps very dear relations, and I have met with such treachery and deceit from others, who I had little reason to suspect would have treated me so unkindly, that I cannot think of the world, and love it as I once did." This is well; it marks advancement. Your earthly affections are dying, but not yet dead. You will find, so long as life remains, that the conflict must be continued; but go on, fight manfully, and all enemies shall shortly be bruised under your feet.

3. As a further mark of growing in grace, you will be desirous to depart, and to be with Christ. As, by the Gospel, life and immortality

* Ps. lxxiii. 25.

are brought to light, and as a glorious prospect of permanent happiness is set before the believer, he acquires, by degrees, that state of mind, which will fit him for the presence of God, and for that blessed society, with whom he soon hopes to lift up his voice in praise to his glorious Redeemer. Even before the separation which death makes of soul and body, he has his conversation in Heaven, and, as it is written in the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "He is come unto Mount Sion, and unto the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of Angels, to the general Assembly of the Church of the first-born, which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant;" that is, he is so connected with all these, that though he sees them not, yet is he placed among them, and in some measure enjoys their presence; for a divine peace, which passeth all understanding, and which he knows not how to describe, pervades his soul, and he can say with the Spouse, in the Song of Solomon, "My beloved is mine, and I am his."* He thinks it painful, that he should be so long separated from the object of his desire, therefore he adopts the words of the holy Psalmist, and cries out "O that I had

* Song of Solomon, xi. 16.

wings like a dove, for then would I fly away, and be at rest."* And again, "As the Hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God! My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God, when shall I come and appear before God?"† Death, which to the wicked only presents a scene of terror, or of gloom, becomes to the advanced Christian, a subject of pleasant meditation. He perplexes not himself with the chilling thought of the coldness of the grave, of corruption, and of worms, but stretches his imagination beyond all these. Jesus, he remembers, is the Resurrection and the Life, and is become the first-fruits of them that sleep. Hence, he is assured, that he shall himself also rise from the dead in due time; then shall this corruptible put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality; and if an unbelieving thought should, for a moment, intrude itself, then does he immediately check it, and exclaim with afflicted, but blessed, Job. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and though worms shall destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Has this lively hope, my brethren, taken possession of your souls? Does it raise your minds above the world, and make you long for that inheritance, which will be allotted to all the subjects

* Ps. lv. 6.

† Ps. lxii. 1, 2.

of the Redeemer's Kingdom? Does it, consequently, give you victory over the fear of death, and make you ready and willing to depart, in whatsoever manner, and at whatsoever time, it shall please the Lord? Are your hearts so filled with Divine Love, that you can say, with Saint Paul, "Who shall separate us from the Love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us; for I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor heighth, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* You see from hence, to what a state of holy triumph a Christian may attain, and how, in the midst of such misfortunes and distress as would sink the most lofty spirits into despair, the servant of God can rejoice, yea and rejoice the more, the more he is oppressed; for "These light afflictions," he says, "are but for a moment, and shall work out for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."†

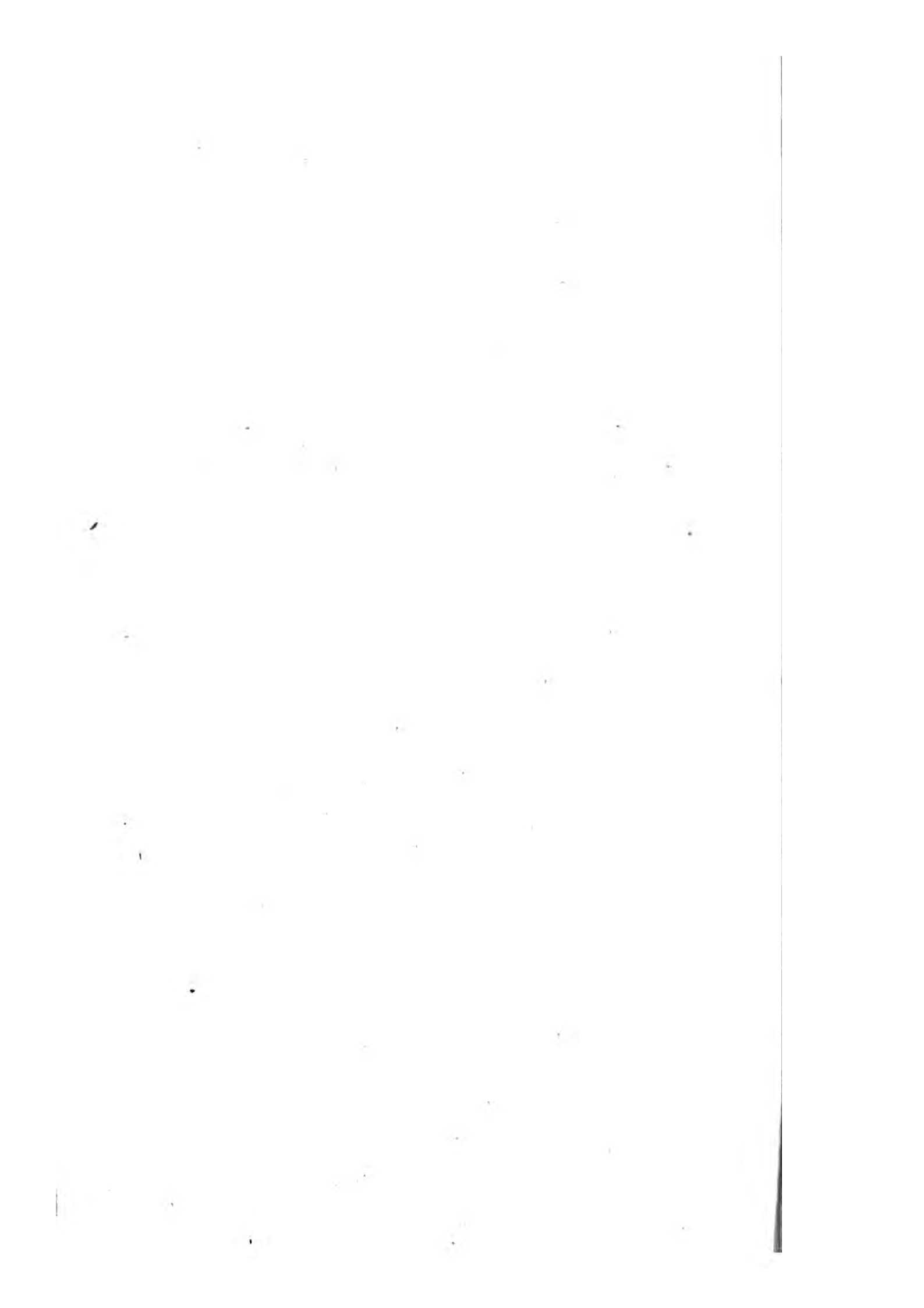
* Rom. viii. 35-39.

† 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Seeing then, that such is the hope, the comfort, the triumph of the established Christian, I beseech you to leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and to go on to perfection. Do you ask "How shall we go on? How shall we attain to that happy condition? Will it not be very difficult, nay, almost impossible, because, looking round upon our fellow Christians, we see few or none so far advanced?" I answer, the difficulty will be soon conquered, if you only go the right way to work; and you will find, upon a more particular inquiry, that there are many who have been able to surmount it. All depends upon your determination to give up yourselves into the hands of God, and upon the yielding up of yourselves, as instruments to perform his holy commandments. He will work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure, and while you continue to seek him and wait upon him, he will cause the light of his countenance to shine upon you, and enable you to behold his glory. Let your eye be single, your purpose be fixed, and you shall go forward; and though the present be but a "Day of small things,"* as the prophet speaks, yet to the knowledge of greater ones you shall soon arrive, and the Lord, in whom you trust, and to whom you continually offer your supplications, shall

* Zechariah, iv. 10.

perfect in you that which he hath began, and make you completely happy in his glorious kingdom. That this may be your portion, may he of his infinite mercy grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

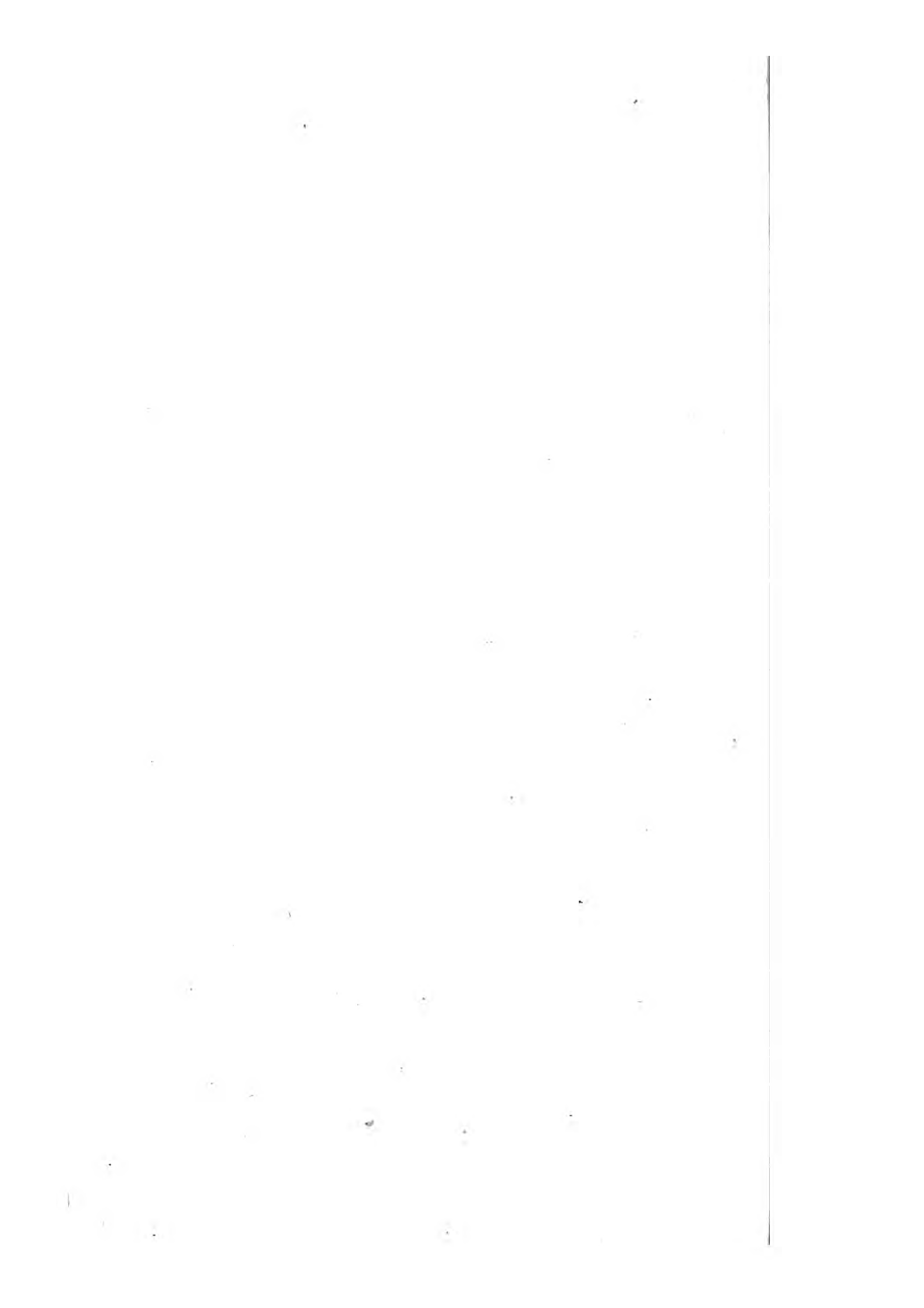


SERMON XXIV.

ON THE GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE

WHICH ARE OBTAINED BY

FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR



SERMON XXIV.

TITUS, 1. 4.

*Grace, Mercy, and Peace from God the Father, and the Lord
Jesus Christ our Saviour.*

SAIN**T PAUL**, in all his epistles, whether addressed to the Church at large, or only to individuals, introduces what he has to say with a prayer expressed in terms little different from the words of my text; for being one, who had himself tasted that the Lord was gracious, and who had the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost, which was given to him, he felt an ardent desire to communicate the blessings which he had received, and to make all men partakers of a happiness infinitely superior to all the delights which this vain world can afford. May the same disposition dwell in my heart, and in that of every minister of the Gospel, and may we set forth, with all our ability, the abundant goodness of our God and Saviour.

To you, my dear brethren, do I heartily wish
Grace, Mercy, and Peace from God the Father,

and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. To this may your hearts answer, Amen. May the Lord of all power and might, the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift, confer these blessings on your souls. Thus seeking, you shall obtain; and, while I deliver the Truths of the glorious Gospel of Christ, you will, I trust, receive them with satisfaction and delight.

In speaking upon the words which I have chosen for the subject of our consideration at this time, I purpose shewing distinctly, what we are to understand by Grace, by Mercy, and by Peace, and then shall remind you from whom these gifts proceed; namely, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

1st. Let us consider what we are to understand by Grace. This imports favour, conferred on the part of the Giver, without any merit on the part of the Receiver. The grace of God is an infinite source of Divine Love, which, like the Sun in the firmament sending forth his beams on the whole creation, flows forth continually on every being in uninterrupted streams of goodness. We cannot conceive that the Creator, who could want no addition to his own happiness, would have formed myriads of beings, except with the

design of making them happy. By grace they were formed, by grace they are preserved, and by grace they have all their capacities for enjoyment. To the bounty of God it is owing that we live, and move, and have our being, and through him we obtain all things pertaining to life and godliness; to godliness, as well as to life, for in addition to the common benefits of nature, these are bestowed upon Christians, according to the measure of the gift of Christ, to one this, and to another that; not agreeably to their will, but to his good pleasure, to the end that all may conspire in their several stations, and according to their several abilities, to spread the Gospel among men, and to bring glory to God. Formerly the gifts, of which I am speaking, were miraculous powers, which could not be acquired by any human art or ingenuity; for to one was given by the Spirit, the word of wisdom, to another faith, to another the gifts of healing, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.* These were bestowed to work conviction in the minds of the Heathens, and to prove, beyond a doubt, that the gospel of Christ was the power of God

* 1 Cor. xii. 8—10.

unto salvation to every one that believeth ; but even now, though such remarkable manifestations are less visible, every humble Christian will heartily exclaim “ By the grace of God I am what I am, and I ascribe it to His goodness, that I was first led to serious reflection, and that my heart was broken off from its attachment to this present evil world. To the same goodness it is owing that I have been inclined to seek a better and a more enduring substance, and that I now feel within myself a constant and abiding desire to know his commandments, and to glorify his holy name. I labour to approve myself as his servant ; yet, verily, not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” This, yea and much more than this, is included in the name of Grace ; and the Apostle, in wishing that Titus might be a partaker of it, prayed that every good and perfect gift that cometh from above might descend upon him. This, brethren, is my prayer for you. I know that your wants are great and many ; but your God is able to supply them all, and I am certain he will, if you are only disposed to receive his bounties, bestow them upon you in far greater abundance than you can ask or think.

2nd. We must remember, that with Grace we are also to join the consideration of Mercy, which implies, that the person who receives the

blessings of heaven, has not only no merit, but much demerit, so that if he were to be dealt with according to his deserts, he would feel the fierce anger of a sin-avenging God. Who can read, believing what he reads to be true, the declaration of the living God in his Holy Word, and not tremble? "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them."* Two precepts of that law are, "Thou shalt do no murder." "Thou shalt not commit adultery:" and an infallible interpreter has told us, that he who is angry with his brother without a cause, transgresseth the first of these; and he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her, transgresseth the latter. The same law, in all its other precepts, forbids, not merely the outward acts of sin, but lays a restraint upon all irregular desires, so that if a man does but covet that which belongs to his neighbour, he stands guilty before God. Justly, then, may we all pray, "Lord have mercy upon us, miserable offenders," and justly may we cry out, "Enter not into judgment with thy servants, O Lord, for in thy sight, shall no man living be justified." What more benevolent wish then, than that of Mercy, can one commissioned to bless

* Gal. iii. 10.

in the name of the Lord, breathe forth? It is an expression wonderfully rich in goodness and love. It intimates that he, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, and who doth whatsoever he pleaseth both in heaven and in earth, is no less ready to pardon than he is to punish; yea, more ready to pardon, for he delighteth in mercy; and to give the strongest proof possible of his compassion towards sinners, he sent his only-begotten Son into the world, to take our nature upon him, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all who believe in him might not perish, but have everlasting life. Through this dear Redeemer there is ample room for the display of Mercy without the infringement of Justice; for God having solemnly engaged himself not to let sin go unpunished, caused to light upon him the iniquities of us all. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree, and by his stripes we are healed.* Considering, then, the abundance of Mercy that was stored up in the bosom of God for the benefit of sinners, the Apostle would not pray in vain that it might be bestowed on the deserving; that is, on those who felt their want of it, those, who were fully sensible of their sinfulness, and who, had they even been cast into

* Peter, ii. 24:

hell itself, would have been constrained to say, "Just and righteous art thou, O Lord, in all thy ways."

3. Another blessing, accompanying Grace and Mercy, is Peace, which is a sweet composure of spirit, arising from a well-founded sense of the Divine favour. It proceeds from the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father, and which beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God,* and must be waited for with humility and prayer. If Titus, and the other Christians, to whom Paul addressed himself, could have laid claim to peace as their own property, and have kept possession of it, as long as they pleased, there would have been no necessity to have besought the Lord to bestow it on them; but well did those holy men know, that all comfort cometh from God, that when he withdraws his presence, all is dark and gloomy, and that, when He again lifts up the light of his countenance, joy and cheerfulness return. Is there any thing, my brethren, in all the world, that is calculated to afford more content to your minds than the persuasion that you are at peace with God? Suppose you have every worldly gratification that your heart can wish; a splendid mansion and costly furniture, variety of raiment to cover

* Romans, viii. 15, 16.

and adorn the body, a table spread with dainties, and an appetite sufficiently keen to enjoy whatever you may be indulged with: Suppose every person and every thing round about you contributing to your ease, and conspiring to increase your satisfaction: Suppose all this, and more than this, if ought beside can be wanting to make you a more envied mortal, yet suppose withal, that you have no well-founded hope of the favour of God, but rather a suspicion that your soul is not in a state of safety, can you really enjoy peace, and can your condition be esteemed enviable by persons of sound sense and understanding? I think not; and allow me to assure you that though you should toil night and day, and try ten thousand schemes to make you happy, you never will obtain what you seek for till you find Peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. *That* is “the Peace, which passeth all understanding,” and for that we pray at the close of all our Sermons, as well as at other times, being heartily desirous that it may take possession of you souls. I am now to remind you

4. From whence the gifts of Grace, Mercy, and Peace proceed. They flow forth, as the Apostle takes care to inform us, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

They come from God our Father. Many people entertain strange notions concerning God. They imagine him to be a cruel tyrant, who delighteth only to enact rigorous laws, severely to judge the transgressors of them, and to punish, without pity, the unhappy criminals. And it is true that God is angry with the wicked every day, and that he threateneth to rain down upon them storm and tempest, fire and brimstone ; nevertheless we have authority from the Scriptures to say, that this same God is Love, that he is very pitiful, and of tender mercy, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the Truth, and be saved. Seeing the case is so, when ever we think of our sins, as frequently, if blessed with tenderness of conscience, we shall do, wishing if it were possible, to undo all that has been done, and whenever we think that the God who made us and governs us, is a God loving justice and taking vengeance ; whenever, I say, we so think, we must remember that as Christians, we have a right to entertain other thoughts also. We have a right to contemplate Righteousness and Peace meeting together, Mercy and Truth embracing each other. We should bid our desponding thoughts be-gone, and think only of the Grace, Mercy, and

Peace, which flow from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him, our Father also.

Parents!—What do you wish for your children? Is it not that they may be blessed and happy? This they shall be, if you have any goodness in you, according to your power, which may perhaps be but small; but the case is not so with your heavenly Father. He has all power; and, when he chooses to exercise it, none shall be able to restrain him.

Remember again, that the gifts of which I have been speaking proceed from the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. Think of him as one who bore our nature, was exercised with our temptations, and was oppressed with our infirmities. Think of him as a friend, and as a brother. Think of his tears—for “Jesus wept;” of his prayers, and of his cries for your salvation. Think of all these things, and then say, if his bosom be not an ocean of love, and if aught but grace, mercy, and peace can flow forth from him?

On your souls, my brethren, may there be Grace, Mercy, and Peace, from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. Why have not all of you these blessings? How is it, that all of you do not magnify the Lord? How is it, that your spirits do not rejoice in

God your Saviour? If you would answer me plainly, you would say, "The reason is this: we prefer things temporal to things eternal. We must and we will have our earthly enjoyments, though we should never enjoy the Kingdom of Heaven. The things that are here we see, we feel, we take interest in; the things that are to be hereafter are unseen and unknown, and we are determined not to give up a present advantage for a prospect in futurity of we know not what." My dear friends, if such be your reasoning,—and the thoughtless, giddy, and careless conduct, of some among you, proves that you reason no otherwise,—I do beseech you, for your souls' sake, to be serious for a little while, and attend to what I have to say to you. Have you plenty of good things, and have you a prospect of still adding to your store? Is this state of sufficiency and independence a matter of joy to yourselves, and of envy to your neighbours? Let all this be granted; yet, after all, what a poor satisfaction have you! The thought of Death plants a thorn in your pillow, and is a pricking sword in your heart, which you must feel at many an unwelcome hour, when you would be gay and jovial. Instead of hearing that small still voice, "which only whispers Love," a neglected word shall often force itself upon your recollection, such as

this, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*" or this, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: † then whose shall be those things which thou hast provided?" O! that men should be so bewitched as to prefer the riches of this world to the riches of divine grace, that they should value the favour of their fellow creatures more highly than the favour of God, and that they should dream of obtaining peace from those things, which, according to their very nature, are likely only to produce perplexity, trouble, and care! But, most of you have no riches to make this world delightful. You have little of human regard, and so much difficulty to struggle through the toils of life, that you do not enjoy much peace of mind. I say you *do* not, but far am I from affirming that you *can* not, for in the deepest poverty, and under the very scorn of men, you may be listening to the voice of God, and, fixing your minds upon eternal things, may obtain a peace which passeth all understanding. It is strange that you, who have no portion here, should not seek one hereafter. It is strange, that when you complain of your lot, and look with an envious eye upon your more wealthy neighbours, you should never consider that this state of things is to last

* Mark viii. 36.

† Luke xii. 20.

but a very little while, and that, when it is over, you may change places, with those who are now above you; that they shall be brought down, and that you shall be exalted. It is surely very strange, that you should be satisfied with the mere rumour of Life and Immortality being brought to light by the Gospel, and never seek them, nor even desire them. But the day is coming, O sad day to those who make light of the heavenly message! when you will know the greatness of your loss, and lament too late, that you missed the opportunity of attending to those things, which you foolishly neglected. Still the door of mercy is open; enter it, my brethren, this day, and live for ever.

That Grace, Mercy, and Peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour, may be the portion of the subscribers to this volume of sermons, the Author sincerely prays; and he humbly trusts that the Spirit of Benevolence which has been planted in their hearts by the Giver of all Goodness, may not lose its reward.



FINIS.

