

The Works of William Jay

Volume XII

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SHORT DISCOURSES

TO BE READ IN FAMILIES.

WILLIAM JAY.

*For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”—*GEN. xviii., 19.

*“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children; and shall talk to them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”—*DEUT. vi., 6, 7.

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DISCOURSE LVI.

CONVERSION.

“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”—MATT. xviii. 3.

THE disciples were such dull scholars, that, after all the education our Lord and Saviour had given them, they were yet imagining that his kingdom was “of this world.” They supposed that he would deliver them from the Roman yoke; advance them as a nation to the high places of the earth; and lead them forth conquering and to conquer. In this secular empire they believed there would be degrees of power and glory, as in any other; and, expecting that these places would be filled by some of their own body, after a dispute among themselves, they inquire of their Master which of them should be the greatest?

How does our Lord reprove and instruct them?

Instead of delivering a lecture on the abstract nature and advantages of a state of mind with which they appeared to be almost entirely unacquainted, “he called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst.”

of them—and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Let us consider,

I. THE TEMPER THAT DISTINGUISHES THE SUBJECTS OF DIVINE GRACE.

II. THE WAY IN WHICH WE ARE TO ATTAIN IT.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF POSSESSING IT.

I. THE TEMPER THAT DISTINGUISHES THE SUBJECTS OF DIVINE GRACE. It is infantile. We must be “as little children.” But it is not to be inferred that we are to resemble them in every thing—

We are not to be like them in ignorance: “Be ye not children in understanding.” A greyheaded babe would be an unnatural and a shocking sight: and yet there are persons who have been many years in the religious world who have never cultivated their minds, nor improved their privileges and opportunities; and who may be addressed in the words of the Apostle: “When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which 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 who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

We are not to resemble them in fickleness: “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby

they lie in wait to deceive." Children are extremely versatile. Though they are impressed with a thousand things, and seem for the time incapable of growing weary of them, they pursue nothing with certainty and constancy. And there are men—there are professors—like them. They have no determinate sentiments; they have no fixed plan; they live extempore; they wander from party to party, they rove from preacher to preacher; you can place no dependence upon them; their attachment and behaviour to-day are no proofs of their attachment and behaviour to-morrow. Let not such think to rise to eminence. Consistency, steadiness, is essential to character. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

We are not to resemble them in sullenness, in waywardness, in pettishness. Have you never met with persons whom it is impossible to please? Or whose importance and vanity are gratified by the perplexity of your attempt? It is not because you employed the wrong expedient that you were not successful; any other would have met with the same fate. The more you allure, the further are they off—the very thing to which our Saviour refers. "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented."

In all this we are forbidden to be found like little children. And yet we are enjoined by our Saviour to resemble them. How is this? I answer; metaphors employed by the sacred writers are not to be taken universally, but in connexion with the subject

that requires illustration. It is sufficient that there be a real and striking resemblance in the article of comparison. And this is unquestionably the case here.

For we may observe that as soon as children are ushered into the world, they cry for the nourishment God has prepared for them. And as it is in nature, so it is in grace. The new creature has wants to be relieved, and appetites to be indulged: and there is provision suited to them in religion. Hence we read, "as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

Again. Little children are teachable, and ready of belief. They receive, with unsuspecting confidence, the declaration of their father. If any doubt arises, if any dispute occurs, they run to him, and his testimony decides every thing. Thus should it be with us. We are to receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child. I was going to say, We cannot be too credulous when God speaks. He cannot be imposed upon himself; and he cannot deceive us: his wisdom forbids the one, and his truth the other. What one party believes, and another denies, should have little influence over us; while we have the judgment of God, to which we can appeal. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." When we find any thing revealed in this Book, we are not to hesitate in admitting it; we are not to reason upon it, "How can these things be? "but with a ready mind yield up ourselves to the "obedience of faith; and do all things without murmuring or disputing."

Little children also are distinguished by a freedom from anxieties. Though they possess nothing adequate

to their own support, and see not the resources from which their supplies come, they feel no uneasiness: they rely with cheerfulness on the father to provide for them; and never question his ability or his will. And shall we despond because we are not affluent? Shall we be miserable because we are called to live by faith on the providence of God? Shall we disobey that gracious command, "casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you"? Shall we never regard the address of our Lord to his disciples? "Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls!" "And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Little children are devoid of malignity. The trifling resentments they sometimes feel and discover are soon over, and they are "at one again," and as friendly as before. There is nothing implacable in them: they easily forgive, and perfectly forget. For which reason the Apostle says, "In malice be ye

children; "which is the same as saying, in another place, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

But the thing principally, though not exclusively, intended, is the humility of little children. Hence our Saviour adds, "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Little children have no ideas of distinction till they are given them. They do not assume state, or stand up for points of honour. If they were not taught otherwise by their hopeful parents, they would be satisfied with the simplest fare and the plainest raiment. Left to themselves, the children of a nobleman would play familiarly with the child of a peasant. They have no great aims, no towering projects.; they are pleased with little and common things.

And Christians are required not only to wear humility, but to be "clothed" with it. They are to be sensible of their insufficiency; they are to "condescend to men of low estate." They are not to be ambitious of pre-eminence; they are not to be "desirous of vain-glory; provoking one another, envying one another." They are not to "seek great things for themselves; "they are to "learn, in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be content: "and, longing to be good rather than to be great, feel the sentiment of David: "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in

great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child." Having considered the nature of this temper,

II. Let us inquire THE WAY IN WHICH WE ARE TO ATTAIN IT. It is, by conversion. We must be "converted," and "*become as little children.*" And this teaches us two things, which ought to be remembered.

First. The temper we are required to possess is not in us naturally, but is the consequence of a Divine change. Innate depravity is, alas! too fully established by Scripture, observation, and experience, to be denied. A man that knows himself will readily subscribe to the mortifying confession of David: "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me;" and acknowledge, with Paul, "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." This being admitted, it follows, that we are not *made* Christians, but *become* such; that it is the effect not of a natural, but a spiritual birth. Ye must be "*born again.*" As creatures, we are in Adam; but if any man be in Christ, "he is a new creature: *old things have passed away; and, behold, all things are become new.*" In order to be religious, we must be saved—"saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost."—And since this conversion is designed to produce in depraved beings such a character as our Saviour describes, it also follows that this conversion implies much more than a change of opinions, or a mere reformation of manners. It is a renovation in the state of the heart; in our principles, motives, and

dispositions. It turns the whole bias of the soul another way, and proves by its tendency that it is Divine; according to the promise: "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 I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

Secondly. This change is to be judged of by its effect. Here many people err. They endeavour to ascertain the time and the manner, and the instrument of their conversion—and distress themselves because they cannot determine. But the grand thing is, to inquire—whether the work be done; whether we have passed from death to life; whether we can say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see"? On the other hand, persons may talk of a change that took place in them at such a period, under such a minister—of the reality of which it would be difficult to find any *present* evidence. But what has your supposed conversion done for you? In what state, in what temper has it *left* you? Wherein do you differ from *others* and from *yourselves*? Whom do you *now* resemble? The picture here portrayed?—Do you resemble little children by your spiritual desires, your faith in God's word, your reliance on his providence, the kindness of your disposition, the humbleness of your mind? And is your want of more conformity to this model your chief distress? And are you praying, as if nothing com-

paratively had been yet done, "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me"?

III. Let us observe THE IMPORTANCE OF POSSESSING THIS TEMPER. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."—An exclusion the most awful; the most unavoidable; the most universal.

First The most *awful*. Many things court our attention that are by no means essential to our safety or welfare. We ought to be ashamed of the impressions they make upon our minds: they are unworthy of our hopes or fears: it is of little consequence whether we gain or lose them; and it will be our wonder hereafter that we could ever have been so much influenced by them. But to be deprived of the blessings of the Gospel dispensation; to be excluded from all the treasures of grace and glory; to see infinite riches, honours, and pleasures, and to hear a voice saying, They are not for thee!—"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." If you do not deem these blessings of importance *now*, it is because you never reflect upon them—but you will not always be able to banish thought: it is because you have substitutes for them, and these divert, though they do not satisfy—but all of them will soon be tom from you: and what, in a dying hour and in a judgment-day, will you do without an interest in this heavenly kingdom!

An exclusion, Secondly, the most *unavoidable*. If God has said in the Scripture that "without holiness no man *shall* see the Lord if God *must* be true, and the Scripture cannot be broken; if there

must be a suitableness between the faculty and the object before there can be enjoyment; if those distinctions *must* be maintained which preserve the moral order and harmony of the world; if we *must* be like God, before we can hold intercourse with him; if light *can* have no communion with darkness, and righteousness have *no* fellowship with unrighteousness—then, upon every principle to which either reason or religion conducts us, every unrenewed sinner stands inevitably excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

An exclusion, Finally, the most *universal*. There are few things in the world so invariably established as not to allow of some deviations. Every general rule has its exceptions. Even the fixed laws of nature have been changed; iron has been made to swim, and flames have been forbidden to burn. But be not deceived: our Saviour here reveals a law that admits of *no* change; and lays down a rule that allows of *no* exception. There never has been, there is not, there never will be, there never can be, an instance even to qualify this assertion: “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Let us conclude with these additional reflections.

First. From our Saviour’s address, you learn to improve from the various objects we behold in the world of nature. If you wish to hold communion with God, you may be reminded of him all the day long; if you wish to learn, you never need be at a loss for a teacher: “Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee.” Hast thou a garden? And dost thou never walk in it but as a creature—delighted

with its flowers and its fruits? Dost thou never think of that garden in which Adam fell; or of that garden in which Jesus suffered? Hast thou children? They *are* cares; they *may* be comforts: but they *must* be instructors and admonishers, unless we are careless and stupid in the most criminal degree.

Secondly. We see what a difference there is between the opinion of the world and the judgment of God. The natural man admires the temper that will endure no insults: he applauds the successful votary of wealth and power: he talks of a becoming pride, a noble pride: to him it is a paradox that “all pride is an abomination to the Lord that “the meek shall inherit the earth that “the slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city.” He wonders to hear, that if “he would be wise, he must become a fool that he may be wise that to sink in his own esteem is the way to rise in the esteem of Heaven; that he who “exalteth himself shall be abased, and he who abaseth himself shall be exalted.” But such is the testimony of God; and his judgment is always according to truth. Oh that we may take our views of excellency alone from him; and make his estimate our own! “For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.”

Thirdly. We congratulate those who have the Spirit of Christ. The world knoweth you not; you think meanly of yourselves, and you ought; for you are encompassed with infirmity—but you are heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him: an everlasting kingdom; a kingdom in comparison with which the renowned empires of the earth vanish into smoke—the kingdom of heaven!

What can you desire more? How thankful, how satisfied, how happy you should live!

And how holy!—

Be concerned to maintain a behaviour answerable to your state and expectation. You are princes. “Walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.”

DISCOURSE LVII.

THE LOSS OF CHILDREN.

“And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”—2 SAM. xii. 22, 23.

THERE is much to censure in David. Yet He, whose understanding is infinite, and whose judgment is always according to truth, has pronounced him “a man after his own heart and told us, that “he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.”

The narrative of his crime has, it is to be feared, been the occasion of hardening ungodly men in their iniquity. But this has been the consequence of perversion. It was written not for encouragement, but for caution. It cries, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall;” it shows the readiness of God to pardon the truly penitent who confess and forsake their sin; and it exemplifies

not only the efficacy, but the nature of genuine repentance.

You will not wonder that I have referred to this awful event in David's history, since the subject of our present meditation is derived from it. Let us consider—HIS AFFLICTION—HIS BEHAVIOUR UNDER IT—AND THE EXPLANATION HE GIVES OF HIS CONDUCT.

I. His AFFLICTION was the death of his child. The death of a child is by no means an uncommon event. If our offspring are spared, and appear like olive plants around our table, we ought to be thankful, and to rejoice; yet to rejoice with trembling. When we reflect on the tenderness of their frame, and consider to how many accidents and diseases they are liable; and that many of their earliest complaints cannot be perfectly ascertained, and may be injured by the very means employed for their relief—the wonder is that they ever reach maturity.

Near half of the human race die in a state of infancy. Some have the allotment which Job so passionately wished had been his own: "Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck? "Others are dressed and appear on the stage of mortal life; but, long before the close of a single scene, withdraw, and are found no more. Others are spared longer, and multiply attractions and endearments. Some begin to open their powers, as well as charms. You saw rising up the seeds of instruction you had sown; the child was forming into the companion—but you looked, and, lo! he was not—and you sighed, "Childhood and youth is vanity: "Some

lose one child from among many; and even this can ill be spared. What then must it be to lose an only one; and perhaps not the only one in possession, but the only one in hope! What a mortality is there in some families! How often have some fathers and mothers been visited with breach upon breach! Here, as I walk over the mansions of the dead, I find two buried in the same grave, and inscribed above them, "They were pleasant in life, and in death not divided." There I find six slumbering in the same bed of dust, and the stone thus vents the anguish and submission of the parental heart—

"The dear delights we here enjoy,
And fondly call our own,
Are but short favours borrow'd now,
To be repaid anon."

The death of David's child was predicted by Nathan, and was the consequence of the father's sin. "Because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die." But how is it that the guilty father continues, and the innocent babe is cut off? "The landlord," says an old writer, "may distrain on any part of the premises he chooses." We would rather say, that there are many cases in which he requires us to walk by faith, and not by sight: that he does all things well, even when clouds and darkness are round about him; we would say, that he indemnified this child by taking it to himself—while the father was punished, and suffered more relatively than if he had died himself.

The execution follows the sentence. "The Lord

struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick."

II. Observe THE BEHAVIOUR OF DAVID WITH REGARD TO THE AFFLICTION.

It takes in prayer—"He besought God for the child." What was so likely to enable him to gain his wishes, or to bring his mind into a state of preparation for a denial of them? Prayer is always proper: but how seasonable, how soothing, how sanctifying, in the day of trouble! Blessed resource and refuge! may we always make use of thee. "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."—"Is any afflicted? let him pray."

He also humbled himself: "He fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth." There was doubtless something peculiar in this case: the child was the offspring of adultery. Much of David's distress arose from reflection on his sin: his grief was the grief not only of affliction, but of penitence. And when are our losses and trials purely afflictions? Is there nothing in our sufferings to bewail but the smart? Is it not sin that has made this world a vale of tears? Is it not our remaining depravity that constrains a merciful God to employ such painful dispensations? Are we not guilty of idolizing or undervaluing the blessings we are going to resign? May we not charge God foolishly in the trouble we are going to enter? Is it not desirable to know wherefore he contends with us? Humiliation is as necessary as prayer.

We have seen David's behaviour *before* the death of the child; let us remark his behaviour *after* it.

His servants feared to tell him of the event; for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself if we tell him that the child is dead? But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead." And what does he?

Some disregard their persons, and affect a slovenliness, in grief. But David "arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel."

Some remain invisible; and even the temple sees nothing of them during the season that peculiarly requires their attendance: for "God is known in his palaces for a refuge." But David "came into the house of the Lord and worshipped." It was to acknowledge the hand of God in his affliction; it was to say, with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; and blessed be the name of the Lord: "it was to praise him, that his sin, though chastised, was forgiven; and to beseech him to proceed no further.

Some disregard the duties of their stations and connexions in life; and weeping hinders sowing. But David knew he had a family that demanded his attention, and whom it behoved him to convince that the exercises of religion can relieve and refresh the mind: "and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat"

Believers are "men wondered at;" and they who are estranged from the life of God cannot comprehend the principles upon which the actions of believers

turn. They consider forgiveness of injuries as a proof of cowardice. They mistake deep humiliation and fervent prayer for an inordinate attachment to creatures; and view acquiescence and thankfulness under trials as senseless indifference. "Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? Thou didst fast and weep for the child when it was alive; but when the child was dead thou didst rise and eat bread."

"But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, though he himself is judged of no man." His service is a reasonable service; his conduct results from conviction and motive. David therefore explains himself: "And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said. Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live! But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

This brings us to the

III. part of our subject.—"And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?"—He deemed the event *uncertain*. It is obvious that he did not consider the threatening as absolute and irreversible. He knew that many things had been denounced conditionally; and he knew also that the goodness of God was beyond all his thoughts.

As there seemed a possibility of success, so the desirableness of the blessing led him to avail himself of it. One might have supposed that the death of a child so young would not have been a very considerable affliction, especially as he would have been

always a memorandum of his sin, and he could not have questioned his future happiness: but he speaks of his recovery as an instance of God's *grace* to himself—so great is the force of parental affection. *His* attachment indeed seems to have been extraordinary; and this was doubtless permitted of Heaven to render his correction the more severe. Such is the import of his reasoning: "I should have deemed it a peculiar favour had God spared my child; and while life remained, the indulgence of hope was not improper, nor the use of means unlawful. Submission *follows* the event."

But what led him to assuage his grief? What made him—I will not say, insensible, but resigned? Attend, ye who have sustained bereaving providences, and behold your model. "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."—The unavailableness of grief—the certainty of his own dissolution—the hope of a union in heaven—these were the sources from which his resignation flowed.

First. Continued grief was unavailing. "Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? "Ah, no! says one; but this is the very accent of my loss. "There is hope of a tree if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease; but man lieth down and riseth not." I have seen my child asleep, but I could awake him at pleasure; but no call can pierce the ear of death. I have taken leave of my child for a journey, but the pain of parting was alleviated by the hope of meeting again; but now I shall see his face and hear his voice no more. I am

reminded of his presence throughout the long day: he meets me no more in my favourite walk; at table his *seat is empty*—and the places that once knew him will know him no more *for ever*. But, upon this very principle, grief is proved useless; and what cannot be prevented or removed, must be endured. Such is the appointment of Heaven; and his determination is not only sovereign, but righteous and good. To alter it is therefore not only impossible in the execution, but rebellious in the attempt.

Secondly. He contemplates his own death as certain: “I shall go to him.” By this he intends the grave: and this part of our subject is common to *all* mankind. As sure as any of your connexions are gone, you are going after, and will soon join them “in the house appointed for all living.” And has not this a tendency to moderate your grief? Does it not remind you of the vanity of life? Does it not proclaim that “time is short; and therefore it remains that they that rejoice be as though they rejoiced not, and they that weep as though they wept not”? If we were to live here always, or to live here long, we should be justified in feeling a deeper interest in its events; but we are only like a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night, and in the morning goes on his way.—And does it not show me that my chief business is to prepare for my own removal, rather than to lament the departure of others? I have no time for unprofitable sadness—I am just going to take a journey of infinite importance—

“Awake, my soul: with solemn care
Thy true condition learn;
 What are *thy* hopes? how sure, how fair?
 And what thy *great concern?*”

How natural, how beautiful, how solemn is the reflection of a pious man* after burying his child:—“And now one of our family is gone to take possession of the sepulchre in all our names. Ere long I shall lie down with my child. Perhaps many of the feet that followed it shall attend me thither. It is a warning of Providence, that these concluding days of my life may be more regular, more spiritual, more useful, than the former.”

Thirdly. He expects to follow his child not only into the grave, but into glory; and anticipates a renewed union with him in heaven. This was unquestionably David's case; but *this* part of our subject must be limited. When we see people in affliction, it seems hard to deny them consolation; but we dare not administer every kind of comfort to every kind of character—it would be only deceiving and destroying their souls. This part of our subject then must be limited two ways.

First, as to *the dead*. We cannot join those in heaven who are not gone there; and all do *not* go there when they die. We are not called to pronounce positively upon their misery; but what hope can we entertain, without offering violence to the Scripture, of the salvation of those who lived without prayer, who profaned the Sabbath, who were slaves to avarice and pride? In many other cases, if we *have* a hope concerning the deceased, it must be weak, and ought to be concealed—weak, from the deficiency of evidence; and concealed, from the fear of mischief.

But of others, when they die, we have a scriptural and a pleasing persuasion. And why should we

* Dr Doddridge.

mourn for them? They have overcome and are crowned. They have done with trouble, and have entered “the rest that remains for the people of God.” Now this consolation extends to all children who die in a state of infancy. I know there are some who believe in the damnation of infants. They have no higher notion of a God of love, the Father of mercies, the God of all grace, than to suppose that he will punish eternally creatures whom the Scripture itself calls innocent as to personal and actual transgression, and whose condition depended entirely upon himself. Admitting this barbarous notion; could such a Being ever be trusted in, or loved? But the God we worship is not Moloch; neither is the punishment we contend for in a future state separate from the effects of conscious guilt, regret, self-accusation—of all which those who die in infancy are incapable. We listen not to unfeeling and system-hardened divines, but to that Saviour “who gathers the lambs with his arms, and carries them in his bosom,” and who, having invited our own souls to rest, cries, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

The second limitation regards *the living*. You cannot join those who are gone to heaven, if you do not go there yourselves. And if you are not “new creatures if you do not “deny yourselves, and take up your cross and follow the Redeemer you must join another assembly, to whose taste you are now conformed, and whose portion you have here chosen Death separates the precious from the vile, and unites only those of similar dispositions. But where we entertain a hope concerning our connexions, and

concerning ourselves, the bitterness of death is passed.

Let us close. What parents are the most afflicted? Those who have children living—but living in sin and—walking according to the course of this world. Where is the father who would not a thousand times rather follow his son to the grave than see him growing up an enemy to God by wicked works? There is no hope of meeting such a child again. And yet instances like these are by no means unusual. But surely they should become subjects of serious inquiry—surely parents should ask themselves whether they have faithfully discharged the trust committed to them. And while we ought to be tender of those whose hearts are bleeding over undutiful and ungodly offspring, we should not overlook the word that says, “Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

As for those who have buried early hopes; remember that by their removal you have an opportunity afforded of exercising the grace of submission, and are left more free to attend to other duties. Guard against an excess of sorrow, which will drink up the spirits and work death. Comfort one another with the assurance that their death is their everlasting gain. Here they were in an enemy’s country surrounded with snares; and who can tell how soon they might have fallen the victims of temptation? They are infinitely happier than it is possible for you to conceive, and their blessedness is secured beyond the power of injury.

Remember they are not separated from you for ever—you are going to them. They are waiting to

receive you into everlasting habitations. On your arrival there, you will know them, and they will know you; even they will know you there, who never knew you here.

And may you not indulge the expectation, not only that you will know them, but be serviceable to them—he employed in forming and in teaching them? Oh! the pleasing work of a mother, to rear a child in that better country, free from sin, perverseness, pain; without anxiety, and without fear!

Nor imagine that in the mean time they are disregarded or overlooked, because of their tender age, or their inferiority of any other kind. Selfishness and pride only reign *here*. *That* world is a world of condescension, of kindness, of love. *There* are pious friends. *There* are angels who attended them here. *There* is “your Father and their Father, your God and their God.” “Thus saith the Lord; a voice was heard in Hamah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border”.

DISCOURSE LVIII.

THE BREAD OF LIFE.

“And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”—JOHN vi. 35.

“**Y**EA, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” Such is the exclamation of Paul. And he does not despise what he could not possess, or undervalue what he did not understand. He was a man of genius and of learning. He had examined the claims of human science, and knew how little it could do for man in his most important interests. He was also no stranger to the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour. The Son of God had been revealed in him; and from that blessed hour his acquaintance with him had been constantly increasing. He knew whom he had believed; and such was the efficacy of this knowledge, in purifying his passions, in tranquillizing his conscience, in refreshing and delighting his heart, that he was led comparatively to depreciate every thing else; and determined “to know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

And is not this the determination of every Christian? And is it not justifiable? Is it not wise! Need we wonder that his Saviour is every thing *with* him, since he is every thing *to* him?—his sun and shield—his guide and guard—his physician and friend—his righteousness and strength—his clothing and his food. “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst”

Observe, I. A REPRESENTATION OF THE SAVIOUR. II. THE WAY IN WHICH WE ARE TO DERIVE ADVANTAGE FROM HIM. III. THE HAPPINESS HIS FOLLOWERS SHALL ENJOY.

I. A REPRESENTATION OF THE SAVIOUR—“I am the bread of life.” All life is valuable; and there are several degrees of it rising above each other. There is vegetable life: this is superior to dead matter, as a tree is more excellent than a stone. There is animal life: this is superior to vegetable, as a bird is more excellent than a tree. There is rational life: this is superior to animal, as a man is more excellent than a beast. His form and his powers proclaim his pre-eminence, and prove him lord of this lower world. But there is a life superior to human, and which “the natural man understandeth not, because it is spiritually discerned.” It is called “the life of God.” Of this man was originally possessed; from this he has fallen by sin; to this he is restored by divine grace.

And there are some who are proofs of the possibility of this restoration. They have “passed from death unto life.” Though alive to other things, they were once dead to the things of God. They had no

spiritual sensibility; but they now feel. They had no spiritual appetite; but they now “hunger and thirst after righteousness.” They had no spiritual senses, “to discern both good and evil;” but they now hear his voice, see his glory, and “taste that the Lord is gracious.” They had no spiritual energy or action; but they now “strive to enter in at the strait gate, walk in the way everlasting,” and “labour that, whether present or absent, they may be accepted of him.” These dispositions may be imperfect, and these exertions may be weak, but they could not make the one, nor be conscious of the other—unless they were alive.

The Scripture loves to present religion to us under the notion of *life*; and it is a very important and distinguishing one. In a picture there is likeness, and how striking does the resemblance sometimes appear! But what a difference is there between the shadow and the substance; between the image and the original! It seems to speak; but it is silent. The “breathing canvass” is not life. A figure may be formed equal to the size of a man; and ingenuity may add motion to likeness: but it is not self-moved; its movements, few and senseless, result from foreign force or skill. And mechanism, however fine or finished, is not life. How many things that look like religion fall short of it! How many have the form of godliness, while they deny the power thereof! How many, destitute of all inward principle, are actuated in duty by external motives only; and whose devotion begins and ends with the operation of the circumstances producing it! But God puts his Spirit within us, and causes us to walk in his ways and to keep his statutes.

Now observe the relation in which the Lord Jesus stands to this life. "I am," says he, "the bread of life." Bread often stands for all that nourishes and sustains our bodies; and hence we read of the "staff of bread:" the meaning is, that life leans on it for support. And our Saviour is all that is necessary to the life of God in the soul: "I am come," says he, "that they might have life, and that they might have it the more abundantly. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world."

Bread corn is bruised. The grain passes through a process which seems likely to destroy it before it becomes our food. And what means our Saviour when he says, "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world"? Some tell us that he refers to his doctrine only. It is admitted that instruction may be called the food of the mind—but why does our Lord refer to his *flesh*? And what master ever spake of his disciples eating *himself*? "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." What can this imply but a truth so fully revealed in the Scripture—that he becomes our Saviour by being our sacrifice, and that we live by his death!

His language leads us to another reflection, which is not the less important because it is common. It is this: Bread is nothing to us, however prepared, or presented, or possessed, unless it be eaten. You may perish with bread in your house, and even in your hand—it is only by admitting it into the animal system that it can become nourishment. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if any

man *eat* of this bread, he shall live for ever. Except ye *eat* the flesh of the Son of God, and *drink* his blood, ye have no life in you. He that *eateth* me, even he shall live by me." Is not this saying, that a Saviour unapplied will profit you nothing? He may have in himself every thing you need; he may be nigh you; he may be proposed to you in the Gospel—and all this is true; but he must be received by faith. For, to vary the image, "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name."

This brings us to remark,

II. THE WAY IN WHICH WE DERIVE ADVANTAGE FROM HIM. It is by coming to him; by believing on him. "He that *cometh* to me shall never hunger; and he that *believeth on* me shall never thirst." And here we are not to suppose that two different characters are intended, of which the one comes to our Lord, and the other believes on him. The expressions designate the same person; and are explanatory of each other. So that if you ask, What is coming to him? you are told, that it is believing on him. And if you ask. What is believing on him? you are told, it is coming to him.

The case is this. Since so much depends on real faith, it is necessary for us to know what it is: but as we have more to do with the uses of things than with their nature; and as they are more obviously known by their operations and effects, than by their physical and abstract qualities, the Scripture holds forth faith by its office, and in its actings. It tells us what faith *does* in the man who is the possessor of it: it "works by love;" it "overcomes the world;" it "purifies the heart;" it brings a man to Christ He that

believeth on him, comes to him. This representation of faith is very instructive.

First. It reminds us that the Lord Jesus is accessible. In the days of his flesh he was approachable in his bodily presence; and many went to him and implored relief; and none ever implored in vain. In this sense we can no longer approach him; in this sense he is "no more in the world." But, unless he is accessible under another and a higher view, how can he verify the promise: "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them"? Did he appoint his disciples to meet him in Galilee after his resurrection; and did they go down and find him there? So he has ordained means, in the use of which if *we* are found, *he* will be found. For he is present among the assemblies of his people, and in his house, and at his table, and in his word, and upon his throne; there dispensing mercy and grace to help us in every time of need.

Secondly. It teaches us that faith is not a notion, but a principle; and is always attended with an application of the soul to the Redeemer. Under the influence of it, I cannot rest without him; but, from a conviction of my perilous and perishing case, and a persuasion of his power, appointment, and readiness to succour and to save me, I go to him and address him. I throw myself at his feet, and cry, "Lord, save; I perish." I see him as the only refuge, and I seek to enter him. I view him as the Lord my righteousness and strength, and pray to be found in him. On this foundation I begin to build: from this "fulness I receive, and grace for grace."

And, let it be remembered, that this application, which always distinguishes genuine faith from false,

is not a single address, but a renewed, a continued exercise. He that believeth on him is not one that *came* and transacted an affair with him, and then had nothing more to do with him—no—but one that *cometh*. Peter has the same thought, and equally excludes those whose religion is an action; instead of a course of action, instead of a habit, instead of a life—“to whom *coming* as unto a living stone.” He will be necessary to the last: as long as we contract fresh guilt; as long as we are called to bear new trials, and discharge new duties; as long as we are in the body of this death—so long must we come to him.

Let us notice,

III. THE HAPPINESS HIS FOLLOWERS SHALL ENJOY: “He that cometh to me shall *never hunger*, and he that believeth on me shall *never thirst*.” This assurance admits of several explanations.

First. The follower of Jesus shall never hunger nor thirst again after the world. This distinguishes him from all unrenewed men; for they hunger and thirst after nothing else. And this was once his own case. But having tasted the provisions of God’s house, his language now is, “Lord, evermore give me this bread.” Having seen the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, nothing else allures or charms: “Whom,” says he, “whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.” Endeavours will be made to draw off the soul from this sovereign good. The world will present its riches, honours, pleasures, and prospects; and often ask, “What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?” But these syren songs will be sung in vain. All believers

indeed are not equally mortified to earthly things; but, as far as grace prevails in the soul, they will, they must lose their influence: as far as we are “after the Spirit,” we shall “mind the things of the Spirit.” And no real Christian, who walks by faith, and not by sight, can so seek after the world again as to make it his portion, or to place his happiness in it. A covetous, ambitious, sensual, pleasure-taking Christian is a character the Scripture knows nothing of.

Secondly. He shall not hunger and thirst in vain. The new creature has wants and appetites, but ample provision is made to relieve and indulge them; and the believer knows where to go for those blessings, and is not liable to disappointment in seeking for them. He no longer runs to and fro, asking, Who will show me any good? He has found the source of satisfaction, and derives supplies from it. It is adequate to the immensities of his desires. More *than* the “consolation of Israel” he does not long for, though he does long for more *of* it. But,

Thirdly. He shall not hunger and thirst always. The days of imperfect enjoyment will soon be over. Then every power will be filled; every hope accomplished; every wish realized. Then, says David, “I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.”

The subject thus briefly explained, is—

A standard by which we may estimate *Christ*. What a life have we been speaking of! But the higher and nobler this life is, the more does it glorify him—for he is “the bread of life.” There is nothing men so value as life. Even this vain life, which we spend as a shadow—even this suffering

life, which we find to be a series of cares, losses, pains, and troubles—how we cleave to it! how concerned we are to secure and continue it; how readily we pay the physician that recovers it; how highly we prize the food that sustains it; and, pressed with want, what exertions and sacrifices are we not willing to make to obtain relief! Surely we are not sensible of our spiritual necessities; surely we have no desires alter the life of our souls, eternal life; or we should above all esteem *Him* by whom *alone* it is to be attained, and not urge his compassionate heart to complain, “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.”

The subject is a standard by which we may estimate *faith*. Why does the Apostle call faith *precious*? Because “he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” It is indispensable to our salvation. It is the medium of all our intercourse with the Redeemer of sinners. If faith be nothing without Christ, Christ is nothing without faith.

The subject is a standard by which to estimate the *Christian*. The world knoweth him not: it knew not his Lord and Master—and why should the servant wish to be above his master, or the disciple above his lord? He may be poor and afflicted; but a man is not to be judged of by outward things, but by the state of his mind, and by his future state. A Christian without pride, may pity philosophers and kings, he is safe. He is happy. His happiness is not only insured, but commenced. He hears nothing but complaints in the world; and no wonder, since they are seeking the living among the dead;—but he has

found rest; he feels satisfaction. He has much in hand, and more in hope. The Saviour is now with him; and soon he will be for ever with the Lord.

“Blessed are the people that are in such a case.”
Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy Name.”

Amen.

DISCOURSE LIX.

THE SCRIPTURE DESPISED.

“I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.”—HOSEA viii. 12.

THE history of the Jews is not only wonderful, but instructive. It shows us what God is, and what man is. In every page we see the goodness of the one, and the wickedness of the other.

For it is in vain to imagine that the depravity of this people was peculiar to themselves. They were fair specimens of human nature; and we have no reason to believe that we should have been better than they under the same dispensation—yea, under superior advantages, we *are* no better than they.

When Hosea exercised his ministry, the volume of Scripture was not complete. The additions of several of the prophets, and of all the New Testament writings, were wanting—whereas we have these additions; the system of revelation is now perfect; and the man that adds to the words of this book is accursed, as well as the man that takes away from it. Thus our privilege is much enlarged, and, alas!

our guilt is increased along with it; and what God said of Ephraim applies to us with equal truth, and with greater aggravation; "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." These words lead us to consider three things with regard to the Scriptures. I. THEIR AUTHOR. II. THEIR SUBJECT. III. THEIR RECEPTION.

I. Observe THEIR AUTHOR.—"I," says God, "I have written to him the great things of my law." This fact it would be well for us to remember whenever we read or hear it; for the manner in which the Scripture affects us will always depend upon our persuasion of this truth. If we consider it as a cunningly devised fable, we shall treat it as a delusion. If we believe it to be the word of man, we shall receive it as a human production. But if we are convinced that it is indeed the word of God, we shall feel it to be divine, and it will work powerfully in us, as it does in those who believe.

Now in favour of these writings we advance a *Divine* claim. "All Scripture," says the apostle, "is given by inspiration of God." So that whoever was the penman, He was the author. I hope I need not labour to prove this. I hope you have not found it necessary to deny it, by indulging in a vicious course of life. "For this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." They are infidel because they are wicked, and pretend to quarrel with the doctrines of revelation because they hate the practice. The character of its enemies has always been a strong recommendation of the Scripture.

We pass by the proofs derived from prophecies

and miracles; from the number and competency of the original witnesses of the Gospel; from its success in the world; from the convictions of the wise, and the suffrages of the good—and remark only at present, the internal evidence there is to prove that this book was written by God. When we survey the works of nature, we discern impressions of perfection and effects of contrivance, so as to urge the examiner to exclaim, “This is the finger of God.” Now opening these leaves, we find a resemblance that reminds us of the same agent. We perceive in the book of Scripture, as in the book of Creation, the same degree of plainness and obscurity intermixed; the same difference between the nature and the use of things—the one eluding research, and the other level to common apprehension; the same order, and the same sublime irregularity; some parts peculiarly prominent, while the whole equally rejects all attempts completely to systematize it.—We see that the Scripture is adapted to the actual state of man; that it is suited to his wants and weaknesses in every period, whether he be young or old; in every condition, whether he be prosperous or afflicted; in every relation, whether he be a master or servant, a father or child, a citizen of this world, or an heir of immortality. The Book understands my fears, and meets my hopes; and were I to find it by accident, and had never read it before, I must, upon perusing it, confess, that it could only have been produced by one who perfectly knew my misery, and was infinitely concerned for my welfare—that is, GOD. “I have written to him”—What? Observe,

II. THE CONTENTS—“the great things of my law.” We naturally judge of an author by his work;

but there are cases in which we judge of a work by the author. What I mean is this; we have such a knowledge of some men, and such a confidence in them, that we are sure they cannot write improperly; and conclude, even beforehand, that what *they* send forth must be worthy of our purchase and our perusal. And as soon as we learn that God himself is the author of this book,— we may approach it confidently, expecting to find in it a *greatness* becoming his glorious Name.

Nor shall we be disappointed. We here find great things.

Great in *number*. What other book ever laid open such a boundless multiplicity of subjects, and gave rise to such an infinity of thoughts?

Great in *profundity*. What other book could bear thousands of writers and preachers to be always explaining and improving it? What other book would bear daily and hourly reading and reviewing?—Yet we always find something fresh and interesting; and the subjects, so far from being exhausted, lead us to pray, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

Great in *importance*. Here we see the way in which God harmonizes all his perfections in the salvation of man. Here we see how he delivers a perishing sinner from the curse of the law and the bondage of corruption; how the guilty are made righteous; how the unholy are made pure; how the

weak are rendered equal to every duty and difficulty of the Christian life.—The subjects are not addressed to our fancies and opinions, but to our consciences. They relate to the soul, to eternity. They include “exceeding great and precious promises;” and which infinitely surpass all the offers of the world.

Great in their *efficacy*. They have awakened the most secure consciences; they have softened the hardest hearts; they have comforted the greatest sufferers; they have enabled them to glory in tribulation, and to triumph in death. Plato complained that he could not bring over the inhabitants of even one village to live by the rules of his philosophy. But how many millions have been reformed and renewed by the doctrines of the Cross! “The words that I speak unto you,” says our Saviour, “they are spirit, and they are life.” “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ,” says Paul, “for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” It bringeth salvation, not only as to the discovery, but the experience of it; and teaches us what nothing else ever did, or ever will teach,—to “deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” And where it does not save, it civilizes; and it has done more in taming the fierceness and savageness of the multitude, in raising the tone of morals, in securing the welfare of the community, than all the civil institutions in the world.

In a word, the greatest thing we have upon earth is the Gospel. It dignifies every country in which it

is found; and the poorest cottage that contains a Bible is rendered unspeakably more valuable than a heathen palace. This gave the Jews their pre-eminence over all other nations; "to them were committed the oracles of God." No wonder therefore that the prophet should consider the loss of this mercy as the greatest judgment that could ever befall a people. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

III. Let us consider THE RECEPTION WHICH THIS DIVINE COMMUNICATION MEETS WITH. "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." *A strange thing*, here, means a thing foreign to us; a matter of indifference; a thing that does not concern us, and cannot affect us; by which we shall gain nothing if we observe it, lose nothing if we despise it; a thing unworthy of our attention: the very reverse of what Moses said, "It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life." And that men thus in reality treat the Scriptures of truth, is the charge here advanced. Let us examine it.

First; it is a charge the most *wonderful*. We should naturally suppose that a book written by God himself would engage attention. We should reasonably conclude that it would excite no little interest if it only professed to be his work; how much more if the probability of this fact was strong; but who would think it possible to disregard it, if the evidences in its favour were numerous and undeniable!—All other books, being human, betray the imperfections of their authors; yet they are eagerly bought

and read, admired and relished: but here is a book neglected, that is proved to be Divine!

People are naturally attracted to a work that regards themselves. If I were to announce that a book was published which only mentioned your name, it is questionable whether you would be able to sleep till you had seen it. If you were poor, or if you were sick and dying, and a publication could inform you how to obtain riches, or health, and cure—you would surely obtain it, and examine it with singular solicitude. But the Scripture speaks of *you*; it describes *your* character; it contains the charter of *your* privileges; it reveals a deliverance from all *your* woes: and by a method that awakens your wonder, while it relieves your wants. The angels desire to look into these things, and study them with intense application; yet angels need no repentance, no redemption. And will you—you, who are immediately and eternally interested in them—will *you* make light of them!

A charge. Secondly, the most *criminal*. We often err in our estimate of things, especially those of a moral nature. We have frequently a wrong standard by which to judge of what is good; hence that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. In the same way we deceive ourselves with regard to what is evil. We judge of sin by outward appearances, or by the grossness of the action. But God takes into view not only the injury that is done to our neighbour, but the dishonour that is done to himself; not only what is done, but what is omitted: he weighs the state of the mind, the motives that determine us, the good we oppose and hinder; the difficulties we have to overcome, the convictions we have to stifle, the reasons that render

us inexcusable. And, by this rule, nothing can be more wicked, than to treat with contempt or neglect the means God has provided and revealed in his infinite goodness and wisdom for our everlasting welfare. It cannot therefore, while any thing like justice remains in the world, be done with impunity.

Hence, Thirdly, the charge is the most *dreadful*. If indeed God was to deal with you after your desert, he would not bear with you a day or an hour. But he is a God of patience; and is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish. Yet, lest you should suppose that forbearance is connivance, and that, because he does not immediately reckon with you, he will never call you to account, hear, I beseech you, the following threatenings, which he stands solemnly pledged to execute: "And if it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven." "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation"? "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much

sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

We could add to the number of these tremendous denunciations. But surely more than enough has been repeated to rouse all your anxiety, and to lead you to inquire, "Lord, is it I?"

Yet, Fourthly, the charge is very commonly *deserved*. Few pay a due regard to the blessed word of God.—Take infidels, who openly reject it, and endeavour to make others believe what it would seem impossible for them to believe themselves, that a system so wise in its contrivance, so beneficial in its tendency, so holy in its influence, is the work of foolish or wicked men!!—Take apostates. How many, even in our own day, have we seen, who once made a flaming profession of religion, whose hearts have turned back, and whose steps have declined from his ways; who can laugh at that which once made them tremble, and are "so bewitched"—I use the words of the Apostle, "that they cannot obey the truth."—Take nominal Christians, some of whom would be much offended if you refused to consider them as real ones. Yet how seldom do they read it! How rarely do they hear it! And of those who hear it, often hear it, hear it dispensed with fidelity and affection, how many are there who are curious hearers, captious hearers, forgetful hearers, hearers only deceiving their own selves! Did you never observe the complaint that God addressed to Ezekiel? "Son of man, the children of thy people speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is

the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." Does this apply to none of us? It characterizes thousands who attend even where the Gospel is preached in its purity. We say therefore again, that *few* pay a due regard to the word of God; few imbibe its spirit; few fear its threatenings; few embrace its promises; few obey its commands; few practically own its authority.

But to conclude. The charge is not universally true. Blessed be God, there are some exceptions; and we trust in the number of exceptions some of *you* are found. I hope some of you are daily kneeling before this sacred volume and praying, "Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name." Good men have always been attached to their Bibles! Many have shed their blood, rather than even conceal their regard to it. We read in the book of martyrs of a husbandman who gave a whole load of hay for one leaf of one of the Epistles! BOYLE, that great philosopher, said, speaking of the Scripture, "I prefer a sprig of the tree of life to a whole wood of bays." Judge HALE, that ornament of his profession and country, said, that "if he did not honour God's word by reading a portion of it every morning, things went not well with him all the day." Job said, "I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food."

David exclaimed, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day! More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."

Can you express yourselves in similar language? Are these your sentiments? You ought to be thankful—and to be thankful not only that you possess such an invaluable blessing as the Scriptures, but that you have been taught to prize it, and enabled to use it. You have found it to be, in your own happy experience, a compass to guide you; a remedy to heal you; a sword to defend you; a balm for every wound; a cordial for every fear.

But let me urge upon you a still greater attention to the word of God. Let it not only "dwell" in you, but dwell in you "richly," and "in all wisdom." Pray for the spread of it, that it may have "free course and be glorified." Long for the day when the Scripture shall be found in every family. Be concerned to furnish those around you with the Bible who may be destitute of it. Take peculiar care early to awaken in those whom God has graciously given you, an affectionate and a familiar regard to it. It is the order of Heaven. "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them, diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes."

O precious Bible! I could for ever enlarge in thy praise.—Head it, ye mourners in Zion: it will wipe

away your tears. Read it, ye bereaved: it will assure you that a father of the fatherless, and a husband of the widow, is God in his holy habitation. Read it, ye poor: it will soothe you under your privations. Read it ye rich: it will sanctify your abundance. Ye old, read it: it will support your tottering age. Ye young, read it: it will preserve your giddy steps. "Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light and reproofs of instruction are the way of life."

DISCOURSE LX.

THE ADVANTAGE OF HAVING GODLY PARENTS.

“A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children.”

—PROV. xiii. 22.

WHAT SO interesting as children? Children are pledges of mutual and hallowed affection. Children recall the early scenes of our own lives; they renew our image; they embalm our memory; they multiply and perpetuate ourselves. Other attachments lose their influence over us with age; but love to children warms the heart in death. It is the source of numberless and unutterable hopes and fears, and pains and pleasures.

What is the emblem of Divine compassion? “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” Rachel weeps for her children, and “will not be comforted, because they are not.” Who does not feel for the venerable patriarch as he exclaims, “Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not—and will ye take Benjamin away? All these things are against me.” Who can refuse to mourn with the king of

Israel as he retires from the shouts of a victory that had saved his own life; and, as he goes up into his chamber over the gate, weeping, exclaims, "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" When the woman came to our Lord on the behalf of her daughter grievously vexed with a devil, how does she express herself? "Thou Son of David, have mercy on wie." The mother suffered as much by sympathy as the daughter by disease; and the deliverance of the one would have been the relief of the other.

But if parents are affected by the condition of children, children are affected by the conduct of parents. Thus we read that God "visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him." "Which is certainly unjust," some are ready to exclaim; "and is sufficient to condemn the Book in which the assertion is found." And yet we constantly see children, in ways innumerable, suffering for the vices of their ancestors. By the idleness and drunkenness of one father, his infants are reduced to rags and ruin. By the licentious guilt of another, disease carries off his newborn babe—the babe is not criminal, yet it is tortured with pain, and dies. The fact is undeniable; and deism has to encounter the same difficulty with revelation. Religion is no more chargeable with it than the course of nature. If the Bible be not the word of God, the world is the work of God; and where is the difference between his announcing such a rule, or his acting upon it?

On the other hand, goodness operates powerfully and beneficially in descent; and we read that "God

showeth mercy unto thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments that “his mercy is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him and “his righteousness unto children’s children.” And among the various subjects that come under the observation of Solomon, is that of a godly father entailing blessings on his family: “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children.”

Let us premise three things.

First. THE CHARACTER IN QUESTION IS A GOOD MAN. Some persons are prejudiced against the very use of the term; but they would do well to remember that it is one of “the words the Holy Ghost teacheth.” It is needless to repeat passages to prove this; but it may be necessary to observe that the term is to be taken with limitations. None are good *perfectly*: for “there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not.” Paul confessed that *he* had not attained—that *he* was not already perfect; but only pressing towards the mark. None are good *naturally*: for as we are all derived from the same source, and this is a depraved one, “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” We are not *born* Christians, but are *made* such. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” But some are *saved* by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. God has begun “a good work in them; “and the work denominates the subjects of it. Such is the *origin* of the character. But what are the features of it?

In a good man we must have *piety*. He trusts in God, and submits to him; he loves and fears him. He keeps holy the Sabbath of the Lord his God.

He enters his house; he reads and hears his word; he comes to his table; he approaches his throne for mercy and grace to help him in time of need. And while others live without God in the world, he is actuated by a desire to please and glorify him in all his actions. Unless the heart be right with God, we are nothing. Without principle and motive, whatever noise we make in religion, we are but "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."

In a good man we must have *sincerity*. You would not think of applying the word to a mere pretender; to one whose actions were always at variance with his words and his heart; to one who was all form and varnish in religion; a whited sepulchre, which looks fair outwardly, but is within full of death and corruption. But you feel no reluctance to appropriate the term to one, even though he has not much light, and is not free from infirmities, who *is* what he *appears* to be; and of whom our Saviour would say, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile."

In a good man we must have *uniformity*. He is not one thing alone, and another in company. He is not a meek follower of the Lamb in the house of God, and a tyrant in his own. He is not prayerful in sickness, and prayerless in health. He is not humble in adversity, and proud and rigorous in prosperity. He is the same essentially in all the varieties of human condition: the changes of life serve only to prove his character, and to develop it. They are trials, and often severe ones; but they meet with gold; and it will "appear unto praise and glory and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

In a good man we must have *benevolence* and *bene-*

ficence. It is not enough to be barely moral; and to render to all their due. A good man does not keep just within the precincts of legal obligation; but goes forth where no human statute could punish him for neglect; and having freely received, he freely gives. The love and gratitude which he cannot extend to God, overflow upon his fellow-creatures. He has imbibed the Spirit of him who went about doing good; and, as he has opportunity, *he* does "good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of faith." This part of his character the Scripture makes a test of the reality of every other part: "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" It is this that attaches others so firmly and inviolably to him: "scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." It is this that draws so peculiarly the gracious notice of God himself. "To do good and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. A good man showeth favour and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

Secondly. Solomon supposes that such a good man may be found in connected life. And what is there in his goodness that is likely to hinder this? what is there in his goodness that does not render it the more probable? His religion will improve all

those views and feelings that tend to make him social and useful. Some have attached I know not what kind of holiness and pre-eminence to celibacy; but the Scripture knows nothing of it. There we read, that "marriage is honourable in all." There we find the doctrine, of forbidding to marry, branded with infamy. Jesus graced a wedding with his own presence, and wrought his first miracle to aid even the festivity of the scene. God himself in Paradise instituted marriage; and said, "It is not good for man to be alone." And who will rise up and give his Maker the lie? Enoch married earlier than his cotemporaries, and begat sons and daughters; and yet "he walked with God; and was not, for God took him." Compare this man, early surrounded with family connexions, with a wretched, sordid monk in a cell, or with any of those poor, selfish, cold-hearted beings who refuse to serve their generation according to the will of God—and which of them rises or sinks in your estimation?—Yea, it is supposed that this good man has offspring too—another natural conclusion, and sanctioned generally by the promise of God. "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord. The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children and peace upon Israel."

Thirdly. Though the subject is spoken of in re-

ference to the man, the woman is by no means excluded. Though she moves less publicly and visibly, her influence, like that of the more primary and hidden springs in a machine, is certainly great and efficient. To a family, a good mother, no less than a good father, is an invaluable blessing. To whom, under God, did the Jewish Church owe a Samuel? To a wise and pious Hannah. To whom did the Christian Church owe a Timothy? "From a child he had known the Scripture, which is able to make us wise unto salvation." And the secret is laid open: "When," says the Apostle, "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also." It is not to Jesse, but to Jesse's wife, that David so tenderly and devoutly refers, when he says, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid."

These things being premised, let us examine what that inheritance is, which a good man leaves to his offspring.

I. It comprehends RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTIONS. There are some who are unfriendly to the practice of infusing into children any doctrinal principles; and plead for leaving their minds quite free and unbiassed, till they are able to judge for themselves. But can a parent forbear to impart to those who are peculiarly dear to him what he knows to be of unspeakable importance, and of immediate necessity? Will the mind of his child remain free and unbiassed through infancy and youth? If empty

of good, will it not be filled with the evil that so pressingly surrounds it in a world like this? Will the enemy check his march, and leave the passes unoccupied till you choose to possess them yourselves?—If our children do not remember God in the days of their youth, they are not very likely to remember him at all. The promise is, “I love them that love me, and they that seek me *early* shall find me.” But can they love him without knowing him? Do they seek him by instinct, or from motive? We are commanded to use means even by him who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure: and if we regard his authority, the dispute is ended: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Hear how Moses charges the Jews: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: and he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. And the Lord

commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.”

Here the duty is not only enjoined, but explained: and we see in the performance of it nothing harsh, nothing formal; it is a familiar, a domestic employment. The father goes not before the child, but follows him; he answers; and the inquiries of the child remind him of the information he needs, and show him the state and opening of the mind on which he is called to attend. How has God the father of all taught us? What is the Old Testament but a collection of imagery, of maxims, and proverbs? but a narrative of great and interesting events, the creation of the world, and the operations of Providence from age to age? What is the Gospel? A body of divinity? A system of theology? No. It is history. It consists of facts and reflections. It is in this way alone that the young can be interested and taught to purpose.

A good man will withhold no useful information from his children: but while he does not overlook them as inhabitants of the present world, he views them as the awful heirs of immortality; and is principally concerned that they should know the things that belong to their everlasting peace. What is every other acquisition, if they are not wise unto salvation!

A good man will cherish in the minds of his children a belief of Divine truth, however mysterious; and maintain in them a sense of the limitation and weakness of human reason; but he will not lead

them to metaphysical subtleties, and “doubtful disputations, that gender strife rather than godly edifying.” He will even distinguish in his endeavours between what *may* be true, and what *is* important. “Secret things belong unto God; but things that are revealed belong to us and to our children.” “And unto man *he* said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom; and to depart from evil, *that* is understanding.”

A good man will not fail to present to the minds of his offspring the more lovely and alluring aspects of Christianity; and patiently teach them other things as they are able to bear them.

And as there are seasons when, the heart is open and impressible; as the young have moments of seriousness, in which they melt and weep: as even they are not free from sorrows and trials—a good parent will be ready to sow his seed during the shower; and to administer the comforts of the Gospel when the mind seems to turn from all other relief.

II. This inheritance takes in pious EXAMPLE. “Let your light,” says the Saviour, “so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Here we have the testimony of One who knew what was in man, to prove the value and efficacy of example in general. But, in the case before us, there are peculiar probabilities that it will not be in vain in the Lord. When the image is derived from a relation so near; when it is presented so early; when it is seen so constantly during a tender period; when it is associated with so many recollections to render it interesting—the impression it makes will not, cannot, be easily worn off. Even when going astray, in a solitary hour, the

young man will recall the season when, embosomed in his native home, it was better with him than now; when his father, the minister too of the household, read the Scripture, led his charge daily to the family altar; maintained order and harmony without violence or severity; was devout,, but equally cheerful; exemplifying “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, whatsoever things have any virtue or any praise in them.” And what is mere occasional, and often morose, admonition compared with such an example? What are rules pressed by mere authority, compared with a temper, a life, so inviting! Children are more likely to practise what their parents do than what they recommend. They are much more led by the eye than by the ear. And it would be well for some children if they saw more of religion, and heard less. It would be well for them if they lived in a mild religious region, instead of being placed by fits of irregular and passionate zeal in religious stocks. We are no enemies to active and direct efforts: but we are persuaded that, where few of these are made, impressions will be left by a consistent and amiable life; and that the effect of example will be more *deep* and durable than those of precept and reproof.

III. It takes in BELIEVING PRAYERS. A good man is a man of grace and supplication; and if he prays for his fellow-creatures at large, can he forget those of his own body? With what earnest appropriation will he think of them when the minister in the sanctuary is interceding for the young! With what ardour will he pray for them when he is praying with

them in the family! How often, when kneeling—when walking alone, will he sigh, “O that Ishmael might live before thee!”

When children grow up and go forth, at the call of education or business, the hour of separation is trying, is painful: then their parents resign them, and follow them with devotional anxieties. In the world they are exposed to scenes of temptation and danger; then their parents resemble Job, who was praying while his children were feasting: “for he said, It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts: thus did Job continually.” But when, casting off the fear of God, they become victims of vice—O the feelings of a prodigal’s father! A minister said to Monica, the mother of Augustine, weeping over him in his profligate youth, “A child of so many tears and prayers cannot perish.” This is going too far. But prayer has power with God, and prevails when offered for others, as well as for ourselves. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth *much*. “I bless God,” says Mr. Flavel, “for a religious, tender father, who often poured out his soul to God for me: and this stock of prayers I esteem above the fairest inheritance on earth.”

IV. It consists of SANCTIFIED SUBSTANCE. Some good men have not much to leave behind them: and this is frequently best. It is often disreputable for a Christian to die very wealthy: it implies that he has not been generous enough in his day and generation. And as it is no honour to his character, so it is seldom a benefit to his offspring: it renders them independent of motives to diligence, and makes “provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.” It is a large stock laid up for their pride and luxury; and it is soon

squandered away. But “he that provideth not for his own, especially those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” There are few good men but have something to leave behind: for religion “has the promise even of the life that now is it renders a man diligent and frugal; and gains him confidence and esteem. What is piously acquired is likely to be usefully expended. A few years ago, a religious officer called his son to his dying bed, and, addressing him by name, said, “My son, I have not much to leave you; but what I have, will wear well; for not a mite of it has been taken from the bodies of my men.” All could not make such an avowal. There are even professors of the Gospel who have laid *up* what ought to have been laid *out*. The hoard they leave has been taken from the cause of God and of the poor—perhaps much of it has been the effect of positive fraud or oppression; the cries of many have been lodged with it, and these “cries have entered the ears of the Lord God of Sabbath.” Thus, unclean and accursed, it descends; and the children receive it as the Israelites the quails—at once gratified and undone. “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked and this is as true with regard to his family as with regard to himself. He that multiplied the oil and the meal of the widow and son; of a servant that feared him; often wonderfully provides for those his people leave behind them. “I have been young, and now am old,” says David; “yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging bread.”

Shall I mention, Fifthly, the DEATH of a good man as another part of this inheritance? In some cases

nothing is said by a saint in his last moments. His testimony and advice are prevented, by the nature or his disease or the suddenness of his removal. Yet even then a dying father may do what a living one could not. The blessing may be valued when lost. But the dying experience of a good man is sometimes rendered peculiarly impressive. The expressions of his faith and hope recommend religion—by showing that it can bear up the mind when every thing else fails. His supplies and consolations prove that he serves a good master, who never leaves him, nor forsakes him. But a dying admonition from a father—added to all this ! “See,” said Mr. Bolton to his children, “that none of you meet me in an unregenerate condition at the day of judgment!” David called Solomon, and said, “And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father; and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind. For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.” Who can rebel against this? “Shall I trouble his rest by departing from truth and integrity? Shall I unkindly frustrate the strong desire of his departing spirit? Can I wish to see him no more? To part with him for ever? I am now a stranger in the earth. I will seek unto God—he is my father’s God. I will go in search of heaven—it is my father’s house.”

Finally. GOD BEARS A REGARD TO THE DESCENDANTS OF HIS FOLLOWERS. As David asked, “Is there any left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” so by the same noble rule of friendship does God act. “The children of

thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed." From the beginning God has done good to some for the sake of others. Though Ishmael was denied the blessing of Isaac, "yet," says God to Abraham, "I will make him a nation, because he is thy seed." Moses tells the Israelites that they were not preferred to national privileges for *their* righteousness; "only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day." "I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake," said God to Hezekiah, when the Assyrian besieged Jerusalem. Many other instances might be mentioned in which we find God bestowing favours from a regard to good men, even ages after their death.

It is neither possible nor necessary to determine how far this regard extends, or in what particular ways it may sometimes operate: but the fact is beyond dispute. And how morally instructive and encouraging is it!—What an appeal does it make to the heart of a parent! "If you would fill up that tender and important relation to advantage; if you would be useful even when you are no longer in this world; be concerned to please and glorify God. Devote yourselves to him whose promise is to you and to your children. The way to bless your offspring is to be religious yourselves." "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children."

What an inheritance then does the sinners leave to his offspring!—No instructions—except such as regard the present evil world; no example—but of folly and wickedness; no prayers—but, recorded in their place, oaths and lies; no sanctified substance; no triumph in death; no Providential alliance—nothing but what will lead the children to rise up in the judgment against their parents, and cause them to be put to death!

How unhappy the condition of those children whose parents are ungodly! Let us pity them. Let us pray for them. Let us also encourage them. “Let not the son of the stranger,” says Isaiah, “that has joined himself to the Lord, say, He has utterly separated me from his people.” He will cast out none that come to him. And, partakers of his grace, you may be the means of saving those who ought to have endeavoured to save you.

Let us hail those who are happy enough to claim godly parents. You ought to be more thankful than if you had been born of nobles or princes. Your obligations to God are inexpressible. But your responsibility rises with your advantages. “To whom much is given, from them will be much required.” And remember that nothing can be a substitute for personal religion. Pious relationship cannot save you. The rich man in hell called Abraham, father. “There are last that shall be first, and there are first that shall be last.—Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The subject addresses the young, with regard to

a very momentous concern, which should always be entered upon with prayer and deliberation: I mean, the choice of companions for life. Much should be looked for in the individuals themselves; but connexions are of consequence, and should not, if possible, be overlooked. You should consider not only *whom*, but *whose* you are about to choose. An intercourse will of necessity take place with their families—Is it likely to be respectable and improving? or injurious and contaminating? There is also a retrospective influence to be valued or feared—What do they inherit? What is entailed upon them from ancestors—a blessing or a curse?

There was a time when your forefathers made this a subject of serious reflection. In those better days, children never thought of acting without the advice of their parents; and their parents, like the patriarchs, never thought of sending them to the daughters of the land, but to the houses of their own people. Thus pious families combined; and while religion was befriended by marriage, it amply repaid the respect shown it by perpetuating a godly seed. This pious prudence has long been set at nought by children and parents; and the effects are too obvious to be denied, and too serious not to be deplored.

“O God, satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.—Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.—Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it”

DISCOURSE LXI.

DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

“God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”—2 Cor. iv. 6.

THE original production of the world is a striking subject of contemplation. It exhibits a marvellous display of Divine power; and serves to distinguish the works of God from the operations of man. Man can do little; God can do every thing. Man can only act in consequence of a capacity given him; God has an all-sufficiency in himself. Man does nothing without labour and toil; God acts with infinite ease: “he speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast.” Man’s workmanship must resemble the materials from which it is derived; but it is the prerogative of God to bring order out of confusion, and good out of evil, and all out of nothing.

Hence the sacred writers frequently speak of the creation. They sometimes adduce it as a sovereign

consideration to relieve the fears of God's people, arising from their dangers and difficulties. "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?—Our help is in the name of the Lord that made heaven and earth."

At other times they allude to it as holding forth an image of Divine agency, in the renovation of our nature. With this view the Apostle, in one place, says, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." In another, he enjoins us to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." And in the words that await our meditation, he tells us; "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

It is commonly and reasonably supposed that the Apostle refers to a sentence recorded by Moses in his account of the creation: "He said, Let there be light: and there was light." Longinus, the heathen, having met with this sentence, mentions it as an instance of the true sublime. The reason is obvious. It combines simplicity and grandeur; facility of operation, and immensity of effect. Paul, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and versed in the poetry of Greece, was no stranger to the "excellency of speech;" but he lays hold of this passage, not to illustrate the nature of style, but to exemplify the doctrine of Divine grace. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in

our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

The saving knowledge of God is our subject: and we are here led to consider—I. THE NECESSITY OF IT. II. THE MEDIUM OF IT. III. THE RESIDENCE OF IT. IV. THE AUTHOR OF IT.

I. THE NECESSITY OF IT. Nothing can be done without it; and yet we are naturally destitute of it.

When God viewed the earth, it was formless and void, “and darkness was upon the face of the deep;” and he produced what he did not find. So, when he comes to the soul, he sees it full of disorder and ignorance. Thus we read, that “darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people:” and the Apostle, referring to the state of the Gentiles, before they received the benefit of the Gospel, describes them as “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness of their hearts.” The exemplifications of this truth are numerous and awful.

There is only one God, the Former of all things: but the world had lost the knowledge of him so early, that it is hard to determine at what period idolatry commenced. But they “had lords many, and gods many.” The least exceptionable kind of idolatry seemed to be the adoration of the heavenly bodies yet even this betrayed their ignorance, that they would worship and serve any of his creatures, however great and useful, “more than the Creator, who is God over all blessed for evermore.” But they descended much lower; and “worshipped birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” A dog was adored: a fly was deified.

As the object of worship was misunderstood, so

the service rendered him was no longer a reasonable service. Even human blood streamed upon their altars; and the "fruit of the body was frequently offered for the sin of the soul." Innumerable other usages prevailed, which, though less cruel, were not less absurd. Indeed it is scarcely possible for us to imagine to what a degree the human mind was imposed upon and degraded. But all history bears testimony to it.—Such were the practices of mankind from age to age; and such are the delusions of mankind even now in countries unblessed with revelation.

There are persons who acknowledge this to be a just statement of the heathen world; but will not allow the application of our charge to those nations that enjoy the advantages of the Gospel. These advantages we cannot too highly value. But is there no difference between the possession of means and the proper use of them? Are men secure from error and delusion in a land of vision? Do we not often see their ignorance—in their views of the evil of sin? in their apprehensions of the way of salvation? in their indifference to the things that belong to their everlasting peace? in their subjection to the world? in their disaffection to God? For this is the decision of the Scripture: "He that loveth not, knoweth not God: for God is love." "If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness; we lie, and do not the truth." "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now." The rays of the sun may shine around a man, and upon him; while yet, because of his blindness, he may grope in darkness at noon-day: "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not."

We may be delivered from gross idolatry, and yet indulge in a more refined species of it, and which is equally destructive to the soul. Many would be shocked to bow down before a stock or a stone, and yet they transfer to some creature the dependence and service they owe to the Lord of all. They make "gold their hope, and fine gold their confidence." The "covetous" man is an "idolater so is he that "loves the praise of men more than the praise of God." Education may dispose us to revere the Sabbath, and to yield a customary attention to the ordinances of religion; but grace alone can so act upon the heart as to enable us to worship "him who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth."

But this knowledge, of which we are destitute, is not a matter of indifference. It is of indispensable importance. "For the soul to be without knowledge," says Solomon, "it is not good." The soul without knowledge, is like the body without the eye, or the earth without the sun. The Devil maintains his empire by error; but God maintains his cause by truth. One reigns in a kingdom of darkness, the other in a kingdom of light. The one blinds all his followers, and all their works are works of darkness; the other enlightens his subjects; he engages them by choice; and they "are all the children of the day; they are not of the night nor of darkness." Ignorance is not the mother of their devotion: they know whom they worship, and why they worship him. In a word, all God's operations in his people are begun and carried on in the illumination of the mind. Take repentance, faith, patience, courage, love—what are these? If they do not result from, and are not influenced by just views of things, which supply what

we call motives, they are not Christian graces, nor even moral virtues.

II. Observe THE MEDIUM OF THIS KNOWLEDGE: we have the light of the knowledge of God “in the face of Jesus Christ.” “No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” And how did he declare him? Not only by the doctrines he taught, but by the work to which he was appointed; and by his temper, his life, his character. If we would know what God is, we must learn of him “who went about doing good and who said to Philip, “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” Hence he is called “the image of the invisible God; the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.”

Much of God is indeed displayed in the works of nature. Impressions of his perfections appear in the largest, and in the least. The heavens declare his glory; and so does every blade of grass. But these works are more adapted and designed to aid us when we know God, than to produce our return to him. We do not find that those who are most familiar with the wonders of the Creation are the most devoted to him. Some of them feel an overpowering admiration of a Being so wise; and may discover an awful reverence for a Being so great; but they know nothing of the sentiments resulting from reconciliation and friendship. The Scripture leads us back to God by the cross. “We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he has consecrated for us, through the veil, that, is to say, his flesh. He has once suffered for

sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God." If he had not assumed the office of mediator, and lived and died for us, we should never have obtained any acquaintance with him that would operate as the principle of our recovery.—We might have known that there was a God, but not that he was our God. We might have known his power and righteousness, by the wrath we should have suffered; but we could have known nothing of his giving us eternal life, for "this life is in his Son."

It is *in him* that we see the union and harmony of the Divine perfections. It is *in him* that we see "the just God and the Saviour." It is *in him* that we see the glory of God without being dazzled to death by the effulgence. There it is softened; there it is approachable; there it is inviting. There we have the only discovery of him that could meet our case—the immensity of his compassion; the exceeding riches of his grace; the pledge of his readiness to admit us to favour and forgiveness. This alone can divest us of that fear which follows guilt, and necessarily produces enmity and flight when there is no prospect of reconciliation. "We are saved by hope;" and here it must be inspired: "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

III. We are led to THE RESIDENCE OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. It is the heart; he hath shined "in our hearts," to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is an awful truth, that we may perish not only by ignorance, but by knowledge. There is a knowledge possessed by many who hear the Gospel, that will

only aggravate their sin and enhance their condemnation.

We are far from pleading for a zeal without knowledge; but let us not rest in a knowledge without zeal. We read in the Scripture of “a form of knowledge.-’ as well as “a form of godliness.” Our creed may be orthodox, while our affections are worldly. The head may be clear while the heart is cold, but the religion of Jesus is addressed to the heart; and as the heart is, so is the man; so is his state; so is his character.

The knowledge of which the Apostle here speaks is very distinguishable from mere opinion and speculation; it has to do with the heart. It affects it first in a way of godly sorrow. There is a “broken heart” which “God will not despise:” and here it is produced. “They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son; and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.”—Secondly; it affects the heart in a way of desire. The man longs to appropriate what he discovers. Such earnestness he feels to obtain nothing else. It is called “hungering and thirsting after righteousness.” And it is as durable as it is powerful. Instead of being satisfied it is increased by indulgence: and the prayer constantly is, “I beseech thee, show me thy glory.”—Thirdly; it affects the heart in a way of complacency. The believer not only submits, but acquiesces. He submits indeed to this plan of salvation from necessity—for there is no other: but if other methods of salvation were possible, he would reject them all; he would enter no other refuge; he would build on no other foundation; he would walk

in no other way. His necessity is his choice. He is not only relieved, but delighted: and so far from being ashamed, he glories: as it is written, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted." It also affects the heart in a way of gratitude. We see, we feel, that we are not our own, but bought with a price, and bound to glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God's. We love him because he first loved us; and cannot but ask, What shall we render UNTO the Lord for all his benefits towards us? This disposition becomes the source of all cheerful obedience, and animates him in every exertion and in every sacrifice he is called to make.

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

IV. We are led to THE AUTHOR OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. It is God himself. "He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." When Peter had made a good confession, our Lord said to him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." The same may be said of every enlightened sinner. The same *is* said. "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him and he will show them his covenant. The meek will he guide

in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. The same *must* be said. "For the natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The nature, the efficacy, the blessedness of this knowledge prove it to be of a Divine original. And to this every believer readily subscribes. He may often question whether he is the subject of this illumination; but he never doubts whether God is the source of it. He acknowledges that by his grace he is what he is: and on him who has begun this good work he is depending for the progress and completion of it: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day."

O that you would think of this! Till God has revealed his Son in you, you know nothing as you ought to know. Many are proud of their attainments who are mere fools in the view of Heaven. "Vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt."—And here he is ruined. He goes on without prayer, relying upon himself, and supposing that he is equal to his own direction; and, in the greatness of his delusion, he eternally goes astray. Whereas the man that is convinced of his ignorance, and feels his insufficiency to understand Divine things without a Divine teacher, falls upon his knees, and immediately finds an Interpreter, who will lead him into all truth. "This is the way, walk ye in it." The wise and the prudent may sneer at the supposed enthusiasm of such a course; but we know the authority that has prescribed it: "If any of you lack

wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

Are there none here in whom this revelation has been made? Cannot you, with humble confidence, say, “‘Whereas I was once blind, now I see ‘? I was living without God; God was not in all my thoughts; but I sought and I found him, found him in Christ ‘reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.’ I was turned ‘from dumb idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven.’ No longer asking, Who will show me any good? ‘The Lord is my portion,’ said my soul, ‘therefore will I hope in him.’ And, oh! what a different life have I since led! I have not only heard that a life of communion with God, and of devotedness to him, is blessed, but I have found it so; and I am rejoicing in the hope, in the earnest, in the foretastes of the glory that shall be revealed.”

What a mercy that the doctrine you have been hearing is not an unexperienced truth, nor a truth you have to confess with regard to others! *You* can say, “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in *our* hearts, to give *us* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!”

And for what purpose has he done this? But that you should “show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Ye were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of the light.”

DISCOURSE LXII.

THE BARREN FIG TREE.

[NEW YEAR'S DAY.]

“Lord, let it alone this year also.”—LUKE xiii. 8.

IT is impossible to do justice to the character, or even manner of our Saviour as a preacher. But even his enemies exclaimed, “Never man spake like this man.” Much of the singular interest that he always excited in his hearers arose from his perfect acquaintance with human nature; from the tenderness of his feelings; from his improvement of present occurrences; and from his command of imagery. We have often remarked a difference between our Lord and men of erudition. When the latter avail themselves of allusions, they are ambitious of selecting those that do not so much illustrate their subject, as serve to display their reading and science: they are classical and artificial, rather than, familiar and natural; and, by being unintelligible to the generality of mankind, are unimpressive and useless. But all the comparisons of the former are derived from

the common scenes and operations of nature. They are such as all, however ignorant, can understand and feel. They are constantly to be met with; they become a substitute for books and teachers; they enable people, wherever they are, to teach themselves, and to find in a field, a garden, a vineyard, nothing less than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. —“He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.”

In this parable Four things require attention. THE PLANTATION OF THE FIG TREE. THE COMPLAINT OF THE PROPRIETOR. THE SENTENCE OF DESTRUCTION. THE INTERCESSION OF THE VINE-DRESSER TO SUSPEND THE STROKE.

I. “A CERTAIN MAN HAD A FIG TREE PLANTED IN HIS VINEYARD.” This “certain man” denotes God. To him every thing belongs. “The earth is his, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” But the Church is peculiarly *Ait*, as it is called by his name, and formed to show forth his praise. It is often held forth in the Scripture by a vineyard, while the wide world is frequently represented by a wilderness. This Church, in its external and visible state, is a mixed community: so that among God’s people are found wicked men; men who have indeed “a name to live, but are dead;”

and wear "the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof."

This circumstance enables us to answer a question of great importance—Who is intended by the "fig tree" "planted in this vineyard?—It cannot be a real Christian. All the truly regenerate are fruitful. They are not indeed *equally*, but they are *really*, fruitful. The good ground brought forth in one place thirty, in another sixty, in a third a hundred i'old: but though it yielded in different proportion, every part of it was productive soil.—The character here intended is a man placed in the external and visible Church, and enjoying all the privileges of such a favoured situation. It was once the highly favoured Jew, to "whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose were the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." It is now the highly favoured Christian, blessed with all the religious advantages of Judaism, multiplied, improved, perfected: it is now the highly favoured Briton, born not only in a land of freedom and science, but of Gospel grace. It is thou who wast brought up in a godly family, and favoured with the prayers, the instructions, the examples, the tears, of pious parents. It is thou who hast a name -and a place in his sanctuary, from Sabbath to Sabbath, where "thine eyes see thy teachers: and thy ears hear a voice behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left." "Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For, verily, I say unto you, that many prophets and

righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." Few are aware of the value of such privileges.

Few consider themselves as accountable for the use of them. Few, few indeed! are concerned to improve them.—And thus we find this fig tree, though planted in a rich soil, and where nothing was wanting to make it fruitful, was all barrenness. For observe,

II. THE COMPLAINT OF THE PROPRIETOR—"Behold," says he to the vine-dresser, "these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none." Every thing here is worthy of our notice. His observation, his disappointment, his patience.

His observation: "I come seeking fruit." It marks the attention which God pays to those who are favoured with religious advantages. Indeed, he investigates all his creatures to see what is in them. "His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he pondereth all his goings. There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves." What think you of this scrutiny? Is it not an awful consideration that you always move in the view of God? That "he is about your path and your lying down, and is acquainted with all your ways? That there is not a word in your tongue but he knoweth it altogether? That he searcheth all your hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of your thoughts"?

God comes among you to see how you are carrying on your business; to see what you are doing with your mercies and your trials; to mark the manner in

which you are filling up your relations in life; to observe the formation of your principles, and the cultivation of your tempers.

And remember, he is not, he cannot be, mistaken in his conclusion. You may err in judging yourselves; you may err in judging your fellow-creatures; but his judgment is always according to truth. You judge after outward appearances, and depend on the declaration of others: but he looketh to the heart, and "needeth not that any man should testify of man, for he knows what is in man." Distance of time and of place add to our embarrassment in the decision of a disputed fact: but all this is inapplicable to a Being that fills heaven and earth, and "with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day." What does *He* think of you?

His disappointment: "I come seeking fruit, and *find none.*" This shows us that God not only searches for fruit, but expects it from those who receive religious benefits. He knows the goodness of the soil in which you are fixed; and the degrees of culture you have received. He forgets none of your privileges, nor his pains. In his book are written all your talents, and all your opportunities. He has recorded when the Gospel came to you, and how many sermons you have heard. For these are not only mercies which you are required to acknowledge, but means which you are expected to improve: they are given for this purpose, and by this purpose you will be judged. But though his expectation be so righteous and reasonable, how often is it frustrated! For what does he look after? If it were lies, oaths, slanders, drunkenness, avarice—he would find enough. If it were leaves, the leaves of profession and appearances

—he would find many. If it were blossoms, the blossoms of conviction, resolution, attendance on the ordinances of religion—he would discern not a few. But it is fruit—“the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God; the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” And where will he find these?

His patience: “These *three years* I come seeking fruit, and find none.” Why did he not complain the first year? Why did he not destroy it the second year? Why does he bear with it to the end of the third? Why?—To teach us that judgment is his strange work—that he delighteth in mercy; that he waiteth to be gracious; that he is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. He therefore spares as long as his perfections will allow him, and even then seems to proceed with reluctance; and his dispensations, like his word, say, “How shall I give thee up?” Yet this will be the case. For observe,

III. THE SENTENCE OF DESTRUCTION: “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? “Here we see. First, that they who derive no benefit from the means of grace are detrimental. Barren trees not only yield no fruit, but encumber the ground. They take up the room of better trees, and draw off the moisture from others. All of them do this; but the injury is in proportion “to their age and their size. Who can tell all the mischief resulting from a long-continued course of worldly-mindedness or wickedness! Who can imagine how much evil men of ability and authority occasion by their influence; or

how much good they prevent by their omissions! But every unholy professor of religion, every mere hearer of the word, is an enemy to the welfare of mankind and the cause of the Redeemer; as he himself has determined: "He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth." He impedes the success of the Gospel; he causes the adversaries of the Lord to blaspheme; he grieves the godly; he discourages ministers; he justifies the wicked, and makes them conclude that religion is either hypocrisy or a dream. He deprives others of spiritual advantages. He hears in vain the sermons that would convert others. He engrosses the means which would otherwise be employed upon persons who would bring forth their fruit in its season. "If the mighty works which have been done in thee," says our Saviour, speaking of Capernaum, "had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes."

Secondly. Unprofitableness under the means of grace is exceedingly provoking to the Most High. And can we wonder at this when we consider what a waste it is of time; what an abuse it is of privilege; what a contempt it is of the Divine goodness; what a disregard it is of the soul and eternity! Sin is to be estimated not by its grossness, but its guilt. And what aggravates guilt? The light we possess; the obligations we are under; the restraints we break through. "He that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few

stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." Upon this principle it is easy to see that there is not, there cannot be a wretch upon the globe so guilty as the man that enjoys the privileges of the Gospel, and remains unrighteous still. He has no cloak for his sin: its commission is without excuse; and its punishment will be without alleviation. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for such. The hell of a heathen, or of a Jew, will be nothing, compared with that of a Christian.

Thirdly. God possesses justice as well as mercy; and though he bears long, he will not bear always. "Sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; "and, as the consequence, the heart of the sons of men is often fully set in them to do evil. But how absurd, as well as dangerous, is such perverse reasoning! Is forbearance forgiveness? No; nor even connivance. God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; and in due time he will rise and prove it. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." The husbandman at length orders the spade to be laid down, and the axe to be brought.—Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground? But we have,

IV. THE INTERCESSION OF THE VINE-DRESSER imploring a limited suspension. "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I dig about it, and dung it; and if

it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Whose language is this?—It is the language of a Christian in favour of an irreligious relation—of a father pleading for a child; a sister for a brother; a wife for a husband; all saying, with Esther, "How can I bear the destruction of my kindred!"—It is the language of a minister pleading for his people. Such a man not only preaches, but prays. He can say, with Paul, I seek not yours, but you. He knows what it is to weep in secret places for their pride and unbelief; and so far is he from desiring the evil day, that he longs to avert the dreadful blow he foresees; and, fearing lest any indifference of his should have caused their unprofitableness, he engages to use renewed and increasing diligence in future.

But, above all, it is the language of Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant; the mediator between God and man. He makes intercession for the transgressors; he prayed for his murderers even in death: "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do."

First. He pleads for the suspension of the stroke. "Let it alone this year also." Thou hast borne with it long, I own, already; oh! bear with it a little longer.—And why is he so desirous of sparing the sinner a little longer in this world? Because, in order to our having the grace *of* repentance, it is necessary that we should have space *for* repentance: because while there is life there is hope; but "when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door," opportunity is over, importunity vain.

Secondly. He engages to use additional means to

produce fertility—"Till I dig about it, and dung it". The word shall be preached with more fervour than before. The minister shall be particular in describing his case, in alarming his fears. Friends shall warn, admonish, invite. Conscience shall awake and reprove. Disappointments shall show him the vanity of the world. Sickness shall invade his frame. Death shall enter his family, and smite a connexion by his side. The day in which he lives shall be dark and cloudy. He shall hear of "distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and after looking for those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." And can he retain his ungodliness through such a year as this?

Thirdly. Here is the supposition of future produce. "If it bear fruit, well." The word *well* is not in the original: there we find nothing but an awful pause. If it bear fruit—*Then*, it might be said, thy design will be fulfilled, my prayer will be answered, the tree will be continued. Our translators have properly enough supplied the word—*well*.—Well for the owner: "for herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."—Well for the vine-dresser, as his labours will be rewarded.—Well for the vineyard: it will be adorned, and enriched, and replenished, where it was cumbered before.—Well for the tree itself, as it will escape the punishment of barrenness, and obtain the blessing of fruitfulness.

Fourthly. Here is the doom of final impenitence. "If not—then—after that thou shalt cut it down." It not only announces the certainty of the event, but

expresses his own disposition with regard to it. He even craves but one year more; and confesses that, after this fresh instance of the Proprietor's patience and his own pains, he cannot—he will not oppose the execution of the sentence. He will interpose no longer.

There is something in this tremendous beyond all expression! We see in it even the patience of the Saviour exhausted; and his mercy not indeed delighting, but acquiescing in our misery. The refuge open to us before, in every danger, is now closed. While *He* was our friend, we always had a resource: but the “Lamb of God is become the Lion of the tribe of Judah;” the “great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

Here the parable breaks off. We want to know more, but in vain. Particularly we want to know whether another year was granted in answer to this importunity. But all is silence; wise, righteous silence; quite in agreement with the whole Scripture, which nowhere tells you that God will give you another year—another week—or even another day.

We want also to know whether, if the boon was granted, the tree became fruitful—but all is silence. If we judge from facts in general, it remained the same. If the Gospel does not succeed at first, it frequently never succeeds at all. There is a hardening of the heart through the deceitfulness of sin; and there is also a hardening of it by the means of grace. The latter perhaps is the more dreadful and hopeless of the two. Truths never heard *may* meet with the former, and alarm him: but the other *can* hear nothing new; the Cross, heaven, hell, eternity, the threaten-

ings of the Law, the promises of the Gospel—all these have expended their force upon him in vain. We know that with God all things are possible. Oh! seize this last, this trembling hope, and, seeking the Lord “while he *may* be found,” say, “Lord, save; I perish!”

The subject leads me to address even those of you who are not only planted in the vineyard, but are alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is a mercy that you are not wholly barren; but must you not acknowledge that you have brought forth very little fruit? Will it bear any comparison with your profession and your advantages? To lead you back no farther than the year we have just closed. How have you redeemed your time? What additions have you made to your knowledge? What faults have you corrected in your tempers? What good have you accomplished by your influence, or by your example? How have you served your generation? How have you glorified God in your bodies and spirits? Alas! who can take a farewell glance of the departed period of time, without many a tear and many a sigh—

“What have I done for Him who died
To save my wretched soul?
How have my follies multiplied
Fast us my minutes roll!

“Lord, with this guilty heart of mine,
To thy dear *cross* I flee;
And to thy *grace* my soul resign.
To be renew’d by Thee.”

But I must address those of you in particular who have begun a new year without a new heart. Let me expostulate with you. You have long enjoyed

the means of grace. The husbandman came three years to inspect this fig tree: but God has come twenty—thirty—forty—fifty—sixty—is it possible that we can go further?—Yes, even seventy years—to some of you; and yet, after all, has found no fruit!!—You have heard of the danger of unprofitableness under religious advantages; you have heard that “the axe is now laid to the root of the tree; and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.” Many have been cut down during the past year in their sins; many, oh dreadful exchange! have been sent to hell from the very house of God; some perhaps less guilty than you, and to whose destruction you were the means of contributing. But you are spared, and you live to enter on another year. Ah! perhaps this is the year, the very year for which the vine-dresser has been pleading. Perhaps he has said, Grant this, and I will not ask for another hour! Perhaps upon this revolution of time all your eternal interest is suspended—and if you are not saved *this* year, you are lost for ever! Perhaps at the end of *this* year, if you are not removed from this world, you may be abandoned of God, who, as you would have none of him, will give you up to your own heart's lust, to walk in your own counsel.

One thing is certain: “there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest; and therefore, whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” And since you know not what will be even “on the morrow,” pray, with David, “Lord, so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

And what is wisdom? Wisdom is a relative thing

and this is so true, that what would be wise for one man to do, would be folly in another. The question then is, What would be a wise part to act, considering the circumstances in which you are placed? Now what does common sense teach us in other cases? If a man has an important journey to take, his wisdom consists in preparing for it. If a man be in imminent danger from an overhanging precipice, he would do wisely to flee. If a man be labouring under a threatening disease, he would be reckoned a fool not to inquire after a remedy and a physician.—Avoid this folly. Betake yourselves to the Friend of sinners. Fall at his feet, and say, “Heal me, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for thou art my praise.” In him seek the justification of your persons, the sanctification of your natures; a title to heaven, and a meetness for it, with all the diligence the importance of these blessings demands; and “so much the more as ye see the day approaching.” Dedicate yourselves unreservedly to him who loved us, and gave himself for us.

And then, should the news, “This year thou shalt die,” be addressed to you, as it was to one of old, you may hear it without consternation; it will only announce your deliverance, your triumph, your eternal gain. And if your life should be continued through the year we have begun, and through many following years, his grace shall be sufficient for you, rendering your trials supportable, and your duties practicable and pleasant. “Whether you live, you will live unto the Lord; or whether you die, you will die unto the Lord: so that, living or dying, you will be the Lord’s.” Amen.

DISCOURSE LXIII.

SAUL OF TARSUS PRAYING.

“And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth.”—ACTS ix. 10, 11.

WE live in a world of changes. Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, succeed each other. Human affairs are as variable as the seasons. We have seen the rich impoverished and the poor enriched. We have seen the noble debased and the vulgar exalted. We have seen thrones demolished and empires formed.

But no changes are so important in their nature, and interesting in their consequences, as those of a moral nature—because these relate to the soul and eternity. It is painful to see a fellow-creature, under the infatuation of error and vice, proceeding from evil to evil; and Waxing Worse and worse, till he has proved that “the Way of transgressors is hard,” and that “the end of these things is death.” But, oh, how pleasing is it to see a sinner plucked as a brand

from the burning!—How pleasing to trace in him the operation of an agency that opens his eyes, and turns him “from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that he may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified.” Then is fulfilled the language of the prophet: “Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree: and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

To one of these remarkable changes we are referred by the words we have read. It took place in Saul of Tarsus. He was a young man who had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and was now employing his time and talents in the infamous work of persecution. He was in a journey of iniquity, and near the end of it, when God, who is rich in mercy, called him by his grace, and revealed his Son in him. “Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” By this he reminds him that his conduct was as ruinous as it was unreasonable, and only inflicted wounds and death upon himself.—Behold the tiger reduced to a lamb, so that a little child may lead him. “And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And I he Lord said unto him. Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his

eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.”

Then follows the passage we have selected for our present meditation: “And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth.” From these words we are led to remark,

THAT THE LORD KNOWS WHERE WE ARE, AND HOW WE ARE ENGAGED. What was this house of Judas? Was it an inn to which Saul repaired for lodgings? If so, it was a sad situation for a man in spiritual distress; and never did an inn before or since accommodate such a passenger. Perhaps it was a private dwelling, and belonged to one of his friends or acquaintances. If so, what would be the emotions of the family as he entered! One would think him mad; another would eagerly listen to the report of his companions; all would wonder; and some we should hope would be seriously impressed. But however this may be, we find that the Lord knew *where* Saul was—the street—the very house in which he was; and he also knew *what* he was doing there.

It would be easy to multiply similar instances and proofs of his perfect acquaintance with the children of men. He knew how to guide Cornelius in sending to Joppa for Peter—“he lodgeth in the house of one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea side.” Nathanael had retired to a place where no human

eye was likely to observe him: "but when thou wast under the fig tree," says our Lord, "I saw thee." Zaccheus ran before and climbed up into a sycamore tree, little imagining that the wonderful stranger who was to pass under would know or notice him—but he looked up, and said, "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house." When Paul was afar off upon the sea, tossed with waves, the night dark, and not a star appearing, the Lord unerringly directs a messenger to his prisoner: "There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." And what said he of Sennacherib? "I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me." Well therefore says the Scripture, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

It was this truth that David applied to himself in a manner so solemn and affecting, when he said, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether." Let us follow his example, and bring home this truth to ourselves. Let sinners think of it; and never dream of secrecy in their guilt; but, wherever they are, and however privately engaged, remember that "his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he pondereth all his goings; there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide them-

selves: hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.”—Let hearers think of it; and remember that he is privy to all they think of their ministers when alone, to all they say of them when they are in company, to all the dispositions with which they come to his house, to all the workings of their minds while in his worship, to all their disregard of instructions when they return home and enter into common life: “Thou ^{so}n of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying. Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.”—Let the righteous believe this; and remember that though they are poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon them; that he knoweth all their walking through this great wilderness; that their walls are continually before him. “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his Name.”—And, oh! thou dejected penitent, anxious to return with weeping and supplications to him from whom thou hast revolted—oh! think of this and be comforted. You naturally turn from a vain world, in which you find nothing congenial with your present views and wishes; you seek the shades; and are often alone—but he follows you—whether you are in the chamber or the field, his

eye sees all your tears, his ear hears all your sighs. These are his promises, and he will not fail to verify them in your experience: "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

II. HOWEVER THE LORD MAY TRY THEM, HE WILL NOT SUFFER PRAYING SOULS TO CALL UPON HIM IN VAIN. "Go," says he to Ananias, "Go and find him out; for, behold, he prayeth, and I can withhold information and comfort no longer from him." Three days indeed he remained in a very awful state; and the period would seem an age. Every thing was calculated to add to the impression. He was deprived of sight; and thus nothing could divert him without, but all his gloomy thoughts turned inward upon himself. He was also without food; the anguish of his mind was such, that he probably *could* eat nothing. All that he had heard was this, "It shall be told thee what thou must do:" but this was general, and capable of various explanations; and his dismal and guilty feelings would incline him to the less favourable conjecture.

But says the Church, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." And here we see this literally accomplished. The third day arrives, and the messenger of mercy knocks at the door and inquires for one Saul of Tarsus. This was

saying, "I have not abandoned or forgotten him: though I cause grief, yet will I have compassion, I never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain." Who is not here reminded of one of the most beautiful and moving passages in the Old Testament? "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely, after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

Joseph was a type of the Redeemer. His behaviour towards his brethren was for a time rough, and apparently very unkind. But it was more painful to him than to them. He was constrained to leave the room, and turned aside to weep. But the trial was necessary: and at length giving way to the compassion which his prudence had restrained before, he said, "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt—but be not grieved." Thus he, "whose heart is made of tenderness, whose bowels melt with love," leaves Saul three days without comfort; but it was in order to bring him to reflection, to convince him of sin, to make him feel his need of mercy, to prepare him for the displays of Divine grace; and to dig low, and lay deep the foundation of a superstructure that was to rise so high. And all the time as Saul was

praying, he was hearing; and longing to succour and relieve him.

What is the use you ought to make of this?—To persevere; waiting on the Lord and keeping his way, though you are not indulged with immediate success. His delays are not denials. He is as wise as he is kind. He has reasons for what we often deem indifference or severity, and reasons founded in a regard to our welfare, as well as his own glory. Hence it is said, “Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.” You cannot be in a worse condition than David was: but hear him. “I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new Song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.”

Say not, therefore, “My hope is perished from the Lord—why should I wait for him any longer?” If you draw back, you are sure of destruction; but if you go forward, you are certain of success. “The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” You have his word to rest upon, confirmed by the experience of all his people: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” And the longer you have been praying, the nearer is deliverance. Perhaps some messenger of mercy is now on his way; perhaps the

next Christian you meet may speak a word in season; perhaps the next sermon you hear may let in the light of heaven upon your gloom, and turn "the shadow of death into the morning. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."

III. THOUGH THE LORD CAN ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK WITHOUT HUMAN INSTRUMENTALITY, HE IS PLEASED TO MAKE USE OF IT. The voice from heaven that called him by his name, and accused him of persecution, could have told Saul at once what he must do—but a messenger shall be employed. He could have sent an angel—but Ananias shall be engaged. He shall learn it from the lips of a man; a man of like passions with himself.

His terror would not make him afraid. With *him* he could hold free intercourse and familiar conversation.

He could speak to him from his own experience; and therefore sympathize with him. He had himself exercised repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. He had felt the heart's bitterness peculiar to religion, and had intermeddled with its joy.

It would be also useful to Ananias as well as to Saul—and this is another reason why men are employed in doing the Lord's work. By doing good to others we benefit ourselves. What do we most admire in people? What constitutes their excellency? Not their fine equipage, nor their wealth; not even their genius or learning; no, but the tender heart, the melting eye, the hand ready to relieve, the tongue that speaks a word in season, the feet that run to the door of the fatherless and widows in their

affliction, a conformity to him who went about doing good. But who needs to be told that knowledge is improved by communication; that the disposition is confirmed by exercise; that the habit is formed and perfected by action? There is no way in which God could instruct us, impress us, honour us, more than by making us the medium, and distributors of those blessings of which he is the sole Author.

It certainly was designed to prevent our undervaluing means, under a notion of depending on Divine agency. These are not incompatible; neither does the one detract from the other. Was this communication less from God because it was made by Ananias?—Saul did not think so. Neither should we in all cases of the same nature.

Here let us however beware of two extremes. Let us not, on the one hand, overlook instruments in relying on God; nor, on the other, overlook God in using instruments. For, as he uses means, so he gives them their value and their efficacy. It is not the sun that warms us, but He by the sun: it is not food that sustains us, but He by food. “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

IV. THINGS DONE IN OUR OWN APPREHENSION, AND IN THE OPINION OF OTHERS, ARE FREQUENTLY NOTHING IN THE JUDGMENT OF GOD. “Behold, he prayeth!” And what was there strange—what was

there new in this? Had he never prayed before? Never.

But was he not a pharisee, and of the straitest sect of the pharisees? Were not these people held in such estimation, that it was proverbially said, If two men only enter heaven, a pharisee will be one of them? And were they not more distinguished by their prayers than by any thing else? Yes. They prayed often, and they made long prayers, and they prayed even at the corners of the streets.—Yet Saul had never prayed till now.

Such is the difference between the prayer of a pharisee and of an awakened sinner! See the difference drawn by an unerring judge. “Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican. The pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” And he only prayed. “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Such a difference is there between praying in the corner of a street to be seen of men, and withdrawing to pour out the heart before God, where no eye can see us. “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” Such a difference is there

between praying and saying our prayers with a form or without one. Prayer is the desire of the soul towards God, and words are not essential to the performance of it: words are nothing but as they express the state of the mind. A single sentence, or a groan that cannot be uttered, arising from a broken heart and a contrite spirit, "God will not despise;" while a fine and orderly address may be rejected, because in the exercise we draw nigh to him with the mouth, and honour him with the lip, while our heart is far from him. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." It is an awful consideration; but there are many who attend several sermons a week, and never hear in reality; who often join in the devotions of the sanctuary and the family, and never serve God at all: their praise and prayer are nothing to him: and, as religious characters, he will disown them at last: "I know you not whence ye are."

Finally. PRAYER IS A GOOD EVIDENCE OF CONVERSION. "Go, Ananias; he is ready to receive you. Go, and be not afraid of him—the man is changed—he is become a new creature—'for, behold, he prayeth."

"The spirit of grace" is always a spirit "of supplications." It brings a man upon his knees. It leads him to speak to God rather than to talk of him. And much will he see, much will he feel, to urge him to seek the Lord. A hell to escape—a heaven to obtain—sins to be pardoned and subdued—duties to be performed—trials to be endured—and God to be glorified—his generation to be served—his own wants and the necessities of others!—All these are enough to induce him to pray—and to pray without ceasing.

Be it remembered, however, that this mark is better applied exclusively than inclusively. What I mean is this. A man *may* pray, and not be in a state of salvation; but he that does not pray, *cannot* be in a state of salvation. A man may have convictions of conscience; he may be impressed by a sermon; he may be alarmed by sickness; and be led to pray when there is no gracious principle that operates in his heart. Such a principle indeed may be safely inferred where prayer is not only public, but private; where it is not only occasional, but habitual and constant; where it is earnest, and accompanied by corresponding exertions; where it is not only performed as a duty, but valued as a privilege.—But, without any distinction or qualification, we can apply it by way of exclusion. No man *can* be a partaker of Divine grace that lives without prayer.—We are certain that a prayerless person—is a graceless person.

What then is the condition of many! They live without God in the world! They acknowledge him not, lying down or rising up, going out or coming in! God is not in all their thoughts! The duty of prayer they never discharge. The privilege of prayer they never enjoy!

Is this your state? If it be—oh that this day may be rendered memorable by your joining “the generation of them that seek him “! From this hour may the Lord take knowledge of you, and say, “Behold, he prayeth.” Then you will enter the way everlasting. The righteous shall compass you about with songs of deliverance. “And there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.”



DISCOURSE LXIV.

THE PARALYTIC; OR, SICKNESS IMPROVED.

“And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house.”—MATT. ix. 1-7.

WHO “went about doing good.” Such is the representation given us by the apostle Peter of “Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power.” And never was there a life more concisely or more justly drawn. All, even of the preternatural exemplifications of his character in the days of his flesh, have not come down to us. “Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his

disciples which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his Name.”

Our Saviour had just arrived from the opposite side of the lake of Galilee, the country of the Gergesinos. While there, he had proved his power over unclean spirits; and had dispossessed two demoniacs who had been long the terror of the place. The devils, such was their mischievous disposition, and such their subjection to the control of our Lord, asked leave to enter a large herd of swine; he permitted them; “and, behold, the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.” This was an exertion of authority and justice, as well as of power: the trade was unlawful, and constantly exposed them to temptation.

But see the worldly-mindedness of these people. Instead of being struck with his goodness in delivering their neighbours from such a wretched state, and in removing the occasions of sin from themselves, “the whole city came out to meet him; and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts”! And “let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone” at them. Pause, and inquire, has he not approached you as a reprover—by conscience, by friends, by ministers, by providence? And have you not disliked the remonstrance; and wished to be allowed to go on undisturbed? And what if he, who knows your meaning, should gratify your wish! What if he, who is not obliged to force his favours upon you, should say, “They are joined to idols; let them alone!”

This was the case here. He takes these people at

their word: he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.”

Indeed, your desires, with regard either to his presence or absence, will be accomplished. If you desire his presence, and pray that he will be with you in all your troubles and duties, he will answer and say, “Here I am. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” When Moses said, “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence he said, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” When the two disciples going to Emmaus reached their abode, and he made as if he would have gone further, “they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.” When the Samaritans, allured by the woman’s report, were come to the well, “they besought him that he would tarry with them; and he abode there two days.” But if you wish his absence; if you say, “Depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of thy ways he will renew the expression of his severity, which the Jews suffered as our examples: “My people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels.” And *woe unto us when he departs from us?* What is a man when left of him? What is a man left to himself? Oh! welcome him, in whatever character he condescends to come to you. Welcome him, even when he comes as a reprover: for, “as many as he loves, he rebukes and chastens.” Welcome him, even when he comes as a destroyer: your swine are not your souls; your *sins* must die, if you would live; and “it is better for thee to enter into life bait and maimed, rather than

having two hands, or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire.”

No sooner had our Saviour entered Capernaum than another opportunity was presented of displaying his goodness and power.

For, “behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed.”—How numerous, how various, are the objects of human wretchedness! What proofs of the evil of sin are perpetually striking our very senses! What daily calls have we, in the distresses of others, to be thankful for our own exceptions and indulgences! What room is there for the daily exercise of pity and benevolence! How happy was our Saviour, who never saw a misery that he was not able to alleviate, to remove!

The subject of this narrative was the victim of a distemper that rendered life useless and burdensome, though not immediately dangerous. The palsy is a partial death, depriving the limbs affected of sensibility and motion. The poor creature, therefore, when he heard of the fame of Jesus, was unable to go to him for relief. But it was his happiness to have those around him who were disposed to acts of humanity and compassion. The impotent man at the pool of Bethesda complained that “he had no one, when the water was troubled, to put him in.” But this paralytic had some neighbours, friends, or relations, who brought him.

And it is said, our Lord “saw their faith.” There was faith in the poor man; or he would have refused their assistance, and have said, Trouble not yourselves—my case is hopeless—let me alone to exhaust the remains of a miserable existence. But there was a co-operation; they also had faith, or they would

not have taken the journey, and the trouble. They had a persuasion of our Lord's ability and mercy; and therefore they agreed to bring the helpless patient, and place him under the Saviour's view. And thus they, in a very material sense, became instrumental to his cure.

And herein they are an example to us. We should endeavour to do good. The ways in which we may render ourselves useful are numberless. Who is so limited as to be able to do nothing for a fellow-creature? Silver and gold you may have none. You may not have the resources of office, of genius, of learning. But who cannot advise? Who cannot speak a word in season? Who cannot sympathize? Who cannot pray? Who cannot bring to the throne of grace—the ignorant, the guilty, the afflicted, the perishing, and say, “Lord Jesus, have mercy on them”? And in doing this let us remember, for our encouragement, that our Saviour never turned a deaf ear to prayer—not only when it was offered for the petitioner himself, but also when it implored relief for others. Did the leper obtain a cure for himself? So did the nobleman for his son. So did the centurion for his servant.

We are not told that the man said any thing. Nor was it necessary. His situation, lying motionless on his bed; his features, his looks—all pleaded loud enough for him. Nor did they plead in vain. “Jesus said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.” But did not the man come for a bodily cure? Was any thing said of his guilt? Why then does our Saviour reverse the order, and begin with the pardon of sin?

First.—To display his sovereignty. Has he not a

right to do what he will with his own?—Is it not becoming in us, who have no claims upon him, to leave the time and the way of communicating his favours to the good pleasure of his will; and be thankful if he blesses us at all? We may pray, but we must not dictate.

Secondly.—To show that the soul is of more importance than the body, and should be principally cared for, even in sickness. We never need a physician so much as we do a Saviour.

Thirdly.—Perhaps the man was convinced of sin. Perhaps he suffered more from spiritual distress than from bodily pain. Perhaps he desired a pardon more earnestly than a cure; though he might have had no apprehension of our Lord's authority to bestow it. Words are not necessary to inform the Redeemer. He knows what is in man. Our desire is before him, and our groaning is not hid from him.

Fourthly.—It would serve to emit a ray of his glory, and prove a test to try the dispositions of the company. And, accordingly, so it fell out.

For, "behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth." What, could not He do good without censure; and shall we wonder at reproach, or be deterred by it from the course of duty? It is enough that the servant be as his master, and the disciple as his Lord. Is it sinful to harbour suspicions and surmisings; and to condemn actions unknown and unexamined? It is. Does he arraign men even for their thoughts? He does. And he is acquainted with them: and "there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: for all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." "Jesus knowing their

thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in yom hearts?"

This indication of his being privy to sentiments, which, though they harboured, they had not expressed, would serve to raise his character, and vindicate the prerogative he claimed. But he does more. He makes use of a sensible argument, and suited to their carnal minds, which at the same time was a very decisive one, and such as could not fail to produce immediate conviction. If he could not forgive sins without a Divine authority, neither could he work miracles without a Divine energy: and the exertion of the one would substantiate the possession of the other, or render it credible. "For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house."

Here several things are worthy of notice. The cure was effected by a word—and in an instant! We think much, by the application of medicine, or the use of means, of easing a pain, or gradually removing it. If the constitution be renovated, it must be the work of time; strength is renewed by degrees, and requires food, and air, and exercise. But this man in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, feels himself enlivened; and becomes a new creature.

It may be asked, why he is commanded not only to walk, but to take up his bed? Was it to show more fully the reality and the completeness of the cure, in that he could not only use his limbs, but carry a

burden?—Was it to teach him not to be wasteful; as in another case, after the miraculous abundance which fed the multitude, he said, “Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost”?—Or was it to be a memento of his disease and deliverance? The mind is approached through the medium of sense. We need every assistance. “Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” This man could never see his bed without thinking, “There I lay, when he took pity upon me. ‘And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord: remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.’”

Again. He was ordered to return home. A man who sought his own glory would have detained him, to swell the number of his followers, and to produce a trophy of his power. There is little benevolence in all our beneficence. There is often more vanity than kindness in what we do for our fellow-creatures. But he only thinks of us; and selfishness deducts nothing from his benefits.—This man had a house, and it was the sphere of his duty. “Go, and there rejoice thy friends. Go, and there fill up every relative duty. Go, and there shadow forth a spiritual cure. Go, and prove that conversion is designed not to draw a man off from his calling, but to teach him therein to abide with God.” “If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an in-

fidel." A man is really in religion what he is relatively: and he is more to be judged of by what he is in *his own house* than by what he is in *the house of God*.

It is easy to imagine what an affecting scene his return would produce. How far or how long he had been from home we cannot conjecture; but his connexions would be anxious for the success of the trial. Perhaps in this cottage was an old withered mother, who waited only to know the event before she departs in peace. Perhaps a wife—perhaps children were there! They are looking out between hope and fear. By-and-by they see him—not borne of four—but walking—and carrying his bed—his neighbours walking by his side. He enters. Who has not known what it is to receive back a dear friend or relation from the grave! How much more vivid is the joy arising from the recovery of a blessing than the pleasure of continued possession!—His first concern is to adore, with his family, the Preserver of men. But the principal thing in his extraordinary case was, that, like the publican, he has returned to his house justified—divinely pardoned, and assured of it; as sure of the salvation of his soul as of the cure of his body.

Let us, in drawing towards a close,

First, fix our eyes on Jesus; the most prominent figure in every piece of evangelical history. What a wonderful, what a peculiar, what a lovely, what a glorious character does he sustain! Wherever we open the memoirs of his life, as given us by the evangelists, we find in him an originality, as free from all affectation and eccentricity, as it is from commonness. We discern the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of *his* person, whose grandeur is his

goodness, and who has named himself the "God of love." We always see him employed in revealing some truth, in conferring some benefit, in working some miracle. We always see him acting in harmony with himself, and in conformity to the design of his coming into the world; which was, to seek and to save that which was lost.—Behold him the physician of soul and body; behold him the friend of man, for time and for eternity; behold him casting out none that come unto him; behold him doing "for them exceeding abundantly above all they are able to ask or think!"—And shall we peruse his life as we would the history of a Cyrus or an Alexander? Shall we read it only to amuse our minds, or merely to inform our understandings? Oh! let the blessed relation interest our hopes and our affections. Let it render him precious to us, as he is to those that believe. Let us, "beholding as in a glass his glory, be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord!"

Secondly. Think of this man; and suffer me to inquire how far his case represents your own. I would address you under a fourfold supposition.

First. Are any of you distressed in mind, and body too; oppressed at once with disease and guilt? It is a sad case: but the best thing you can do is to go to him, and address him in the language of one who has been in the same state before you. "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks? Look

upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins.”

Secondly. Has he healed thy body, and not said to thy soul, “I am thy salvation”? O be not satisfied with the inferior blessing. Rest not till you are justified by faith, and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It would be infinitely better to have the forgiveness of sins, and be left languishing under incurable disease, than to be released from the most dreadful malady, and left under the guilt of sin. What are fifteen years added to our life, to go on treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God! Thousands have been recovered from the borders of the grave, and have afterwards seen not only the pit of corruption, but of destruction. What are the nine ungrateful lepers the better for their cure now! Many never think of this. They are only concerned to escape from a bed of sickness. Whether their souls are blessed or injured by the visitation is no inquiry with them. But it is an awful thing to have an affliction removed and not sanctified.

Thirdly. Has he spoken peace to thy conscience, and is thy body still under the influence of disease? Be thankful that the greater work is accomplished, and submit to his pleasure with regard to the less. You may pray for ease and deliverance from your affliction: but it must be conditionally; “Not my will, but thine be done.” He may have ends to answer by keeping you in affliction after he has pardoned you. He may design to endear to you the Scriptures and the throne of grace; to wean you from a vain world; to afford you opportunities to

prove the tenderness of his care, and the supports of his presence. Bodily infirmities, like breaks in a wall, says Watts, have often been avenues through which the light of heaven has entered to the soul, and made the imprisoned inmate long for release.

He has done enough to secure your welfare and happiness, whatever your outward condition may be: for "blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered." Your trials are without a sting, and will soon be removed for ever; and "the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick."

Fourthly. Are there none here who are freed from sickness and condemnation too? Such was the distinguished privilege of this poor man. Thus it was with Hezekiah. In *his* mercy, assurance of pardon and recovery from disease were combined. "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." If this be your case, resemble him. Say, "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth." Say with David, after his remarkable salvation, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living." Publish his praise, and constrain others to come to him. Say to your neighbours and friends, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him."

DISCOURSE LXV.

THE WORK OF THE DAY DONE IN THE DAY.

“As the duty of every day required.”—EZRA iii. 4.

TIME, with regard to many—I use the words of Solomon, is “a price in the hand of fools.” They know not its value, nor the importance of the things they could purchase with it, if properly laid out; and therefore they barter it away upon trifles, or heedlessly lose it. But the talent is the same, notwithstanding the ignorance of the possessor.

Yes—time—time is unspeakably precious. And this is readily acknowledged by all those who know the worth of it by the loss. O what would the miserable in hell give for a little of that time which many consume in doing nothing, or worse than nothing! O what thoughts of time has a dying sinner, who has lived without God in the world! If Heaven would lengthen his days, he would accept the boon on the hardest condition that could ever be proposed. Could he only but live, he would be content to labour in a mine, or beg his bread from door to door. Ah! how feelingly then does he admonish children, friends, and

neighbours, to number their days, and “apply their hearts unto wisdom!”

No wonder, therefore, that the Apostle should call upon us to “redeem the time;” that is, to improve it by devoting it to the purposes for which it was given. In doing this, there is no one rule of greater importance than that which we may lawfully draw from the words before us: in which we are informed that the pious Jews returned from Babylon, having erected an altar; kept also the feast of tabernacles as it is written; and offered the daily burnt-offerings by number, according to the custom, “as the duty of every day required.” It is in the margin, “the matter of the day in his day.” This has grown into a proverbial saying among those who love Scripture phraseology; and teaches us that we should do the work *of* the day *in* the day.

I. WE MAY APPLY THIS TO LIFE IN GENERAL This is called “a day”—and it is a single day—a short day—a day which it is impossible to lengthen. And what is the language of reason; of Scripture? “To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart. Behold now—is the day of salvation.” And what will be your language if the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus? “I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh, wherein no man can work.”

II. IT WILL APPLY TO PROSPERITY. This is called “a day;” and Solomon tells us what is the duty of it. “In the day of prosperity be joyful.” He cannot, we may be assured, intend to countenance extravagance and excess. The good creatures of God’s providence are not given to be consumed upon our lusts, or to degrade a man below the beasts that perish. We

are to use this world, but we are to use it as not abusing *it*.

The wise man would teach us to enjoy the comforts our circumstances afford, in opposition to that self-denial that arises, not from religious motive, but from anxiety; from a disposition to live comparatively poor and destitute at present, in order to hoard up for the future: whereas the Apostle tells us, that "God gives us all things richly to enjoy." Those men are to be pitied who possess much and enjoy little; who have the blessings of life in abundance, but no heart to use them. These generally promise themselves great enjoyment hereafter when they shall have obtained *so* much. But what is the result? Their souls are often required of them before the expected season, "and then whose are those things which they have provided?" When they do reach this period, they feel the infirmities of nature, or the assaults of disease; many of their connexions, who would once have shared their joys along with them, are lodged in the cold grave, while those that remain are praying for their death: and when to all this we add, that they carry into these new scenes old habits that cannot be changed; what wonder is it that they "have no pleasure in them"? We should never sacrifice present happiness to future imaginations. God, like a generous friend, is pleased to see his presents enjoyed—"to enjoy is to obey." Yea, such is the goodness of our heavenly Benefactor, that he does not desire us, even by a sense of our unworthiness, to lessen our relish of his favours. But let us be always joyful *in him*; let us enjoy all *in God*, and *God in all*.

For, behold another thing that the duty of this day requires. It is *gratitude*. The more you have re-

ceived from God, the greater is your obligation to him; and your language should be, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." In order to this, you must never sacrifice unto your own net, nor burn incense unto your own drag, because by them your portion is fat, and your meat plenteous; but, "remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth. The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." Compare your circumstances with those of others, whose plans are equally wise, and whose dependences seemed equally sure. Compare your present with your former condition; the "two bands "with the "staff." Compare your indulgences with your deserts:—and how can you be unthankful?

And surely the duty of this "day" requires liberality. He had others in view as well as yourselves, in all that he has done for you. He has made you stewards, and not proprietors; and he will soon call you to give up your account. This is your rule: "Let every one lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him. Charge them that are rich in this world that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate."

III. IT WILL APPLY TO ADVERSITY. This also is called "a day and it is said, "in the day of adversity, consider." This is the grand duty of the season. Whatever be your affliction, it is a solemn call to consider your ways; to examine your hearts and lives; to inquire wherefore he contends with you; and what he would have you to do. You are also to consider the alleviations of your suffering; how much

worse it might have been; and to compare your resources with your difficulties.

Another part of the duty this "day" requires is submission. This is what the Apostle Peter prescribes, with promise: "Submit yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and he shall exalt you in due time and this is that which the Apostle Paul so beautifully enforces: "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." This subjection does not exclude feeling, but regulates it; keeping us, while sensible of the affliction, from quarrelling with Providence, from charging him foolishly or unkindly, and leading us to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." This, says an old divine, turns the stroke of the rod into a kiss.

The duty of this day also requires prayer. "Call upon me in the day of trouble. Is any afflicted? Let him pray." The very exercise of it will soothe him, while the answer of it will deliver him. Indeed, prayer is the privilege, rather than the duty, of sufferers. Who ever tried it in distress and could not say, "It is good for me to draw near to God"?

IV. WE MAY APPLY IT TO THE SABBATH. This is called "the Lord's day" because it is consecrated to the memory of his resurrection, and is employed in his service. But as to advantage, it is *our* day. It "was made for man." It is a day in which we enjoy a solemn repose from worldly employment! in which we lay in a store of spiritual supplies for the week;

in which we meet God in his ordinances, and see him in the sanctuary.

Such a season has peculiar claims upon us, and we are commanded “to sanctify it, calling the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; not doing our own ways, nor finding our own pleasure, nor speaking our own words.” Some profane it. Some trifle it away. And let me remind you, that it may be trifled away even in divine things. If you go to the house of God, but “leave your souls behind;” if with your mouth you show much love, but your heart goeth after your covetousness; if you hear his words, however frequently, and do them not—in vain do you worship him.

Can this be doing all the duty of the day? Our obligation does indeed take in public worship: and a Christian will say,

“With *early* feet I love t’ appear
Among thy saints—”

“How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” He knows that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” He will therefore gladly hear; and he will take heed *what* he hears and *how* he hears. But this is not all. He will retire. He will indulge in private reflection. He will apply the truths which have been delivered to his own soul. He will pray that the Holy Spirit may bring these things to his remembrance, and enable him to reduce his knowledge to experience and practice. And surely something more should be done in the family on this day than at

other times; not only in keeping servants from work, and children from play, but in rendering instruction more personal and minute, by some kind of examination and inquiry. In doing this, it is neither necessary nor proper to make the service long and irksome. It may be serious, and yet short and interesting too.

“What a dismal day have you described! ‘It is a hard saying; who can hear it?’”—But hard to whom?—To you? If so—what can we think of your disposition!—and what can you think of spending an eternity in religious exercises!—Hard! to whom? Not to a Christian. These are his “pleasant things.” He does not say, “What a weariness it is to serve the Lord; when will the sabbath be gone! “He resigns it with reluctance; and, in the enjoyment of its privileges, he begins to enter “the rest that remains for the people of God.” When once a regard for the sabbath is gone, every thing serious goes with it. Have we to learn this?

Lastly. IT WILL APPLY TO EVERY DAY. No day comes without its appropriate duty. There is something to be done for God; our fellow-creatures; ourselves: something religious, and something secular. We are not even to neglect any of the duties of our civil concerns. We are to be diligent in our respective callings. And not only so—but we are to do every thing in its season; to do the work *of* the day *in* the day; and not leave it till to-morrow.

First. Because we may not live till to-morrow. “We know not what a day may bring forth.”

Secondly. Each day will have its own engagements; and it is wrong to surcharge one period with the additional work of another: “sufficient for the

day is the evil thereof." Note. It is unlawful to encumber to-day with the *care* of to-morrow; and to encumber to-morrow with the *work* of to-day.

Thirdly. Because, by this temporary negligence, we have nothing to do, or too much; whereas, by doing the work *of* the day *in* the day, we are never unoccupied, never oppressed; we keep our affairs under easy management, and never suffer them to accumulate into a discouraging mass.

Fourthly. Because by this means the mind is kept cool, and tranquil, and cheerful; and we shall know nothing of the perplexities and ill temper of those who are always in confusion and haste.

To verify this important maxim, let me lay down three rules:—

First. Rise early.

Secondly. Grasp not so much business as to "entangle yourselves in the affairs of this life."

Thirdly. Arrange a plan of life, and firmly adhere to it. This will furnish you with means and resources which they know nothing of who go on as accident determines or humour inclines. You will find that "to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

If you look ahroud into tho world, you may be satisfied, at the first glance, that a vicious and infidel life is always a life of confusion. Thence it is natural to infer, that order is friendly to religion. As the neglect of it co-operates with vice, so the preservation of it must assist virtue. By the appointment of Providence, it is indispensably requisite to worldly prosperity. Thence arises a presumption that it is connected also with spiritual improvement. When you see a man's affairs involved in disorder, you

naturally conclude that his ruin approaches. You at the same time justly suspect, that the causes which affect his temporal welfare operate also to the prejudice of his moral interests. "Let every thing therefore," says the Apostle, "be done decently and in order."

Thus you will resemble the greatest and best of Beings, who condescends to propose himself as your model. He is the God of order. "He has fixed the bounds of the earth, and given to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment. The day is his, the night also is his. He has made summer and winter. He appointeth the moon for seasons, and the sun knoweth his going down." And, under his government, every thing arrives in its proper time and place.

May we be followers of him as dear children; and carry away with us this reflection, as one of the most important maxims of life and religion—That it highly concerns us, and becomes us, to be found doing as the duty of every day requires!

And as of ourselves we can do nothing, but "our sufficiency is of God," on him let us depend, and to him let us apply, that we "may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."



DISCOURSE LXVI.

THE MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN.

“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”—ACTS vii. 59, 60.

THE words and actions of dying persons are peculiarly impressive. If we have not been present to witness the interesting event of their departure, we anxiously inquire how they behaved themselves; what they did, and what they said.

We often surround the cross, and contemplate the dying of the Lord Jesus; and it is impossible to do it too often. No death is to be compared with his; whether we consider the advantages derivable from it, or the graces which it displayed. But perhaps no death, recorded in history, approaches so nearly to it as the martyrdom of Stephen. He finished his course with joy, a few weeks after his Lord and master; and near the spot where the one was crucified was the other stoned. Let us bring the whole of his short history under our review.

Stephen was the first of the Christian Church that fell a victim to the rage of persecution. He led the van in the noble army of martyrs—that army, that “resisted unto blood striving against sin;” that army, that rose triumphantly to fame, not by the sufferings of others, but their own; that army, that conquered, but conquered by dying! Stephen was employed in administering the alms of the Church. The people had been influenced in their choice of him as a deacon by his acknowledged piety and prudence: “he was full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom.” And such qualifications should alone recommend to all sacred offices. For a proper behaviour in a lower and a private condition is the best pledge of, and the best preparation for, a proper conduct in a higher and official situation. He “that is not faithful in little,” is not likely to be faithful in much: “but to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; while from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.” Advancement in the state commonly produces envy; as it gives a man wealth, power, authority, influence. But promotion in the Church only places him more forward in the battle, and exposes him to greater danger. “Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.” Though they seem to have challenged him to this debate, and wero certain of victory, they are completely foiled. “They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” Argument fails them—but malice does not. “Then they suborned men, which said. We have heard him speak

blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."

It is no unusual thing for the judge and the spectators to observe the countenance of a prisoner at the bar. It is frequently an indication of guilt or of innocency. Stephen's countenance would bear remark. It was neither flushed with passion, nor pale with fear. There reigned in it an unshaken confidence, an undisturbed serenity; meekness and majesty combined. Perhaps there was something preternatural in the case. Thus we read of our Saviour, that "as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was changed, and his raiment became white and glistening." And it is remarked of Moses, that when he came down from communion with God in Horeb, "his face shone so that the Israelites could not stedfastly behold him for the glory of his countenance." But the effect does not disarm or soften his adversaries. "Then said the High Priest, Are these things so?" We must pass over the speech of Stephen; only observing, what has frequently and justly been remarked, that it seems not the whole of what he intended to deliver. He was more anxious to save his audience than himself; he thought a dying testimony would be preferable to a train of

reasoning, which they were in no temper of mind to receive; he saw they were full of impatience, and would not suffer him to proceed further; he therefore judged it wise to draw towards a conclusion, by a short but faithful address to their consciences. "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

This was intolerable. "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow: and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." And it is a poor Hormon that produces no resentment, either against the preacher or against the hearer. Who can tell what rage and malice people sometimes feel against a faithful minister? They wish to remain asleep, and he rouses them; they wish to remain in darkness, and he flashes conviction into their minds; he demonstrates their duty, and they hold fast deceit, and refuse to return. Were it not for the laws of the land, such a man would often be dragged from the pulpit to the stake. But it is well when people are made enemies to themselves; when they go home at war with their pride, their avarice, their indifference; when they determine even "to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts."

?????eulogium the French monarch Louis XIV. pronounced on one of his chaplains: "When," says he, "I hear my other preachers, they always lead me to admire them; but Massillon always makes me dissatisfied with myself." Convinced against their wills, and having nothing to answer, these wretches discover the very dispositions of the damned, who are represented as "wailing and gnashing their teeth."

In *them* we see hell portrayed and begun. But let us observe Stephen, and behold in *him* the meekness and gentleness of Jesus Christ.

But he—"he being full of the Holy Ghost." He was replenished with his influences and joys. It was this that preserved and sustained him. A Christian is not alone in his trials and difficulties: there is something *divine* that bears him up, when the world expects him to sink. For the world can see his afflictions, but not his succours. These are invisible, but they are real: and they are wisely proportioned to his exigencies; so that as the sufferings of Christ abound, the consolations abound also.

He "looked"—not upon the council, to see if any was disposed to favour his cause; nor around the hall, to see if there was any way of escape—but he "looked up stedfastly into heaven"—as one that had already his conversation there, longed to spring from this molehill earth, and to begin the song of Moses and the Lamb! What said that look? "Saviour, it is thy cause in which I am engaged. It is for thy dear Name I suffer. On thee I depend, to thee I appeal. O carry me through this trying hour; and be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death!"

"And saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing

on the right hand of God." Three things are here observable. First. He did not see God. No man hath seen God at any time. He is as invisible as immortal—but he beheld a splendour, the symbol of his presence, and that intimated the place where he resides and reveals himself—he "saw the *glory* of God." Secondly. When of old the prophets saw the glory of God, it was always attended with *angelical* appearances. Thus we find seraphim in Isaiah's vision, and cherubim in that of Ezekiel. These were then his agents; ministers of his to do his pleasure. "But to the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak?" Angels, with every other class of creatures, are placed under our Redeemer's feet. He is head over all things unto his body the Church. All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth. And this is the source of the Christian's consolation and triumph, that his Saviour is now at the right hand of God. Hence he knows that his sacrifice is accepted, that his enemies shall lick the dust, and that all those who put their trust in him shall be saved to the uttermost. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Thirdly. In every other passage of Scripture where our Saviour is spoken of, he is represented as *sitting* at the right hand of God. Sitting is a posture of rest, of dignity, and of dominion; but here he appeared *standing*—a posture of attention. The sight of Stephen touched his heart. He could no longer keep his seat—he rose to animate, sustain, receive, crown his suffering servant. This vision he immediately makes known. This shows the animating impression it produced

upon his mind. And it may also be considered as a testimony borne to the cause for which he was going to die. "You condemn me for saying that He whom you crucified lives and reigns above. But I *see* him. *There* he is. 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.'"

Their fury now can no longer be restrained. "Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him." Yet, in this infamous transaction, they pay some regard to the forms of justice. They do this, pretendedly, in execution of a law enacted by Moses against blasphemers. In this law, the "hands of the witnesses" were to be first upon the offender to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. This circumstance explains what is here added—"the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."

Here first comes in view an individual destined to be the most extraordinary character in the Church of God. Had a prophet stood near on this occasion, and said, "Ah! Saul, you will by-and-by be stoned for the same profession, and die a martyr in the same cause he would have been filled with surprise and indignation, and have exclaimed, "What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" O how wonderful are the ways of Divine Providence!—God had his eye upon him at this hour: he had watched over him through life; he had separated him from his mother's womb; and all this with a view to call him by his grace, and reveal his Son in him. He was a, chosen vessel unto him, to bear his name before

the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For a time Saul seemed beyond the possibility of a reclaim. Even those who had experienced the efficacy of divine grace themselves, seemed unanimously to have despaired of him. When they heard of his conversion, they were astonished even to incredulity; and when he assayed to join himself to them, they were afraid of him. Let us despair of none. He has a mighty arm; strong is his hand, and high is his right hand. "I obtained mercy," says this monument of divine grace, "that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

But, oh! with what pain, even after a lapse of years, does he acknowledge the guilt he contracted by his connivance and assistance at this murder! "And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him."

Stoning was a painful, a dreadful death. Who can think of it without shuddering?—The flesh bruised, the bones broken, the skull fractured perhaps in several places, before the soul escapes! But how died he, morally? This is the question. Archbishop Usher said, he hoped to die with the language of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" and his wish was indulged. The devotional Mrs. Rowe was found dead on her knees. And "blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing." Stephen died "calling upon God." And the two petitions he offered are recorded.

The first regards himself. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Some people are afraid to honour the

Son as they honour the Father. But we are commanded to do this. And we have here an instance of it; a prayer addressed to our Saviour, and by a man who was in circumstances to render his example unexceptionable; full of the Holy Ghost, and dying too.—What does this prayer teach us?

It teaches us that there is a separate state between death and the resurrection. Had Stephen believed that the soul would either die or sleep with the body, would he have uttered such language as this; “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”?

It teaches us that Stephen considered our Saviour as the Lord of glory, and as possessing supreme power and authority in the other world. “I know,” as if he had said, “whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.”

It shows us that Stephen was principally concerned for the security and welfare of his soul. He thought little of the body. The reverse of this is commonly the case. The body engrosses all the attention. There are many who even seem to *die* as regardless of their souls as if they had none. They only think and talk of the physician and lawyer; of their disorder and their temporal concerns. One is sometimes surprised to hear with what composure persons who cannot possibly possess a good hope through grace speak of their dissolution; and arrange the circumstances of their funeral. You would conclude they had no souls to be disposed of or provided for. Not a word escapes them concerning these I But the soul is the man. This is the immaterial, the immortal part. “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or

what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Oh! says the Christian, I feel comparatively indifferent as to the destiny of my body. Let wild beasts devour it; let the flames consume it; let the winds scatter it—if I may but conclude that my soul shall be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus!

And, be it remembered, this is his concern in life as well as in death. From the hour of his conviction, the chief inquiry with him has been, not what shall I eat, or what shall I drink, or wherewithal shall I be clothed?—But, "what must I do to be saved?" How are my sins to be pardoned? How to be subdued?—Is this your concern?—If he does not receive your departing spirits at death, they will be seized by the powers of darkness, and become the prey of devils. But if you receive him in life, he will receive you at death; receive you to glory; receive you to himself, that where he is there you may be also.

Oh! that when we come to die we may feel the sentiments of Stephen, and be able to say, "Lord Jesus,

"Since the dear hour that brought me to thy foot,
And cut up all my follies by thy root,
I never trusted in an arm but thine,
Nor hoped but in thy righteousness divine."

Thou art all my salvation and all my desire. In every difficulty thou hast been my guide; in every danger my refuge; in every distress my consolation. My happiest moments have been passed in communion with thee. I cannot look back upon a well-spent life. Every view I take of myself is humbling. But I review with thankfulness the instances of thy goodness. By thy grace I am what I am. And now I

come to thee; and this soul of mine, which thou hast redeemed with thy blood, and won by thy love, I surrender.

“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On thy kind arm I fall;
Be Thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all.”

The second petition regards his enemies; and seems to have been offered up with peculiar solemnity and earnestness: for he now “kneeling down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” Behold here a proof of the grandeur of soul real religion inspires: “It is the glory of a man to pass by a transgression.” Behold an example of obedience to a command, which infidels have ridiculed, and which thousands look upon to be impracticable: “I say unto you, 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.” Behold an instance of conformity to the temper of a dying Saviour, who prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” The same spirit actuates the Master and his disciples. The difference only lies here: he received the Spirit without measure, while we possess it in a limited degree. In him the exercise of it met with no counteracting depravity; but in us it is resisted by adverse powers: and hence a perpetual warfare; “the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that we cannot do the things that we would.” But, if we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are none of his. The same principles that resided in him must

be found in us; and, as far as they prevail, they will produce the same effect.

Having said this, "he fell asleep." Sleep has nothing formidable in it. A weary man, after a day of toil, feels no reluctance to lie down in his bed. The disease of the babe awakens all the anxiety of the mother, and she cries, "Let me not see the death of the child but it is otherwise when she views him asleep. She knows that it is in her power to awake him at pleasure; and to embrace him refreshed and improved. And this is the soft representation given of the believer's death in the Scriptures; and it is so essentially just, that we here find a death of violence and anguish expressed by it. When David had served his generation, he "fell asleep"—but he died in a palace, in a fine bed, and surrounded with every indulgence. Stephen dies under a shower of stones; but *he*, even *he* fell asleep!

I see his body left on the ground, mangled with blows, and covered with gore. But let it not be despised. That body is the workmanship of God: it is the purchase of the Redeemer; it is the temple of the Holy Ghost; it shall be renewed, and fashioned like the Saviour's own glorious body.—Accordingly we find that "devout men carried Stephen—to *his burial*," says our translation; but this is not in the original: they carried him from the place of execution to his house, and from his house to his grave; "and made great lamentation over him."

Honour is to be valued according to the quarter whence it comes. Who would like to be deemed the favourite of Satan! And why should we wish to be admired and caressed by the world—the very world that "crucified the Lord of glory," when he was on

earth; and would willingly do it again! You do not wish to stand high in the estimation of vagrants, traitors, idiots, and madmen—and what, as to religious concerns, are numbers better?—and yet how many things you often conceal, or sacrifice, or pursue, to gain their favour! But “devout men “the saints that are in the earth”—these are “the excellent, in whom is all my delight.” To belong to them; to hear them coming around me, and saying, “My brother;” for them to rejoice when I rejoice, and to weep when I weep; to be loved and esteemed by them in life, in death;—this is delightful; it is, to use the words of a beautiful writer, “like walking in an eastern spice grove.”

And such were the men who testified their regard to Stephen, and bedewed his sepulchre with their tears. In no other way could they mourn for him. They knew that death was his gain; but it was their loss. And the removal of such a man is a loss; a loss to the world, and a loss to the Church: the loss of a protector, an intercessor, a benefactor, an example. As they retire, we feel the earth poorer; and if all of them were withdrawn, who would wish to live here another day? Our world would be a cage of unclean birds, a den of dragons, an emblem of hell. Oh! how the death of such a friend “cools our brainless ardours”! How it detaches us from

“These low grounds where sorrows grow,
And every pleasure dies!”

How it induces us to say, with Thomas, “Let us go away, that we may die with him!”

Do *we* pass through the world so as to draw forth the blessings of many while they live, and the tears

of many when we die? Are tyrannical masters, are selfish neighbours, are hard-hearted and close-fisted professors of religion, thus lamented? "When the wicked perish," says Solomon, "there is shouting." This is dreadful. For a man to think that there is no individual upon earth that wishes his continuance; that, if he were removed, no one being would sigh; and, could he endeavour to come back, he would find the door of life bolted against him—why there is something in this more chilling than death, and more cruel than the grave. And yet how many are there who, if they were carried to their burial to-morrow, would excite no lamentation over *them*—unless indeed a lamentation that they had not died sooner. One perhaps would be ready to say—"O that the wretch had died before: by his wanton speculations he had ruined the substance that was to rear my babes." Another—"O that the wretch had died before he had seduced my daughter, the glory of my family." A third—"O that the wretch had died before, by his infidel principles, he had poisoned the mind of my darling son."

Let us hasten to conclude by inquiring—Whether an inflexible adherence to the cause of God be not wisdom; and whether wisdom be not justified of all her children?—How amply was Stephen indemnified by the glory he immediately enjoyed in heaven—by the usefulness which his example has produced on earth—by the testimony of Divine approbation—by the satisfaction of his own mind!

Who could help feeling interested in such a character? Who would not rather have been in the condition of the martyr than of the persecutor? Surely his enemies were compelled to venerate him,

and inwardly to pray, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

We may be losers, says Mr. Henry, *in* the service of God, but we cannot be losers *by* it. And says our Saviour, "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

Though he does not crown his servants on this side Jordan, he owns them: and he will be sure to stand by those that stand by him. The world may frown upon them; but he will smile. They may be reproached and "persecuted for righteousness' sake;" but "he is near that justifieth them;" and "he that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye." They may expect a succession of personal and relative trials; but "he will be with them in trouble," and deliver them and honour them. They must die; but they need not shudder at the approaching event, he will be "the strength of their heart, and their portion for ever," when every worldly resource fails. As "the earthly house of this tabernacle dissolves, they will have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Though invisible to the eye of sense, they know that he is pleading for them within the veil; yea, by faith "they see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." And while looking down upon them, though inaudible to the ear of sense, by faith they hear his voice saying, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!"

DISCOURSE LXVII.

A CHRISTIAN IS NOT A FAVOURITE WITH THE WORLD.

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”—2 TIM. iii. 12.

WHO can help admiring the frankness of the Scripture!

We find nothing like this in the methods employed by the enemy of our souls. He deceives in order to destroy. He keeps his followers in ignorance. He allures them on by flatteries and lies. He conceals from them the dreadfulness of the end, and the hardships of the way: he cries, “Peace, peace; when there is no peace.”

But the Gospel hides nothing. It shows us the difficulties as well as the enjoyments of religion; the sacrifices it requires, as well as the rewards it insures. Now this is perfectly just; and it is every way profitable. It serves to discriminate between the false, the timid, the worldly-minded; and those who are in earnest: those who know that they *must* advance or perish, and who will not flinch whatever they may

feel. It also prevents surprise and confusion when the evil day comes; and keeps us from being discouraged because of the way. Yea, it even tends to confirm and establish our faith and hope, by showing us in ourselves the truth of God's word, and the experience of his people.

Upon this principle is founded the declaration of the Apostle, in which, having mentioned the sufferings he had himself endured, he adds, "To suffer is not peculiar to me: let my son Timothy, and believers universally, reckon upon the same treatment: the cup is common to all, though some are called to drink a larger draught of it: 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.'" In these words let us consider two things.

I. THE LIFE THEY DESCRIBE. II. THE CONDITION THEY ANNOUNCE.

I. THE LIFE THEY DESCRIBE. It may be taken with two distinctions.

First. It is not merely a *moral* life, but a *godly* one. The religion of many people consists only in certain regards to their fellow-creatures; and if they "do justly," and "love mercy," they are not concerned to "walk humbly with their God." We by no means depreciate morality. The Gospel demands it, and makes provision for it. A man cannot be religious without being moral; but he may be moral without being religious. It is well to be a good master, a good neighbour, a good subject—but how are you disposed towards God? Are you honest? Are you liberal? It is well. But I have another question to ask. "Are you renewed in the spirit of your minds"? Are you holy? Are you godly?—No tiling but that disposition towards God, which is

implied in godliness, can give principle to our actions, induce us to avoid every sin however secret; engage us to make conscience of every duty however private; and carry us through every discouragement that lies in the way everlasting. Virtue, without godliness, may gain us a fair character among men, and variously subserve our temporal advantage; but, whatever it may do for us as to this world, it will not be sufficient with regard to another.

Secondly. It is not merely a godly life, but a Christian one. We are not only to live godly, but to live godly "in Christ Jesus." This is a very interesting addition; and it will be necessary to examine it.—What is it to live godly "in Christ Jesus"? It is in all our religious concerns—To be governed by the revelation of Jesus Christ—To be conformed to the example of Jesus Christ—To be actuated by the grace of Jesus Christ—And to depend on the mediation of Jesus Christ.

We cannot live godly in Christ Jesus, unless we are influenced by "the revelation" of Jesus Christ. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him and he hath declared him in such a manner as he was never known before. He has displayed him not only as making the world, but as "reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Hence we are to go to him, not as innocent creatures, but as guilty; feeling our need of redemption, and exercising faith on him "who suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God."—He has displayed him more affectionately: as "the God of all grace as "the Father of mercies as love itself. Hence we are

to regard him as children, not slaves; "receiving not the spirit of bondage again to fear; but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Shall I say, he has revealed him after a more spiritual manner; as looking at the heart, and not attaching himself to particular places and forms? He has: and at the same time taught us the use we are to make of it. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

We cannot live godly in Christ Jesus, unless we are conformed to the example of Jesus Christ. His godliness was not only real, but perfect. His soul was full of God: all his actions, words, and purposes referred entirely to him. He trusted in God, and never desponded under the darkest dispensations: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." He loved him supremely: nor was this love cooled by the dreadful sufferings he was appointed to endure. Instead of avoiding his tremendous passion, he went forth to meet it, and said, "That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." His devotedness to his honour was invariable; "I seek not mine own glory, but the glory of him that sent me. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." His attachment to his worship was so great, that he could say, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." How often do we read of his devotion! He

prayed in the wilderness. He prayed in the garden. He rose up a great while before day, and went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. He went up into a mountain, and continued all night in prayer to God. It is impossible for us, while encompassed with infirmities, to equal him: but we must resemble him. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." He had the Spirit without measure; but the same mind must be in us which was also in Christ Jesus.

We cannot live godly in Christ Jesus, unless we are actuated by the grace of Jesus Christ. It is a truth taught us in the Scripture, and of which we need to be constantly reminded, that "from him is our fruit found." Though we bear it, he enables us to yield it. "We live; yet not we, but Christ liveth in us: and the life that we live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God." Does the branch flourish independently of the tree, or by means of the sap derived by union from it? "As the branch," says the Saviour, "cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me: for without me ye can do nothing."

The engagements to which we are called in the Scripture, seem fitter for angels than for frail and depraved men. How are they to be accomplished—how are these enemies to be conquered—how are these trials to be borne—how are these duties to be performed? How are we to live "with our conversation in heaven;" to "walk by faith, and not by sight;" to "forgive those that trespass against us until

seventy times seven”? Who would not shrink back, and lie down in despair, but for the voice that cries, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”? The charge of enthusiasm has been frequently advanced against this doctrine—but would it not be easy and just to retort the charge? What enthusiasm is like that which expects such mighty effects without an adequate cause? Upon our principle, a Christian has a resource equal to all the claims of his high calling; and may without presumption say, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.”

We cannot live godly in Christ Jesus, unless we depend on the mediation of Jesus Christ. There are many who find it an easy thing to hope in God: they confidently presume on the acceptance of their performances; and seem even to challenge a reward. But it is otherwise with a Christian. He sees, he feels the poverty and unworthiness of his duties. He confesses that, when he has done all, he is an unprofitable servant; and, instead of being recompensed for the excellences of his obedience, he wonders that he is not rejected for its defects. His sabbaths humble him as much as his week-days. He even looks off from his holy things, to find a better foundation to rely upon; a better righteousness to appear in before God. And where is this to be found? He has boldness and access with confidence, by the faith of Him who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification, and ever lives to make intercession for us. He is the great High Priest over

the house of God; he represents and introduces us; and "we are accepted in the Beloved."

II. Let us attend to THE CONDITION these words announce, as the consequence of the life they describe. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus "shall suffer persecution."

This doctrine is frequently observable in the Scripture. Our Lord preached it to his immediate disciples when he said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." It is strongly implied in the declaration, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." It is recognised even in the promise, "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." Paul held the same sentiment; and, therefore, as he visited the churches, he not only exhorted them to continue in the faith, but reminded them that "they must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God." Suffering in the Christian life he always takes for granted: "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Events perfectly answered to these intimations. In the Acts of the Apostles we see what Christians endured from Jews and Gentiles, priests and people; and history spreads before us examples of the same truth in every successive period.

But, how is this! It seems wonderful, if not incredible, that persons, whose lives are harmless, and

holy, and passed in endeavours to do good, should experience treatment like this. But the wonder ceases if we observe

That ever since the Fall there has been an irreconcilable enmity between the "seed of the woman and tho seed of the serpent that "man being alienated from the life of God," loves nothing that reminds him of God, or that resembles him; that the tempers and actions of the righteous necessarily reprove and upbraid the wicked; that their endeavours to save, disturb them in their sins; that the Gospel condemns the worldly as well as the vicious, and the formal as well as the negligent; that, as there is nothing in Christianity that flatters sin, so there is nothing that flatters self; and that every man is naturally as self-righteous as he is depraved.

To this we may add another source of the inevitableness of persecution. It is taken from the Christian himself. Suffering is necessary for his trial and his triumph. Without this, how could he prove that he loves God better than friendship, reputation, wealth, or life? How could he overcome evil with good? How could he love his enemies, bless them that curse him, and pray for them that despitefully use him and persecute him?—It is warfare that makes a good soldier. A Christian is like the firmament, and it is the darkness of affliction that makes his starry graces to shine out. He is like those herbs and plants that best effuse their odours when bruised.

But you say—though this was true formerly, is it not far otherwise now? And if the truth be applied to us at all, must it not be taken with limitations? And what are they?

Here let us admit with gratitude the difference

between our own times, and the days of those “who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” We should not talk like martyrs. Owing to the justice and mildness of our laws, what perils do we run? We can “sit under our own vine and fig tree, none daring to make us afraid.” The greater part of our sufferings are not distinguishable from the common afflictions of life; and many of the trials that some foolish professors frequently charge on religion, religion would teach them to avoid, if its admonitions were regarded. But, on the other hand, it must be allowed,

First; that human nature is essentially the same in every age; and that a tiger may be chained and not changed. Under every form of government, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” And where there is a strong active propensity against any thing (as, in this case, there *must* be against real godliness), it will show itself as opportunity offers; and such opportunity there must be in a world like this.

Secondly; that persecution admits of various degrees. It includes every kind of injury or vexation, from a fiery stake to a scornful sneer; and is not to be estimated always by the bulk of the suffering only, but by the grace, the temper, and the state of the individual that endures it. It commonly operates *now* in a way of reproach; and frequently this is no less trying than bodily pain. We know who said, “Reproach hath broken my heart.” This reproach endeavours to turn their faith into folly; their hope into presumption; their meekness and forgiveness of injuries into meanness and cowardice; their sanctity into singularity or hypocrisy. It will take the

blemishes of an individual, and charge them upon the whole body. It will magnify the common infirmities of human nature into crimes. Let the young man swear and challenge; let him be a companion of them that drink, and make merry, and mock at sin; and he shall be applauded as a young man of spirit: but no sooner is he convinced that “the end of these things is death, and that the way of transgressors is hard and “comes out from among them, and is separate;” than he is “had in derision of all around him, and is as one mocked of his neighbour.” How often has genuine religion produced the loss of friendship, or chilled the warmth of attachment into cold civility! Where power is possessed, it is frequently exerted as far as safety or a regard to appearances will allow. This is seen in the attempts of husbands, parents, and masters, to restrain from following their religious convictions their wives, their children, and their servants. With regard to relations, a Christian will sometimes find a greater trial in their affections than in their frowns. Here is a mother, in all other respects tender and kind; she takes her daughter aside, and weeps to think she should favour a doctrine “every where spoken against,” and draw upon herself some opprobrious name;—she beseeches her not to grieve the heart of one who bore her—and “bring down her gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.” Now, to withstand all this, and to break loose from such an embrace—not from a want of filial regard—this religion increases at the very time, but from obedience to the voice that cries, “He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me”—what a trial is here!

Thirdly. If modern Christians frequently escape persecution, may it not be asked, whether, in many instances, it does not arise from their less fully exemplifying the spirit of their religion than the primitive Christians did? Many professors, it should be observed, seem to make it their whole concern to elude the reproach of the Cross; and we may notice two methods employed by them for this purpose, both of which will tend to prove the truth of the Apostle's assertion, even with regard to ourselves.

The one is *concealment*. This is dastardly and mean. We should never be drawn out of a corner by the praise of man, nor be driven into a corner by the fear of man. We should be ashamed of nothing we embrace upon conviction. We are required to "confess with the mouth," as well as "to believe with the heart and to *appear* Christians as well as to *be* such. But if we hide our peculiar character, we cannot of course provoke notice and opposition in that peculiar character.

The other is *accommodation*. And it is awful to think how one doctrine and usage after another has been given up! Christianity, says one, will never be received by Jews and Mahometans, while you "honour the Son as you honour the Father." It will never be acceptable, says another, to men of taste and learning, till you abandon the barbarous notion of the atonement and of original sin. Now, upon this plan, what would be left after all the objectors were satisfied? How much would the residue resemble the Gospel as it now stands? And, admitting that this pruned system *teas* unexceptionable, and even admired by the generality of mankind, would this be a proof of its truth? If so, why was the preaching of "Christ

crucified to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness"? and only to them that were called, Christ the wisdom of God, and the power of God"? Was Paul mistaken when he said, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"?

In practice as well as principle, professors have conceded one thing after another, in order to take off prejudice, and to make themselves the more rational, and liberal, and agreeable to the men of this generation. One thing is obvious from all this trimming and changing their way; and it is this—that either Christianity or the world must be altered, before they can be rendered agreeable to each other. But Christianity allows of no alteration. It needs none. The change required therefore is, where it ought to be, in the world. Hence, says the Apostle, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

Think of this, ye God-and-Mammon men; ye would-be friends of the world, and of God too. If your aim be to elude opposition and reproach, as far as ye are "of the world, the world will love its own but as far as you dissent from them, they will dissent from you; as far as you oppose them, they will oppose you. Our Saviour may say to many Christians as he did to the Jews; "the world cannot hate you: but me it hateth, because I testify that the deeds thereof are evil."

This subject is fruitful in reflections.

First. There are some who suffer persecution—

that do not live godly in Christ Jesus. For it is not the cross, but the cause, that makes the martyr: men may go weeping to hell, as well as to heaven. But to whom does our observation apply? It applies to pretenders; who have “a name that they live, but are dead.” The people of the world cannot easily distinguish between “the form of godliness and the power,” and therefore the pretending and the sincere frequently fare alike. It is a sad thing for a man to share in the sufferings of religion, while he is a stranger to its supports, and unentitled to its privileges. But so it is; the hypocrite loses heaven for the sake of earth, and earth for the sake of heaven; and is of all creatures the most miserable.—It applies also to those whose conduct is exceptionable. If you will speculate; live beyond your income; involve yourselves in difficulties, and defraud others; and as you go along hear the reflection, “There goes a religious cheat bear it as well as you can: the world speaks truth: by your profession you are religious, and by your practice you are unrighteous. “What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye should take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.” Your sufferings are not Christian sufferings, unless they are unmerited by *immoral*, and even *imprudent* conduct. “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.” Secondly. With what caution and prayer should we assume a profession of religion! God forbid we

should discourage any; even any of you, my young friends, who are disposed to join yourselves to the Lord's people in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten: we would rather invite you to cast in your lot among them, and assure you, that in religion you will find a portion infinitely better than all the pleasures of sin, and the vanities of the world—But at the same time we would not deceive you. We would follow the example of our Lord in addressing those who spoke of following him. You are going, said he, to build: "Sit down first and count the cost." Your religion will be an expensive thing. Can you bear its charges? You are going to declare war. "Sit down first and count the dangers." Have you equal forces? Good alliances? A rich treasury? "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

"And who after this can think of following him?" Why, all who are truly wise. Such a course, notwithstanding every sacrifice, is *wisdom*; "and wisdom is justified of all her children." If God would open your eyes as he did Balaam's, you would look upon this poor despised people, and say, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob; and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." If Moses, the son of Pharaoh's daughter, was here, and a palace was offered him, he would "choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; and esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, having respect unto the recompence of the reward."

Thirdly. If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this

behalf. It gives you an opportunity to prove your thankfulness for his goodness, and your adherence to his Gospel. Your cause is noble: it is the cause of truth and holiness; it is glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men. Your companions are glorious; the same afflictions happened to your brethren who were before you in the world, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and Jesus himself, your elder brother. Your crown is invaluable; and you may say, with Paul, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

But what shall we say to persecutors? If you feel enmity against the godly, and would injure them were it in your power, it is "a token of perdition." You may now be placed above them in circumstances; and may love to misrepresent and to vilify them. But "their Redeemer is mighty." He is "near that justifieth them." He "will plead their cause." He that "toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye." They shall "have dominion over you in the morning of the resurrection; and condemn you at the last day." "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?"



DISCOURSE LXVIII.

HOW WE ARE TO HONOUR GOD IN TROUBLE.

“Glorify ye the Lord in the fires.”—ISAIAH xxiv. 15.

“**W**HETHER ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” What an extensive admonition is this! It demands of us nothing less than an universal regard to God;—a reference to his honour in all our actions, not only religious, but civil and natural.

And yet even this does not include the whole of God’s claim upon us. We are required to honour I^{dm}, not only in all we *do*, but in all we *suffer*. Witness the words which I have read: “Glorify ye the Lord in the fires.” Let us consider,

I. THE STATE HERE SUPPOSED. II. OUR DUTY WHEN IN IT. III. THE REASONS BY WHICH IT IS ENFORCED.

I. THE STATE HERE SUPPOSED—“In the fires.” The language is figurative. It is common for the sacred writers to hold forth trouble and affliction by fire; and frequently in connexion with its opposite, water. Thus the Church triumphant looks back and

exults: "We went through fire and through water; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." Thus runs the Divine promise: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." And the apostle Peter exhorts Christians not to "think it strange concerning the fiery trial."

Stripped of metaphor, the passage before us supposes a state of suffering.

In this state we may be found as *men*: for, "although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground, yet man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward."

In this state we may be found as *Christians*: for "many are the afflictions of the righteous." This fact may seem strange to the natural man, who concludes that the favourite of Heaven is entitled to every indulgence upon earth: and it has often proved a source of temptation to the people of God themselves, who have been led, from their sufferings, to suspect their safety.

But why such an inference? Their Lord and Saviour was made perfect through suffering; he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and they are foreordained to wear his image. There must be a conformity between the Head and the members: "it is enough for the servant to be as his master, and the disciple as his Lord."

Why such an inference? "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth *every* son whom he receiveth." "As many," says our heavenly Father, "as I love, I rebuke and chasten." The

history of the Church furnishes no exceptions to this truth. And can you see good men, and men of the most eminent goodness, invariably suffering—and refuse to drink of the cup they drank of, and to be baptized with the baptism they were baptized with?

In what condition, could we view them, should we now find many of those who are infinitely dear to God?—Depressed with weakness, fear, and much trembling; pining with disease; “made to possess months of vanity and wearisome nights;” disappointed in their worldly schemes and exertions; perplexed and straitened in their circumstances—, bereaved of their dearest connexions; “lover and friend put far from them, and their acquaintance into darkness;” opposed and persecuted by their neighbours and relations; and finding, by bitter experience, that “a man’s foes are those of his own household.” And what, under all this, should we find them doing?—Hardening themselves by infidel reasonings, by stoical apathy? Endeavouring to banish all sense of their sorrows, by repairing to the dissipations of the world?—They would rather die at their Saviour’s feet, saying, “Carest thou not that we perish?”—They invite feeling; but this is their language:

“What should I wait, or wish for, then,
From creatures, earth, and dust?
They make our expectations vain,
And disappoint our trust.”

“Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night? Therefore will I look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock

that is higher than I." This is well. It is therefore enjoined, "Call upon me in the day of trouble."—But it is not enough to *seek* God in our afflictions—we must *serve* him. It is,

II. THE DUTY HERE ENJOINED. "Glorify ye the Lord in the fires."

The glory of God is essential or declarative. We cannot add to the former. In this sense, he is "exalted above all blessing and praise. Our goodness extendeth not to him." But "the heavens declare the glory of God: all his works praise him." How? By the impressions and displays of his perfections: by showing us what he is, and what he deserves.

Thus Christians are appointed to "show forth the praises"—virtues—excellences—"of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light;" which is done by their language and by their lives. Hence it is easy to see that we glorify God in our afflictions, when we verbally and practically acknowledge

His *agency*—that nothing comes to pass by chance—that his providence is concerned in all our trials—that "there is not an evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it." Many walk all through life and never meet with God. Whatever occurs, whether it be pleasing or painful, never reminds them of him. When they experience a distressing event, they stop at second causes; they are kept from God by the very instrumentality he employs. They exclaim, "Oh I It was that unlucky servant; it was that perfidious friend; it was that malicious enemy." But, if Eli had met with it, he would have said, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." Job

would have said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: What! shall we receive good at the Lord's hand, and shall we not receive evil?"—We glorify God in our afflictions, when we verbally and practically acknowledge

His *rectitude*. "He is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works and none of our troubles can deny this. Let us always be concerned to keep God free of all blame. Let all our reflections turn upon ourselves. Let us own that he is justified when he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth; that we have no reason to complain, whatever we suffer, for he has punished us infinitely less than our iniquities deserve. In this way Daniel gave him glory: "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face, as it is this day." So did David: "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." We glorify God in our afflictions, when we verbally and practically acknowledge

His *wisdom*. "He is a God of knowledge and this regulates his corrections, and even every circumstance attached to them. It may not be easy always to see this, because we do not fully know ourselves, our defects, and our maladies; and therefore we cannot judge properly of the means employed to cure and improve us. But of this we may be assured, that he never errs in the time, the place, the continuance, the instrument, the kind of affliction—it is precisely the very thing we need; and nothing could be altered without injury. We glorify God in our afflictions, when we verbally and practically acknowledge

His *goodness*. For this is really the principle from

which proceeds every sorrow that wrings the heart. Severity is often evidential of care and of regard. If God was not concerned for your welfare, why does he employ means to do you good? Does the husbandman prune and manure the tree that he is going to cut down? No—but that which he wishes to save and to fructify. Is it kind to rebuke a friend, or to countenance his faults? Is it kind in a father to suffer the child to have his own will, or to impose upon him salutary restraints, and to urge his attention to things which will qualify him for future life? “We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” If his aim in your afflictions be to prevent that which is your disgrace and ruin; if it be to promote that which is your glory and happiness; if it be to make you wise, humble, tender-hearted, spiritually-minded; to wean you from earth and fit you for heaven—how obvious is the love of God in sending them! lint his love is to be acknowledged not only in the *design* of affliction, but in its *alleviations*. These are numerous; and a grateful mind will look after them. “It is trying—but it might have been worse. I have lost one comfort—but some have lost all. I am in trouble—but I have the sympathy of friends; I have the promises of Scripture—I have the presence of Him who said,

Fear not.”—We glorify God in our afflictions, when we verbally and practically acknowledge

His *power*. This regards our support and deliverance, and is to keep us from all hasty and dismal conclusions. For by nothing do we dishonour God more than by our despondency. Is anything too hard for the Lord? However dark the scene may be, he can turn the shadow of death into the morning. If, when he comes to save us, he finds no way of escape, he can easily make one. Head the history of Joseph, and of David: observe the relief of Elijah in the famine; and the deliverance of Daniel in the lions’ den—and learn to trust in your almighty and wonder-working Friend. You say, perhaps, many of these things were supernatural.—They were. And, that we are not to expect a repetition of miracles.—It is acknowledged. But he who performed these wonders is still alive, and the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He is as near to you as he was to his people of old; and you are as dear to him as they were. But, alas! we are not “strong in faith, giving glory to God.” Israel “limited the Holy One of Israel,” and so do we; and like them we do it after the wonders he has shown us. We forget “the years of the right hand of the Most High,” and every fresh difficulty chills our hope, and forces our confidence to a stand. But this is wrong. We ought to be peculiarly concerned to “glorify God in the fires.”—

III. We proceed to examine THE REASONS. There are three. The first is derived from *opportunity*—the second from *obligation*—the third from *hope*.

First. You ought to glorify God in the fires, because you have the finest *opportunity*. The scene

naturally awakens attention, and fixes observation upon you. Nothing preaches like a fact. Nothing is so impressive as the graces of a Christian in trouble. Infidels have been convinced, the wicked have been reclaimed, the weak have been strengthened, the timid encouraged, by what they have seen and heard in the hour of affliction. How much, therefore, should you prize such a useful providence; and how anxious should you be to improve such an opportunity, to illustrate your principles, to exemplify the advantages of religion, to recommend the master you serve! Let it not be a price in the hand of fools. It will be painful to look back upon such a season neglected. It will be dreadful to review such a season perverted. Yet this is often done by improper behaviour, by ungracious tempers, by passionate words.

Secondly. The *obligations* you are under to the blessed God, should induce you to glorify him in the fires. Once you had no being. He called, and you came—not in the contemptible nature of a worm—but “a little lower than the angels.” What wonders are there in thy body! Yet this is the baser part. You have conscience, reason, immortality. He has taught you more than the beasts of the earth, and made you wiser than the fowls of the air. There is a spirit in you, and the “inspiration of the Almighty giveth you understanding.” And is all this to enable you to labour for shining dust with the covetous? To run after air with the ambitious? To dive into mud and mire with the sensual and vicious? Should you not “worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord your maker”? By whom have you been upheld from the womb? At whose table have you been daily fed? From whose wardrobe have you

been clothed? There is not a comfort in life but gives God a title to thy praise. But he has greater, dearer claims. Go to the manger, the garden, the cross. See him not sparing his own Son, but delivering him up for us all. See him exalting this Sufferer “to be a Prince and a Saviour; to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins.” What has he done for thee in the application of this free and full redemption? He has opened thine eyes, and turned thy feet into the path of peace. What has he done for thee since thou hast known him? Has he ever left thee. Has he ever turned away thy prayer from him, or his mercy from thee? And is it for you to be wrapped up in selfishness? How unworthy a creature; but how much more unworthy a Christian! When a man is writing a book, says an old divine, he ought often to look back to the title, and see whether he is conforming to it, or deviating from it; and so he tells us we should often turn back and inquire the end of our creation and our redemption, in order that we may regulate ourselves by it. We ought—we ought—to “reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Thirdly. *Hope* should influence you. Such a disposition to glorify God in the fires is productive of your own advantage. God is a good master. Though we owe him all the obedience we render, and it is impossible for any of our works to be meritorious, yet his grace *has* made them rewardable—and “*verily* there is a reward for the righteous.” We *cannot* be losers by any thing we do for him. You may often study the wishes, and promote the interests of men, and meet with no suitable return. But he renders

love for love, service for service, in a proportion infinitely increased. "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

One of these two things is certain, as the consequence of sanctifying the Lord in your afflictions.

First: The removal of them. For when the end is answered, the dispensation will cease. As soon as we are silent, and submit, the rod drops out of our heavenly Father's hand, and he cries, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

Or, Secondly: Indemnification for them; so that the continuance shall subserve our welfare more than the withdrawment. And this can easily be done by the internal supports of grace, and the future recompences of glory.

Such are the arguments to enforce this duty. But I hear you say—

"Lord, can a feeble, helpless worm
Perform a task so hard?
Thy grace must all the work perform,
And give the free reward."

It must. And there are two things I wish you to learn with regard to this grace.

The one is, the necessity, the absolute necessity of it. Without this you can do nothing, suffer nothing, as you ought.

The other is, the sufficiency of it for every purpose in the Divine life. It is shameful to hear Christians

talking as if their duties were impracticable, or their crosses intolerable. It is disgraceful to hear them excusing their improper carriage in affliction on the ground of weakness. O! who could help it; it was *so* trying! What do you mean by weakness? Your own strength separate from the succours of the Gospel? Of this you cannot have too deep a sense. But are you not a Christian? Are you not in union with One who says, "My grace is sufficient for thee"? Are you ever required to "be strong" in yourselves? No—But "in the grace there is in Christ Jesus." And "in him all fulness dwells." View, therefore, your difficulties in connexion with your supplies. View his commands in connexion with his promises, and courageously face all—saying, with Paul, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."



DISCOURSE LXIX.

THE CONNEXION BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND ANGELS.

“Ye are come ... to an innumerable company of angels.”—
HEB. xii. 22.

HOW numerous, how various, are our obligations to the Scriptures of truth! How they rouse, how they extend, how they enlarge, how they refine our views and our sentiments! They lead us backward; and we behold the fair frame of nature springing out of chaos. They draw us forward; and we see the heavens passing away with a great noise, the elements melting with fervent heat, the earth also, and all the works that are therein, burnt up. They tell us to look inward; and, under this burden of flesh, this perishing clay, we discern a spirit in man immaterial, immortal, and able to subsist independent of the body. They call us to look upward; and, drawing back the veil, they show us an order of beings, far above human, and with which Christians have the honour to be already connected. It is the testimony of the Apostle in the words before us. “Ye are come to as innumerable company of angels.”

We are come to them five ways. We are come to them as FRIENDS—as ATTENDANTS—as WITNESSES—as PATTERNS—as ASSOCIATES.—As friends, from whom we were separated by the Fall—as attendants, whose care is to follow us through life—as witnesses, whose observation we are to reverence—as patterns, whose example we are to imitate—as associates, with whom we are to blend our future being, and from whom we shall derive no inconsiderable portion of our happiness.

I. WE ARE COME TO THEM AS FRIENDS, FROM WHOM we have been separated by the Fall.

Men and angels, in their original creation, formed but one family; and, though they differed in nature and in residence, they had one Father, and there would have been a free and pleasing intercourse between them. But sin destroyed the harmony of the world. Sin disunited heaven and earth. Sin separated not only between God and men, but between angels and men. When man revolted from his lawful Sovereign, they remained in their allegiance and as sin rendered God our enemy, so it rendered angels our enemies too. Accordingly we read of their being the executioners of the Divine vengeance. As soon as Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, an angel rushed to the gate with a darning sword, to keep the way to the tree of life. An angel of the Lord smote all the first-born in Egypt. An angel of the Lord, to punish David for numbering the people, goes from Dan to Beer-sheba, and seventy thousand victims seal his angry commission. An angel of the Lord in one night enters the camp of Sennacherib, and destroys one hundred and eighty-five thousand men. An angel of the Lord smote

Herod, that he died. We pretend not to understand the prophecies in the book of the Revelation; but it is certain, that when the nations are angry, the angels are to pour out the vials of the wrath of Almighty God upon the earth. And perhaps, says a judicious expositor, if an inspired history of our own eventful times were written, the defeat of many a haughty worm would be traced up to such an awful agency.—Hence, when they have appeared to man, they have been objects of terror.

But, in consequence of the mediation of our Lord and Saviour, the breach is healed. We are reconciled not only to God, but to the angels. It is the meaning of the Apostle, when he says, “Having made peace through the blood of his Cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. That, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” So that the angels now view us again with delight. They call themselves our fellow-servants, our fellow-worshippers, our brethren. Men and angels form again one family: *they* remained in their original state; *we* are restored to it; and such is the disposition of those celestial beings, that they do not repine, like the elder brother, at the return of the prodigal, but rejoice to welcome the younger branches of the family home: “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

II. WHO ARE COME TO THEM AS ATTENDANTS, whose care is to follow us through life. The alarm that some religious people have taken at this doctrine,

as if it interfered with the glory of God in their preservation, is absurd. God is the author of all good. He is the guide, the guard, the strength, the consolation of his people; but does this imply that he does not employ means in doing them good? And may we not in this case argue from analogy? He “spreads a table before us in the wilderness,” but not immediately. He commands his sun to shine, and his rain to descend; yea, he requires our own exertions to prepare the supplies of nature for our use. He employs us to aid each other. We are at once the subjects and the instruments of his goodness; *he* gives, and *we* diffuse. Have you never been in sickness; never laid on a bed of languishing? And has no friend, by sympathy, by kindness, by attention, reminded you of the promise—“I will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; I will make all his bed in his sickness”? Thus too he makes use of ministers to “turn us from darkness to light;” to be “helpers of our joy; to comfort us concerning our faith.” Why then should it be deemed a thing absurd, or incredible, that God should employ the ministrations of angels for the welfare of his people?

Neither is it an argument against this doctrine, that the proofs of it fall not under the observation of our senses. We walk by faith, and not by sight. How many things do we admit as real, that are not visible! How little is the babe aware of the fond attentions of her who bare him; and how long is it before he can estimate his obligations to a mother’s vigilance! She can afterwards inform him how she denied, and exposed herself for his sake; how she watched over him by day and by night; fled with him to a purer air, or snatched him from a burning

couch: but he was not sensible of it at the time. And should he happen to be blind, how much would be done for him all through life, which, though he would enjoy in the effects, he could never see! If we had organs of perception adapted to the spiritual world, what striking scenes should we constantly witness! But our incapacity does not render them less true. The king of Syria had sent an army to Dothan to secure Elisha. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and had gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city, both with horses and chariots. He therefore cried out, "Alas, my master, what shall we do? "He *saw* the danger; this was material. But Elisha knew the defence was as real as it was invisible. "Fear not," says he, "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." "Where?" says the servant. "And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, open, I pray thee, his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

Thus the believer is safe in the midst of danger^ "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." And though he may be despised, and overlooked by his fellow-men because he is poor and needy, yet has he more glorious attendance than any worldly monarch. God's noblest creatures are his children's servants. "Such honour have all the saints."

The Scripture is express upon this subject. An angel fed Elijah under the juniper tree. An angel brought to Daniel an explanation of prophecy. An angel of the Lord released Peter from prison; and

comforted Paul in the storm. Angels carried the soul of Lazarus into Abraham's bosom. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. For he shall give his angelic charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

WE ARE COME TO THEM AS WITNESSES, whose observations we are to reverence.

It would be well for us to remember that we are always in sight. The eyes of our fellow-creatures are *often* upon us; and if they were always upon us, they would restrain us from a thousand sins. But invisible beings *always* behold us. No consideration indeed is like the omniscience of God: "Thou God seest me!" We should, therefore, "set the Lord always before us." But motives do not always impress according to their real importance. We are like children, upon whom various motives operate, according to their age and disposition: the thought, therefore, that we are come to an innumerable company of angels, may strike us even more than a sublimer consideration. Now this is the fact.

We are a spectacle to angels as well as to men. The Apostle enforces a proper behaviour in religious assemblies, "because of the angels." And charges Timothy not only "before God, but his elect angels."

The angels are our observers; and what they witness they will be called upon hereafter to report.

For the proceedings of the great day will be judicial; we must “give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil;” and we read that the books will be opened, and witnesses called to depose. You despise my teaching, said our Saviour to the Jews, but you shall hear of it again. “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.” And thus will it be with others.

I see hearers brought forward as evidence against their ministers—“You never warned us to flee from the wrath to come. You never convinced us of the depravity of our nature, and our need of ‘the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.’ You made lies our refuge, and lulled us to sleep on the brink of ruin. Cursed watchman, you gave us no warning till it was too late! Cursed physician, you withheld the only remedy; you administered poison!”

I see ministers brought forward as evidence against their hearers. “Lord, I addressed them from sabbath to sabbath, with affection and fidelity. I thundered the terrors of the Law, and whispered the promises of the Gospel. I am clear from their blood. I warned and I wooed them, but they would not bear.”

I see parents brought forward as witnesses against children. Ah, cruel, but necessary task!” Lord,

we established thy worship in our family. We led them early to know the Scriptures. We often prayed for them, and with them. We bedewed them with our tears. We set forth the blessedness of thy ways, and rendered religion lovely. But they would none of our counsel, they despised all our reproof."

I see children brought forward as witnesses against their parents. Oh! how dreadful to hear them say, "You taught us to swear, but not to pray. You led us into the dissipations of the world, but you never fixed in our minds the principles of the Gospel. In your lives we saw nothing but instances of levity, inconsistency, irreligion. Unnatural monsters, to bring us into existence, and leave us exposed to eternal ruin!"—Thus children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

But angels will be some of the principal witnesses, in that great and terrible day of the Lord. They have inspected you perfectly. They can distinguish between the circumstances which confound us. There are cases in which two guilty individuals are implicated. They accuse each other; and no human being was privy to their wickedness. But angels saw Abel and Cain when they were alone together in the field. They can decide, in an intrigue, who was the seducer, and who the seduced. What a world of private wickedness will they develop!

IV. WE ARE COME TO THEM AS PATTERNS, whose example we are to imitate. To these models our Saviour himself leads us in the form of devotion he gave to his disciples: in which he teaches us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." And, even now, this prayer is accomplished. Between believers and angels there is a

resemblance, though not an equality. Wherein does it appear?

It appears in the nature of their obedience. We are told that the angels, however great, find it their privilege to serve. Though they “excel in strength, they do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.” And their obedience is ready, without delay; cheerful, without reluctance; constant, without intermission; and impartial, without choice. The reason is, they love God, and it is his will alone they regard: whether, therefore, he calls them to come, or orders them to go; whether he requires them to ascend, or descend; they are equally satisfied, as they have equally an opportunity of showing their submission to him. And whatever low idea you may form of a Christian, such is, and such must be, his leading desire, and his prevailing endeavour.

It appears in their union. Those beings have various degrees among them. We read of “angels and archangels; of thrones and dominions; principalities and powers.” Yet these produce no contempt, no envy, no eagerness to dictate, no backwardness to co-operate. They perfectly harmonize. They have but one spirit, one wish. The Scripture represents them as uniting their voices, and answering to each other in their sacred songs. “One cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.” Shall I say that Christians do resemble all this? Alas! there is too little of it in our churches and assemblies. We meet together, and apparently unite in the same exercises; but if our voices accord, our hearts disagree. One hears with humility, another with cap-

tiousness. One finds the word and eats it, another goes after his covetousness. One "worships God in spirit and in truth," another in form and pretence. What a scene of confusion must one of our congregations present to the eye of Him that searcheth the heart! Even among those who are Christians indeed, there is too little of this blessed harmony and concurrence. Yet there is a degree of it. God has given them "one heart and one way." They agree "touching the things they should ask of their heavenly Father." They "magnify his Name together;" and in a little time their mutual prejudices will be done away, and they shall see eye to eye; they "shall 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"

It appears in the subject of their study. The angels are proverbial for knowledge: we read of being "wise as an angel of God." Had we heard only of such exalted beings, we should be anxious to know what things they deemed most worthy of their attention. But we are informed. They are "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow—which things the angels desire to look into." We never read of their being politicians, philosophers, naturalists, astronomers. Doubtless they contemplate the works of creation and providence, and trace the appearances of God in them. But as the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest display of the Divine perfections, their eyes seem taken off' from every other object, and fixed upon this. And they are not satisfied to take a transient, superficial view of it, but gaze and examine; and the

more they know, the more they wish to know. Are you like-minded? Is this the most welcome subject to your hearts? The most important to your minds? Or are you engrossed with trifles? Can you climb the skies, number the stars, fathom the ocean, penetrate the bowels of the earth, and—"neglect this great salvation"? In the eye of an angel, you are a trifler. You disregard what they above all things esteem. You are no Christian—a Christian is like an angel. *This* constitutes his attraction; and he exclaims, "I determine to know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified: God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

It appears in their worship. They adore the incarnate Redeemer. When he bringeth his first begotten into the world, he saith, "Yea, and let all the angels of God worship him." When he was born, there was "suddenly a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." John heard them saying, with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." And is there a Christian upon earth that does not delight in the same praise—that does not sing,

"Jesus is worthy to receive
Honour and power divine;
And blessings more than we can give
Be, Lord, for ever thine."

They are his most, heavenly moments, in which he is fullest of this interesting theme, and can breathe out

his very soul in saying, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

V. WE ARE COME TO THEM AS ASSOCIATES, with whom we are to blend our future being, and from whom we shall derive no inconsiderable part of our happiness.

It is not good for man to be alone. He is formed for social enjoyment; and it is a great source of his present pleasure. The representation of heaven meets this propensity. We are assured that it is a state of society. And there are two classes of beings that—will contribute much to our satisfaction and improvement.

The one is endearing.—It takes in those you loved in life, with whom you took sweet counsel together, and went to the house of God in company, your pious friends and relations, who now sleep in Jesus. With what reluctance you yielded them up!—Sorrowing most of all that you should see their face, and hear their voice, no more! Memory from month to month renews the anguish, and opens afresh the wounds which time was beginning to heal. But wipe away your tears. They are not lost. Their separation from you is but temporary. You shall see and hear them again. You shall know them; and shall together review all tin; way by which the Lord has led you in the wilderness.

The other is dignifying.—It comprehends patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs—*angels*. You shall be introduced to company of the very first sort. Angels are the flower of the creation; and the poorest,

meanest believer shall enjoy it; and be prepared for it. There are many now whose excellences you venerate, but their pre-eminence confounds and embarrasses you. You long to be in their presence, but shrink from the interview. You could wish to be with them without being seen or heard: such a sense have you of their wisdom and your weakness; their goodness and your unworthiness. But nothing of this perplexity which now often robs us of half our social enjoyments, shall hereafter be known. Whatever sense we have of our inferiority, it will not be disagreeable; we shall feel no fear, no reluctance. These glorious beings are all generosity, tenderness, and love. They will receive us with joy. We shall find ourselves perfectly free and happy. With what pleasure will they communicate their knowledge! And with what ecstasy will you receive it! How instructive, how sublime will our intercourse be! How delightful to find ourselves translated from this bedlam-world, this Mesech,

“From those low grounds where sorrows grow
And every pleasure dies—”

to that better, that heavenly country: and to exchange the society of men, vain men, vexing men, sinful men for “an innumerable company of angels.”

Let, us conclude with two questions.

First. How can it be said that “we *are* come to” this blessed assembly? Are Christians already in heaven? Is it possible to conceive how we *are* come to this innumerable company of angels; as *friends* who are reconciled to us, as *attendants* who care for us, as *witnesses* to observe, and as *examples* to stimulate us? All this regards the present state; but to

be with them as our eternal *associates*, from whom we are to derive so much of our happiness—this regards a future state. How then are we said to be already come to this glorious community?—By the certainty of the event. By promise—and “the Scripture cannot be broken.” By hope—and “hope maketh not ashamed.” By anticipation, by earnest, by foretastes of this exalted felicity. A real Christian needs not to be informed that “he that believeth hath everlasting life.” He is often reminded of the words of the Apostle; He “hath raised you up, and made you to sit together with him in heavenly places.” In the closet, in the temple, in the communion of saints, he knows that heaven is not entirely future; it is already commenced. And, whatever the people of the world may think of religion, he can look them in the face, and say,

“The men of grace have found
Glory begun below;
And heavenly fruits on earthly ground
From faith and hope may grow.

“The hill of Zion yields
A thousand sacred sweets
Before we reach the heavenly fields
Or walk the golden streets.”

Secondly. To whom are *you* come! I shudder as I proceed to press this inquiry. I have been speaking of heaven: but remember, there is another society—a society of wicked and miserable beings—a society of which the devil is the head—a society that is constantly labouring to multiply its victims, and bring them into the same place of torment. How many are hastening to mix with it! To how many will the Judge say, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire

prepared for the devil and his angels"! Will this be your destiny in the great day? What! instead of going with the righteous, will you "be led forth with the workers of iniquity"? Instead of joining God and his angels, will you have your "portion with the devil and *his* angels"?

There cannot be a more awful question. And one would naturally conclude that you could "not give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids," till you had endeavoured to answer it. But you ask, Is it possible to answer it? It is; and observe, I beseech you, the rule of judgment. It is not an arbitrary one. It is founded in justice and reason. It is not impulse, but character. It is not some unaccountable impression; but the principles that govern you, the dispositions of the heart, the habits of the life. By these you are to try yourselves. To know what you will be in another world, you must inquire what you are in this. To decide with whom you will have your portion in eternity, you must determine who are your companions in time. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: for he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

Whom then do you most admire?—Are they "the saints, the excellent of the earth, in whom is all your delight"? Have you taken hold of "the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, I will go with you, for I have heard that God is with you"? Look forward, and rejoice. As sure as you can appeal to God when you come to die, and say, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth," you may, with confidence and sue-

cess, plead, "Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men." Being let go, you will repair to your own company.

But are you vain? Are you ambitious? Are you lifted up with pride?—You will "fall into the condemnation of the devil." Can you vilify and reproach the good? Can you rejoice in discovering their blemishes, and magnifying their infirmities?—Are you regardless of truth?—Do you indulge in falsehood and hypocrisy?—Do you hate your neighbour, and harbour in your bosom malice and revenge?—Do you endeavour, by your influence or example, to poison the principles, and sap the morals of those around you? There is already a connexion established, that death will only discover and complete; your resemblance points out your party and your doom—you are devils by anticipation, and must have your portion with him who is the "accuser of the brethren; a liar; a murderer from the beginning; a roaring lion, going about seeking whom he may devour."

Oh! to be—for ever a companion with Robespierre, with Nero, with Judas, with Pharaoh—with the devil—and his angels!! Surely there is enough in the thought to keep any man in his senses all his life long from the paths of the destroyer, and to induce him to pray, every moment, "Hide thy face from my sin, and blot out all my transgression. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Save me, and I shall be saved; heal me, and I shall be healed; for thou art my praise." May God inspire you with these desires, and to him be glory. Amen.

DISCOURSE LXX.

THE AGED SAINT COMFORTED.

“And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.”—ISAIAH xlvi. 4.

SUCH was the address of God to his peculiar people, the Jews, he has a peculiar people now; and we need not ascend up into heaven, and examine the book of life, to know who they are. We have a copy of this book of life in our possession. It is the Scripture. There we have not only their portion secured, but their characters described. Let us take one exemplification only. “We are the circumcision,” says the Apostle, “who worship God in the spirit; and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Do you “*worship God*”—in public? Alone? Habitually? Do you worship God “*in the spirit*”? Have you only “a form of godliness, while you deny the power thereof”? Do you “draw nigh to him with your mouth, and honour him with your lips, while your heart is far from him”? Or do you pray, “Unite my heart to fear thy Name”?

Do you “*rejoice*”? Are you grateful for your mercies; or full of murmuring and complaining? Is the service of God your pleasure, as well as your employment? Your privilege as well as your duty? Do you “*rejoice in Christ Jesus*”? Do you find consolation in him when the world is a vale of tears? When creatures fail you? Are you encouraged by him; thought that there is such a Saviour? That he is so suitable to your case? So sufficient to save? Do you, even while unable to claim him, rejoice in hope; and, under every dejection, throwing yourself at his feet, say,

“Should worlds conspire to drive me hence,
Moveless and firm this heart shall lie;
Resolv’d, for that’s my lust defence,
If I must perish, here to die!”

Have you “*no confidence in the flesh*”? No dependence upon your own resources, for your happiness? No dependence upon your own righteousness, for your justification? No dependence on your own strength, for your sanctification? No dependence upon your own wisdom, for your guidance?

These questions we ask so early in the discourse—that if you find yourselves to be strangers to the character of the Israel of God, you may be affected with your condition; and that, while you hear of their blessedness, you may sigh after it:—and if you are able to determine in your favour, and humbly hope, that you have avouched the Lord to be your God, and joined yourselves to him in a perpetual covenant, you may sit and hear, with gratitude and joy, that you have chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from you.

I. WHAT HAS GOD DONE? *He has made you.*

II. WHAT WILL HE DO? Carry and deliver you.
III. How LONG? How FAR? To old age; to grey hairs. "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

I. WHAT HAS GOD DONE FOR YOU ALREADY? "*I have made.*" This brings him very near. It presents him to us as our Creator; as the Fountain of life! Others have claimed us as children; and we early learned to say, My father; my father. But to *them* we owe our being subordinately, and instrumentally; to *Him* we owe it supremely and efficiently. *They* were "fathers of our flesh but *He* is "the Father of our spirits."

I love to realize this relation. Is my body fearfully and wonderfully made? Do I possess reason and immortality? Are matter and spirit, clay and thought, strangely united together, to render me the being I am? "His hands have made me and fashioned me." I behold, I feel, his wisdom, power, and goodness; and at once embrace him and adore! The view is instructive; it is encouraging. The constitution I possess, limited as it is in capacity, and subject as it is to infirmity, he gave me. The degree of health and strength I enjoy, he assigned me. He knows my frame; and remembers that I am but dust. He sees that to will is present with me, though how to perform that which is good I find not: he knows that "the spirit indeed is willing, though the flesh is weak." Why does Peter admonish those that suffer according to the will of God to commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, "as unto a faithful Creator"?—Because he who made me is perfectly

acquainted with all I feel; because he who made me is able to save me; because he who made me has a benign propension to the work of his own hands. Do I form a garden, or plant a tree? I feel a propriety in it. That upon which I expend my exertion and care will soon be interesting and endeared. If a fine piece of statuary could be possessed of intelligence, the figure would find much less satisfaction in the workman than the workman in the figure. A real benefactor feels more pleasure in doing a kindness than the beneficiary feels in receiving it. What a strength of attachment has God produced in all creatures towards their young! And will the Author, and the model, of all these sympathies abandon those who live, and move, and have their being in him?

But there is another and a higher operation of which the Scripture speaks. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." He has a new nature; new powers; a new heart; new eyes; new ears—not physically, but morally new: not new as to substance, but as to transformation and use. It is the production of a Christian out of a man: it is the change not only of that which was vicious into virtuous, but of that which was earthly into heavenly; and that which was natural into spiritual. It is of this the Apostle speaks when he says to the Philippians; "I am confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Whence it appears, that this operation is not only certain in its issue, but *divine* in its origin and progress; and, therefore, *excellent* in its nature.

All God's works are good; but this is called *good* by way of distinction. O Christian! it is the *best* work God ever did for thee. His making thee a man was far less than his making thee *a new man*. The one brought thee into the world of nature; the other into the world of grace. The one made thee a partaker of a life full of vanity and sorrow; the other commenced in thee "the life of God!" As the creature of his power, thou art encouraged to hope in him; but this relation alone does not secure thee from his displeasure—for it is written, "Because they are a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour." But, as the subject of his grace, a foundation is laid for everlasting confidence and joy in him. He "taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy." He has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee therefore they may boldly say, "the Lord is my helper; I will not fear;" and plead with him, like David; "Perfect, O God, that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the works of thine own hands." Our promise echoes back the prayer, and leads us,

II. TO CONSIDER WHAT GOD WILL DO. "*I will carry, I will deliver.*"

First. He will carry. This implies something more than to guide and to lead them. It supposes helplessness and inability on their side; and tender support and assistance on his. If a man has any thing very valuable, and peculiarly esteemed, he would not willingly leave it, or entrust it to another. God's people are his jewels. They are precious in his sight, and honourable, and he has loved them. A father

carries liis child, and the burden is a pleasure. Moses, in liis improper expostulation with God, says, "Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them, that thou shouldst say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?" The imagery is here taken from a journey. A family is travelling. But the babe cannot go alone. The father is mentioned as being the stronger parent of the two; or, rather, it intimates—that the mother is dead, perhaps she expired in giving life—she is left behind—the father therefore becomes the nurse, lays the bereaved babe in his bosom, now doubly endeared, and goes forward. God has a large family; but, as Bishop Hall observes, none of his children can go alone. Yet they are not left to perish in their weakness. He will render them equal to the difficulties and duties of the Christian life. He will afford them seasonable and adequate succour. His grace shall be sufficient for them; and his strength shall be made perfect in their weakness. "Fear not," says he, "for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Secondly. He will deliver. This implies that they are exposed to danger; but that they shall not become a prey.

He delivers them *from* trouble. Who can imagine from how many evils you are *preserved* in a world like this—every day and every hour! From how many afflictions have you been *released*, in your passage through life! How has he appeared for you when there seemed no possibility of escape! But he

turned the shadow of death into the morning. He brought your souls out of prison—and compassed you about with songs of deliverance.

He delivers them *in* trouble. A state of suffering is a state of trial; and it is mentioned, as a moral prodigy, in the affliction of Job, that “in all this he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” Rebellion against Divine Providence; distrust of God’s goodness; impatience; envy at the exemptions and indulgences of others—to these, and many other kindred sins, we are peculiarly liable in the day of adversity: and it is a distinguished privilege to be preserved from them, even if the distress should be continued.

He delivers them *by* trouble. But for “the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him,” Paul would have been “exalted above measure.” “Before I was afflicted,” says David, “I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.” It was “the hedge of thorns “that restrained the Church from “finding her paths, and following her lovers.” Who is not more indebted to his trials than to his enjoyments?

And this leads us to another view of the deliverance here promised. Our bodily dangers are nothing to our spiritual. We should be chiefly concerned for the safety and welfare of the soul. Now what are our moral hazards? Is not “our adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, going about seeking whom he may devour”? Do we not live in a world of error! Are we not surrounded with evil examples! Are there not “fleshly lusts that war against the soul”? Is there not “in us an evil heart of unbelief departing from the living God”?—Who then can

be saved?—Who can hope to endure to the end?—No one but the Christian; and even *his* expectation would be no better than presumption were it not that he has an Almighty Deliverer who is pledged to secure him. To him he looks; on him he relies. His defence is of God, that saveth the upright in heart. He “*is* able to keep him from falling, and to present him faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy and he says to him, as David did to Abiathar, “Abide with me: for he that seeketh thy life seeketh my life; but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.”

III. BUT HOW LONG—NOW FAR will his tenderness and care extend? *To old age; to hoar hairs.* “And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.”

This is a period in which a man is deprived of many of his relations and friends; is gazed on by a new generation; feels a thousand infirmities, anxieties, and distresses; and is reduced to dependence upon those around him. “When thou wast young,” says our Saviour to I’eter, “thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.” Owing to the nature of this period, Barzillai refuses the oilers of a palace: “I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?” Such also was the view Moses took of the

same season: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten: and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." But Solomon has given us an enlarged representation of the decline of life; and he mentions the disadvantage of it to enforce an important duty: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." Then will you be unable to discharge the duties of religion; then will you require all its comforts; then how dreadful to encounter the remorse of reflection, and the horror of anticipation! "While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond-tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher "all is vanity."

Such is the period to which the promise extends, and two things may be observed concerning it.

First. The promise does not necessarily suppose that you will reach this period. Immensely the majority of mankind die before Time can snow upon their heads. There are few comparatively who “come to their grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season.” The wonder is that there are so many.

“Dangers stand thick through all the ground,
To push us to the tomb;
And fierce diseases wait around,
To hurry mortals home.

“Our life contains a thousand springs,
And dies if one be gone;
Strange that a harp of thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long!”

But the meaning is, that, if you should reach this period, you need not be afraid of it; he will be with you, and “a very present help in trouble.”

Secondly. It is only said that he will be with you “*to* old age, and *to* hoar hairs.” He will be with you *nil through* “the months of vanity, and the wearisome nights appointed you;” he will be with you even when “your heart and flesh fail you.” This is implied. But it was not necessary to mention it—old age and death are so near each other—they touch. This subject displays,

In the First place, The patience of God. Ye aged, are you not a wonder to yourselves? Are you not compelled to exclaim, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not”? What a number of provocations has he

had to bear with from you in the course of sixty, seventy, eighty years! How soon would a fellow-creature, however kind and longsuffering, have abandoned you! But he is God, and not man. Even he has asked, "How long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" And his providence and grace have answered the question—"Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

The subject affords, Secondly, Encouragement for those who are descended into the vale of years. Doubts may assail the mind of a believer to the last. And there are things that may peculiarly produce them at this period: such as a consciousness of guilt arising from faithful reviews of life; and a sense of unworthiness resulting from present unprofitableness. They can now no longer actively serve God. The loss of animal spirits deprives them of those lively emotions they once enjoyed. The feeble body enervates the mind; trifles distract them; and they easily misjudge themselves.

But be of good comfort, ye aged servants of God. He will not turn you out of doors now your labour is over. He remembers "you, the kindness of your youth." He accepts of your desires and designs, he pities your infirmities. He is "the strength of your hearts, and your portion for ever." If the world is weary of you, he is not. If "lover and friend have been put far from you, and your acquaintance into darkness," the eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

Your salvation is nearer than when you believed. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." You

are riding at anchor off the fair havens; and the next wind or tide will waft you in.

And cannot you trust him, after all the proofs you have had of his power, faithfulness, and love? Cannot you make this language your own? "By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bow els: my praise shall be continually of thee. Cast me not off in the time of old age: forsake me not when my strength faileth. My mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof. I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come."

Thirdly. What shall I say to the hoary-headed sinner? I do not pretend to inform you that the world is vain: with this you *must* be already acquainted. But is it not strange that you continue to retain such a tenacious hold of it, "trembling at once with eagerness and age?" It seems less necessary to tell you that, death is near—the young *may* die, the old *must*. But, like Ephraim, gray hairs are here and there upon you, and you perceive it not. You promise yourselves time to come, when there is but a step between you and death. You have lived longer than thousands of your fellow-creatures: but to what purpose? The longsuffering of God was designed to lead you to repentance. Has it done so? Look back. What a scene! Time trifled and sinned

away; faculties perverted; privileges neglected and abused! Nothing done for God or your generation! Thy gray hairs are only a fool's cap. Thou art ripe for ruin. And would it not be righteous in God to cut thee down instantly as a cumberer of the ground? If there be an object of pity on earth, thou art the man. There is nothing at present that can afford thee comfort. But thou art not excluded from hope. "He yet waits to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy upon you." Go to him, heavy laden with years and sins. Late repentance is seldom true, but true repentance is never too late. O that I could hear you saying, Lord, save, I perish!

Finally. What a motive is there here to induce us all to become the Lord's followers! "A friend is born for adversity yet very little of this friendship is to be found. How many, who possess a warm regard in prosperous and earlier life, cast us off in affliction and declining years: But he will be principally with us when we principally need his aid. We may live upon him when we cannot live for him.

Here are two suppositions.

You may die; and you may die soon. In this case, you "will be for ever with the Lord."

You may live; and live to old age. In this case, he will be continually with you. "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

What remains?—Let the best of all masters have the most dutiful of all servants. As he is never weary in doing us good, may we never be weary in well-doing: "But be stedfast, immovable, always

abounding in the work of the Lord; and, bringing forth fruit in old age, be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright. He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.”

DISCOURSE LXXI.

GEHAZI.

“But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot in meet him, and said, Is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said. Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house; and he let the men go, and they departed. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence contestest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The

leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.”—2 KINGS v. 20–27.

As the sun in nature enlightens valleys as well as hills, and so diffuses its influence that nothing is hid from the heat thereof—so it is with the Scripture, the luminary of the moral world. It does not confine its attention to the great; but gives directions to all ranks and degrees of men. It describes not only the excellences and defects of kings, but of subjects. It represents not only the virtues and vices of masters, but of servants. It gives us instances of good servants; such as Eleazar, Joseph, Obadiah. And it gives us examples of bad ones—of which number none is more strikingly awful and improving than that of Gehazi.

Let us enter a little into the history, and see what instructions it will afford.

It is supposed that Gehazi had lived with Elijah, and that, at the translation of his master, he was taken into the service of his successor. However this may be, we know that he was the servant of Elisha, who it is probable had been hitherto ignorant of his real character. For the prophetic spirit was given him by measure, and the exercise of it was limited by the will of God; and till this event occurred, the true character of the man was not developed.

A person may go a long time before he meets with his own proper trial, intended to show what “manner of man he is.” Indeed none of us know much of ourselves till we are tried. While the water is calm and clear, we are not aware how much mud there is at the bottom; but the winds and waves throw up the mire and dirt. If the weather be unfavourable

the ants are invisible, but let the sun shine forth and they appear. Undisturbed, we see nothing of them; but remove the stone, and stir the brood only with a straw, and swarms are in motion and all alive. When our prophet had predicted the future vileness of Hazael, Hazael shocked at the intelligence exclaimed, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" He was probably at the time sincere: but he knew not how differently he should feel in new and untried circumstances; he knew not the seducing corrupting power of wealth and dignity upon the human heart. Hence he soon became the monster he had abhorred. These things had not even budded in winter: but spring soon calleth them forth; summer saw the blossoms turned into fruit; and autumn ripened them. And it is probable that, had all this wickedness of Gchazi been foretold a few months or weeks before, he would have been equally surprised, Pray we, therefore, as directed by Him who knows what is in man, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Elisha had healed Naaman, and Naaman in his gratitude for the blessing pressed the man of God to receive a present. "But he said. As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused." Not that he deemed the gold of the Syrian impure; or did not stand in need of assistance, for he was poor; or supposed it unlawful to take a gratuity: he thankfully accepted the hospitality of the Shunamite, who furnished him with a room, with a table, a stool, and a candlestick. But he spared his purse in love to his soul; he would teach this new convert that true godliness can find its reward in its work. He would

teach us to do good for its own sake; to use discretion in what is allowable; to distinguish times and cases; to know when to adhere to general rules, and when to deviate from them. In all this, "wisdom is profitable to direct."

But the servant had not looked upon the offered treasure like his master. If Elisha dispensed with it, so would not Gehazi. He therefore resolves by some means to obtain a share. "Behold," says he, "my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him."—Naaman seeing him running, stops, descends from his chariot, and meets him with a question that shows he was fearful some evil had happened to his friend and benefactor; "Is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim, two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver and two changes of garments." What a falsehood was here!—It was not the effect of surprise, but framed deliberately for the purpose!

The disposition of this Syrian was as noble as his rank. He was delighted to comply with this supposed desire, and to leave something behind him. "And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him." Thus he exceeds the demand; and makes some of his own train porters to Gehazi.

But where did he lodge the treasure? At "the tower," says the common translation; "the secret

place," says the margin: some place separated from the dwelling-house of the man of God, and into which he could enter without being seen. Here he dismisses the two Syrian attendants, hides the load, and blesses his good fortune; and, looking demurely, "he went in and stood before his master."

Elisha does not throw himself into a passion, but calmly convinces, and righteously punishes him. "Gehazi," says he, "whence comest thou?" We are required to condemn the guilty—yet who does not pity the criminal in the hour of detection?—What a melancholy spectacle he exhibits—deprived of his innocency—his courage failing him—his countenance changing—incapable of defence—and the lies he made his refuge leaving him speechless!—"Thy servant went no whither. Then said he unto him, Went not my heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?" Did he meet thee *no where*? Did he speak to thee *no where*? "Is this a time to receive money, and garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?"

By this question Elisha convinced him, not only that he was privy to this base action, but that he knew the very thoughts and purposes of his heart. Gehazi had already in imagination laid out the substance he had so unjustly acquired: such things he would purchase; in such a style he would live; he would improve and enlarge his means, till, rising from a private to a splendid station, he could command the homage he had been accustomed to pay.

But punishment follows detection; "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his pre-

sence a leper as white as snow.”—The punishment hath three characters.

First. It was *extensive*: and took in his family as well as himself. He derived from his offspring-, probably, one of the motives that produced this fatal action; he would “lay up for the children but, instead of entailing a large estate, he has entailed a loathsome disease from generation to generation. If he had any affection for his offspring, how must he have been cut to the heart to see these innocent objects the victims of his vice!

Secondly. It was *scandalous* and *obvious*, he was thus excluded from the tabernacle, and carried with him marks of his fraud and sacrilege: wherever he went, his sin was read in his face and family.

Thirdly. It was *immediate*: and, seizing him in a moment, without any previous symptoms or tendencies, proved that it was inflicted, not by revenge, but by a supernatural impulse.

It is hoped that in due time Naaman was disabused, and informed of the vileness of the man, and the generosity of the master. But let us hasten to derive a few general and useful reflections from the whole narrative.

I. PERSONS MAY BE VERY WICKED UNDER RELIGIOUS ADVANTAGES. The means of grace and the grace of the means are very distinguishable from each other, and are frequently found separate. Of the four portions of ground sowed with the same seed, by the same hand, and at the same season, one only was productive soil. Children, trained up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” have been known to turn aside into “the paths of the destroyer,”

and to "bring down a parent's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

There are servants who see good example, hear daily instruction, attend morning and evening worship, yet have no fear of God before their eyes; yea, they can return from these exercises and treat them with contempt, and become ten-fold more the children of hell than others! Thus we here find a bad servant living with a godly master. Some of those who resided at a distance from the man of God honoured him, and derived advantage from him; while one that stood continually before him, and heard his wisdom, and saw his miracles, and witnessed his holy life, seems to have been only corrupted and hardened by them!

But wherever such awful characters are found, let them remember that they cannot sin so cheap as others: they will be left without excuse; they will have to answer for abused privileges; their guilt will be in proportion to their advantages, and their punishment in proportion to their guilt. For "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." "And that servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

II. HERE IS A WARNING AGAINST THE LOVE OF MONEY. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness."

What did Gehazi acquire by his wealth? His

gain was loss. He lost his health. He lost his honour. He lost his peace. He lost his place. And, without repentance, he lost his soul for ever. Was he not much happier before! He has indeed increased his substance: but he enjoys it with the abhorrence of God; the scorn of men; disease of body; the affliction of his family; the scourges of his conscience; the foretastes of hell.

What a commentary is the history of this man, and of Balaam, and Achan, and Judas, and Demas, and all one-half of the modern professors of religion, on the following passages of Scripture! "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue, is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death." "In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits: every hand of the wicked shall come upon him. When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and shall rain it upon him while he is eating. He shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike him through." "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

"Let your conversation therefore be without covetousness. Be content with such things as you have." For God has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. You brought nothing with you into the world, and it is certain you can carry nothing out."

"Man wants but little here below,
Nor wants that little long."

Money implies no excellence, and confers none. Neither does "a man's life consist in the abundance of the things that he possesseth." But, oh! the moral hazards—the difficulties in the way of salvation attending it! This is the most dissuasive view we can take of it. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Again I say, take heed, and beware of this insinuating, this detestable, this destructive passion. Meet every temptation to it with the question of our Saviour: "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

III. SEE THE ENCROACHMENTS AND PROGRESS OF SIN; AND LEARN HOW DANGEROUS IT IS TO GIVE WAY TO ANY EVIL PROPENSITY.

Here is avarice leading on to lying; and one lie followed up by two more. One transgression breaks down the fence; and then others, like cattle, go in more easily, and by a kind of licence. One sin often renders another necessary to its execution; one sin often renders another necessary to its concealment. The obligation the sinner lays himself under in order to proceed in an evil course is frequently endless: while every step of the progress he makes blinds and hardens him still more. When a child leaves his house clean in his apparel, he is afraid to soil even his feet: but the first stain he contracts makes him less regardless of the second, and the second of the third; till he thinks himself so bad, that caution is needless, and he treads anywhere.

Thus we read that men "proceed from evil to evil that they wax worse and worse;" that these

“things eat as do a canker;” that, when “lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

And is it only in the Scripture that this truth is asserted? Do we not see it confirmed in actual instances every day? Over how many of late years have we had to mourn! But which of these unhappy characters became either infidel or vicious at once! They endured evil company, and then chose it. They trifled with the Sabbath, and then profaned it. One thing after another was given up, till they “said unto God, Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.”

Can we then be too early in our precautions? Can we be too much afraid of beginnings? Is it not better to crush the egg before it breaks forth into a fiery flying serpent?

HOW ABSURD IS IT TO SIN WITH AN EXPECTATION OF SECRECY! “There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves.” When going forth to commit iniquity, goes not your own conscience with you? Goes not the eye of God with you? Does not he see all, and record all, and with a view to bring all into judgment! But, even with regard to others it may generally be said, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” There are often eye and ear witnesses of whom you have no suspicion. Strange circumstances frequently occur to awaken inquiry, and lead to detection. You may divulge your iniquity by inadvertency in conversation; by dreams when asleep; by delirium when distracted. You may be compelled to acknowledge it by the anguish of a guilty

mind. Men have sometimes turned their own accusers long after the fact, and when no suspicion attached to them; and have sought shelter in a legal death.

Lastly. ABHOR AND FORSAKE LYING. It is in common peculiarly easy to detect falsehood. Hence it is said that every liar should have a good memory. And what an odious character is a liar! How shunned and detested when discovered! To every mortal upon earth, the appellation of a liar is the most detestable. A liar is the emblem of "the devil, who was a liar from the beginning, and abode not in the truth."

God, of such importance is it that we should speak the truth one to another, has sometimes remarkably interposed, not only to detect, but to punish, lying. Did Ananias and Sapphira escape? Did Gehazi? The mouth of them that speak lies shall he stopped. Lies may be their refuge now. But "all liars," it is said, "shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." For "without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie."

Do not say of such a discourse as this, it is not evangelical. We know the main thing is to make you acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ, and to bring you to him. But there are various truths which we are required to lay open; and which we find in the Book of God for this purpose; they are written for our admonition, and are to be improved. And nothing can be done till men are convinced of sin. But by instances of sin. we may be led to a sin-

ful course; from a sinful life, to a sinful nature—and so feel the necessity of an application to him, whose name is Jesus, because he saves his people from their sins; and is raised up to “bless us, by turning every one of us a way from our iniquities.”

DISCOURSE LXXII.

DYING REGRETS.

“And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say. How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!”—PROV. v. 11, 12.

RELIGION has one undeniable advantage to recommend it—whatever it calls us to sacrifice, or to suffer, it always ends well. “Mark the perfect man,” says David, “and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.” And even Balaam exclaims, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”

On the other hand, sin has one undeniable evil to excite our aversion and horror. Whatever sensual pleasures and imaginary profit attend its course, it always ends awfully. We are far from allowing that the sinner has *present* happiness; for Scripture and history, observation and experience, unite to prove that “the way of transgressors is hard.” But if it were not so—if it were easy and smooth and flowery—yet, who would walk in it—since “the end of these things is death”

Behold the representation of a sinner closing his sad career—"He mourns at the last, when his flesh and his body are consumed, and says, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!" Let us consider,

The SUBJECT of these regrets.—II. The PERIOD of these regrets.—III. The NATURE of these regrets.

I. The SUBJECT of these regrets. It IS A man who has disregarded through life the means employed to preserve or reclaim him: it is one who has "hated instruction, and whose heart has despised reproof. What instructors and reprovers has man! I mean, a man living in a country like this; I mean, a man possessing advantages like ours. These instructors and reprovers may be ranked in six classes.

In the First, we place your connexions in life.—You reside in a family, the head of which, like Joshua, has said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord and of whom God has testified, as he did of Abraham, "I know him that he will command his household and his children after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment."—You have had a pious father, who has often with tears said, "My son. if thou be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine;"—perhaps, after an example the most powerful, with his dying breath he said, "I go the way of all the earth: and thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind; for if thou seek him he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him he will cast thee off for ever."—Has not she who bore thee sometimes taken thee aside, and in eloquence, such as can only come from the heart of a woman and a mother, addressed every

feeling of thy nature? “What, my son! and the son of my womb! and the son of my vows!”—If parents have never discharged the duty their office requires, have you not had an instructor and a reprover in a brother? In a sister? In a wife? In a husband? If relations have all neglected you, have you met with no pious friend? No godly acquaintance? No religious neighbour?

In the Second, we place the Scriptures. These you have in your own language, and are not forbidden the use of them. You can read them; and by the perusal bring around you Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and Paul; the prophets and the apostles; with all their warnings and invitations. And I may apply to you the words that were originally addressed to Timothy: “From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

In the Third, we place ministers. In the name of God, whose they are, and whom they serve, they place before you your duty in the various conditions of life, and alarm and allure you to the performance of it. They proclaim the threatenings of the Law, and the promises of the Gospel. They announce your danger, and call upon you to flee for refuge to the hope set before you. “Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things that you see, and have not seen them; and to hear the things that you hear, and have not heard them. Put blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”

In the Fourth, we place conscience. This instructor and reprover you have always with you. always in you. How often has this Divine messenger, when you have been venturing on a sinful action, cried, Forbear! How often has it arraigned and condemned your proceedings, and filled you with anguish and terror! How often has it told you that you are in the gall of bitterness, in the bond of iniquity; and that your heart is not right in the sight of God!

In the Fifth, we place irrational creatures. Can you hear the melody of the birds, and not be ashamed of your sinful silence? Can you see the heavenly bodies perform unerringly their appointed course, and not reflect on your own numberless departures from duty? "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise; which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." "Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

In the Sixth, we place the dispensations of providence. All events have a voice, especially those of an afflictive kind. Hence we are commanded to hear the rod. And who has not been addressed by it? He has chastened you with sickness. You drew nigh unto the grave, and looked over the brink of life into an awful eternity. He has visited you with disappointments in your worldly affairs; and told you not to lay up treasure on earth, where moth and

rust do corrupt, and thieves break through and steal. You have seen your neighbours carried to their long home. You have witnessed dying beds. Your own dwelling has been made the house of mourning—"lover and friend has he put far from you, and your acquaintance into silence." The very day in which you have lived has been full of awful admonitions. When his "judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world should learn righteousness."

Yet how many are there who "regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operations of his hands!" How many are there who disregard all these instructors and reprovers! Let us turn from the subject, to

The PERIOD of these regrets. It is a dying hour. It is "*at the last*, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed."

Such a period is *unavoidable*. There is no prevention of it, nor escape from it. However long life may be, it will have an end: the last breath *will* expire; the last sabbath *will* elapse; the last sermon *will* be heard. The sparkling eye *must* be closed in darkness; the busy tongue *must* be silenced for ever; the hands *must* forget their enterprises; and those idolized frames, that exhausted so much time and attention in pampering and adorning them, *must* be consigned to rottenness and worms.

Such a period *cannot be far off*. "For what is our life? It is a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." It is a flood. It is a flower. It is a talc that is told. It is a dream. It is a hand's breadth. It is nothing before God—"surely every man at his best estate is altogether vanity:

Such a period *may tic very near*. The general limitation of human life is threescore years and ten; but few reach it, and come to the grave in full age. Indeed, when we consider of what a multiplicity of delicate organs our system is composed, and how liable they are to injury; and add to this the numberless diseases and accidents that lie ambushed in our path; the wonder is, that we live a week, a day, an hour, to an end.

Such a period is *sometimes prematurely brought on by sin*. Solomon here intimates this; and it is a supposition illustrated and confirmed by facts. How many die by the hand of civil justice; and acknowledge, at the place of execution, the disregard of instruction and reproof, in which the fatal career commenced! How many of those who die what is called a natural death might have been now living, had not their “bones been filled with the sins of their youth, that lie down with them in the dust”! How many yet living, but diseased, emaciated figures, exhibiting the appearances of decay and age, might have been sound in constitution, and healthy and strong, had they listened to that wisdom which has “length of days in her right hand,” as well as in “her left hand riches and honour”! How many, reduced and worn down by hard labour and living to which they had been unaccustomed, who have pined away in want, or dragged on a miserable being in prison, might have still enjoyed liberty and ease, had they followed that godliness which “has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come”! As to “bloody and deceitful men,” often they do not “live out half their days.”

But such a period as this, if it be not prematurely

produced by irreligion, is always embittered by it. "You will mourn at the last, when your flesh and your body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!" Such self-reflection and condemnation are unavoidable—unless prevented, first, by your being cut off suddenly, and not having a moment given you for thought. Secondly, by your being deprived of reason, and thus rendered incapable of any mental exertion. Or, thirdly, by your having annihilated all moral feeling, and completely subdued the power of conscience—and who can tell how far a man may be hardened "through the deceitfulness of sin," and by trifling with the means of grace, and die in peace, though he is sure to wake in torment! Would you desire such preventions as these? Are they not more dreadful than the effect? Yet you must hope—either for sudden death—or the suspension of reason—or the loss of conscience; or you *must* expect a dying hour to be embittered with regrets.

Let us consider the NATURE of these regrets. "And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body be consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!" In other cases, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." But this mourning has two attributes to distinguish it.

First. It is dreadful. A dying hour has been called an honest hour. The world then recedes from your view, demonstrating its incapacity to succour; and acknowledging that it attracted you only to show its emptiness, and elevated only to depress. The delusions of imagination give way. Criminal excuses vanish. Memory goes back, and recalls the guilt of

former life: and conscience sets your most secret sins in the light of God's countenance. With what ingratitude, folly, madness, will you charge yourselves! What reflections on opportunities lost! on faculties perverted! What fear of mercy abused; and of judgment approaching! What anticipations of hell, where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched! Many of the sinner's dying confessions and horrors are never made known. Relations and friends conceal them. They often indeed mistake them, and ascribe these exclamations to the frenzy of the disorder. And, perhaps, were it not for the composing draught, it would be impossible, in many cases, to secure the attendance of any in the room—"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

Secondly. It is useless. I do not mean as to others—it may serve to convince them what "an evil and bitter thing it is to sin against God," and awaken in them a salutary, because a seasonable, fear. But with regard to the individuals themselves, says God himself; "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their

own way, and be tilled with their own devices." What! Is this dying grief always, and invariably unavailing?—I answer; We are to describe things according to their natural and common course, and not according to occasional and very unusual exceptions. And in the case before us—are not exceptions very unusual? Do not men commonly die as they live? And with regard to those dying regrets, to which so many look forward as a final refuge, and from which so many instantaneous saints are furnished for our magazine-calendars—what degree of dependence is to be placed upon them? In reply to this, let the following remarks be examined.

The First regards the Scripture. There we find *one*, and *only one* called at this hour. It was the dying thief. He implored and obtained mercy when the heaven was covered with blackness, and the earth trembled, and the locks rent, and the graves were opened, and a suffering Saviour would crown the prodigies of nature with a miracle of grace—a case in all its circumstances so amazingly peculiar, that, were not men infatuated by sin, it could never be drawn into a precedent

The Second is derived from observation. We have often attended persons on what was deemed their dying bed; we have heard their prayers and their professions; we have seen their distress and their relief; and, had they died, we should have presumed on their salvation. But we have never known one of these, who on recovery lived so as to prove the reality of his conversion! We have often asked ministers concerning the same case; and they have been compelled to make the same awful declaration.

The Third regards the force of habit. "As well may the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots, as they learn to do good who have been accustomed to do evil." Diseases which, if taken in time, are curable, by becoming inveterate are rendered desperate. "But there is no desperate case here," you are ready to say. "With God all things are possible; his grace is almighty." Acknowledged: and you shall have all the encouragement derivable from a miracle of grace. But what probability is there that an extraordinary dispensation of grace will be adopted, after all the ordinary means of salvation have been despised and neglected? And despised and neglected too in hope of this!

Hence our Fourth remark regards the influence of such examples. If persons who live without God in the world were as frequently called in their last hour as too many seem to admit, would not the frequency of the occurrence influence persons to procrastinate their religious concerns, and to say to every present application, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee"? But does God by his conduct contradict his commands? And having said, "To-day if ye will hear his voice harden not your heart;"—"now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation;"—"seek ye the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near;"—would he supersede the necessity, or weaken the impression, of all this, by his constantly receiving sinners when they can insult him no longer, and showing that forced regret is as acceptable to him as genuine repentance?

For, Finally, observe the uncertainty the individual must feel in determining the reality of his religious

feelings. How is he to know whether they are the cries of nature, or the desires of grace? whether they How front the Spirit of God, or result from his tremendous situation, and his depressed and disordered frame? And has he not enough to bear without this cruel perplexity? Now that he needs the comforts of religion, is he incapable of deciding whether he is entitled to its promises? Now that he needs confidence, must he expire in darkness and in doubt?—Yet, by the way, we should have more hope of such a man, if he died uncertain and distressed, than were we to see him dying in “the full assurance of hope.” For, though God is a sovereign, and we are not to limit the Holy One of Israel, it is not surely reasonable to expect, that a man, who has given his whole life to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and is only driven to God by dying regret, should be iible to say, with a Simeon who has been waiting lor the consolation of Israel, “Lord, now leitest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!” Let us conclude by three reflections.

First. *How good is God!* He is much more attentive to our welfare than we ever have been, or ever can be. He originally made man upright; and when, by transgression, he fell away from him, he did not avail himself of the rights his justice had acquired over him; nor did he even treat him with neglect. I le remembered us in our low estate; and “so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” He has sent us the information, with numberless means and motives, to awaken our attention to it. And these he is continually repeating. So true is it that he is “long-suffering,

not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live." So justly may he complain, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" For,

Secondly. *How fallen is man!* Some deny his depravity, contending that we are naturally virtuous, or at least as much inclined to good as to evil. But if this be the fact, why do we need so many hindrances to restrain us from evil, and so many endeavours to excite us to good? And why are they ineffectual too? They ought upon this principle to be successful with the majority, or at least an equal number of mankind. But are they? Do we not see men generally breaking through every restraint, and disregarding every kind of instruction and reproof? And are not they who walk by the rule of God's word "a peculiar people"?

Thirdly. *How important is serious thought!* In this religion commences: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Could men go on as they do, if they considered their ways, comparing them with the word of God, and examining their consequences? Impossible. It is thoughtlessness that ruins them. They never faithfully inquire. How will this close? Will it bring me peace at the last? How will it appear when reviewed from the borders of the grave? "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished." "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"

DISCOURSE LXXIII.

DEATH CONQUERED:

[ON THE LOSS OF A CHRISTIAN FRIEND.]

“Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue till things unto himself.”—PHIL. iii. 20, 21.

THE present is not the principal state in which man is to be found; and it should never be viewed separate from another; to which it bears the same relation as infancy to manhood, as spring to autumn, as seed-time to harvest. Who, in nature, having scattered one kind of grain in his field, would think of filling his barn with another? And in religious concerns “be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

This consideration stamps an awfulness on human nature; and teaches us the true importance of the

present period. It is, comparatively, a matter of little concern what is to become of us, and where we shall reside, for a few weeks or years. The grand question is, Where are we to reside for ever? And, What is to become of us when the trumpet shall sound, and all the dead, both small and great, shall stand before God, and receive of the things done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil?

Some never afford this subject a moment's thought. Others remain in a state of uncertainty. But the primitive Christians gave all diligence to make their calling and their election sure; and, conscious of the reality of their religion, and the blessedness of their condition, could say, "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Let us consider—THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE—THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPECTATION—THE CHRISTIAN'S DESTINY.

I. His present STATE. It is thus expressed: "Our conversation is in heaven." The original term is used two ways. Sometimes it signifies a certain alliance, and means citizenship: and sometimes it DENOTES a peculiar behaviour. Our translators have preferred the latter; and rendered it *conversation*. And they have done so, not only in the passage before us, but in several other places, meaning, however, by the term, not discourse only, but the whole tenor of our conduct. We need not disunite these two senses. The one will infer and explain the other.

Be it remembered, therefore, in the First place, that the believer stands in connexion with another and a nobler world; he belongs to “a better country, even a heavenly.” He is a citizen of no mean city: “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” and which abounds with laws, honours, riches, pleasures, immunities, and intercourse, the most valuable and glorious. How did a man boast in being a citizen of Rome! When the centurion heard that Paul was a Roman, “he went and told the chief captain, saying. Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free-born.” Think, then, what a privilege it is to belong to a state concerning which it is said, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him!”—Hence our Saviour teaches his disciples to prefer their being registered among the living in Jerusalem to the power and fame of working miracles: “Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

Now, Secondly, as the Christian is allied to such a country, a suitable mode of living becomes him. A citizen of Rome could live elsewhere, even in any of the distant provinces. A citizen of heaven resides on earth for a season; but he is a stranger and a foreigner. Though in the world, he is not of it. And while certain purposes detain him here, his principles, his habits, and his speech, show that he belongs to “a pe-

cular people." He is a citizen of glory. He prefers his fellow-citizens. He loves to speak of the glory of his kingdom. He will correspond with it, and, as cold water to a thirsty soul, so will good news be from this far country. His body is here, and his business is here—but his soul is there—there is his treasure; there his inheritance; there his thoughts fix; there his affections rest;

"There his best friends, his kindred dwell;
There God his Saviour reigns."

He acts habitually under an impression of heaven, and with a reference to it. His chief care is to gain it. He often fears that he shall miss it at last; and the apprehension stimulates his vigilance, self-examination, and diligence. He concurs in the prayer, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven." He mourns over his want of conformity to the servants of God above; and is seeking after an increase of those blessed tempers and joys which are possessed by them in all their perfection. He is not only longing, but preparing for heaven. And he is hastening towards it, not only as a place of release from trouble, but as a state of freedom from sin, and communion with God.

II. His high EXPECTATION. "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

This reminds us of the present abode of our Redeemer: he is now in heaven. And hence we need not wonder that Christians should have their conversation there. For he is their treasure; and where "the treasure is, there will the heart be also." The removal of a very dear friend into another neighbour-

hood will frequently render a place indifferent to us; and we change our residence to be near him. The death of a delightful relation will turn a paradise into a wilderness. How often do we look up, and follow our departed connexions in our thoughts! But something of them remains. The body we have laid in the grave. We go to the place to weep there. We feel a propriety in the very dust we approach. But nothing of our Saviour remains to attach us to earth: his very body is gone from us. "I am no more," said he, "in the world"—a sentence sufficient to render the world dreary; we feel his attraction as he ascends; and, "rising together with Christ, we seek those things that are above, where he sitteth at the right hand of God. We set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God. And when he who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory."

Again. Though our Redeemer is now in heaven, he will come thence. The time is indeed a secret: but the thing is sure. He does not forget his friends while he is absent: he communicates with them, and supplies them; and has promised to "come again and receive them to himself, that where he is there they may be also." But how wonderful the difference between his former and his future coming! Then he was seen of few; now "every eye shall see him." Then his glory was veiled, and "the world knew him not now we shall "see him as he is." Then "he was despised and rejected of men now he "shall come in the clouds of heaven, with all the holy angels"! Then he was born in a stable, and nailed to a cross; now "he shall sit upon the throne of his

glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations." He was "once offered to bear the sins of many; and to them that look for him will he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

Observe also the state of the Christian's mind with regard to this appearance. He looks for him.

He believes his coming; and this distinguishes him from *infidels*. They ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" and having rendered it their interest that he should not come, persuade themselves that he will not. Their unbelief is the offspring of their vices and their fears. But with the Christian it is not a matter of opinion or conjecture; he does not say, He may come; but, He will come: and by means of that "faith which is the evidence of things not seen," he beholds him already marshalling his angels—and travelling down.

But do not all believe this truth? It is an invidious task to call men *infidels*. But suppose they prove themselves so! Now we know from observation and experience that belief sways the mind, and governs the conduct. Even when our persuasion is founded on our own imagination, or the testimony of our fellow-creatures, it produces some effect. How much more operative should be; our confidence in the testimony of God, who cannot be deceived, and who cannot lie! Now if men live precisely like others; as bold in sin; as remiss in duty; can they really believe? Do not actions speak louder than words?

The true believer, therefore, pays attention to his coming; and thus he is distinguished from *nominal* Christians, who, if we must allow that they believe it, are not influenced by it. What we look for we prepare for, in proportion as we attach importance to

it. We prepare for the reception of a friend. How much more should we prepare for the reception of a king! But here the personage expected is the King of kings; the Governor of the universe; the Judge of all!—And does the Christian, who is looking for *Him*, immerse himself in the cares of this life? Does he “sleep, as do others”? Does he play and trifle? Does he smite his fellow-servant, and eat and drink with the drunken? No; but, “seeing he looks for such things, he is diligent that he may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” He waits, with his “loins girded, and his lamp burning and, “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, he lives soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world and is thus looking for that blessed hope, “and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

For, Finally, remark the character under which the Christian waits for him: “from whence we look for the Saviour.” This was the name given him at his birth, and for the most important of all reasons, because he should “save his people from their sins.” This work he has not only undertaken, but will completely accomplish. He is coming to finish it; and to fulfil all that the name imposes upon him, or implies. He will create new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. He will gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. “O Death! he will be thy plagues. O Grave! He will be thy destruction: repentance shall be bid from his eyes.” “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put death conquered.

on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, 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, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

III. His final DESTINY. "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Three things are observable.

First. The subject changed. "This vile body." Much of the wisdom and power of God is displayed in the formation of the human frame. And when we consider the multiplicity and delicacy of its parts; the connexion of its members; the proportion and adaptation of its organs to each other, and to the whole; we need not wonder that David should say, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! "In this sense, it is not a vile body.

But when we view it as degraded by the Fall; as prostituted to the purposes of sin; when we think of the sordidness and lowness of its appetites and infirmities when we view it under various kinds and

degrees of disease, requiring all the interest of reward or vigour of friendship, to discharge towards a fellow-creature the common duties of humanity; when we are compelled by the approach of putrefaction to bury our dead, however once loved and valued, out of our sight; when we go and open a grave, and witness the intolerable disgrace of our nature; we acknowledge with what propriety it is called "the body of our humiliation." But this body is not to be annihilated, though reduced—it will be only *changed*. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

Secondly. Here is the model to which it will be conformed: "It shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body." The comparison does not regard his body in "the days of his flesh." It was then possessed of all our sinless qualities and feelings. But, after his resurrection and ascension, it was deprived of every thing animal and humiliating. It was incapable of hunger or weariness. It could move with the ease of thought, and was invulnerable and eternal as the soul. It was glorified. A glimpse of this glory was given by way of anticipation to the disciples, in the Transfiguration, when "his face shone as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." In this glory he appeared to Saul: he shone "above the brightness of the sun," and struck him blind. When John saw him, "his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength;" and though he had been once familiar with him, and had leaned often on

his bosom, he fell at his feet as dead. How glorious must that body be in which he now governs the world! In which he will judge the universe! In which we shall hold all our intercourse with Deity for ever! Yet a conformity to this glory is not a privilege too great for our hope. As sure as we now resemble the Saviour in disposition, we shall be like him in person: and the same mind will be followed with the same body.

Thirdly. We are informed of the omnipotent agency by which the work is to be accomplished: “according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” It is obvious that such a renovation is nothing less than a miracle, and the most stupendous of all miracles; and, therefore, that it demands in him, who is to effect it, something more than kindness. “*We cannot by taking thought add one cubit to our stature.*” We cannot replace a leaf; or revive a blade of grass. Oh! if love could bring back the dead—if cries and tears could be heard—how soon would our breaches be repaired, and our wounds healed!—Such power is not ours: it is not ours by nature; it is not ours by dispensation. But it belongs to the Saviour. “He is the mighty God.” He has “power given him over all flesh. He is Lord of the dead, as well as of the living.” And he fainteth not, neither is weary. The reanimation and organization of millions of dead bodies will not exhaust him. He could do infinitely more. He is able “even to subdue all things unto himself.”

From this subject we should learn, First, to be thankful for the discoveries of Revelation. The notions of the heathen philosophers, even concerning

the immortality of the soul, were very confined and confused; and it is to be observed that they never laid stress upon it as a principle and a motive. But the resurrection of the body never entered their minds. The history and experience of mankind had furnished no ground for such an expectation. They had always followed the body to the grave, and had seen it return to its original element. The doctrine of its revival and transformation was so new at Athens, that the preaching of it by the Apostle was turned into mockery. But the poorest and most illiterate Christian can open his Bible, and say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

Secondly; observe the importance the Scripture attaches to the doctrine of the resurrection. With what severity does the Apostle speak of those who endeavour to explain it away metaphorically; and "said, the resurrection is past already, and overturned the faith of some." The Gospel certainly admits of an intermediate state between death and the resurrection; but whenever the blessedness of the future world is spoken of, it is, with few exceptions, placed not immediately after death, but after the resurrection. "Thou shalt, be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day. A crown of righteousness, which the righteous Judge shall give me at that day, and

not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing." It would be unnecessary to multiply passages to prove the remark. But does not all this imply, that whatever the intermediate state may be, compared with the present, it is a defective one, compared with the final state of the believer?—And it «cannot be otherwise. Man was embodied in his original creation; and so he will be in his ultimate condition. Till the resurrection, he wants an essential part of human nature; and a medium of connexion and intercourse with material things, from which a large proportion of the happiness of our compound being results.

Thirdly. Let this truth be always combined with the thought of death. Remember it in view of your own dissolution; and as you look towards the grave, and tremble, take courage, and drink in the heavenly intelligence which the Saviour communicates: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die."

Remember it when you are called to lose your pious friends and relations. You have not parted with them for ever. Thy brother, thy sister, thy child, thy mother, will rise again. "Be not ignorant concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Lastly. Are you children of the resurrection? Let me earnestly entreat you not to elude the inquiry. For though the resurrection, as an event, is universal;

as a privilege, it is limited. "All that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." And can that be called a deliverance that raises a man from a bad state, and consigns him to a worse? This will be the case with the wicked and the worldly: this will be the case with all those who have not been raised from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. The pit of corruption will resign its charge into the pit of destruction. O dreadful doom! Those bodies for which you have disregarded your souls; those bodies upon which you have expended all your time and attention; those bodies which you have nursed in sickness, and pampered in health—those bodies *death* will surrender to the *worms*: and—the *resurrection* to the *flames*!

DISCOURSE LXXIV.

DANIEL; OR, CONSTANCY IN RELIGION.

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times A day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”—DAN. vi. 10.

IN a day of rebuke and blasphemy, in which we see so many of an infidel and profligate character, and so few, even of those who profess the Gospel, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, it is peculiarly pleasing and useful to be able to contemplate an instance of genuine, decisive, impartial, persevering, unrebukable religion before God and the Father.

And such an one we have in the example of Daniel, he had doubtless his infirmities: “for there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not:” but nothing is alleged against him. This is the more remarkable, since the sacred writers freely mention the faults as well as the excellences of good men: and I do not remember that any other indi-

vidual, recorded in the Scriptures, has entirely escaped censure.

But let us attend to the words which I have read, and in which we have to consider—THE EMPLOYMENT OF DANIEL—THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE ACTION—AND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT ENHANCED THE VALUE OF THE PERFORMANCE.

I. THE EMPLOYMENT OF DANIEL. It was pious. He prayed and gave thanks before his God. He was not one of those who are satisfied with morality without godliness. He well knew that our greatest connexions are with God; and that *with him* we have principally to do. He was a good neighbour, a good citizen, a good master, and a good magistrate; but this did not excuse him from the worship of God. “He prayed—and gave thanks before his God.”

First. He *prayed*. Prayer is the breathing of the desire towards God. Words are not essential to the performance of it. As words may be used without prayer, so prayer may be used without words: he that searcheth the heart “knoweth what is the mind of the spirit;” and when we cannot command language, like some of our fellow-Christians, it is well to be able to say, “Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee.”

The expediency, the necessity of prayer, results from our indigent and dependent state. We have enemies to overcome—and how are we to conquer them? we have trials to endure—and how are we to bear them? We have duties to accomplish—and how are we to perform them? We need mercy and grace to help us—and how are we to obtain them? God has determined and revealed the method in which

he will communicate the blessings he has promised “for all these things will I be enquired of by the house of Israel. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Ask, and it shall be given to you, seek, and ye shall find.” And, as he is a sovereign, and under no obligation to favour us at all, he has surely a right to appoint the way in which he will be gracious: but, in this appointment, his wisdom appears as conspicuous as his sovereignty; and his goodness as clearly as his wisdom. Nothing can be so beneficial to us as prayer is, not only by the relief it obtains, but by the influence it exerts; not only by its answers, but by its energy. Beyond every thing else that is instrumental in religion, it improves our characters, it strengthens our graces, it softens and refines our tempers, it contributes to our spirituality, and promotes our holiness. The more we have to do with God, the more we shall resemble him. “It is therefore good for us to draw near to him.”

Secondly. *He gave thanks.* This should always attend prayer. Whenever we go to God for new favours, we should be careful to acknowledge old ones: while we implore deliverance, we should be grateful for alleviations and supports. I am sorry to say, that this is too commonly neglected. We are very selfish; and it appears even in our devotional services. We are too backward to every duty of religion; we are backward to pray, but still more to praise. Pressed by our difficulties, and urged by our wants, we are constrained to pray; but, when we have succeeded, we become unmindful of our Benefactor. Thus, of the ten lepers that wen; cleansed, “one only returned to give glory to God.” And,

even of good Hezekiah it is said, when his health was restored, and his adversaries destroyed, that “he rendered not according to the benefit done him.” A sad blemish! “Oh,” says David, “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” And that he did not wish to enforce upon others what he neglected himself, appears from his own resolution: “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth!” And let us not think that he was undertaking more than could ever be accomplished: for the injunction of the Apostle is, “In every thing give thanks.” There is no state that does not require gratitude. There is always much more to be grateful for than to complain of, however afflicting our circumstances may be. Yea, even those things which seem the most unfriendly to our wishes and our welfare, did we know all, would probably draw forth our highest praise. For who has not had reason to say, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted”? Daniel, you would naturally conclude, had much to *pray* for—but though a captive in a strange land, and labouring under the most cruel persecution, he did not forget to *give thanks*.

Thirdly, He did all this *before his God*. By which we are to understand, that he placed himself, in his religious exercises, under the eye of Jehovah, and realized his presence. Abraham was commanded to “walk before God and it would be well for us to remember, that, wherever we go, and whatever we do, God *is* with us, as our observer, our witness, our judge. But when we engage in devotional services, whether public or private, we are considered as withdrawn from the world, and appearing more immedi-

ately before God. And to impress our minds with this truth is the way to secure our profit. It will banish hypocrisy, and formality, and carelessness; and unite our hearts to fear God's name II. The circumstances of the action.

The First regards the *place*. He "went into his house." God does not confine his regards to the great congregation; but "where two or three are gathered together in his Name, there he is in the midst of them." He dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

"Where'er we seek him, he is found;
And every place is holy ground."

And every house not only may be, but should be, a house of prayer; and in every family there ought to be an altar, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Daniel worshipped God in his house, and with his family—but this was not all. He worshipped God alone: he was now—not in the parlour, but in his chamber—the very circumstance enjoined by our Saviour upon all his followers, and who will find it to be their privilege as well as their duty to observe it. "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

The Second regards his *posture*. "He kneeled upon his knees." God is a Spirit; and the great thing is, to worship him in spirit and in truth. This may be done under an endless variety of forms and modes. We have always reason to fear that men are drawn off from the weightier matters of the law, in proportion as they are taken up with the external and

circumstantial parts of religion. The Gospel has a nobler aim in view, than to stoop to regulate by positive law the minute ceremonial order of divine worship. There are many things left very safely at large, and which may be determined by circumstances variously, and yet prove equally acceptable to God, and useful to the worshipper himself.

But though bodily exercise profiteth little, God is "to be glorified in our bodies," as well as "in our spirits and we are free to say, that where it can be indulged, kneeling seems to be the most proper and advantageous posture of devotion. It preserves us more from distraction; it is more expressive of reverence, humility, and submission. It was not only the posture of Daniel, but of Paul: "I bow my knees unto the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It was our Saviour's posture: "he kneeled three times, praying and saying the same words." It is the posture we all seem unavoidably to adopt, in private and in family worship.

The Third regards the *direction* in which he performed his devotion: his windows were open "toward Jerusalem." Here we see the love a pious Jew bore to his native land, and the city of his solemnities. Though it was now in ruins, "he took pleasure in her dust, and favoured the stones thereof." Though he himself was advanced and provided for, yet said he, "if I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

When the temple was dedicated, Solomon, in his address to God, had thus expressed himself: "If

thy people sin against thee, and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; and so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy Name: then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling-place, and maintain their cause." Daniel had read this prayer. he had also read the prophecy of Jeremiah: "Thus saith the Lord, After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." And thus encouraged, he hoped and believed that in due time they should be released and restored. Hence in his prayers he always remembered Zion, and would give God no rest till he established, and till he "made Jerusalem a praise in the earth." A public spirit is a great excellency: and we ought, even in our private devotions, to be social; to be concerned for our country, and the Church of God.

The Fourth regards the *frequency* of the exercise. He did it "three times a day." And surely this is little enough, considering the command, "Pray without ceasing." You all refresh your bodies three

times a day. Can your souls require less? A few moments of retirement in the middle of every day would much tend to keep you in the things of God, and to preserve you from the evil of the world.

I know that habitual devotion is what we should seek to maintain; but, with many people at least, that which may be always done is often never done; and if it be not proper in some cases to *bind* conscience, it will be useful, in all cases, to *remind* it: regular and appointed exercises of piety are of great importance.

David, as well as Daniel, was aware of this, and therefore says he, "Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice."

The last circumstance is the *constancy* and invariableness of the practice—"as aforesaid." There was therefore nothing *new* in it. It was not an *extraordinary* fervour, produced by the spur of the occasion: it was not occasional impulse; but the regular effects of principle and disposition. It was a plan he had laid down, a rule to which he always conformed. He did it when a young man, and he does it now he is an old one. He did it when he was in private life, and he does it now he is in public office.

Many of you, perhaps, complain that you cannot find time for duties, the importance of which you are constrained to acknowledge. But who are you? and what are your circumstances and engagements, that you cannot secure a little time for God and your souls? Daniel was a man of business; of vast business; a prime minister; having to inspect and manage the affairs of an enormous empire: yet he retired three times a day; and not for one day only, but

every day. "He went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." Remark,

III. THE KNOWLEDGE THAT ENHANCED THE VALUE OF THE PERFORMANCE.

We all know that an action we admire would not discover the same degree of principle in other circumstances. When a man is surrounded with honour and applause—then—to think himself soberly—this evinces his humility. When a man is insulted and injured—then—to rule his own spirit, and to render blessing for cursing—this marks his patience and meekness. When a man sees his danger—but says, "None of these things move me"—this is the trial and the triumph of his conviction and his resolution. Had Daniel been ignorant of the king's decree, his decision and courage would not have appeared. But he knew that the writing was signed, and was aware of the consequences of disobedience—yet he determined to stand his ground; and proved, that he loved his duty more than life; and that he who fears God fears no other fear.

Whence we learn, that no danger should hinder a good man from doing his work.

It is natural to conclude, that some would press Daniel to yield; nor is it difficult to conjecture the reasons or excuses they would urge.

Some would plead loyalty. "The command was from the king his master, and in honour of him too; and would he disobey the order of his sovereign, and when his glory was at stake!"—But Daniel knew how to distinguish between civil and religious con-

cerns. He knew that in the former we are to obey the powers that be; in the latter we are held by a higher homage: and if the commands of any superior contradict the commands of God, we are pre-engaged; and must "obey God rather than man." Thus children are only required to obey their parents "in the Lord."

Some would plead usefulness. "His life was in danger; and it was valuable. What a loss would the world and the church sustain!" But Daniel knew that we are to go on in the path of duty, whatever we meet with; that we are not allowed to decline a command of God, by reasoning from remote or probable consequences; that we are to cast our care upon the Lord; and that we are most useful when, in simplicity and godly sincerity, "not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have our conversation in the world."

Some would have recommended a plan of accommodation. "He could have withdrawn into the country, and concealed himself for thirty days. He might have discontinued the exercise of prayer, though not the inclination, he might have prayed inwardly and secretly, and thus have preserved his character and his conscience too." But Daniel knew that if he had done this, it would have appeared to his friends, and much more to his enemies, that he had thrown up the duty for the sake of his secular advantage, and was afraid to trust the God of his salvation; it would have dishonoured his religion, and have justified others in temporizing and cowardice: whereas, by acting this noble and open part, he rendered himself peculiarly useful, and obtained the most distinguished honour.

I said, he rendered himself by this example peculiarly *useful*. Who can imagine what an attention would be excited; what inquiries would be made; how many would become proselytes to the Jewish religion, and adore a God that, unlike their abominations, was able to save those that served him?

Why are we required to “hold forth” the word of life; to hold fast “the profession of our faith;” to “confess with the mouth,” as well as believe with the heart; to “let our light shine before men, that they may see our good works”?—Why? Because our religion is to be visible as well as real; and must be fairly and fully exhibited, in order to be impressive and profitable. It is not by trimming and yielding, but by amiable, consistent, firm, and uniform deportment, that we are to strike and convince beholders.

When Sir Thomas Abney was mayor of London, he made no scruple at the Lord Mayor’s least to rise in the evening and inform the company that, he was going to withdraw, to perform the worship of God in his family; after which he would return again. It is not every one that *could* have done this. In many it would have appeared a part over-acted; it would have appeared sanctimoniousness. But where it was a sample, and not an exception; where it was an action of a life, the whole of which corresponded with it; it is easy to conclude what effect it would produce. Even those who affected to ridicule would inwardly venerate; some would be led to reflection; some would be stung with reproach; some would be determined, and some encouraged.

Christians! how many opportunities have you of saying, with Nehemiah, “so do not I, because of the

fear of God"! Are you asked to go to a place of dissipation? What an opportunity is afforded you of bearing a verbal and practical testimony against a worldly life! Slander creeps into conversation. What a call have you to enter, though in a proper manner, your testimony against evil speaking!—Avow your principles. Live answerable to your profession. "Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

I said, he obtained by this example the most distinguished honour.

A miracle was wrought in his favour. "Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."

His enemies are punished. An edict was passed in honour of his religion. Even an edict was passed in honour of Daniel's Deliverer. "Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto

you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions." He is also advanced. He "prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

What sublime consolation filled his mind while he saw the Divine power securing him in the very jaws of death! As he is drawn out of the den, how would every eye be attracted towards him! How would the multitude follow him to his own dwelling! Whenever he appeared in public, how would every tongue be ready to extol him! What weight would attach to his character! What force would be acknowledged in his advice and his reproof!

"Them that honour me," says God, "I will honour." Whatever the world may think, there is a reality in religion; and it more than indemnifies its followers; "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." "Verily," says the Saviour, "there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."



DISCOURSE LX XV.

THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT.

[CHRISTMAS.]

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”—ROM. viii. 32.

FEAR naturally follows guilt. When a breach has taken place between two parties, the hardest to be won is always the offender. *He* has all the consciousness of blame; and judges of the person offended under the influence of his own uneasy feelings.

But if it be hard to believe that he whom I have provoked will forgive me, how much harder is it to believe that he will indulge me—that, instead of being my enemy, he will be my greatest friend—and that, instead of employing his power against me, all his resources shall be held at my disposal! For friendship does not necessarily succeed reconciliation, nor the munificence of kindness the forgiveness of injuries: as we see in the case of Absalom, who was permitted to return to the capital, but “lived three whole years in Jerusalem without seeing the king’s face.”

From these reflections it will follow, that it is no easy thing for a sinner to place his faith and hope in God." But difficult as this confidence in God is, it is necessary. We fell by losing it; and we can only be recovered by regaining it. We shall never serve him, never love him, never go to him, till we can see that "he is good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon him."

Difficult as this confidence in God is, it is attainable. He has proclaimed his Name, "the Lord God, gracious and merciful, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." He has caused his goodness to pass before us. He has given us his word; and "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

But in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ every objection seems silenced for ever; and the despairing soul rises from its dungeon, and reasons itself into light and comfort from the words which I have read; "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

The words contain two things.

I. A WONDERFUL FACT. II. AN UNDENIABLE INFERENCE.

I. God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." This is THE FACT—to which we have well prefixed the term WONDERFUL. "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?"

Various wonders distinguish the works of God. There are marvellous displays of his power, of his wisdom, of his truth, of his holiness; but the miracle we are now led to contemplate is a miracle of love. Every other perfection is indeed apparent in the dispensation; but hear how the Scripture speaks of it: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." To magnify this goodness, observe,

First: the boon he did not withhold. He "spared not his own Son." How many things could you resign before you spared a child! Nothing is so strong as paternal affection. A man's wife is himself divided; a man's child is himself multiplied. How unwilling was Jacob to spare Benjamin, though he had many children; and it was only for a season, and to save him alive! How unwilling was David to give up even a rebellious Absalom! "Deal gently with the young man for my sake," said he in his orders to Joab; and when he heard of his well-deserved death, the father vanquished the man, and the king, if not the saint. "He went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" In the famine of Samaria, the woman, by promising to make a similar sacrifice, persuaded her neighbour "to boil her son:" but

when her own turn came, "lo, she hid her son!" History mentions a poor family in Germany, who were ready to perish in the time of famine. The husband proposed to the wife to sell one of their children for bread. At length she consents. But—here—here is the difficulty—which of them shall it be? The eldest was named, but refused. This was their first-born, and the beginning of their strength. The second was named, but refused. He was the living image of the father. The third was named, but refused. In him the features of the mother breathed. The last was named, but refused, he was their youngest, the child of their old age. And so they consented to starve together rather than sacrifice one. What was the severest trial of Abraham's regard for God? "Now I know that thou fearest me, seeing thou hast not withheld—thy son—thine—only son from me." How dignified was God's Son! "For to which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son. And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." How dear was God's Son! The Son of his love; who always did the things that pleased him; in him his soul delighted! Yet he withholds him not!—He "spared not his own Son."

Secondly. Observe the state into which he surrendered him. He "delivered him up."—To what? "Be astonished, O Heavens; and wonder, O Earth!"—To a world that disowned him. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew' him not." To a people that abhorred

him, though prepared, by miracles, and ordinances, and prophecies, to receive him. "He came to his own, and his own received him not." To obscurity and indigence. He was born in a stable, and laid in a manger; and, as he passed through life, "he had not where to lay his head." To infamy and scorn. He was reviled as a glutton and a winebibber; as a friend of publicans and sinners; as a madman, as a demoniac, and a rebel: "Reproach," said he, "hath broken my heart." To pain and anguish. "He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." To be betrayed by Judas; to be denied by Peter; to be forsaken of all his disciples. To Caiaphas—who insulted him; to Herod—who set him at nought; to Pilate—who condemned him; to the Romans—who crucified him. To an agony, that, before the hand of man had touched him, made him "sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground;" and exclaim, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death—If it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" "Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto his sorrow. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him. He hath put him to grief. The Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all." Surely here is love for which we want a name! Especially when we remark,

Thirdly, the persons for whose advantage he was given. "He delivered him up"—for whom? For *us*. And who are we? Not angels; but men. Not *men* only; but *sinners*. Not sinners humbled under a sense of our misery, and applying for mercy; but sinners regardless of their deliverance, and abusing the Divine goodness: "herein God hath commended his love towards us. in that, while we were yet sin-

ners, Christ died for us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." To love our parents and our children, is natural. To love our friends, is just and grateful. To do good to strangers, is humane. To relieve the poor and needy, is kind and generous. But to love our enemies, to do good to them that hate us and injure us, is divine. It is not only commanded by God, but exemplified in the highest degree—in all its perfection.

And not for a few of these rebels, but for many; not for Jews only, but for Gentiles also; not for persons of one condition and character, but of every condition and character; not for some who seek him, but for all, under whatever discouragements they may labour. Such was the indefinite and unlimited message of the angel to the shepherds: "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." And such is the extension of the Apostle: "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us *all*."

II. Let us examine THE INFERENCE TO be drawn from the fact we have explained.—Shall "he not with him also freely give us all things?" Here it may be necessary to remark,

First: The *way* in which he communicates his favours. He gives them *freely*. And were it not for this, we could have no hope: for we are not worthy of the least of all his mercies. But if we are not worthy, we are welcome. If we find ourselves without money, we are called to buy without price. If the blessings are great, they are equally gracious: and we are invited to come and "take of the water of life freely."

Adam could not have merited in Paradise. Angels do not merit in heaven—their obedience is *due*; and *duty* can never be meritorious. How well, therefore, does it become sinful creatures like us, to acknowledge, when we have done all, that “we are unprofitable servants;” and have done no more than, was our duty to do! And how have we done this? By a power not our own; and with numberless imperfections, that deserve condemnation rather than reward. With what indignation did Peter speak to Simon Magus, who supposed the gift of the Holy Ghost was to be purchased with money! Are any of you endeavouring to buy what you ought to beg? “Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray to God, if haply the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”

Secondly. Observe the extent of his liberality. He will freely give us “all things.” It intends whatever is needful to our salvation and welfare: pardon, to remove our guilt; strength, to aid us in the performance of duty; consolation in distress; guidance in perplexity; “a land flowing with milk and honey” beyond Jordan, and supplies for the wilderness on this side of it. It provides for soul and body: for time and eternity. “The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” The grant has only one limitation—the *goodness* of the things conferred: of this, God only is the judge; and therefore with him the determination must be left.

Thirdly. The *reasonableness* of our most enlarged

expectation. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, *how shall he not with him* also freely give us all things?" The conclusion is not only undeniable, but so simple and obvious, that it seems needless to enlarge; otherwise we might observe, that the force of the reasoning lies in this: That he was designed to prepare the way for all the blessings we need; that he is superior to them all; and that they are all really in him.

He was designed to prepare the way for the communication of all the blessings we need. Sin had stopped the effusion of the Divine goodness, and forbidden God to hold communion with man. But he "devised means that his banished should not be expelled from him." He furnished the sacrifice he required. "He sent his own Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world *through him* might be saved." He came to remove every obstruction, and to render the exercise of Divine favour consistent with the honour of Divine government. And is not this a powerful consideration, that now, if we go to God, there is nothing to hinder his mercy; nothing even in his truth, nothing even in his righteousness, nothing even in his law, to restrain him from relieving and blessing the guilty? Yea, that he can relieve and bless us in a way even glorious to all his perfections; that he can be even "faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"?

He is superior to every other blessing. You are sometimes dismayed at the thought of your demerit: but if your demerit restrained the Divine goodness, the Saviour would never have appeared. You are sometimes dismayed at the greatness of the blessing

you ask: but if the greatness of the blessing restrained the Divine goodness, he would have denied giving his own Son. If a man had sacrificed for you his own and his only son, you could hardly think he would withhold from you a common instance of his bounty; for the one, you say, has no proportion to the other. What God has already given is infinitely more precious than any thing we can in future implore.

Yea, he *is* in reality every other blessing: and we *have* all with him. "He that hath the Son hath life." "He is made of God unto us, wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. He is all and in all." He, and his influences and blessings, cannot be divided. When we receive him, all things are ours.

Are we not constrained to admire the Supreme Being? Can we survey the dispensation we have reviewed, and not acknowledge that he well deserves the name of "the Bather of mercies, the God of all grace"? Can we think of it, and not exclaim, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" No. We have heard of benefactors; but they all shrink into nothing from a comparison with him. "God is love."

Where do you study the Divine character? There are many who view God in the beauties of Nature, and the bounties of Providence; they are thankful that he does not "leave himself without witness in doing them good, and giving them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with joy and gladness." But this is hardly rising above heathenism. Christianity seems to afford them no advantages. They never regard God in his highest, noblest work of redemption! Yet this is the dispensation by which he

intends to make himself known, according to the words of the Apostle: "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us by Christ Jesus." Here the primitive Christians beheld him. "He hath shined," said they, "in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Paul did not overlook any of God's favours: but this—this drew forth all the ardour of his soul. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

But a barren consideration of a subject so important and interesting is as unworthy as indifference. The subject should always produce three effects.

First. It should inspire you with *encouragement*. Never entertain any harsh and gloomy notions of God when you go to him; but remember that you are going to address a Being whose heart is set upon your welfare; a Being who, after all that you have done, waits to be gracious; a Being who says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him. and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Were you to ask, "What sign showest thou, that we may believe?" Behold, says he, the garden, and the cross. See my own Son dying, that you may live. I sacrifice him, and save you.

Secondly. The subject should impose upon you *submission*. Is any thing denied you that seems desirable? He distinguishes between your welfare and your wishes; between the present and the future;

between appearances and reality. The blessing *is* not withheld from a want of power; nor *can* it be withheld from a want of love. If it were proper and profitable for you, he *could* bring down the kings of the earth to lick the dust of your feet; he *could* possess you with an abundance of this world's goods; he *could* free you from bodily pain, and retain your dear connexions around you: and, if it were proper and profitable for you, he *would* do it. Cannot you trust him? "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Thirdly. The subject should inflame you with *gratitude*. You can never discharge your obligation to such an infinite Friend; but ought you not to be sensible of it? And ought you not to convince all around you that you are alive to his glory? Should you not constantly ask, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" He spared not his own Son for you: and will you spare nothing for him? Will you not spare a little of your time? One day in every week? Some part of every day? Will you not spare a little of your substance—to spread his word, and to relieve his poor?

You ought to say—

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small:
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”



DISCOURSE LXXVI.

DIVINE CORRECTION.

“Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.”—HEB. xii. 9, 10.

SUPPOSE a person should prescribe a course, by following which he would promise you an escape from death. The scheme could only excite a momentary wonder; and you would not waste your time even to examine it. Scripture, history, and observation, would convince you, that “in this war there is no discharge and, lifting up your eyes to heaven, you would sigh, and say, “I know that thou wilt bring me to death; and to the house appointed for all living.” But it would be otherwise if he should recommend a preparation for it. This would be wise; this is necessary.

The same may be said with regard to affliction. “Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust,

neither cloth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards." No expedient has yet been discovered as a preservative from calamity. Power, wealth, honour, learning, prudence, morality, have all been unable to find a pathway through life free from sorrow. And religion, even the religion of the Bible, does not promise us security; yea, it asserts that "many are the afflictions of the righteous."

But if there is no exemption from trouble, there is a preparation for it. And, since it is impossible for us to escape suffering, it is of high importance to know how we may endure it—so as never to be injured by it—and always to derive advantage from it. Our case is truly alarming, when even medicine is administered in vain. It is bad, says Bishop Hopkins, to lose the lives of our friends, but it is worse to lose their deaths. It is a serious thing, says Henry, to lose a calamity. And we ought, says Owen, as much to pray for a blessing upon our daily rod, as upon our daily bread.

How ought we then to suffer? The Apostle tells us. For, speaking unto us as unto children, he says, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."

Let us consider two things.

I. THE DUTY OF AFFLICTION. II. THE REASONS BY WHICH IT IS ENFORCED.

I. THE DUTY is *subjection*. "Shall we not be in subjection?" This is not opposed to insensibility.

To be insensible under affliction is not only unnatural, but immoral; and subverts the very purpose of the dispensation. Health and happiness, pleasure and pain, the life or death of our connexions, are not to be absolutely indifferent to us; we are allowed a preference with submission. We see this exemplified in the Son of God himself. "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour—I would, if it were allowable—But for this cause came I unto this hour." With strong cryings and tears he prayed: and you may say, as he did, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." if you add, as he did, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Yea, so far is this very subjection from excluding sensibility, that it necessarily require» it. There is no virtue in the senselessness of a stone. There is no patience, no resignation, in bearing what we do not feel. If you do not prize what you give up at the call of God, there can be no value in your obedience.

But it is the repression of every thing rebellious—in our *carriage*—in our *speech*—and in the *temper of our minds*.

Every thing rebellious in *carriage*. It is said of Ahaz, that, in his affliction, "he sinned yet more against God." Jeremiah complains of the Jews; "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return." There are some who repair to worldly company and dissipation to banish all sense of sorrow; like those in Isaiah, who said, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Many, under the grasp of Providence, do not

ask for release, but struggle to get free; and have recourse to any unhallowed means to deliver themselves. This is wrong. Trouble is in Scripture compared to a prison: and you are not to attempt to burn down the house, or to force open the door, or to escape by the window—but if you see him passing by who placed you there, you may address him as one did before you: “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy Name; the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.”

Every thing rebellious in *speech*. Aaron, under the loss of his sons, “held his peace.” So did David under sickness of body; “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.” Job was so fearful of offending, that he determined to be silent: “Behold, I am vile: what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken: but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.” An example which Solomon recommends to our imitation, when he says, “If thou hast thought evil, lay thy hand upon thy mouth;” endeavour to check it: for though it be bad to feel it, it is worse to express it; it dishonours God more, and scandalizes others more. “In a multitude of words there wanteth not sin;” and there is such peculiar danger when we suffer, that it is necessary to pray continually, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.”

Every thing rebellious in the *temper of the mind*. For the Lord looketh to the heart; and if this be full of impatience and resentment, though we may do nothing and say nothing amiss, we are refractory; and, though men may applaud us, God will condemn

us. But we should always distinguish between a rebellious state of mind, and a rebellious emotion. The most humble and dutiful may feel at times an unruly thought suddenly rising up—but it will not be encouraged; and, finding no entertainment there, it will withdraw. The disposition of the soul appears in this, that it is shocked and distressed by such a sentiment: while it longs and strives after acquiescence. We are to judge of ourselves, not by what is unavoidable, but by what is voluntary: not by what is occasional, but by what is habitual and prevailing. The rest will be readily pardoned by Him, who “knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust, and spareth us as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” How beautifully is this state of mind characterized and expressed in the following lines!

“Peace all our angry laissions, then;
 Let each rebellions sigh
 Be silent at his sovereign will,
 And every murmur die.”

And again:

“I charge my thoughts, be patient still,
 And all my carriage mild;
 Content, my Father, with thy will,
 And quiet as a child.

“The patient soul, the lowly mind,
 Shall have a large reward;
 Let saints in sorrow lie resign’d,
 And trust a faithful Lord.”

II. Let us consider THE REASONS BY WHICH THIS DUTY IS ENFORCED.

Nothing can be more pleasing and convincing than

the language of the Apostle: "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." Here are four motives.

The First is derived from the relation in which God stands to us. He is our *Father*. This is the common name by which he has revealed himself in the Gospel; and it is equally lovely and venerable. There is indeed another being you have honoured with this title. Eut he is not your father in the same sense with God. The former is your father subordinately, the latter is so absolutely. The one is the father only of your *flesh*, the other is the Father also of your *spirit*—and *this* is the man: this is the principal part of human nature. The body is the case, the soul is the jewel; the one is the habitation of clay, the other is the inspired resident. By the one we resemble worms, by the other we are allied to angels; the one is mortal, the other is immortal: "the dust returns to the dust whence it came, the spirit returns to God who gave it." In whatever way the spirit unites with the flesh, in the production of it human agency has no share; and God claims the creation of it as his prerogative. He is called "the God of the spirits of all flesh;" and is said to have "formed the spirit of man within him."

But to what does this lead? The conclusion, says the Apostle, is obvious. If he pre-eminently fills this relation, his claims to duty are proportionally great. You gave the fathers of your flesh reverence Look

back to the period of infancy and childhood. Were all your wishes gratified, whether wise or foolish? whether good or evil? Were no restraints laid upon you, the reasons of which you were unable to discover? Were you not compelled to apply yourselves to various exercises, which your vain and roving minds would have gladly passed by? But you regarded the authority that enjoined them; and submitted. You sometimes provoked the rod, and incurred rebuke. And you have better apprehensions of the whole system of discipline now than you had then. But even *then* you did not strike again—your arm would have been unnerved. You did not snatch the rod out of your father's hand, and break it to pieces—you would have shuddered at the thought. You did not fly from the house and refuse to return. You did not say to him, I despise thy strokes, and will do so again. You did not even dare to ask, What right hast thou to deal thus with me? And shall a man obtain more obedience than God? "Shall you not much rather be in subjection unto the Bather of spirits? "It is to be feared that the children of Jonadab will not only rise up in judgment against the Israelites, but against ourselves. Hear what God says of *them*: "Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the Lord. The words of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me. Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment

of their father, which he commanded them; but this people hath not hearkened unto me: therefore, thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them."

This brings us to the second reason of submission. It is taken from the *danger of resistance*. "Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?" Clearly intimating that disobedience will end in death. It did so among the Israelitish children, to whom the Apostle alludes. Under the Law, rebellion after parental correction was a capital crime; it was death by statute. And thus the statute runs: If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of the city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear." In such a case, there was no alternative but submission or destruction.

And so it is here. Resistance is not only unreasonable, but ruinous. "Who ever hardened himself against him and prospered? Woe be to the man that striveth with his Maker!" There cannot be a more awful presage of future misery than to counteract the afflictive dispensations of Divine Providence, and

“despise the chastening of the Almighty.” It provokes the anger of God, and operates penally in one of these two ways Either, first, it induces God to recall the rod, and, giving a man up to the way of his own heart, to say, as he did of Ephraim, “He is joined to idols; let him alone;”—or, secondly, he turns the rod into a scorpion, and fulfils the threatening: “If ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.” Thus he strikes at first more distantly, and less severely. He takes away a part of the man’s estate. He then bereaves him of a friend or relation. He next visits him with some bodily disease. After this he strikes his conscience, and he has “a wounded spirit” that he cannot bear; he is afraid to die, and he is unable to live. At length God casts him into hell, with these words: “He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

At the thought of this, a Christian trembles in every particle of his frame, and, falling on his knees, cries, “‘Do not condemn me.’ Chasten me as thou pleasest with thy people, but let me not be condemned with the wicked. Make use of the rod of a father, but let me not feel the sword of the judge. ‘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.’”

If this be your desire; if your soul bows to his authority, and subscribes to his wisdom and goodness: if you can say, “I have borne chastisement; I will not offend any more: that which I know not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do so no

more"—it, is a blessed omen; and, whatever affliction you may suffer, you may say, with David, "I shall not die, but live."

The Third motive is taken from *the brevity of the discipline*.—They verily chastened us; but it was only "a few days." The child soon became a man, and the course of restriction and preparation resulted in a stati; of maturity. This is to be applied to our heavenly Father, as well as to our earthly ones; and contains an encouraging intimation, that the whole season of trial, when opposed to our future being and blessedness, is but a short period. Indeed the argument is much stronger in this case than in the former. There is some proportion between the days of minority and manhood, but there is none between time and eternity; there is none between the introductory and the final state of Christians. If life be short, and it is "a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away," trouble cannot be long. The Scripture seems to labour for expressions to diminish any apprehension of length, as an attribute of our grief. Ye shall have "persecution ten days but what are ten days."—Weeping may "endure for a night:" but what, is a night!—I will keep thee from "the hour of temptation but what is an hour?—This light affliction is but "for a moment:" but what is a moment?—Yet this is not short enough to answer, I was going to say, the impatience of our Deliverer: "For a *small* moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee."

The Last motive is derived from *the principle and design of affliction*. Men are imperfect, and their actions are like themselves. Hence, when as their children they chastened us, it was frequently "for

their pleasure." They *would* do it. It was to give ease to their passions; to vent their feelings. It was from a peevish humour; a false point of honour. It was to show their authority, or maintain their consequence, regardless of our welfare.

But this is not the case with God. "*He* does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." He does it only "if needs be"—He does it "for our profit." This is his aim in all his dispensations. If he keeps you in a low and impoverished condition; if he removes lover and friend far from you; if he makes you to possess months of vanity and wearisome nights—whatever you may be tempted to think of all this—it is "*for your profit.*"

What profit? A profit that infinitely weighs down every other advantage, and which, above all things, yea, and by "any means," you should be anxious to secure: spiritual profit; divine profit—"that you might be partakers of his holiness."

It is the essence of religion and happiness to resemble God: but observe in what the resemblance is principally to consist. Not in our imitation of the natural, but moral perfections of Deity. Here men perpetually mistake. They wish to be as God, knowing good and evil: they wish to be independent of others; they wish to be like the Most High in exalting their throne above the stars; they wish to govern with an arm, and to thunder with a voice, like his. A Nebuchadnezzar could desire this—Adam desired this, and fell—angels desired it, and were driven from their first estate. But who wishes to be *true* like God, *patient* like God, *merciful* like God, *holy*—*holy* like God? Yet this is the design of the Gospel; it is to create us after the image of God

“in righteousness and true holiness.” It is the design—let it never be forgotten—it is the design of every affliction with which you are exercised:—“but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.” Reflect on four things when you retire, for we have not time to enlarge. If God chastens us to make us holy—we learn.

First; the *importance* of holiness, and the value of it in the eye of a Being who cannot be mistaken.

Secondly; we learn how *defective* we all are in this attainment; seeing God deems such trying means necessary, in order to promote it.

Thirdly; we learn that if any thing can promise a *happy deliverance from trouble*, it is the sanctification of it: when the end is answered, the rod is laid by.

Fourthly; we learn that whatever our afflictions may do for us, they have not fulfilled the Divine purpose *unless they have made us more holy*. It is not enough that our trials have made us more wise and cautious with regard to business; more sedate and regular in our deportment; more dissatisfied with society. Is sin more abhorred? Are our corruptions more subdued? Are we more devotional? Are we more heavenly-minded? Are we more like a pure and a holy God?

We conclude the whole with one general reflection. It regards the manner in which the sacred writers teach us. They simplify every subject they touch. They exemplify it by comparisons; and these images are not taken from the arts and sciences, but from familiar scenes: from those relations which all fill; from those occurrences which all meet with. All therefore can understand them; all can feel them. And while these images serve to illustrate religious

subjects, they also instruct us in the duties of civil life.

Take an instance from the words before us. The Apostle refers to the conduct of children, to illustrate the disposition of a suffering Christian; but the very reference inculcates a dutiful behaviour in children themselves. They should give their parents reverence; the reverence of obedience to their commands, and of submission to their corrections. A child commits one fault in rendering correction needful, but he commits another and a still greater, in neglecting and despising it. Parents have not only authority, but a charge to correct.

Again. The Apostle refers to the conduct of parents, to illustrate the character of God in chastising us; but the very reference gives him an opportunity to show parents how they ought to correct. They should not do it for their own pleasure, but the child's profit. He should see that they are not actuated by passion, but conviction: that they do it, not willingly but from a sense of duty. This being the case, would it not be better to defer punishing till provocation has subsided? This would allow of your judging impartially of the offence; of proportioning the degree of penalty to the crime; of adapting the kind of discipline to the criminal. In this case, instruction would unite with correction. If rebuke be really necessary, it will be equally so an hour after; but many, if they do not chastise immediately, cannot do it at all: a sure proof that irritation, and not religion, is the principle that actuates them.

What reason have we all, masters and servants; children and parents; for deep humiliation before God!

Oh, Thou supreme, Thou infinite Excellency!
enable us to make Thee our only model, and be
perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven ia
perfect.

DISCOURSE LXXVII.

THE RULER'S DAUGHTER RAISED TO LIEE.

“And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and railed, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meet.”—

LUKE viii. 54, 55.

IT must have been very gratifying to a mind possessed of tenderness and benevolence to have accompanied our Lord and Saviour from place to place, as “he went about doing good.” How delightful to have seen him, at one time, feeding a multitude of hungry people upon the grass; at another, stopping to open the eyes of a blind man, that sat by the way-side begging; at a third, restoring a poor paralytic to the use of his limbs, and enabling him to return home, carrying the bed upon which he himself had been brought; at a fourth, repairing the losses of those who had been bereaved of their connexions, and were sorrowing most of all that they should see their face, and hear their voice, no more! Who is not ready to envy his immediate followers!—Who does not wish that he had seen one of the days of the Son of man!

But no small decree of the same pleasure may be enjoyed in perusing the *history* of these interesting scenes. It is secured to us in the Gospels; it is written with a simplicity the most exquisitely natural and striking; and the events themselves are much more instructive to us than they were to those who witnessed them.

We are now going to bring under review the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus.

Jairus was "a ruler of the synagogue probably a magistrate: obviously a man of some eminence and consequence. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." It was asked by our Lord's enemies, "Have any of the rulers believed on him?" They were the common people that heard him gladly; and very few in higher life were either his followers, his friends, or his suppliants. But there were some. Joseph of Arimathæa was a rich man, and a counsellor. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews. A centurion besought him on behalf of his servant. A nobleman besought him on behalf of his son. And Jairus besought him on account of his daughter.

That which brought him to the Redeemer was an event that, reduces the high to a level with the low, and proves the insufficiency of wealth and honour. Can a higher station in the world secure peace of mind? can it ward off the common vexations of life? can it prevent, sickness? can it protract the approach of death? Does it not rather multiply our fears and anxieties; and render us more widely vulnerable? Does it not produce many evils, which others escape? and make every affliction less tolerable, by previous and softening indulgence?

Behold this man. Disease invades his family, and seizes a daughter; his only daughter; a daughter twelve years of age; a period of peculiar attraction, when the mind begins to move, and the character to bud; when the heart is all alive, and confidence is unchilled; when the parent begins to feel esteem blending with tenderness, and to hail a companion in a child!—She lay a dying!” The aid of medicine had doubtless been called in: and no expense had been spared to obtain relief. But all is in vain—the disease increases—and hope begins to fail. Vet the distressed father cries, ““Let me not see the death of the child.’ I have heard of the fame of Jesus of Nazareth. He is not far off. I will go to him. I will try his goodness and his power.” And to him should we bring all our distresses, whether temporal or spiritual; personal or relative. They are intended to remind us of a friend born tor adversity, and who is too generally forgotten in tin; hour of prosperity: and if they have led to an interview with him, or increased our intercourse, we have reason to bless the rod, and can acknowledge, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted.”

This man had some faith in our Saviour, or he would never have taken a journey to apply to him: yet it seems to have been weak and wavering. Compare him with the Centurion. When Jesus offered to go with him, the Centurion said, “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.” But Jairus deems his bodily presence necessary to the cure; and, therefore, falling down at his feet, he beseeches him to go to his house. The Friend of sinners would not break the bruised reed,

nor quench the smoking flax, he adapted himself to the views of the petitioner; and immediately complied with his wishes.

But as they went, a messenger from the house met them, and said, "Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master." It is easy to conceive what a shock this would prove to the father's feelings. While there was life there was hope, however weak: but who can recall the dead? I see him turning aside to weep—struggling to say, like David, "I shall go to her; but she shall not return to me—or, with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed he the name of the Lord;"—then, thanking the Saviour for the kindness of his intention, and for coming so far; but, like the servant, deeming all further application both useless and tiresome. Jesus, the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble, answers him, saying, "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole."

May we not remark hence, First, that sometimes while dealing with the Saviour, the storm becomes darker than before? We cry for pardon, and feel a growing sense of guilt. We pray for sanctification and the power of corruption seems to revive. We hope for deliverance, and our difficulties multiply. Thus he tries those whom he intends to succour, in order to wean them from every false dependence, and to render his interposition the more wonderful and endeared. And the trial is commonly very humbling, as it shows us the weakness of our confidence in him.

Secondly. Let us never deem importunity in prayer *troublesome*. By our continual coming we may weary the best of earthly benefactors: but it is

otherwise with God our Saviour. His power is almighty; his understanding is infinite. He listens to the cries of a world of creatures dependent upon his care; and yet he can regard our affairs as much as if he had no other affairs to regard. And as to his disposition—this is such, that our prayer is his delight; and the oftener we come, and the more we ask, the more welcome we are.

Thirdly. It is never *too late* to apply to the Lord. Though means fail us, and the case is desperate as to help from creatures, yet our extremity is his opportunity; he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly, above all we can ask or think: and “at even-tide it shall be light.”

And, therefore, Fourthly, the way to obtain present case, and certain relief, is to exercise faith under every discouragement. How well are, “Fear not,” and “Believe only,” coupled together! “Thou wilt keep him,” says Isaiah, “in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon thee: because he trusteth in thee.” But in another place he tells us, “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.”

Our Saviour could have healed the child at a distance, and with a word; but he chooses to go “to the house of mourning”—to teach us to go there. A family in such a condition, is a very affecting and improving object. We instantly feel a sympathy with the distressed. We melt into pity as we see the emblems of death. The world loses its hold of our minds. By the side of the breathless corpse we see the vanity of human life; we think of the mortality of our friends—and of our own. Who can see death, and not think of eternity? We sigh—we pray. “By the sadness of the countenance the heart is made

better." A visit to the house of mourning affords an opportunity of doing good, as well as of gaining good. At no other season is instruction so likely to be impressive. The ground is now prepared to receive the seed. The value of the Gospel is now felt: and you can introduce religion as—a friend; as—a comforter.

Behold our Saviour approaching the scene of sorrow. Many attended him to the door; but he would not suffer any of them "to enter in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and mother of the maiden." The admission of a large crowd would have produced inconvenience, and have violated the sacredness of grief. Our Lord wished not for ostentatious display; yet the truth of the miracle would require a competent number of persons to attest it; and in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established. But in vain we ask why Peter, and James, and John, were selected for this purpose? The circumstance would have been less remarkable had it not been exemplified on two other extraordinary occasions: I refer to his transfiguration, when these same three individuals were chosen to witness his glory; and to the garden, when they were admitted to witness his agony. He does not always explain himself; but, of this we maybe assured, that, though he acts sovereignly, he never acts arbitrarily: whatever he does, he does it "because it seemeth good in his sight and what *seems* good to *him*, *must he* so: he always has reasons to influence him; and when he shall divulge them, they will not only bring glory to him, but yield satisfaction to us.

How many little touching circumstances does the narrative incidentally mention! Thus far we have

heard of the father only; now we learn that the diseased had *a mother* living. The mother had been torn with anguish twelve years ago, to give her birth; had carried her in her bosom; had fed her at her breast; had watched over her by day and night; had given "no sleep to her eyes, or slumber to her eyelids," while the disease was preying upon her child's tender frame. What her confidence in the Saviour was we are not able to determine; but, informed probably, by the previous and hasty return of the servant, of his approach, and of what he had said to her husband, she also had gone forth to meet him. Thus did Martha, when he was drawing near to Bethany: "As soon as she heard that he was coming, she went forth and met him; and said, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!"

We have seen the few with which he entered the house: but he found many in it; and all wore the appearance of sorrow: "all wept and bewailed her."—Her death was unquestioned: and we find the mourners and the minstrels, usually employed on such occasions, already called in; and performing their lamentations.—How then could he say. "Weep not: she is not dead, but sleepeth"?

He spake modestly. Another would have said, "Come; examine this patient; see, there are no remains of life in her—you will witness, before I begin, that there is nothing to aid my operations." But he would not magnify the action he was going to perform. He sought not his own glory.

He spake figuratively. Sleep is the term commonly, in the Scripture, applied to the death of all believers: and it is peculiarly just. Sleep is the pause OF care—the parenthesis of human woe. Sleep

is a short death; and death is but a long sleep, during which the body rests from its toils, and at the end of which it will awake, refreshed and renewed, in the morning of the resurrection.

He spake in reference to his present intention. They were preparing for her interment, and performing the funeral rites: but he would gradually intimate, that there was no need of this, since, instead of a burial, she was going to be raised to life.

He said this also to try his hearers. Accordingly it showed their disposition. For though the occasion was solemn; though they must have heard of his miracles; and were informed of the wisdom and holiness of his character; they treated his words with contempt, and indecently “laughed him to scorn.” “Is he a dreamer? Are we blind? Did we never see a corpse before?—Is not the breath gone; and the flesh cold and stiff?”—

Here we are led to note two things. First. How much more are men governed by their natural views and feelings than by the word of truth; and how easily are they befooled in Divine things by their sense and reason! Because their sense and reason are competent judges in some cases, they are prone to imagine they are so in all; forgetting that faith has an office, and a province, as well as sense and reason: faith adds the knowledge of God to our own; faith acquiesces in his declarations, however mysterious; and looks for the accomplishment of his promises, however improbable.

Secondly. We observe that a serious state of mind is the best preparation for Divine truth. “A scorner,” says Solomon, “seeketh knowledge, and findeth it not.” And no wonder: he is not in earnest in his

inquiries. He is under the bias of his prejudices and his passions. The mind and will of God are nothing to him; he neither regards his grace nor his glory. He would rather meet with argument, to countenance his error. He rejoices to discover any thing that can furnish materials for ridicule and reproach. He has a proud confidence in his own talents, and never thinks of asking wisdom of God. Every serious inquirer is a prayerful and practical one; and he will be sure to succeed. "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain upon the earth."

But our Saviour does not indulge a bantering Pilate with an answer. He does not gratify an anxious Herod with a miracle. When he rose from the dead, he does not appear to those who had seen him work miracles, and ascribed them to Beelzebub. What is one of the reasons he assigns for speaking in parables? "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

What was the consequence of this mode of tuition? Those who loved the truth, and longed to be acquainted with it, applied to him for an explanation; and were in no case refused: while the obstinate and self-sufficient, the vicious and inattentive, stumbled and fell, and had only to thank themselves for their injury and ruin. So true is it that, "To him that hath shall he given; and he shall have more abundantly: but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that he hath."

Hence these scoffers shall not remain in the room. After they had made a declaration, which they could not retract, concerning the certainty of her death, "lie put them all out;" and, as the resurrection and the life, he "took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise:" when, lo! the fountain of life is warmed, the blood begins to liquefy and flow, the pulse beats again; she breathes; she looks—"her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat." This order was to show—

The *reality* of the miracle, by the use of her faculties.

It evinced the *perfection* of the miracle: she was not restored to the state in which she died—that was a state of sickness, in which food was rejected; but to the state she was in before her disease; a state of health and appetite.

It was also to mark the *limitation* of the miracle: nothing further was to be done preternaturally; but her life, which had been stored by extraordinary agency, was to be preserved, as before, by ordinary means.

It also distinguished this miracle from

final resurrection. The resurrection will produce a spiritual body, requiring neither sleep nor food: but this damsel was raised only to a natural life, subject to the same infirmities as that of other people, and liable to die again.

But have we not here an image of the restoration of man from the death of sin to the life of righteousness?—The Lord's hand goes with his word; and he lays hold of those he calls.—We immediately arise, and spiritual motion follows spiritual life.—We “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” and the food we desire is furnished: and we are nourished up unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

The scene must have been inexpressibly interesting.—Jesus stands in all the charms of compassion, enjoying the luxury of doing good.—The child clasps the fond father and mother, and looks around with surprise and awe upon this wonderful Stranger in the room.—The parents embrace her, and adore Him, giving vent alternately to the feelings of natural affection, and religious praise. “Her parents were astonished;” they seemed like men that dream; they could hardly believe the reality of their blessedness, while they broke forth in expressions of wonder at the display of such power and kindness, such omnipotence and mildness; and were ready to run forth, and publish abroad their obligations to one who had done such great things for them.

But his hour was not yet come. He would furnish us with an example, not only of beneficence, but of humility. He would teach us to be content to do good, for its own sake, and like the sun to shine, and bless without noise—“but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.”

Let us conclude.

If our Saviour so amazed the spectators, and honoured himself, by the revival of one body newly dead; what will it be when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe; when he shall speak, and “all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”!

Again. It is worthy of remark, that of the three persons whom our Lord raised from the dead, Lazarus was the loved and *only* brother of Martha and Mary; the young man was the *only* son of his mother; and the damsel the *only* daughter of Jairus: so touched is he with the feeling of our infirmities; so much regard does he show to relative affection; so well does he remember that we are dust; so perfectly does he “consider our trouble, and know our souls in adversity”!

The subject leads me to address those who are parents. You say, God only knows the anxieties you feel on behalf of your rising charge. But he does know, he inspired you with the tenderness you feel, and produced the relation in which you stand. It is not consistent with the designs of his providence that you should regard your children as burdens and torments. Nor is it his pleasure, on the other hand, and on this side the greatest danger commonly lies, that you should idolize them. You should hold them with a loose hand, as you know not how soon your “dear delights” may be taken from you, and pierce you through with many sorrows.

Have your children been blessed with health and

strength? and are they now blooming like olive-plants round about your table? Remember, the continuance of a blessing demands your praise no less than the recovery of it.

Have you been tried by seeing your children "at the point to die," and did he send his word and heal them? Have you received them back, though not from the grave, yet from the borders of the grave? Dedicate them afresh to their Deliverer. "Train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." And let the sickness which has not been unto death, be for the glory of God.

But others weep for their children, and refuse to be comforted, because they are not.—You no longer see, while repeating their morning and evening prayers, their little hands suspended on your knees. You no longer hear their broken, artless language, more affecting than all the eloquence of words. And you say, There is no Saviour now on earth—or I would hasten to him, and pour out my heart before him—

Yet let me ask, not unfeelingly to condemn your sorrow, but to regulate and alleviate your distress;—

Had not He who has removed your child a right to take it away? Was it not his own? Did he ever relinquish his claim to it? Did he enter your house as a robber, or as a proprietor?

Cannot he sanctify the loss, and more than make up any deficiency in creature-enjoyment, by the comforts of the Holy Ghost? So that you shall not faint in the day of adversity, but in every thing give thanks?

Is not your lamb lodged in the Shepherd's bosom? Said not the Saviour to you, as he was languishing

and dying, and you wished to keep him back, “Suffer this little child to come unto me, and forbid him not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven”?

Will not the very body that is now mouldering in the dust be changed and fashioned like the Saviour’s own glorious body?

Will you not soon meet? And never part?

“Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

DISCOURSE LXXVIII.

THE PROFITABLE PURSUIT.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”—

MATTHEW vi. 33.

“**M**AN that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble.” To the numberless real evils of life he adds imaginary ones; and of all his afflictions, none oppresses him more than care. The heathens confess this, and their philosophers endeavour to remove the burden; but they could only lighten it. They saw the disease preying upon his vitals, and they pitied and prescribed; but they could only abate the paroxysm of the pain, while the root of the distemper continued.

Let us be thankful for Revelation. Let us sit at the feet of Jesus.—How does he enforce a freedom from anxiety? Never man spake like this man. “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or 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 unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and 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 clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." We have not time to examine the beauty and the bree of this reasoning. Suffice it to observe, that, in the words which I have chosen for our present meditation, he finishes his admonition by opposing care to care; he would draw us off from inferior concerns by the attractions and impressions of a superior interest—an interest which demands our principal regard, and will more than indemnify us for every sacrifice we make in the pursuit of it. "But seek ye first, tint kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." The words lead us to ask, and enable us to answer, three questions.

I. WHAT ARE WE TO SEEK? II. HOW ARE WE TO SEEK? III. WHY ARE WE TO SEEK?

I. WHAT ARE WE TO SEEK? "The kingdom of God, and his righteousness."

The children of this world are wiser in their gene-

ration than the children of light. If I had to propose an estate, I should easily engage your attention; how much more if I could offer a province!—a kingdom! A crown sparkles in the eye of ambition. A throne is the pinnacle of human pride. What exertions have been made, what blood has been shed, to grasp a sceptre that rules a few miles of territory, and soon drops from the hand that wields it! But here you behold “the kingdom of God:” a kingdom of which he is the founder, the governor, the owner, the giver; a kingdom announced by prophets, established by miracles, prepared before the foundation of the world; a kingdom that cannot be shaken, but remains for ever; a kingdom, in comparison of which, all the renowned empires of the globe vanish into nothing, and in the possession of which you may mourn over an Alexander as a grovelling worm.

Grace and glory are not so much different states, as different degrees of the same state. Hence Christians are even *now* made partakers of this kingdom: but their present participation is imperfect. *Here* they are princes; but princes in disguise; the world knoweth them not. They are like David, anointed, but not proclaimed; and through much tribulation are entering the kingdom. Their royalties are above. There—are their robes, their crowns, their palaces; and they shall reign for ever and ever. Nothing less than this will satisfy the infinite goodness of God towards them: though they were once his foes, and by a frown he could have annihilated them, he spares them, he pardons them, he exalts them: “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.”

Let it however be observed, that there is something inseparably connected with this kingdom of God. It is "the righteousness of God." There are some who, instead of proving their schemes by the Scripture, are always bringing the Scripture to their schemes. Having attached a favourite meaning to a particular word, they give the term the same signification wherever they meet with it, regardless of the connexion in which it stands, or the purpose for which it was introduced. We make no scruple to say, that the righteousness of God in this passage intends, real holiness; the renovation of our nature; the sanctification of our lives. And we say not this from our disbelief of another very interesting doctrine of the Gospel, and which holds forth our justification as flowing from the merits of the Redeemer: and while we know that our obedience is defective, and feel that in many things we all offend, and come short of the glory of God, we humbly look for the acceptance of our persons and of our services in the Beloved; and repose the confidence of our weary souls under the shadow of his cross, "not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

But this reliance is always accompanied with true holiness. The same principle that calms the conscience always purifies the heart. A title to heaven is always attended with a meetness for it. And to this our Saviour refers. No righteousness, no kingdom! The one is essential to the other. And the other is not arbitrary: it is founded in the nature of things; in the nature of man; in the nature of heaven.

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the king-

dom of God." The enjoyment is impossible. To look therefore for glory without grace, or heaven without holiness, is treason against Scripture, and rebellion against common sense. It is to make God a liar; to abolish all the distinctions which preserve the harmony of the world; and to reduce the creation to a chaos. "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

These are the blessings we are to seek. But,

II. HOW ARE WE TO SEEK THEM? First: "seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness." First, in *time*: and first, in *attention*.

We are to seek them first, in *time*.

It should be the first concern in life. Here I have an opportunity to address those of you whose reason is opening, and whose affections are beginning to glow. How encouraging is the promise: "I love them that love me; and they that seek me early shall find me! Remember therefore your Creator in the days of your youth hereafter you may not have time for this work: and how dreadful would the consequence of prevention be! If you die before you finish a journey you intend to take, a building you intend to rear, a connexion you intend to form, it is comparatively of little moment; you will then have done with every thing below the sun for ever. But if you die before you have secured the salvation of the soul, it would

have been good for you if you had never been born: for if you are not saved, you are lost—and lost for ever! And is there no danger of this? Are any of you so young as not to have followed to the grave persons younger than yourselves? There is but a step between you and death. “For man knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare: so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.”—But godliness is as necessary for time as for eternity. If I were sure of your living to the age of Methuselah, I should still say. “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” You must enter the world with God, if you would pass wisely, and safely, and happily through it.—And never, my young friends, will you have such a favourable opportunity of knowing the things that belong to your everlasting peace as you now have. Of the year of life, this is the spring; of the day, this is the morning. How many are now bewailing the waste of this precious season, and vainly endeavouring to redeem the time, and repair the loss!

What applies to youth, falls with redoubled force upon age. Have you, my aged friend, been criminal enough to neglect this concern till now? Surely you have no time to lose. Let it be your *next* concern. It should have been your care sixty, seventy years ago. Every thing now cries, with a voice louder than thunder, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

What has been said respecting time at large, will apply to every period of it in particular.

Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness *first* every week; by sanctifying the first day of the

week; "calling the sabbath a delight; the holy of the Lord, honourable; and honouring him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words."

Seek them *first* every day; by securing in the morning a season for the closet and the family. Such previous devotion will best fit you for the duties and events of the day. Such intercourse with God will best prepare you for all your dealings with men.

Again. We are to seek them first in *attention*. They are to be supremely regarded, because they are supremely valuable. Many acquisitions are desirable, and some are useful; but religion is the one thing needful. It fixes its residence in the soul, and strikes its influences through eternity. If it be any thing, it is every thing; if it be important at all, it is all-important. It is not therefore to be a secondary business, which is to give place to every other interest; every other interest is to give place to this; to this every other pursuit is to be rendered subordinate and subservient. Thus David, in the Old Testament, and Paul, in the New, speak of godliness as their *only* concern. "One thing," says the former, "have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." And, says the latter, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark."

Are you like minded with them? To determine this, let me ask you two questions.

First. What are your *desires*? Every man has

some languid and lazy wishes. Balaam wished to “die the death of the righteous,” but was not concerned to live their life. Herod wished to see our Saviour work a miracle, but he would not stir out of doors for the purpose. Pilate asked, What is truth? and stayed not for the answer. If a few powerless, inoperative wishes would carry persons to heaven, none would ever be turned into hell. But, if you are in earnest, your desires accord with the strong language of Revelation: you “hunger and thirst after righteousness you “wait for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning “your soul breaketh for the longing it hath unto God’s judgments at all times.” And, upon a review of your anxieties, you will be able to say,

“Give me thy counsel for my guide,
And then receive me to thy bliss;
All my desires and hopes beside
Are faint and cold, compared with this.”

Secondly. What are your *exertions*? For something in this case will necessarily be done. This in the Scripture is held forth by “pressing into the kingdom of God,” “taking the kingdom of heaven by violence,” “lighting the good fight of faith,” “running the race that is set before us,” “labouring to enter into his rest.” Now explain these expressions as you please, deduct from them far more than the laws of metaphorical language require; yet will not the remainder be more than enough to condemn thousands who assume the name of Christian? Will it not imply much more than that speculative, indolent, formal time-serving, costless religion, which satisfies

many of our modern professors; a religion that requires of them no sacrifices, and allows the retention of every worldly passion and indulgence?

What then are you doing? What is your prevailing and habitual course of action? Are you applying the sabbath to the purposes for which it was consecrated? Do you read the Scripture, and hear the Gospel, with reverence and attention? Do you take pains to go to the house of God with constancy, and to worship him when you are there “in spirit and in truth”? Do you pray without ceasing? And in every thing give thanks?—You toil for the meat that perisheth—do you labour for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life? You forego ease, you give up your time, you “rise early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness,” to please the world, to gain a name, to increase your hoard of shining dust—are you laying up treasure in heaven? Do you deny yourselves, and take up your cross, and follow the Saviour, in obeying his commands, in imbibing his spirit, in copying his example? Are you, by patient continuance in well-doing, seeking for glory, honour, and immortality? Are you steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord?—But,

III. WHY ARE WE THUS TO SEEK THESE BLESSINGS? Here are two motives to animate and encourage us: the one implied; the other expressed. We shall succeed in our principal aim, which is to secure the kingdom of God and his righteousness—this is implied: and, in addition to these, all other things shall be given us—this is expressed. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; *and all these things shall he added, unto you as a kind of sur-*

plus, over and above the contract. What can we desire more?

First. Though destitute, as we naturally are, of his kingdom and righteousness, if we seek them in the manner here required, we shall obtain them. Snell an assurance is necessary, to excite attention and diligence. No man will undertake an enterprise that he deems useless and impracticable, especially if it be attended with difficulty and expense. Hope is the mainspring of motion in all the concerns of the world. The soldier wars, the scholar studies, the merchant trades, the husbandman ploughs, in hope. It is the same in religion. Here, indeed, so infinite is the prize, if there was only a probability, or a possibility, of success, we ought to seek it, and to seek it *first*. But we have not only possibility, but probability; we have not only probability, but certainty, to actuate us—a certainty derived from the promise of God, who cannot lie; from the gift of his own Son; from the experience of all his people. Here is no peradventure—“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. They that know thy Name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.”

Secondly. Besides gaining this kingdom and righteousness, all other things shall be added unto us. This is designed to meet an objection, by no means unusual, in the experience of Christians. It arises from their natural and civil condition in the world; from their businesses; their families; their

children; their bodies. They cannot be entirely dead to those things. If they wish not to “make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof,” its wants must be relieved; and the honour of their profession is concerned in their “providing things honest in the sight of all men.” They often find it harder to trust Clod in their temporal than in their spiritual interests. This thought will, sometimes at least, enter their minds, though it be not lodged and entertained there: “If I always make religion my first concern, may I not be a loser by it? Will it not frequently stand in the way of my secular advantage?” He who knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust; he who often meets the fears of his people before they have expressed them. He cries—“No. Mind my affairs, and I will manage yours. ‘Them that honour me, I will honour.’ All these things, while you regard them in the order wherein I place them, shall be added unto you.”

It would be an unwarrantable conclusion to suppose hence, that a Christian can never expect any difficulties in life; but it does authorize us to hope for such a proportion of the good things of this world as shall be needful for us: only, of this, He who dispenses them is the judge. It is the office of a father, before a child comes to years of discretion, to choose for him; and it is the happiness of tire child to have such a guide. Hence we are so much disposed to pity an orphan deprived of such a director, and thrown upon the wide world. Poor little traveller! What wonder if he mistakes his way!—Now this can never befall the children of God: He will not leave them orphans. This is their privilege, that, while incapable of judging for themselves, they have a

Father in heaven, infinitely wise and good, to choose for them. If they can bear prosperity without injury, they shall have it. If fulness will make them forget God, he will reduce them. He has engaged to give us whatever is conducive to our welfare—and we could have asked no more. “O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.”

We also learn, from this part of our subject, that religion has a friendly influence over secular affairs. It would be cruel to intimate that every instance of failure in trade originates in vice: but it may not be going too far to say, that the generality of these deficiencies, even in good men, are not pure afflictions; but have been preceded by the neglect of some of its duties, or the violation of some of its proprieties. We have not time to enlarge here, otherwise we might show how real religion makes a man punctual, and diligent, and economical; how it makes him liberal—and “he that soweth plentifully, shall reap plentifully how it cuts him off from expensive vices and amusements;” how it raises his character by the exercise of thee moral virtues, and gains him the confidence of his fellow-creatures; how it contributes to his health, and to the improvement of his understanding, and thus helps him both to judge and to execute; how it secures him the favour of Providence—and “the blessing of God maketh rich and addeth no sorrow in all which instances it would appear, that it “has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.”

What use should we make of this subject? I fear

the words I have endeavoured to explain, will suit some of you in a way of exhortation only. For can you say that you resemble this portrait and have complied with this admonition? Can I bless God at the close of this exercise, that for once I have been addressing an audience who “seek *first* his kingdom and righteousness,” and leave the addition of all other things to him? Ah! these other things—these engross you—and destroy. Heaven is hid from your view. Earth contains all your esteem. Your hopes and fears, desires and pursuits, are all confined within the narrow limits of time and sense! You came into the world you know not why, and are going out of it you know not whither. You are dead while you live. You have souls; but you never ask, “What must I do to be saved?” You “know not what a day will bring forth;” yet you live as if you were to live here always. You have been brought up in a Christian country: but your god is your belly, your glory is your shame, you mind earthly things. And therefore your end will be destruction. For no man ever dropped into heaven by chance; nor does God ever force a man into heaven against his will. He always makes it the object of his solicitude; and brings him thither, to accomplish his wishes, and to crown his services. There is a sober sense, in which, Win and wear it, is the motto inscribed on the prize for which we run.

I hope some of you are disposed to follow the advice, the command of our Lord and Saviour, founded in a regard to your everlasting welfare. Retire, and say, O God, I bless thee that thou hast not cut me off during my guilty negligence. May tliy goodness lead me to repentance! May thy

longsuffering be my salvation! Give me a token for good that thou hast received me graciously, and henceforth rank me with thy willing people.

Some of you have weighed both worlds, and have given the future preference.

Nevertheless—these other things occupy too much even of *your* time and attention: and render it necessary for us to admonish you to reduce your regard. For this purpose, you will do well to remember two things.

First. This undue solicitude injures your spiritual welfare. These suckers occupy the sap that should rater the boughs. These weeds exhaust the nourishment the ground requires for the plants. These cares of the world, and this “deceitfulness of riches, choke the word,” and it becometh unfruitful.

Secondly. It is hurtful even to your temporal welfare. The surest way to have any temporal blessing is to be satisfied without it. When we *must* have certain things, God sees that our hearts are too much set upon them for us to be indulged with safety. On the other hand, when we refer ourselves to his pleasure, he loves to surprise and gratify us: a remarkable instance of which we have in the case of Solomon. “God said unto him, liecause thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and

honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days." And what a dreadful contrast have we in the history of Eli! "There came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? And did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith. He it far from me; for them that, honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."



DISCOURSE LXXIX.

GOD THE SANCTUARY OF THE AFFLICTED.

“Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come.”—EZEK. xi. 16.

PHILOSOPHERS have frequently remarked, what may be called, the doctrine of compensation: by which they mean, the tendency there is in nature and providence to keep things in a kind of equality; so that while, on the one hand, there are defects to counterbalance advantages, there are, on the other hand, advantages to counterbalance defects. Nothing can exceed the weakness and helplessness of a new-born babe. But provision is made for the relief of its earliest wants; and the strength of maternal affection renders every exertion and sacrifice its welfare repines a pleasure. The blind are generally superior to other men in the senses of hearing and feeling. If the poor are denied the elegancies and luxuries of riches, they are not corroded with their cares, nor endangered by their perils. The labourer toils; but he is free from the languor and infirmities of the idle

and disengaged: and “his sleep is sweet, whether he eats little or much.”

In what condition can we be found that possesses no advantages? These a grateful mind will always look alter; and, however severe the affliction, endeavour to say, “It might have been worse. I have lost much; but I am not deprived of all. He has chastened me sore; but he has not given me over unto death. The stroke is painful: but it will be profitable. ‘Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.’” What is the emblem of the church, from the beginning of the world? A bush burning with fire, and not consumed. And what is the motto? “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed: always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

In harmony with these remarks is the language with which Ezekiel was commanded to address the Jews: “Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come.” Let us consider,

I. THE CALAMITY. II. THE ALLEVIATION.

I. THE CALAMITY: “I have cast them far off among the heathen, and have scattered them among the countries.”

Upon this part of our subject I am not going to

speak as a historian. Then it would be necessary for me to show how this dispersion took place; the different times and degrees in which it was accomplished; the numbers that were successively carried away; and endeavour to solve many questions which have more of curiosity in them than profit. But I shall speak only as a moralist, concerned to improve the fact by rendering it instructive. The event serves to display,

First, The *agency* of God. He, therefore, in the words before us, claims the work as his own: "*I have cast them off among the heathen; I have scattered them among the countries.*" Nor is it an unusual thing for him to assert his dominion and influence over all the sufferings of nations, families, and individuals. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? I form the light and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things."

In the dispersion of the Jews he employed instrumentality, and wicked instrumentality; but neither of these detracts from his agency. What does God, without the intervention of any cause between him and the effect? He blesses us by means; he warms us by the sun; he refreshes us by sleep; he sustains us by food; and he even requires us to prepare, for our use, the supplies he gives us. In a similar way he inflicts evil. And hence an irreligious mind is detained from God by the persons or the events that injure him. He thinks only of the flood, or the fire; of the heedless servant, the uncertain friend, the cruel enemy. Because the hand that holds them is invisible, he accuses the lance, and the scourge. But a pious man can say, "It is the Lord;" and will try to

say, "Let him do what seemeth him good." "Let him alone," says David, of the insulting Shimei. "Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him." Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away though they were the Chaldeans and Sabeans that plundered him. God did not carry away the Jews by miracle, but by the effect of war: by the invasion and success of unprincipled and wicked conquerors. What did Tiglath-Pileser, or Shalmaneser, or Sennacherib, or Nebuchadnezzar, think of God? They were only following the calls of vanity, and of revenge. Yet, says God, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and to cut off nations not a few." Whence we learn, that we are not to conclude that God has nothing to do in any work, because of the vileness of those who are engaged in it He adapts his instruments to their employment; overrules the natural tendencies of human actions, to subserve his designs; and makes the very wrath of man to praise him. The event,

Secondly, displays the *truth* of God. It had been clearly foretold, it had been threatened, as early as the days of Moses: "The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And thou shalt become an astonishment, a

proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee." It would be needless to prove how every successive prophet in the name of God renewed the threatening. But, in consequence of these denunciations, the calamity was identified with the Divine veracity, and became surer than heaven and earth: for "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." The Jews imagined that they had nothing to fear: they thought that such a mighty judgment was improbable, if not impossible; and presumptuously cried, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we they leaned upon the Lord, and said, Is not the Lord among us? None evil can come upon us. But "the Lord is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

Thirdly. The event displays the *holiness* of God. His holiness is most strikingly seen in his abhorrence of sin. He is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. The wicked shall not stand in his sight. He will not spare the guilty." His conduct towards this people seems severe; and it was severe. But the provocation was peculiar. Much was given, and much was required. Their offences were aggravated by their privileges. Sin is not to be judged of by its grossness, but by its guilt; and guilt arises from knowledge possessed, from obligations violated, from advantages abused. God has not "dealt so with any land." What wonder, therefore, that he should say, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"?

Fourthly. The event displays the *wisdom* of God. By their dispersion the Scriptures were diffused, and the Desire of all nations was announced and expected. The pious Jews would be in “the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord.” We have reason to believe many miracles were wrought by them. We know that some were: witness the preservation of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, in the fiery furnace; and Daniel in the lions’ den. These prodigies, accompanying a good conversation, would doubtless induce many to become proselytes to their religion, and to “take hold of the skirt of him that was a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

Lastly. The event displays his *goodness*. In the midst of judgment he remembered mercy. Though he punished them, it was not to destroy, but to correct and reform: and therefore he said, “Though I make a full end of the nations, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure.” The dispensation, therefore, was temporary and limited. Hence he said, “After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. 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. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither i have driven you, saith the Lord; and I

will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive." Hence, even in the mean time, he did not leave them comfortless. It was a calamity unspeakably awful and painful to be driven from their native land, and deprived of all their civil and sacred privileges; but it was softened. And, observe,

II. THE ALLEVIATION. "Thus saith the Lord God: Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." He undertakes to secure and accommodate them. He engages to afford them the advantage of a refuge and a temple: so that wherever they sought him, he would be found of them; and they should see his power and his glory, so as they had seen him in the sanctuary.

The doctrine to be drawn from this part of our subject is this—That God is never at a loss to serve his people; and that he will compensate them for the want of those very things that seem essential to their welfare.

Let us consider two cases in which this truth may be exemplified.

The first is, in *the loss of outward comforts*. God does not require us to be indifferent to our substance, to our health, to our friends and relations: yea, under the removal of them, he allows us to feel. But it is the duty and privilege of a Christian to be able to say, with the Church, "Although 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 stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

The believer may well display a superiority over those events that keep others constantly alarmed or distressed, since God is his portion; and, in his unchangeableness and all-sufficiency, he has a stock of happiness independent of the body and its diseases; time, and its vicissitudes; the world, and its dissolution.

The design of affliction is to wean us from creatures, and to bring us more entirely to make use of God. At first we are often ready to murmur and repine, imagining we are undone: but when we find that, in consequence of the failure of the streams, we have been led to the Fountain of living waters, we can be thankful for the exchange; and acknowledge that it is good for us that we have been afflicted. Is not he better to us than ten sons; better than thousands of gold and silver? Is not he “the father of the fatherless, and the husband of the widow”? How pleasing in this view is the promise, “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the days when she came up out of the land of Egypt”! When Moses was wandering with the Israelites in “the wilderness, in a solitary way, and found no city to dwell in,” he familiarized God under the image of a home; and said, “Lord, thou hast been our refuge and dwelling-place in all generations.” When David was driven from his palace by the rebellion of Absalom, and was obliged to keep the field, he said,

“Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort.” A pious female, in the most distressing bereavement, was able to say,

“Thou dost but take *the lamp* away,
To bless me with *unclouded day*.”

And a good man, who had endured the wreck of fortune, being asked, how he bore the change in his condition so cheerfully, replied, “When I had these good things, I enjoyed God in all; and now I am deprived of them, I enjoy all in God.”

How many can bear witness, that He has made that condition comfortable which they once deemed insupportable; that “as the sufferings abound, the consolations abound also and that the light of his countenance, the joy of his salvation, the comforts of the Holy Ghost, are effectual substitutes for every deficiency in creature-good!

Secondly. In *the want of gracious ordinances*. The preaching of the word, and the observance of public worship, will always be deemed a privilege by the godly: they will therefore repair to them, not only because they are commanded, but because they are inclined. They are glad when it is said to them, Let us go into the house of the Lord: upon the same principle, the loss of them will be their grief. “When,” says David, “I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day.”

God will never countenance the neglect of the means of grace; but he will make up for the want of them. And those should remember this remark,

who, by accident, or sickness, or the care of young children, or the duties of servitude, are wholly or partially denied the privileges of the sanctuary. When we cannot follow him, He can follow us. I have known Christians placed by Providence in situations that had very few spiritual advantages—and yet they have surpassed others who were much more favoured.

The superstitious should remember this, as well as the afflicted. He dwelleth not in temples made with hands: as saith the prophet; “The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” He can meet with his people in any place; and wherever he holds communion with them, the place becomes sacred. “And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.” Though there was no building near, “he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” To which we may add, the assurance of our Saviour to the woman at the well: “The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

What a place then is heaven!

There we shall need none of these outward advantages. What a *natural* world must that be where we can dispense with such an essential blessing as the sun! "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."—There we shall need none of these spiritual helps. What a *moral* world must that be where we can dispense with sabbaths, with preaching, with temples! Even religion will cease there, and nothing of it remain, but the dispositions it formed, and the state to which it led. "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."

What a being then is God!

He enables us to realize and to begin this blessed state, even in this world. *There* we shall be perfectly happy, because he will be *all in all*: and *here* we are happy in proportion as we live a life of dependence upon him, and communion with him. There are some individuals who are of importance to many around them. They are eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; they are a father to the poor; the blessing of him that is ready to perish comes upon them; and they cause the widow's heart to sing for joy. But the circle is limited; their power is contracted; and, in numberless cases, pity and prayer is all the succour they can yield. But God is the fountain of life; he is an infinite good. "He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think." There is no want but he can relieve; no hope but he can accomplish.

Let us rejoice that he is accessible. Though sin

carried us to such a distance from him, we are “made nigh by the blood of Christ, who once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God.” Let us come unto God by him, saying, “Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.” While many ask, Who will show us any good? may we pray, “Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me:” and feel a gladness to which the man of the world is a stranger, even when his corn and wine increase.

Happy the man, wherever he resides, or whatever is denied him, who can say, with David; “I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

“Give what Thou canst. without Thee we are poor.
And with Thee rien, take what Thou wilt away”

DISCOURSE LXXX.

OBEDIENCE THE FRUIT OF REDEMPTION.

“What? know ye not that—ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”—1 COR. vi. 19, 20.

IT cannot be denied that the death of our Lord Jesus holds a very large and distinguishing place in the Scripture: but the importance attached to it is frequently diminished, or misunderstood.

There are some who contend that he died not to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, but only to give us an example of patience, and to seal the truth of his doctrine with his blood. This is an error peculiarly at variance with the types and prophecies of the Old Testament, and the language and spirit of the New; with the relief of an awakened sinner; and the consolation of the believer who “joys in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom he has received the atonement.”

But there is another heresy. It consists in believing that the Son of God died not to save us *from*

our sins, but *in* them: not to render us *holy*, but to *dispense with our being so*. This, though not always avowedly professed, too generally prevails; and alarms us with regard to many of those who are very tenacious of the doctrines of the Gospel.

Against this delusion we would warn you in the words of the Apostle: "God is not only your Saviour, but your Sovereign: and from the Cross he demands of you nothing less than a life of praise. 'What? know ye not that—ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.'"

Let us consider,

I. YOUR STATE. II. YOUR DUTY. III. THE CONNEXION BETWEEN THESE; OR, THE DERIVATION OF THE ONE FROM THE OTHER.

I. YOUR STATE. Paul expresses it in the form of a question. "What? know ye not that—ye are not your own? "Such a mode of address is very common with our Apostle; and it always implies either the obviousness or the importance of the principle he is establishing; and so is designed to reprove either our ignorance or our inattention. How much do we need reproof with regard to each of these! How little do we know! How little do we consider!

But let us attend to the truth of the statement. "Ye are not your own"—you are not the masters of your own actions; the framers of your own condition; the proprietors of your own persons: you are not at your own disposal, but entirely at the Lord's command. And if it be asked, On what principle is the claim founded, and whence does the title spring? We answer, It is a claim you cannot deny; it is a title you cannot dispute—you are redeemed—you are

paid for. "Know ye not that ye are bought with a price?"

No being can be his own, unless he be supreme, absolute, independent, self-existent. In *this* view, therefore, you are not your own. He made you and fashioned you. He formed your body out of the dust of the earth, and breathed into your nostrils the breath of life. Show me one day, one hour, in which you can live without God; and that day, that hour, shall be reckoned your own. If you refuse to acknowledge his right, why do you live at his table? why are you clothed by his bounty? why are you mean enough to be indebted to him for all your enjoyments, as well as supports? Tell him to take back all that is his, and leave you nothing but what is your own.—And where is the earth you tread? the air you breathe? the light you behold?—All are vanished. And where are you?—Annihilated.

Strong however as this claim is, it is not the principal one. The Apostle alleges another. You are God's, says he, not only because he made you and preserves you, but because he has bought you—"bought you with a price."

What price? He deemed it needless to describe it. He knew every Christian could exclaim, "He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. In him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins. We are redeemed—with the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Having finished the work that was given him to do, "neither by the blood of goats, or of calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place having obtained eternal redemp-

tion for us." What a ransom is here offered and accepted! What a redemption is here made and pleaded! Now we are his by a more awful, a more endearing, a more powerful, claim than creation. Redemption delivers us from far greater evils than creation. Redemption confers upon us far greater blessings than creation. Redemption was much more difficult than creation. Our Maker had only to speak; our Saviour had to suffer. He made us—at the expense of his breath; he redeemed us—at the expense of his blood.

II. YOUR DUTY. It is to "glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." It reminds us,

First, Of our complex nature. Some, by a kind of voluntary humility, would strip us of our glory, and reduce us to mere matter. But "there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We combine clay and thought. On the one side, we unite with angels; and on the other, with the beasts that perish. We are mortal in life, and immortal in death. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it."

Secondly. The body is not to be excluded or undervalued, in religion. It is the workmanship of God, and displays much of his perfection. His providence appears in preserving and supplying it. He has redeemed it; and will glorify it. And therefore the body, as well as the soul, is to be employed in glorifying him. Religion is not only a real, but a visible thing. It flows from principle, but is to be exemplified in practice. We are not only to approve

ourselves to the eye of God, who seeth in secret; but we are to convince, to impress, to encourage, others. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

The form of godliness is nothing without the power; but when the form is produced by the power, it is comely, and useful, and necessary. They who disregard the Sabbath and the sanctuary, (under a notion that all times and places are to be alike to Christians, and under a pretence of superior spirituality despise the exercises of devotion, and the means of grace,) show little regard to the revealed will of God, and little acquaintance with the constitution of human nature. For man is an embodied creature: his soul is to be approached through the medium of sense; and his communion with things unseen and eternal is to be maintained by means of those that are seen and temporal. I low is the Scripture to be read but by tin? eye? I low is the Gospel to be heard but by the ear? Is not the ordinance of the Lord's Supper founded on the principle, that the body may be helpful to the mind?

But our greatest danger lies not here. Many are satisfied with their state in religion, because they regularly observe its forms, and abound in bodily exercise, which, when alone, profiteth little. We therefore remark,

Thirdly, that in all the duties of religion we are indispensably bound to glorify God in our spirit, as well as in our body. This is his demand: "My son, give me thine heart." Keep this back, and every thing else you render him will be unacceptable. Actions and professions may satisfy a fellow-creature,

because they may delude him: but God is not mocked—he views our principles and motives; he looketh at the heart. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” The Jews never insulted our Saviour more than when they bowed the knee before him, and said, “Hail, king of the Jews!” Judas gave him lip-service, and betrayed the Son of man with a kiss. If you pray without desire, sing without gratitude, hear without reverence and obedience; if you approach his table, and rest in the outward and visible signs, not discerning the Lord’s body, or showing forth his death; “you draw nigh to him with your mouth, and honour him with your lips, but your heart is far from him:” and, therefore, in vain do you worship.

Fourthly. We are to glorify God in our corporeal and spiritual powers respectively, by exertions peculiar to each.

As to the *body*—we are to glorify God in guarding our health; in watching our senses; in regulating our appetites; in opposing idleness and intemperance; in “yielding our senses and our members as instruments of righteousness unto holiness;” in rendering our natural refreshments and our secular callings subservient, to religion, according to the injunction, “Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

As to the *spirit*—we are to glorify God in the understanding, by exploring his truth; in the memory, by retaining his word; in the conscience, by fearing to offend him; in the will, by submitting to his commands, and acquiescing in his dispensations; in our affections, by loving him above all; in our de-

pendence, by “rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh.”

All these subdivide themselves into branches of duty too minute and various to be specified. What the Apostle requires is nothing less than an entire consecration of ourselves in all our faculties and actions to God, according to his comprehensive words in another of his Epistles: “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.”

III. Let us consider the CONNEXION BETWEEN YOUR STATE AND YOUR DUTY, OR THE DERIVATION OF THE ONE FROM THE OTHER. “Know ye not—that ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: *therefore* glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” The inference is natural. The force of it appears in four things.

First. Does not Justice demand this dedication? He has not only procured a title for you, but a title to you: and unless you devote yourselves to his service, you rob him of his right. What a man has bought he deems his own; and especially when the purchase has been costly. And has not God bought you with a price—of infinite value? And would you rob him of a servant from his family? of a vessel from his sanctuary? To take what belongs to a man is robbery, but to take what belongs to God is sacrilege.

Secondly. If we do not glorify God, are we not chargeable with the vilest ingratitude? You ought to be thankful for the common bounties of his pro-

vidence; but how much more for his unspeakable Gift! How ready are you to censure a fellow-creature, whom you have served and indulged, when he appears insensible to your welfare! Yet had he some claims upon you; and the favours you conferred were small, and attended with no painful sacrifices—what then should you think of yourselves? Has not God done enough to gain your hearts, and engage you in his service for ever? In what state did he find you? To what blessedness has he raised you! In what way—by what means—has the deliverance—the elevation been accomplished? “He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all. He commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were sinners, Christ died for us.”

“By these cords of love, these bands of a man, how am I drawn! how am I bound! ‘What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant: thou hast loosed my bonds.’ I am not my own: I cannot be my own: I would not be my own. I had I ten thousand bodies and spirits, they should be only and eternally thine.”

This is the language of a man properly penetrated with the subject. And how necessary it is, will appear by asking,

Thirdly. Is not this glorification of God the very end of your redemption? Were you rescued from bondage to be lawless? or to become your own masters? Does this amazing work terminate in your mere escape from deserved punishment? What says Zechariah in his song of praise? “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed

his people.”—“That he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.” What says Peter? “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” What says our Apostle? Let him explain the inference he has here drawn—“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, ai-rose again.”

Lastly. How can you determine your actual interest in this redemption, unless you have dedicated yourselves unto God? Who are the persons our Saviour will render eternally happy by his death? Not the righteous, but sinners. This is true. But what sinners? Those that remain in their unbelief and impenitence?—Can the profligate; can the sensual; can they who mind earthly things, however orthodox; can such men say, “I know that my Redeemer liveth: and that in my flesh I shall see God?—They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts.—He is the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him.” He groaned, and bled, and died: but this does not, cannot render it less true, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”—“This,” says John, “is the message which we have heard of him, and de-

clare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say, that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." What is the experience of a man who can claim all the benefits of the Cross, and who will never be confounded? "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Thus, if we consider the claims of justice and of gratitude; if we would meet the design of God in the dispensation, or know that we have eternal life abiding in us as the consequence of it; the inference strongly results—"ye are not your own, but bought with a price; *therefore* glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

If I had been addressing persons, who, like the Athenians, can only be charmed in hearing some new thing, I should not have chosen the subject on which I have been speaking. It pretends to no novelty: but it possesses importance; and to those who are in a proper state of mind, it will always prove interesting.

It clearly shows us that the doctrines of Christianity are derived from its facts; and that its duties arise from its doctrines. These doctrines therefore are not, as some would suppose, mere opinions, or speculations, but are necessarily connected with experience and practice. The Christian's consolations and motives are supplied and maintained by his

principles. Is it not therefore astonishing, that the preacher who inculcates these principles is to be considered an enemy to holiness, or as taking an improper method to produce it? *He* values his system because of its practical bearing; because of its sanctifying influence; and affirms constantly, that "they which have believed in God, be careful to maintain good works." He abhors the imputation of doing evil that good may come; or of sinning that grace may abound. But he does not rear a superstructure without a foundation; neither does he lay his foundation in the sand. He does not expect spiritual motion without spiritual life. He does not look for good fruit from a bad tree. His concern is, that the spring may be healed; and then he knows the streams will be wholesome.

Oh! Christians, let it appear from your practice, as well as from our argument, that the doctrine we preach is according to godliness. Let your lives furnish us with our best defence. "Be our epistles known and read of all men." The eyes of many are upon you, not that they may find reason to remove their unhappy prejudices against the Gospel, but to confirm them; and, though we quote Scripture, they will appeal to you; and, perhaps, all the notions they form of evangelical religion will be taken from the representations you give, and the impressions you make. May these representations be accurate! May these impressions be just! May you "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."—"And this I pray, that, your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye maybe

sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

As for those who are living without God in the world, and who feel no concern to glorify him, let them remember that God will be glorified even in them—though not willingly, yet by compulsion; though not intentionally, yet by his overruling providence; though not *in their salvation*, yet *in their destruction*. His power, his truth, his holiness, and his justice, will be displayed in their misery. The grace that should have been the savour of life unto life will become the savour of death unto death. It cannot be otherwise. They are exposed to a twofold condemnation: one from the Law, which they have transgressed; and another from the Gospel, which they have neglected. And how can they escape? “He that despised Moses’ law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”

DISCOURSE LXXXI.

LIFE ENJOYED AND IMPROVED.

“I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good, in his life.”—ECCLES. iii. 12.

“**I** LEAP,” says Wisdom, not only—“in the way of righteousness,” but—“in the midst of the paths of judgment:” that is—between the extreme on each side of the road, and into which we are so liable to run. Indeed, moral duty always lies in the middle of two opposites. Patience is equally remote from stupidity and excessive sensibility: it is alike destroyed by feeling too little or too much. True courage is ashamed of rashness, as well as of fear. Real economy shuns parsimony and meanness, as well as profusion and waste.

Let us apply this to the subject before us. It is desirable and necessary to form a proper estimate of our present condition; so that we may use this world as not abusing it. We are prone to value it too highly: to acquire too keen an appetite for its pleasures to lay too great a stress upon its riches; and to rest in that as our home, which was only designed

for our passage. Yet it is possible to err on the other side; and we may neglect to secure and enjoy all the advantages which our residence on earth is capable of affording.

There are some whose liberality trenches on their allowed enjoyment. The case, indeed, is not very common; and there is something noble in the principle, when it *does* arise from principle,—for it may arise from vainglory, when a man denies himself for the sake of usefulness. Yet it should be remembered, that God “giveth us richly all things to enjoy;” that as Christians, we are not to suffer “our good to be evil spoken of;” that, if we refuse ourselves such accommodations and comforts as our station in life permits, we shall appear sordid and avaricious to those who, while they witness our savings, are not acquainted with the use we make of them; and that what is expended upon ourselves, in the hire of servants, the employment of workmen, and the purchase of articles in trade, is one of the ways in which we can “serve our generation.” This, however, though a mistake, is an error on the right hand: the greatest danger lies on the left; and arises from the self-indulgence that trenches upon the claims of charity. For there are persons who give way to so much needless gratification, as to have no ability with which to answer the calls of misery; they are wrapped up in selfishness, looking every man on his own things, and not on the things of others; while their conscience gives them no alarm, and their very religion is bribed to acquiesce in the hardness of their hearts.

Let us see whether life will not yield sources of enjoyment and beneficence too. Solomon saw no inconsistency between these: but recommends both

in the words of our text. "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life." That is, all our temporal possessions are only valuable, as they are expended upon ourselves, or others; either as they aid our own comfort, or advance the welfare of our fellow-creatures. Let me then call upon you,

I. TO REJOICE IN THEM. II. TO DO GOOD WITH THEM.

I. Let me call upon you to REJOICE IN THEM—This part of our subject requires remarks, not so much of a stimulating as of an explanatory and qualifying nature. Let me begin with two cautions.

The first regards *justice*. See that what you enjoy is your own. "Owe no man any thing," says the Apostle. You would deem it shameful to purloin from a neighbour's garden, or shop, any thing you deemed agreeable; but what is the difference between stealing, and ordering what you are conscious, at the time, you are unable to pay for? Yet there are those, who are determined, that, whoever may suffer, they will enjoy themselves; who have not only every thing comfortable, but often luxuriant, in food, in apparel, in furniture: while their tradesmen's bills give them not a moment's uneasiness; or the prospect of failure, the least sentiment of disgrace. It was well said by Lord Mansfield, that "for one cruel creditor, there were a hundred cruel debtors." Upon this head our laws are far too lenient for the support of the public welfare. But what can we think of professors of religion who can gratify themselves at the expense of others, and involve themselves in debt, rather than exercise the least self-denial! There may be honesty without religion; but it is a strange

kind of religion that can subsist without honesty. A real Christian should blush, not to be seen in a threadbare, mended garment, that is *his own*; but in a goodly and splendid one, that belongs to *his tradesman*! Poverty is not disgraceful; but sin is. Jesus and his Apostles were poor; but they were not unjust: otherwise, *He* might have had where to lay his head, and *they* would not have complained of nakedness and hunger.

The second regards *moderation*. You can never suppose that God requires, or even allows intemperance. Reason does not allow it; health does not allow it; enjoyment does not allow it: for it is verified by experience, that the moderate use of all earthly good is productive of the greatest degree of pleasure. "Let your moderation, therefore, be known unto all men and, while alive to the beauties of nature and the bounties of Providence, beware of losing the heart of a stranger. The danger lies on the side of gratification. Therefore, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Never be so absorbed in any present indulgence, as to be careless of the voice that will summon you to "arise and depart hence, for this is not your rest, because it is polluted."

After having cautioned you, allow me to admonish.

And first. If you would rejoice in the good things which God gives you under the sun,—

Cherish a grateful sensibility. Some receive all their mercies like the beasts that perish. The animal only is gratified in them. There is nothing to refine the grossness of appetite, or to increase the relish of possession, derived from the mind and the heart. How much, in passing through life, does he lose who regards all its blessings as the effects of chance, and

is not led by them to an intelligent Author, and an indulgent Benefactor! He has the secret of adding a hundredfold to his enjoyment who connects all his advantages with the agency of his God, and feels his obligations to his bounty. He has the highest relish of every thing who, instead of "sacrificing to his own net and burning incense to his own drag," realizes the sentiment of Solomon, "The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." Gratitude is a lively and cheerful feeling, even where it regards a creature only; how much more when it respects the God of love! The man who lives a stranger to it can never rejoice in his mercies, and is comparatively a wretch in all his abundance.

Secondly. *Guard against habitual discontent.* To possess is not to enjoy. Many possess much and enjoy nothing. We cannot judge of a man by outward appearances. His grounds may bring forth plentifully. He may fare sumptuously every day; he may have servants to anticipate all his wants; he may have more than heart can wish; and yet, if we could look within, we should see his soul a prey to dissatisfaction. An ability to relish our mercies is considered by Solomon as the gift of God: "Also that every man should eat and drink, and *enjoy the good of all his labour*, it is the *gift of God.*" But this gift of God comes to us like other gifts, in the use of means, and is increased by them. You should, therefore, sanctify reason and exercise thought. You should compare your circumstances with the state, not of those above you, but of those below. As soon as you are placed in a condition, you should shut your eyes and ears against all its disadvantages, and dwell only on the good and improvable. You should

often inquire, what it is that keeps you from taking comfort in your portion; and be ashamed to think, that one trial should make you insensible to a thousand favours; that one trifling event not according to your mind, but upon which your real welfare has no dependence, should deprive every thing else of all power to interest you! Did you never think Haman a fool? "He called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover. Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." It is to no purpose to exempt some even from real evils; they will be sure to conjure up imaginary ones. It matters not what is done for them; they are incapable of being pleased. It matters not where they are placed; it is impossible to make them happy. How must it shock an angel, to see a man, notwithstanding his unworthiness, surrounded with every wish, every comfort, and yet made up of fretfulness and complaint, a torment to others, and a burden to himself! He is far worse than his brethren in the field: "Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass? or loweth the ox over his fodder?"

Thirdly. *Shun avaricious and distrustful anxiety.* This will produce excessive exertion, and make you forget that "the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment." Diligence is a duty, and employment

is a privilege. But this cannot be said of drudgery, or bondage; these are incompatible with comfort. And why is the man a slave and a drudge? Has he not often prayed, "Give us day by day our daily bread"? Has not God promised that he shall eat the labour of his hand? Yes—but he must make haste to be rich; he must gain, not a substance, but a fortune; he must, not continue in his calling with God, but, retire from it, to live in a state of independence and inaction: hence, he has not a moment that he can call his own; hence he denies not only recreation, but rest, to body and mind; hence he is afraid of every present expense and gratification; and loses the best part of life, in providing for the worst! He may never reach the period that flatters him; and if he does, he may be incapable of relishing what he has laid up, owing to bodily infirmities and disease, the removal of relatives and friends, and the force of habits deprived of their proper objects.

Fourthly. *Entertain no harsh and superstitious news of religion.* "Touch not, taste not, handle not: which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." But where has God prescribed bodily flagellations? Where does He require us to withdraw from society? to turn mendicants? to live in deserts and caves? to go barefooted? and sleep on the cold ground? Is God pleased only as we are tormented? does He surround us with enjoyments only that we may not taste of them? To enjoy is to obey, because it corresponds with the obvious will of God. "What says Paul of those who "forbid to marry, and command to abstain

from meats which God hath created to be received with thankfulness, of them which believe and know the truth? They preach the doctrine of devils." And what says the wise man in this book? "Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun."

Some Protestants have had a tinge of Popery, and have enjoined themselves austerities which God has never required. Their motive, perhaps, in some cases, has been good; and they adopted these mortifications, not to recommend them to God, so much as to promote their sanctification. But God knows our frame. His own means are the best; and we ought not to distinguish ourselves by morals and self-denial of unscriptural devisings; but, remembering that we serve a good master, gratefully use what his providence supplies. "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

Lastly. *Seek after a knowledge of your reconciliation with God.* It is your mercy that you know how this is to be obtained. Jesus is the only Mediator, and he made peace by the blood of his cross. He "once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God." Through him, "God now waits to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy upon you." You are allowed, you are invited, you are commanded to "seek him, while he may be found, and to call upon him, while he is near." And can

you be happy without any well-grounded hope of your pardon and acceptance with God? Could a man enjoy a feast if a sword was suspended over his head by a hair? Could he be charmed with the finest music if he knew he was hanging over a bottomless pit by a rotten thread? Can you enjoy life while you know—that death is certain—that it cannot be far off—that it may be very near—that after death is the judgment—and after the judgment—the sentence, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”? You may, indeed, banish the thought; but forgetfulness is not safety. And the thought cannot be always banished; it will sometimes intrude, and mar all your peace and pleasure. “But blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” The curse is removed from all his trials. He has a covenant right to all his mercies. God is his father—death is his friend—heaven is his home—the Bible is his treasure—he has nothing to do with events. Providence is engaged to make “all things work together for his good.” All his interests are secured—not a hair of his head is unnumbered—he dwells safely, and is “in quiet from the fear of evil.” *This* is the man to enjoy life; every thing smiles when God smiles. “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.”

Having called upon you to rejoice, let me exhort you also, with the royal preacher,

II. TO DO GOOD. “I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to *do good* in his life.” Here let us inquire, What is the good these things will enable us to do? How we are to

perform it? and, Why we should be concerned to accomplish it?

What good can these things enable us to do?—It is of three kinds.

They enable us to do *religious* good. This is the chief. No charity equals that which regards the souls of men: and what an honour is conferred upon property, that, by means of it, you can be instrumental in the salvation of sinners, in the diffusion of the Scriptures, in the preaching of the Gospel, and the establishment of the Redeemer's empire! But so it is; and every thing, under God, depends upon the pecuniary resources of his agents. What, at this hour, hinders, or limits, a thousand exertions in the cause of truth and of righteousness—but the want of “silver and gold,” to replenish the funds of wisdom and zeal? “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest by which we mean, not ministers only, but men of independence, who will say, Lord, I am thine, and all that I have: men of trade and commerce, who will gain, not to squander away in extravagance, or hoard up in the miser's bag; but to honour the Lord with their substance, and to realize the prediction concerning the deliverance and conversion of Tyre: “And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord: it shall not be treasured, nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing.”

They enable us also to do *intellectual* good. This takes in education: and, whatever the advocates for mental darkness suppose—who plead that because a man is born to poverty he is born to ignorance, and

will fill his place the better the less he knows—no property can be better expended than that which is laid out in the instruction of the young. A little education gives a poor child the use of his understanding. It opens to him a thousand sources of pleasure, to alleviate his condition. It prepares him to support himself, and to be useful to others: while it is friendly to religion, by teaching him the nature and grounds of his duty, and enabling him to read the word of truth.

They enable us to do *corporeal* good: by which we mean, that which immediately regards the body, though the mind will also derive comfort from it. Here we can never be at a loss. We are surrounded with the defenceless, the hungry, the naked, and the sick. We live in a world full of misery, and, whatever be our situation, it is impossible to elude cases of distress. But are we to elude them? Are we to hide ourselves from our own flesh? “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

Secondly. In *what manner* are we to do it? We are to do good

Immediately, and with diligence. “Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee.” He may be dead before to-morrow, or you may be dead; and thus the action will be lost for ever. For the saints on earth have one privilege above the saints in heaven; it is the opportunity of doing good: but this opportunity, we should always remember, is as short and pre-

carious as it is precious: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."—We are to do good Extensively, and with impartiality. Some cases, indeed, will have stronger claims than others; and the most generous ability cannot reach every case. But it is only preference, not exclusion; it is only want of means, not indisposition, that must limit our exertions. We are not to be restrained by relationship, or country, or religion, or even personal injury—yea, says our Saviour, "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; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."—We are to do good

Perseveringly, and without declension. We must reckon upon encountering much, very much, that will try us. We shall often meet with very unworthy returns. We shall frequently seem to labour in vain. The harvest will very slowly follow the seed-time. Zeal, without patience, will do nothing. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good. Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due time we shall reap, if we faint, not."—Let us inquire,

Thirdly. *Why* we should be concerned to accomplish it.

Why? Because the bounties of Providence were

conferred upon us for this very purpose. The Donor looked beyond ourselves in communicating them. He designed them to be not only indulgences, but talents: he constituted us not so much the proprietors as the stewards; “and it is required in a steward, that a man be found faithful.”

Why? Because God hath commanded it. He is our sovereign master; and, if we are servants rightly disposed, we have often asked, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” And has he left us ignorant of his will? Did you never read, “as we have opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of faith”? Can any reason be assigned why he is to be obeyed, when he commands us to believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ; and when he enjoins us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together—and despised, when he issues the charge, “Charge them that are rich in this world that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate”?

Why? Gratitude requires it. How much has God done for us, notwithstanding all our unworthiness and guilt! What an instance of unparalleled goodness does the Apostle of love mention with rapture; and how natural, how forcible, the inference he draws from it, while teaching us to derive Christian morals from evangelical motives: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” Gratitude consists in a disposition to return a favour received: and, from man to man, it may be so expressed, as that a compensation may

be made, yea, and even more than an equivalent be returned. But we can never discharge the obligations we are under to God. Let us, however, show that we are sensible of them. Let us ask, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" And if he is exalted above all blessing and praise, and our goodness extendeth not to him, let it extend to those who are appointed to receive, as his substitutes, the acts of our beneficence. He will judge of our disposition towards himself, whom we have not seen, by our conduct towards his creatures, and his children, whom we have seen. "To do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." The Redeemer, at the last day, will acknowledge, "Forasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

Why? Profit requires it. What is it that attaches one man so powerfully to another—and gives him a resource in the tears, the prayers, the attentions, of his fellow-creatures in the day of evil? Power may cause the possessor to be feared; wealth, to be envied; genius, to be admired; righteousness, to be respected: but "for a good man some would even dare to die." Yea, goodness secures a man much higher resources than human. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord shall deliver him in time of trouble. Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy." But it would be needless to mention all the promises made to beneficence by a God that cannot lie, and is never at a loss to perform.

Why? Pleasure requires it. If you are strangers to the pleasures of benevolence, you are to be pitied; for you are strangers to the most pure, the most

durable, the most delicious, the most satisfactory, the most God-like, pleasures to be enjoyed on this side heaven.

And here I unite the two parts of our subject into one. I have called upon you to rejoice in your portion, and to do good with it: but it is possible to rejoice *in* doing good. The most beneficent life is the most happy life. We talk of pleasure! What are the feelings of the most successful and indulged worldling compared with those of Job? "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me. Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." O the delight of resembling Him "who went about doing good"! O the joy of being followers of God, at once the greatest and the best of Beings! "GOD IS LOVE: AND HE THAT DWELLETH IN LOVE DWELLETH IN GOD, AND GOD IN HIM."

DISCOURSE LXXXII

THE NEW CREATURE.

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.”—GAL. vi. 15.

IF religion be, as it is commonly acknowledged, the one thing needful; if it be absolutely indispensable to every character, and in every condition; if it be “profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;” it must be desirable to know wherein it consists, what are its peculiar attributes, and how it may be distinguished from every thing that would speciously usurp its place.

To afford us this necessary satisfaction is the aim of the Apostle, in several parts of his writings; and, as he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, his decisions are infallible. “We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but

righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith that worketh by love." "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*"

The negation extends, by a parity of reasoning, to a thousand other things. In Jesus Christ neither episcopacy, nor dissenterism; a liturgy, or prayer without a form; kneeling, or sitting at the Lord's Supper; sprinkling in baptism, or immersion; avail-eth any thing. We say not, that all these are equally true and proper in themselves, and that no degree of importance is attached to them; but that real religion is not essentially involved in them: real religion may subsist without them, and they may subsist without real religion.—Neither will mere orthodoxy, knowledge, gifts, profession, avail—What then? "*A new creature*" "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*" Let us endeavour to explain and improve this subject—

I. BY EXAMINING WHAT IS IMPLIED IN "A NEW CREATURE." II. WHAT IS TO BE INFERRED FROM ITS UNRIVALLED IMPORTANCE.

I. LET US EXAMINE WHAT IS IMPLIED IN "A NEW CREATURE."

Four explanatory questions maybe asked upon this subject.

First. In *what sense* is a Christian a new creature? Is it a physical or a moral one? It is only a moral one. New faculties are not given him; but his faculties have new qualities and applications. Hence the original complexion, or constitutional peculiarity,

remains; and the *man* is seen even in the Christian. His very religion takes a kind of hue from his natural character, whether it be sanguine or phlegmatical, tending to severity or mildness. And this is no inconsiderable proof of sincerity: for it is custom, it is formality, it is hypocrisy, that produces sameness; that constrains the lively to revolt from cheerfulness; the talkative to keep silence; and the young to look demurely, and speak and move with the gravity of old age. Had I known the individual turn and temper of Martha and Mary before our Lord entered their house, I should have viewed them as hypocrites had Mary acted as Martha did, or Martha acted as Mary did: but when I see the one "sitting at his feet," and the other "cumbered about much serving," I see a difference; but it is principle, operating according to character. To proceed. The man, therefore, continues the same as before, and yet is a new creature. His soul, and all its powers, are the same: he has not another understanding, another memory, another imagination, another genius; but these are changed in their use, and sanctified. His body is the same, and all its senses: grace does not give him another tongue, or other eyes and ears; but they are now sacred to new purposes. His condition is the same: he is not another husband, another father, another master; but he is a different one: he is godly in each of these relations. He carries on the same business: but now he abides with God in his calling. He eats and drinks as before: but now, whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, he does all to the glory of God. If the covetous become liberal, the proud humble, and the prayerless devout, they are new creatures as to religious purposes—and

this is the subject in question. Compare Paul after his conversion with Paul before his conversion: his body and soul, his learning and abilities, and the ardour of his disposition, continued the same; and yet, was there ever a being so different?

Secondly. *How far* does this change extend? The reason of this question is obvious; it is to keep persons from resting in things, which, though good in themselves, come short of it. A man may be baptized, and not regenerated. A new creed, or a new denomination, does not make a man a new creature. It is pleasing to see a man reformed externally; but he may abandon a course of profligacy and live soberly and righteously, and yet not live *godly*, in the present world. The new creation is not a change from vicious to virtuous only; but from natural to spiritual, from earthly to heavenly, from walking by sight to walking by faith. To go still further: a man may be convinced, and not converted; he may be alarmed, and not have the fear of God in his heart; he may receive the word with joy, and be a stranger to the comforts of the Holy Ghost. Let us hear Paul. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

His conceptions are new. His views of himself are changed. He discovers that he is a guilty creature, and deserves to perish; that he is a depraved creature, and that his heart is infinitely worse than his life; "whereby he abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes;" nor does he ever again recover those lofty thoughts of himself he once had. His views of the Saviour are changed. He once neglected or despised him: but now he cries. How great

is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! and deems only those happy, who enjoy and serve him.

His desires are new. He no longer asks, "Who will show us any good?" but he "hungers and thirsts after righteousness." "Yea, doubtless," says he, "and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. That I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." These are the desires of the new creature.

His pleasures are new. The pleasures of sin he abhors. The dissipations of the world he despises; but it is his meat to do the will of his heavenly Father. He calls the sabbath a delight. He is glad when they say unto him, Let us go into the house of the Lord. He finds his word and eats it, and it is unto him the joy and the rejoicing of his heart.

His pains are new. He once felt the sorrow of the world that worketh death; but he now understands that godly sorrow, which worketh repentance unto life. He is not insensible under the afflictions of life; but says he, What is every other loss, to the loss of the soul? O this evil heart of unbelief! O this ingratitude towards the God of my mercy! O this unprofitableness under the means of grace! O this insensibility under the corrections of his Providence! "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" These are the groans of the new creature.

His life is new. In simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he now has his conversation in the world. How shall he that is dead to sin live any longer therein? If he was not vicious before, he now abhors, from disposition, what he once only shunned from selfish motives: if moral before, his morality is now evangelized; and whatsoever he does, "in word or deed, he does all in the name of the Lord Jesus."—After all, this is only a specimen; the proposition is universal in its reference: "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new!" This, however, regards the extent, not the degree of this change. We therefore ask. Thirdly. Is this work produced *instantaneously*, or is it *gradually* advanced to perfection? Were we to affirm, that it is completed at once, we should offend against the generation of God's children; for though believers often question the reality of their religion, they never doubt the imperfection of it. We should lose the evidence of analogy. If we examine the world of nature, we shall see God producing nothing in immediate perfection; but from imperceptible beginnings carrying them, by numberless degrees, to maturity.—Look into the field—there is first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. Look into the fold—there are lambs as well as sheep. Look into the family—there are babes as well as young men: even our Saviour himself "increased in wisdom, and in stature, and in favour with God and man." We should lose the authority of Revelation. For what are the commands of Scripture? "Grow in grace." "Be filled with the Spirit." What are his promises? "They shall grow as the vine. The righteous shall hold on his way, and he

that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." What are its representations? It describes Christians as going "from strength to strength as "renewed day by day as "changed into the same image, from glory to glory." Who then would reject the bud, because it is not the dower; or contemn the dawn, because it is not the day? "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Of whom is it prophesied, "a bruised reed shall he not break, the smoking flax shall he not quench, till he bring forth judgment unto victory"?

Fourthly. Who is the *Author* of this new creation? The question seems answered by the very terms employed. Creation is a work of omnipotence, and belongs exclusively to God. This is not denied in any other instance. Men will allow, that God alone can make a blade of grass; they will allow that in him we live, and move, and have our *natural* being; and yet, with marvellous inconsistency, they would be their own saviours, and derive from themselves that *spiritual* life, which is emphatically called "the life of God," not only to show its resemblance, but its origin. If the stream can rise no higher than the fountain; if no effect can exceed its cause; if no one can bring a clean thing out of an unclean: how is it to be accounted for, that those who were once so depraved as to need a universal change should be in the possession of real holiness? of spiritual excellency? If we appeal to the Scripture, the case is explained. There we shall find this work, in the perfection, the progress, and the commencement, ascribed to the agency of God. We are said to "live in the Spirit:" to "walk in the Spirit:" to be "born of the Spirit." "You hath he quickened,"

says the Apostle, "who were dead in trespasses and sins. You are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."—Having shown what is implied in a "new creature," let us,

II. OBSERVE WHAT IS TO BE INFERRED FROM ITS UNRIVALLED IMPORTANCE. And, "if in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature," this should regulate your inquiries—your prayers—your praise—your esteem and your zeal.

First. It should regulate your *inquiries*. You are commanded in the Scripture to examine yourselves; and, therefore, the examination is necessary. But on what is it to turn? Not on the place, the time, the manner, the means of your conversion, but the reality. Can you say, "one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now *I see*"? On what is it to turn? On that which is of the highest moment. What is it to know that you are right in every thing else; in your opinions of church government, in your views of Divine ordinances, in your notions of Gospel grace; if your heart is not right in the sight of God? Are you "saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost"? This is the question "For in Christ. Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

It should regulate your *prayers*. If you are strangers to this work, an experience of it should be your immediate, your prevailing, your supreme concern. You should lay your unhappy condition to heart. You should reflect on what has been done for millions of your fellow sinners, who are by nature

children of wrath, even as others. You should consider, that what is impossible to man, is easy with God. You should remember, that his power is under the direction of his goodness; and that he is not only the Lord God Almighty, but the God of all grace, and the God of all comfort. You should remember, that he has provided for your weakness and depravity, as well as your guilt, and danger; and that, "if ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father that is in heaven give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him!" At his dear footstool, you should plead and pray, as David did. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Without this, you are undone for ever. Compared with this, every thing else you want is a trifle. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

Thirdly. It should regulate your *praise*. You ought to be thankful for every thing you enjoy: and in a proper frame of mind you will say, with Jacob, "O Lord, I am not worthy of *the least* of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed to thy servant." But gratitude should be wise, and measure out its favours according to the value of the blessing acknowledged. You should be thankful if you are favoured with civil freedom; if you have the comforts of life; if your body is free from pain and disease: but you should be much more so if the Son has made you free; if you have the comforts of the Holy Ghost; if your soul prospers, and is in health. What are temporal good things, compared with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ? The Disciples, on their return, rejoiced in their miraculous

powers; but their Master corrected them, and said, "In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." If God has convinced you of sin, given you the spirit of grace and of supplication, and enabled you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, he has done much more for you, than if he had enabled you, with Balaam, to prophesy, or with Judas, to cast out devils. One of these endowed mortals was slain fighting among the enemies of God's people; and the other went and hanged himself, that he might go to his own place: but he has sealed you with that holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of our inheritance. Here, therefore, call upon your souls, and all that is within you, to bless and praise his holy Name. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Fourthly. It should regulate your *esteem*. It is said of a citizen of Zion, "In his eyes, a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord." And what are all adventitious distinctions, or bodily or mental accomplishments, compared with the grace of God? The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: a man's real worth is his religious worth. But, in judging of this, do not inquire after his particular opinions, his mode of worship, or the denomination to which he belongs; but the evidence he gives of being a partaker of the Divine nature. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ,

he is none of his and if he has, let this be sufficient to endear him. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

Finally. This should regulate your *zeal*. You ought to be concerned to do good: but let it always appear, that your aim is, to win souls to the Redeemer, and not to a party; not to proselyte, but to christianize. To bring men into the way everlasting, is something, is *every* thing; but what is it to detach them from one place of worship, and fix them in another, where the same truth is already preached? When, therefore, a person who gave *little* evidence of her being under the power of godliness, one day, said to an eminent minister, now with God, "Sir, I am going to turn from the Dissenters to the Church;" "Madam," replied he, who knew her disposition, "you are turning from nothing, to nothing." And, says not the Apostle the same? "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

But if our text should regulate our zeal, it should also enliven and increase it. "Brethren," says James, "if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Here is an object worthy of all our powers. And is the attainment practicable? Can we convert a sinner, save a soul, hide a multitude of sins? Yes: the honour, the pleasure,—unspeakable and full of glory,—is placed within our reach. O ye who are the subjects of his grace, be anxious to become the instruments too! Let David's prayer and resolution

be yours—"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

Surely, if there was only a probability, yea, a possibility, of this success, in one instance only, it should be enough to awaken all your powers, and employ all your efforts for life!

"Pleasure and praise run through God's host
To see a sinner turn;
Then Satan hath a captive lost,
And Christ a subject born.

DISCOURSE LXXXIII.

THE HAPPY PARENT.

“My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine.”—PROV. xxiii. 15.

NO person can read the works of Solomon without observing how frequently he addresses the young. Two considerations not only justify his conduct, but render it exemplary. The first is, The probability of success. This, indeed, is only a comparative; for, owing to the depravity of human nature, many attempts to promote the welfare of mankind will fail at every age. How often have the young themselves been “wooded and awed,” admonished and encouraged in vain! Yet, surely, the hope of usefulness is greater before the heart is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and the offender is entrenched in long-established habits of iniquity, which he has learned to defend by those erroneous reasonings which vice always renders necessary. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to evil.” The second is, the importance attached to it. For who

can view the young without concern? Who knows not that they are to fill all future offices? that they are the sources of families and churches? that the nation and the world will be influenced by the character with which they grow up?

In doing good, it is always wise to make those peculiarly our aim by whom, if good is received, it is likely to be multiplied, diffused, perpetuated. Now this is the case with the young. If you do good to an old man, it is of importance to himself; but it is *confined* to himself, and dies with him. But communicate right views and dispositions to a child, and it will be impossible to calculate the degree of his usefulness: for, as he rises up and spreads abroad, he exemplifies and extends them; and, in time, thousands may be improved and blessed by his instruction, his example, and his influence..

Solomon well knew all this: hence he so often bespeaks the attention of youth. And what motive has he not seized and employed in this all-interesting service? Is it the certainty of eternal judgment? "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." Is it old age as the most unfavourable season for commencing a religious course, when infirmities and afflictions, instead of allowing exertion, call for consolation? "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." Is it the peculiar regard of Him, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? "I love them that love me;

and those that seek me early shall find me." Is it the condescension of God in asking for a surrender which he might demand; and addressing not our fear, but our affection? "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." Is it the poignant anguish, or the delightful satisfaction, a child is capable of yielding to those who have the tenderest claims upon him; according as he chooses the way of folly, or of life? "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice; and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice. My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine."

Let us enter into our subject. Solomon was a parent himself: Rehoboam was his son; and, probably, the very person here addressed. You know what a foolish, rash, improvident, irreligious character he proved; yet was he the son of Solomon! And, it Solomon perceived these rising evils when he wrote this passage, with what feelings did he utter the words, "My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice even mine"!

Let us consider Solomon as the representative of every father and mother, and as speaking in their name. Not that all parents are concerned for the spiritual welfare of their children: some have no more regard for the souls of their offspring than if they had none, and were to die like the beasts that perish; but this is what every parent ought to feel, and what every godly parent will feel. Let us consider, I. THE ATTAINMENT REQUIRED. II. THE CONSEQUENCE ANTICIPATED.

I. THE ATTAINMENT REQUIRED. "My son, if thine

heart be wise." A pious youth is said to be wise in heart—

First, to show us that religion is wisdom. I know, my young friends, that some will endeavour to make you think that it is folly, and at your time of life, many who have not been *reasoned* have been *ridiculed* out of every serious notion; for a laugh with you often does more than an argument. But hear what the Judge of all says: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding."

And, though our faith standeth not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God, reason, as well as Scripture, is on our side. Men, the most pre-eminent in every department of genius and learning; men, who perfectly understood the value and force of evidence; men, the last in the world to be the dupes of delusion—these men have expressed a conviction of mind with regard to the truth and importance of Revelation, such as they felt upon no other subject.

Yea, and even those who are so wise in their own conceit, and even treat the godly as visionaries and madmen, will, in a very little time, change their sentiments and their language, and exclaim, "We fools counted their lives madness, and their end to be without honour! Now are they numbered with the children of God, and their lot is among the saints!"

It is a fine representation which the apostle John gives us of vital Christianity, when he says, "we have

an unction from the Holy One, and we know all things." Not that a Christian is taught the secrets of nature, the inventions of art, the mysteries of politics and trade: in all these he may be inferior to a man of the world. But he knows all that is essential to his safety and welfare. He is made "wise unto salvation." He is "wise towards God." He knows himself. And he knows the Saviour of sinners. He that is ignorant of *Him* knows nothing; he that knows *Him* knows every thing.

Secondly. That this wisdom is not notional; but consists principally in dispositions and actions. Speculative knowledge is, indeed, necessary to experimental and practical; but does not always produce it. We often find accurate and strong convictions exerting no influence, beyond the understanding. Nothing is so certain as death; and "the living *know* that they shall die," and yet do they live as those who expect it? A man knows that the body is nothing to the soul, or time to eternity: and yet the grand question with him is, not "What must I do to be saved?" but, "What shall I eat, and what shall I drink, and where withal shall I be clothed? "How many are there, who hear the Gospel, and even acquiesce in the doctrine of the Fall, and our recovery, and yet never fall at the feet of the Recoverer, crying, "Lord, save: I perish!" They are Christian in their creed; and infidel in their conduct. Religion has to do "with the heart;" and a knowledge that does not reach the heart, and govern the heart, is nothing. Knowledge is to be viewed in the order of means; and when it does not answer its end, it is considered by the sacred writers as ignorance. Because he that does not know

him to purpose, does not know him savingly; they will not allow that a man knows God at all—who does not trust in him, and love him, and obey him “They that know thy Name, will put their trust in thee.”—“He that loveth not, knoweth not God. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” To believe these things, and to feel them; to know these things, and to do them—this is to be wise in heart: and nothing less than this is the promise of the new covenant; “I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.”

II. THE CONSEQUENCE ANTICIPATED: “My son, if thine heart be wise, *my heart shall rejoice, even mine.*” Pious children afford their parents pleasure, on three principles:

I. A principle of *benevolence*. They rejoice in the salvation of every sinner. They would rejoice to hear of the conversion of an enemy. There is no room for envy in the Church, for there is enough and to spare, however multiplied the partakers: and nothing is so remote from a Christian’s disposition as a wish to exclude or monopolize. Instead of repelling, he invites: “O taste, and see, that the Lord is good: come with us, and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” And can he be indifferent to the spiritual welfare of those to whom he is united by the ties of flesh and blood? Does religion prohibit relative affection? Yea, it requires, it enlivens, it sanctifies it; and causes the possessor to cry, “How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred!”

II. A principle of *piety*. God is peculiarly pleased and glorified by the sacrifices of early religion, in which choice, and not compulsion, influences the offerer. An old man regards devotion as a refuge, rather than a temple; and takes hold of the horns of the altar, not to hind his victim there, but to escape from being a victim himself. He only forsakes the world—when he can enjoy it no longer; and leaves his sins when they leave him.—Does he present to God his soul? All its powers are wasted and destroyed. Does he yield his body? It is a worn-out instrument in the service of sin. But the young do not insult him with the leavings of the world, the flesh, and the devil. They do not put him off with the refuse of life; they consecrate to him the first-born of their days, the first-fruits of their reason and affections; they give him the prime of their being, and while others too are powerfully soliciting their regards. And can a Christian be devoid of the love of God? Can he be indifferent to efforts, by which his Divine Benefactor is so signally delighted and honoured? Can he see a soldier so early entering his army, a servant so early engaging in his service, a worshipper so early approaching his altar—and see in this soldier, this servant, this worshipper of God, his own offspring—and not glow with the sentiment, “My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine”?

III. A principle of *self-interest*. We must distinguish between self-interest and selfishness; and between a sinful self-love and a righteous self-love. “Thou shalt love,” says the Law, “thy neighbour as thyself.” This clearly allows and requires a proper love to ourselves; and with this the design of

religion falls in, which is the advancement of our welfare. Now on this ground the piety of children delights parents, because,

First. It affords them evidence of the answer of their prayers, and the success of their endeavours. How mortifying is it to run in vain, and labour in vain! How painful to see an object of peculiar solicitude and attention baffling every effort, and disappointing every expectation! But how pleasing is it to sow, and then reap! to plant, and water, and prune, and then gather the increase! How delightful to a parent to see that his instructions have not been lost; that his tears have not flowed in vain; that his God has not turned a deaf ear when his big heart cried "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" And what a blessed stimulus and encouragement is this to future supplication and zeal!

Secondly. because it becomes the means of their usefulness. It is by such children parents hope to serve their generation according to the will of God. "What, a pleasure is it," says the father, "that I am not sending into the neighbourhood and the nation a number of mischiefs and curses, children that are corrupters, such as will lead many to wish that the wretch who had begot them had been childless; but such as will attach the purest honour to my name, and lead numbers to say, as they witness the amiableness and beneficence of my offspring, 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked!'"

Thirdly. Because it insures the proper returns of duty. It is natural for a parent to wish for reverence and affection; for gratitude and obedience; for assistance and comfort; especially when they feel the

infirmities of nature, or meet with the afflictions of life. Who does not say, "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old"! Who does not tremble at the threatening, "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it"! But pious principle is the best security for moral practice. He who fears God, and confides in him, is the only one that will feel the authority of the command and the truth of the promise, "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." And, my young friends, be assured of this, there can be no piety where morality is wanting. An undutiful child can never be a partaker of divine grace.

Fourthly. Because it will free them from a thousand bitter anxieties. Here let me suppose a few of the cases in which children peculiarly interest the feelings and fears of their parents; and in which nothing but a hope of their piety can set their hearts at rest.

Such is *their removal from home*. Children, in common, are soon sent to school, or articed to business; or, in humbler life, placed abroad as servants. When this is the case, they are no longer under the eye and the wing of their parents; and frequently their intercourse with them is very slender. Some places and situations are more dangerous than others; but none are free from moral hazards to youth: and what can relieve the anxiety of a parent, but a confidence in the religious principles and dispositions of his child—that these, when he has no other witness, will remind him of an omnipresent Inspector, the Judge

of all and lead him to exclaim, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Such is *their taking any important step in life*.— Nothing awakens the concern of parents more than the settlement of their children in marriage: and nothing can delight them more than to find them disposed to "marry in the Lord;" for such a connexion only can secure the discharge of all mutual duty, and draw down the blessing of God; enable them to "walk together as heirs of the grace of life, that their prayers be not hindered and "seek a godly seed." But what, except the power of religion, can guarantee them against the influence of beauty, or talent, or wealth, or honour; and induce them to look after godliness as the one thing needful?

Such is *the nature of their condition in the world*. A parent cannot be insensible to the temporal estate of his children, whether they be regarded or despised; rich or poor; comfortably provided for, or struggling with the hardships of life. But *this* can comfort him, in all circumstances: "My child is only a stranger and pilgrim upon earth. He has a better country. God is his portion and his guide. He possesses that grace which, if he prospers, will preserve him; or, if he be afflicted, will support him. He has the wisdom which is from above, and knows how to be abased, and how to abound; and can do all things through Christ, who strengthens him."

Such is *their being bereaved of their dearest relatives*. How often are parents distressed at the thought of leaving their offspring behind them, especially as the hour of their dissolution draws near! "Ah! soon their guardian and comforter will be removed far from them, and they may become a prey to cunning

or oppression. Soon their cries, if injured, will not reach my ears; or the news, if well treated, gladden my heart. What a world I am leaving them in! What errors, what vices, what examples will assail them! ‘Holy Father, keep, through thy own Name, those whom thou hast given me.’” If, in the midst of all this, he knows that they have chosen God as “the guide of their youth,” and hears God saying, “Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive,” the shadow of death is turned into the morning. “I shall not leave them orphans. He will take them up; and more than supply the place of every creature.”

But let us suppose *another case*. In the order of nature, parents die before their children: but this order is sometimes reversed; and parents are called to close the eyes of those on whom they relied to close their own. But who can imagine the anguish of a father or mother, at the death of an ungodly child? Whose heart does not bleed for David? “And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” But the bitterness of death is past, when the pious father, as he views his earthly hope closing in the grave, can say, “Well, thou art hastening away from the evil to come. My loss is thy eternal gain. Thou hast not been born in vain, nor in vain have been my labour and expense in rearing thee. Thou art an immortal now. Thou art equal to the angels. Our separation is but short. Soon shall I overtake thee, and ‘we shall be for ever with the Lord!’” No; that parent is not half so

much to be pitied who has buried a young saint, as he that is mourning over a living sinner. Pointing to the grave, in which he had just lodged the remains of a pious youth, a father was one day heard to say, though with a quivering lip—"I do not weep for *that* dear child—he *was* my comfort and *is* my comfort but for him, who is still alive, and is 'bringing down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.'"

Let me conclude:

First. By addressing those who, instead of being a joy to their parents, are only their grief. And with what vile ingratitude are you chargeable! Need I tell you what claims your parents have upon you? With what tenderness did they treat you in your infancy! What nights of watching, what days of confinement, what instances of self-denial, have they passed through in training you up to youth! What pains and cost have they incurred in furnishing you with food and raiment; and affording you an education which, perhaps, their circumstances with difficulty allowed! And do you thus requite them?—You may one day have children of your own; and "with the same measure ye mete, it may be measured to you again!" Undutiful children commonly meet with undutiful children. "I knew," says Dr. Doddridge, "a son; in his passion he struck his father down, and dragged him by the hair of his head. When he had drawn him a certain distance, he cried out, Drag me no further—for *here* I let my father go when I dragged him!" For this reason, oh! young man, never choose for a wife a daughter that has been a disrespectful daughter. And, oh! young woman, never choose for thy husband a son who has been a disobedient son. Bad behaviour in a private condi-

tion is a preparation for bad behaviour in a public one; and the curse of God is likely to attend such disreputable companions.

We read of murderers of fathers, and murderers of mothers! a charge at which you revolt; a crime that makes you shudder. But, remember, there are more ways of destroying a parent than by poison, or a blow! You may destroy their reputation; you may break their peace of mind; you may undermine their frame, and bring on premature decays, by the corrosions of anxiety and fear. We lately read in a foreign journal of an advocate who was desired to undertake the defence of a young man, charged with a serious crime. He went to his prison to obtain documents—and—in the criminal he instantly recognized—his own son, of whom he had not heard for a length of time! The sight upset his reason; and he went home, and put an end to his existence. Hast thou a father or mother in the grave, whose heart was broken by thy vice and disobedience? How deeply shouldst thou humble thyself, and repent in dust and ashes, under a consciousness of thy guilt! Hast thou a parent yet alive, to whom thou hast been only a trial and a torment? Oh! hasten to make what atonement thou canst, by confession and amendment; and become the consolation of those who are saying, “My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine.” And here allow me the liberty of introducing two anecdotes: the one, to awaken your fear; the other, to operate, if you have any, upon your tenderness.

A pious father, in writing to his friend, says, “I lately dreamed that the day of judgment was come. I saw the Judge on his great white throne, and all

nations were gathered before him. I and my wife were on the right hand—but I could not see my children. I said, ‘I cannot bear this—I must go and seek them.’ I went to the left hand of the Judge, and there found them all, standing in the utmost despair. As soon as they saw me they caught hold of me, and cried,—‘Oh, father, we will never part!’ I said, ‘My dear children, I am come to try, if possible, to get you out of this awful situation.’ So I took them all with me; but when we were come near the Judge, I thought he cast an angry look, and said, ‘What do thy children with thee now? They would not take thy warning when on earth, and they shall not share thy happiness in heaven. Depart, ye cursed.’ At these words I awoke in agony and horror.”

But you say, “This was only a dream.” Admitted. But a reality, equally dreadful, will be exemplified in many. Oh! what cruel separations will the last day witness! It was but a dream; yet the relation of it was the means of impressing serious conviction on the minds of several of the children.

A minister from England, happening, some time since, to be at E—b—gh, he was accosted by a young man in the street, with an apology for the liberty he was taking: “I think, Sir,” said he, “I have heard you at ——— Chapel.” “You probably may, Sir; for I have sometimes ministered there.” “Do you remember,” said he, “a note put up by an afflicted widow, begging the prayers of the congregation, for the conversion of an ungodly son?” “I do very well remember such a circumstance.” “Sir,” said he, “I am the very person; and wonderful to tell, the prayer was effectual. Going, with some other abandoned

young men, one Sunday, through, ——— and passing by the chapel, I was struck with its appearance. We agreed to go in and mingle with the crowd, and stop for a few minutes, to laugh and mock at the preacher and the people. We had just entered, when you, Sir, read the note, requesting the prayers of the congregation for an afflicted widow's profligate son. I heard it with a sensation I cannot express. I was struck to the heart: and though I had no idea that I was the very individual meant, I felt, that it expressed the bitterness of a widow's heart, who had a child so wicked as I felt myself to be. My mind was instantly solemnized. I could not laugh: my attention was riveted on the preacher. I heard his prayer and sermon with an impression very different from that which had carried me into the place. From that moment, the truths of the Gospel penetrated my heart; I joined the congregation; cried to God in Christ for mercy, and found peace in believing; became my mother's comfort, as I had been her heavy cross, and, through grace, have ever since continued in the good ways of the Lord. An opening having been made for an advantageous settlement in my own country, I came hither with my excellent mother, and, for some years past, have endeavoured to dry up the widow's tears, which I had so often caused to flow, and to be the comfort and support of her age, as I had been the torment and affliction of her days." Secondly. Let me address parents. Perhaps here are some who are strangers to the pleasure of which we have been speaking. Will you allow me to ask—Whether your affliction has not been your fault? Have you discharged your duty towards your children, I will not say perfectly, but conscientiously? God

works by means. And do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? It would be little less than a moral miracle, if the children of some professors of religion were pious—such inconsistencies are they called to witness, which, in their influence, are worse than absolute neglect.

But if, “in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, you have had your conversation in the world, and more abundantly to them-ward,” and your “house is not so with God” as you desire,—yield not to despair. Never cease to pray and to admonish. Some shower of rain may cause the seed, which has long been buried under the dryness of the soil, to strike root, and spring up. ‘Manasseh had a pious education, and yet went great lengths in transgression; but in his affliction he sought the Lord God of his fathers, and he was found of him.—“Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.”

But, all hail, ye highly favoured of the Lord, who enjoy this felicity! What satisfaction can equal that which a parent feels in seeing his children growing up intelligent and amiable, and pious and useful; approved of God, and acceptable to man! If there be a sight on earth sufficient to detain an angel in his passage, it is a father and mother surrounded with the pledges of their mutual affection, endeared by grace as well as nature, rising up and calling them blessed!

Parents! God grant you this heaven, till you are removed to another—where, presenting yourselves at his throne, you will say, “BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN THOU HAST GIVEN ME!” Amen.

DISCOURSE LXXXIV.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

“And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”—EPHES. iii. 19.

As the minister addresses the people on the behalf of God, so he addresses God on the behalf of the people. Preaching and prayer are parts of his office, equally indispensable; and there is an encouraging relation between them. The one is the resource of the other. For a good minister of Jesus Christ does not look for success as the consequence of his own reasoning, or eloquence, or energy; he is convinced of the depravity of human nature, and has observed how often the most powerful instruments have failed. What then animates him? Why this—He knows that the means are of Divine appointment; that God giveth the increase; that nothing is too hard for him. He, therefore, invokes his aid, and pleads the promise—“For, as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may

give seed to the sower, and bread to the cater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Paul is here praying for the Ephesians, in language the most sublime and significant: "For this cause I bow my knees unto 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; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God."

In the words which we have selected for our present improvement, three things demand our attention.

I. AN INTERESTING SUBJECT—It is *the love of Christ*. II. A DESIRABLE ATTAINMENT—It is *to know it*. III. A BLESSED CONSEQUENCE—It is "*to be filled with all the fulness of God*."

I. AN INTERESTING SUBJECT'—It is the "*love of Christ*." The love of Christ would furnish us with a thousand sources of reflection; but we shall confine ourselves to one view of it only. It is the incomprehensibility of this love. This is the view of it which the apostle himself here takes. He tells us it "passeth knowledge." This is the noblest commendation he could have pronounced; and it would be easy to prove, that it is as just as it is glorious.

Witness the *number of its objects*. It is but a few that the bounties of a human benefactor reaches and

relieves. We pity an individual. We take up a family. We explore a neighbourhood. The liberality of a THORNTON flows in various channels, through different parts of a country. The compassion of a HOWARD visits the miserable in other lands, after weeping over the dungeoned victims of his own. But a "multitude, which no man can number, out of every nation, and people, and tongue, and kindred," will for ever adore the riches of the Redeemer's love. We shall hereafter see that his love has not been circumscribed by the piety of our fears, by the uncharitableness of our censures, or the mistakes of our creed. "All nations shall be blessed in him, all generations shall call him blessed. As the stars of heaven, and as the sand on the sea-shore, so shall his seed be." This is indeed Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Witness the *value of its benefits*. You feel your obligation to some of your fellow-creatures, and let them not be forgotten: they have pleaded for your reputation; they have befriended your business; they have relieved your distress; they have preserved your life: but which of them has restored you to the favour of God? Which of them has obtained eternal redemption for you? It is impossible, while we are here, sufficiently to estimate the effects of his love. We know but imperfectly the evils from which he has delivered us. What do we know of the vileness of sin, the sting of death, the curse of the Law, the wrath of God? We know but imperfectly the contents of those exceeding great and precious promises to which he has entitled us. We know but imperfectly the import of the hope "laid up for us in heaven the meaning of "a crown of glory that

fadeth not away," of "beholding his face in righteousness," of "awaking up after his likeness," of "a glorious body like his own." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." "Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!"

Witness *the unworthiness of the partakers*. Whatever others may think of themselves, a Christian will readily acknowledge that he had done nothing to recommend himself; that he had done every thing to provoke and justify the Divine displeasure; that he was not only miserable, but guilty, and criminal even in his distress. Oh! this magnifies the love of Christ—it was entirely self-moved! Love, among creatures, originates from some excellency, real or imaginary. In our alms we look after something that seems to deserve what we profess to give. Mere want and wretchedness are not sufficient for our compassion, without some plea. Persons, therefore, endeavour to convince us that they have been unfortunate rather than criminal; they know that more is won from us by extenuation than confession. We wait for application. We refuse till the suppliant owns his dependence, and feels our consequence. There is little—little, indeed, of true charity among men! But "*He* is found of them that sought him not." He awakens our attention. He presses us to receive. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die." But we were ungodly. We were enemies by wicked works—yet "for the vilest of the vile he dies!"

Witness *the expensiveness of its sacrifices*. The only quality in the love of many is its cheapness. It will endure no kind of self-denial. If they embrace an opportunity of doing good, they will never seek one. They may dip their hand into a full purse, and give a trifle of what they are convinced they cannot expend upon themselves; but they shun the trouble of inquiry, and the pain of sympathy: they will not visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. Few resemble the poor woman in the Gospel, who, while others gave of their abundance, and could go home to a well-spread table afterward, gave all that she had, even all her living for the day; determined that her charity should be sure, however uncertain her subsistence. But *His* love drew him from heaven to earth. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Trace him in the humiliation of his life. Behold him in his agony in the garden. See his soul exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. See him nailed to the cross, exclaiming, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!"

"See! from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love How, mingled, down."

Saviour Jesus! never was sorrow like thine; and, therefore, never was love like thine! It "passeth knowledge."

Witness the *perpetuity of its attachment*. How rare is a friend that loveth at all times! How many fail, especially in the day of trouble! Who has not leaned on a broken reed, and bled for his dependence? Who has not had reason to complain, with Job, "My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the

stream of brooks they pass away; which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: what time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place”? But loving his own who are in the world, he loves them unto the end, and will afford them proof of it whenever they need his aid. He has said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” “For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” Nothing appears to the Christian more wonderful than this. “Oh!” says he, “how have I tried him! How incorrigible have I been under affliction! How ungrateful for all my mercies! How unedified by means and ordinances! How often have I charged him foolishly and unkindly, while he was displaying his wisdom and goodness; and blamed him for doing the very things I had a thousand times implored! Oh! had he human passions—were he a creature only—I had long ago been forsaken. But he is God, and not man; therefore I am not consumed.”

Witness the *tenderness of its regards*. To know this you must be familiar with the language of the Scripture; your very souls must melt into such expressions as these: “He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. A bruised reed will

he not break, and smoking flax will he not quench. In all their affliction he was afflicted. He that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities." You must be—I was going to say, a father, and a tender one—"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." You must be—I was going to say, a mother, and the tenderest that ever breathed—"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." You must hold communion with him, you must be intimate with him, in order to know—the mildness of his censures; the gentleness of his reproofs; the kindness of his communications; the delicacy of his encouragements. O ye models of sensibility: ye Josephs! ye Jonathans! ye Davids! ye Rachels! be ashamed of your tears! Your hearts are flint compared with his: "his heart is made of tenderness; his bowels melt with love!" Blessed Jesus! we know thou hast loved us; but we know not how much—and angels know not how much—It "passeth knowledge."

II. Here is A DESIRABLE ATTAINMENT—It is *to know it*.

But does not the Apostle say, that this love "passeth knowledge"? How then does he pray, that we may know it? Can we know that which is unknowable? I answer, we may know that in one respect which we cannot know in another; we may know that by grace which we cannot know by nature; we may know that, in the reality of its existence, which we cannot know in the mode; we may know that, in the effects, which we cannot know in the cause; we may know that, in its uses, which we cannot know in its

nature; we may know that increasingly, which we cannot know perfectly.

Let us apply this to the subject before us. Though the love of Christ passeth knowledge, we may know much more of it than we do. The knowledge of a Christian is gradual, and growing. He is always a learner. He will know many things in eternity of which he is ignorant in time. He will know many things as he advances in the Divine life of which he is ignorant at the commencement. There are many things which, for a time, he cannot receive: but, in proportion as divine grace works in him, to humble the pride of his heart; to render him willing to be saved in the Lord's own way, and to place himself under his guidance; crooked things are made straight, and rough places plain. Thus his path resembles "the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Thus it is promised: "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." An instance of which we have in Nathanael: he had little knowledge; but he was "an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile;" he was open to conviction, and willing to come to the light; and therefore, says our Lord, "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." We therefore observe, with regard to your knowledge of this love,

First. Your ideas of it may be more clear and consistent. There is a kind of mistiness which envelops the minds of some people: they see every thing dimly; or, like the man, when his eyes were

half-opened, who saw men as trees walking. A confusion seems to reign in all their religious conceptions: they have no distinguishing views of the difference between the Law and the Gospel; justification and sanctification: the ground of the one, and the means of the other. They cannot reconcile duty and privilege; dependence and activity; a sense of our unworthiness, with a confidence of our acceptance. It is impossible for us to determine, with how much ignorance in the judgment real grace may be found connected; yet it is very desirable to have judicious and consistent views of Divine things; a clear and full knowledge of the Gospel. "It is a good thing," says the Apostle, "that the heart be established with grace."

Secondly. Your views of it may be more confidential and appropriating. Your doubts and fears, with regard to your own interest in it, may yield to hope; and that hope may become the full assurance of hope. The Saviour you now admire you may be able to claim as your own; and to exult, "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

Thirdly. Your views of it may be more impressive, more influential. It is to be lamented, that our speculative religion so far exceeds our experimental and practical. How often does the will refuse to bow to the dictates of the judgment! What a war is there often in our bosoms, between conscience and inclination! Who knows not the difference there is

between a principle slumbering in the head, and alive in the heart, and at work in the life? "The living know that they shall die," that their time here is short and uncertain; and that "what a man soweth, that shall he also reap." But where is the efficacy of the belief? And, though they look for such things, how few are there who live in a state of holy preparation for them! We find no difficulty in admitting that God does all things well, in the government of the world, and in the management of our individual concerns. The natural consequence would be, to preserve us from murmuring and envying; to induce us to cast all our care upon Him who careth for us; and to feel a peace "which passeth all understanding, keeping our heart and mind through Christ Jesus." But whose creed gets into his temper, and actuates his conduct?—The grand thing is, so to know the love of Christ as to walk becoming it; to be what it requires; for all our feelings to echo back the language of the Apostle: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." For our whole life to be a kind of shout—"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

III. This leads us to remark, A BLESSED CONSEQUENCE: "That ye may be filled with all the fulness of God." If we consider man in his natural state, he is empty of God; if in his glorified state, he is full of God, or, as the Apostle says, "God is all in all;" but, in his gracious state, he has a degree of both his

original emptiness and his final plenitude. He is not what he was; neither is he what he will be. His state is neither night nor day; but dawn: the darkness is going off, and the splendour is coming on. He is thankful for what, he has; but he wants more of the presence and the image of God. He wants to be "filled [I use the language of Scripture] with the Spirit;" to be "filled with all joy and peace in believing;" to be "filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God." This is what the apostle Peter recommends, when he says: "Giving all diligence, add to your 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." This is what Paul exemplified in his own person: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also 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 toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And this is what he here means by "all the fulness of God."

But what has the knowledge of the love of Christ to do with this? It is indeed easy to see how it will add to the plenitude of our comfort: how it will inspire us with "a joy that is unspeakable and full

of glory." And need you be told, that "the joy of the Lord is our strength: "and that the Christian is never so active in duty as when he enjoys a sense of his privileges!

But take it with regard to holiness. Some would suppose that the knowledge we have been speaking of is a mere notion; or, if it has any tendency, it is of a licentious, rather than of a sanctifying nature; that it must tend to set men loose to duty, rather than to make them practical Christians. Hence they imagine the Christian an Antinomian, where, if they could read his heart, they would find in him most of the devotedness of real piety, But so it is: we cannot make these things plain and easy and unexceptionable to the natural man: for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man." He knows others, though others know not him. The reason is, he has been in their state, but they have never been in his. They are not, therefore, acquainted with the nature and force of those principles and motives which are peculiar to him as a new creature. But he feels and glories in them. Haul knew that the only way to be filled with the fulness of God, is "to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." It was this that *fully* possessed and governed himself and his fellow-labourers: "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose

again.” “And my experience,” says the Christian, “confirms it. If my heart is contracted, this love enlarges it; if cold, this love inflames it; if burning, this love adds fuel to the fire. This makes difficult things easy, and bitter ones sweet. This turns all my duty into delight. This determines me to confess him before men, and emboldens me to go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach. This induces me, not only to avoid, but to abhor sin. This disarms temptation of its power, and weans me from a world that crucified my Lord and Saviour.

“His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o’er his body on the tree;
Then am I dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.”

What remains then, but to make this love your lesson, and your study! For this purpose, daily impress your minds with the importance of knowing it. Remember that all other knowledge is dross, compared with this gold. A man may know much, to his own pride, and the admiration of others: he may be familiar with the secrets of nature; he may have the knowledge of the arts and sciences; he may be a deep politician, and a profound linguist: he may know the Scripture, in the history; and Christianity itself, in the theory—and live and die a fool. A man may go to hell, silently, by hypocrisy; openly, by profaneness: he may go self-righteously, with the pharisee; or learnedly, with the scholar! A man knows nothing with regard to his soul and eternity, if he knows not the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge—“*This is life eternal.*”

If you would make proficiency in this knowledge, the following things are necessary:

Retirement is necessary. "Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom." This is peculiarly the case here. This subject is not for the crowd, but the closet. Friendship deals much in secrecy: especially the friendship between the Saviour and the soul. "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and there will I speak comfortably unto her." It is thus that he manifests himself to his people, and not unto the world.

Application is necessary. You must not only retire, but place the subject before your mind. You must survey it in its attributes and relations. You must learn to meditate, and meditate till the exercise becomes habitual and delightful. Then you will be able to say, "My meditation of him shall be sweet. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee."

Intercourse is necessary. There are Christians far superior to you in age and attainments; and these are not confined to your own level in the world. Many below you in condition may be above you in experience; and have much to tell you of a Saviour's grace. By mingling with them your doubts may be removed, your confidence strengthened, and "your hearts comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Reading is necessary. We forbid not other books; but the Scripture is the word of Christ, which is to “dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” This testifies of Him; and of nothing so much as his unexampled love.

Hearing is necessary. If the minister be a Christian minister, (and it is at your peril to place yourselves under any other—for you are to take heed not only *how* you hear, but also *what* you hear,) he will “determine to know nothing among you, but Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Prayer is above all things necessary. In other schools the pupils learn fitting; but in the school of Christ they all learn upon their knees. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” Hence Paul prayed for the Ephesians—Hence your ministers pray for you—God help you to pray for yourselves—“*That, you may know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, and he filled with all the fulness of God.*”

DISCOURSE LXXXV.

BLESSINGS UNIMPROVED RESUMED BY THEIR OWNER.

“For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flux.”—HOSEA ii. 8, 9.

IF you are accustomed to reflection, two subjects must often present themselves to your minds. They are—the goodness of God, and the wickedness of man. These subjects are equally obvious and common; and though the one is as painful as the other is pleasing, we must not turn away from it. Nor must we, in the exemplification, so think of our fellow-creatures as to forget ourselves. We frequently condemn the Jews for their unbelief, ingratitude, and rebellion; yet, instead of casting stones, it would be better to kneel and confess—

“Great God, how oft did Israel prove,
By turns, thy anger and thy love!
There in a glass our hearts may see
How fickle and how false they be.”

They were fair sped mens of human nature; and we have no reason to believe that we should have been better than they, had we been placed under the same dispensation: yea, have we not proved ourselves worse, under superior advantages? Let us consider,

I. The source of our mercies.

II. Our guilt in the use of them.

III. Their removal. "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax."

I. THE SOURCE OF OUR MERCIES. *I gave her—"I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold."*

Here we do not refer to those blessings, which we call spiritual. These it should be our principal concern to obtain: for these alone can afford satisfaction to the mind, and yield up a hope beyond the grave. If the inquiry concerned these, I trust we should be prepared to join in the acknowledgment of the apostle: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." But we now speak of temporal good things. He who is the Saviour of the soul has provided also for the body; and his bounty ministers, not only to our support, but our delight. "He giveth us," says the apostle, "richly all things to enjoy." "He daily," says David, "loadeth us with his benefits." In these declarations we see, not only the plenitude of these mercies, but the author of them. To establish in your minds the conviction, that God is the giver of all you

possess, I could add a number of testimonies from the sacred writers; and remark, in particular, that our Saviour has taught us to pray for them—"Give us day by day our daily bread." But it is needless to enlarge. There is one tiling, however, concerning which it is of importance to admonish you. "Never suffer instruments to keep your thoughts from God."

There is, First, *unconscious* instrumentality. This wakes in what we call nature. The sun, the air, the rain, the earth, the seasons, are all essential to the welfare of man. But how could this do us any good, without God? Their operation, and their very being, depend upon him. "*He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good. The day is his, the night also is his. He hath made summer and winter. His paths drop down fatness.*"—"It shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saitli the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel."

There is, Secondly, *voluntary* instrumentality. Thus our fellow-creatures may do us good, in a thousand ways; and are we to feel towards them, only, as we do towards a bridge that carries us over a river, or a spring that refreshes us in our journey? *They* act knowingly and freely in relieving us, and display the noblest principles of their nature. And we are not only allowed, but required to be grateful towards them. And a man that is destitute of gratitude has no good principle that we can rely upon. But here again, God has higher claims upon us:—for, who placed these friends and benefactors in our way? Who endowed them with their ability? Who

inspired them with their disposition? Who gave us favour in their eyes?

There is, Thirdly, *personal* instrumentality. Few of the good things of this life are obtained without some exertions of our own. Indeed, if they were they would not be half so sweet: it is what a man gains by his own skill and diligence that is so peculiarly dear and precious—"Thou shalt eat the labour of thy hand." But are we then to turn Chaldeans? of whom it is said; "They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag; therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous." But from whom have we derived our natural talents and the prudence which results from experience and observation? "Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken and hear my speech. Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rye in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart-wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working." Whose providence fixed us

in a situation favourable to our efforts; and ordered those opportunities, without which our attempts might have been in vain? Where is the wisdom of a man, who sees not that his plans depended upon a multitude of events over which he had not the least control; any one of which might have rendered foolish that scheme which now appears so wise—and that undertaking fatal which now appears so flourishing? Where is the piety of the man who does not own the agency of God in his most successful endeavours, and say, with Solomon, “The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it”? This is the grand lesson which Moses gave to the indulged Israelites; “Lest, when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; and thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.”

II. This brings us, from the source of our mercies, to OUR GUILT IN THE USE OF THEM. “For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.” Here are two charges: *ignorance*, and *perversion*.

First. *Ignorance*. “She knew not that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold.” God does much more good in this world than is ever known. He has done each of you countless

acts of kindness, of which you have never been aware. For instance—From how many evils have you been preserved, by night and by day, abroad and at home, of which you were not sensible, because the danger was hidden, by the very interposition that hindered it! lint sometimes you have seen your danger. The fire had begun to consume your property. The disease had suspended you over the grave. The accident had scarcely missed the child's life; and the Lord, in delivering, made "bare his arm." And yet, perhaps, you were oidy struck with the wonderfulness of the event; or your gratitude was a mere notion, vanishing "as the morning cloud, and early dew."

For a distinction is here necessary. There are two kinds of knowledge: the one speculative, the other practical. The former is nothing without the latter: it is no better than ignorance; and as such it is always considered in the Scripture. Thus the apostle John tells us, "He that loveth not, knoweth not God." And again, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." When a man is really convinced of sin, and is taught the truth as it is in Jesus, though he had often read of it, and heard of it, he naturally says, "I never knew this before." It is said, the sons of Eli were sons of lielial, "and knew not the Lord:" it cannot mean that men of their education and office were unable to distinguish the God of Israel from idols; but they did not act as those who were acquainted with him, and professed to serve him. "Know them that labour among you," says the apostle: that is, own them, and conduct yourselves properly towards them. It is in vain, there-

fore, to say, this charge does not apply to us: we are not ignorant; we know that God gives us all we enjoy. Yes; but do you know, so as to be impressed and influenced by it? This is the accusation: they know not, so as to feel, and speak, and live, as if they knew. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people do not consider."

But here is a Second charge. It is *perversion*. "She knew not that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal." Instead of using them in the service and for the glory of God, they appropriated them to the use of idols! This is worse than the former: as insult exceeds indifference; and opposition, neglect. What would you feel more provoking than for a man to borrow of you in order to publish a libel upon your character? What would you have thought, if, when Jonathan gave him his sword and his bow, David had instantly wounded him with his own weapons? Yet is not God thus perpetually affronted and dishonoured? Does not the swearer employ the very breath he continues in blaspheming him? Does not the drunkard take what was designed for his nourishment and refreshment, and offer it in sacrifice to his vile appetite, to the injury of his health, and disgrace of his reason? Is not the raiment, given to cover and screen us, made to minister to pride, and to excite unhallowed passions? Genius and learning are valuable in themselves, and may be applied to purposes the most useful: yet how often have they pandered for lewdness and infidelity! The tongue, "wherewith bless we God, even the Father, often curses men, who are made after the similitude of

God! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

III. Observe THE REMOVAL. "Then will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax." What a number of reflections arise from this part of our subject!

First. We see how precarious every thing earthly is! "Riches make to themselves wings, and flee away:" they are called "uncertain riches." Honour hangs upon the wavering tongue of the multitude; and our laurels wither as we wear them. Children often disappoint our fondest hopes. Friends die. Our strength is not the strength of stones. Who knows how soon he may be "made to possess months of vanity, and have wearisome nights appointed unto him"? "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity."

Secondly. God withdraws our comforts, as well as gives them. "I will return and take them away," says God. "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil: I, the Lord, do all these things." Job knew who had robbed him of his substance: but he said, "the Lord hath taken away." We exclaim, "O, it was that unlucky servant; it was that perfidious friend; it was that malicious enemy but old Eli would say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Our Lord knew that Peter would deny him, and Judas betray him, and Herod

insult him, and Pikitte condemn him, and the Jews crucify him: yet he speaks only of God: "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

Thirdly. We learn that God does not relinquish his propriety in any of his blessings, when he bestows them: "I will take away *my* corn, and *my* wine, and will recover *my* wool and *my* flax." Still they are his: and, therefore, when he comes for them, he comes not to rob, but to resume.

"The dear delights we here enjoy,
And fondly *call* our own,
Are but short favours *borrow'd* now,
To be *repaid* anon."

Fourthly. He often removes our blessings and comforts when they seem most attractive, most necessary; when their loss is least expected, and we are rejoicing to see them flourish!—"I will take away my corn *in the time* thereof, and my wine *in the season*." So it was with Jonah, his gourd was not only removed, but in the very time thereof. "The Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said. It is better for me to die than to live."

Again. God does not deprive us of our enjoyments without a cause. "Therefore says he "because

they acknowledged not that I indulged them: and employed my mercies for Baal: therefore will I return, and take them away." God gives freely; but he takes away justly: he is a sovereign in the one, but not in the other. "Why," says he, "will you be stricken anymore?" And he himself answers the question: "Ye will revolt more and more." "My strokes are continued only because your provocations are renewed." "Me does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men: but our own wickedness corrects us, and our backslidings reprove us." It is our non-improvement, it is our abuse of our mercies that endangers them. And, upon this principle, who has not reason to tremble? who would have a right under bereavement to complain? Which of our blessings have we not frequently forfeited? which of them has not caused us "to go a whoring from God"?—"It is of the Lord's mercies that *we* are not consumed; because his compassions fail not."

Finally. His conduct, in the removal of our joys, looks forward as well as backward: he is not only the righteous Governor, but the tender Father; he punishes, not for our destruction, but advantage; and the very consequences of sin are made to cure. Thus you here find these losses inflicted because we have departed from God; but at the same time, they are the merciful means to bring us back to him. "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with

me than now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax." And observe what follows: "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her ear-rings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord. Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." It was for their sin that he sent the Jews into Babylon; yet it was for their *good*: "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good." "Who is a God like unto thee"?

But while this subject leads us to magnify the Lord, it should afford instruction and encouragement to those who are afflicted. No affliction will ever do us good unless it excite in us both fear and hope. It can do nothing unless it lead us to condemn ourselves,

and to acknowledge that God is justified when he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth. At the same time, we must apprehend not only his justice in the dispensation, but his goodness. Without this we shall feel a sullen despair, or be hardened into impenitency. Remember, therefore, that “though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the greatness of his mercy:” and that your severest trials may become your greatest blessings. Many are beginning to see this already—yea, they perceive it so plainly, that they are now praising God for providences which once tempted them to entertain the most harsh and unworthy thoughts of him.

But it is a sad thing when the lamp is extinguished, and there is no Sun of Righteousness near—when creatures are lost, and he is not found, nor even sought after! When this is the case, God will either withdraw the affliction in wrath, and say, “Ephraim is joined unto idols: let him alone;” or he will increase the severity of his measures, and after chastising us with whips chastise us with scorpions. So he threatens—“and if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins!”

The day of trouble, therefore, is a period peculiarly eventful and important. Your salvation, or destruction, may hinge upon it. God then comes near, and if you do not receive him, you may miss him for ever!—Who thinks of this? Who is sufficiently impressed with the awful consequences of *losing an affliction*? In general, you ask for our prayers when you come into trouble, and our thanksgivings when you come out. But sometimes we hardly know

what to do. If we were to regard the result, we should often be far from hailing you upon your recovery from sickness, or your emerging from penury; we should see your deliverance, as you call it, wearing away every serious thought of God, renewing your worldly spirit, and leading you to violate the vows your souls made when you were in trouble. It is best, perhaps, to invite our praise when you come into affliction, and our prayers when you come out. I say, our praise when you *come into affliction*—for this is a token for good; it is a proof that God has not as yet cast you off: it is an evidence that the husbandman has not yet resolved to cut down the tree, while he digs about it and manures: the physician does not entirely despair of the patient, while he orders medicine, or even amputation—I say, our prayers when you *come out*—that you may never forget the things your eyes saw, and your ears heard; never lose the lessons you received in the school of correction; but be able to say, in every review, “it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes. Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.”

To conclude. There is no subject under which we cannot teach and preach Jesus Christ. How is it that any blessings are communicated to us but through the mediation of Him, who is the way, the truth, and the life?

“He sunk beneath our heavy woes,
To raise us to his throne;
There’s not a gift his hand bestows
But cost his heart a groan.”

What wood is it that, thrown in, heals the waters of Marah? It is the tree on which he died that takes

the curse out of all our comforts, and all our crosses too. He has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. While faith views the rod, however dry and barren before, it then enlivens and blossoms, and bears: and “though no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby.” Amen.

DISCOURSE LXXXVI.

DIVINE FORGIVENESS.

—“A God ready to pardon.”—NEH. ix. 17.

GOD is absolutely incomprehensible; and the highest archangel cannot “find him out unto perfection.” Yet we are not called to worship “an unknown God.” He has furnished us with all the information necessary to bring us to himself. “All his works praise him:” but his word, “which he hath magnified above all his name,” peculiarly reveals him.

In this sacred volume, indeed, some clouds and darkness are round about him. Subjects are occasionally intimated which lie far beyond the reach of our present faculties; and concerning which we may safely follow the advice of the poet: “Wait the great teacher, Death.” But the Scripture renders things plain and obvious in proportion as they are important and necessary; so that he may run that readeth them. Some truths are written as with a sunbeam—such are those which regard our state as sinners, and are calculated to draw forth our faith and hope in God. For “we are saved through faith: we are saved by

hope." Man fell by losing his confidence in God; and he is only to be recovered by regaining it. For which purpose, we read, not only that there is forgiveness with him—but that "he is a GOD READY TO PARDON."

We shall divide our reflections into three parts. In the First, we shall show what is NECESSARY TO RENDER THE SUBJECT INTERESTING. In the Second, we shall adduce THE PROOFS WHICH ESTABLISH THE TRUTH OF IT. And, in the Third, we shall point out THE WAY IN WHICH IT *may* BE *abused*, and THE MANNER IN WHICH IT *ought* TO BE *improved*.

What is NECESSARY TO RENDER THE SUBJECT INTERESTING? THREE THINGS.

First. *A conviction of guilt.* "They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick." "The full soul loathes the honeycomb: but to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet." In vain we present alms to the affluent, or offer pardon to the innocent; our kindness will offend rather than gratify. Suffer me then to ask, Are you not sinners? Have you ever lived a day, or an hour, as you ought? Have you not, at least, been chargeable with sins of omission?—But a servant's disobedience appears in neglecting to do what the master enjoins, as well as in doing what, he forbids. If your conduct has not been grossly wicked, what has been the state of your heart? For the law of God is spiritual; and each command comprehends under it not only the outward acts, but our very desires and thoughts.

By the law, therefore, is the knowledge of sin. The law begins with the object of all adoration, and requires that we serve God alone. But have you never transferred to the creature that supreme regard

—coat love—that fear—that confidence—which are due to the Creator, God over all, blessed for evermore? If you have never worshipped wood or stone; never cried, “O Baal, hear us!” never sacrificed to devils; have you not made gold your hope, and fine gold your confidence? have you not made flesh your arm? have you not “had men’s persons in admiration, because of advantage”? If you have often, if you have daily, worshipped the Supreme Being, has it been in spirit and in truth? or only with the form of godliness? Have you never taken “his Name in vain,” either in profane swearing, or in idle conversation, or in those prayers and praises which have “mocked him with a solemn sound, upon a thoughtless tongue”? Have you sanctified the “Sabbath-day, to keep it holy”? Have you not squandered away many of its precious hours in idleness, in dress, in visitings, in pleasure-taking? Have you suffered your ox and your ass, your manservant and your maidservant, to rest as well as you? Have you called the Sabbath a delight! and have you honoured it by a devout attention to the purposes for which it was instituted? But you are sure you are no *murderer*! Is there then no one dead, in whose removal you have rejoiced? Is there no one alive, at whose continuance you have inwardly repined? Have you never been angry with your brother without a cause?—You think you are no *adulterer*! But the infallible Expositor has said, “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”—You repel with indignation the charge of *theft*! But is it not pride, rather than principle, that has sometimes restrained you: or the fear of the con-

sequences, rather than a sense of the sin? Are you a stranger to all unjust gain and excessive profit in trade? Have you never taken advantage of ignorance, or confidence? Have you fully paid your servants for their toil; and never kept back the hire of your labourers, by fraud? Have you never robbed the poor of what was due to them? In a word, have you “done unto others as you would they should do unto you”?

I have not examined you by every command of the Moral Law; but I have endeavoured to convict you of transgressing those of which you were most likely to deem yourselves blameless. Examine yourselves by the remainder: they are before you, and they are all “holy, and just, and good.” Try yourselves by them; try your conduct by them; try your dispositions by them; and “every mouth must be stopped, and all be found guilty before God.” “I was alive,” says Paul, “without the law; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”

Hence, a Second thing needful to render our subject interesting is *an apprehension of our danger as transgressors*. Sin exposes us to the wrath of God; for it is written, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” The tremendousness of this curse exceeds all the power of language to express, or of imagination to conceive. It is the curse of God! The present effects of transgression show that it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God; and are sufficient to lead a reflecting mind to exclaim. “Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath!” But these are only the beginning of sorrows—What then must the comple-

tion of them be? Who among you can dwell with the devouring lire? Who among you can dwell with everlasting burnings? If there was only a possibility of incurring a doom so infinitely dreadful, common sense, if consulted, would tell you to agonize with the question, "What must I do to be saved"? till the cruel uncertainty was over. But, in your present state, there is no uncertainty. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." And how can you escape? Can you grapple with Almighty Power? Can you conceal yourselves from Infinite Wisdom? Can you flee from Him who is everywhere; and everywhere the sin-avenging God?—There is only one way of deliverance. It is forgiveness!

Thirdly. Our subject is rendered interesting by a *discovery of the privileges of a pardoned state*. We talk of happiness. Oh! what a change, to be delivered from the wrath to come—to know that God's anger is turned away—that, from an enemy, he is become a friend—a friend giving us cordial access to all the rights of innocency, and entitling us to a felicity superior to the happiness of Adam in Paradise, and even of an angel in glory! Well might Paul say, "Being justified by laith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Yea, we joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement!" Well might David exclaim, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!" Such a man has the true notion of blessedness—and he has the reality. His blessedness is insured—and it is begun. He is blessed with assistance and acceptance, in all his duties: for "he is not under the law, but under grace." He is blessed in all his mercies, and

tastes a sweetness, which others know not of, derived from a covenant claim, and the love of his heavenly Father.

And what has he to fear?—Is it affliction?—His troubles, however severe, have no curse in them. They are not the effects of wrath, but tokens of love, and blessings in disguise. He will be supported under them. He will be sanctified by them. He will be delivered out of them. Is it death? The sting of death is sin; but that sting is extracted. To die is gain. Is it the grave? The grave is no longer the condemned hole, in which the criminal sleeps the night before execution; but the chamber, in which, after refreshment, he dresses for his interview with the King of Glory. Is it the judgment? The judgment only proclaims his absolution, and ushers him into the joy of his Lord. Is this credible? Is such a blessedness attainable? Yes; and,

II. We proceed to adduce THE PROOFS WHICH ESTABLISH THE TRUTH OF THE DOCTRINE—“*a God ready to pardon.*” And do you ask for evidence?

See it *in the provision he has made for the exercise of it.* For it *became* him—we use his own language; “*it became, him* “to administer this pardon in a peculiar way. It was necessary that nothing like a conivance at moral evil should be suspected in the Divine government. It was necessary that sin should be condemned in the flesh, even while it was forgiven. It was necessary that God’s law should not appeal so rigid as to require relaxation, or so changeable and weak as to admit of dispensation; but be magnified and made honourable. It was necessary that God’s truth should be seen, as well as his grace; and his righteousness, as well as his mercy. Here were

difficulties which he alone could remove. Here was a plan which he alone could devise. Here was a sacrifice which he alone could provide. But, of his own self-moved compassion, "He has reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ. He has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that *IK*; loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."—Rather than not pardon—he spares not his own Son, but delivers him up for us all. Do you ask for evidence?

See it *in the promptitude with which he pardons on our return*. "And it shall come to pass," says God, "that before they call I will answer, and while they speak I will hear." Was the father backward to receive the prodigal, when famine and misery drove him home? Disobedient and vile as he had been, "when lie was yet a great way off, the father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants. Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry." Do you ask for evidence?

See it *in his earnestness to excite us to seek after the blessing*. It would be enough to prove that a man was ready to pardon, if he yielded immediately upon the offender's submission and application; but God

does more. He not only “waits to be gracious,” but he comes forward—He begins—He cries, “Come, and let us reason together: though your sins were as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they were red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” He urges: he entreats; yes—by the uneasiness of conscience, by the afflictions of life, by the importunity of friends, by the addresses of ministers—it is, as the apostle says, “as though God did beseech you—to be reconciled unto God!” Do you ask for evidence?

See it *in the character of those who have received pardon*. Some of these have been the chief of sinners; sinners of long standing; sinners whose crimes have been not only numberless, but attended with every aggravation. You have read of Manasseh; of the dying thief; of the murderers of Christ; of the Corinthian converts: yet all these obtained mercy! Do you ask for evidence?

See it, finally, *in the number of those who obtain forgiveness*. Let us not reduce them. There are thousands more than we are aware of, even when we send forth Candour to reckon them; and when they shall be all “gathered together out of every kindred, and nation, and tongue, and people; they will be found a multitude which no man can number.”—Thus real, and thus obvious, is the glorious character of Jehovah—as “A GOD READY TO PARDON.”

III. But it will be requisite to point out THE WAY IN WHICH THIS SUBJECT *may* BE ABUSED, and the manner in which it ought to be improved.

The subject is abused when it leads us to deny any disposition in God to punish. God is not only to be viewed as a tender father, but a moral governor. His mercy cannot be too much extolled, provided we

allow that “he is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works: and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.” We do not approve of the word *vindictive* justice: but *punitive* justice is essential to his character; and, without it, we could neither venerate nor love him: for how could we esteem a being, especially in the relation of a ruler, who should feel alike disposed towards the liar and the man of truth, the cruel and the kind, a Robespierre and a Howard—and treat them alike? The Scriptures do not “bid mercy triumph over God himself, undeified by such opprobrious praise even when he said to Moses, “I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee,” he recorded himself, “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will *by no means* *dear the guilty.*”

The subject is abused when it encourages us to hope for pardon in ways not warranted by the word of God. For instance—

Thus—unwarranted is our hope when we expect it *without a reference to the mediation of Christ*. It is acknowledged that God’s love is unpurchased; and that of his own nature he is disposed to be merciful and gracious. But the question is, Whether he has not a right to exercise his mercy and grace in his own way; and whether, if he has appointed and revealed such a way, any thing but criminal ignorance and pride can lead me to oppose it; or any thing but disappointment and wretchedness can result from my neglect of it? We are “justified freely by his grace;” but it is “through the redemption that is in

Christ Jesus." "I am the way," says the Redeemer: "no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

Thus—unwarranted is our hope when we expect pardon *without repentance*. Show me a single Scripture where the bestowment of the one is unconnected with the exercise of the other. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." "He that confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." "He is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

Thus—unwarranted is our hope when we expect this pardon *by delaying an application for it to the close of life*. We can never merit the Divine goodness: but it is in our power to provoke his wrath—and I would ask, What can be so likely to induce him to reject us as our being evil, "because he is good;" our "continuing in sin, that grace may abound"—while animated by the hope that a dying petition will save us, when we have sinned till we can sin no longer? He is a God ready to pardon; but he will not make this pardon "the minister of sin."

Finally. Thus—unwarranted is our hope when we expect *to find this pardon in another world, if we fail to obtain it in this*. He is ready to pardon—but it is in time only. At death "the door is shut." "Then," says God, "shall they call, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." "Seek ye, therefore, the Lord, while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

But what is the proper improvement we should make of this delightful subject?

It should yield encouragement to the broken-hearted. It is often as hard to persuade such persons as these to hope as it was formerly to induce them; to

fear. They are commonly tempted to conclude that their case is peculiar, or that the greatness of their guilt excludes them from mercy.—Is this thy case? Art thou, my fellow-sinner, ready to say, “I am cast out of his sight”? Look again towards his holy temple. Once more turn back, and address his throne; once more cry,

“Yet, save a trembling sinner, Lord,
Whose hope, still hovering round thy word,
Would light on some sweet promise there,—
Some sure defence against despair!”

And, behold, this sure defence; behold, this sweet promise—“a God ready to pardon”!

The subject should afford consolation to those who have believed through grace. Believers are enemies to sin, and long to be delivered from it; but while they are in the body they are imperfect. They find it impossible to live without contracting fresh guilt. Their duties are defiled; and, among their holiest exercises, they must exclaim, “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who should stand?” But are they, while they mourn, to refuse to be comforted? Are they, while they are humble, to be hopeless? “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Instead of keeping away from God under a sense of our unworthiness, as the enemy of souls would urge us, “let us,” with ingenuous feelings, “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” He is “a God ready to pardon”!

The subject demands our admiration and praise

There is no character we esteem and extol so much as that of the merciful, the tender, the placable, the forgiving: "It is the glory of a man to pass by a transgression." How glorious then must God appear! "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy."

But the subject calls upon us not only to admire, but to imitate. Is he a God ready to pardon? "Be ye followers of God as dear children. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

DISCOURSE LXXXVII.

THE LORD THE UNERRING CONDUCTOR OF HIS PEOPLE.

“And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.”—PSALM cvii. 7.

IN these words, it is not easy to ascertain the persons immediately intended. Thus they are spoken of in the preceding verses: “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy: and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south. They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.” Does the sacred writer refer to travellers in general? Much of the Lord’s goodness is to be seen in long and perilous journeys: but the language here employed seems too strong to justify such an application. Does he allude to the Israelites, when marching through the desert to Canaan? Of this we are naturally reminded by

some things in the description: but a part of it does not harmonize with fact. They were taken from Egypt; but not “gathered from the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.” Does he refer to the return of the Jews from Babylon to Judæa, in consequence of the decree of Cyrus? We know that Ezra, who led back a portion of them, says, “Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, *to seek of him a right way* for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance and after this, we also know, they arrived safe at Jerusalem, “through the good hand of their God upon them.” But what evidence have we that this Psalm was written after this event? Or that it was written by David? Or, if written by him, that it is to be considered as prophetic rather than historical?

But the difficulty there is in determining the persons immediately designed is a circumstance not to be lamented. It is even an advantage; it constrains us to a more spiritual and evangelical interpretation of the subject. And thus the whole representation is fully and easily embodied. For the people of God are *redeemed*—redeemed from the curse of the Law, the powers of darkness, and the bondage of corruption. They are *gathered*—gathered by his grace out of all the diversities of the human race; “out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.” Whatever this world is to others, they find it to be “a wilderness;” where they are often tried; but their trials urge them to prayer, and prayer brings them relief. And, being Divinely conducted, they at length reach their destination: and this is the conclusion of the whole, and it applies to each of them; “And he led

them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.”

Let us consider—THE LEADER—THE WAY—and THE END.

I. THE LEADER. *He* led them. The land to be given them is said to be “very far off;” and, in a journey of such extent, such difficulty, and of such importance, who would venture alone? But the believer is not alone. He travels under the conduct of Jehovah; and can say, and sometimes he can even sing too, “This God is my God for ever and ever, he will be my guide even unto death.”

In the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, the engagement runs, “They shall be my people, and I will be their God.” As if he should say, “I dedicate myself to their welfare. I hold myself at their call.” As he undertakes to be nothing less than “*their God*,” there is divinity in every relation in which he stands to them. If he is their friend, he is not only a perfect, but a *divine* friend, and therefore an *infinite* one. If he is their guide, he is not only a perfect, but a *divine* guide, and therefore an *infinite* one. Let us more particularly examine this privilege. Let us connect it with his omnipresence; his patience; his power; and his wisdom.

Let us connect this guidance with his omnipresence. As his people travel from all countries, and are remote often from each other, no creature, if their leader, could be with them all at the same time: while he approached some, he would withdraw, in the same proportion, from others. But God is everywhere. He fills earth, as well as heaven; he is constantly at hand, and to each of his people a very

present help in trouble. They shall never perish for want of seasonable aid: "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

Let us connect this guidance with his patience. No other being in the universe would be able to bear with our imperfections and provocations. The meekest man upon earth, and the most merciful angel in heaven, if entrusted with us, would soon abandon his charge. A Christian has sometimes such views of his depravity; of his omissions of duty; of his distractions in it; of his ingratitude, his unbelief, his perverseness—that he cries, with Job, "Behold, I am vile and abhors himself, repenting in dust and ashes. He then wonders that God does not cast him off. But his Leader is the God of all grace; he is longsuffering; he does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth we are dust." And while, under a recollection of his past guilt, and a sense of his present unworthiness, he prays, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me his Leader replies, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Let us connect this guidance with his power. No other leader could defend them; for the country through which they pass is full of snares and dangers. and

"A thousand savage beasts of prey
Around the forest roam."

And what emboldens them? The voice of him who cries; "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not

dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest. Thou shalt walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. Thou shalt tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under foot."

Let us connect this guidance with his wisdom. Who knows what is good for a man in this life? Who can distinguish between appearance and reality? Who can determine that what he wishes to shun is not a blessing; or that what he covets is not a curse? The way of man is not in himself. Hence the admonition and the promise; "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." Some possess great talent, and have acquired much knowledge and experience: yet, no creature is infallibly wise, and therefore we cannot implicitly resign ourselves to him; but we may absolutely commit ourselves to God. His understanding is infinite. He sees the end from the beginning. He perfectly knows what we are, and what we want: and "though clouds and darkness are round about him, justice and judgment, are the habitation of his throne; mercy and truth go before his face."

II. THE WAY. "He led them forth by the *right way*." Many things seem inconsistent with this

acknowledgment; especially the various trials with which they are exercised, and which often lead them to say, with Gideon, "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this evil befallen us?" Are they persecuted by enemies, and betrayed by friends? Are they stripped of their substance; bereaved of their kindred; invaded by sickness; made to possess months of vanity, and have wearisome nights appointed for them? And, is this the "*right way*?" In answer to this, it will be necessary to ask two questions:

First. According to what principle is it "right"? For a thing may be wrong in one view, and right in another. It is sinful to take away life; but there are cases in which it is lawful and praiseworthy: as in self-defence, and the execution of judicial policy. In the system of nature, winter is as necessary as summer, and night as day; though for some purposes they are not equally good. A way that winds about may not be valued for its shortness, but it may be preferable for its safety, or for the sake of avoiding a hill, or for touching at several places where the traveller may do business. The correction, which may appear cruel, if considered only with regard to the feelings of the child, appears very differently when connected with his profit. We do not extol medicine for the pleasure of taking it, but for the effect resulting from it, in the restoration of health. So it is here. Many of the dispensations of Providence, if viewed separately and partially, would be objectionable; but right when considered in connexion with their designs, and relatively to the glory of God's name and the spiritual welfare of his people. This is the rule by which they are to be tried.

Secondly. According to whose judgment is it right? And to this we immediately answer, The judgment of God. He alone is capable of judging; and his judgment is always according to truth: what seems good in his sight, must be really good; for he cannot be deceived. But we are so ignorant, and can grasp so little of the plan—so occupied, and full of prejudices—we are so selfish, so carnal, so impatient—and are such very inadequate judges; that we often call evil good, and good evil.

Four things, however, may be observed, in reference to this case.

First. It will be right, according to the judgment of the Christian himself, in another world. "What I do," says his Leader, "thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." When in God's light he shall see light, he will join the acclamations of those to whom the mysteries which once perplexed them are explained; and say, "Marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!"

Secondly. The Christian is not wholly without satisfaction even now. There are some openings into the dispensations of Heaven which more than enable him to acquiesce. When the noise of the passions is subsided, and he can hear the small still voice; when he has wiped away the tears which bedimmed his light; "I can now," says he, "perceive the reason of such a defection of friendship—I was making flesh my arm. I see why the vessel was broken—I was forgetting the fountain. He planted thorns in my tabernacle, for I was in danger of saying. This is my rest. 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.'"

Thirdly. We should be more satisfied with the rectitude of the Divine proceedings if we were more dutifully attentive. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." But we too often get down from our watch-tower, or fall asleep there; and the interpreter passes by unaddressed and unseen.

Fourthly. There is one way of obtaining complete satisfaction even while we are in this vale of tears. It is to rely on his word when we cannot explain his conduct; it is to walk by faith when we cannot walk by sight. And what is it that you are required to believe in order to bring this heaven into your souls? Why, only, that He who spared not his own Son will deny you nothing that is really good for you; that he takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servants, and knows how to advance it better than you do; that he doth all things, and "doth all things well." "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. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

III. THE END: "He led them forth by the right way, *that they might go to a city of habitation.*" "It doth not," says the Apostle John, "yet appear what we shall be; but this we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." From these words we learn that the glory to which the believer is advancing, is not wholly developed, and yet it is not entirely concealed. Indeed some revelation is necessary; for we cannot desire

what we are ignorant of, and have no sympathy with. There are, therefore, some mediums through which we may catch a glimpse.—Such are the evils to which we are now exposed. Imagine all these removed. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” Such are the imperfections we now feel. Imagine all these annihilated. Then, “that which is perfect is come, and that which is in part, in knowledge, holiness, and bliss, shall be done away. We shall be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.” Such is the imagery the Scripture employs; and as our souls are now incarnate, and we acquire knowledge by sensation and reflection, our future condition will more powerfully impress us when it is held forth by things seen and temporal.—Hence it is expressed by “rivers of pleasure; trees of life; crowns of glory; a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; a city of habitation.”

This suggests *magnificence*. It is not a village, or a town, but a *city* of habitation. A city is the highest representation of civil community. There have been famous cities; but what are they to all this? “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God! “It is the city of the living God. It is the city of the great King. It is the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. The foundation is of precious stones. The pavement is of pure gold. The gates are of pearls. “I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of

God did lighten it; and the Lamb is the light thereof." But who can estimate the honours, the provisions, the pleasures of the place? As it is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." It is to display the munificence of his goodness, and to prove to men and angels that he has not called himself their God in vain. "But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city."

Not a city of *inspection*! Many—(Eternal God! will it be any of this company?)—will look in; and "there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, when they shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, and they themselves shut out." Not a city of *visitation*. Christians shall not only enter, but abide. They shall go no more out—It is "a city of *habitation*."

This conveys the idea of *repose*. The Christian is now a traveller; then he will be a resident: he is now on the road; he will then be at home: "there remaineth a *rest* for the people of God."

It reminds us of a *social state*. It is not a solitary condition; we shall partake of it with an innumerable company of angels, with all the saved from among men, with patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, our kindred in Christ.—"These are fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God."

The subject requires from us an admiration of God. "His greatness is unsearchable." "He dwells in the light which no man can approach unto." "Heaven is his throne, and the earth is his footstool." "Thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thou-

sand stand before him." And what are we?—"Of yesterday, and know nothing. Our habitation is in the dust. We are crushed before the moth." Numbers will not relieve our meanness; all nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity—And will *He* make *our* concerns his care? His condescension admits of no comparison. A king deigning to lead a poor beggar; a philosopher stooping to teach an infant his alphabet—is a very inadequate image of his grace. We sometimes see persons who "condescend to men of low estate but they are only men themselves, deriving their nature from the same original, inheriting the same infirmities, and doomed to the same corruption. God even condescends to behold the things that are done in heaven: well, therefore, when we meet with him on earth, may we exclaim, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him!"

We congratulate those of you who have reason to conclude that you are the people of God. We hail you, on the ground of your *present privileges*. You are under a Divine guide; and you are in the right way. One of these necessarily results from the other. If you are under the Lord's direction, though he may lead you in a strange and a thorny way, it will be—it must be—it is, a right one; and you cannot indulge too firm a confidence. You know his name; and should put your trust in him. What have you to do with to-morrow? events are his. Duty only is yours; and in the performance of this, he allows, he commands you, to rely upon him for wisdom and strength. "Be careful for nothing: but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving,

let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

But still greater reason have we to hail you, on the ground of your *future expectation*. Though you have much in hand, you have more in hope. He is *now* guiding you by his counsel, but he will *afterwards* receive you to glory. He is leading you by the right way; but the way, whatever may be said in praise of it, is not the city of habitation. But there—there the journey ends.

“See the kind angels at the gates,
Inviting us to come;
There Jesus the forerunner waits,
To welcome travellers home.”

Unhappy sinners! How much are you depriving yourselves of while sacrificing all the present, and all the future advantages of religion! You may banish thought, and remain insensible of your loss for a while—but it can be for a while only—you must soon be convinced of your folly; and how dreadful, if you should learn your error when it is too late to be rectified! As yet, however, this is not your state. Your harvest is not yet past; your summer is not yet ended. You are yet in the number of those who are within the reach of mercy. May you “seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.”

And what says all this to you, my young friends? Will you not “from this time cry unto him, my Father, thou art the guide of my youth”? You are entering a world full of temptation. You are begin-

ning life without the advantage of experience, and yet in all the strength of passion. How liable are you to err! And yet how much depends upon every wrong step you take! Would you be wise, and safe and happy? Yield yourselves unto God; saying, "Lord, I am thine, save me. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day."

DISCOURSE LXXXVIII

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE RIGHTEOUS.

“He merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.”—Ps. cxix. 132.

MAN is the subject of numberless wants and desires. He feels himself unhappy, and is therefore restless FOR a change. He supposes the future to be better than the present, and is therefore alive to hope, he imagines the condition of others superior to his own, and hence the spirit that is in him lusteth to envy.

And how many are there who only envy those upon whom the world smiles, or who, if ever they pray, are saying, “Lord, rank me with the healthful, the rich, the honourable!” But there are some who have the knowledge of the holy, and are made wise unto salvation. These no longer ask, “Who will show us any good”? But their language is, “Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.” “There is only,” says such a man as this, “there is only one class of persons I envy. They are those whom the world overlooks and despises. They are the redeemed; the pardoned; the sanctified. They are

those who are 'blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' *These*, and these *alone*, I envy: not that I grudge them their privileges, or wish to deprive them of their portion; but I long above all things to share with them. 'Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may set the good of thy chosen; that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation; that I may glory with thine inheritance! Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy Name.'"

From these words we observe—

I. THERE ARE SOME WHO LOVE GOD'S NAME. The word *name*, in Scripture, is significant of person. Thus we read of "a few names in Sardis" which had not defiled their garments; and when Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, it is said, "the number of the names was about an hundred and twenty." As names distinguish, and make known, and recall to our minds, the characters to whom they are attached, it is hardly a figure of speech to make them stand for the individuals themselves. Thus it is with God. His name means his perfections, his nature, his being, himself; and they who love his name mean, those who love himself.

Such there have been in every age of the world; for he has never hid himself without witness. But do not all men love God! So far from it, that we read in the Scripture of the "haters of God:" a charge which, however dreadful, we have reason to fear will apply to the generality of mankind. Will it apply, my dear hearers, to you? In answer to this question, it is in vain for you to say that you are not Haters of God, because you never *speak* against him:

for there are works, as well as words, of enmity; yea, actions speak louder than words; and you are accustomed to lay more stress upon them, in judging of the disposition of a fellow-creature towards you. We read of our "being enemies to God by wicked works." And there is a "carnal mind, which is enmity against God, because it is not subject to his law." Is it true, that "God is not in all your thoughts"? That you do not like to retain him in your knowledge? That the conversation is uninteresting which turns upon his glory? That you have no desire to enjoy his presence? That you never strive to please him?—In vain also you say, that you join in his worship, and do not find your attendance irksome. For, not to inquire whether this is true; whether your heart never rises up against the doctrine of the Gospel, the strictness of God's commands, and the spirituality of his service—let me ask, How do you feel towards the same Being *alone*? Do you relish *private* devotion? If you were with a person you dislike, in a large am-entertaining company—though, even then, you would rather he was absent—the hour would pass off less disagreeably,—perhaps even pleasantly,—because you would have other attractions and engagements: but suppose all the rest were withdrawn, and you left with this individual only—your situation would then be intolerable, and your only wish would be to escape. The application is easy. It is little proof of your regard for God, to intermingle with a large and respectable congregation in the sanctuary, especially where all the exterior of devotion is inviting; where the pulpit is distinguished by talent and eloquence, and the preacher is "as one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument." The

question is, How do you feel towards God in the want of all this? Do you love to meet him in solitude? There are those who do.

There are those who can say, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee." They admire his excellences, and feel his goodness. They have seen him in the sacrifice of the Cross; and on Calvary have complied with a demand so long resisted before: "My son, give me thy heart." There are many dear to them on earth, and more in heaven; but they can say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee?" For, though they do not love him perfectly, they love him supremely. There is no one they so fear to offend. There is no one whose favour they so long to enjoy: "His lovingkindness is better than life." Their eyes run down with tears because men keep not his law. They delight to speak good of his Name, and recommend him to others: while they glory in the success of his cause; and, holding themselves at his disposal, ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

II. HIS MERCY IS THE SOURCE OF ALL THE GOODNESS THEY EXPERIENCE. It is not necessary to set aside compulsion: for Deity can suffer no impression from external power; and what is constrained has no value in it. But the great opponent of mercy is merit; and for this, man, who is naturally as proud

as he is poor, will always strive to find a place. And yet where will he find it? Only in the creed of ignorance and presumption: not, I am sure, in the testimony of the Scriptures, or in the language of believers. They “look to the rock whence they were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence they were digged.” They know that it was the mercy of God alone that brought them into the state which now attracts his regard, and inspired them with all those dispositions in which he delights: “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us; by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Nor is their consciousness of unworthiness confined to their natural condition; but, since they have known God, or, rather, have been known of him, they see enough in their daily walk and temper, in their non-improvement of means and privileges, yea, in their very duties, to convince them that mercy is the principle of God’s conduct towards them. Hence, as they are spared from year to year, they exclaim, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.” Hence, in their sufferings, they see that they have no right to complain; but much reason to acknowledge, under the severest trials, “He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” If they pray, it is with the sentiment of Daniel: “We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies.” If they hope, it is a “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

What a character does Paul give of Onesiphorus; of his charity, and fortitude, and zeal; yet he prays,

“The Lord grant that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day!” Even he needed mercy; and would need it to the last, and then more than ever. And where is the man, however holy, that would think of “that day,” and not sink into despair and horror but for the prospect of mercy! “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”

III. THE LORD HAS BEEN ALWAYS ACCUSTOMED TO DEAL MERCIFULLY WITH THEM. It is not a single, casual, occasional exercise, but a well-known and invariable dispensation, to which David refers: “Be merciful unto me, as thou *usest* to do unto those that love thy Name.”

It cannot be otherwise, if his word is the faithful word; for he has promised it. He has said to every believer, “I will surely do thee good. All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Here is the rule by which he has bound himself to act towards his people. And that his conduct has been conformable to these assurances even their enemies have been judges. They have frequently been so struck with the displays of his goodness, as inwardly to venerate the godly, and to commend their condition. “Verily there is a reward for the righteous.” “How amiable are thy tents, O Jacob; and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.” Thus it is said, “All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.” But they themselves are the best judges of the Divine conduct towards them.

They can judge spiritually; and see mercy in dispensations which may appear to the world as the effects of wrath.

With what pleasure do they look back, and compare the words of his mouth with the works of his hands: "as we have heard, so have we seen, in the city of our God"! What Ebenezers have they reared as they passed along; inscribing on each, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me!" How often, among all their complaints of themselves, have they looked up and said, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord!" Time would fail me to specify all the instances in which he has been *used* to deal mercifully with them—He has been accustomed to appear for them in their temporal exigences; and though they have not had the miracle of the ravens, and the meal, they have had the mercy: "Their bread has been given them, and their water has been sure; and he has blessed their bread and their water."—He has been accustomed to indulge them, peculiarly with his own presence, when creatures have failed them, by death, or weakness, or perfidy: so that they could say, "Nevertheless the Lord stood by me: I am not alone, because the Lather is with me."—he has been accustomed to counteract their fears, and surpass their expectations. When they said in their baste, "I am cut off from before his eyes," he has "heard the voice of their supplication, when they cried unto him: at even-tide it has been light: he has turned the shadow of death into the morning." What appalled them in apprehension they endured with cheerfulness: "as the sufferings abounded, the consolations" more than counterbalanced them; and their greatest gains sprang from their greatest losses.

—He has been accustomed to bear with their ignorance and weakness; to “help their infirmities to uphold them with his free Spirit to show them his power and glory in the sanctuary to say to their souls, “I am thy salvation.” But where shall I stop?

“My Saviour, my Almighty Friend,
When I begin thy praise,
Where will the growing numbers end,
The numbers of thy grace?”

All his dealings with his people have been nothing but mercy. He was merciful to them when he frowned, as well as when he smiled; when he denied, as well as when he indulged; when he took away, as well as when he gave. What use ought we to make of this?

IV. HIS MERCY TOWARDS THEM SHOULD ENCOURAGE US TO IMPLORE MERCY FOR OURSELVES. “Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.” “I ask nothing but what thou hast been in the constant practice of giving. I come after millions, every one of whom has said, ‘It is good for me to draw near to God. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.’”

Beggars naturally love to go to a door where others have been successful, especially where none have ever been sent empty away. This, indeed, is never the case among men. No earthly benefactor, however disposed, can afford universal relief. But we have every thing to inspire our application at “a throne of grace.” In what he has done through every age, we see his resources and his bounty. We see “the same Lord over all, and rich unto all that call upon him.” And we know that he is unchange-

ably the same. "His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." And we know that all those who have been saved and blessed by him had no more to recommend them to his regards than we have; but originally stood before him "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." We go a step further, and we say, that one end God had in view in showing them mercy was to excite our application, and to pull up despair by the roots. And hence the characters of many of those who have found mercy. In acts of grace among men, the principal offenders are always excepted; and the reason is, not only because they are more deserving of punishment, but their pardon would be dangerous, by being so exemplary: but God has, in every age, called and saved some of the vilest of the vile; and, so far from his wishing to conceal it, one of these ringleaders, in his Name, says, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might, show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." When convinced of sin, and feeling our desert, and urged to seek for the greatest of all blessings, from him whom we have offended and provoked, it is not a little encouragement we need. And have we not everlasting consolation and good hope through grace? Let us think of the gift, of his dear Son. Let us remember the promises and invitations of the Gospel. Let us reflect upon the examples of his grace. Let us consider the invariableness of his regard to prayer: "*This* poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his trouble." "*They* looked unto him, and were lightened and their faces were

not ashamed." "He *never* said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain." But,

V. WE SHOULD BE ANXIOUS TO SECURE THE MERCY THAT IS PECULIAR TO THEM; and not be satisfied with his common kindness. "Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name."

God is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works. The sun is called his sun; and he makes it to shine upon the evil and upon the good; and sendeth his rain upon the just and upon the unjust. David had received from God a crown—and so had Pharaoh long before him. David had genius—so had Ahithophel, who hung himself. Natural talents and earthly possessions and enjoyments are *common* to the righteous and the wicked; and no man can infer the love or hatred of God from them—David prays for those benefits which are tokens for good and *pledges* of Divine friendship.

Again. He knew that as ordinary mercies were not *distinguishing*, neither were they *satisfying*. The greatest abundance of them cannot fill the void within, and tell the immortal mind to rove no more. There is no true peace nor joy but as we are able to say of the God of all grace, "Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

Yea, temporal blessings may even draw us astray, and become our sin and ruin. How many are there now in hell cursing their success in business, because it set their affections on things below; their honour, because it flattered their pride; their plenty, because it fed their passions and lusts—"The prosperity of fools shall destroy them"!

To which we may add, that these outward blessings, however good in themselves, are not *durable*.

They are “the meat, that perisheth.” They are “the treasure that moth and rust can corrupt, and thieves break through and steal.” They are “but for a moment.” “O give me,” says the man like-minded with David, “give me the meat that endureth unto everlasting life, give me the ‘treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.’ Tell me that ‘the eternal God is my refuge, and that underneath are the everlasting arms.’ What are the wants of my body to the necessities of my soul! Not only is every thing here going, but—I am going! I am a dying creature; I have nothing, if I have not a hope beyond the grave. I want pardon. I want holiness. I want the earnest of the Spirit. I want a better country. There are those who feel a peace which passeth nil understanding; and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

‘Where is the shadow of that Rock
That from the sun defends *thy* flock?
Fain would I feed among *thy* sheep;
Among *them* rest, among *them* sleep.’

‘Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy Name.’”

Lastly. WE SHOULD BE CONTENT IF GOD DEALS WITH US AS HE HAS ALWAYS DEALT WITH HIS PEOPLE. While he could not be satisfied with any thing less than their portion, David asks for nothing better; he implores no singular dispensation in his favour, no deviation from the accustomed methods of his grace. “Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy Name.” This was the disposition of Paul: “if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” He did not pre-

scribe, but submit. The *end* was every thing; the *way* he left, with a holy indifference, to God. And it is always a good proof that your convictions and desires are from the operation of the Spirit when you are willing to conform to God's order. What is this order? It is to dispense his blessings connectedly. It is never to justify without sanctifying; never to give a title to heaven without a meetness for it. Now the man that is divinely wrought upon will not expect nor desire the one without the other.—Therefore he will not expect nor desire the blessing of God without obedience: because it is always God's way to connect the comforts of the Holy Ghost with the fear of the Lord: and, if his children transgress his laws, to visit their transgressions with a rod. Therefore he will neither expect nor desire his blessing without exertion: for it has always been God's way to crown only those that run the race that is set before them, and fight the good fight of faith. Therefore he will not expect nor desire the Divine blessing without prayer: for it has always been God's way to make his people sensible of their wants, and to give in answer to prayer. Therefore he will not expect nor desire to reach heaven without difficulties: for his people have always had to deny themselves, and take up their cross. If they have not been chosen in the furnace of affliction, they have been purified. God had one Son without sin, but he never had one without sorrow: "he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." "Yes," says the suppliant before us, "secure me their everlasting portion, and I am willing to drink of the cup they drank of, and to be baptized with the baptism they were baptized with. I want no new, no by path to glory. I am content to keep

the King's high road. "Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that fear thy Name—I ask no more."

I conclude by observing, that with regard to some of you this prayer has been answered. You are not able, perhaps, to ascertain precisely how it was at first awakened in your bosom: but it *was* awakened; and made you to differ from others, and from yourselves. From that hour it has been the prevailing petition; nor has it been offered in vain—he has looked upon you, and been merciful unto you, as he useth to do unto those that love his name. Be not afraid to acknowledge it. Be humble, but be grateful; and say, to the praise and glory of his grace, "Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy Name." I hope some of you are beginning to make this prayer your own. The world does not appear to you now as it once did; your connexion with it is loosened, and you long to form an alliance with a better. You wish to be companions of them that fear God. And what should hinder you? They will receive you with delight; they are all saying, "Come with us, and we will do you good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." "And *I* will receive you, and be a Father unto you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." If he is not with us, he is not far off; for "the Lord is nigh unto them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth." But he *is* with you. It is he that has excited the desire you feel; and "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them. Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

But what can we say to those who never yet in earnest made the prayer of David their own! In a little time, you must leave all your possessions and enjoyment, relations and friends, to enter an eternal world, and to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Then you will see the value of what you now despise. Then the mercy peculiar to his people will appear the one thing needful. Then the saved of the Lord will shout, "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever!" While you will exclaim, O that we had prized that mercy, and sought after it when it was attainable!

Then, alas! it will be too late. But it is not too late at present. You are yet in the land of the living. With the Lord there is mercy; and with him there is plenteous redemption. Be prevailed upon to seek him while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near.—You will not say, I know not how to seek him. Jesus is the way. Prayer is the breathing of desire. Even words are not necessary to inform Him who searches the heart, and knoweth what is the mind of the spirit. But you are furnished with words. Borrow language that has never been refused; avail yourselves of petitions which have been crowned with intitule success. Pray, with the prodigal, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Pray, with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Pray, with sinking Peter, "Lord, save: I perish." Pray, with the king of Israel, "Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy Name."

DISCOURSE LXXXIX.

THE WATER OF LIFE.

“The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”—JOHN iv. 14.

IT is a mark of true wisdom to value objects according to their real worth. It is childish, it is foolish, to be taken with toys and trilles. And yet who has not incurred this reproach? I low many things not only invite, but, alas! engross our attention, which are by no means essential, or even important to our welfare! We ought to be ashamed of the impression they make upon us. They are unworthy of our hopes and fears; joys and sorrows: and angels must blush to see what exertions and sacrifices rational and immortal beings make, in order to gain vanity and vexation of spirit.

My dear hearers! many things are desirable, and some things are useful: *“but one thing is needful,”* absolutely needful; needful to every character; needful in every condition and in every period; needful for life and needful for death; needful for time and needful for eternity. It is genuine religion; it is the

grace of God; it is the water of which our text speaks—"The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Observe, I. Its DONOR: "I shall give him." II. Its RESIDENCE: "It shall be in him." III. Its ACTIVITY: "a well of water springing up." IV. Its TENDENCY: "into everlasting life."

I. And who is THE DONOR? Yonder poor man, who has not where to lay his head; who is relieved by the alms of widows; who is seen weary with his journey, and asking the refreshment of a cup of cold water! And does *He* profess to have the disposal of the blessings of salvation?—Yes; the water that "I shall give him."

And it is not profession only. Nothing disgraces a man more than his undertaking what he is unable to accomplish, and promising what he cannot bestow. But our Saviour raises no visionary expectations. He can more than realize every hope he excites. He is mighty to save. He is able to save to the uttermost. He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. He obtained eternal redemption for us; and, as the reward of his obedience unto death, he was invested with the whole dispensation of the Spirit: "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell."

What a complex character is here! How abased, and yet how glorious! I low poor, and yet how rich! How dependent, and yet how all-sufficient!—Yes; by him who is now saying to the woman of Samaria, "Give me to drink," are all the regions of heaven peopled! All that, are brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God acknowledge that he redeemed them. All that are saved own that in him

they have righteousness and strength. All that are replenished, whether living under the Law, or under the Gospel, look to him as the *only* source of their supplies; and exclaim, "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." And be it remembered, that after all he has communicated he remains the same. For his fulness is not the light of a lamp, which, however large, shines not far, and is soon extinguished; but the light of the sun, which, after shining for ages, and blessing so many myriads with his beams, shines with undiminished vigour. His fulness is not the resource of a vessel, which, however capacious, will by frequency of application be soon exhausted; but the fulness of a fountain, which, though always running, is always full.

In addition to this sufficiency, we may remark his appointment, he has not only a fulness to relieve all our wants, but he has it for this very purpose. "Having ascended up on high, he received gifts for men, even for the rebellious also." "Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

We must also notice his disposition. In the gifts which God bestows upon his creatures, he has in view, not only the good of the receiver, but the welfare of others. Our talents, therefore, whatever be their nature or degree, are to be considered as so many obligations to usefulness. For instance—a man has wealth; but of this wealth he is the steward, and not the proprietor: he has it to feed the hungry; to clothe the naked; to instruct the ignorant; to spread the Scriptures; to send forth missionaries: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not

highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.”—But he is selfish and ungenerous: he refuses to give, or he gives with reluctance; while he expends his money in extravagance, or hoards it up in the miser’s bag; and thus the wise and kind design of Providence is eluded. But donation falls in with the Saviour’s disposition. He is fit to be entrusted with unsearchable riches. He has a heart to give—“his heart is made of tenderness; his bowels melt with love.” He is in his element, as well as in his office, while he relieves the distressed. This ability to succour was “the joy set before him for this “he endured the cross, and despised the shame.” He was willing that his soul should be made a sacrifice for sin—if he could “see the travail of his soul.” Accordingly he was assured that his death would not be in vain; that his benevolence should be completely gratified: all nations being blessed in him, and all nations calling him blessed.

And did any, in the days of his flesh, address him in vain? Had one suppliant only been repulsed, or sent empty away, the rejection would have been a source of despondency in every age of the world; we should have feared that our case resembled his. But what pretence has any one now to perish in despair; when he says, by his conduct as well as by his word, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely!”

Here then we see to whom, in all our necessities, we are to betake ourselves. It is to Him, who is able,

who is appointed, who is willing, who is delighted, to supply us. And how much better is it to proclaim such a Source of relief as this, than to lead men to rely upon themselves! And what, but pride, can make me revolt at such a doctrine? Why should I wish to be my own Saviour any more than my own Creator? Why am I not satisfied in grace, as well as in nature, to “live and move and have my being,” in another?—Especially in one so dear. It is, indeed, painful to be under obligation to an enemy, but not to a friend. To one we love, the burden of gratitude is a pleasant load. Saviour Jesus! we love thee above all—to Thee we owe all our salvation, and all our hopes. And we rejoice to think, that through eternal ages we shall be bound to serve thee, and exclaim, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

II. Its RESIDENCE. “The water that I shall give him *shall be in him.*”

The internal principle of religion is not to be opposed to external practice. Some tell us, as they are out of sight, that their hearts are good; though their lives are not quite what they ought to be. But a good heart will be accompanied and evinced by a good life: “a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things.” It is in vain to tell us of your experience; and refer us for proofs of your religion to a number of views and feelings beyond our reach—your religion is to be visible; your light is so to shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Yet Divine things must be known and felt before they can govern us. Christian experience, therefore, precedes Christian practice; and internal principle is essential to real godliness. Without this there will be no course of consistent, unvarying obedience; and if there was, yet there would be no value in it; for the action devoid of the motive is nothing. Here, therefore, God begins: he begins with the heart, and I admire the way he takes to secure holiness and good works. To purify the streams he cleanses the fountain; and to make the fruit good he makes the tree good. You cannot gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles: you may, indeed, tie a cluster of grapes, or figs, to a thorn, or a thistle—but they do not look natural there—they do not live there: and both the ligature and the fruit will in time rot off. You may fasten feathers to a wing, and a wing to a bird: but the bird can only fly by wings growing out of his body, and feathers growing out of his wings. Surely a man is never so likely to avoid all sin as when he is mortified to it; or to obey God, as when he delights in his law after the inward man. The religion of some people is all external; and we may arrange them in four classes.

The religion of the first depends on *external occurrences*. It may be compared to a stream produced by a storm, instead of being supplied by a spring. The man is seized with sickness, and is alarmed—he sends for the minister: he prays; he resolves; he promises—but he recovers, and his devotion departs with the danger and the disease. He is poor and afflicted; and he worships God in his family, and he loves to attend the preaching of the word of life;—he succeeds in business, and becomes rich and

worldly—and has no time for the one, or relish for the other.

The religion of the second consists in *external performances*. They do a thousand things; but the heart is not in them. They would gladly give up the whole of their irksome task if they could do it with safety. Obedience is not enjoyed as their meat, but taken as their medicine. All their care is to make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter: they have no concern about inward purity; no struggles with innate depravity; no anxiety to have the heart right in the sight of God. But we know who has said, “He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”

The religion of the third is found in their *connections*. They never examine or judge for themselves; but leave their ministers to think for them. Their own knees never bend before God; but they desire the prayers of others. They take shelter under the wing of godly parents, like the Jews, who thought they could not be destroyed because “they had Abraham to their Father:” yet we read of one in hell, who said, “*Father, Abraham*”! Religion is a personal thing; and we can no more be saved by the piety of another than we can be nourished or refreshed by another’s sleeping or eating.

The religion of the fourth is *all in Christ*. These ridicule the very notion of a work of grace *in us*: to look after any thing *in ourselves*, though not self-derived, is legal and pharisaical. *They* have all in Christ—and so have we; but with this difference—

we have all in him so as to seek all *from him*. We believe that when he died all was finished *for us*—and we are now praying that all may be finished *in us*. It is a glorious truth that in him we have sanctification as well as righteousness: but he cannot be our sanctification by suffering us to remain in sin—he is our sanctification, not by being a substitute for our sanctification, but by sanctifying us. Woe to the man who pleads for a religion, of which even Christ is the author, but of which he himself is not the subject! David prays, “Create *in me* a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit *within me*.” And the promise of the new covenant runs: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” If such prayers and promises are to be accomplished, we must look after something *in ourselves*—and, as the Apostle enjoins, *examine*, not Christ, but ourselves, to know “whether we are in the faith.”

III. Its ACTIVITY. “The water that I shall give him shall be in him *a well of water springing up*.” Observe the representations given us of real Christians; mark the design of the Gospel; take any of the graces of the Holy Spirit, or the images of Divine influence: all, all of them will convince you, that genuine religion is something more than notion; that it does not consist in a dormant creed, or a dead confidence; but is a principle, full of life, of energy, and of influence.

How are real Christians represented?—As those

whose strength is to sit still?—No: but they are held forth by those whose profession calls for the most strenuous exertion—they are husbandmen; they are reapers; they are warriors; they are racers.

What is the design of the Gospel? These are the words of an infallible Judge? “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zeal of good works.” How are the graces of the Holy Spirit described? What is faith? Is it a conviction that rests in the judgment?—It overcomes the world; it purifies the heart. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” What is love? We read of the labour of love. What is hope? We read of a lively hope; “we are saved by hope.” What is repentance? “Behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!”

All the images of Divine influence imply the same thing. Sometimes it is compared to leaven, which operates in the meal till the whole mass be leavened. Sometimes it is compared to fire, which penetrates and consumes every thing combustible within its reach. Sometimes it is likened to the force of vegetation: the seed sown is quickened and springs up, first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear.

No wonder, therefore, it is here expressed, not by a pool; not by dead, but living water—the water of a bursting spring: the water that I shall give him shall he in him “a well of water springing up”—into what? “into everlasting life.”

IV. We have to observe its TENDENCY. It weans us from the world, and constrains us to set our affections on things above. It elevates our thoughts, our desires, and our pursuits, in a manner inconceivable to the grovelling sons of time and sense; and enables us, even while our bodies are below, to live with our conversation in heaven.

The difference between grace and glory is not so great as some may imagine. They differ only in degree. The state is the same; the nature is the same. Grace is glory in the bud, and glory is grace in the flower. The one is the child, and the other the man; the one the dawn, the other the day. For what is heaven? Is it a condition in which all worldly distinctions will be done away, and only those remain which resulted from character? The Christian is rising towards it now. “In his eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.” Is it a condition in which all the differences which now divide the religious world will be abolished: in which no inquiry will be made *where* we worshipped, but only *how*? He is tending to it now; “Grace he with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother.” Does it consist in perpetual blessing and praise? He is entering it now: “I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Are the glorified happy in being

ever with the Lord! He now cries, "O that I knew where I might find him!" "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?"

A Christian, therefore, has something of heaven now: he has it in its source; in its elements; in its earnest; in its foretastes. Is he in the temple? He is "made joyful in God's house of prayer he "sees his power and glory in the sanctuary." Is he alone? "My soul," says he, "shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches." Is he in tribulation? He can "glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope: for as the sufferings of Christ abound in him, his consolation also aboundeth by Christ." Yes: "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen: and that which we have heard and seen declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

And yet all we possess, all we enjoy, all we experience, all we know, here, is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. If a transient visit be so delightful, what will the constant vision be! If it be so satisfactory to behold through a glass darkly, what will it be when we shall see face to face! Ah! says the Christian, grateful yet still aspiring, "In thy presence there is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. I will behold thy face in righteousness:

I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.”—And such is the assured blessedness of the Christian; for the tendency of this Divine principle is not liable to frustration. It cannot issue in hell. Grace is nothing, unless it conquers, as well as fights. But,

“Grace will complete what grace begins,
To save from sorrows, or from sins.”

They that believe on Christ are said to believe on him “to life everlasting.” You have often heard how to distinguish between false grace and true: but of this you may rest assured—that what is Divine will be durable; what comes from heaven will lead to it—“We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

We may say reversely the same of sin. There is a connexion between sin and hell. They only differ in degree. In the present experience of the wicked, hell is not only insured, but begun. He is miserable already in the strife between his convictions and his inclinations; in the reproaches of his conscience; in the tyranny of his passions; in the contempt of the wise and good; in the vexations of life; in the fears of death. What he now suffers is sufficient to prove a tendency in sin to produce misery; and the only reason why he is not completely miserable at present is, because he has now the advantage of diversions; because he lives in a mixed state of things; because he is under a dispensation of forbearance and mercy—but all these preventions will soon

give way, and the perfect result of sin will be—read it in the Scripture, and tremble.

May God deliver you from a course, the way of which is hard, and the end of which is death: “that, being made free from sin, and become servants unto God, you may have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”



DISCOURSE XC.

PETER'S CURIOSITY AND PRESUMPTION.

“Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The rock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.”—

JOHN xiii. 36–38.

NO kind of writing is so entertaining, instructive, and useful, as biography; and for this species of composition, there is no book like the Bible. We have, indeed, no complete lives given us; but we have sketches of character, remarkable for their discrimination and effect: we have no full-length and finished portraits; but we have bold outlines and touches, which instantly and powerfully recall the originals.

Here, also, we have no “faultless monsters.” When I am reading of a person, and the writer labours to represent him as perfect, I feel more than dissatisfied: I am imposed upon: I have fable given

me instead of fact: I feel no moral sympathy with the subject; he does not belong to the order of humanity. In the Scriptures we have men portrayed as they were: their defects, as well as excellences, are placed before us; and we see what we have to shun, as well as to pursue.

Peter always appears in the sacred story, like himself. The individuality of his character is supported with wonderful propriety and consistency. We always find him eager, forward, impetuous; always zealous, but his zeal not always according to knowledge; equally rash and affectionate; speaking first and thinking afterward; bold in profession, but failing in execution—yet open to conviction, and deriving profit from his very failings. Observe the words which we have read: “Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.” These words consist of two parts. In the first, our Saviour checks his CURIOSITY. In the second, he confounds his PRESUMPTION.

I. Simon Peter said unto him, “Lord, whither goest thou?” The question was occasioned by what our Saviour had said in a former part of his discourse: “Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and, as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.” Though he said many things after this, yet *this* impressed the mind of Peter—he resolved it again—and again; and as soon as our Saviour paused, he

suddenly asks, "Lord, whither goest thou?" Now here is something which, if we cannot commend, we know not how entirely to censure. It has been said, that the very imperfections of good men are peculiar, and betray their excellences. Here we see Peter's love to his Lord, and concern for his presence. It is always trying to part with a dear relation or friend. Rachel weeps for her children, and refuses to be comforted, because they are not. When Elijah was going to be taken up from the earth, we see how his disciple Elisha followed him from place to place, and would not go back. When Jonathan and David were about to separate, they fell upon each other's neck and wept, until each exceeded. When, at Miletus, "Paul kneeled down and prayed with the brethren, they all wept sore, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." But think of Christ! What a benefactor, what a master was he! How had he endeared himself to his disciples—how essential must, he have appeared to their happiness and welfare I Could Peter then view his continuance with them, or removal, with indifference?

But if our Saviour blames Peter, Peter was blameworthy; for *He* always judges righteous judgment. Peter was a little too curious—a fault, I fear, by no means uncommon. For how many are there, who are more anxious to know secret things, which belong unto God, than to improve the things revealed, which are for us, and for our children! How much attention has been employed in fruitless inquiries, concerning the Divine decrees, the downfall of antichrist, the future state of heathens, the place of judgment,

the employments of the glorified state! We are all fonder of speculation than practice. Whereas, we ought to remember, that this is a world of action rather than science; that things which principally concern us are the most easily found; that, in a state where we have so much to do, and so little time to do it in, we should secure ourselves as much as possible from all superfluous engagements. How many diversions, alas! have we already: necessary diversions by sleep; unavoidable diversions by business; accidental diversions by company and occurrences: and shall we add to all these—trifling and needless diversions?

The Bible is not designed to indulge our curiosity, but to be the guide of our faith, and the rule of our life: like the pillar given to the Israelites; which was not intended to amuse them as naturalists, but to conduct them as travellers, through a trackless wilderness, to the land flowing with milk and honey.

Our Saviour, therefore, never encouraged this principle. When a man asked him, "Lord, are there few that shall be saved?" he would not answer the inquiry; yea, he did not even notice the poor empty trifler at all: he said unto *them*, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto *you*, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." When he had told Peter his duty and destiny, Peter saw John approaching, and asked, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" But our Saviour said, "What if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me." So here he shows his judgment of the inquiry by eluding it. But though he does not gratify him, he instructs him. "Jesus answered

him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards." In two senses, Peter was to follow him, in due time—to the *throne*, and to the *cross*: but at present he could follow him as to neither.

First. Peter was to follow him to *glory*. It was what our Lord prayed for, and what he promised. "Father. I will that they whom thou hast given me he with me where I am, that they may behold my glory. Where I am, there shall also my servant be." This is true of all Christians. They are to be for ever with the Lord. He is gone to prepare a place for them, he is their forerunner; their trustee; and has taken possession of heaven in their name. Already he has drawn their hearts after him; and he will by-and-by draw their persons. But for every thing there is a season. He could not follow him now—because, though our Saviour's hour was come, Peter's was not; though the Master had finished the work given him to do, the servant, had scarcely begun his—and "we are all immortal till our work is done." Enemies cannot hasten, nor friends retard, our departure, before the time appointed of our heavenly Father. Christians are sometimes impatient, and long to be gone; but this is wrong. "The best frame we can be in," says Henry, "is to be ready to go, and willing to stay," if God has any thing for us to do, or to suffer, for his sake. We have three good men in the Scripture who wished for death: but they knew not what they said; and are all blamed for it. The eagerness is not only wrong, but useless. What would it avail the husbandman to fret and rave? Would this bring harvest the sooner? There must be months of winter, and weeks of cold; and nights

of frost, and days of rain and sunshine. He cannot reap in May, or June: the order of nature forbids it. There is also an order in grace. Why cannot you follow him now! Perhaps you have an aged mother to support. Perhaps you have an infant charge to rear. Perhaps you are destined to give birth to an institution of charity. Perhaps you are to exemplify religion in your temper and practice. Perhaps to recommend the Gospel by your sufferings.—We must run, before we can conquer. We must fight, before we can triumph. What a length of time are some detained in life after their connexions have fallen off; after disease and infirmity have rendered them unfit for active employment: and they seem to themselves as incumbrances, instead of helps! But there are some reasons for their detention, connected with the glory of God, and their own welfare; though, as to the knowledge of them, we must walk by faith, and not by sight.

Secondly. Peter was to follow him to the *cross*. He was to suffer for him, and like him—he was to die the same kind of death—“When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.” But he could not follow him now, because he had not sufficient faith and resolution to suffer. The Saviour, therefore, forbears to call him to a task for which he was inadequate. This is very instructive. It shows us that our Lord’s dealings with his people tire founded not only in kindness, but in wisdom and prudence. He adapts the burden to the shoulder, or fits the shoulder to the burden; he smooths the road, or prepares the foot—so is the

promise; "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy day, so shall thy strength be." Some of you can look back and remember how you dreaded such and such trials. You thought, that if they should befall you *then*, you must sink under them—and so you would. But he gradually prepared you for them; and when they actually came, your mind was in a different state—you had other views and feelings—your faith was more strong, and your hope more lively. Gideon, while threshing in the barn, had not, and did not want, the degree of prowess which was necessary when he took the sword, and placed himself at the head of the army; but when, in obedience to the Divine will, he entered the field, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. It does not become you to cast down your souls by imagining future difficulties, and comparing them with your present strength. You should not say, "O, if I was called to prison, or a fiery slake, how could I endure!" See that you are the land's servant: endeavour to hold yourself at his disposal; attend willingly to the duty of the day; and leave the morrow with him. Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he will never suffer the righteous to be moved. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof—and what is belter, sufficient for it too will be the grace. This was our Saviour's meaning; and Peter understood by his following him—his following him to suffer. He, therefore, said unto him, "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now! 'I do not want courage or zeal: Lord, 'I will lay down my life for thy sake'—and what ran I do more?"

II. "Jesus answered him," with a countenance and voice more expressive of pity than severity—

“‘Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?’ Ah, Peter, this is sooner said, than done. Life is not so easily parted with. You trembled upon the water; and, beginning to sink, you cried out, ‘Lord, save, I perish.’—Be not so confident now—‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.’” Let us remark the sin; and derive some reflections from the melancholy statement.

First. The crime was heinous. To deny his Master was unfaithfulness: to deny his Friend was perfidy: to deny his Benefactor was ingratitude: to deny his Redeemer was impiety. It was, for the time, to break off all connexion with him; it was saying, I neither wish to serve him, nor to be saved by him. I know him not, nor wish to know him—“Away with him—Crucify him.”

This, too, was the conduct of one who had been called from a low condition in life to the high honour of apostleship—of one who had seen his miracles—of one who was with him in the Transfiguration, and in Jairus’s chamber when he raised the dead—of one who had confessed him, and said, “To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life: and we believe and are sure that thou art Christ the Son of the living God.” Three aggravations are here mentioned. First, he was warned and admonished—he could not plead ignorance. Secondly, the sin was immediately committed. Things soon wear off from the mind; but here was no time for forgetfulness—the voice of the Saviour had hardly left his ear—his own resolution had scarcely dropped from his lips—he had said, “I will *never* be offended,” and was offended *that very night*: “The cock shall not

crow, till thou hast denied me *thrice*”—which is the last aggravation—here is repetition. A man may be surprised and overtaken in a fault; but, the moment after, reflection may return; and he may wonder, and shudder, and flee. But Peter, after his first offence, feels nothing—he renews it again—and even again—yea, and each time he waxes worse and worse till a lie ends in an oath—and an oath in a cursing!

From this affecting statement let us, Secondly, derive some profitable remarks.

And, First: behold the foreknowledge of our Saviour. Whoever attentively reads the four Gospels must perceive that there was always something to relieve his humiliation, and to convince us that his abasement was not original, and constrained; but assumed and voluntary: that “he made himself of no reputation; and for our sakes became poor.” The soldiers in the garden apprehended him, and led him away; but not till they went backward and fell to the ground, in consequence of his presenting himself, and saying, “I am He!” He was now to be disowned and forsaken: but he proves that he was able to read the heart; and to foresee, certainly and minutely, what would happen, contrary to every degree of probability. For what appearance was there that Peter would deny him—deny him just three times—and three times that very night—and that very night before the cock crew—and with the most profane language? Of all the apostles, he seemed the most determined—the least likely to yield to fear—and had at this very time engaged to die with him, rather than disown him—when, lo! at the very moment of giving this assurance of his attachment and fidelity, Jesus declares, that, in two or three hours, he would falsify

every thing he had said and thought! This was a proof that he “needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.”

This foreknowledge, however, does not justify or extenuate Peter’s sin. Peter was perfectly free and voluntary in what he did. Foreknowledge supposes, not renders, things certain: it does not compel men to sin: their sins are committed not because they are foreknown, or foretold; but they are foreknown and foretold because they will be committed.

Secondly. What reason have we to exclaim, with David, “Lord, what is man!” Survey him under the greatest advantages and obligations. Look—not at *heathens*, but at *Jews*—a people distinguished and indulged above all the families of the earth. Look not at *Jews*, but at *Christians*, with all the privileges of the *Jews* increased and perfected. Look—not at those who are only Christians *in name*, and live under the dispensations of the Gospel; but at those who are “*partakers of the grace of God in truth.*” Look it these—not only as chargeable with *infirmities*; with drowsiness of attention or wandering thoughts in Divine things; but overcome with temptation, and betrayed into the *grossest guilt*—and no longer wonder that a man after God’s own heart should pray, “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins: let them not have dominion over me.” No longer wonder that our Saviour should say, even to his disciples, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.” There is nothing too vile for us to fall into, if we are left of Him who alone can keep us from falling.

Thirdly. We see how little we are acquainted with ourselves. When Peter said, "I will lay down my life for thy sake," he spoke according to his feelings. But sincerity is not constancy. There is a goodness, compared to the morning cloud and early dew, that soon passeth away. Peter did not consider the difference between an impulse and a principle; between an hour of ease and a moment of trial. We are now in health; but we know not how it would be with us if we were removed to a climate much warmer, or colder, than our own: and we know less of ourselves morally than physically. There are excellences which we may presume upon our possessing, only because we have never been called to display them. There are provocations with which we have never been tried, the effect of which would render us a wonder to ourselves. Events increase our self-acquaintance, by showing us what there is in the heart: as the waves cast up mire and dirt in the pool that was clear, because calm, before, Hazael's case is a strong one; but it will apply, in various degrees, to ourselves, he was shocked at the prophet's representation of himself when he should become a king—and exclaimed, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" And yet, as an old writer says, the dog did it. God only knows how much of our innocency has been owing to principle, or the absence of temptation; or what we should have been in conditions the reverse of those which have sheltered our weakness.

But, Fourthly. Here is the grand lesson you and I have to learn—That the most confident are the most exposed; and the most humble the most safe. "When I am weak, then am I strong." Why?

Because the deep consciousness of my weakness will induce me to shun scenes of temptation; keep me from aspiring after high and responsible stations; and to pray, without ceasing, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

No: we do not wonder at this strange and sad revolution in Peter. He is proud and self-sufficient. He places himself above his brethren, and considers himself as much less likely to fall than they—"Though all should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." He talks away about sacrificing his life—without one word like this: "By thy grace helping me: for without thee I can do nothing." A Pharisee could hardly have held more vainglorious language.—Is it any marvel, then, that he should be permitted to learn, by bitter experience, that he was nothing, and could do nothing, without that Holy Spirit whose influences he had forgotten to acknowledge? "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." I never saw a professor of religion full of confidence in himself, and speaking censoriously of others, but who fell into some gross crime, or into some great calamity. "Be not highminded, but fear. Blessed is the man that feareth always." Let us sing the words of our incomparable Cowper:

"To keep the lamp alive,
With oil we fill the bowl;
'Tis water makes the willow thrive,
And grace that feeds the soul.

"The Lord's unsparing hand
Supplies the living stream:
It is not at our own command,
But still derived from Him.

“Beware of Peter’s word;
Nor confidently say,
‘I never *will* deny thee, Lord
But—‘Grant I never *may*.’

“Man’s wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone;
And e’en an angel would be weak
Who trusted in his own.

“Retreat beneath his wings,
And in his grace confide:
This more exalts the King of kings
Than all your works beside.

“In Jesus is our store:
Grace issues from his throne:
Whoever says, ‘I want no more,’
Confesses he has none.”

DISCOURSE XCI.

THE THORN IN THE FLESH.

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee.”

—2 COR. xii. 7-9.

WHERE the subject is himself, it is a delicate and a difficult thing for a man to speak properly. And, whether it be from constitutional reserve, or a fear of hypocrisy, or a sense of unworthiness and imperfections, it is certain, that those who feel most, and do most, in religion, generally talk the least about it. It is the shallow stream that cannot flow; it is the empty vessel that cannot be—touched without telling it.

Yet a reference to a person's own history and experience is sometimes not only allowable, but commendable and useful; and a man of talent and real godliness, and whose character is placed above suspicion, is often peculiarly interesting and edifying when he speaks of things concerning himself. Such a man was Paul; and the narrative he here gives us

has relieved the minds, and called forth the gratitude, of millions. It contains,

I. His DANGER. II. His PRESERVATION. III. His PRAYER. IV. His SUCCESS.

His DANGER. "Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations." By "the abundance of the revelations," he refers to some extraordinary discoveries with which God had favoured him; and particularly a trance, recorded in the preceding verses: "It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." On the nature and circumstances of this transaction I am not called to enlarge. I shall only remark what is necessary to our immediate purpose. It is the modesty and diffidence of the Apostle, who had concealed this privilege for more than fourteen years. How unlike him are those who sound a trumpet before them, to awaken attention to all their religious movements! who are forward to publish to the world accounts of their conversion and deliverances, depressions and raptures—Not that it is improper to take notice of any of God's dealings with us: "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." But while we remark these things for our own profit, we need not plague the public, or suppose

that every body must feel interested in our concerns. Had many been indulged like Paul, they would not have contained themselves for a single day, but have announced, in every company, and probably in print, that they had been in the third heaven, and heard unspeakable words! But, it is likely, Paul would never have divulged this distinction unless he had been compelled by his enemies, in vindication of his office; and, when he *does* mention it, he frankly acknowledges that it nearly proved too much for him—I was in danger, says he, of being “exalted above measure.”

That is, First. He was in danger of being raised too high for his usefulness as a minister. A minister is to have compassion on the ignorant; to comfort the feebleminded; to sympathize with the afflicted; and to speak a word in season to him that is weary—He is to enter into all the circumstances, and melt into all the feelings of his people. Now there are things which, instead of preparing him for this accommodation, may disqualify him. He may be raised above it. That which promises the preacher usefulness, by adapting him to the state of his hearers, is not something peculiar to himself, but that which he experiences in common with them. Paul was growing too wise; he was in danger, so to speak, of shooting over the people’s heads, he had to do with poor mortals upon earth. What was the language of paradise to them; it could only make them stare, or exclaim, “How fine, how wonderful a preacher! Why, no one can understand him!” But when he spake to them of thorns, and afflictions, and prayer, and sustaining grace, he was on their level; and they could apprehend and feel him.

Secondly. He was in danger of being elevated too high for his present condition as a Christian. When Peter saw Moses and Elias in glory, and our Saviour transfigured before them, he exclaimed, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." He wished to abide there: but, says the Holy Ghost, he "knew not what he said." For, admitting his wish had been indulged, what would have become of his wife and family? Peter, in his transport, had forgotten these. But these may be forgotten too soon—these must not be forgotten at all. As the Saviour does not pray that his followers, before the appointed hour, should be taken out of the world by death, so neither does he improperly draw them out of it by religion. It is their allotted residence for a season; and many relative and civil claims demand a subordinate share of their attention. He could so indulge his people, that their manifestations and joys would unhinge them from earth, take all interest out of their present connexions, and render them listless to all the duties of their stations and callings. But he is a God of judgment; and fits us for the way, as well as the end.

Thirdly. He was in danger of rising too high in his own estimation, as a favourite of Heaven. Christians, while here, are sanctified but in part. They are not like the Holy One of God, of whom it is said, "The prince of this world came, and found nothing in him." He met with nothing inflammable in him, and therefore he could kindle none of his unhallowed fires; there were no evil appetites and passions for temptation to operate upon. But it is otherwise with us. Owing to the sin that dwelleth in us, we are in danger

from every thing around us; and therefore must walk circumspectly, and watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. There are dangers in our dress; and dangers in our table; and dangers in our friends; and dangers in our children. Things innocent in themselves may become injurious; things even good in themselves may become evil. Knowledge may puff up: our enlargements in duty, and even our attainments in religion, may—through our remaining corruption—gender, or at least feed, self-sufficiency and highmindedness.

Do you wonder at *your* danger? See Paul himself in hazard, from the influence of vanity and pride. Even he was beginning to rise and swell, from the distinguishing honours that had been shown him. “Why this is a very astonishing privilege—Who was ever caught up into heaven, while on earth? This is really placing me above the prophets; yea, above Moses himself, he spake with God, it is said, face to face; but he was never admitted into the third heaven. The glorious prerogative belongs to me only.” No creature, perhaps, discovered in him such a tendency towards self-exaltation; and Paul himself was probably unconscious of his danger. But it was his mercy that he had one to watch over him who discerned his exposure in time; and employed means,

For his PRESERVATION; which we proceed to consider. “There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.” This thorn has exceedingly perplexed expositors; and they knew not, after all their conjectures, what to do with it. It would be a waste of your time to attempt to determine what is among the secrets of the Almighty; and

which, if discovered, would be of no importance. We even admire the wisdom that has left it in uncertainty. If you knew what it exclusively was, those of you who are in affliction, but not afflicted in the same thing, would be ready to say, "Ah! Paul never knew my heart's bitterness—He never had my thorn!" But now, none of you can say this; for you are ignorant of what it was. Let then a Baxter, who for thirty years endured the stone, imagine that it was his torment; let a Watts, moving in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, conclude that it was a nervous malady; let a third infer, that it was a slanderer; a fourth, a trying companion; and so of the rest.—If such a supposition tends to soothe the mind under irritation, and leads the sufferer to believe that it is sent to "keep man from his purpose, and to hide pride from man;" the supposition can never be improper. Thus the Scripture teaches us, by what it conceals, as well as by what it discovers; and our ignorance, as well as our knowledge, is rendered useful.

All we learn is, That this thorn in the flesh was some sharp and piercing affliction; in which the enemy of souls had a peculiar influence: for it was "the messenger of Satan to buffet him." And to buffet him was all his aim. But his intention was overruled; and the curse turned into a blessing. Thus the leech adheres to the flesh, and fills himself with blood, and looks no further: but the hand of the Faculty guides it to the place of contact, and the relief of the patient is the consequence. Thus we have seen men in a boat, looking one way, and rowing another. Thus all creatures are in the Lord's hand, and under his control: he gave Joseph favour in the

sight of the jailer; brought Elijah food by ravens; and sent Paul safety by Satan himself!

But you will observe, that Paul does not say, "There was given me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, because I *was* exalted above measure," but "*lest I should be.*" I wish you to remark this, in order to see, that affliction is designed to *prevent*, as well as to *recover*. This is a case of great importance in the experience of Christians. You say, perhaps, "After the most faithful examination of myself, I am not able to discover any duty that I have knowingly neglected; any sin that I have indulged in the practice of; any idol that I have adored." But God saw the future in the present; and the effect in the cause. No: you *had* not adored such a creature—but he saw that your admiration would soon have become idolatry, and that you were ready to kneel. No: you *were* not vain and worldly—but he saw a train of prosperous circumstances had commenced, which would flatter you into self-importance, and make you forget that this is not your rest.

He therefore determined to prevent the evil; and it is commonly said, Prevention is better than cure; and it is truly said, and never so truly—as with regard to sin. Let us take, for instance, Joseph and David, with respect to adultery. Joseph was preserved, and David was restored. But observe the difference. The one was useful, as an example, to excite and encourage; the other hardened and justified the ungodly, turned religion into a jeer, and "caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." The one retained his peace of mind; the other was torn with anguish, and his sin was ever before him.

The one was crowned with glory and honour; the other, in his reputation, suffered a dreadful eclipse. A blot and a dishonour did he get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away. Take Hezekiah and Paul, with regard to pride. Hezekiah was lilted up; and when he humbled himself he was forgiven: but this did not repair the many sad effects of his ambition—for “wrath came upon him and upon all Judah.” But Paul was taken earlier; the God of his mercy prevented him—or who can imagine what consequences might have resulted from sin in such a character, both with regard to himself, the church, and the world!

Ah! said David, when he had been hindered from effecting a purpose of revenge; “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.” Who is not under obligation to praise God for the same preventing goodness! One ought to say, “Blessed be God for that event, which took me out of a situation in which I now see I should have been corrupted and destroyed.” Another ought to say, “Blessed be God for that breach of friendship: it saved me from a pleasing, but irreligious companion, who would have undermined my principles.” Another ought to say, “Blessed be God for such a brotherly reproof: it seemed severe, and many a tear it cost me; but it checked me on the very brink of ruin.” Another ought to say, “Blessed be God, I should have made flesh my arm, and gold my hope; but disappointment has turned my eye upward, and, ‘now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.’”

III. How was he employed under this trying dispensation? HE GAVE HIMSELF UNTO PRAYER. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me."

Prayer is the refuge of the afflicted. It is, therefore, recommended by Infinite Wisdom and Goodness. "Is any afflicted? let him pray." Prayer cannot be offered in vain; for, says the promise, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." Yea, the very exercise of prayer, as well as the answer, brings succour. There is some relief even in tears. You have heard of the luxury of weeping. It is soothing, in distress, to pour our tears into the bosom of a friend, who, rejoicing when we rejoiced, will now weep when we weep. But, oh! to turn aside, as Job did, and say, "Mine eye poureth out tears unto God!" To tell *Him* all that distresses us, and all that alarms, with a confidence in his compassion and sympathy and power and wisdom, all of which are infinite! Here is an asylum, from which no enemy can cut us off; here is a sanctuary, that no evil can invade; here the repose of the grave, and of glory, begins—here "the wicked cease from troubling," and here "the weary are at rest." I do not wonder that David should say, "It is good for me to draw nigh to God;" or that Hannah, when she had poured out her soul before God, should go her way and eat and drink, and her countenance be no more sad.

Prayer was the effect of Paul's suffering. Is it the result of yours? How does your affliction operate? Does it make you a suppliant, or a fury? Does it lead you to quarrel with instruments, or to commit your cause unto God? It is by their influence you

are to know whether your afflictions are sanctified. If they lead you to the throne of grace; if you can say,

“Trials make the promise sweet:
Trials give new life to prayer;
Trials bring me to his feet,
Lay me low—and keep me there

then the thorns have done something for you; and will do more.

A man under sanctified affliction will not pray carelessly, but “continue *instant* in prayer.” He will say, with Jacob, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” Thus Paul besought the Lord *thrice*. Our Saviour, “in his agony, prayed more earnestly; he kneeled down and prayed three times, saying the same words.” But I do not understand the expression of our apostle numerically: it imports, that he prayed fervently and frequently. But was this necessary? Is not the God he addressed “a God hearing prayer? Merciful and gracious? A very present help in trouble? “The case is this: The prayer of faith is always immediately heard, but not always immediately answered. The reason is, not that he is wanting in kindness, but, that he exercises his kindness wisely: he is a God of judgment, and therefore he waits that he may be gracious unto us. He will take away all hope in ourselves and in creatures, he will make us sensible of the value of the blessing; and prepare us to sing aloud of his mercy when it comes. We are like children; we wish to gather the fruit while it is yet unripe; thaï is, before it has acquired the fine complexion and the rich flavour, and while the use of it is even dangerous.

But he pulls back our impatient hand; he is resolved that it shall ripen before it is eaten. Nor will he yield for our crying.

The time of delay is often peculiarly trying. When he seems to shut out our prayer; when we stand at the door and knock, and hear nothing like an opening, especially if the weather be foul too; there is danger of our withdrawing, with the complaint of the unbelieving nobleman, "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" But "he that believeth, maketh not haste." He will check his murmuring and his despondency, by reflecting, that God is a sovereign, upon whom he has no claims; that his own time of acting must be infinitely the most proper; and, above all, that he cannot seek him in vain. For "the vision is but for an appointed time; in the end it will speak," and its contents will be more than satisfactory. Thus Paul at length obtained,

IV. An ANSWER. "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee." Observe two things.

First. The answer does not apparently correspond with the petition. Paul prayed to have the thorn removed: to this, God says nothing; but assures him of something equally good; yea, unspeakably better. Let us not overlook this circumstance. With regard to temporal things we cannot be too general in our prayers, or refer ourselves too much to the pleasure of God. We can hardly with safety say more than this—"O Lord, grant me such a deliverance, or such an indulgence, if it be good for me; but, if not, favour me with a denial. Not my will, but thine be done." For our prayers, like ourselves, are imperfect: nature sometimes speaks, without our being aware of it, in the tone of grace; and we are really pleading

only for our pride, or impatience, or unbelief. We know not what to pray for as we ought: but the Lord knows what to give; and he gives, perfectly acquainted with the case, in all its bearings, and in all its consequences; and with a love towards us that passeth knowledge. Hence he sometimes denies a request entirely; at other times he separates the good from the evil, and grants us a part; while frequently he answers by way of exchange. If a child was to ask of a father a fish, and he should give him a serpent, we should be shocked at the deed. But suppose the child, by reason of his ignorance, should ask for a serpent instead of a fish; we should then admire the father, if he refused what he asked, and gave him what he did not ask. We applaud not only the judgment, but the kindness of the parent, who, in the education of his son, regulates his conduct, not by his *wishes*, but by his *wants*. He may *wish* for holidays, while he *wants* schooling: he may *wish* for delicacies, while he *wants* medicine. Our heavenly Father always gives according to what we *ought* to ask;—and according to what we *should* ask,—if we had the same views with himself, and the same regard for our welfare—for our welfare governs all his dealings with us.

Secondly. The answer is yet blessed and glorious. “My grace is sufficient for thee!”—not *thy* grace, but *mine*: not that which thou hast in thy possession, but that which I have in my keeping, and will seasonably communicate, in the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Nothing in thyself, I will be always near; always within call; always within reach. “My grace is *sufficient* for thee.” Sufficient for what? Write all thy wants underneath. Sufficient for what?

Sufficient for thy *work*; which often discourages thee, and is enough to discourage thee, if it is to be performed in thine own strength. But it is not. "As thy day, so shall thy strength be. My strength shall be made perfect in thy weakness." Sufficient for what? Sufficient for thy *warfare*; which often alarms thee, and is enough to alarm thee, if thine enemies only are seen. But look at me. "More are they that are for thee than they that are against thee."—"Greater is he that is in thee than he that is in the world." Sufficient for what?

Sufficient for thy *affliction*; which often depresses thee, and is enough to depress thee, if thou art to struggle with it alone. But thou art not to be alone. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

This was Paul's case. I will not remove the thorn in the flesh, says the Saviour—but, while suffering, my grace shall be sufficient for thee. Whatever therefore, Christian, be your affliction, remember, here is your sufficiency; and be persuaded, that this grace *is* sufficient for two purposes, which you should be more concerned to have accomplished than to have your thorns extracted. It is sufficient, First, to sanctify your afflictions: so that though "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Secondly, it is sufficient—to render them supportable. What am I saying? I have marked the effect too low.—It is sufficient—to enable you to

“glory in tribulation also.” “Yes,” says the Church, “having nothing and yet possessing all things”—“Although 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 stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” And what says the experience of some of you, my fellow-Christians? Have you not, when they arrived, borne with patience, with cheerfulness, with peace, with joy—trials which, in the prospect, made you tremble? Spilsbury was a sufferer for conscience’ sake. He had been once imprisoned, and released: and when apprehended a second time, he said, as they were conveying him away,—his wife and children weeping around him—“Weep not for me; I am not afraid to go to prison now, for I found God there the first time.” Ah! says many a sufferer, awaking from despondency, in a situation where he thought no ray of heaven could enter, “Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not! “The people of the world often wonder that Christians are not only patient, but blessed in those circumstances which make *them* turbulent and miserable—as Isaiah finely expresses it, “like a wild bull in a net.” The reason is this. They can see their losses and sufferings, but not their supports and consolations. Did they see all—did they see how *underneath were the everlasting arms*—they would not wonder that they do not sink. Did they see how they are fed with the hidden manna, they would not wonder that they do not faint. Did they see how, in the mud-walled cottage, and lying on the half-straw bed of languishing, the kingdom of God was within

them, they would not wonder that they can “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory! “But many know nothing of the blessedness of this promise; and even those who are the heirs of it know but very little.

With one reflection we conclude; and it is a necessary application of the whole subject. To what purpose should I have proved that this grace was sufficient for Paul, and for the people of God, since, —sufficient for their work, their warfare, and their trials,—if it be not, my dear hearers, sufficient for *you*? But it is. There is the same fulness and efficacy in it as ever; and what it has done it can do.

But you say, Is it attainable? It is.

By whom? Every one that feels his need, and implores it. “FOR EVERY ONE that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”



DISCOURSE XCII.

THE REGULATION OF THE TONGUE.

Set a watch, O Lord, before my month; keep the door of my lips.—Ps. cxli. 3.

PRAYER is not only a duty, but the manner in which it is commanded shows it to be a duty of universal obligation. “Continue instant in prayer. Pray without ceasing. In every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgivings, let your requests be made known unto God.”

With these demands, the experience of a man attentive to his spiritual welfare harmonizes. He knows, he feels, prayer to be always seasonable; always necessary. There is much to employ him at the throne of grace with regard to *others*; for, in his intercourse with God, he does not forget the world, the nation, the church, the family; his friends, or even his foes. But when he considers *himself*; and reflects on the grace that is needful to preserve him in prosperity; to support him in adversity; to renew his heart; to govern his life; and to regulate his

tongue—no wonder he says with David—“But I give myself unto prayer.”

“Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” These words remind us of four things—Importance—Danger—Inability—Application. A man would not use such language as this unless he was convinced—I. OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT. II. THE DANGER HE IS IN OF TRANSGRESSION. III. HIS INABILITY TO PRESERVE HIMSELF. IV. THE WISDOM OF APPLYING TO GOD FOR ASSISTANCE. Let us examine and exemplify each of these four convictions.

A man would never use this language without a conviction of THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT. This conviction, I fear, does not very generally prevail. The use of speech is seldom considered morally. Unless on some very particular occasions, people imagine, that it is perfectly optional with them, what they speak, and how they speak—saying, with those in the time of David, “Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?” Hence numberless words are daily uttered with indifference, and never thought of again; and if ever people confess, or pray, speech never makes an article either in their confessions or prayers.

Such is the common sentiment. And, to crush it at once: to inspire you with a holy dread; to bring you upon your knees with this supplication, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips—let me lead you to a few passages of Scripture—a hook to which you all professedly appeal. Let us consult the apostle James; he seems, more than any other of the sacred writers, to have enlarged upon the subject. There are many declara-

tions in his epistles which you would do well to read, at least once a week, before you leave your retirement.

For instance: "If a man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

"Religion! what treasure untold
Resides in that heavenly word!
More precious than silver and gold,
And all that this earth can afford."

Religion! It is profitable unto all things: having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Without it, we have no hope beyond the grave, no comfort in death, no solace in affliction, no God with us in the world. But the careless use of the tongue annihilates all title to the possession, and stamps the man who assumes the profession as a self-deluder. What a charge! What a decision! How many thousand does this righteous sentence unchristian and condemn! "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

Again: the same writer tells us, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." A Christian, it seems, should not be stationary, but advancing. It is his duty and privilege to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour." And what is the consequence of this progression? What is the evidence? There is not a better test than the government of the tongue. There is nothing that implies a higher degree of wisdom and goodness; of self-atten-

tion; of the power and prevalence of holy principles. Such a man may he consulted in any enterprises; he may be intrusted with any secret; he may be left in any trying situation; he will betray no friendship; he will punish no confidence: the very discipline and grace he must have exercised before he could have reached his present attainment are securities for every future duty, and pledges of every future excellency. Whoever has accomplished this victory need despair of no other; and it is not a figure of speech, but the language of truth and soberness—"If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."

Again: says the inspired author, "Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us: and we turn about their whole body." Do you perceive the force of the image? He who has not the government of his tongue is like a person riding a horse without a bridle—the consequence of which, especially if the beast be spirited and fierce, may be easily conjectured.—"Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth." Do you see the force of the comparison? The man that has not the control of his tongue is like a passenger on board a vessel without a rudder, rolling as the waves direct, and in constant peril of shipwreck. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature: and it is set on fire of hell." As if he should

say, Every thing is transacted by speech, in natural, civil, and religious concerns—how much, therefore, depends on the good or evil management of the tongue! What an ardour of holy love and friendship, or of anger and malice, may a few words fan into a flame! The tongue is the principal instrument in the cause of God; and it is the chief engine of the devil—give him this, and he asks no more—there is no mischief or misery he will not accomplish by it. The use, the influence of it, therefore, is inexpressible; and words are never to be considered only as *effects*, but as *causes*; the operation of which can never be fully imagined. Let us suppose a case; a case, I fear, but too common. You drop, in the thoughtlessness of conversation, or for the sake of argument, or wit, some irreligious, sceptical expression—it lodges in the memory of a child, or a servant it takes root in a soil favourable to such seed—it gradually springs up, and brings forth fruit, in the profanation of the sabbath; the neglect of the means of grace; in the reading of improper books; in the choice of dangerous companions; Who can tell where it will end? But there is a lying who knows where it began. It will be acknowledged that some have it in their power, by reason of their office, talents, and influence, to do much more injury than others; but none are so insignificant as to be harmless.

But I must lead you from the servant to the master. Hear the language of the faithful and true Witness, and who knows the nature of the judgment, because he will be the Judge: “I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy

words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Did you ever hear this before, and do you believe it now? What! are not only your actions, but your words—every idle word—recorded in the book of God's remembrance, to be called forth before the whole world, as evidences of your character, and of the righteousness of the sentence to be passed upon you? This surely is sufficient to convince you of the importance of the subject, and to induce you to cry, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

A man would never use this language without a conviction that HE IS IN DANGER OF TRANSGRESSION. And if David was conscious of a liability to err, shall we ever presume on our safety?

Our danger arises from the depravity of our nature. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; and who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" The stream will always resemble the fountain.

Our danger arises from the contagion of example. There is nothing in which mankind are more universally culpable than in the disorders of speech. Yet with these we are constantly surrounded; and to these we have been accustomed from our impressible infancy.

We are in danger from the frequency of speech. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin." We must of necessity speak often; but we often speak without necessity. Duty calls us to intermingle much with our fellow-creatures; but we are too little in the closet, and too much in the crowd—and when we are in company we forget the admonition—"Let every man be swift to hear, and slow to speak."

We are in danger from the extent of our obligation. The laws of speech are so numerous and various, that it must be difficult indeed not to neglect or violate some of them. Observe these laws.

There is the law of *prudence*. This condemns silliness and folly—for no one has a licence to talk nonsense. This condemns all that is impertinent, and unsuited to the place, the company, and the season. “A wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment. A word fitly spoken, O how good is it! it is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” “All foolish talking and jesting” are forbidden by the Apostle; while he enjoins, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

There is the law of *purity*. This forbids all ribaldry: and not only every thing that is grossly offensive, but all indecent allusions and insinuations, however artfully veiled: “But fornication, and all uncleanness—let it not be once *named* among you, as becometh saints.”

There is the law of *veracity*. This condemns every thing spoken with a view to deceive; or spoken so as to occasion deception; and which may be done by a confusion of circumstances: by an omission of distances; by an addition of circumstances: “Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another.”

There is the law of *kindness*. This condemns all calumny and tale bearing; the circulation of whatever may be injurious to the reputation of another. This requires, that if you must speak—if you *must* speak—of another’s fault, you do it without aggravation; that you do it. not with pleasure, but pain; and

that if you censure, you do it as a judge would pass sentence upon his son. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."

There is the law of *utility*. This requires, that we should not scandalize another, by any thing in our speech; but contribute to his benefit, by rendering our discourse instructive, or reproofing, or consolatory. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers."

There is the law of *piety*. This requires that we should never take God's name in vain; never speak lightly of his word, nor his worship; never charge him foolishly; never murmur under any of his dispensations. It requires that we extol his perfections, and recommend his service: "Praise the Lord, call upon his Name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his Name is exalted. Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee." So will you render the calves of your lips.

Who can reflect upon all this, and not see his daily, his hourly danger? "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

III. A man would never use this language without a conviction of INABILITY TO PRESERVE HIMSELF.

This conviction is well founded. There is no subject the Scripture more fully teaches than our natural weakness and insufficiency. It assures us that we are left by the Fall, not only without righteousness, but without strength. "Without me," says the

Saviour, "ye can do nothing." The Bible teaches us this truth, not only doctrinally, but historically. The examples of good men, and men eminent in godliness, confirm it, and confirm it in the very article before us. Moses, the meekest man in the earth, "spake unadvisedly with his lips." You have heard of the patience of Job; but he "cursed the day of his birth:" and Jeremiah, the prophet of the Lord, did the same. Peter said, "Though all men should be offended because of thee, I will never be offended—though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." But how did he use his tongue a few hours after? Then "began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man!"

"Beware of Peter's word:
Nor confidently say,
'I never *will* deny thee, Lord
But—'Grant I never may.'"

This conviction is continually increasing. As the Christian, in the course of his experience, is learning to cease from man, so is he also taught to cease from himself. He knows the truth of Solomon's words, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." He has seen how little his practice has kept pace with his knowledge; he has verified the vanity of his purposes and resolutions; his warmest frames and feelings have varied, and left him a wonder to himself; he has fallen, where he once deemed himself most secure—and is *now* persuaded—though he will be more strongly persuaded of it ten years hence—that if he stands, he is kept by the power of God.

It is a conviction the most happy. You need not be afraid of it. This self-acquaintance will only reduce you to the proper condition of a creature, and

prepare you for the reception of Divine supplies. Our misery is from our self-sufficiency; it is pride that ruins us. "He filleth the hungry with good things, while the rich he sends empty away. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted. If any man will be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. Let the weak say I am strong."

IV. A man should never use this language without A CONVICTION OF THE WISDOM OF APPLYING TO GOD FOR THE ASSISTANCE WE NEED. Prayer is the effect of our weakness, and the expression of our dependence. It confesses the agency of God. They who pray, and yet deny the doctrine of Divine influence, offer the sacrifice of fools; but those who believe that God works in us to will and to do, and strengthens us with all might by his Spirit in the inner man, act wisely in addressing him as David does—"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

For, in the first place—God is equal to our preservation. However great our danger, he can keep us from falling. Whatever difficulties we have to encounter, or duties to perform, his grace is sufficient for us. "I can do all things," says Paul, "through Christ who strengtheneth me."

Secondly. His succours are not to be obtained without prayer. He has a right to determine in what way he will communicate his own favours; he is infinitely capable of knowing what method is most consistent with his own glory, and conducive to our good—and he has revealed it: and however freely he has promised his influences, he has said, "Nevertheless, for all these things, will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them."

Thirdly. Prayer always brings the assistance it implores. "Ask," says he, "and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find." So it has always been: "He never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain."

"What a dry, uninteresting subject!"—It may be so to *you*; but it was not so to the man after God's own heart, he sung, indeed, of the mercy of the Lord for ever; and exclaimed, "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound." But he never disregarded the practical influence of religious principles. He prayed—"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

And suppose, my dear hearers, you were now to examine yourselves by this subject? Would you find nothing to induce you to exclaim, "Who can understand his errors?"—Nothing to humble you in the dust before God!—Nothing to draw forth your penitential grief?—Nothing to urge you to a Mediator, whose blood cleanses from nil sin, and in whom alone our unworthy persons, and our imperfect services, can be accepted?

Let this subject awaken and engage much of your attention in future. Make the resolution of David your own: "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue." But let it be an enlightened resolution: while it makes you diligent—be humble; while it makes you watchful—be also prayerful. It is the Saviour's own combination; "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." David not only prayed, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips but he prayed also, "Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise." Religion is not made

up of negatives. There is not only a time to keep silence, but a time to speak. It is not enough, that we are harmless and blameless in our speech; we must do good with it. Pray, therefore, that you may be "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and be filled with the Spirit." Burnet, in the History of his own Times, speaking of the incomparable Leighton, says, "In a free, and frequent conversation with him, for twenty-two years, I never heard him utter an idle word, or a word that had not a direct tendency to edification." But what does he add besides! "And I never saw him in any other frame of mind, than that in which I wish to die!" This justifies the eulogium, and accounts for it. For,

As the man is, so is his strength. "A good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil: for, of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaketh."

DISCOURSE XCIII.

SPIRITUAL SUCCOUR DERIVED FROM APPOINTED MEANS.

“Who, when he was come, helped them much which had relieved through grace.”—ACTS xviii. 27.

THE God of nature is the God of grace; and his influence in the one strikingly corresponds with his agency in the other. In the world of nature, God not only brings creatures into life, but provides for their support; and, in the regular economy of his Providence, opens his hand, and “satisfieth the desire of every living thing.” So it is in the world of grace. Christians are new creatures: but they are not perfect at once; they require attention and supplies. And “He who giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry,” will not overlook the wants of his own children. He taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy. Hence they may boldly say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.”

In harmony with this reflection are the words

which we have chosen for our present improvement. They were spoken of “a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria.” He was “an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures and had come to Ephesus. “This man,” it is said, “was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.” Here we remark, that natural talent, and actual knowledge, are very distinguishable from each other; and that the heart may be right with God, while the judgment, in Divine things, is defective. It is well, however, to see a man using the light he has. It shows that he is sincere and in earnest; and “to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly.” This was the case here. “And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.”

This honours both parties.

It commends Aquila and Priscilla. Though they found Apollos, in Christian knowledge, inferior to themselves, yet, as he was truly pious and zealous, and had good and useful endowments, they did not despise or disparage him, saying, “He may do for others; but such a young, raw, inexperienced preacher is not deep enough for us—so many a *gifted* brother, and many a *gifted*, sister, in our day, would have said—but they encouraged him, by their attendance; and watched and cherished the ripening of the fruit. For they also communicated to him of their own experience. But observe—They did it not superciliously, nor in public; but, with a delicate regard to his feelings, alone, in their own house.

And it looks well in Apollos, that he so willingly received their instruction. He was a young man of great parts and learning; a preacher exceedingly cried up and followed—and it was not an apostle that undertook to teach him; nor even a brother minister; but two of his bearers, and mechanics too—but he listens to them with pleasure and gratitude. And thus he shows us his good sense, as well as his humility. For those who are below us in some qualities, may yet be above us in others; and there is no such thing as independence. In the mystical body, as well as in the natural, “the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”

Apollos was willing to go where there was least help, and most probability of usefulness. But no preacher ought to be countenanced till he is accredited by some authority better than his own. When, therefore, Apollos was “disposed to pass into Achaia,” he travelled with letters of recommendation; for “the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him;” and he fully answered to their contents: “for, when he was come, he helped them much which had believed through grace.”

Whence we observe—that CHRISTIANS ARE BELIEVERS—That THEY RELIEVE THROUGH GRACE—That THEY NEED HELP; and—That ASSISTANCE IS AFFORDED BY THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL.

I. CHRISTIANS ARE RELIEVERS. To believe is to have a persuasion of the truth of a thing submitted to our attention.

It is obvious, however, that the credence which characterizes the subjects of divine grace does not rest in the judgment, without producing a corre-

spondent state of the heart: “for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness. Purifying their hearts by faith. Faith worketh by love. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” Such is the influence ascribed to the faith of the primitive Christians. That these are not the invariable effects of believing is evident from fact; and the advantage the apostle James took of such a fact, in his days, was to show the inutility of that faith which admits the truth into the understanding, while the possessor is not sanctified by it. “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

It a man believe any thing with certainty, it is his own mortality; and yet, though he cannot, does not, doubt, for a moment, that he is a dying creature, the conviction is completely counteracted by his passions and sins; and he lives as if he were to live here always: and, according to the prayer of Moses, God alone can *so* teach us to number our days, that we shall apply our hearts unto wisdom. Ungodly characters may, therefore, give credit to the Scriptures in general, and to the most interesting doctrines of the Gospel, and yet retain their wickedness—“Holding the truth in unrighteousness.”

The hazard of deception, to which we are exposed, arises from the near resemblance there often is between a counterfeit and a genuine faith; and the

tendency there is in men to be satisfied with the assent of the mind, which costs nothing, without “obeying from the heart the form of doctrine which is delivered us; and being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.” But such is the disposition of every one that believes to the saving of the soul. See it in his conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin; his abhorrence of himself; and his humiliation before God. See it in his consciousness of the need of a Saviour; his reception of him; and his dependence upon him. See it in his profession of his Name; and in his adherence to his ordinances. See it in the love he bears to his people; and the reproach he is willing to submit to for his sake. See it in his readiness to “deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow him.” See it in the little account he makes of things seen and temporal, and the strength of his attachment to those things which are unseen and eternal.

A faith operating in such effects as these proclaims itself to be of the operation of God’s Spirit; and prepares us to observe,

II. That they who believe, RELIEVE THROUGH GRACE.

Here we may observe, that from this source comes the very object of faith, as a revelation. This principally consists in the “record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son.” The Gospel assures us that the Lord Jesus is the only foundation of a sinner’s hope: that “he was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification;” that “in him we have righteousness and strength;” that “he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make

intercession for them." These are the things with which faith has to do: and how came we by the knowledge of them? They are the result of a supernatural communication: "As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." And what influenced him to send us such glad tidings of great joy? How often is the Gospel itself called the *grace* of God! "The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men.—This is the true grace of God wherein ye stand."

From this source is also derived the *existence* of faith, as a production. This may be inferred from our moral inability, or that state into which sin has brought us. Of this the Scripture gives us a mortifying, but a faithful account. "The heart," says Jeremiah, "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." And "who," says Job, "can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." "When we were without strength," says the Apostle, "in due time Christ died for the ungodly." "Without me," says the Saviour, "ye can do nothing. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

But we are not left to infer the fact: we have, in the word of God, the most express ascriptions of it to a Divine influence. Upon Peter's profession of faith, our Lord said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." And so far was this from being peculiar to him, that it is said of the

Philippians, "To you it is given on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake;" and of the Ephesians, "By grace are ye saved, through faith: and *that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.*" Connecting himself with them, the Apostle speaks of the "exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." What an accumulation of terms to express the omnipotent exertion of God! And to what does this exertion refer? Our final resurrection from the dead? So the enemies of the present truth would have it—for what power, say they, is necessary to draw forth our bodies from the tomb, and make them like the Redeemer's own glorious body! This is true—But the Apostle refers to an energy which has already operated in believers, and by which they were made believers; an energy—not which *shall* draw forth their bodies from the corruption of the grave, but which *has* delivered their souls from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God; an energy—which has drawn them from rebellion to obedience; from pride to humbleness of mind; from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son; an energy—which combines the glory of all our Saviour's miracles; at once opening the eyes of tin-blind, unstopping the deaf ears, causing the dumb to sing, the lame to walk, and the dead to live: an energy—that, in some sense, surpasses the creation of the world:—for, in producing this, if there was no co-operation, there was no resistance; whereas, here, "the carnal mind is enmity with God, for

it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

Again. From the same source is derived the *exercise* of faith as a principle. This faith must be exerted in every condition; in prosperity, and in adversity; in sickness, and in health; in solitude, and in society; in devotion, and in trade. We are to walk by faith; and by faith we are to live. But as there is nothing of so much importance as this faith, in the whole of our Christian course, there is nothing so much opposed, by all the hidden evils of the heart, and all the powers of darkness. And how is it to be maintained? “I have prayed for thee,” says our Saviour, “that thy faith fail not.” “Lord,” said the apostles, “increase our faith.” Thus the continuance and the progress of the principle depend upon the same grace which produced it; and he who is the *Author*, is acknowledged also the *Finisher*, of our faith.

III. THEY NEED HELP. This they all feel; and this they always feel. They are not without fears whether the work is begun in them; but, though they often question the reality of their religion, they never question the deficiency. This is too obvious to elude the most superficial examination of their hearts and lives. Paul himself, after all the proficiency he had made in his Christian course, was not ashamed to say, “I have not yet attained, neither am I already perfect.” The Christian feels a deficiency in his knowledge which requires help. A full and judicious acquaintance with the things of God is a great advantage: but the views of some are very limited; the word of Christ does not dwell in them richly in all wisdom. Some have such obscure and confused notions, that they resemble the man under the pro-

cess of illumination, who “looked up, and saw men as trees walking.” Yet, before this, he could see nothing; and another application enabled him to see every thing clearly.

Some ought to be ashamed of the remaining degree of their ignorance, considering the advantages they have enjoyed, and the season they have been under tuition. We may address them as our Saviour did his disciples: “Are ye also yet without, understanding?” or as Paul did the Hebrews: “When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God.”

The Christian feels a deficiency which requires help, in his *sanctification*. He is renewed in the spirit of his mind, so as to delight in the law of God after the inward man: but “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit; and when he would do good, evil is present with him.” His graces are imperfect. Something is wanting—and, oh! how much—to his patience, his love, his hope, his faith, he is far from being what he ought to be in his duties. God demands of him a spiritual worship; but how little of’ this does he render him, when kneeling at his throne, or sitting at his table! He finds too little of the Christian in his temper; too little of the Gospel in his walk. And yet. “what manner of persons ought we to be, *in all holy conversation and godliness!*”

A Christian feels a deficiency in his *comfort*, that requires help. This arises from the former. Injured in his work, and hindered in his advancement, he cannot but grieve. It is inconsistent with his disposition to see his infirmities, and not sigh, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body

of this death?" He is not in the possession of his inheritance; but an heir. And an "heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all." How often is his peace interrupted! How often is he constrained to groan, "The enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Whatever the world may be to others, it is to him a vale of tears. In addition to the common troubles of life, he has trials peculiar to his religion; and from the union of these, "many are the afflictions of the righteous."

IV. But ASSISTANCE IS AFFORDED BY THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL. "Who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace." It is necessary, however, to observe, that he did this only through the blessing of God attending his labours. Hear the apostle: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." This being premised, we remark that Apollos helped the believers three ways: and the same will apply to every minister of the Gospel now.

First. By his *prayers*. This was done by his

praying *with* them. How much instruction and relief did they often derive from his devotional exercises! How encouraging and delightful, to hear their own wants and desires offered up officially, in all the fervour and solemnity of Divine worship. But he did not only pray *with* them, but *for* them: and he prayed for them, not only in public, but in private. And was this in vain? “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availed) much.”

Secondly. He helped them much by *preaching*. Preaching is an ordinance peculiar to the Gospel; and it *is* an ordinance. It would be easy to prove that there is a natural suitableness and tendency in preaching to do good: but we are to view it as a Divine institution, and to infer the blessing from the appointment. When the Saviour ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men; and established the ministry, “for the edifying of 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.” Thus the apostle tells the Romans, “For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.” And to the Thessalonians he says, “Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-labourer in the Gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith.” Thus “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Every religion of old had its rites; and its votaries were accustomed to assemble together at stated times and on various occasions, in their temples and at

their altars: but they never came to receive instruction.—What instruction had their leaders to communicate? What could they publish, with the evidence of truth, the force of importance, or the joy of hope? But when your ministers meet you, they have every thing that is interesting to announce. They can send you “help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion.” Their messages are “the savour of life unto life”—you go away new creatures. Which of you has not realized the support—the compensation of the prophet: “Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”

Thirdly. He instructed them by *example*. Example illustrates and confirms and enforces doctrine; and is deservedly said to be more influential than precept. And though we ought to consider *what* is said, rather than *who* says it, yet it is not in the power of human nature to disregard the *practice* of a *moral* and *religious* instructor: and a drunkard is not likely to preach with effect against intemperance; or one that is greedy of gain, against covetousness. The physician is not likely to gain the confidence and submission of the patient, when he prescribes for a disease under which he labours himself—but will be reminded of the proverb, “Physician, heal thyself.” Therefore says Paul to his son Timothy, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” And of Levi, says God, “My covenant

was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my Name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.”

To conclude. Suffer me, First, to ask the question which our Lord addressed to the man born blind, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” Do not put off or elude this inquiry, which is pressed, purely from a regard to your everlasting welfare. It is of infinite importance to each of you. The salvation or damnation of the soul depends upon it. It is useless to attend to other things, while you overlook the *state* you are in before God. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

Secondly. If faith comes from the grace of God, they are mistaken who place it in the virtue of man. And such there are: but you have not so learned Christ. All men have not faith; you were once destitute; and if now enriched with the benefit, you are not at a loss to determine how you obtained it. You disclaim your own goodness and power, and exclaim, “By the grace of God, I am what I am.”

Let the same truth which excludes boasting prevent despair.—Let it encourage the hope of those who fear they are strangers to this precious faith, and let it guide their application. Let it also lead those to the God of all grace who desire an increase—praying, like the father of the child, who “cried out with tears. Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.”

Thirdly. Do not despise the day of small things.

Despise it not in others. Observe and cherish every serious conviction, every pious sentiment; and resemble Him who does "not break a bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax; but brings forth judgment unto victory."—Despise it not in yourselves. The life of God is progressive, and the commencement is often no more to the completion than the mustard seed to the mustard tree. That you are not what you ought to be, should humble you; that you are not what you would be, should stimulate you; but that you are not what you once were, should encourage you. The dawn and the blade are too precious to be disregarded: they are not only beginnings, but pledges: that blade shall become the full corn in the ear; and that dawn shall shine more and more unto the perfect day. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Fourthly. Pity those who are destitute of your religious advantages. Many of your fellow-creatures have not even a Bible. Others are destitute of a gospel ministry. By their condition they cry, "Come and help us." They would be thankful for the crumbs which fall from your spiritual table; and would go any distance, and make any sacrifices, to hear with rapture—what you often attend upon with indifference.

Finally. Be grateful for the privileges you enjoy, and be concerned properly to improve them. Attend regularly and conscientiously the pastor who feeds you with knowledge and understanding. "Laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow

thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." Repair to the house of God, influenced by the command, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is." Go with lively expectation, founded on the promises upon which he has caused you to hope. "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

DISCOURSE XCIV.

THE STAR GUIDING THE WISE MEN TO THE BABE IN BETHLEHEM.

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”—MATT. ii. 1, 2.

IN the productions of Jehovah we behold immensity and minuteness; complexness and simplicity; obscurity and luminousness; an effulgence that dazzles and repels, and a softness that composes and allures. If this be true of the wonders of creation, it equally applies to the work of redemption; and shows us that nature and grace have one and the same Author. If we examine the character and the history of our Lord and Saviour, we shall discern a marvellous union of grandeur and humility; of independence and subjection; of indigence and riches. Observe his death. He suffers every kind of indignity; he is scourged, buffeted, spit upon, numbered with transgressors, crucified through weakness. But the sun is enveloped in darkness, the earth shakes, the rocks rend.

the graves open, the dead arise: the centurion exclaims, "Surely this man was the Son of God;" the dying thief adores him as the disposer of the heavenly world; and cries, "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom." See him in the ship. He sleeps—there is his infirmity. He awakes, and rebukes the wind and the sea—there is his omnipotence. Weary with his journey, he sits at the well of Sychar, and asks for a cup of cold water—but at the same time proclaims himself the Giver of the water of eternal life.

Nothing could be more expressive of the deepest abasement than the circumstances of his birth. To read the narrative is enough to scandalize all the worshippers of the god of this world. "She brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." But the period of his birth is called the fulness of time. All heaven is awakened by it. One angel of the Lord appears to Joseph, and informs him of the dignity of the child. Another flies to the shepherds in the fields, and cries, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." When lo! "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The Spirit of inspiration, after a lapse of ages, rests upon Simeon and Anna; and they prophesy. Some are waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and looking for redemption in Jerusalem; and embrace him with a joy that loosens all the ties of life.

But in him, as the seed of Abraham, "all the families of the earth" were to be blessed. He was to

be “a light to lighten the Gentiles,” as well as “the glory of his people Israel.” And behold a star appearing to persons in a remote clime, and leading strangers in search of the infant Messiah. “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”

Various questions might be asked concerning these wise men, which it is not in our power to answer. We could entertain you, indeed, with the opinions of the learned concerning their profession, the country from which they came, and the star which guided them. But we hasten to make a practical improvement of the subject; only remarking, with as much brevity as possible, two or three things, in explanation of the passage.

When it is said, “We have seen his star in the *east*,” you are not to suppose that they saw the star shining in an easterly direction, for it appeared to them in the very opposite quarter; and the words mark, not the situation of the object, but of the spectators, when they viewed it.

What is called a *star* could not mean any thing like those heavenly bodies which go under this name; but a luminous meteor in the middle region of the air, near enough to guide them, and at last dropping down so low, as even to signalize the very house which contained the child.

It is worthy of notice, that by a similar instrument God formerly conducted his people through the wilderness. It was by a pillar of fire he led them to the holy hill of Zion.

But how could they infer, from this celestial appearance, that the King of the Jews was born? What relation was there between the sign and the event? All mankind originally had a revelation in the family of Noah, by whom the new world was peopled; and imperfect traces of it were found many ages after in the various nations of the globe. And though this revelation, as secured in writing, was committed to the Jews, it was not confined to them. Copies were occasionally taken away by foreigners, as objects of research and even of religious information. Thus, we know, the queen of Sheba came to prove Solomon with hard questions, when she heard of his "fame concerning the name of the Lord." Also, by the dispersion of the Jews, their scriptures were scattered, and their prophecies as well as miracles were read; so that a general expectation was excited in the east of the birth of some very extraordinary character. It is needless to adduce proof of this; but we may observe, that Balaam, who was himself from the east, had predicted the Messiah under the very image of a star. But as the case before us was confessedly supernatural, why may we not extend the miracle a little further, and suppose that, while the sign engaged their attention, God impressed their minds with a conviction of its relation and design? Could not he do this as easily as he afterwards "warned them, in a dream," that they should not return to Herod, but go back into their country by another way?

He was born King of the Jews. This awakened the alarm of Herod—but it was needless; though a king, he was not a temporal prince. In this character the Jews looked for him, and, not finding in him a hero who should deliver them from the Roman yoke,

they despised and rejected him. But he had other enemies to conquer, and another empire to gain. "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king, then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

But let us offer a few remarks upon this subject: "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness." CHRIST IS OWNED BY SOME IN THE HIGHER ORDERS OF LIFE—THEY WHO ARE REALLY DESIROUS OF FINDING HIM SHALL NOT ERR FOR WANT OF DIRECTION—WE SHOULD DEEM NO DIFFICULTIES TOO GREAT TO ENCOUNTER IN SEEKING AFTER HIM—WE ARE TO BE CONCERNED TO HONOUR CHRIST, AS WELL AS TO BE SAVED BY HIM.

I. CHRIST IS OWNED BY SOME IN THE HIGHER ORDERS OF LIFE. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things that are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." Such are they who have generally constituted the majority of our Lord's followers. His more immediate disciples, when he was on earth, were Galileans, fishermen, publicans, and sinners. This was

urged, as a reproach by his adversaries: "Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed." And the same matter of offence has attended his cause in all ages. Had we the disposition of the Son of God, instead of being scandalized at such a dispensation, we should more than acquiesce in it: we should rejoice in spirit, and say, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." But his followers are not taken exclusively from those of low estate. There have always been some who have vanquished the difficulties of their station; and, "going forth without the camp," have thrown down their distinctions at the foot of the cross, glad to part with all to purchase the pearl of great price. Zaccheus was rich. Joseph of Arimathea was a counsellor. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews. We read of a nobleman "who believed, with all his house;" and "of honourable women, not a few." A man who feared God rode in the second chariot of Egypt. A prime minister, of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, prayed three times a-day. Kings have been nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers. And as to talent, we are able to bring forward on the side of Christianity persons superior in every department of genius and science to its adversaries.

By all of which we do not mean to intimate, that the great bring any real honour to the Gospel by embracing it—though they derive honour from it—but we wish to show what the power of Divine grace can accomplish; to rescue from despair the minds

of those who are placed among the perils of elevation; and to remove the prejudice so often entertained, that Christianity is only limited to the taste of the vulgar, the illiterate, and the ignorant.

II. THEY WHO ARE DESIROUS OF FINDING CHRIST WILL NOT MISS HIM FOR WANT OF DIRECTION. "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." And is he unable to accomplish what he has promised? In how many ways can we ourselves convey information to a fellow-creature, even when no audible voice is heard! And how limited is human perfection! "To whom," says God, "will ye liken me, or shall I be equal, saith the Holy One? He that planted the ear, shall not he hear? He that formed the eye, shall not he see?" He who made us has access to every power of our souls. He who governs us has all the resources of nature and providence at his command. He who saves us can turn any object or event into an instrument to fulfil the purposes of his grace. Let us leave the poor heathen to Him who could make a star to conduct those who were destitute of a Bible; and who, without the intervention of a preacher, could convey to their minds a knowledge of the use of it; and let us not limit the Holy One of Israel either in his love, his power, or his wisdom. And let us remark, that where common means are withholden God often has recourse to unusual ones. "Faith cometh by hearing: "yet it is reasonable to hope that he has awakened many who were never

blessed with an opportunity of hearing evangelical preaching: he has awakened their consciences to the importance of eternal things, and taken them under his more immediate tuition; and “none teaches like him”

But as for you, my dear hearers, who live in a Christian country, and are privileged with the ordinances of religion, *you* can never want a star to guide. *Your* danger lies not on the side of ignorance, but of knowledge—knowledge unprized, neglected, perverted, abused. This is the condemnation—that you have light, but refuse to follow its leadings; and cause the Saviour to complain, “Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.”

For you have the Scripture, “which is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path.” This is the word of Christ. And what part of it is there that does not lead to him? Is it the predictive? “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. To him give all the prophets witness.” Is it the ceremonial? The altar, the tabernacle, the temple, the shewbread, the sacrifices, and the incense; all were “shadows of good things to come, of which the body is Christ.” Is it the miraculous? Who can help looking towards him from the ark of Noah; the deliverance of the Jews out of Egypt; the manna that fell in the desert; the waters that flowed from the smitten rock?—for “that rock was Christ.” Is it the legal? The Law, by convincing us of sin, worketh a sense of wrath, and annihilates all hopes of salvation by our own obedience: “The law,” says the Apostle, “was our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ.” Is it the doctrinal? All the doctrines of the Gospel are derived from his history—from his incarnation, his

sufferings, and his glory; and all lead to him, as streams that flow from a fountain enable us to find it. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

You have the ministry of the word. And what does every preacher of the truth but proclaim, with the forerunner, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world! "Is he asked by an anxious inquirer, "What must I do to be saved?" He would be a misleader of souls, and chargeable with their ruin, if he gave any other direction than that of Paul and Silas to the jailer; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."—"These are the servants of the most high God, which show unto men the way of salvation."

You have the Spirit of promise: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that, shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for ye shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." Though these words had a peculiar relation to the apostles, they have a real, and a very encouraging, reference to Christians in every age of the world—"who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit: and as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Avail yourselves of all these advantages; and, like these men from the east, "then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." This brings us to observe:

III. WE SHOULD DEEM NO DIFFICULTIES TOO GREAT TO ENCOUNTER, NO SACRIFICES TOO GREAT TO MAKE,

IN SEEKING AFTER CHRIST. Behold your example. These wise men did not say, as they were setting off, "But will not our neighbours and friends condemn us?" They do not ask, "But what will the learned think of us? Will they not reproach us, as engaged in a visionary enterprise, unworthy of the professors of philosophy?" No. They did not consult the many, or the few, but *the star*. There is a striking difference between men, individually and socially considered. Alone, they often feel well: conscience has a moment of leisure; truth speaks, and, in the absence of lies, is heard; and now, convinced and impressed, they resolve to walk before God in newness of life. But all this resolution is ruined as soon as they intermingle with others. To avoid the laugh of one, and the frown of another; the coolness of friendship, or the enmity of power; they swerve from the known path of duty, and "hold the truth in unrighteousness." Public opinion is one of the greatest obstacles the grace of God has to overcome; especially in two cases—With regard to the *young*, who are so impressible to flattery and ridicule—And the *Intellectual*, who pride themselves on the reputation of knowledge, and to whom the words of our Saviour may be applied: "How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" How many are there who believe on him, but fear to confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: "for they love the praise of men more than the praise of God." Let us, therefore, like these Magi, choose our guide, not from below, but from above. Let us simply ask, What does God say—what does God require? It is a light thing to be judged of man's judgment. He

that judgeth. us is the Lord.—How shall I appear before Him?

Again. These men were willing to leave their country, their connexions, their families; and disregarded all the expenses, inconveniences, and dangers, of a distant and difficult journey. And you know the decision: “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath cannot be my disciple.” Some things must be *absolutely* renounced. This is the case with sin of every kind, and every degree—Bosom lusts must all be sacrificed—the right hand cut off, the right eye plucked out. Other things must be *conditionally* parted with. These are our temporal interests. Duty and advantage may lie the same road; but, when a separation is necessary, we must show, by our choice, what we deem the one thing needful. Thus Moses “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” Thus, between a human and a Divine command, Peter and John said, “We ought to obey God rather than man.”

If, however, the Gospel requires us to labour, and strive, and fight, it more than deserves all our exertions. If it demands sacrifices, it more than indemnities us. “There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting. Godliness is profitable unto nil things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” But, alas! what a difference is there between the disposition of these followers

of the star, and the conduct of mankind at large—may I not add, of many of you? Though you have no such lengths to go, but the kingdom of God is nigh you; though you know more of the end of the Saviour's coming, and through the veil of his humanity can behold his glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth;" though you have been invited, and pressed, times without number, to go and partake of the fulness that resides in him—what effect has all this had upon your hearts and lives? What solicitude have you discovered to "win Christ, and be found in him"? Of what importance should we deem salvation were we to judge of it by your concern to obtain it? How many will the wise men of the east rise up in the judgment against and condemn!

IV. WE ARE TO BE CONCERNED TO HONOUR HIM, AS WELL AS TO BE SAVED BY HIM. The first thought of a sinner when he seeks him is to obtain relief from him in a case wherein all other assistance must fail. He is guilty, and needs forgiveness, he is depraved, and needs renovation. He is all ignorance and weakness, and needs wisdom and strength. He therefore cries, "Lord, save; I perish!" And for this very purpose he is commanded to look to him: "Look unto me, and be; ye saved, all the ends of the earth." But whenever there is a real work of grace in the heart, there will be a disposition not only to seek him, but to serve him; and we shall say, with the wise men, "We are come to worship him."

What was the worship they rendered him? Some have ascribed to these men a higher degree of knowledge than we have any reason to believe they pos-

sessed. It is not to be supposed that they knew his divinity: but they viewed him as an extraordinary personage; and as they were accustomed to prostrate themselves before a superior, and offer him presents, so, when “they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”

But what worship are *you* to render him?—You are to render him the homage of the *mind*. This is done by entertaining the most exalted conceptions of him. And can you think of him too highly, after searching the Scripture, and finding him “fairer than the children of men: the King of kings, and Lord of lords: the Sun of righteousness: the Saviour of the world: the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person”?—You are to render him the homage of the *heart*. This is done by giving him your confidence; and “blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” This is done by yielding him your supreme affection; and be it observed—you do not love him at all, unless you love him above all.—You are to render him the homage of the *lip*. This is done by extolling his excellences, and recommending him to others. And can your tongue, which is your glory, be ever so well employed?—You are to render him the homage of the *life*. This is done by obeying his commands; by holding yourselves at his disposal; by submitting to his dispensations; by devoting yourselves to his cause—honouring the Lord with your substance, and, in the true spirit of a moral, or rather Christian martyr, saying—

“All that I have, and all I am,
Shall be for ever thine;
Whate’er my duty bids me give
My cheerful hands resign.”

Yea,

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!”

Are you afraid of rendering him such homage, lest you should incur the charge of idolatry? Behold your authority: “As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour th” Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a Name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Here is an authority which not only allows, but demands the honours we pay him.

I hope you are not confounded at the thought of yielding this homage—in the stable, and kneeling—before the manger. The wise men, it is probable, judging from the prodigy of the star, expected to find the new-born king surrounded with magnificence; but his abasement hindered not their adoration. And shall it hinder your ardour? Yea rather, shall it not inflame your love? For what has brought him down;

what has placed him here? Compulsion? No:—but compassion—a love “that passeth knowledge.” He, who was in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant! He made himself of no reputation. You know it, Christians! You know it:—“Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor; that ye, through his poverty, might be rich.” And is dignity lessened by condescension? Shall his goodness rob him of his glory? So far was Paul from being ashamed of his humiliation, that he exclaimed, “God forbid that I should glory, *save* in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And when does God require all the highest orders of his creatures to adore him? When he has not where to lay his head. “WHEN HE BRINGETH THE FIRSTHEGOTTEN INTO THE WORLD, *he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.*”

And when John heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders,—and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,—they cried with a loud voice, saying, “Worthy is the *Lamb that was slain* to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

DISCOURSE XCV.

GOD THINKS UPON HIS PEOPLE.

"I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me."—
Ps. xl. 17.

THE life of a Christian is a very chequered scene. IF it be said of others, "they have no changes, therefore they fear not God he can say, with Job, "changes and war are upon me." However attractive this world may appear to those whose disposition is congenial with it, and who make it their portion, *he* feels that it is not his rest. He is a stranger and a sojourner, as were all his fathers: and there are seasons when he sighs, "Woe is me that I dwell in Meshech, and make my tents in Kedar. Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

But let us not view his present condition on the dark side only. It admits of relief. Under all his disadvantages and trials, he is furnished with everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. Though a soldier, he fights the good fight of faith; and does not go a warfare at his own charges. Though a stranger and a pilgrim, he has accommoda-

tions and refreshments by the way. This is his emblem—a bush burning with fire and not consumed. This is his motto—“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken: cast down, but not destroyed.”—This is his experience—“I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me.” It would be fastidious to refuse the divisions which these words naturally afford. They contain,

I. A HUMBLE CONDITION.

II. A BLESSED ASSURANCE.

I. A HUMBLE CONDITION. “I am poor and needy.” A man may be in such a state—*spiritually*—*experimentally*—*comparatively*—*temporally*.

All men are by nature poor and needy, as to their spiritual condition. Sin is very properly considered a fall; and it has reduced us to a low estate. It expelled us from paradise; it stripped us of our original righteousness and strength; it robbed us of the image, the favour, and the presence of God; it left us no worthiness, no hope—nothing but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation to devour us.—This is what we mean by being poor and needy, *spiritually*.

But the conviction of our natural state is not easily fixed in the mind: and hence, far from acknowledging it, many, like the Laodiceans, are saying, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” But the subjects of Divine grace are all acquainted with their condition. The Holy Spirit has convinced them of sin; and humbled them before God. They now see, that their recovery cannot spring from any good-

ness or power of their own; they are convinced, that if ever they are saved, it must be by another, in whom, at once, they can find wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Hence they become beggars at the door of mercy, and are willing to live on alms; feeling their dependence, and thankful for their supplies. This conviction, though self-abasing, is necessary and profitable. Till we apprehend our danger, we shall not inquire after a refuge; till we are sensible of our disease, we shall not prize the physician, or submit to the remedy; till we know that we are guilty and helpless, we shall never cry with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" or with Peter, "Lord, save; I perish"—But, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.—Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."—This is what we mean by being poor and needy, *experimentally*.

As all believers feel this to be their condition, so we may observe no difference is made in their sense of it by their worldly circumstances. David was a king; yet this did not alter the view he had of himself, as a fallen, sinful, perishing creature before God. His palace was not a substitute for heaven, nor even caused him to forget it. He had fame, and armies, and riches; yet these could not supply the place of all spiritual blessing: he therefore prays, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation, that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance." "I am poor and needy," says the believer, "unless as I obtain the true riches,

the unsearchable riches of Christ: and I often fear I have none of them. But if I am a possessor, O how small a portion do I possess! How little, compared with what I want and wish! How little, compared with the infinite fulness there is in the Redeemer! How little, compared with the acquisition of others! They have received from his fulness, and grace for grace. But I have not attained: I am not already perfect. How weak is my faith; how wavering my hope; how flameless my zeal! How far—O how far am I from being filled with all the fulness of God!—I am less than the least of all saints! I am nothing!” —This is what we mean by being poor and needy, *comparatively*.

But David was liable to affliction; and there had been periods when he was low in his outward estate. He was originally a shepherd, and often acknowledged, with equal humility and gratitude, his elevation in life. Even after he had the throne of Israel promised him, and the holy oil had been poured upon his head, he was driven out from his inheritance, and was an exile in other lands; pursued from place to place “like a partridge upon the mountains;” reduced to the necessity of imploring of a foreign prince an asylum for his father and mother; and compelled to beg a sword and even bread for himself at Nob. Years after he was enthroned he was betrayed and opposed, and forced by a rebellion the most unnatural to leave his palace and his capital! Some believers, through life, have had very little of this world’s goods. They have found it hard to provide things honest in the sight of all men. We sometimes censure and condemn; as if men were the absolute masters of their secular condition: but they

are not; it does not depend upon every mini to rise and prosper: "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, licit lier yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." There are those who have met with losses which no talent could have prevented. Every time they have attempted to row, the wind and waves have been contrary. Is this the case with any of you? Are you sethack in life? Are your visions fled? Are your purposes broken off? Remember, this has been the case with multitudes of your brethren who were before you in the world. Your Elder Brother had not where to lay his head; he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Your condition is not the result of chance, but appointment. Your safety and welfare required it. In more easy and flattering circumstances, you would have had less love to the Scriptures; less business at a throne of grace; less longings after a better country; less proof of the tender care of Providence and the all-sufficiency of Divine grace. This is what we mean by being poor and needy, in a *temporal* sense. Let us,

II. Examine THE GLORIOUS ASSURANCE—"I am poor and needy; *yet the Lord thinketh upon me.*" This is,

First, the language of *confidence*. David speaks without hesitation, and so may every Christian; for there is nothing of which they can be more certain than this—That God thinks upon them.

It is proved by his relations. He calls himself their deliverer; their friend; their husband; their father; and as a divinity is attached to these relations, they must all therefore be perfectly exemplified.

His beneficiaries, his bride, his children, therefore, can never be forgotten.

It is proved by his promises. "Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me."—"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." These are words found in a Book we know to be divine. They are the words, not of a man, that may lie, or the son of man, that may repent; but of the God of truth. Talking and doing may be two things with creatures, but they are the same with him. He is often better than his word; but who ever found him worse?

It is proved by his works. What has he not done, O Christian! to justify your hope? He remembered you in your low estate. Without your desert, and without your desire, he raised up for you a Saviour and seemed to love your souls better than his own Son. "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for you all; and shall he not with him freely give you all things?" He found you wandering the downward road, and turned your feet into the path of peace. He has admitted you into his service, and adopted you into his family. Had he a mind to kill you, he would not have shown you such things as these. You have had your fears, but he has shown you their foil. You have said, "I am cast out of his sight but you have been enabled to look again towards his holy temple, and the shadow of death has been turned into the morning. You have not advanced as you ought to have done, and you mourn it; but you can say, to the praise of the glory of his grace, "Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way: though thou hast

sore broken us in the phicc of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death.”

How many things are there worthy of particular review in your history! Though they have been less marvellous, they have not been less merciful, than his dispensations towards his people of old. Have you not been delivered “from the land of Egypt, and the house of bondage, by a strong hand and an outstretched arm”?—I mean, have you not been “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son”? Have you not had the bitter waters of Marah healed by casting a tree into them?—I mean, have not your sufferings been sweetened by the cross of Christ? Have you not been fed by ravens?—I mean, have not the most unlikely instruments befriended you? Have not the oil and the wine multiplied?—I mean, have not considerable resources been rendered sufficient for your exigencies; so that while you had nothing to depend upon, you have lacked nothing? “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord;” and he able to say, “I am poor and needy—yet the Lord thinketh upon me.”

Secondly. It is the language of *wonder*. It is said by the apostle Peter, that God calls his people out of darkness into his marvellous light; and one of the things which fill them with surprise, and continue to fill them with surprise through life is, that God fails not to regard such creatures as we are.

It is rendered truly wonderful by the “conduct of men.” This we continually witness; and we are prone to judge from what falls under our own observation. How many, alas! of those with whom you

have to do prove either frail or treacherous! How many have abandoned you, after the warmest expressions of friendship and kindness! How often have you heard the voice saying, "Cease from man! Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm"! In this way you have been peculiarly tried when reduced; for people reverse the maxim of Solomon, and suppose a friend born for prosperity. The flower that, while fresh and green, is put into the bosom, is thrown away when shriveled and dry. Eut it is otherwise here. "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me."

It is rendered wonderful by the *greatness of God*. What a trifling elevation leads one man to overlook another! How generally are the lower ranks disregarded by those who have a few acres of land, a little shining dust, or an empty title, to distinguish them—while they are only worms themselves, and are crushed before the moth! "But, behold, God is great, and we know him not. All nations are before him as nothing." Well, therefore, did David, when he surveyed the universe, exclaim, "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him!" This is nothing less than Infinite Power and Majesty stooping to weakness and meanness.

It is rendered wonderful by *our unworthiness*. The more holy any being is, the more must he be offended with sin. How then must God be provoked by it, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity! "And yet how much has he seen in me," says the Christian, "to try him, not oidy before I knew him, but since I have been called by his Name! I cannot take the most superficial review of myself without seeing that

it is of the Lord's mercies I am not consumed. Where is there any other benefactor that would have continued his regards, or have given me another thought, after such instances of perverseness and vileness as I have been chargeable with, from year to year, towards God?"

Thirdly. It is the language of *consolation*. "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me." This is enough; this will more than counterbalance every thing that is defective or distressing in my condition. There are three things in God's thinking upon us that are solacing and delightful.

Observe the *frequency* of his thoughts. Indeed they are incessant. You have a friend whom you esteem and love. You wish to live in his mind. You say, when you part and when you write, "Think of me." You give him, perhaps, a token to revive his remembrance. How naturally is Selkirk, in his solitary island, made to say:

"My friends,—do they now and then send
A wish, or a *thought*, after me?
O tell me I yet have a friend,
Though a friend I am never to see!

"Ye winds, that have made me your sport,
Convey to this desolate shore
Some cordial, endearing report
Of a land I shall visit no more."

But the dearest connexion in the world cannot be always thinking upon you. Half his time he is in a state of unconsciousness; and how much, during the other half, is he engrossed! But there is no remission it; the Lord's thoughts. He never slumbers: and, though he manages worlds, and calls the stars by their

names, he numbers the hairs of thy head, and regards thee as much as if thou wert his only care.

Observe, in the next place, the *wisdom* of his thoughts. You have a dear child absent from you, and you follow him in your mind. But you know not his present circumstances. You left him in such a place—but where is he now? You left him in such a condition—but what is he now? Perhaps, while you are thinking of his health, he is groaning under a bruised limb, or a painful disorder. Perhaps, while you are thinking of his safety, some enemy is taking advantage of his innocency. Perhaps, while you are rejoicing in his prudence, he is going to take a step that will involve him for life. But when God thinket'n upon you, he is perfectly acquainted with your situation, your dangers, your wants. "He knows all your walking through this great wilderness"—and can afford you the seasonable succour you need.—For again,

Observe the *efficiency* of his thoughts. You think upon another; and you are anxious to guide, or defend, or relieve him. But in how many cases can you think only! Solitude cannot control the disease of the body; cannot dissipate the melancholy of the mind. But with God all things are possible. He who thinks upon you is a God at hand, and not afar off: he has all events under his control; he is the God of all grace. If, therefore, he does not immediately deliver, it is not because he is unable to redress, but because he is waiting to be gracious. "The Lord is a God of judgment, and blessed are all they that wait for him." Let us conclude.

Here we see how it is that the believer stands while others sink. He has supports peculiar to him-

self; and, when creatures frown or fail, he encourages himself in the Lord his God. "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow. Although 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 stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me."

Is this your portion? How anxious are men to gain the notice of their fellow-creatures, especially if they are a little raised above themselves in condition! "Many will entreat the favour of the prince, and every one is a friend to him that giveth gilts." But in this case you are never sure you shall succeed; and you have gained nothing if you do. Whereas here—the success is sure, and the success is—every thing. Pray, therefore, with Nehemiah, "Think upon me, O my God, for good. Seek the Lord, and ye shall live."

O believer! If God thinks upon you, ought you not to think upon him? David did. "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake I am still with thee." If he minds your affairs—Be not you forgetful of his. Ever ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Ever cry, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."



DISCOURSE XCVI.

THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE.

“In that day there shall be a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness.”—ZECH. xiii. 1.

THERE are many curious things in nature; and there are many things useful and necessary. But we have things, shall I say, of the same kind in the world of grace, far superior; and superior, because they regard the soul and eternity. How is the rising of the orb of day surpassed by “the Sun of righteousness, who arises with healing under his wings”! How are the meekness of the lily, and the fragrance of the rose, excelled by “the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley”! It is pleasing to behold a number of trees adorned with blossoms, or bending with fruit—but we have in the Church “trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.” It is delightful to view a river refreshing and fertilizing the meadows through which it murmurs—but WE READ of “the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” There are fountains. We hear of remarkable ones abroad. We have some very valuable ones

in our own country. One of these bubbles up in the place of our residence; and to which multitudes repair for relief. But I have to invite your attention, this evening, to a Fountain infinitely more wonderful and efficacious; and of which Zechariah speaks, in the words which I have read: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness."

For, my brethren, to what can he refer, but the exclamation of John, the forerunner of the Messiah—"Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" Nothing less will be found sufficient to justify, or embody, the language. Even allowing that Zechariah had not the same distinct and explicit views of the Saviour that we have who possess the explanations of the New Testament writers, it does not follow that this was not his object; for we know that the prophets often delivered predictions which they did not completely understand; and therefore studied them after they had announced them: "searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

I am not unmindful of the day* which has assembled us together; but my choice of a subject shows that I consider it of little importance to dwell

* Good Friday.

upon the crucifixion of Christ as a wonderful or a tragical scene. I am aware, that such a pathological representation might be given of the history as would draw tears from every eye—while the mind remained uninformed of, and the heart unaffected with, the nature and design of the event. The grand thing is, to know why the dispensation was necessary; and, realizing its accomplishment in ourselves, to be able to say, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

I have two things in view.—I. To EXPLAIN THE PROMISE.—II. To IMPROVE THE TRUTH IT CONTAINS.

I. In the EXPLANATION OF THE PROMISE, three things are observable. The *fountain*—the *opening*—and the *end*.

First. The *fountain*. This image holds forth the Redeemer. In distinction from creatures, which are “cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water,” he may well call himself “the fountain of living waters.” The Jews were accustomed, on the last, which was called the great day of the feast, to fetch water from the pool of Siloam, singing the words of isaiah, “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” On that very occasion, we find our Saviour preaching; and he takes advantage of the ceremony to proclaim himself to the multitude as the true source of blessedness: “In the hist day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” To the woman of Samaria

he had said before, "The water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."—He shall possess a plenitude himself: but the fulness of the Christian is limited; is derived; is the fulness of a vessel. This vessel is supplied from the fulness of a fountain—and this fountain is the Lord Jesus. His fulness is original and boundless. It is the fulness of a spring; always flowing, and yet undiminished. He is in himself an infinite and everlasting source of all the influences and blessings we need: "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily: and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

Secondly. This fountain was to be *opened*. If a fountain was shut up, and sealed, though the contents would be equally precious in themselves, they would be useless to us; yea, they would only provoke our desire, to torment us. And what would the Saviour's excellences and benefits be to us, it unattainable and inaccessible? But they are placed within our view, and within our reach. This fountain was actually opened in his sufferings. His blood flowed in the garden, and upon the cross. His back was wounded by the scourge; his temples with the crown of thorns; his bands and his feet with the nails; his side with the spear. Then was the fountain opened; and one, hard by, beheld it—

"The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain, in his day

And oh! that each of us, with humility and confidence, may be able to add;

"And there have I, as vile as he,
Wash'd all my sins away!"

The apostles laid it open doctrinally, in their preaching. Paul could appeal to the Corinthians, and say; "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." And referring both to the subject of his preaching, and the plain and lively manner in which he had delivered it, he could say to the Galatians, "Before your eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you."

It was, unquestionably, open, when the apostles wrote their epistles; for thousands were rejoicing in the efficacy of this fountain, and could say, "We are come to the blood of sprinkling—We are redeemed with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ—The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin!"—And is it closed since? No: it stands open now—open, in the means of grace—open, in the invitations of the word—open, in the nearness, the power, and the grace of the Saviour—how open while he says, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out"!

Thirdly. This fountain is "opened *for sin and for uncleanness*." There had been provisions for ceremonial pollution, under the Mosaical economy. There was the brazen sea, fifty feet in circumference, and ten in depth; in which the priests were to wash their hands and feet. There were also ten lavers, in which the things offered in sacrifice were washed, and whence the water was taken to sprinkle the offerers. There were also fountains for bodily diseases—the pool of Siloam to which our Saviour sent the man born blind; and the pool of Bethesda, where lay a great number of sufferers, waiting for the troubling of the waters. These probably had a preter-

natural quality imparted to them, about this period, to rouse the mind to expectation, and to prepare it to contemplate the approaching Recoverer of the human race. He differed from all these, as a fountain for moral and spiritual defilement—"for sin and for uncleanness."

And sin *is* uncleanness. Its very nature is contamination. The moment it touched a number of angels in heaven, it turned them into devils, and expelled them from their first estate. It is so contagious, that it infects every thing in contact with it: so that, as the house of the leper was to be taken down because of the inhabitant, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth, also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burned up"—not because they are guilty; but because they have been the witnesses, the instruments, the abodes of sin.

Sin is a pollution the most deep and diffusive: it stops not at the surface, but penetrates the inner man of the heart; it spreads through every power, from the highest intellectual faculty, down to the lowest animal appetite. If any part were left uninjured, it would seem to be the conscience—but no; *the very conscience itself is defiled*: and nothing has been too vile to be perpetrated under its permission, and in obedience to its dictates. It is a pollution the most horrible and dangerous; as it disfigures us before God, and renders us odious in his sight. And nothing else does this. Poverty does not; meanness does not; disease does not—Lazarus full of sores, begging at the rich man's gate, and Job, covered with boils, among the ashes, were dear to God, and lay in his bosom. But sin is the *abominable thing*

which *hit soul hates*. Men often roll it, as a sweet morsel, under their tongue: but it is more poisonous than the gall of asps. They think lightly of it: but can *that* be a trifling thing which causes God to hate the very work of his own hands—"my soul loathed them!"—and induce the very "Father of mercies" to say at last, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels."

Have you, my hearers, such views of sin? Does it appear to you, as it does to the Judge of all, *exceeding sinful*?

Such is certainly the sentiment of every man who is "convinced of sin." The Holy Spirit leads him to see, not only its guilt, but its defilement; and while the one excites his fear, the other calls forth his aversion. Self-complacency is then ruined for ever. He no longer wonders that he stands excluded, in his present state, from the presence of a holy God. He feels that he deserves to perish—and cries, with the leper, "Unclean, unclean!" And as things strike us most forcibly by contrast, the more he is enlightened to see the purity and glory of God; and especially his grace and love in the person, work, and sufferings of his dear Son; instead of being reconciled to himself, the more will he feel of the temper of Job, who exclaimed, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

But there is a fountain that washes out even the stains of the soul—and of sin! And it was opened for this very purpose: "In that day there shall lie a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." And I proceed,

II. TO IMPROVE THE TRUTH CONTAINED IN THE

PROMISE. And should I dwell longer on this part of our subject than on the former, it will not appear wonderful to those who reflect, how much more ready people are to hear than to apply; and how seldom practice keeps pace with speculation. In order to commend myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God, I arrange the assembly in five classes; each of which has a relation to the truth before us. The first are *ignorant*. The second *presumptuous*. The third *self-righteous*. The fourth the *fearful*. The fifth the *believing*.

First. The *ignorant*. The Apostle speaks of some who cried. Peace, peace! while sudden destruction was coming upon them—such a difference is there between confidence and security. Our Lord tells us of some who are “whole, and need not the physician”—so necessary is a conviction of our spiritual state to excite a proper regard to the Saviour. And, to vary the metaphor, some are not defiled, and need not this fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. We do not mean that there are any *really* in this condition, and the reason is involved in the inquiry, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” It is a law pervading all nature, that “like begets like.” A viper brings forth a poisonous brood. Swine produce something that loves the mire. The skin of an Ethiopian will be black. What but depraved offspring can descend from sinful parents? Therefore, says Job, “What is man, that he should be clean, or he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous!” The Scripture assures us that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” It teaches us, that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” It assures us that

it is not the life which defiles the heart; but the heart the life: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man." It requires no less than a change of nature, to show that our nature is depraved; and it requires this change in every man, to show that this depravity is universal.

Yet there are those who deny this mortifying fact; and though they live in a land of vision, are so unacquainted with the Bible, and ignorant of themselves, as to imagine that *they* are pure. "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness." We may conclude the reception our subject will meet, with from you. You cannot understand it, because you know nothing of the state to which it refers; and you cannot value it, because you feel nothing that can render it interesting. The whole system of the Gospel is founded in the fact of our guilt and depravity; and till a man is convinced of this, he will be like the deaf adder, that stoppeth his ear against the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. Pardon offered to the innocent will be deemed an insult. Alms presented to the affluent will be rejected with disdain. O what a mercy, to feel our need of mercy!—Beg of God to open the eyes of your understanding, and lead you into an acquaintance with yourselves; that, seeing what you are, and feeling what you deserve, and what you need, you may be prepared to welcome the glad tidings of salvation, and deem it a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that,

There is "a fountain opened for sin, and for uncleanness."

Secondly. The *presumptuous*. Antinomian perversion is far worse than mere ignorance of the Gospel. We should be cautious in applying hard names; but the Scripture makes no scruple to call those "ungodly men, that turn the grace of our Lord God into lasciviousness." And yet there are men, whose very religion leaves them *personally* unchanged: who dream of mercy while they live in sin; and claim eternal life without the "washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." But there is no salvation without cleansing: "He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure." For sin separates between God and the soul; and that wall of division must be removed before we can meet. There must be agreement before there can be intimacy. "How can two walk together, except they be agreed? What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Were we even pardoned for contracting the disease, yet, while it continues uncured, we can have no ease within. If we entered heaven with an unsanctified disposition, we should be incapable of relishing its enjoyments. A title to glory can never give us a

meetness for it. Wherever we carry sin in us, we carry hell with us. The Lord Jesus is a Saviour, because he “saves his people *from* their sins.”—“He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Beware of deceiving yourselves. To be washed in this fountain, is the one thing needful. “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”

Thirdly. The *self-righteous*. I mean, those who hope to cleanse themselves in some other way than by this fountain. Some would wash away their sins by the tears of repentance. Some would cover them by charity; for “charity” (by the mistake of a passage of Scripture) “covers a multitude of sins.” Some would pay off the old score by ceremonial and superstitious observances—And here, what an article could religious folly furnish! What is there to which men have not had recourse while asking, “How shall I come before the Lord, or bow before the high God!”

Even when people are in a measure awakened, and begin to feel their need of salvation, it cannot but be remarked, how inclined they are to some plan, some services, some sacrifice, of their own. The simple provision of God offends them; and they resemble Naaman. Naaman was a leper. He had come with a splendid train; and, more full of pride than of disease, he stood, with his horses and his chariot, at the door of the house of Elisha. Hence, when Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean, Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said. Behold, I thought,

He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage." And would have remained a leper had not the servants been wiser than the master. Here was his error. He came for a cure, and it was, therefore, for him not to prescribe, but to submit. So it should be with you. You are not to go about to establish your own righteousness, but to submit yourselves to the righteousness which is of God. You are not to reason and speculate; but follow the Divine will. You are lost, and ready to perish. The Gospel reveals a method of salvation, and you should cheerfully and thankfully bow to it—you should *implicitly* acquiesce in it; remembering that you have no claims on the sovereign Donor; and that the plan is the effect of his wisdom, as well as of his goodness.

And would he, at an infinite expense, have provided, and made known, this way of salvation, if any other had been sufficient? Would he have called the attention of the universe to the opening of this Fountain, for the ablution of souls, had other streams been available? Our having recourse, therefore, to any other plan of salvation, is not only useless, and sure to end in disappointment; but it is criminal. There is nothing that can render us more guilty before God. It is disobedience; it is opposition. It robs him of his peculiar glory. It degrades his understanding, as well as detracts from his mercy. It "frustrates the grace of God, and makes Jesus Christ to be dead in vain."

Fourthly. The *fearful*. It is no easy thing to satisfy the conscience of awakened sinners: *they* need strong consolation who are “fleeing for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them”—And is it not provided? Wherefore do you doubt? We acknowledge, the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin. Neither could blood merely human. But the blood of which we speak is the blood of a Divine Sufferer; and we know the all-sufficiency of it, because it has been accepted by Him who required it on our behalf. And if *He* has heard the voice of the blood of sprinkling, and is satisfied; if his law is magnified and made honourable; and he can be faithful and just, as well as merciful and gracious, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness; *we* may well believe—and enter into rest.

But you say, it is not the efficiency of the Fountain you question. What then? Why, whether *I* have liberty to make use of it? Let us examine this case. And for whom is this Fountain opened? The innocent and the clean? No—It is opened “for sin and uncleanness.” Guilt, therefore, constitutes no exclusion. We are told, he “came into the world to save sinners;” and that “he died for the ungodly.” As I can only at first apply to him in the character of a sinner, it is obvious that the warrant which authorizes me to apply must be addressed indiscriminately to *all* sinners. And so it is. All who have the Gospel have such a warrant—a warrant that will not only justify *any man* from presumption who acts upon it, but will be sure to condemn all those who do not. Come, therefore, come, whoever you are.

“This Fountain unsealed
Stands open for all
Who long to be healed—
The great and the small.”—

But I have nothing to pay. And you need nothing:

“This Fountain, though rich,
From charge is quite clear;
The poorer the wretch,
The welcomer here.”

I know that such language has been deemed altogether exceptionable: as if we encouraged sin, while we only encourage the sinner. And how are we to encourage a sinner? Is it by requiring of him, as the ground of his hope, conditions which he cannot perform? Or is it by keeping him back from Christ, while waiting for qualifications which he can never derive from himself? Are men to be warmed before they go to the fire, to entitle them to the heat, and to prepare them for it? Are patients to be recovered, or, at least, considerably mended, before they apply to the physician? The sick and the dying are his charge. Do not wait, therefore, for qualifications to recommend you—We do need a mediator between God and us, but not between us and Christ. What said Paul and Silas at once to the jailer's question? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

“Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream:
All the fitness he requireth
Is to feel your need of Him.”

Finally. There is one class more who have a relation to our subject: and it consists of those who by

faith have applied to this Saviour; and who know, by *experience*, that there is indeed a Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. *You* are witnesses. You can vouch that it is accessible and free. Were you refused? Were you required to wait? Was your claim questioned? Father, were you not welcomed with a smile, which showed, that the backwardness had only been on your side; and with a voice, that kindly anticipated your approach, and said, "Wilt thou be made whole?"

You can vouch for its efficacy too. You *know* that it can relieve a troubled mind; that it can heal the broken in heart, and bind up all their wounds. You *know* that, while it deeply humbles before God, it can inspire a holy freedom: for you "*have boldness and access with confidence, by the faith of Him.*" You *know* that, while it renders the curse harmless, it makes sin odious; and not only tranquillizes, but "purifies the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God."

When persons, labouring under a malady, have found relief, a grateful disposition leads them, as opportunity offers, to commend the physician; while a benevolent feeling urges them to recommend his remedy to others who are suffering under the same complaint. "Praise ye the Lord. Declare his doings among the people. Make mention that his Name is exalted." Go, and divulge—not only what you have read and heard, but—what you have known and felt. Are there not thousands perishing around you? And are they not your brethren; bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh? What was once your promise, your vow, if you were snatched from the jaws of death yourselves?—

“Then will I tell to sinners round
What a dear Saviour I have found;
I’ll point to his atoning blood,
And say, Behold the way to God!”

Pray that this way may be known on earth; this saving health among all nations. Senti, where you cannot go yourselves—aid the Bible Society, in diffusing the Scriptures; and Missionary Societies, in sending forth missionaries. Employ your personal influence. Make use of your talents; make use of your tongue. Let your temper, your conduct, your life, your character, speak.

Indeed, it will be in vain for you to applaud a remedy that has done *you* no good. When you recommend it, with all the symptoms and effects of your disorder upon you, they will naturally say, “You have an end to answer, regardless of our welfare. You do not believe in the virtue of the medicine, or you would have used it yourself.” If, therefore, you are vain, and proud, and revengeful, and selfish, and covetous; if your family is the scene of discord and strife; if your shop is famed for cunning, overreaching, and injustice: if, under the profession of Christianity, you have not the honesty of a heathen—you had much neuer say nothing: for people will immediately judge of your religion by *you*—And will your conduct impress it? Will this endear it?

But, blessed be God, allowing for human infirmities, and imperfections, inseparable from the present life; blessed be God, there are some who are emphatically the better for the Gospel: they are spiritually convalescent; they are other creatures than they once were: they are renewed in the spirit of their minds; they live soberly, righteously, and

godly, in the present world; and they walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called: they are followers of him who went about doing good. They are also increasing; and though, as yet, they are few, compared with the world that lieth in wickedness, there are enough to show the reality and power of the Saviour's grace, and to leave those without excuse who will not come to him, that they might have life.

But, oh! what, what will it be when all, "out of every kindred, and nation, and people, and tongue"—all that he has ever saved, shall be assembled together, as the trophies of his Cross—while he, engaging every eye, and enrapturing every heart, shall hear from the countless throng: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father; be glory and dominion for ever!"

DISCOURSE XCVII.

RELIGIOUS INDECISION.

“Ephraim is a cake not turned.”—HOSEA vii. 8.

BAKED on one side only—neither soft nor hard—neither bread nor dough—disagreeable—unserviceable. “A very homely comparison, a very vulgar image,” you say. But the sacred penmen are above our fastidiousness. They write for the common people; and what are little delicate allusions, discerned and relished only by a refinement of taste, while they are lost upon the majority of readers? *They* want something plain, and yet forcible; something to rouse the conscience, and to lodge in the mind. And “the words of the wise,” says Solomon, “are as goads, and as nails *goads* to wound, and *nails* to fasten. If the image be vulgar, it is striking; and if the comparison be homely, it is much too flattering for the persons it is intended to express.

Let us divide our subject into three parts. I. We shall INQUIRE AFTER THE CENSURED CHARACTERS.

II. We shall EXPOSE THEIR CONDUCT and THEIR CONDITION. III. We shall ENDEAVOUR TO BRING THEM TO A DECISION; or, as our text would authorize us to say—see if we cannot turn these cakes.

I. WHO ARE EPHRAIMITES? In answering this question, as the preacher ought to proceed with great caution, so you ought to hear with peculiar seriousness; and may the God of the spirits of all flesh empower an inward monitor to say, as we proceed, “Thou art the man.”

There are three classes of persons, as far as our subject requires us to distinguish them. There are real Christians, who are entirely for God. There are the profligate, who make no pretensions to religion. And there are some who stand between both, and seem to partake of each; and *these* are the characters we are in search of.

Few are totally regardless of Divine things. Some, indeed, wear no disguise, and encumber themselves with no forms. They never call upon God’s Name—unless to profane it; never observe the sabbath, or hear the word preached; they explicitly avow their ungodliness, always in actions, and often in words: and, “I am for hell,” is written in capitals on their forehead. But these are not the mass: there are not many who can shake off *all* religious concern. Their education, their relations, reason, conscience, reputation, even their worldly interest—all these induce them to pay *some* attention to religion. But the lamentation is, that they are only formal, external, partial—at best, but half-hearted, in their regards. “Ephraim is a cake not turned.”

Who then are the characters intended? If we look into the Scripture, we shall find some of them

represented by the successors of Israel. When the king of Assyria had carried away the ten tribes from Judea, he brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the Lord: therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them. Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom he brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land." And so they did; and, with a mongrel devotion, they served both Jehovah and their idols; the one from affection, and the other for fear of the lions: "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence." We shall find some of them in a Balaam—unable to go beyond the word of the Lord; and yet loving the wages of unrighteousness; delighting in what he declined; sacrificing his conscience to his fame; blessing Israel, and showing how to curse them; praying, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his," and perishing in battle against them. We shall find some of them in a young man, so promising, so wise, so humble, as to inquire

after eternal life, kneeling; and so amiable, as to enrage the affection of the Saviour; but who went away sorrowful, because he could not resign an earthly possession at the command of Him, who would more than have repaid the sacrifice. We shall find some of them in a Herod, who “heard John gladly, and feared him, and did many things,” but retained his Herodias, and murdered his admired preacher, for the sake of an unlawful passion. We shall find some of them in an Agrippa, who, pressed by the eloquence and truth of the Apostle’s reasoning, exclaimed, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

And cannot we find, nearer home, individuals, alternately in the temple and the tavern? now in the house of prayer, and now in the place of dissipation? repairing to the one from conviction, and to the other from inclination? refusing to the passions what may trouble the conscience, and to conscience what may trouble the passions? equally remote from the ardours of the pious, and the excesses of the profane? free from gross vices, and yet indulging in graceless tempers? wearing “a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof? having a name to live, and yet dead”?

Some of these characters are to be met with in connexion with the more evangelical modes of religion. Such persons will attend only on the preaching of the Gospel. They are orthodox in their views. With their mouth, they show much love. Their feelings are sometimes powerfully excited. They receive the word with joy. They have another heart; but not a new one.

We have read of a bishop, formerly in Spain,

whose clergy had long been carrying on a controversy, concerning the condition of Solomon; some pleading for his salvation, and others for his perdition. To accommodate both parties, the good bishop ordered a representation of him to be drawn on the walls of his chapel, half in hell and half in heaven. And what better could a moral painter do with numbers in our day? We know not whether to set them down as children of wrath, or heirs of glory. Their inconsistencies are such, that each side seems to disown them; and they continue to agitate both the hopes and fears of those who have any regard for their eternal welfare. But our fears must prevail: and we proceed,

II. TO EXPOSE THEIR CONDUCT, and THEIR CONDITION. And this may be done by observing Four things.

First. This indecision is *unreasonable*. What is there that will not convince you of the truth of this remark!—Think of God. Is he such a friend, such a father, such a master, such a sovereign, as to deserve only a languid devotion, a divided heart? “Cursed he the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my Name is dreadful among the heathen.”—Look at the Saviour of sinners. How did he engage in the work of your deliverance? Did indifference bring him from heaven to earth; and induce him, who was rich, for your sake to become poor: and die, that you might live? He loved us, and gave himself for us: and one feeling only can correspond with his infinite kindness, a feeling of universal consecration:

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!”

Look at the hell you have to escape; the glory you have to obtain; the brevity and uncertainty of the time allowed you for success. Does a state of slumber become the awfulness of your situation and prospects? “Escape for thy life: look not behind thee; neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.” “Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” Look at religion. Is there any medium between the truth, and importance of the subject? If you do not believe this Book to be true, you are an infidel; if you do, and disregard its contents, you are worse. Can lukewarmness ever perform the duties of religion? Is prayer only the bending of the knee? Is praise only “a solemn sound upon a thoughtless tongue”? Can lukewarmness ever conquer the difficulties of religion? Will this enable you to run the race that is set before you, or to fight the good fight of faith?—Look at your fellow-creatures. They rise up early, and sit up late, and compass sea and land, to gain a little shining dust, or the smile of the great; and yet, what a disparity is there between your zeal and their zeal, their sacrifices and your sacrifices!—Look at the uselessness of all your half-measures. Have you suffered so much in vain, if it be yet in vain? Are ye so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh? If the course in which you have been engaged is not worthy of your regard,

why did you go so far? If it be, why not go further? If resolved to perish, could you not have perished without resisting any sin; without performing any duty?

Secondly. This indecision is *dishonourable*. Such a man is never regarded. In vain you say, "Why, he is the very man the people of the world approve"—and suppose he was—Are they to be our judges? He that judgeth us is the Lord. But you are mistaken. The people of the world may like such a temporizer so far as by resemblance he justifies them; but as to real veneration and respect for him, they have none—nor can they have any. No; such a man is never regarded. He is no character, he has neither the value, nor solidity of gold: lead is his image—worthless, and easily receptive of any impression. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Uprightness and consistency are always admired. The possessor, after awhile, lives down reproach, and enthrones himself in the judgment and esteem of his fellow-creatures. "Well," say they, "he is sincere and honest; he is all of a piece." But base is the man who changes with the times; varies with his situations; conforms to the company he is in; is always worldly with the worldly, and sanctified with the saints—Who likes "a cake not turned"?

Thirdly. Such indecision is *wretched*. Can any thing be more miserable than to have two businesses to carry on at the same time; two parties to consult in every action and in every look; two masters to serve who hate each other, and whose designs are perfectly opposite? What but distraction, confusion, and drudgery, and strife, must ensue? These half-Christians, owing to the light they have in the under-

standing, and the checks of conscience, cannot enjoy the vanities of the world and the pleasures of sin: while religion, as regarded by them, is no source of joy; they do not enter into the spirit of it, and therefore cannot relish its satisfactions. The real believer enjoys the light of God's countenance, the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and has meat to eat which others know not of; and the professed votary of sin and the world enjoys the delights which arise from time and sense: but the character before us enjoys neither. He gives up the creature for God, and God for the creature. He loses heaven for the sake of earth, and earth for the sake of heaven; and is of all men the most miserable.

Fourthly. Such indecision is *dangerous*. I wish to be understood to mean—*peculiarly dangerous*. Observe, in the first place; such characters are not easily converted. For though they have not religion enough to insure their safety, they have sufficient to make them insensible of their danger. Though they have not enough to keep them awake, they have sufficient to lull them to sleep. Conscience has nothing very criminal, in their view, to reproach them with. Their exemption from immorality gives them confidence and peace. Their attention to the exterior of piety, and the decency of their general demeanour, attract from men the praise which is due to real godliness; and this flatters and confirms the good opinion they entertain of themselves. Their satisfaction with themselves is also strengthened by contrasts with the character and conduct of others, who are outwardly and openly wicked. Their very convictions, too, in time are altered; their practice has bribed their judgment; and what formerly appeared wrong is

now deemed a vain scruple, the effect of education, or a contracted mind. Secondly: they are not very likely to continue always in this state. Duties, never relished, in time disgust. Prayer never performed in earnest, may be wholly given up. Doctrines never known in their vital influence, may be discarded as speculations. Errors more congenial with their present feelings, and necessary to justify the course they take, may be adopted. God may withdraw his restraining and assisting grace, and leave them to their own lusts. The principles of sin, being unmortified, may gather strength by having been so long repressed, and may break forth with greater violence. And when such persons as these fall, they generally become despisers, revilers, persecutors. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." Thirdly: however this may be—though they hover between truth and error, holiness and sin, the world and the Church, heaven and hell,

through life—this will not be the case in death. They will then be developed, and have their portion with the vile and the profligate; with swearers, drunkards, thieves, and murderers; with the Devil and his angels.

Ah! says the Saviour to the Laodiceans, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou were cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” And yet, oh! how he waits to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy! Yet, even these characters, hateful as their state is, and sure, if continued in, to bring upon them the utmost destruction, he does not treat with neglect—but counsels them—“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.” I cannot, therefore, conclude without endeavouring,

III. TO BRING YOU TO A DECISION. I, therefore, address you in the language of Joshua: “Choose you this day whom you will serve or, in the words of Elijah: “How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” The reason of the address, if you believe the Scripture, is obvious; for “no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and

mammon." "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Which then of these states will you take? What is your answer?

Shall it be the language of the convinced, penitent, returning Israelites, spoken of by the prophet; "Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel." O that this were, indeed, your reply! To whom can you go but unto him? He has the words of eternal life. He is able, he is willing—to pardon, to renew, to satisfy, to delight, to bless you "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

Or will you say, with the rebels among the Jews, who, when admonished, "Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst," said, "There is no hope; no: for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." Ah! think again. Listen not to the dictates of despair—"There *is* hope in Israel concerning this thing."—"Come and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins were as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they were red like crimson, they' shall be as wool." The bridge is not yet drawn. The door is not yet shut. Think again. Will you turn your back upon such an opening of deliverance? Can you mean what you say? Are you resolved to follow your

idols, and to forsake the God of love? How shocking, how dreadful—to bid farewell to God!

Or will you take a middle course, and, neither actually complying nor refusing, say to the man who importunes you, with Felix, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.” But we cannot admit of this reply; it is evasion. Our commission requires an immediate determination: “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” And does not your safety require the same? “Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. *Now* is the accepted time; *now* is the day of salvation.”“ How long have some of you hesitated already! How wonderful is it that God has borne with you to this day, when he might justly have considered your excuses and delays, ten, twenty, forty years ago, as a rejection; and have sworn, “in his wrath, that you should not enter into his rest”! Surely, after this fresh proposal, God may resolve, consistently with all the riches of his goodness, to address you no more; to order away all the means and influences that can benefit your souls, and to say, “He is joined to idols: let him alone.” It is certain, that the longer you waver, the more difficult you will find it to decide: for the world tyrannizes the more it is obeyed; and the heart is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. And what is it, to determine that you cannot decide at once? Is there any comparison between the respective claimants? Between hell and heaven? Between the bondage of corruption and the service of God? Between the way of transgressors, which is hard, and Wisdom’s ways, which are all pleasantness and peace? “What fruit had ye then in those things

whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”

But the grand prevention is the world—To give up the world!—But you must give it up soon—and who is most likely to resign it with ease and pleasure; the man who idolizes it, or he that is weaned from it?—To give up the world! But how are you required to give it up? Not as to your station in it, your business, or your duty; but only as to what is evil and injurious to yourselves. Giving up the world is not giving up happiness. Did it ever make you happy? Has it not left your heart cold and void; and, even in its best estate, led you to ask, “Who will show us any good?” And who enjoys the world most in its lawful pursuits and innocent indulgence? The man who is reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, and renewed in the spirit of his mind. To him the sun shines fairer, and the rose is more fragrant, than before. “OLD THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY; BEHOLD, ALL THINGS ARE BECOME NEW.”

DISCOURSE XCVIII.

RETIREMENT.

“And he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee.”—EZEK. iii. 22.

THE pleasures and advantages of solitude have been often admired and recommended. All love the world; yet all complain of it: and whatever schemes of happiness are devised, the scene is always laid in a withdrawalment from it. “It is there,” says the victim of perfidy and malice, “it is there the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary tire thit rest.” It is there the warrior feeds his courage, and arranges the materials of victory. It is there the statesman forms and weighs his plans of policy. There the philosopher pursues his theories and experiments. There the man of genius feels the power of thought and thnc glow of fancy, and roves in a world of his own creation. “Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and mtermcddleth with all wisdom.”

I have to consider solitude in reference to the Christian: it has a very interesting connexion with religion.

Ezekiel was now by the river Chebar, with the captives of Israel, to whom he had been sent: *ami* says he, "The hand of the Lord was there upon me." This expression always marks an impulse of inspiration. What kind of impression it was that moved them in these cases we cannot determine; but they knew it to be *Divine*. And we observe here—that no *place* can exclude God from approaching his servants, or holding intercourse with them.

But he is a sovereign; and may manifest himself when, and how, and *where* he pleases. Yet his sovereignty is never to be confounded with arbitrariness—He has reasons for his conduct; and though all places are alike to him, they are not the same with regard to us. To receive, therefore, the intended communication, he is ordered to *withdraw*. "And he said unto me, Arise, and go forth into the plain, and I will *there* talk with thee."

If we consider Ezekiel as a prophet, the order applies peculiarly to ministers; and says to them—"Appear, but *live* not in public. Be not too companionable. Retire much for study and devotion. It is there you will obtain an unction from the Holy One, and know all things." Look ye out, said the Apostles to the churches, deacons to manage your temporal affairs: but "we will give ourselves unto prayer, and the ministry of the word." And to Timothy, Paul said, "Meditate upon these things: give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all."

But the address will apply to Christians at large: and we may derive from it this observation—RETIREMENT IS FRIENDLY TO COMMUNION WITH GOD. Let us consider,

I. The DUTY—And, II. The PRIVILEGE.

“—Call me away from flesh and sense;
 One sovereign word can draw me thence:
 I would obey the voice Divine,
 And all inferior joys resign.

“He earth, with all her scenes, withdrawn;
 Let noise and vanity be gone—
 In secret silence of the mind,
 My heaven, and *there my God I find.*”

I. The DUTY enjoined—“And he said unto me. Arise, and go forth into the plain.” It may be necessary to premise two things. First: the *place* is indifferent. It matters not whether it be a private room, or the open field. The thing required is to be alone. And, Secondly, It is not a state of absolute retirement that God enjoins. Man was made for society, as well as solitude: and so is the Christian. A great part of our religion regards our fellow-creatures, and cannot be discharged but by intermixture with them: and what our Saviour thought of resigning business, abandoning our connexions, and hiding ourselves in woods and cells, appears obviously, from the language which he addressed to his own disciples: “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” It is, therefore, possible for a Christian to be alone, when he *ought* to be abroad; and to be indulging a favourite inclination, when he should exercise self-denial, in order to meet

the calls of Providence. It may be much more pleasing often to sit alone, reading or reflecting, than to be called forth to give advice, or to visit the afflicted—but, as we “have opportunity, we must do good unto all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith.”

But what our subject demands is, comparative and occasional secession for moral and spiritual purposes. This will be found a duty; and God says to you, as he did to Ezekiel, “Go forth, and I will talk with thee.”

And says he not this by express commands? I hope you acknowledge his authority; and in the true spirit of obedience ask, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” And can you be ignorant that he has said, by the mouth of his servant and of his Son, “Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which is in secret shall reward thee openly”?

And says he not this by example? “Isaac went out into the field at eventide to meditate. Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled with him a man, until the dawning of the day.” “Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?” Daniel retired three times a day. Peter went up to the house-top to pray about the sixth hour, and received a Divine communication. Of our

Saviour, whose life has the force of a law, it is said; "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." At another time, "he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."

Says he not this by the institution of the Sabbath? We are not to consider the appointment of the Sabbath as a display of the Divine prerogative only: "the Sabbath was made for man." It has a merciful reference, even to his body; by conducing to cleanliness, comfort, and health: but the provision principally regards the welfare of the soul. The Sabbath comes, and tells us, that while we are not slothful in business, among all our cares, one thing is needful: and admonishes us to choose that good part which shall not be taken away from us. It brings us more immediately into the presence of God: and gives us an opportunity to examine our character and our condition. It renews those pious impressions which our intercourse with the things of time and sense is continually wearing off. It is in this view the believer prizes it; calling the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable.

"Now from the crowd withdrawn away,
He seems to breathe a diff'rent air;
Composed and soften'd by the day,
All things another aspect wear."

The light he beholds is the Lord's. The ground he treads is sacred. Even the public worship is a seclusion from the world: it is the exchange of secular employment for religious; of civil society for spiritual; of the ledger for the Bible; of the shop for

the sanctuary. But it affords him a season for the more large and particular exercises of private devotion—and the return of every Saturday evening cries, “To-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord.” “Go forth into the plain, and there will I talk with thee.”

And says he not this by the dispensations of his Providence? Affliction often at once disinclines us to social circles, and disqualifies us for them. Sickness separates a man from the crowd, and confines him on the bed of languishing, there to ask, “Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?” A reduced condition will diminish your associates. It will drive off the selfish herd, who think that a friend is born for *prosperity*; but it will bring you Christians and ministers, whose religion teaches them to comfort those that are cast down; and they will bring God. “Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness”—is a groan that is, in time, wrung from every heart. What a solitude—what a dreariness—does the death of relations for a time produce! The death of a child will desolate the world, in feeling if not in fact. “He sitteth alone, and keepeth silence;” or sighs, “I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop!”—Sons have been deserted by weakness and perfidy: Job could say, “My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away; which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: what time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place.” “At my first answer,” says Paul, “no man stood by me, but all men forsook me”—but, adds he, “nevertheless the Lord stood by

me, and strengthened me." For the Christian is often never less alone than when alone. When Joseph was sent to prison,—and he tells us *God* sent him there,—“the Lord was with Joseph.” When John was banished to the isle of Patinos, he was indulged with the manifestations of the Almighty. Paul, in prison, wrote many of his Epistles: and there many others, whose works praise them in the gate, composed their most admired and useful publications—They were ordered out of the world, that God might talk with them!

Says he not this by the influence of his grace? This agency always produces in its subjects certain sentiments and dispositions, which urge and attach them to retirement. I will mention four of these.

The First is a devotional temper. Whoever delights in prayer will delight in retirement; because it is so favourable to the frequency and freedom of the exercise. There we can divulge what we could not communicate in the presence of the dearest earthly friend. There words are unnecessary—“our desire is before him; our groaning is not hid from him:” the eye poureth out tears unto God; and he hears the voice of our weeping.

The Second is a desire to rise above the world. This will induce a man to retire. How often does the Christian lament that his conversation is so little in heaven, and that he is so much governed by things that are seen and temporal! But where is the world conquered? In a crowd? No; but—alone. In the midst of its active pursuits? No—but viewed as an object of solitary contemplation; viewed in the presence of Jehovah; viewed in the remembrances of eternity. Then its emptiness appears—Then the

fascination is dissolved—Then we look upward and say, “Now what wait I for? my hope is in thee.”

The Third is a wish to obtain self-knowledge. This will induce a man to withdraw. It is only alone that he can examine his state; that he can estimate his attainments; that he can explore his defects; that he can discern the sources of his past dangers or falls, and set a watch against future temptation.

The Fourth is love to God.—This will lead a man to retire. When we are supremely attached to a person, his presence is all we want; he will be the chief attraction, even in company; how desirable then to meet him alone, where he seems wholly ours, and we can yield and receive undivided attention! Friendship deals much in secrecy; kindred souls have a thousand things to hear and to utter that are not for a common ear. This is pre-eminently the case with the intimacy subsisting between God and the believer. There is a peculiarity in every part of the Christian’s experience. “The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddeth not with his joy:” but both his pains and pleasures bring with them evidence that they are from God; for they dispose the soul to hold communion with him. “Come,” says the Church, “come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the fields, let us lodge in the villages.” And says God, of his people, “Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and there will I speak comfortably unto her.”

II. Let us consider the PRIVILEGE promised—
“And I will there talk with thee.”

Mark, First—The condescension of the Speaker.

We admire the nobleman that kindly notices a peasant; and the sovereign that deigns to converse with one of his poorest subjects. But who is it that here says—"There *I* will talk with thee"? And with whom does he hold this converse? It is the Creator talking with the creature. It is the God of heaven and earth, holding communion with man that is a worm, and the son of man that is a worm!

Nor is this all—annexed to our meanness are our unworthiness, and our guilt. Here is, therefore, the condescension not only of goodness, but of mercy and grace. "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

Secondly. Observe the happiness of the believer. By what scale can we judge of blessedness so rightly as the degree of nearness to God, the supreme good, the fountain of life? In his presence there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore. How blessed, then, is the man whom God chooses, and causes to approach unto him now! Yet "such honour have all his saints." How would a man be envied if the king was to favour him with his presence and intimacy! Especially if he was known to meet him by appointment, from time to time alone. Yet is this no more than every Christian expects and enjoys. He has insured interviews with the blessed and only Potentate. Some of us cannot aspire after intercourse with many of our fellow-creatures, by reason of our condition and our talents. We may wish to be in their company, yet shrink from their notice; we may long to hear them talk, yet could not talk with them—we should be swallowed up—we should deem it impossible for them to listen to our weakness, But, whatever be our condition,

or our talents, we have a free and invited access to God—we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus—He hears our praises and complaints—and “there,” says he, “will I talk with thee”!

Thirdly. What is the subject of communication? It is variously expressed in the Scripture. It is called, his secret, and his covenant: “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.” It is called judgment, and his way: “The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.” It is peace: “He will speak peace unto his people.” It regards everything that is important to their welfare, or interesting to their feelings and hopes. It takes in what he has done for them, what he is doing, and what he will do. He speaks concerning them for time and eternity: he gives them exceeding great and precious promises; and adds to his word his oath, that, “by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, they might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them.”

Fourthly. What is the mode of address? He does not talk with us in a preternatural manner, as he did sometimes of old with his people. He came down and spake with Moses as a man talketh with his friend. Moses saw his glory, and heard his voice. But it is enthusiasm in us to expect dreams, and visions, and sudden impulses, and audible sounds. There are no new communications from God now: I. mean, new in themselves, and such as were not to be found in the Bible before; for as to us they may be, and will be often new. If a man born blind was to be restored to sight, the sun. which he never saw

before, would be new to him; but it would not be a new sun. We may begin to feel truths which we never thought of before; yet the truths themselves are as old as the revelation of God to man. But he opens our eyes to see wondrous things out of his law. He opens our understandings that we may know the Scriptures. He leads us into all truth. He applies the doctrines and promises of his word by his Spirit; and, by enabling us to realize our own interest in them, he says to our souls, I am thy salvation.

Finally. What is the evidence of the fact? How shall we know that *he does* talk with us? Remember the two disciples going to Emmaus. Our Lord joined them as they journeyed, and inquired after the subject of their conversation and concern. "And beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Yet all this time they took him for a stranger. But at supper their eyes were opened, and they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight. And this was the reflection they made on the occurrence: "Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" As if they had said—"Is it not astonishing that Ave did not know him earlier? That we did not discover him upon the road—For who could have conversed with us as he did? Who could have made such impression on the heart?"

Determine the Divine converse with you in the same way. Judge of it by its influences and effects. Three effects will always arise from it.

First. It will produce a deep and solemn sense of our vanity and vilcness. Communion with God, instead of gendering and encouraging unhallowed

Kingdom gives a man such intimate views of the peculiar glory of God as fill him with godly fear. Thus it was with our prophet. It was the same with Jacob, with Moses, with Elijah, with Job, with Isaiah, with Peter.

Secondly. It will draw forth unquenchable desires after additional indulgence. That which contents the believer makes him also insatiable. From his intercourse with him, he desires no more than God: but he will desire more of him; and from every fresh discovery the prayer will arise, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory."

Thirdly. It will produce likeness. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." We soon acquire the tone and the manner of those who converse much with us, especially if they are our superiors, and we very highly love or revere them. Some boast of being much with God; but so censurable are their conduct and temper, that few of their fellow-creatures would like to be much with *them*. If you are selfish, and covetous, and censorious, and revengeful, some other being has been talking with you: this spirit cometh not from him who calleth you: it is from beneath; and is earthly, sensual, devilish. "Lint the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

From this subject—Some are to be censured.

Such are those who call themselves Christians, and are regular in their attendance on public ordinances, but are seldom alone. They who hear much, and re-

fleet little, are always found very imperfect characters, for it is not what we devour, but what we digest, that aids health and supports life.

Others never retire—and what is the reason? “O, we have not time; so numerous and pressing are the cares and avocations of life.” Have you more engagements than David, who had to govern a large and distracted empire, surrounded with enemies—yet could he say, “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice. Seven times a day do I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments.” Do you not trifle away more time every day of your lives than is required for the purpose of devotion? Could you not, by order, and diligence, and rising earlier, secure more leisure than you now command? Where there is a will, there is a way. Disinclination loves to shelter itself behind difficulties. The slothful cries, “There is a lion in the way;” and so there is; but he puts it there. Zeal clears the road, and will often convert hinderances into helps.

Let me ask, whether you do not decline being alone because you are afraid to awaken or to meet inquiry? If so—Are you not ashamed of a peace of mind that is only preserved by shunning reflection?—And will you be always able to shun it?—If you cannot meet conscience, how will you meet God? If you live in company, remember this—you must *die alone*.

But he whom you have neglected and contemned has yet thoughts towards you, and they are thoughts of peace. He has opened a new and living way to himself. He waits to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy upon you. Return to him through an

atoning and interceding Saviour, and live. Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.

The subject requires us to comfort others.

Perhaps you approve of all we have said—but you are so straitened in your circumstances, that you have not a room to retire in—and are so necessarily engrossed with the difficulties of life, that it is scarcely possible to secure a moment for devotional solitude in the field.

See that this is not your fault, but your affliction, and you may hope that God will indemnify you in some other way.

But others are more favoured. You not only love retirement, but you are able to enjoy it. Yet you find it much easier to withdraw the body than to separate the mind from earthly things. The world follows you, and invades and defiles the very sanctuary of silence. You value the presence of Him who manifests himself to his people and not unto the world; and wherever he meets with you, the place is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. You would gladly pass in such enjoyment the hours that duty requires to be devoted to inferior claims. Your intercourse with God, therefore, is short and interrupted; but it is refreshing and instructive. It shows you what heaven is, and makes it desirable. “Ah,” you say, “if these views, these feelings, were but perfect and permanent!” Well, soon, *very soon*, they will be perfect and permanent, and you will *be for ever with the Lord*.

DISCOURSE XCIX.

DAVID'S FEAR AND FOLLY.

“And David said in his heart, I shall now perish the day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines.”—

I SAM. xxvii. 1.

THE memoirs of David occupy a large proportion of the Old Testament; and we need not wonder at this when we consider, not only his relation to the Messiah but the peculiar providences that distinguished him., He is one of the most interesting characters recorded in all history. His life was singularly eventful; and as in nature we do not wish for a continuity of level, or an uniformity of aspect, but are most gratified with hill and valley, and wood and lawn, and intermixtures of the beautiful and sublime; so we are most attracted to the lives of those who have been placed in a variety of scenes, especially in conditions so opposite and extreme, that we marvel by what kind of process they could have passed the gulph between. Had we seen David a stripling in the field of Bethlehem, keeping his father's sheep, who could have thought that he would emerge from obscurity, and become

the champion of Goliath, the terror of the Philistines, the conqueror of the Ammonites, and Moabites, and Edomites; and one of the most renowned heroes, monarchs, legislators, and writers of the East!

His religious experience is as interesting as the events of his life. Indeed much of the one grew out of the other, and was diversified by them. Many of his psalms, as we see by the titles, were composed in consequence of his dangers and afflictions. His trying situation produced the language I have read. It consists of two parts—His FEAR—and his FOLLY.

I. His FEAR—“David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul.”

II. His *Folly*—“There is nothing better than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines.”

O Thou by whose inspiration all Scripture is given, render these words profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness!

I. Observe his FEAR.

It was the language, not of his lips, but of his feelings—he “said *in his heart*, I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul.” He does not seem to have uttered it in words—restrained probably by prudence and kindness. It is not necessary, or proper, to trouble others with all our uneasy feelings. It is a noble and magnanimous mind that can suffer without complaint. Indeed, if a man hawks about his trouble from door to door; if he loves to talk of his trials in every company he meets; we may be assured he will never die of grief. Profound sorrow, like the deep river, flows noiseless: the man wounded at heart, like the smitten deer, leaves the herd for the shade—“He sitteth alone, and keepeth silence: he put-

teth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope.”

Religious people should be concerned peculiarly to appear peaceful and cheerful. Nothing recommends godliness more, or is more necessary to counteract the prejudice so commonly and injuriously entertained against it, as the mother and nurse of mopishness and melancholy. We would not wish you to be hypocrites, avowing joys to which you are strangers; but you are not required to publish all your painful emotions, especially before those who cannot understand, and are likely to misinterpret them. I have often admired the holy delicacy of Ezra, when returning to Jerusalem from Babylon, with a number of his countrymen. “Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help up against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.” There was *really* no inconsistency between his profession of confidence in God, and asking for a convoy: for God works by means. But so it might have appeared to a heathen prince: he would therefore rather expose himself to peril than bring a cause, dearer to him than life, not only under reflection, but under suspicion.

When we see persons filling up their stations in life with diligence, and declining no duty in their power, how little can we often imagine what they feel,

at the very time, within!—Truly “the heart knoweth his own bitterness.” While David appeared cheerful and courageous, lest, by his deportment, he should confound or dismay his followers, his very soul was cast down within him.

And was this the case with a man of such superior attainments?—Where are the hands that never hang down; and the knees that never tremble? We are prone to think that many of our feelings are peculiar, and to cry, If I am his, why am I thus?—Here we see the advantage of pious intercourse. The communication of Christian experience will convince us, that nothing has befallen us that is not common to the partakers of divine grace; and thus, things that were stumbling-blocks before become way-marks, and marks of our being in “the way everlasting.” We sometimes think that the saints recorded in Scripture were a class of beings very different from ourselves: but the Spirit of God has taken care to show us that there was nature in *them*, as well as grace; and that while they were made *holy*, they were left *human*. We see their sorrows, as well as their joys; their conflicts, as well as their victories. David, who, in the triumphs of faith, had exulted, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” now said in his heart, “I shall one day perish.”

By perishing, he means dying. There is a perdition of a more dreadful import. It means, not annihilation, but misery; not the destruction of being, but of all comfort and hope. This perdition the sacred writers never pretend to define. They tell us that it is “a fearful thing,” but not *how* fearful a

thing, "to fall into the hands of the living God." Indeed they *could* not; for "who knoweth the power of his anger?" From this destruction a Christian is secured: he is redeemed from the curse of the Law; he is delivered from the wrath to come, and there is nothing penal in all the sufferings he endures. Yet he is not always free from apprehension, but feels many a shivering thought how it may go with him at last. Is there a Christian present that has not sometimes, if not often, said, "I shall one day perish?" And you could have drawn no other conclusion while you considered only your own ismorce and weakness, and the enemies that were seeking your soul to destroy it: but, having obtained help of God, you continue to this day the living, the living to praise him. You are now saying, to his glory, "Our heart is not turned hack, neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death." And what is the Saviour saying? "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."—But, by perishing, David means dying.

"I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." And suppose he had? This was all the injury he could have done him: and we are forbidden to fear those that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. He must have died, according to the course of nature, in a few years: and what is death, in any form, to a good man, but falling asleep or going home? He ought then, you say, to have risen above the fear of death. But the fear of death

is a natural principle; and there is nothing in it more sinful than in hunger or thirst. Adam had it in a state of innocency; or there would have been no threatening in the words, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Our Lord himself felt it; and "with strong cryings and tears made supplication to him who was able to save him from death." There was no want of resignation in this: it was the effect of a natural aversion to suffering, and which rendered his submission the more illustrious—when he said, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Had we no appetite for food, there would be no virtue in fasting. Death is not always desirable even to a good man. When Hezekiah was ordered to set his house in order, he turned his face to the wall, and wept sore, and prayed for recovery. And if you take a man better acquainted with the way of salvation and a world of glory, yet his evidences of a personal interest are not always satisfactory—And can he be willing to go in a state of uncertainty? He may also have peculiar attractions, and detentions, in his connexions: the benefactor may feel these in his dependents; the father in his children; the minister in his people. It was this that placed Paul in a strait between two: he longed to depart to be with Christ, which was far better; but to abide in the flesh was more needful for those among whom he laboured.—David had a father and a mother who fled with him, and depended upon him for support.

But David was in no danger of perishing by the hand of Saul. Saul was indeed a malicious and powerful enemy; but he was chained, and could do nothing against him except it was given him from

above. And the Lord was on David's side. And he had the promise of the throne, which implied his preservation. And the holy oil had been poured upon his head. And he had already experienced many wonderful deliverances. And he should have reasoned from the past to the future, as he had done before—"The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." But here we see how hard it is to trust in God in the hour of difficulty.

I am far from thinking that it is an easy thing to trust in God at any time. Some, I know, are accustomed to say, "O, it is easy enough to trust in God in prosperous scenes." But they are mistaken; and mistaken because they probably never made the trial, or, at least, never made it in earnest. In such scenes it is difficult to see God, and realize him. When we have health, and peace, and affluence, and friends, it is difficult to determine whether we are relying on these, or on God. When they are removed, then our dependence is obvious. If God was the strength of our souls, he will be our support: if the creature was our portion, we shall faint in the day of adversity. The nests appear in the trees and hedges when stripped of their leaves; the winter discovering what was done in the summer, but hid before by the foliage. And thus it is with us: adversity betrays the resting-places we had in prosperity.

But to return.—It is hard to repose, and maintain, a becoming confidence in God in the hour of difficulty. When means fail—and we are forbidden to look for miracles; when our way is hedged up with thorns, and we dare not break through the fence:

when Providence opposes the promise, and God himself seems to be fighting against us; it is not every Job that can say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." In these cases, our diffidence often extends to the power of God, as well as his goodness. People, indeed, think that they only question his will; but, if they did not doubt his all-sufficiency too, why does their faith waver as difficulties multiply? Does God know any thing about difficulties? Why are they disheartened as means fail? Cannot God furnish means if he does not find them? What was the language of the Israelites?—Will he?—No—But can he furnish a table in the wilderness? Can he give, bread to his people? What is the commendation of Abraham's faith?—That he believed God's goodness? No—but his power: "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God—being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform."

You would, therefore, do well to take the advice of an old writer. "Never," says he, "converse with your difficulties alone." How is it when you suspect that a man wishes to entangle you in your talk, or to take advantage of your weakness? Fearing that he will prove too much for you, and induce you to commit yourself, you take with you a third person, a wise and an able friend. When your difficulties wish to parley with you, let God be present; God in promise, or God in experience—then they may tell you any thing. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. The Lord

of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”
—But we are,

II. Reminded of David's FOLLY. “There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines.” But nothing could have been worse. For by this step—he would alienate the affections of the Israelites from him—he would justify the reproaches of the enemy—he would deprive himself of the means of grace and the ordinances of religion—he would grieve his soul with the vice and idolatry of the heathen—he would put himself out of the warrant of Divine protection—and lay himself under peculiar obligation to those whom he could not serve without betraying the cause of God.

I cannot enlarge on these; but I would remark two or three of the evil consequences naturally arising from this measure. For how could he expect to gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles!

First. The king of Achish gave him Ziklag for his residence. Thence he invaded the Geshurites, and the Gezrites, and the Amalekites; “David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish.” But when questioned concerning this business by the king, he used a dissimulation unworthy his character; inducing him to believe that he had destroyed Israelites only, and gaining his confidence by falsehood. “Achish said, Whither have ye made a road to-day? And David said, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites. And Achish believed David, saying, He

hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant for ever.”

Another embarrassment attends him. War breaks out between the Philistines and Israel; and Achish orders David and his men to accompany him to the battle. Now if, when the armies engaged, he should retire, or betray his post, he would be chargeable with cowardice and treason, and ingratitude towards the king, who had been his friend, and honoured him with the command of his life-guards. On the other hand, if he should fight against his own people, under the banners of the uncircumcised, he would be justly considered an enemy to the Israel of God, a betrayer of his country, and would render his ascension to the throne more difficult. Out of this strait God, who does not deal with us after our desert, delivers him. The lords of the Philistines are dissatisfied with David's going along with them, and insist upon his dismissal.

But, behold a third result of this wrong measure. He returns; but little does he imagine what had befallen him at home. By accompanying Achish, he had left Ziklag, where his substance and his relations were defenceless. The Amalekites took advantage of his absence, and burned the town, after carrying away the spoil, and making his friends and his wives captives. Informed of all this, David was greatly distressed; and the anguish of loss was embittered by self-accusation, and the reproaches of the people: for “the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters.”

See, First: How much depends on one improper step. The effects may be remediless, and give a

complexion to all our future days. Our reputation, our comfort, our usefulness, our religion, our very salvation, may hinge upon it.

Secondly. Let us learn how incompetent we are to judge for ourselves. "The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh, to direct his steps." Who has not found this to be true in his own experience! Who can look back upon life, and not see how often he has been mistaken, both in his hopes and fears! If things had been according to our mind, should we not have been cursed by many an indulgence? and should we not have shunned those trials which enable us now to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted? Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life?" We cannot distinguish between reality and appearance; between the present and the future. We look forward into new and untried conditions with our actual views and feelings; not considering that new and untried conditions will draw forth new views and feelings; and that, like Lot, we may become the very characters we abhor. Lot thought he could do nothing better than choose the land of the plain, the vale of Sodom, well watered as the garden of the Lord. But, in doing so, he separated himself from intercourse with his uncle Abraham—his soul was vexed, from day to day, with the filthy conversation of the ungodly—he was taken a prisoner by the confederate kings—he was driven out of the place by fire and brimstone—his wife became a pillar of salt—his daughters plunged him into unheard-of infamy.

Take care, therefore, how you say, "There is nothing better for me," than to do this, or that. Venture on nothing rashly. Move with all your moral

senses alive and awake. In your connexions for life; in removing your residence; in giving up, or changing your employment, “ponder the path of your feet, that your goings may be established.” Let your eyes look on, and your eyelids straight before you. Pray, as you are directed, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” We may acknowledge God in words, while we deny him in works. But it is a practical acknowledgment that is required of us; and it consists in three things. First: in our taking no step without asking counsel of the Lord. Secondly: in not refusing to take one, when he calls us. Thirdly: in not charging him foolishly, when, having taken a step, in compliance with his command, it proves unanswerable to our wishes and expectation: for we may be in the will of God, and meet with very painful exercises; but we must justify him in all that befalls us.

To conclude. See the dangers and mischiefs of unbelief, or the want of confidence in God. It is the worst counsellor we can ever consult, the most perilous guide we can ever follow. What did Moses and Aaron lose (“Because,” says God, “ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them:” and no entreaty could induce God to revoke the sentence. From how many gratifications, and advantages, does unbelief cut us off, even when it does not destroy! It robs the mind of stability—“If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.” It withholds

from it peace—"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."

Without faith, the soul is like a ship, deprived of the rudder, driven of the winds, and tossed. By believing in God, we shall find that our strength is to sit still; instead of running from one creature to another. "It is good for a man, both to hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord;" instead of conferring with flesh and blood, and adopting unhallowed expedients for relief. Them that honour God, he will honour; but they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed. "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill."

"Now, the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

DISCOURSE C.

THE SAVIOUR'S GRACE IN ITS FREENESS AND EFFECTS.

“And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”—1 TIM. i. 14.

PERHAPS some of you are come from motives of curiosity, and expect to hear something new. But I have nothing new to communicate. There is only one way of salvation, and this is older than Adam: for “he hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began.”

You will therefore, probably, be disappointed; but this will be of little importance if you are benefited. It is at your profit I aim; and nothing is more likely to secure it than the subject we have chosen; for God only gives testimony to the word of his grace.

And as for those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, they are saying, Evermore give us this bread. Let us,

Consider THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS

CHRIST. II. Show how eminently it was displayed in the conversion of Paul. III. Prove that it is always productive of suitable influence and effects.

I. I may address you, my dear brethren, in the language of the apostle to the Corinthians: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye, through his poverty, might be rich."

It was this that led him to remember you in your low estate; to interpose on your behalf; to assume your nature, and to give his life a ransom for many. "Surely he hath borne our grief and carried our sorrow. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

Behold, how he loved him! said the spectators around the grave of Lazarus, when they saw only his tears. Behold, how he loved them! was surely the exclamation of angels, when, at his cross, they beheld his blood. Here is a love which passeth knowledge. For was he compelled to submit to this undertaking? No.—Did we deserve it? "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."—Did we desire it? It was accomplished ages before our existence. And, therefore, when we were awakened, and began to seek after these things, we found them already provided: we had them not to procure, but to enjoy; and the voice cried,

Behold redemption for the enslaved, pardon for the guilty, sanctification for the unholy, strength for the weak, health for the sick, and consolation for the miserable—Come, for all things are now ready!”

In the application, as well as the procuring of our salvation, the grace of the Lord Jesus appears. Means were used; but they derived all their efficacy, and their very being, from him. Go as far back as you please, you will find him there before you; predisposing instruments, awakening and encouraging your application, preventing you with the blessings of his goodness. A friend, by his conversation, enlightened your mind. But who made this friend? Who placed him in your way? Who inclined him to seek your welfare? You hunger and thirst after righteousness: you wait for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning. But whence sprang this desire? From conviction. What produced this conviction? Reflection. And what produced this reflection? A train of events. And what are events? *Providence*. And what is providence? God inaction: and God, acting for the welfare of the unworthy, is *grace*. “Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory. We love him, because he first loved us. I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold ME. behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my Name.

The progress is equally from the same source, he who quickens us, when dead in trespasses and sins, renews us day by day; and enables us to bold on our way, and wax stronger and stronger. Which of you, whatever be his attainments, would ever reach the end of his faith, the salvation of his soul, were he to

discontinue the supply of his own Spirit? But he does not. We live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit. His grace is sufficient for us; and in this grace we are commanded to be strong. As this laid the foundation, so it will raise the superstructure; and *he* shall bring forth the top-stone thereof, with shoutings, crying, *Grace, grace*, unto it!

And on his head were many crowns. The expression refers to the universality of his empire: for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. But it will be also exemplified in the praises of all the redeemed from the earth. For if those, who are called under the preaching of the word, are said to be the joy and crown of the ministers, who are only the instruments of their conversion; how much more will they be so to him, who is the Author! O what a multitude of praises will adorn his head—since every believer ascribes to him the undivided glory of his own salvation; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe! and from every tongue he will hear the exclamation—“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

But, though all are saved by this grace, some individuals seem to be, in a peculiar manner, the trophies of it: and were it necessary, we could make, even from the records of Scripture, a marvellous selection of instances. We could mention Manasseh; the dying thief; the murderers of the Son of God; the Corinthian converts: but it is needless to go beyond our subject.—We are reminded,

II. That THIS GRACE IS EMINENTLY DISPLAYED

IN THE CONVERSION OF PAUL: "And the grace of our Lord," says he, "was *exceeding abundant*." Mover did his heart pity a more undeserving wretch; or his hand undertake a more desperate case.

Perhaps you say, this made the Apostle so humble. It did. But humility is not ignorance and folly. Christians are often ridiculed for speaking of themselves in depreciating terms; especially when they call themselves the vilest of the vile, or the chief of sinners. It is admitted and lamented, that such language may be insufferable affectation; and is sometimes used by persons who give ample evidence of their not believing it. When show is a substitute for reality, it is generally excessive. Many fish for praise with the bait of humility; and say things against themselves in hopes that you will contradict them—but be sure never to gratify them. It is otherwise with a real Christian: he speaks according to his real views and feelings, he does not, however, mean that he has been the greatest profligate: but he knows that sin is to be estimated by its guilt, not by its grossness; and he knows more of himself than he can know of others. He can only see the actions of others, and not the greater part even of them; but he can look into his own heart. He knows not but the sins of others will admit of extenuation; and he ought to be wining, as far as possible, to excuse; but he knows against what light, and advantages, his *own* transgressions have been committed.

But, even without this justification of his language, Paul may well refer to himself as a very signal display of the riches of the Saviour's grace. To see the exceeding abundance of it, observe

What he *once was*. He tells Timothy that he was

a *persecutor*, a *blasphemer*, and *injurious*. The first time he appears in the sacred history is in connexion with the murder of Stephen; when, it is said, the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. He, probably, reproved their slackness, and said, "Strip, and stone him—I'll take care of your raiment." How did this circumstance pain his mind, in review; and how feelingly does he mention it: "When the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him!" In this course he continued: "Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme: and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." And could he have dismissed their souls to hell as easily as he deprived them of property, liberty, and life, he would have done it gladly. So unparalleled was his ferocity, that he seemed beyond the possibility of reclaim. They who knew the extent of the Saviour's grace seemed unanimously to despair of *him*; and when he assayed to join himself to them, they were afraid of him, and drew back, like sheep from the wolf.

Again. Observe how *he was engaged at the very time of his conversion*. Perhaps he has repented, and reformed: perhaps he is begging forgiveness; and is thus preparing himself for the Divine regards. Some have been called under the preaching of the word, when they were far from expecting it. They have been apprehended under a minister, whose doctrine

they came to insult, and whose person they came to injure. The word has reached the heart, and turned the stone to flesh: they have thrown down the weapons of their rebellion; and, weeping over them, acknowledged the presence of all-conquering grace.—Paul was now in a journey of iniquity; he was engaged in open defiance of the Son of God, crucifying him afresh, and putting him to an open shame, at the very moment, when the lord took knowledge of him!

Observe, also, the *manner of his call*. He is not saved in an ordinary way; but his conversion is illustrated with marvellous and miraculous circumstances. Jesus personally comes down from heaven for the purpose. But how? Plashing the lightning and rolling the thunder? No. He comes down low enough to be visible—but no terror clothes his brow. He approaches near enough to be heard—he speaks—in wrath surely?—“O thou child of the devil—I have found thee, O mine enemy.” No.—Nothing but the tender expostulation, “Saul, Saul, why persecutes! thou me? Forthree-and-thirty years I lived in thy nation—I went about doing good—I opened the eyes of the blind—to parents I gave back their children from the grave—I healed all manner of sicknesses and diseases among the people. I am *Jesus* whom thou persecutest—the *Saviour*—of others—and of THEE!”

Trace, finally, what *followed*. He trembles and is astonished; but this is not all. His heart is changed. He had fallen to the ground—but he now kneels. Behold, he prayeth! and to the very Being In- had so often blasphemed—“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? “He consecrates his life to his service. The

lion is turned into a lamb; and a little child leads it. The persecutor is an apostle. He is straightway in the synagogue, and preaches the faith that once he destroyed. Consider the journeys he took; the sufferings he endured; the sermons he delivered; the epistles he wrote; the churches he planted and watered: see him, at the close of a life the most laborious and unexampled, the willing martyr—"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." Contemplate all this, and see whether "the grace of our Lord was not exceeding abundant and also, if we are not authorized,

III. To observe, that THIS GRACE IS ALWAYS PRODUCTIVE OF SUITABLE INFLUENCES AND EFFECTS? "In faith and love," says the apostle, "which are in Christ Jesus." Many effects followed; but nothing appeared more certainly and powerfully than these: *faith*—in opposition to his former unbelief; and *love*—in opposition to his former hatred and malice. He thus resembled the blind man recovered, in the Gospel: "immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way."

And First. Divine grace produces *faith*. Faith is the belief of the Gospel; a firm and lively persuasion of the truth of the record that God has given of his Son, accompanied with acquiescence, dependence, and application. It will lead me to have recourse to him for all I want. It will induce me to make use of him for every purpose he is revealed to accomplish: to enter him as my refuge, to build on him as my foundation, to follow him as my guide; to regard him, as my prophet, to teach me; my high priest, to put away my sin, by the sacrifice of himself; my king, to rule me; my shepherd, to feed. This repre-

sentation will hardly satisfy those whose minds are speculative; but it is Scriptural. The sacred writers describe faith, rather than define it. They hold it forth, not in the nakedness of abstraction, but in attributes and actions, by which it is more subject to apprehension. It is, in their language, looking to Christ; coming to him; committing the soul into his hands against that day.

Secondly. Divine grace will equally produce *love*.—To whom? To the Saviour himself; his name, his word, his day, his service, his ways.—To whom? To all his people as branches of the same household of faith; as parts of the same body, having communion with each other: so that, if one member suffers, all the members suffer; and if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice.—To whom! All mankind, so as to desire their welfare, and to do them good, as opportunity offers—determining the exercise of this affection by their necessities; instructing them, if ignorant; reproofing them, if vicious; feeding and clothing them, if destitute; always remembering that we are to love, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. “Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

Thirdly. Divine grace will produce *both* these in the *same* subjects. In five other places, as well as in the passage before us, we find faith and love in Christ Jesus connected together. This must be more than sufficient to show, that the combination is not accidental. In fact, there cannot be a more natural, or a more noble union.

Faith, according to the Apostle’s order of state-

ment, goes *before* love: for faith precedes every thing in religion: it is an original principle; it is the spring from which flow all the streams of pious temper and practice: it is the root, from which grow all the fruits of Christian obedience and affection. Using another metaphor, it is considered a foundation; and we are required to “build up ourselves on our most holy faith:” and Paul admonishes Timothy to affirm always, that they “who have believed” in God, be careful to maintain “good works.”

But love *follows* after faith. We are told that “faith worketh by love.” And how should it be otherwise? Is it possible for me to believe the compassions of the Saviour, and to realize as my own the blessings of his death, and not feel my heart affected? and my gratitude constraining me to embrace *him*, and my fellow-christians, and my fellow-creatures, for *his* sake?

By the latter of these, therefore, you are to evince the reality and genuineness of the former. “Show me,” says the Apostle James, to a man who imagined he had one of these, while he was a stranger to the other—“Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” It is admitted, that faith justifies the soul: but works justify faith; and what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

Faith *cannot* be *divine* unless it operates in a way of holy and benevolent affection: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."

O God! we can never be completely blessed, till we love thee supremely, and our neighbour as ourselves. Put this precious law into our minds, and write it in our hearts: "for he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him"!

The subject, in the first place, admonishes Christians. It calls upon you, like Paul, to *review* the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember where you were, and what you were, when he said unto you—Live! Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. This will prove the destruction of pride and ingratitude. It will ask *you*, Who made thee to differ from another? And lead *you* to ask, What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?—It requires you, also, like Paul, to *acknowledge*, as well as review, this grace. Review it for your own sakes: acknowledge it for the sake of others. Let the humble hear thereof, and be glad. Let the fearful hear thereof, and be encouraged. They need strong consolation, who are fleeing for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before them. Let them see in example, as well as in doctrine; that with the Lord

there is mercy, and that with him there is plenteous redemption.

Secondly. The subject comforts the despairing. It gives the wine of the Gospel to them that are ready to perish; without diluting the strength of it away, by requiring conditions to be performed, or qualifications to be possessed, to authorize us to trust in his Name. It cries, Behold the Redeemer! How mighty to save—and how willing! Neither the number nor the heinousness of your sins exclude you from hope, if they do not keep you from him: and why should they keep you from him?

Ah! says Paul, his grace was exceeding abundant to me-ward: and it was designed, not to be a wonder, but an ensample: “For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.”

Sinner! Look at this pattern, and despair if you can. Rather say, Am I unworthy? So was he. My case is aggravated, and is difficult? So was his. Yet he obtained salvation? So may I—and so *I must*—if his word be true. “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.”

Thirdly. The subject attacks the presumptuous—not those who venture to come to him as they are: this would contradict, our former article, as well as the whole language of the Gospel: but those who think they *have* come to him, while they are yet in their sins. If any man be *in* Christ, he is a *new creature*. We must judge of the cause by the consequences.

We have sometimes been surprised to hear persons speak of their being converted so many years ago,

and under the ministry of some good man, whom they have named. What they were *before* their conversion we cannot say; it is undeniable what they are *since*—vain and worldly; proud and envious; covetous and selfish; quarrelsome and revengeful: if carried to their grave to-morrow, no widow nor orphan would shed a tear for them; neither would the cause of God or of man sustain the least loss. What could *they* have been before their conversion who are all this since? If such is their regenerate state, what was their natural?

Be not deceived. To the Law and to the testimony. Observe the nature of conversion as it is described in the Scripture: and remember, that Divine grace is not changed by time or place. It is not only free, but powerful. It never leaves you as it finds you: it never finds you in love with holiness, and it never leaves you in love with sin; it never finds you with your conversation in heaven, and it never leaves you cleaving to the dust. It turns you from darkness unto light; and from the power of Satan unto God. It causes you to pass from bondage into liberty, and from death unto life. And, though the operation may be gradual, and produce not every thing at once, yet, even in its beginning, it decides the *state*, and gives a *bias to the whole character*.

Whatever peculiar circumstances may distinguish one conversion from another, the essence and the effects are the same; and you cannot possess the grace of God in truth, if you are strangers to faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

DISCOURSE CI.

THE DEATH OF DEATH.

“Our Saviour Jesus Christ hath abolished death.”—
2 TIM. i. 10.

“**T**O them that believe he is precious.” But *how* precious the sacred writer does not determine. And, my brethren, is it too much to say, he could not? He is more precious than light is to the eye, or melody to the ear, or food to the taste, or wisdom to the mind, or friendship to the heart. All words and images are too poor to hold forth the estimation in which the believer holds the Saviour of sinners.

But there is one thing we may remark concerning it—The attachment is not only supreme, but reasonable. He is altogether worthy of it; and the wonder is, not that we admire and love him so much, but that **WE** love and admire him no more. We have had benefactors, and we have heard of benefactors; but they are all nothing compared with him.—One thing alone ought to render him infinitely dear to us—It is, our deliverance from the king of terrors. For, O

proclaim it to the ends of the earth, and let all the dying sons of men hear it—*He has abolished death!*

Let us consider the enemy and the victory:

I. THE EVIL IN QUESTION—DEATH. II. THE DESTRUCTION OF IT—HE HATH ABOLISHED DEATH.

I. THE EVIL IN QUESTION—It is DEATH. We should suppose that this subject was very familiar to the thoughts of men, were we to judge from the importance and frequency of the event. But, alas! nothing is so little thought of—So true are the words of Eliphaz: “They are destroyed from morning to evening; they perish for ever, without any regarding it.” The subject is irksome and awful; and the whole study of the multitude is to banish and keep it from their minds.

Let us examine what *Nature* teaches us concerning death; and then go to the Scripture for additional information.

Suppose then there had been no revelation from God—what does *Nature* teach us concerning death? It sees plainly enough that it is a cessation of our being. The lungs no longer heave; the pulse ceases to beat; the blood pauses and congeals; the eye closes; the tongue is silent; and the hand forgets her cunning. We are laid in the grave, where worms feed upon us, and over the spot friendship inscribes:

“How loved, how valued once, avails thee not;
To whom related, or by whom begot:
A heap of dust alone remains of thee;
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be.”—

So says Nature.

It also teaches us the universality of death. This is a thing that falls under the observation of our senses. It is heard and seen that all die: the rich as well as the poor; kings as well as subjects; and philosophers as well as fools. It is known that a century sweeps the globe, and dispossesses of their inhabitants every cottage, and mansion, and palace, and temple. It has never been otherwise. One generation passeth away, and another cometh.—So says Nature.

Nature teaches us that death is unavoidable. After the lapse of so many ages, and the disposition there is in man to shun it, if he could,—“for all that a man hath will he give for his life,”—we may easily and fairly infer, that every expedient has been tried, and that there *can* be no discharge in this war: that this enemy can neither be bribed off, nor beaten off. It is obvious, too, that the human frame is weak, and not capable even of prolonged duration. Its powers, however they have been spared or cherished, soon exhibit in all proofs of declension: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. The keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows are darkened; and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low: also then they shall be afraid of that which is high, and tears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden,

and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.”—So says Nature.

Nature sees also that death is irreparable. It cannot produce a single specimen of posthumous life. In vain we linger by the corpse—the countenance will no more beam upon us. In vain we go to the grave: it will not—deaf to our cries—deliver up its trust: and the expectation of the revival of our dearest connexions would be deemed absurdity and madness. “There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the roof thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: so man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.” All have journeyed this way; but from the bourn no traveller has returned.—So says Nature.

We may also learn from it, that death is uncertain in its circumstances; and that no man knows the place, the time, the manner, in which he shall expire.—So far Nature goes; but not a step farther. So much it tells us; but it can tell us no more. Here the *Scripture* takes up the subject, and furnishes all the additional aid we need.

If it be objected, that the generality of the heathen have had some other views of death than those which we have conceded, and had even notions of an existence beyond the grave—let it be observed, that the

world always had a revelation from God; and that when mankind dispersed from the family of Noah, they carried the discoveries along with them: but as they were left to tradition, they became more and more obscure; yet they yielded hints which led to reflections that otherwise would have never occurred. And if wise men, especially from these remains of an original revelation, were led into some speculations bordering upon truth, it should be remembered, that in a case like this, as Paley observes, nothing more is known than is proved: opinion is not knowledge; nor conjecture, principle. We, therefore, need not hesitate to say, that, separate from revelation, nothing either would or could have been known concerning death—but that it ends our being—and is universal in its prevalence—unavoidable by any means in our power—irreparable in its effects—and uncertain as to the time and mode of its approach.

But how much more does the *Scripture* teach! Here we learn.

First. Its true nature. To the eye of sense death appears annihilation; but to the eye of faith it is dissolution. Faith knows that there is a spirit in man; and that when the dust returns to the dust, whence it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Secondly. Its true consequences. Very little of death falls under the observation of the senses; the most awful and interesting parts beyond their reach. is the state of the soul: it is the apprehension of it by devils or angels; it is the transmission of it to heaven or hell. Luke tells us of the death of a rich limn who was clothed gorgeously, and fared sumptuously every day; and also of a beggar, full of sores, at his gate. In any other book nothing more would

have been said, or could have been said, than the fact itself; unless the mean burial of the one, and the splendid funeral of the other. But the Scripture draws back the veil; and we see the beggar lodged in Abraham's bosom, while the rich man lifts up his eyes in hell, and calls for a drop of water to cool his tongue.

Thirdly. Its true cause. The Scripture shows us that man was not created mortal; and that mortality is not the necessary consequence of our original constitution; but is the penal effect of transgression: In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die. By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death hath passed upon all men, because all have sinned. In Adam all die."

Fourthly. The true remedy. What! Is there a remedy for death? "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? No man can redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; (for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever;) that he should still live for ever, and not see corruption." And is there then a cure for death? What is it? Where can it be found?—Who was the Mercy promised to the fathers? Who is called the "Consolation of Israel"? Who is our hope? Who said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die"? Who said to his hearers, "If a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death? He hath abolished death."—But let us,

II. Consider this DESTRUCTION—For does not death continue his ravages? Does he not fall upon

the people of God themselves? Where then is the proof of this abolition? Or how is it to be understood?

It is undeniable that Christians themselves are subject to the stroke of death, as well as others. God might have translated them all to heaven, as he did Enoch and Elias. But it does not comport with his wisdom: and it is easy to see that it would have made the difference between the righteous and the wicked too visible; it would not have accorded with a mixed state of obscurity and trial, where "all things come alike to all, and no man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before him." If translation had been the substitute for dissolution, there would have been no *dying in faith*; which is one of the noblest exercises and triumphs of divine grace.

I am unwilling to forego any exemplification of the subject: and, as Bishop Horne justly observes, "What we call the various senses of a Scriptural expression are, in reality, but the various parts of the complete sense." We may consider the Lord Jesus as abolishing death, spiritually—miraculously—in his own person—penally—comparatively—and absolutely. Whatever seems obscure, from the brevity of the statement, will, I hope, be made plain in the process of illustration: and the whole, taken together, must show that the Apostle's language, though bold, is not more bold than just.

First. He abolishes death, spiritually; that is, in the souls of his people. To all these, without exception, it maybe said, in the words of Paul to the Ephesians, "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Not that they were dead, in every sense of the word; for the Apostle speaks of

their walking, at the very time, according to the course of this world: but they possessed no spiritual faculties, felt no spiritual sensations, performed no spiritual actions. They were insensible and indifferent to the favour, and image, and presence, and service, of the blessed God. But, quickened by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, now they breathe the breath of prayer, and of praise. They feel the pulse of sacred passion. They hunger and thirst after righteousness. They see his glory; they hear his voice; they taste that the Lord is gracious. They walk in the way everlasting; fight the good fight of faith; and labour, that, whether present or absent, they may be accepted of him. "The body is indeed dead, because of sin; but the spirit is life, because of righteousness."

Secondly. He abolished death by his miracles, while he was on earth. We find this among the proofs of his Messiahship, addressed to the disciples of his forerunner, in prison: "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, *the dead are raised up*, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them."

He displayed his power over death in the case of the ruler's daughter. She was at the very interesting age of twelve years old. While her distressed father was gone to implore the Saviour's aid, she expired; and a messenger was sent after him to communicate the dismal tidings, and to prevent his troubling the Master, now it was too late. While there is life there is hope: but who can raise the dead? O, says Jesus, it is never too late to apply to

me—*only believe*. When he arrived, the offices of death had commenced. The body was laid out; and the minstrels were making a noise. “And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And he put them all out; and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat.”

Another instance of this dominion was in the case of the widow’s son of Nain. This young man was older than the ruler’s daughter, and had been longer dead; for they were carrying him to his burial; and the widowed mother of an only child would not have allowed this, we may be assured, before the time. Our Saviour met the procession; and, before any prayer was addressed to him, he saw who was weeping behind—“and he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.” At the sound of which she draws back her veil, to see what stranger interested himself on her behalf, and, with more kindness than wisdom, enjoined upon her an impossibility. “But he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.”—What a present!

Behold Lazarus. Our Saviour loved him; but suffers him to fall sick; and leaves him to the natural effect of the disease. Two days he abode still in the same place, after hearing that he was dead. When he reached the suburbs of Bethany, the process of putrefaction was supposed to have begun.

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him. Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept.”—He ordered the stone to be rolled away, and, in a tone of uncontrollable authority, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”

Once more: we are told that, as the Redeemer expired, “the vail of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” Thirdly. He abolished death in his own person. *His own* rising from the dead is very distinguishable from all the former instances of resurrection. The ruler’s daughter, the widow’s son, Lazarus, and the saints in Jerusalem, were raised by the power of another; but He rose by his own power. Of his dominion, even over his own death and revival, he had spoken before—“No man taketh my life from me; I lay it down of myself; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. Destroy this temple,” said he, “and in three days I will raise it up: “and he spake of the temple of his body. *They* rose as private individuals; but *He* as the head

and representative of his people: and because he lives, they shall live also. *They* only rose to a temporal life, and were again subject to disease and mortality; but “he being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.” Hence he is called, “the first-begotten of the dead; the first-born from the dead; and the first that should rise from the dead;” referring not to the order of time, but to peculiarity, supremacy, and influence.

Fourthly. He abolished death penally. Thus he has destroyed death as to its sting. The sting of death is sin—because sin exposes us to the wrath of God, and binds us over to suffer: and the strength of sin is the Law—for cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the Law to do them. But Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us. *One died for all*, says the Apostle. His death was equivalent to the destruction of all the redeemed: there was such value in his suffering, derived from his dignity, that in lieu of our perdition it was accepted as “an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweetsmelling savour.” Every moral purpose that could have been answered by the punishment of the sinner has been better subserved by the death of the Saviour. “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” And did he himself bear our sins in his own body on the tree? Was the chastisement of our peace laid on him, and by his stripes are we healed? Well may those who believe enter into rest: well may they sing

“If sin be pardon’d, I’m secure;
Death has no sting beside:
The Law gives sin its damning power—
But Christ my ransom died!”

He has not abolished *going home*; and *falling asleep*, and *departing*: but he has abolished *death*. This leads us to observe, that he has,

Fifthly. Abolished death comparatively: I mean, as to its terror. This is not the same with the foregoing particular. *That* regards all the people of God, and extends even to those who die under a cloud of darkness, and a load of depression: it belongs to a Cowper, who died in despair, as well as to a Hervey, who said, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” *All* believers die *safely*; there is no curse for them after death, or in death. In *this* sense, their end is peace; peace in the result, if not in the passage. But their end is generally peace in experience as well as in result. There are, however, cases of constitutional infirmity that may not only exclude joy, but even hope. Sometimes the nature of the disorder is such as to hinder sensibility, or expression. Sometimes, too, God may allow the continuance of fear, even in those he loves, as a rebuke for loose or irregular walking; and as a warning to others. It is a great mercy, as the time draws on, to be raised above the torment of fear, and to be able to say, *The bitterness of death is past!*

And this is commonly the case with those who die in the Lord. It has been the case even with those who have had to encounter a death of torture. Martyrs—men, women, children—have embraced the fiery stake, with all joy and peace in believing. It

has been the case with those who have had every thing agreeable in their condition, and attractive in their connexions. They have said to those they were leaving, "You are dear—but I am going to him who is all-wise, all-kind, all-fair." And such have been their views of opening glory, and such their earnestness and foretastes of it, that they have not only been resigned to go, but have longed to depart to be with Christ, which is far hotter. Yea, we have often observed this to be the case with those who all their lifetime were subject to bondage through fear of death. When the hour has arrived, they have had mercy and grace to help in time of need; and, amazed at their former apprehensions, and their present feelings, have said;

"Tell me, my soul,
Can *this* be *death*?

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me"—

"I have tasteCanaan's grapes;
And now I long to go
Where the Lord his vineyard keeps,
And where the clusters grow"—

While spectators have been ready to envy them their condition, and have seen our doctrine explained and verified—"He hath abolished death."

Finally. He will do this absolutely. He will abolish the very state: "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is

raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." This amazing change, this infinite consummation, will be accomplished by *his* agency—I "will raise him up at the last day." HE "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

"His own soft hand shall wipe the tears
From every weeping eye;
And pains, and groans, and griefs, and fears,
And DEATH ITSELF, SHALL DIE."

Let it not be said. But this is a future event; and the Apostle speaks of the past—he *has* abolished death. His recompence is as certain as his sufferings Purpose and execution are the same with him. His promise is fulfilment. One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. "He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me. IT IS DONE. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end."—

These reflections should relieve us in the loss of pious connexions. And how many have bereaving dispensations constrained, in speaking of their relations, to look back and say—I *had* a child—a parent—a wife—a husband! Who has lived a few years in

this vale of tears, and not had reason to sigh, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me"? And is sensibility forbidden us? "Our tears become us, and our grief is just."—Yet may a departing saint say, with a dying Saviour, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." Yes, we are objects of pity—not they. We who are still in the wilderness—not they who have entered the land of promise. We who are still in the conflict—not they who have gotten the victory. We who rise in the morning to cares that corrode us, fears that alarm us, infirmities that press us down—not they who have obtained joy and gladness, and whose sorrow and sighing are fled away. Did they die? No—*death* is abolished.

"Why do you mourn departing friends,
Or shake at death's alarms?
'Tis but the voice that Jesus sends.
To call them to his arms."

Are they *dead*? No—their spirits are now with God: and their "flesh rests in hope. He will not leave their souls in hell, neither will he suffer his holy ones to see corruption" for ever. "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Again. Should not this subject raise the minds of Christians above the fear of dissolution?—You dread it—but what is it you dread? According to Paul—*nothing*—for he has *abolished* death. Yea—this is only one part of your consolation. This is all negative

comfort. But, remember, he has turned the curse into a blessing: he has made of the enemy a friend. Instead of robbing you, it relieves; it enriches—it is the making of you for ever—**TO DIE IS GAIN!**

Behold the recommendation of religion; by which I mean, the religion of the Gospel; for there is no other that reaches the case of fallen man. The people of the world often affect to despise Christians; but there are moments in which they, really envy them. When conscience has a wakeful moment, and they are led to reflect on the believer's final safety and privileges, they exclaim, with Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." And no wonder; for he alone is the happy man whose chief interest is provided for; who is safe for the soul and eternity—not he who has health, but he who is prepared to lose it—not he who prospers in life, but he who has hope in death—not he who lays up treasure on earth, but he who in heaven has a better and an enduring substance—he who can say, with Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." Ignorance may conceal from a man his danger: wickedness may harden his heart against a sense of it: vain reasonings may stupify the conscience with an opiate—but there is no true victory over death but that which is derived from the cross and grace of the Redeemer. Happy ye who are found in him! It is not presumption, but becoming confidence, in you, to dare every thing—and to triumph over all. "Nay,

in all things, we are more than conquerors through him that 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 height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

To conclude. What, then, is the duty of a sinner? It is, to remember that it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment; that his breath is in his nostrils; that if he leaves the world a stranger to the Lord Jesus, temporal death will only be the passage to eternal—but that there is hope in Israel concerning this thing: that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him; that he came, not only that we might have life, but have it more abundantly—and that we cannot escape, if we neglect so great salvation.—It is, to pray, with Moses, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” It is, to “seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near.” All else, for creatures circumstanced like you, is folly or trifling. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

Say then—“I am mortal—yet an heir of eternity. Every breath I draw brings me nearer the hour when this world will recede from my view, and proclaim its vanity and vexation. Then, O solemn thought! these states of changeless existence will open on my view in all their tremendous grandeur and import-

ance. Then, dreadful alternative! the glories of heaven, or the damnation of hell, will be my portion.—To which of these am I hastening?—What am I? A sinner.—What then is my doom? The wages of sin is death.—But is there no escape? ‘With the Lord there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption.’ O cheering hope! But is it for me? He came into the world to save sinners; he died for the ungodly; and why not for thee?—And can he save me? He is able to save to the uttermost. And will he save me? ‘Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.’ O heavenly intelligence! Tis a saying worthy of all acceptation—I am saved by hope—To the throne of grace will I flee—on the Friend of sinners will I rely—and in the exercise of faith, love, patience, and obedience, ‘all the days of my appointed time will I wait’—till—it will be nothing more—till my *change* comes.” Amen.*

* This Discourse was occasioned by the death of the Rev. William Rowe, pastor of the Baptist church in Weymouth. Though not of the author’s own denomination, he considered him equally entitled to affection and esteem; and dying in Bath, he was led to notice the event; while his bereaved widow and relations and friends who were present desired the author (as they understood he was publishing) to let it stand in this volume.

DISCOURSE CII.

THE TWO INTERCESSORS.

“He ever liveth to make intercession for them.”—HEB. vii. 25.

“The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us.”—ROM. viii. 27.

ONE of the ways—“for we are not ignorant of his devices”—one of the ways in which the enemy of souls destroys men, is by joining together what God has separated. Hence the alliance between the world and religion; and hence the awful declarations: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” If God had told us that we cannot walk on the sea, or fly in the air, we should have believed him, without risking life by experiment: but here—in declarations equally express, men are not content without trying whether his word will come to pass or not. And,

were it not for the dreadfulness of the result, we should say—"And let them try! But 'God will be true, and every man a liar'!"

Another mode by which he destroys, is to separate what God has joined together: such as, principle and practice; doctrine and duty; pardoning mercy and renewing grace—the water and the blood; for he came by water and blood; not by water only, or blood only, but by water and blood: these were not severed in their effusion from the cross, and they cannot be divided in their application to the soul. That man is not yet truly awakened and enlightened from above who does not see and feel his equal need of—the Saviour and the Sanctifier—the Son of God and the Spirit of God—the work of the one *for* him, and of the other *in* him.

To such a connexion I am going to lead you. For, be it remembered, every Christian has two Advocates, two Intercessors; and they should be viewed relatively to each other. "Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for them. The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us." We have therefore three things in view. And,

I. Let us consider THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST. Dr. Owen, long ago, complained, and there is much truth in the remark, that we do not dwell enough, in our thoughts, on the present life of Christ: for he is living, not a life of glory only—though even this should delight those that love him—but a life of office. It was expedient for *us* that he went away. It was for our welfare that he ascended into heaven, as well as descended into the grave. "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." "Because he lives, we shall live also."

“If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

When our Saviour left our world, he ascended up *far above all heavens*; and frailty might have feared, that his concern for us would have ceased with his residence among us. When a friend is going far away, we sometimes painfully think of the proverb, “Out of sight, out of mind.” Men, as they rise, too commonly lose much of their recollection; and forget even those to whom they were under obligation before—“Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.” But, says Paul, though Jesus the Son of God be passed into the heavens “we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” The ligature which unites us remains—and is all sensibility and life. Had we seen him as he was going up, we should have prayed, with the dying thief, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” And does he not? Yes: “he ever liveth to make intercession for us.”

Volumes might be written on the subject; but we must be brief. It has been questioned whether this intercession be *vocal*. Why should it not? He is “clothed in a body like our own.” Certainly the common reason assigned—that it would be inconsistent with his present dignity, is not valid. For do we not know that dignity is never injured by condescension?—That true greatness is tender and sympathizing?—That his goodness is his glory?—“Do not forget the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich?”—And that he

does not give up the kingdom to God, even the Father, *till* he has put down all rule, and all authority, and power.

But, not to intrude into things which we have not seen, it is enough for us to know,

First. That his intercession is *real*. It consists in his personal appearance; in the presentation of his sacrifice, and claiming the benefits arising from it. Æschylus was strongly accused, and likely to be condemned. His brother Amyntas engaged to be his advocate. Amyntas had done much for the commonwealth; and, in a certain action, in their service, had lost a hand. He came into the court. The court was uncommonly crowded; and all were eager to hear him plead on so interesting an occasion. But he said nothing—he only held up his dismembered arm!! The audience and the judges were so moved, as immediately to order his brother's release. It does not appear that the High Priest *said* any thing when he entered the holy place: but what he *did*, spake loud enough. He wore the names of tire twelve tribes of Israel on his breastplate; he took the blood of the slaughtered victim in a basin, and sprinkled the mercy-scat, and burned incense before the golden altar, and then came forth and blessed the people. Abel's blood *spake* to God from the ground; that is, it demanded vengeance: the blood of Jesus is equally vocal; but it speaketh better things than that of Abel—it calls for mercy. How did John see him in the vision? As a lamb that had been slain; that is, with the wound in the neck, and the blood on the wool. Without a figure—he retains in his glorified body the marks of his sufferings and death. The saints and the angels behold them, and exclaim, "Worthy

is the Lamb that was slain!" God views them, and says, "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." So the Saviour said himself—THEREFORE "doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep."

Secondly. It *extends to all our important, interests*. We may look upon his prayer for his disciples, on the night in which he was betrayed, as a specimen of his continued intercession before the throne. And for what does he not there plead? Is it their preservation? "Keep through thine own Name those whom thou hast given me. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Is it their renovation? "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." Is it their union? "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." Is it their glorification? "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

Thirdly. It is *successful*. "I know," says he, "that thou hearest me always." This conclusion is derivable from the grandeur of his character, and his nearness to God. He is called God's own Son, his only begotten Son, his dear Son, in whom his soul delighteth. It is derivable from the ground of his demand. By his obedience unto death, even the

death of the cross, he has rendered the communication of the blessings we need consistent with the truth, and righteousness, and Law of God. It is derivable from Divine fidelity. He who is faithful to his saints, cannot be unfaithful to his Son: the joy that was set before him, as the recompence of his sufferings, he *must* possess. He “shall see his seed; he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be SATISFIED.”—To which we may add, the interest he feels in his people. What he asks on their behalf, he asks for himself; for they are one: and “he is glorified in them.”

II. Let us examine THE INTERCESSION OF THE SPIRIT: for the Spirit “itself maketh intercession for us.”

In entering on this part of our discourse, it is necessary to observe, that, subjectively and instrumentally considered, religion is our *own* work: *tee* run the race set before us; and fight the good fight of faith: *we* believe, and repent, and pray—But, owing to our natural ignorance, and weakness, depravity, and aversion, it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. To his Spirit, therefore, all our renovation is ascribed: we are said to be “born of the Spirit;” to be “led by the Spirit;” to “live in the Spirit;” to “walk in the Spirit and to “worship God in the Spirit.”

Let us see how this general reflection bears upon the subject before us. “I will pour,” says God, “upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication.” “Because ye are sons,” says the Apostle, “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts,

crying, Abba, Father." And Jude exhorts Christians to "pray in the Holy Ghost." And how are we to understand this? There is only one way in which the Spirit itself maketh intercession *for* us; and that is, by making intercession *in* us: it is, by teaching and enabling us to make intercession for ourselves: for the Apostle adds, "he maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered." Let us see, then, how this Divine agency brings the sinner upon his knees, and keeps him there.

First. The Spirit leads us to an acquaintance with ourselves. He removes the veil of ignorance and delusion that concealed our state, our wants, and our desert; and the man who once said, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, now sees that he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, he no longer denies his guilt; or palliates his offences; or goes about to establish his own righteousness: but, filled with self-aborrence, condemnation, and despair, cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner." For,

Secondly. The Spirit fixes upon the mind a concern to be delivered and relieved, too great to be shaken off. Many persons are followed with some general notions of their being in an unconverted state; and feel some superficial apprehensions of the unhappiness and danger of such a condition; but they have no burden too heavy for them to bear: they are not weary, and heavy laden: they can sleep, and eat, and drink, and trade, and trifle, as well as before. But it is not so with a man whom God is bringing along to his footstool. He sows in tears. His sin is ever before him. Neither business, nor company, nor amusement, can ease the anguish of

his broken heart; or divert him from the inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?"

Thirdly. The Spirit enables us to apprehend and believe the mercy and grace revealed in the Gospel. Hence arises a hope that maketh not ashamed. This hope enters the soul, as the sun does a garden in spring; calling forth, by a genial influence, the leaves and the buds, after the dreariness of winter. We are sweetly, yet powerfully, excited and encouraged to make known our requests unto God. We see that our case, however deplorable, is provided for; that all things are now ready; that the blessings we need are as free as they are suitable. Particularly, we see Jesus as the Mediator of the new covenant; as once suffering for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God; as the way to the Father—and "have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." Thus these words of the Saviour are fulfilled: "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

Finally. The Spirit renews our souls, removes our alienation from the life of God, and produces in us those principles and dispositions which cause us to delight in approaching him, and even to give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. Thus our duty is converted into a privilege; and we find it too good to draw near to God ever again to restrain prayer before him.

Here I would observe, that this influence is afforded us all through life, and is not confined to the commencement of a religious course; neither is it limited to persons of inferior attainments only—What says the Apostle? *We* know not what to pray for as we ought; but the Spirit helpeth *our* infirmities. The

wisest, if left to themselves, would often ask for scorpions, instead of fish—but he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God. The most zealous sometimes grow careless and formal—but he quickens their souls, when they cleave unto the dust. The holiest contract fresh guilt; and, when they remember God, are troubled—but he revives their confidence by the application of the blood of sprinkling; and brings them into the presence of God again, as their Father and their Friend.

Therefore, grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. It would be, not only the vilest ingratitude, considering what he has done for you, but the greatest folly. How much, how entirely, do you depend upon his agency! You cannot even pray without him—and what can you do without prayer! Would you grieve a friend, and induce him to give up his correspondence, and his visits; and constrain him to withhold his assistance, and to look another way, if he meet you in the road—when you every moment need his smiles and his aid?

Shall I also say, Beware that you do not abuse this encouraging truth? It is abused, when you neglect prayer till, you say, the Spirit moves you. For we are to stir up ourselves to take hold of God. We are to cry for aid, as the Church does: “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” By tacking about, the mariner gets wind—not by lying still. God helps us, not in the neglect, but in the use, of means—“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” The more dull and dead we feel ourselves, the more we need these exercises, which are appointed to help us; and which, for this very reason,

are called the *means of* grace. And Christians well know what a change they have often experienced even *in* the performance of the duty. They have kneeled down, dark, and cold, and contracted; but have risen up enlightened, and inflamed, and enlarged; and have exemplified the promise: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."—Having considered the intercession of Christ, and explained the intercession of the Spirit, let us,

III. View them IN THEIR RELATION TO EACH OTHER.

It is easy to *distinguish* these Intercessors. The one makes intercession above; the other below: one in the court of heaven; the other in the conscience. The one makes intercession for us, the other in us. The sanctifying Intercessor produces the petition; the atoning Intercessor introduces it: the one is the notary that indites the case; the other is the counsellor that pleads it before the jury and the Judge.

But there is a connexion between them; and it is threefold. First: a connexion of derivation. The one flows from the other. If the Son of God had not made intercession *for* you as a sinner, the Spirit itself would never have made intercession *in* you, as a believer. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Secondly: a connexion of dependence. The one needs the other. Is not the work of the Spirit pure and holy? *Can*

that which he produces be imperfect and polluted; You must distinguish between the same work as it is his, and as it is ours. What comes from him is pure and complete; but as far as it is done by us, it is defective and defiled: like water, which, however clear from the spring, rolling over a muddy bottom, or running through an impure channel, will be soiled and injured. Hence all need, as long as they are here, the continued mediation of the Saviour; and he is the great High Priest over the house of God, for this very purpose, and offers with much incense the prayers of all saints. We need not be afraid to pray, since all our services pass through his hands, and he presents and perfumes them. Thirdly: a connexion of evidence. The one proves the other. As to some of you, how long have you been praying, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation? Show me a token for good, that I may rejoice in thee"? What happy beings would you go away at the end of this exercise, if you could ascertain one thing; namely, that the Redeemer thinks upon *you* for good—and appears in the presence of God for *you*!

Well; the proof does not lie far off—it is nigh thee, even in thy *mouth* and in thy *heart*. It is prayer—not fine prayer—not well-arranged language. The proof does not require language at all. No—but a broken heart; a contrite spirit; tears; sighs; groanings—groanings which cannot be uttered.

Of this therefore rest assured, that if the Spirit itself is thus making intercession *in* you, Jesus is ever living to make intercession *for* you.

And what can you desire more? It was the privilege of David, that he had a friend at court—and this was Jonathan the king's son. It was the privilege of

Jacob's sons, that they had a friend at court—and this was Joseph their brother. Christians! both these advantages are united in your portion. You have a Friend at court; you have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous—and he is the King's Son; he is your Brother. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

And while he represents you in heaven, may you, Christians, represent him on earth! While he pleads your cause, may you plead his; and henceforth live, not to yourselves, but to Him who died for you and rose again!

DISCOURSE CI.

THE GRAND INQUIRY.

“Lovest thou me?”—JOHN xxi. 17.

SOME OF the greatest works of God seem to have been the effects of accidental occurrences, rather than the results of design. The reason is, because God is the sovereign Master of occasions, as well as of their consequences. He foresees them; he procures them; and what is contingency with us, is purpose with him.

The same may be said of his Word. Many parts of it were produced by particular events; but they were intended for universal and perpetual use; and therefore, in reading them, we should be concerned to bring what is said of others to bear upon ourselves. Many of the Psalms of David were composed by the author under the influence of peculiar circumstances; but these peculiar circumstances were comprehended in the Divine arrangement, and have been rendered subservient to the welfare of the Church of God in all ages of the world. When Joshua was going to cross the river Jordan, at the head of the Jewish

tribes, to take possession of the land of Canaan, God addressed him, and said, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee; be strong and of good courage." The promise was personal; yet, after a lapse of near two thousand years, the apostle applies it to all believers, whose minds need the same support, and whose confidence is derived from the same assurance: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

This reflection fully justifies the plan we have in view this evening—The words which I have read were originally addressed to Peter; and you are familiar with the circumstances of the history. I will not detain you a moment in referring to them. But, my dear hearers; imagine the Saviour of the world looking down from his throne, and applying this question to you—to each of you—young or old—rich or poor—learned or illiterate—while heaven and hell are in suspense, anxiously waiting for your reply—
LOVEST THOU ME?

The question is REASONABLE.

The question is IMPORTANT.

The question SUPPOSES DOUBT.

The question ADMITS OF SOLUTION.

LOVEST THOU ME?

I. The question is REASONABLE. And why is it reasonable? Because we *ought* to love him, and the affection is *just*. This part of our subject engages us in a train of reflection, at once difficult, mortifying, and apparently presumptuous. Difficult—not from the fewness of materials, but from the necessity of

making a selection, where proofs are so numberless. Mortifying—not because the theme is irksome; but it is painful to think, that any should want conviction of his worth, or even need to have their minds stirred up by way of remembrance. Apparently presumptuous—for what are we, worms of the earth, to take upon us to investigate his merits, and to determine whether he is deserving of the regard he requires? Oh! let not the Lord be angry while we thus speak, and, for the sake of those that hear us, attempt to lay open a few of the sources of his claims.

And, First, my brethren, we call upon you to contemplate his *person*. Go, read his history. Look at his likeness as it is sketched in the Gospel. Survey his features: behold the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in his temple. *What* is he? In himself he is the most amiable of all beings. He “is the chief of ten thousand; yea, he is altogether lovely. He is fairer than the children of men:” fairer than the children of God: as much above angels as he is above mortals: comprising in himself all the graces of time, and all the perfections of eternity; all the attractions of humanity, and all the glories of Deity. Bring forward all the excellences the world ever saw; add as many more as the imagination can supply: render them all complete: combine them together—yet this is not He that here demands thy affection; all this aggregate is no more to him that asks, “Lovest thou me?” than a ray of light to the sun, or a drop of water to the ocean: compared with the Saviour, it is nothing, less than nothing, and vanity.

Secondly. Observe his *doings*.

Look *backward*, and consider what he *has* done. He remembered thee, O Christian, in thy low

estate: and without thy desert, without thy desire, he interposed between thee and the curse of the Law, and said, "Deliver from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom." He came and preached peace. He established the Gospel dispensation. He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers; for the work of the ministry. He sent the word of life to this country, and brought it to thy door. He preserved thee through years of ignorance and rebellion by his power; and at length called thee by his grace; so that thou art no longer a stranger and a foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God.

Look *upward*, and consider what he *is* doing. He has taken with him to heaven the same heart of tenderness that he possessed on earth. He remembers thee, now that he is come into his kingdom. He ever liveth to make intercession for thee. He is moving the wheels of nature, and ordering the dispensations of Providence, for thy welfare: he is making all things to work together for thy good. There is not a prayer you offer up but he hears it. There is not a duty you discharge but he enables you to perform it. There is not a trial you endure but he sustains you under it. There is not a blessing you taste but he sweetens and sanctifies it.

Look *forward*, and consider what he *will* do. For he has made known the thoughts of his heart, and bound himself by promise. He is engaged to be with you in trouble; to render your strength equal to your day; and to make his grace sufficient for you. He is engaged to comfort thee upon the bed of languishing; to receive thy departing spirit to himself; to change thy vile body into a resemblance of his own

glorious body; to confess thee before an assembled world; and to say of those services over which ihou hast so often blushed and groaned—"Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Thirdly. Mark his *sufferings*. For, to enable him to be our best friend, something more was necessary than the wishes of benevolence, or the exertions of power. To obtain eternal redemption for us, he submits to a scene of humiliation and anguish, such as no tongue can express, or imagination conceive. For our sakes, he who was rich, became poor—so poor, that while foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, the Son of man had not where to lay his head. For our sakes the King of glory was numbered with transgressors; had his name cast out as evil; was treated as a glutton, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, a madman, a demoniac, a rebel, a traitor. For our sakes, he, who was blessed for evermore, became a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Before the hand of man had touched his body, we find him in the garden exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: we see him sweating as it were great drops of blood falling down to the earth; we hear him praying, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." As we follow him from Gethsemane to Golgotha, he gives his back to the smiters, and his cheek to them that plucked oil' the hair; he hides not his face from shame and spitting. The thorns enter his sacred temples. They pierce his hands and his feet; he hangs upon the cross, suspended by the soreness of his wounds, and as he dies—and well he may—he appropriates to

himself the language of the prophet: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!" No; blessed Saviour! Never was there sorrow—and, therefore, never was there love—like thine!—

But we must observe, not only what he suffers *for* us, but what he suffers *from* us. The more holy any being is, the more does he abhor sin. Sin is, therefore, more offensive to a saint than to a man; it is more intolerable to an angel than to a saint; and it is more grievous to God than to an angel. How infinitely provoking it is to *him*, may be inferred from his own expostulation and complaint, with regard to his people Israel: "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary God also? Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." And yet, how much of this has he had to bear with from us, even since we have known him, or rather have been known of him! O, what unprofitableness under the instructions of his word and the ordinances of his house! what insensibility and ingratitude under all his mercies! what incorrigibility under all his rebukes! what murmuring and repining under the dispensations of his providence! what charging him foolishly, and unkindly, even when his wisdom and kindness were performing the very things which we had a thousand times implored him to accomplish!—And all this, from day to day— from year to year—in lengthened provocation!— While he, with all his patience, seemed urged to ask, "How long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" O, if he were swayed by human passions! if he were a mere creature like ourselves—

where, at this hour, should we have been found! In the whole universe, where is the benefactor that would have continued his regards a moment longer, after meeting with such instances of indifference, of perverseness, of vileness—as we have been continually displaying towards the Lord that bought us!

Even this is not all. We must not only observe, what he suffers *for* us, and *from* us, but also what he sutlers *in* us. “For we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” Such is the intimate union between him and his people, that, as the Head, he feels afresh what every member bears. He that persecutes them persecutes him. He that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye. In all their affliction he is afflicted—

“O, for this love, let rocks and hills
Their lusting silence break!
And all harmonious human tongues
The Saviour’s praises speak.”

“Angels! assist our mighty joys,
Strike all your harps of gold:
But when *you* raise your highest notes,
His love can ne’er be told.”

LOVEST THOU ME?

II. THE QUESTION IS IMPORTANT. And why is it important? Because we *must* love him; and the affection is not only just, but necessary. To illustrate THIS, you will observe—

That this love is even necessary to our sanctification. Love is a powerful and a transforming principle. By constant residence in the mind, the image stamps and leaves its own resemblance; so that every man is in reality the same with the supreme object of

his attachment. If he loves any thing sordid and mean, he will become so too; while his intercourse with purity and grandeur will be sure to refine and elevate his mind. And hence it is easy to see what will be the effect of the love of Christ: for, as he is the centre of all excellency, the source of all perfection, it follows that, in proportion as our love to him prevails in us, it will renew us; it will exalt us; it will change us into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

This love is necessary, to give us delight in all our religious services. We shall never proceed to advantage in any cause, especially if much opposed and tried, unless we feel an interest in it: conviction may carry us some way, but affection much farther. It is the nature of love to render difficult things easy, and bitter ones sweet. What was it that turned the seven years of hard bondage, that Jacob served for Rachel, into so many pleasant days? The affection he bore to her who inspired him. What is it that more than reconciles that mother to numberless nameless anxieties and privations, in rearing her baby charge? "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" It is love that does all this. But there is no love like that which a redeemed sinner bears to his Redeemer; and, therefore, no pleasure can equal that which he enjoys in pleasing him. While others say, What a weariness it is to serve the Lord! *he* finds his service to be perfect freedom; he calls the Sabbath a delight; he is glad when they say to him, Let us go into the house of the Lord; he finds his word, and he eats it, and it is the joy and the rejoicing of his heart. Religion renders all this our duty: but it is love alone

that can make it our privilege; it is love alone that can bring the soul into it; it is love alone that can make it our meat to do the will of Him that sent us, and to finish his work.

This love is necessary, to render our duties acceptable. That a renewed mind nothing can be more desirable than the approbation of his Master; nothing more delicious than the testimony that he pleases him. The humility of the Christian, however, renders the attainment no easy thing. He feels the poverty and the unworthiness of his services, and, instead of supposing that his obedience merits a recompence for its excellences, he rather wonders that it is not rejected and disdained for its defects. But the Lord looketh to the heart; and when this is given up to him, he values the motive, though we err in the circumstances; he regards the intention when we fail in the execution; and says, as he did to David, "It is well that it was in thine heart." In judging of our services, he admits into the estimate, not only what we do, but what we desire to do. He judges by the disposition; he acknowledges liberality where nothing is given; and applauds heroism where nothing is suffered. "For where there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." But it is equally true, that "in vain we draw nigh to him with our mouth, and honour him with our lip, while the heart is far from him."

Finally. This love is necessary, to ascertain our interest in the Saviour's regards. His followers are not described by their knowledge, their gilts, their creed, their profession; but by their cordial adherence to him. We may do many things materially good;

we may abound with external privileges; we may eat and drink in his presence, and he may preach in our streets; we may prophesy in his Name, and in his name cast out devils, and do many wonderful works; and yet at the great day he may profess unto us, I never knew you. But hear Paul: "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and remember that this is a decision, as well as a wish; a promise as well as a prayer—Grace *shall* be with them, adequate to all their exigencies. I am far from saying that our love to him is the cause of his love to us: but it is unquestionably the consequence, and therefore the evidence. His love produces ours; but our love evinces his: "I love them that love me." And when we consider the attributes of his love—a love so tender, so active, so gracious, so durable, so changeless—what are we not authorised to expect from an assured interest in it?

LOVEST THOU ME?

III. The question SUPPOSES DOUBT. And, my brethren, is there nothing in you to render this love suspicious? Let us fairly and honestly examine.

And First. Is there nothing to render it doubtful to the *world*? You are not only to *be* Christians, but to *appear* such. You are required not only to believe with the heart, but to confess with the tongue; and to hold fast, not only the reality, but the profession of faith, without wavering. Like the primitive saints, you are to be *manifestly* the epistles of Christ, known and read of all men; and not render it impossible, or even difficult, to determine whose hand has inscribed you. Like the patriarchs, you are to declare *plainly* that you seek a country; and not perplex all around you to decide whether you are settling

here, or only strangers and pilgrims upon earth. To them that are in darkness it is said, "Show yourselves."

Have you always done this? Have you risen up for Him against the evil doers, and stood up for Him against the workers of iniquity? Have you never denied his name?—Never concealed his truth? Never been ashamed to avow your principles and your connexions? Have you never made concessions, in presence of the vain and the vicious, to escape a reproach which it would have been your glory to have deserved; and concerning which, binding it as a garland around your brow, you should have said, If this is to be vile, I will yet be more vile? Have your temporizing carriage and conversation never inspired men of the world, whom you had professedly left, with the hope that you were coming round again; and would in time rise above all your scruples, mingle in their dissipations, and run with them to the same excess of riot?

Secondly. Is there nothing to render it doubtful to the *Church*? Nothing can be more opposite to the spirit of the Gospel than a dark and distrustful temper. We should not harbour a misgiving mind; we should not even take advantage of the infirmities of our brethren, to conclude that their hearts are not right in the sight of God. Charity suffereth long, and is kind: charity hopeth all things; believeth all things; endureth all things. Yet it must be acknowledged that candour has its difficulties as well as duties. It has its bounds, beyond which it cannot pass. We must not be induced, by any tenderness of judgment, to violate the express decisions of the word of God. There are many, and, perhaps, never

more than in our day, of whom, as the Apostle says to the Galatians, "We stand in doubt." They keep our hopes and our fears equally awake through life. When we pray for them, we are at a loss whether to consider them as in the flesh or in the Spirit. We receive them to the Lord's table, not because we are convinced of their state, but know not how to refuse them: and we continue them in communion upon the same principle. But, my brethren, these things ought not so to be. Your ministers and your fellow-members are entitled to satisfaction concerning, if not the degree, the reality of your religion.

Thirdly. Is there nothing to render it doubtful to *yourselves*? "Indeed," say some of you with a sigh, "Indeed there is." Hence I go mourning all the day. How happy should I be, if I could but make out this awful case!

"'Tis a point I long to know;
 Oft it causes anxious thought;
 Do I love the Lord, or no?
 Am I his? or am I not?"

"I am a wonder as well as a grief to myself. If there are things that sometimes make me hope I am not in a state of nature, there are others—and these, alas! are far more numerous—that make me fear I am not in a state of grace. O my soul, surely this state implies much more than I have experienced: surely there is a secret that has not been revealed to me. *If* I loved him—could I ever read without pleasure the Book that unveils his glories? *If* I loved him—could I ever fear to die, and shrink back from the only event that can bring me into his presence? *If* I loved him—could I feel so impatient

under those reproaches and afflictions that make me a partaker of the fellowship of his sufferings?

“*Could* my heart so hard remain;
Prayer a task and burden prove;
Every trifle give me pain;
If I knew a Saviour’s love?

“If I sing, or hear, or read,
Sin is mix’d with all I do:
You that love the Lord indeed,
Tell me—is it thus with you?”

Lastly. Is there nothing to render it doubtful to *the Saviour*? There is a sense in which this is impossible. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. No disguise can screen us from his penetration. We are all transparency before him. But we are to distinguish the question of right from the question of fact. With regard to right, he may, and he often does complain in his word, as if he was disappointed and surprised at the conduct of his professing people. And is there not a cause? You would think it strange if a husbandman should expect fertility from the dry sand or the barren rock: but it would be otherwise if he had a vine planted in a rich soil, and attended with every kind of culture. Then, surely, his expectation of fruit would be natural; and he would have reason to complain if nothing was produced. And is not this, at least in an awful degree, true of many of us? Estimating our proficiency by our advantages, *ought* he not to have found in us what he has yet sought for in vain? *Ought* he not to have seen something in our tempers and lives much more perfect; something in our conduct so unequivocal, something in our exertions and sacrifices so decisive,

as to lead him to say, Now I know that thou lovest me; as God said to Abraham, "Now I know that thou fearest me, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me"?

LOVEST THOU ME?

IV. The question ADMITS OF SOLUTION. It is not only possible, but comparatively easy, to know whether we love another. And here it will be in vain for you to allege that though this is generally true the case before us is a peculiar one, because the object is invisible. For this furnishes no objection to our remark. Who knows not what it is to love a being he never saw? Many of us never saw Howard: but who does not feel veneration at the mention of his name? Who does not glow at the perusal of his journeys of mercy? Who does not melt at the sight of his statue? I envy not the heart of that man who can enter St. Paul's Cathedral, and view, unmoved, the mild compassion that beams and breathes even through the cold marble image. I never saw Cowper: but can I think of this amiable, this celestial spirit; can I read his matchless Letters, and his immortal Task; and not feel a thousand tender sympathies that attach me to him, and render inviting that part of the universe in which his piety and his genius range undepressed and uncontrolled? With regard to those with whom you are familiar, that which you love them for is not that which you see, but that which you cannot see. It is their mind, their heart, their intellectual qualities, their moral principles. Honesty, virtue, dignity; these are all invisible: it is true, you have seen their actings, and their effects; but you never saw them—Yet we hope you love them.

It is also useless to urge, as an exception to the

justice of our remark, that the love of which we have been speaking is a principle, and not a passion. We readily acknowledge the propriety of the distinction, and hope it will always be remembered. Had it been duly considered, many things would never have been published that have caused the way of truth to be evil spoken of: and many Christians would have escaped the despondency into which they have been plunged by judging of their state, not by the habitual and prevailing bias of their soul, but the flow and rise of their animal spirits. While, however, we allow the distinction, we deny the inference that might be supposed to result from it. For if we call this love esteem, rather than attachment—still it *is* esteem: if we call it a principle, and not a passion, still it *is* a principle—a principle that has a real being—and with whose operations and effects we are all acquainted. How then will this love show itself?

It will show itself by our *thoughts*. Those naturally follow the object of our regard, and it is with difficulty we can draw them off. The current may be diverted by force; but the prevention removed, it soon flows in its wonted channel, and finds its former destination. Where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. David could say, “I love thee, O Lord, my strength.” And what was the consequence? “How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! if I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.” If, then, I love the Saviour, I shall surely think of him. I shall reflect upon his character, his glory, and his grace. I shall dwell much upon his humiliation and

sufferings. My thoughts will cling and cluster around his cross like bees around the hive—and my “meditation of him will be sweet.” Even when my hands are employed in the common affairs of life, my mind will often ascend, and take a view of the Lamb that was slain: and I shall feel the refreshing and enlivening influence of these thoughts—for they are not thoughts of speculation, but of affection.

This love will show itself by our *speech*. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” When Peter and John were ordered by the council to speak no more in the name of Jesus, what was their reply? “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” How was it with a certain woman in the company when his preaching had touched her heart? “She lifted up her voice, and said, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.” When the multitude cried, “Hosannah, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,” the Pharisees besought him that he would rebuke and silence them. What said the Master? “You are strangers to their views and feelings, or you would know that you require an impossibility: ‘for if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.’” So great are the Saviour’s charms! so powerful are the impressions of his grace! “One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: and let all flesh bless his holy Name FOR ever and ever.”

It will show itself by *desire after intimacy*. Do we love another? We long to be with him. Separation is a grief. Distance is a torture. We wish to annihilate the space that intervenes. We meet him at the time appointed, and feel a pleasure in the interview that words can no more express than paint can do justice to light or heat. Our Lord and Saviour has promised to be found of them that seek him; in his word, in the assemblies of his people, on his throne, and at his table. To these, therefore, if I regard him, shall I repair; and with a disposition expressive of this language: "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?" Is he withdrawn from me? I shall "lament after the Lord." And, turning to those who are better acquainted with him, and know his resting-places, I shall anxiously ask, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?"

Once more. This love will show itself by *devotedness to the service and glory of its Master*. And here, my brethren, I wish to lay a peculiar stress. Nothing, be it ever remembered, can authenticate the existence of this principle in our hearts, detached from this regard to his will. It is in this way that he himself requires us to place our love beyond all dispute: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. If ye love me, keep my commandments." Am I then an enemy to his enemies? Am I a friend to his friends? Do I espouse his cause? Do I pray for the extension of his empire? Do I rejoice in the success of his affairs? Do I weep over the dishonours of his Name? Am I

sorrowful for the solemn assembly, and is the reproach of it my burden? Do I daily and hourly inquire, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Do I present myself at his footstool, saying,

"All that I have, and all I am,
Shall be for ever thine:
Whate'er my duty bids me give,
My cheerful hands resign.

"Yet if I might make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great,
That I should give him all."

—"When Gad had addressed David, and given him the choice of war, pestilence, or famine, he pressed for a decision, and said—"Consider now, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me."

Men, Brethren, and Fathers! Allow me to close with a similar demand. What answer shall I give to Him in whose name I have addressed the solemn question—LOVEST THOU ME? or, What answer will *you* give? For I would rather you should deliver it yourselves. It would distress every feeling of my soul to return a negative answer—How could I tell him, on your behalf, "No, I do not love him"? And yet, what other reply could many of you make; at least, if you made a true one? And to what purpose would it be to return a falsehood? He is not mocked.

—What, would *you* say—*you* love him? No: you dare not. You *know* that his love is not in you. You *know* that you daily prefer a thousand objects to his favour, and image, and service. You *know* that you constantly ask, with the world, "Who will show me

any good?”—But you never pray, “Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me. O remember me with the favour thou bearest unto thy people. O visit me with thy salvation.” *You* love him!—“What moaneth then this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and this lowing of the oxen which I hear?”—Your whole lives contradict your avowal, and render it your folly as well as your guilt. Actions speak louder than words; and these are the exceptions they compel you to make. “Yes, O Lord, I love thee—but I never think of thee. I love thee—but I cannot endure the conversation that turns upon thy praise. I love thee—but I wish to shun thy presence: ‘depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of thy ways.’ I love thee—but thy law is not my delight; and I resolve to follow the way of my own heart.”

And what—if this be your answer—what are we to think of you? What are we to think of your taste? What are we to think of your temper? How low! how vile! What a compound of stupidity and depravity is thy wretched soul, to be even capable of indifference towards greatness and goodness so infinite! If you had no love to the creation, no love to the beauties of spring; if you had no love to him that begat you; no love to her that bore you; no love to her that lieth in thy bosom: it would be infinitely less disgraceful than to declare, you have no love for Him who died for you, and rose again.

And is this your answer?—Deliver it yourselves. Look up, and, if you have courage, tell him; tell him, by your lips, what you have constantly told him by your lives—“No: I do not love thee. I deem thee unworthy of my regards. Whoever becomes

thy follower, I will not." And is this your language?—If we lived in a period of temporal judgments, I would instantly desire this congregation to withdraw: I would say, Flee from the tents of these men, lest the earth open its mouth, and swallow them up. But you believe that no such doom awaits you; and therefore you imagine yourselves secure. But spiritual judgments are much more dreadful than temporal; and wrath, the longer it is delayed, becomes the larger in the aggregate, and the heavier in the fall. "If," says the Apostle, "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha." Oh! to be excluded, when the Lord comes, from his favour, from communion with his people: to be sealed up under his curse, in hopeless misery, when he appears! Who can describe the horrors of such a scene! Who can dwell upon it! We are not going to attempt it—it is too awful for declamation.

But let me observe—There is no *unrighteousness* in the sentence. The very victims of this justice will be compelled to feel, if not acknowledge, its equity; and hence they will be speechless.

Neither is there any *uncertainty* in the execution of it. If the word of God is true, this *will* be the portion of every man, whatever be his condition or character, that dies a stranger to the love of Christ. Such a disposition of mind *must* terminate in perdition. There is no other part of the universe to which you are suited: and there will be the same propriety in shutting you up in hell, when you die, as in confining a madman in Bedlam, or a rebel in prison. Were you even allowed to enter heaven, the state of your mind would destroy all the happi-

ness of the place. And if you would consult, in religious concerns, the same common sense that guides you in secular life, you could not withstand the conviction for a moment. For *could* you be happy in being for ever the companions of those with whom you now feel no congeniality, and whose intercourse you now so anxiously shun? Could you be happy in being for ever in the presence of One you always disesteemed; and in hearing for ever the praises of a Being you never loved?

Yet I will not, I cannot, conclude such a subject as this with the language of terror. While I feel a horror at the crime, I would gladly save the criminal. While I condemn, I pity. And if there is an object worthy our compassion in this assembly—Who claims it?—It must be—not the man that is stripped of his substance, that is bereaved of his friends, that has been through life saying, “I looked for light, and behold darkness”—No: he may be dear to Heaven; and the valley of Achor may be given him for a door of hope. But it is the man that sits yonder, and in whose soul there is not one sentiment of love to llim whom all the angels adore!

“Ah!” art thou saying, “this is my condition—What is the duty of a wretch like me?”—It is, to get a full conviction of the fact. It is, to reflect, with shame and sorrow, on the fault. It is, to guard against despair, which will only harden thee into enmity, while a hope of mercy—after all!—will tend to soften and allure. It is, to pray that the heart of stone may be turned to flesh, and the promise accomplished—“I will pour upon them the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for

him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.”

But there are some here who ought to be able to answer the question in the affirmative. Come forward, Christians, and let us hear your reply.—Why do you draw back? We are called upon to fear, “lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it.” It is true: but the Scripture justifies confidence, as well as awakens caution.—Why are you afraid to speak? “O, it is an awful thing to determine; and if, after all, I should be mistaken!” The very apprehension is a good evidence in your favour.—“I have nothing to boast of.” Acknowledged.—“I ought to be very humble.” And ought you not to be very thankful too? And is not this impossible, while you refuse to own what he has done for your souls?—“I would then hesitate no longer.—I hope—I may—I can say, with Peter, ‘LORD, THOU KNOWEST ALL THINGS: THOU KNOWEST THAT I LOVE THEE.’”

All hail, ye highly favoured of the Lord! This is your distinction; this is your privilege—your noblest distinction, your richest privilege—that you love him! But there are two things which you ought to remember: the one, to hide from you pride; the other, to excite in you diligence.

Though you love him *now*, you did not love him *always*. There was a time (and with some of you it was a long time) before you saw any form or comeliness in him, or beauty that you should desire him. “Ah!” says Augustine, “ah, my Lord, I began to love thee too late!”

Though you love him *really*, you do not love him

sufficiently. Your love is nothing, compared with the zeal of many of your brethren, less indebted to him than you. It is nothing, considering how long you have known him. It bears no proportion to your means, your obligations, your professions. Yet this love is all the return he expects, all he requires, from us!—Let us, therefore, sing the words of Dr. Watts:

“Dear Lord, and shall we ever live
At this poor dying rate;
Our love so faint and cold to thee,
And thine to us so great!

“Come, holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,
With all thy quick’ning powers;
Come, shed abroad a Saviour’s love,
And that shall kindle ours.”

This last Discourse is the usual length of Sermons. The author introduced it as a small token of respect for a female friend,* at whose application it was preached a second time, when it was secured by a professional short-hand writer. It is published without alteration.

* The lady of Samuel Mills. Esq., Finsbury Square.



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