The Works of Thomas Manton, D.D. Vol. VII.

by

Thomas Manton

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VOL. VII.

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THE COMPLETE WORKS

OF

THOMAS MANTON, D.D.

VOLUME VII.

CONTAINING

SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE CXIX. PSALM.

LONDON:

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SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE CXIX. PSALM.

VOL. VII.

SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE CXIX. PSALM.

SERMON LIII.

And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.—Ver. 47.

THE man of God is giving arguments to enforce his request that 'the word of truth might not be taken utterly out of his mouth.'

1. He could not bear it, because all his hopes of felicity were built upon it, ver. 43.

2. He promiseth constancy of obedience, ver. 44.

3. Liberty of practice, ver. 45.

4. Liberty of profession, not hindered by fear or shame, but should be borne out with confidence in that profession.

5. He urgeth in the text with what delight he should carry on the work of obedience, 'And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.' In which observe—

1. His great pleasure and contentment is asserted and professed, *I will delight myself*.

2. The object of it, *in thy commandments*.

3. The fundamental reason or bottom cause of this delight, *which I have loved*.

Doct. A gracious heart doth Jove and delight in the commandments of God: the godly are described by it. Hence David makes it the character of a blessed man: Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' And Ps. cxii. 1, 'Blessed is the

man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments.' Paul asserts of himself, as a comfortable evidence of his sincerity in the midst of his infirmities, Rom. vii. 22, 'For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.' By 'the inward man' he means the renewed part, that is pleased with all things that please God, if we have such a delight as is above the delight of sense, &c. I will—

1. Explain the point as it lieth here in the text.

2. Show how the heart is brought to this; for corrupt nature is otherwise affected.

First, To explain the point.

1. His pleasure and contentment is asserted, 'I will delight myself.' A Christian hath his joys and delights, but they are pure and chaste; they delight in the Lord, and in his word and ways: Phil. iv. 4, 'Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.' He hath a liberty, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἐν κυρίῳ, 'but only in the Lord,' 1 Cor. vii. 39; not only may, but must. It 'is his duty. Joy is a great part of his work; not our felicity or wages only, but our work also. Now, I shall prove that all the pleasures and delights of the earth are nothing to the pleasures and delights which the godly do find in God and in a holy life.

[1.] These delights are more substantial. It is not a superficial joy that they are delighted withal, but a substantial joy. It must needs be so, partly because these are better grounded, not built upon a mistake and fancy, but the highest warrant and surest foundation which mankind can build upon, the word of the eternal God, which can never fail; whereas the joy that is merely built upon carnal delights is built upon a fancy and mistake. Both are represented by the apostle: 1 John ii. 17, 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever.' If they considered the shortness of their pleasures, and in what a doleful case their wealth, and honour, and fleshly delights will leave them, they would have little list to be merry till they had looked after a more stable blessedness. The world will be soon gone, and the lust and gust thereof gone also; but he that goeth on with the work of holiness, building on the promise of another world, layeth a sure foundation. Partly because they do more intimately affect the soul. Sensual delights do not go so deep as the delights of holiness: Ps. iv. 7, 'Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time when their corn and their wine increased:' like a soaking shower that goeth to the root. The other tickleth the senses; poor, slight, and outside comforts, that do not fortify the heart against distresses, much less against the remembrance of our judge, or the fears of an offended God, or the serious thoughts of another world. For these two reasons, the joys of a Christian, stirred up in him by the conformity of his will to the will of God, are solid, substantial joys. A wicked man may be jocund and jovial, but he hath not the true delight; he may have more mirth, but the Christian hath the true joy: 'In the midst of mirth the heart is sorrowful.' It is easy to be merry, but it is not easy to be joyful, or to get a substantial delight.

[2.] These delights are more perfective; a man is the better for them. Other delights, that please the flesh, feed corruption, but these corroborate and strengthen graces. They are so far from disordering the mind, and leading us to sin, that they compose and purify the mind, and make sin more odious, and fortify us against the baits of sense, which are the occasion of all the sin in the world. All our joy is to be considered with respect to its use and profit: Eccles. ii. 2, ‘I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doth it?’ The more a man delighteth in God, and in the ways of God, the more he cleaveth to him, and resolveth to go on in this course, and temptations to sensual delights do less prevail; for, ‘the joy of the Lord is our strength.’ The safety of the spiritual life lieth in the keeping up our joy and delight in it: Heb. iii. 6, ‘Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end;’ Isa. lxiv. 5, ‘Thou meetest him who rejoiceth and worketh righteousness.’ But now carnal delights intoxicate the mind, and fill it with vanity and folly. The sensitive lure hath more power over us to draw into the slavery of sin: Titus iii. 3, ‘For we ourselves were also foolish, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures.’ Surely then the healing delights should be preferred before the killing, wounding pleasures that so often prove a snare to us.

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2. The object is to be considered, ‘Thy commandments.’ Here observe—

[1.] David did not place his delight in folly or filthiness, as they do that glory in their shame, or delight in sin, and give contentment to the lusts of the flesh; as the apostle speaks of some that ‘sport themselves in their own deceivings,’ 2 Peter ii. 13; that do not only live in sin, but make a sport of it, beguiling their own hearts with ground less apprehensions that there is no such evil and hazard therein as the word declareth and conscience sometimes suggesteth; they are be holden to their sottish error and delusion for their mirth. Neither did he place his delight in temporal trifles, the honours, and pleasures, and profits of the world, as brutish worldlings do; but in the word of God, as the seed of the new life, the rule of his conversation, the charter of his hopes; that blessed word by which his heart might be renewed and sanctified, his conscience settled, his mind acquainted with his Creator’s will, and his affections raised to the hopes of glory. The matter which feedeth our pleasures showeth the excellency or baseness of it. If, like beetles, we delight in a dunghill rather than a garden, or the paradise of God’s word, it shows a base, mean spirit, as swine in wallowing in the mire, or dogs to eat their own vomit. Our temper and inclination is known by our complacency or displacency: Rom. vii. 5, ‘For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sin which were by the law did work in our members, to bring forth fruit unto death.’ Therefore see which your hearts carry you to to the world or the word of God. The most part of the world are carried to the pleasures of sense, and mastered by them; but a divine spirit or nature put into us makes us look after other things: 2 Peter i. 4, ‘Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises,’ even of the great blessings of the new covenant, such as pardon of sin, eternal life, &c.

[2.] Not only in the promissory, but mandatory part of the word. Commandments is the notion in the text. There is matter of great joy contained in the promises, but they must not be looked upon

as exclusive of the precepts, but inclusive. Promises are spoken of Ps. cxix. 111, ‘Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.’ They contain spiritual and heavenly riches, and so are matter of joy to a believing soul. But the commandments call for duty on our parts. The precepts appoint us a pleasant work, show us what is to be done and left undone. These restraints are grateful to the new nature, for the compliance of the will with the will of God, and its conformity to his law, hath a pleasure annexed to it. A renewed soul would be subject to God in all things, therefore delights in his commandments without limitation or distinction.

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[3.] It is not in the study or contemplation of the justice and equity of these commandments, but in the obedience and practice of them. There is a pleasure in the study and contemplation, for every truth breedeth a delectation in the mind: Ps. xix. 8, ‘The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the soul.’ It is a blessed and pleasant thing to have a sure rule commending itself with great evidence to our consciences, and manifesting itself to be of God. Therefore the sight of the purity and certainty of the word of God is a great pleasure to any considering mind; no other study to be compared with it. But the joy of speculation or contemplation is nothing to that of practice. Nothing maketh the heart more cheerful than a good conscience, or a constant walking in the way of God’s commandments: 2 Cor. i. 12, ‘Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that, with simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, 1 have had my conversation in the world.’ Let me give you this gradation: The pleasures of contemplation exceed those of sense, and the delights of the mind are more sincere and real than those of the body; for the more noble the faculty is, the more capable of delight. A man m his study about natural things hath a truer pleasure than he greatest epicure m the most exquisite enjoyment of sense: Prov. xxiv. 13, 14, ‘My son, eat thou honey because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul when thou hast found it; then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.’ But especially the contemplation of divine things is pleasant; the objects are more sublime, certain, necessary, profitable; and here we are more deeply concerned than m the study of nature. Surely this is sweeter than honey and honeycomb, to understand and contemplate the way of salvation by Christ. This is a heaven upon earth to know these things: John xvii. 3, ‘This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.’ As much as the pleasures of the natural mind do exceed these bodily pleasures, so much do these pleasures of faith and spiritual knowledge exceed those of the natural mind; these things the angels desire to pry into. Now the delights of practical obedience do far exceed those which are the mere result of speculation and contemplation. Why? Because they give us a more intimate feeling of the truth and worth of these things, and our right in them thereby is more secured, and our delight in them is heightened by the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost. The joy of the Spirit is said to be ‘unspeakable and full of glory,’ 1 Peter i. 8. In short, it is exercised about noble objects, the favour of God, reconciliation with him, and the hope of eternal life—all these as belonging to us; and it is excited by a higher cause, the Spirit of God; and lastly, it giveth us a sense

of what we had but a guess before: we ‘know the grace of God m truth,’ Col. i. 6; we know it so as to taste

3. The fundamental or bottom cause of this delight is expressed, ‘Which I have loved.’ There is a precedent love of the object before there can be any delight in it. Love is the complacency and propension of the soul toward that which is good, absolutely considered, abstracting both from presence and absence. Desire regardeth the absence and futurition of a good; delight the presence and fruition of it. It is impossible anything can be delighted in, but it must be first loved and desired. None can truly delight in obedience but such as desire it. By nature we were otherwise affected, counted his commands burdensome, because contrary to the desires of the flesh: Rom. viii. 7, ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ But when the heart is renewed by grace, then we have another love and another bias upon our affections: 1 John v. 3, ‘This is love, to keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.’ To others they are against the bent and the hair, and too tedious, and love maketh way for delight.

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Secondly, Reasons why a gracious heart doth love and delight in the commandments of God.

1. The matter of these commandments showeth how much they deserve our love and delight. The matter respects either law or gospel. (1.) That which is strictly called the moral law is the decalogue; a fit rule for a wise God to give, or a rational creature to receive, a just and due admeasurement of our duty to God and man: the world cannot be without it. To God, that we should love him, serve him, depend upon him, delight in him, that we may be at length happy in his love. ‘The law is holy, just, and good;’ not burdensome to the reasonable nature, but perfective. Surely to know God, to love him, and fear him, and trust and repose our souls on him, and to worship him at the time, in the way, and manner appointed, is a delightful thing, and should be more delightful to us than our necessary and appointed food. To man, justice, charity: Micah vi. 8, ‘He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy;’ Hosea xii. 6, ‘Keep mercy and judgment.’ Now all kinds of justice should not be grievous. Political justice, between the magistrates and people. How should we live else? This maintaineth the order of the world. Private justice, between man and man: Mat. vii. 12, ‘Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.’ Family justice, between husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants. How else can a man have any tolerable degree of safety and comfort? 1 Peter iii. 7, ‘Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge.’ Then for mercy, there is not a pleasanter work in the world than to do good; it is God-like. A man is as an earthly god, to comfort and supply others: Acts xx. 35, ‘It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive.’ And blessedness is not tedious; the work rewards itself. The satisfaction is so great of doing good, and being helpful to others, that certainly this is not tedious. (2.) The gospel offereth such a suitable remedy to mankind that the duties of it should be as pleasant and welcome to us as the counsel of a friend for our recovery out of a great misery into which we had

plunged ourselves. In the law, God acteth more as a commander and governor; in the gospel, as a friend and counsellor. Surely to those that have any feeling of their sins, or fears of the wrath of God, what can be more welcome than the way of a pardon and reconciliation with God, whom his word and providence, and the fears of a guilty conscience, represent as an enemy to us? Surely this should be more pleasant than all the lust, sport, and honours, and pleasures of the world. Here is the foundation laid of everlasting joy, a sufficient answer to the terrors of the law, and the accusations of a guilty conscience, which is the greatest misery can befall mankind. In short, that the matter of God's commands deserves our delight and esteem is evident:—

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[1.] Because those that are unwilling to submit to them count them good and acceptable laws. When their particular practice and sinful customs have made them incompetent judges of what is fittest for themselves in their health and strength, yet their conscience judgeth it a more excellent and honourable thing in others if they can deny the pleasures of the flesh, and overcome the temptations of the world, and deny themselves the comforts of the present life, out of the hopes of that which is to come. Such are accounted a more excellent and better sort of men: Prov. xii. 26, 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour;' he hath more of God and of a man than others, as he hath a freer use of reason, and a greater command of his own lusts and passions. There is a reverence of such darted into the consciences of wicked men: Mark vi. 20, 'Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and observed him.'

[2.] Because of the sentiments which men have of a holy, sober, godly life, when they come to die, and the disallowance of a dissolute carnal life: Job xxvii. 8, 'What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?' Ps. xxxvii. 37, 'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.' When men are entering upon the confines of eternity, they are wiser; the fumes of lust are then blown over, their joys or fears are then testimonies to God's law: 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.' It is not from the fancy or melancholy of the dying person, nor his distemper, that his fears are awakened, but his reason. If it did only proceed from his distemper, men would be rather troubled for leaving worldly comforts than for sin. No; it is the apprehension of God's justice by reason of sin, who will proceed according to his law, which 'the guilty person hath so often and so much violated and broken. They are not the ravings of a fever, nor the fruits of natural weakness and credulity. No; these troubles are justified by the law of God or the highest reason.

[3.] By supposing the contrary of all which God hath commanded concerning the embracing of virtue, shunning of vice. If God should free us from these laws, leave us to our own choice, command us the contrary, forbid us all respect to himself, commanding us to worship false gods, transform and misrepresent his glory by images, and fall down before stocks and stones, blaspheme his name continually, and despise all those glorious attributes which do so clearly shine forth in the creation; if he had commanded us to be impious to our parents, to fill the world with murders, adulteries, robberies, to pursue others with slanders and false-witnessings, to covet and take what

is another man's, wife, ox, or ass,—the heart of man cannot allow such a conceit; nay, the fiercest beasts would abhor it, if they were capable of receiving such an impression. Now, surely a law so reasonable, so evident, so conducing to the honouring of God, government of ourselves, and commerce with others, should be very welcome and acceptable to a gracious heart.

9

2. The state and frame of a renewed heart; they are fitted and suited to these commandments, and do obey them not only because enjoined, but because inclined. Nothing is pleasant to men but what is suitable to their nature; so that may be delightful to one which is loathsome to another; as the food and converse of a beast is loathsome to a man; one man's pleasure is another's pain. There is a great deal of difference between a carnal and a spiritual mind, the heart sanctified and unsanctified: Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27, 'I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments to do them.' When the heart is fitted and suited by principles of grace, the work is not tedious, but delightful. Things are easy and difficult according to the poise and inclination of the soul. So Heb. viii. 10, 'I will write my laws upon their hearts, and put them into their minds.' The law without suiteth with an inclination within; and when things meet which are suitable to one another, there is a delight: Ps. xl. 8, 'Thy law is in my heart; I delight to do thy will, O God.' There is an inclination, not necessary, as in natural agents; but voluntary, as in rational agents. There is an inclination in natural agents, as in light bodies to move upwards, heavy bodies to move downwards; in rational agents, when a man is bent by his love and choice. This latter David speaketh of, Ps. cxix. 36, 'Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.' The heart of man standeth between two objects—the laws of God and carnal vanities. In our natural estate we are wholly bent to please the flesh; in our renewed estate there is a new bent put upon the heart. Now the old bent is not wholly gone, though overmastered and over powered: the false bias of corruption will still incline us to the delights of sense; but the new bias to the way everlasting, to spiritual eternal happiness: as that prevaileth, we love and delight in the commandments of God.

3. The helps and assistances of the Spirit go further, and increase this delight in the way of God's commandments. God doth not only renew our wills, and fit us with an inward power to do the things that are pleasing in his sight, but exciteth and actuateth that power by the renewed influences of his grace: Phil. ii. 13, 'He giveth us to will and to do:' not only a will, or an urging and inclination to do good; but because of the opposition of the flesh and manifold temptations, he gives also a power to perform what we are inclined unto: 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,' 2 Cor. iii. 17, or a readiness of mind to perform all things required of us, not only with diligence, but delight.

4. The great encouragements which attend obedience, as the rewards of godliness both in this life and the next. The rewards of godliness in this life I shall speak of in the next head; for the future, the end sweetens the means to us. We have no mean end, but the eternal enjoyment of God in a complete state of glory and happiness. Now this hath an influence upon the love and delight

of the saints, to sweeten their labours, and difficulties, and temptations. The scripture everywhere witnesseth: 1 Cor. xv. 58, ‘Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord:’ Phil. iii. 14, ‘I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;’ Rom. v. 2, ‘We rejoice in hope of the glory of God;’ and Rom. viii. 18, ‘For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.’

5. Present comfortable experience.

[1.] In the general, of peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost.

(1.) Peace, which is the natural result of the rectitude of our actions: ‘The fruit of righteousness is peace,’ Isa. xxxii. 17; and Ps. cxix. 165, ‘Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.’ *Pax est tranquillitas ordinis.* That description fits internal peace, as well as external. When all things keep their order affections are obedient to reason, and reason is guided by the Spirit of God according to his word, there is a quiet and rest from accusations m the soul.

(2.) Joy in the Holy Ghost is distinct from the former: Horn xiv 17, ‘For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.’ These two differ in the author. Peace of conscience is the testimony of our own souls approving the good we have done; joy in the Holy Ghost is a more immediate impression of the comforting Spirit: Rom. xv. 13, ‘Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound m hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.’ They differ in their measure: peace is a rest from trouble; joy, a sweet reflection upon our good condition or happy estate. It is in the body a freedom from a disease, and a cheerfulness after a good meal; or in the state, peace, when no mutinies and disturbances; joy, when some notable benefit or profit accrueth to the state So here they differ in their subjects. The heathen, so far as they did good, might have a kind of peace or freedom from self-accusing and tormenting fears: Rom. ii. 15, ‘Which show the work of the law written in their hearts; their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts in the meantime excusing or else accusing one another;’ but ‘a stranger intermeddleth not with these joys.’ The Spirit, where a sanctifier, there he is a comforter. They differ m the ground. The joy of the Holy Ghost is not merely from a good conscience as to a particular action, but from a good estate as being accepted with God, who is our supreme judge, and assured of our interest in eternal life. They differ in effects. Peace is an approbation for the present; joy in the Holy Ghost a pledge and beginning of that endless joy we shall have hereafter: 2 Cor. i. 22 ‘Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts;’ and Rom. viii. 23, ‘We ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.’ Both together show that there is no such solid comfort as in the obedience of God’s commandments; certainly more than in all the pleasures of sin, yea, more than in all the enjoyments of the world:

whoever have proved them both find it so. Many have proved the pleasures of sin, but never yet found what comfort is in mourning for sin. Many have proved the comforts of the world, but never yet proved what is the joy of a good conscience, and the sweet pleasure of a godly conversation.

[2.] There is a particular experience, when borne out in the confession of truth in the time of trial. A man that out of love to God's commands hath endured troubles and trials, and hath overcome temptations, will see more cause to love these commandments, and to increase his obedience to them, than ever before in ordinary temptations: Ps. xix. 11, 'Moreover, by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is a great reward.' When they see that divine truth is like to bear out itself, and man that doth confess it, in such cases, they feel the excellency of God's truth, and the power of God sustaining them that confess it, therefore embrace heartily the Lord's commands, and take pleasure in his ways. The Lord appealeth to this experience: Micah ii. 7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' Have not you found the fruit answerable? Therefore the children of God value and esteem and look upon them 4is the greatest means of their safety and comfort.

6. Because of their love to God, they have a value for everything which cometh from God and leadeth to him. Common mercies point to their author, and their main end is to draw our affections to him, and enable us in his service; but these are apt to be a snare, and are used as an occasion to the flesh. But here is a greater impression of God on his word and laws; their use is more eminent to direct us to God, therefore are valued above ordinary comforts: Job xxiii. 12, 'I have not gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.' They are his commandments, therefore dear to us, who hath obliged us so much in Christ, whose love they believe and have felt. The word is wholly appointed to maintain the life of grace in us.

Use 1. Is to show us how to bring our hearts to the obedience of God's commands.

1. Love them, if we would keep them. Nothing is hard to love. An esteem will quicken us to the obedience of them.

2. Delight in them, for then all goeth on easily. Delight sweeteneth everything, though in themselves toilsome or tedious; as fowling, hunting, fishing. Delight never mindeth difficulties. The reason why the commands are grievous is want of love and delight.

Use 2. Showeth of what kind our obedience must be—free and unconstrained; when we are not forced to our duty, but do willingly delight in it and the law which prescribeth it, and do bewail our daily failings. Many do some external works of obedience, but not with an inward delight, but out of custom or compulsion. God never hath our heart till he hath our delight, till we willingly abstain from what may displease him, and cheerfully practise what he requireth of us; when it is grateful to obey, and all pleasures to this are nothing worth.

12

SERMON LIV.

My hands also will I lift up to thy commandments, which I have loved and I will meditate in, thy statutes. Ver. 48.

IN the morning we opened one profession of David's respect to the word of God; now follows another. He would employ all his faculties about the commandments of God, which is his last argument: his mind, for here is meditation promised; his heart, for here is love asserted; his tongue, for that is his original request which occasioned all these professions; and here his hands, his life, 'My hands also will I lift up,' &c. Observe—

1. The ground or cause of his respect to the commandments of God, in that clause, *which I have loved*.

2. A double effect, *I will lift up my hands to thy commandments, and I will meditate in thy statutes*.

Lifting up the palms or hands is a phrase of various use.

1. For praying: Ps. xxviii. 2, 'Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands towards thy holy oracle;' Lam. ii. 19, 'Lift up thy hands towards him, for the life of thy young children,' &c.; Hab. iii. 10, 'The deep uttered his voice, and lift up his hands on high.' Thence the apostle, 1 Tim. ii. 8, 'I will, therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.'

2. For blessing others. Aaron lift up his hands towards the people, and blessed them. Or for praising or blessing God: Ps. cxxxiv. 2, 'Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord:' so Ps. lxiii. 4, 'Thus will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name.'

3. For swearing or vowing: Gen. xiv. 22, 'I have lift up my hand to the most high God,' that is, sworn; so Rev. x. 5, the angel 'lift up his hand and swore.' So of God: Ps. cvi. 26, 'Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness,' that is, 'swore they should not enter into his rest.'

4. For setting about any action, especially of weight: Gen. xli. 44, 'Without thee shall no man lift up his hand,' that is, attempt or do anything; so Ps. x. 12, 'Arise, O Lord, lift up thine hand; forget not the poor,' that is, set to thine active hand for their assistance; so Heb. xii. 12, 'Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees,' that is, set actively and vigorously about the Christian task. To this rank may be also referred what is said Mat. vi. 3, 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.' The hand is the instrument of action.

Now all these senses might be applied to the present place.

[1.] Praying for God's grace to perform them.

[2.] Blessing God, as we do for our daily food, giving thanks for them.

[3.] Vowing or promising under an oath a constant obedience to them. But the commandments are not the proper object to which the acts of praying, blessing, swearing are directed, but God. It is not, I will lift up my band to God, but 'thy commandments.' We ought, indeed to bless God and praise God for the blessings we receive by his word, to vow our duty; but lifting up the hand in all these senses is to God. Therefore—

[4.] Here it meaneth no more but I will apply myself to the keeping of them, or set vigorously about it, put my hands to the practising of thy law with all earnestness, endeavouring to do what therein is enjoined. Two points:—

Doct. 1. That it is not enough to approve or commend the commandments of God, but we must carefully set ourselves to the observance of them.

Doct. 2. Whosoever would do so must use great study and meditation.

Doct. 1. That it is not enough to approve or commend the commandments of God, but we must carefully set ourselves to the practice of them.

1. Hearing without doing is disapproved: Deut. iv. 5, 'I have taught you good statutes and judgments, that ye might do so:' Deut. v. 1, 'Hear, Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and do them.' Otherwise we deceive our own souls: James i. 22, 'But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls.' We put a paralogism on ourselves, build on a sandy foundation: Mat. vii. 26, 'Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man that built his house upon the sand.'

2. Knowledge without practice is not right: Luke xii. 47, 48, 'He that knoweth his master's will, and prepareth not himself to do it, shall be beaten with many stripes.' Better never known, if not done, for then they do but aggravate our guilt and increase our punishment.

3. Our love is not right unless it endeth in practice. A Christian's love, to whatever object it be directed, must be an unfeigned love. If God, if the brethren, if the word of God, those words must ever sound in our ears, 1 John iii. 18, 'My little children, love not in word and tongue, but in deed and in truth.' Do you love the word of God? Do it not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

4. Our delight is not right; the pleasure is but an airy, idle, and speculative delight, unless it set us about the practice of all holy obedience unto God, making it the design and business of our lives to exercise ourselves unto godliness. That showeth the reality of your delight, when you come under

the power of the truth, and are absolutely governed by it; for then you delight in them aright as mysteries of godliness. The Lord complaineth of them that had a delight in the prophet, 'His voice was as pleasing to them as a minstrel; they hear the words, and do them not,' Ezek. xxxiii. 32. They may delight in sublime strains of doctrine or flourishes of wit. Demosthenes had made a plausible speech to the Athenians; Phocion told them that the cypress-tree is goodly and fair, but beareth no fruit There may be flourishes of wit, but no food for hungry consciences.

5. Our commendation is not right unless it endeth in practice. Many may discourse of the ways of God, never speak of them but with commendation, but they do not lift their hands to this blessed work: they show some love to God's commandments, but when it cometh to action, their hands are remiss and faint. Christ refuseth that respect of bare naked commendation: Luke xi. 27, 28, 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that thou hast sucked. Μενοῦνγε, yea, rather, blessed is he that heareth the word of God, and keepeth it.' We are disciples of that master that did both teach and do: Acts i. 1, 'The former treatise have I made, Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.' Of the Pharisees it is said, 'They say, and do not,' Mat. xxiii. 2, 3. But in Christians there must be saying and doing: James ii. 12, 'So speak, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.' We shall be rewarded, not for speaking well, but for doing, hands lifted up.

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Well, then, nothing remains but practising duties that are pressed upon you on the first opportunity. Not he that heareth, understandeth, loveth, delighteth, commendeth, but 'he that *keepeth* instruction,' it is, 'is in the way of life,' Prov. x. 17. He that submitteth himself to be guided by God's word, he is going the right way to eternal life and happiness. But to set home this point more fully, I shall inquire—

1. What kind of observance we must address ourselves unto.

2. Why we must thus lift up our hands, or address ourselves to our duty.

First, How, for the manner, must we lift up our hands, or what doing is necessary?

1. It must be universal: 'Herod did many things,' Mark vi. 20. Partial reformation in outward things will not serve the turn. In sundry particulars men may yield to the word of God, but in others deny their obedience; as in some cheap observances, or such duties as cross not our lusts; but David would lift up his hands to the commandments, without distinction and limitation. Many, this they will do, and that they will not do; and so do not obey God's will, but their own: Ps. cxix. 6, 'Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments:' Luke i. 6, 'And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.'

2. This doing must be serious and diligent. Every Christian must bend the powers of his soul, and lay out the first of his care and labour, in his obedience unto God: Phil. ii. 12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling:' this is not a work to be done by the bye; but with the greatest care and solicitude.

3. This must be our settled and our ordinary practice. To lift up our hands now and then is not enough, to do a good thing once, or rarely. No; we must make religion our business. The lifting of the hands to God's commandments is not a thing done accidentally, occasionally, or in a fit of zeal, but our trade and course of life: Acts xxiv. 16, 'I exercise myself in this, to have a conscience void of offence both towards God and men, ἐν τούτῳ ἀσκῶ. This was the employment of his life.

4. We must persevere or continue with patience in well-doing, not withstanding discouragements: Heb. xii. 12, 'Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.' There must be no fainting, whatever discouragements happen; as there was a great deal of do to hold up Moses's hands in Israel's conflict with Amalek: Exod. xvii. 11, 12, 'As long as he held up the rod of God, Israel prevailed; but Moses' hands were heavy;' a sign of many infirmities, not able long to endure in spiritual exercise; for though 'the spirit be willing, yet the flesh is weak.' But faith should still hold up our hands.

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5. This lifting up the hands, or alacrious diligence, should flow from a right principle, and that is faith and love.

[1.] Faith, or a sound persuasion of God's love to us in Christ, that keepeth us doing: Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service;' and Titus ii. 11, 12, '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.' Thankfulness to God is the great principle of gospel obedience.

[2.] Love: 'Thy commandments, which I have loved:' 2 Cor. v. 14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' Nothing holdeth up the hands in a constant obedience to God and performance of his will so much as a thorough love to God and his ways. Faith begets love, and love obedience. These are the true principles of all Christian actions.

6. This lifting up of the hands imports a right end. Commanded work must be done to commanded ends, else we lift up our hands to our own work. Now, the true end is the glory of God: 1 Cor. x. 31, 'Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;' and Phil. i. 11, 'Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus, unto the glory and praise of God.' God's glory must be our main scope, not any by-respect of our own. Well, then, this is lifting up our hands to the commandments of God, not doing one good work, but all; and this with a serious diligence, in our ordinary practice, continuing therein with patience, whatever oppositions we meet with; and this out of faith, or a sincere belief of the gospel, and fervent love, and an unfeigned respect to God's glory.

Secondly, Why such a lifting up the hands, or serious addressing ourselves to our duty, is necessary? My answer shall be given in a fourfold respect—God, ordinances, graces, and the Christian, who is to give an account of himself unto God.

1. God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Father, as a lawgiver; Son, as a redeemer and head of the renewed estate; Holy Ghost, as our sanctifier.

[1.] God the Father, who in the mystery of redemption is represented as our lawgiver and sovereign lord, and will be not only known and worshipped, but served by a full and entire obedience: 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 'And thou, Solomon, my son, know the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind.' He hath given us a law not to be trampled upon or despised, but observed and kept; and that not by fear or force, but of a ready mind. Though there be an after provision of grace for those that break his law because of the frailty of the creature, yet if we presume upon that indulgence, and sin much that God may pardon much, we may render ourselves incapable of that grace; for the more presumptuously wicked we are, the less pleasing unto God. The governor of the world should not be affronted upon the pretence of a remedy which the gospel offered; for this is to sin that grace may abound, than which wicked imagination nothing is more contrary to gospel grace: Rom. vi. 1, 'What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid.' To check this conceit, God deterreth men from greater sins, as more difficult to be pardoned than less; they shall not have so quick and easy a pardon of them as of others; nay, he deterreth men from going on far in sin, either as to the intensive increase or the continuance in time, lest he cut them off and withdraw his grace, and pardon them not at all. Therefore he biddeth them to 'call upon him while he is near,' Isa. lv. 6; not to 'harden their hearts, while it is called to-day,' Heb. iii. 7, 8. Therefore, if we should only consider God as our lord and lawgiver, we should earnestly betake ourselves to obedience.

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[2.] If we consider the Son as redeemer and head of the renewed estate, he standeth upon obedience: Heb. v. 9, he is 'the author of eternal life to them that obey him.' As he hath taken the commandments into his own hand, he insisteth upon practice, if his people will enjoy his favour: John xv. 10, 'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, as I have kept my father's commandments, and abide in his love.' He hath imposed a yoke upon his disciples, and hath service for them to do: he, being a pattern and mirror of obedience, expects the like from his people. He fully performed what was enjoined him to do as the surety of believers, and therefore expecteth we should be as faithful to him as he hath been to God. So John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.' No love of Christ should encourage us to cast off duty, but continue it. He taketh himself to be honoured when his people obey: 2 Thes. i. 11, 12, 'Wherefore also we pray always for you, that God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you.' The work of faith is obedience, and Christ is

dishonoured and reproached when they disobey: Luke vi. 46, ‘Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?’

[3.] The Spirit is given to make graces operative, to flow forth: John iv. 14, ‘Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life:’ and John vii. 38, ‘He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water: this spake he of his Spirit, which they that believe in him should receive.’ Therefore, if we have an inward approbation of the ways of God, unless we lift up our hands, we resist his work.

2. With respect to ordinances: They are all means, and means are imperfect without their end. Things πρὸς ἄλλο are of no use, unless that other thing be accomplished for which they serve: as he is a foolish workman that contents himself with having tools, and never worketh; for tools are in order to work, and all the means of grace are in order to practice. We read, hear, meditate, to understand our duty. Now if we never put it in practice, we use means to no end and purpose: ‘Hear and live;’ ‘Hear and do.’ The word layeth out work for us; it was not ordained for speculation only, but as a rule of duty to the creatures: therefore, if we are to hear, read, meditate, we must also lift up our hands.

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3. All graces are imperfect till they end in action, for they were not given us for idle and useless habits. Knowledge, to know merely that we may know, is curiosity and idle speculation. So Ps. cxi. 10, ‘A good understanding have all they that do his commandments;’ Jer. xxii. 16, ‘He judgeth the cause of the poor and the needy. Was not this to know me? saith the Lord.’ That is true knowledge that produceth its effect. So James ii. 22, ‘By works faith is made perfect;’ faith hath produced its end. So love is perfected in keeping the commandments: 1 John ii. 5, ‘Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected;’ as all things are perfect when they attain their end and their consummate estate. The plant is perfect when it riseth up into stalk, and flower, and seed; so these graces.

4. The person or Christian is judged not only by what is believed, but what is done; not by what is approved, but what is practised. Many profess faith and love; but if it be not verified in practice, they are not accepted with God: 1 Peter i. 17, ‘If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work;’ and Rev. xx. 12, ‘I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.’ God will judge men according to their works, and what they have done in the flesh, whether it be good or evil: John v. 29, ‘They that have done good shall rise to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.’ The redeemed sinner shall have his trial and judgment.

Use 1. For the disproof of two sorts—preachers and professors.

1. Preachers: if they be strict in doctrine and loose in practice, do they lift their hands to God's commandments? No; they are like the Pharisees, who 'bind heavy burdens upon others, and do not touch them with their own little finger,' Mat. xxiii. 4. It is not enough to lift up our voice in recommending, but we must lift up our hands in practising, lest like a mark-stone, they show others the way to heaven, but walk not in it themselves, and contribute nothing of help by their examples.

2. Professors.

[1.] That approve the word only. There may be an idle naked approbation: Rom. ii. 18, 'Thou knowest his will, and approvest the things that are most excellent, being instructed out of the law.' *Video meliora proboque*; they esteem these things better, but their hearts incline them to what is evil, and their reason is a slave to appetite.

[2.] That commend as well as approve: Rom. ii. 20, 'Who hast a form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law,' but without action, and practice. Have many, good words; their voice Jacob's but their hands Esau's: Ps. l. 16, 17, 'What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or to take my covenant in thy mouth, since thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind me?' It pertaineth not to thee to profess religion, since thou dost not practise it, to commend the law which thou observest not, or to profess love to what thou dost not obey.

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Use 2. Is to press you to lift up your hands, and to obey and do the things which God hath prescribed in his word. Do not rest in the notional part of religion. That which will approve you to God is not a sharp wit, or a firm memory, or a nimble tongue, but a ready practice. God expecteth to be glorified by his creatures both in word and deed; and therefore heart, and tongue, and hand, and all should be employed. I will urge you with but two reasons:—

1. How easy it is to deceive ourselves with a fond love, a naked ap probation, or good words, without bringing things to this real proof, whether the truth that we approve, esteem, and commend, have a real dominion over and influence upon our practice! 1 John ii. 4, 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;' James i. 22, 'Be ye doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving your own souls.' Respect to God and his word is a true evidence of a gracious heart. Now, how shall we know this respect real, but by our constant and uniform practice?

2. That it is not so easy to deceive God: he cannot be mocked with a vain show, for he looketh to the bottom and spring of all things: 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, '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.' He searcheth our hearts, knoweth our inward disposition, whether firm, strong, or productive of obedience. Now, to him you are to approve yourselves, and he will not be mocked with lying pretences and excuses: Gal. vi. 7, 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked.' The all-seeing God cannot be blinded: he knoweth

our thoughts afar off, and seeth all things in their causes; much more can he judge of effects. Therefore, whatsoever illuminations we pretend unto, if we do not live in the obedience of the commands of self-denial, humility, justice, patience, faith, and love, he can soon find us out. If our actions do not correspond to our profession, it is a practical he, which the Lord can easily find out.

Doct. 2. Whosoever would lift up his hands to God's commandments, and seriously address himself to a course of obedience, must use much study and meditation. On the one side, non-advertency to heavenly doctrine is the bane of many: Mat. xiii. 19, 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not,' μὴ συνιέντος, *non advertit animum*, 'then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.' And so James i. 23, 24, 'If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. God s great complaint of his people is that they will not consider: Isa i. 3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' So Jer. viii. 6, 'I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, what have I done?' The heathens have commended such recollection. On the other side, the scripture recommendeth meditation, as one great help to obedience. Lydia's conversion is described by attendancy: Acts xvi. 14, 'The Lord opened her heart, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul:' because that is the first step to it; minding, choosing, prosecuting. So the man that will benefit by the word of God is he, James i. 25, 'That looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein;' that is, abideth in the view of these truths; for a glance never converted or warmed the heart of any man: 'This man being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.' Now, more particularly, why meditation is necessary:—

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1. To know the mind of God and understand our duty. A superficial knowledge hath no efficacy and hold upon us; therefore, by deep meditation, search and study, we come to be more thoroughly acquainted with the mind of God revealed in his word. We are bidden, Prov. ii. 4, to 'dig for knowledge as for silver.' Mines do not lie on the surface, but in the bowels of the earth. Every day we should get more knowledge: Rom. xii. 2, 'Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God;' and Eph. v. 17, 'Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' Now we cannot know this without a serious search and inquiry into the rule of duty: there must be an accurate search; spiritual knowledge will not drop into our mouths. There are many clouds of ignorance and folly that yet hover in the minds of men, and they are dispelled more and more by a sound study of the scriptures.

2. To keep up a fresh remembrance of our duty. Oblivion and inconsideration is a kind of ignorance for the time. Though we habitually know a thing, yet we do not actually know a thing till we consider of it: Eccles. v. 1, 'They consider not that they do evil:' so Hosea vii. 2, 'They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness.' That which we consider is always

before us; but that which we consider not is forgotten, laid by, and the notions which we have about them are as it were laid asleep, they work not. But now frequent meditation keepeth these things alive.

3. Meditation is necessary to enkindle our affections. Affections are stirred by thoughts, as thoughts by objects. The truth cannot come home to our hearts till we think of it again and again. We have no other natural way to raise affection; and we must not think that grace worketh like a charm, in a way contrary to the instituted order of nature. No; the heart of man must be besieged with frequent and powerful thoughts before it will yield to God and give entertainment to his truth and ways. There is no coming at the heart but by the mind; and the mind must be serious in what it represents to gain the heart; that is, we must meditate. The devil watcheth our postures; he seeketh to catch these thoughts out of our mind as soon as he seeth that we begin to be serious, Mat. xiii. 19.

4. Meditation is necessary to show our love: 'I will lift up my hands also to thy commandments, which I have loved, and I will meditate in thy statutes;' Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night;' Ps. cxix. 47, 'And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.' The mind will muse upon what we love. As thoughts stir affections, so affections stir up thoughts; for in all moral things there is a κθκλογένησις. A pleasing object will be much revolved in our mind, and frequently thought of.

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The use is for direction to us. When you have heard the word, remember what you hear, and apply it to yourselves by serious inculcative thoughts. So when you read the word, do not only understand it, but think of it again and again: Deut. xxxii. 46, 'Set your hearts to all the words which I testify among you this day,' saith Moses to the Israelites. So Christ: Luke ix. 44, 'Let these sayings sink into your hearts.' Truths never go to the quick of the affections but by serious and ponderous thoughts. You will not lift up your hands till the truth sink into the heart. You read chapters, hear sermon after sermon; they do not stir you, or it is but a little, for a fit, like a man that hath been a little warming himself by the fire, and goeth away, and is colder than he was before. O Christian! this means is not to be neglected, no more than reading and hearing, because of its great use, both for first conversion, and continual quickening.

1. For first conversion. A man cometh to himself by serious thoughts of those great and important truths which are delivered in the word of God: Luke xv. 17, 'And when he came to himself, he said,' &c.; Ps. xxii. 27, 'All the ends of the world shall remember, and turn unto the Lord;' Ps. cxix. 59, 'I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.'

2. For continual quickening. Musing maketh the fire burn. The greatest things will not move us if we do not think of them: Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?' Job v. 27, 'Lo, this we have searched, so it is; hear it, and know thou

it for thy good.' The benefit of sound doctrine consists in the application thereof by the hearers. When men have spent their time and strength to find a good lesson for us, shall not we think of it?

SERMON LV.

Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.—Ver. 49.

IN the words observe—

1. His prayer and humble petition to God, *remember thy word*. God is said to remember when he doth declare by the effect that he doth remember. He sometimes seemingly forgets his promise, that is, to appearance carrieth himself as one that doth forget.

2. His argument is taken—

[1.] From his interest, *thy servant*.

[2.] From his trust and hope, which is expressed—

(1.) As warranted.

(2.) As caused.

(1.) As warranted by his *word*; that gave him ground of hope and comfort

(2.) As caused by his influence, *Upon which thou hast caused me to hope*. The word his warrant, the Spirit his anchor. Would God raise up such a hope merely to defeat it? The word concurred to this hope, as it offered—

(1st.) A command to believe.

(2d.) The promise of the eternal and immutable God to build upon. The influence of his grace concurred; for he that maketh the offer in the word doth also work faith in the believer, and inclineth his heart to apply the promise and trust in it; for faith is 'the gift of God,' Eph. ii. 8. In short, here is a promise believed and pleaded; and both confirm our faith in the fulfilling and granting of it.

Doct. That believers may humbly challenge God upon his word, and seek the full performance of what he hath promised.

This point, that it may be managed with respect to this text, I shall give you these considerations:—

1. That God delighteth to promise mercy before he accomplish it; which showeth these things:—

[1.] His abundant love. God's heart is so kindly affected to his people that he cannot stay till the accomplishment of things, but he must tell us aforehand what he meaneth to do for us: Isa. xlii. 9, 'Before they spring forth, I will tell you of them;' long before there was any sight of such things, or means that might produce them: so that his promise is an eruption and overflow of his love.

[2.] His care for our security; for by his promise he giveth his people a holdfast upon him, as he maketh himself a debtor to them by his own promise, who was otherwise free before such engagement to poor creatures: Ps. lxxxix, 34, 'My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips' The word is gone out of his lips, not to be recalled, nor reversed. The promises are as so many bonds, wherein he stands bound to us; and these bonds may be put in suit, and his people have liberty and confidence to ask what he hath promised to them. Austin saith of his mother, *Chirographa tua injiciebat tibi Domine*—Lord, she showed thy own bond and hand writing. It is a mighty argument in prayer when we can plead that we ask no more than God hath promised.

2. That there is usually some time of delay between making the promise and fulfilling the promise; for therefore God promiseth, because he meaneth to do us good, but not presently. And this delay is not for want of kindness, or out of any backwardness to our good; for so it is said, he will not tarry: Hab. ii. 3, 'Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry.' Nor out of ignorance, as not knowing the fittest time to help his people; for his waiting is guided by judgment: Isa. xxx. 18, 'He waiteth that he may be gracious; for he is a God of judgment;' he will take hold of the fittest season or occasion. Not from forgetfulness of his promise; for 'he is ever mindful of his holy covenant,' Ps. cxi. 5. Not from any mutability of nature or change of counsel; for he is Jehovah, that changeth not: Mal. iii. 6, 'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' He hath a due foresight of all possible difficulties, and needeth not to alter his counsels. Not from impotency and weakness, as if he could not execute what he had promised, as the sons of Zeruiah were too hard for David, 2 Sam. iii. 39; all things are at the beck and signification of his will. But (1.) Partly with respect to his own glory, he will do things in their proper season: Eccles. iii. 11, 'Everything is beautiful in its time.' This is the wise providence of God in the government of the world, that every thing is brought forth in its proper season, and in the time when it is most fit. God humbleth and God exalteth his people in due time: 1 Peter v. 6, 'Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.' So it is said of their enemies: Deut. xxxii. 35, 'Their foot shall slide in due time.' Summer and winter must succeed in their seasons. (2.) With respect to us, God will try our faith, whether we can stay on his word, and hug it, and embrace it, till the blessing come. As it is said of the patriarchs ἀσπασάμενοι, Heb. xi. 13, 'They embraced the promises;' Ps. lvi. 4, 'In God I will praise his word; I have put my trust in the Lord; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.' During this time we may be exercised with divers troubles and difficulties, so that to appearance God seemeth to forget his promises; and this he doth—

[1.] Partly to try our faith to the utmost, to see if we can trust and depend upon God for things which we see not, nor are likely to see. Faith, in the general, is a dependence upon God for something that lieth out of sight. Now, when the object is not only out of sight, but all that is seen and felt seemeth to contradict our hopes, and God seemeth to put us off, and we meet with many a rebuke of our confidence, instead of an answer, as the woman of Canaan that came to Christ at first meeteth not with a word, then his speech more discourageth than his silence: Mat. xv. 26, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs.' She turneth this rebuke into an encouragement: ver. 27, 'Truth, Lord! yet the dogs, eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table;' ver. 28, 'Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman! great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.' Many times we come and pray for blessings promised, and the oracle is dumb and silent. Though God love the supplicant, yet he will not seem to take notice of his desires, but will humble him to the dust. Now, to pick an answer out of God's silence, and a gracious answer out of his rebukes, showeth great faith. Job saith, chap. xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him.' Faith supports us under the greatest pressures; when God seemeth to deal like an enemy, yet even then trusts in God as a friend, and that his dispensations will never give his word the lie.

[2.] To try our patience as well as our faith. God's dearest children are not admitted to the enjoyment of the mercies promised presently: Heb. vi. 12, 'Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' And Heb. x. 36, 'Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye may receive the promise.' We must first do, and sometimes suffer, the will of God. The promises are to come, and at a great distance. 'And if we hope for that we see not,' and enjoy not, 'then do we with patience wait for it,' Rom. viii. 25. But especially is patience tried when we meet with oppositions, difficulties, dangers, many things done, many things suffered, before we can attain what we hope for. Now, quietly to wait God's leisure is a great trial of our patience: Our times are always present with us, when God's time is not come. A hungry stomach would have meat ere it be sodden or roasted, and a sickish appetite must have green fruit; but to wait, like the husband man, in all seasons and weathers, till the corn ripen; and to persevere in hoping and praying, that is that which God requires.

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[3.] Our love, though we be not feasted with felt comforts, nor bribed with present satisfaction and benefits in hand. God will try the deportment of his children, whether they will adhere to him when he seemeth to cast them off. It is not said, 'In the way of thy mercies,' but, 'In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee,' Isa. xxvi. 8. Love for himself, without any present benefit from him, yea, when kept under sore judgments and deep distresses.

[4.] To enlarge our desires, that we may have the greater sense of our necessities, and value for the blessings promised. A sack that is stretched out holdeth the more. Delay increaseth importunity: 'Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you,' Mat. vii. 7; Luke xi. 8, 'Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet διὰ τὴν ἀναίδειαν,

because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.' And things promised being asked, and at length obtained, are the more valued.

3. That if we yet continue our faith, and heartily believe God upon his word, it is a great encouragement in waiting for the thing promised; for to believe is a qualification. There are in the word of God promises that we may believe, and then promises because we do believe; promises to invite faith and hope, and then promises because we believe in God and hope in his word; promises *for* faith, and to faith. As for instance, God hath promised to be a defence unto his people: Zech. ii. 5, 'I the Lord will be unto her a wall of fire round about her, and will be the glory in the midst of her.' Now see how David pleadeth: Ps. lvii. 1, 'Be merciful unto me, God, be merciful unto me; for my soul trusteth in thee; yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.' When once we believe, then we have a claim: Isa. xxvi. 3, 'Thou keepest him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.' Trust giveth us a fresh claim or new interest: Ps. lxxxvi. 2, 'O thou my God, save thy Servant that trusteth in thee.' God will not disappoint a trusting soul. An ingenuous man will not fail his friend if he rely on him. We count this the strongest bond we lay upon another, to be faithful and mindful of us: I trust you, that you will do this for me. How much more will God do so,—

[1.] For his own honour, to show himself faithful, willing, and able to succour his people in their distresses. This is the reproach cast upon the worshippers of idols, that they call upon those things which cannot help them nor relieve them in their straits: Judges x. 14, 'Go to the gods whom ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the day of tribulation.' When you trust God, the honour of his Godhead lieth at stake. By trust you own him for a God: Jonah i. 5, 'Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man upon his god.' By making good your trust he showeth himself to be a God, that they do not seek to a vain help.

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[2.] With a condescension to his people. Nothing goeth so near their hearts as a disappointment of their hope in God. This will mightily damp their spirits, when God spits in their faces, and seemeth to reject their prayers: Ps. xxv. 2, 'O my God, I trust in thee, let me not be ashamed; yea, let none of them that wait on thee be ashamed; but let them be ashamed which transgress without a cause.' To have hopes fail which were invited and drawn forth by promises is a great temptation.

[3.] With respect to their enemies, who will be sure to cast this in their teeth, if the God in whom they trusted should not send help from his holy place. You will find God's servants often mocked for their trust: Ps. xxii. 8, 'He trusted in the Lord; let him now deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.' Christ himself was not free from the lash of profane tongues, he was mocked for his dependence on his Father: Mat. xxvii. 43, 'He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him.' The world counts faith but a fancy. Now if God should deny the things promised to his people, it would seem to countenance the slanders of their enemies. Wherefore do the children of God expose themselves to difficulties, and all manner of hard usages, but because of their hope in God? 1 Tim. iv. 10, 'Therefore we suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God;' for that

reason, because they look for great things from God; therefore God hath a great respect for them that trust in him.

4. This trust must be pleaded in prayer.

[1.] Because prayer is one of the means by which God hath decreed to fulfil his promises; and therefore we must obtain mercies in his own appointed way. God saith, I will do thus and thus for you: Ezek. xxxvi. 37, 'But I will be inquired after by the house of Israel for this very thing.' God will do it, but prayer must give a lift; he will be sought to: Jer. xxix. 11, 12, 'I know the thoughts which I think to wards you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end,' that is, such an end as yourselves hope for and desire; 'then shall ye call upon me, and go, and pray to me, and I will hearken unto you,' that is, you must address and set yourselves seriously to this work. When the promise is urged by the believer, it will be performed by God. So when Daniel understood by the books and writings of the prophets that the time was come wherein God had promised to deliver his people, then he falleth a-praying in a serious manner, Dan. ix. 3. When God hath a mind to work, then he sets the spirit of prayer awork, for he will have all things accomplished in his own way.

[2.] Because he hath put this office upon his people, that they are to be his remembrancers at the throne of grace: Isa. lxii. 6, 'Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence:' it is in the margin, 'Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers,' whose office it is to be constantly minding God, and soliciting him in the behalf of his church. Public remembrancers are the officers of his church; but every Christian is a private remembrancer, to put God in mind of his promise. Not that God is subject to forgetfulness, as man is, who hath need of such minders; but he will be sought and solicited for the performance of his gracious promises. We have an advocate in heaven, but there are remembrancers upon earth. We come as David here, 'Remember thy word unto thy servants, on which thou hast caused us to hope.'

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5. We are the more encouraged because God, that made the promise, doth also give the faith; for he pleadeth two things the grant of the promise, and the gift of faith. Reasons:—

[1.] God would not deceive us. Would he raise a confidence to disappoint us? In such a case we might say, as the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xx. 7, 'Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived:' the words seem to intrench upon the honour of God. In the general, I answer—They were spoken by the prophet in a passion. Others soften them by another rendering and interpretation, 'Thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded:' that is, to undertake the prophetical office, of which I was nothing forward of myself, but averse thereunto, yet found it more troublesome than I expected. But put it with a supposition, 'If I be deceived, thou hast deceived me,' there is nothing inconvenient God had told him he would make him as a brazen wall; God had raised a faith and hope in him to be borne out in his work. Now, if God hath specially excited your faith, it is not a foolish imagination

or vain expectation, like as of them that dream; it is God's word you build upon, and it is by a faith of God's operation; he raiseth it in us.

[2.] The prayer of faith is the voice of the Spirit, and God heareth the voice of the Spirit always, 'who maketh requests κατὰ Θεὸν, according to the will of God:' Rom. viii. 27, 'He that searcheth and trieth the hearts, knoweth what is a groan of the Spirit,' what is a fancy of our own, what is a confidence raised in us by the operation of his own Spirit. For there may be a mistaken faith, seemingly built upon the promises, whereas it is indeed built upon our own conceits. Now God is not bound to make that faith good. But when we can appeal to the searcher of hearts that it is a faith of his own working, surely we may have confidence.

Now how shall we know that it is a faith of God's raising?

1. If the promise be not mistaken, and we do not presume of that absolutely which God only hath promised conditionally, and with the limitations of his own glory and our good, which are joined to all promises which concern the present life. In temporal things, God exerciseth his children with great uncertainties, because he seeth it meet to prove our submission in these things, for our happiness lieth not in them. Those things wherein our happiness doth consist, as remission of sins and eternal life, are sure enough, and that is encouragement to a gracious heart: 2 Tim. iv. 18, 'God hath delivered me out of the mouth of the lion, and will deliver me from every evil work.' In the Old Testament, when God discovered less of heaven, he promised more of earth; but in the New Testament, where life and immortality are brought to light, we are told of many tribulations in our passage; yea, the eminent saints of the Old Testament, that had a clearer view of things to come than others had, were more exposed to the calamities of the present life, because God thought the sight of happiness to come sufficient to countervail their troubles; and if he would give them rest in another world, they might well endure the inconveniences of their pilgrimage: Heb. xi. 16, '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.' The holy patriarchs left their country, flitted up and down upon this hope; but to us Christians the case is clear: Rom. viii. 18, 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us;' 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'For this light affliction, that is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

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2. When the qualification of the person is not clear, we must not absolutely promise ourselves the effect: Jonah iii. 9, 'Who can tell whether God will turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?' So Joel ii. 14, 'Who knoweth if he will return, and leave a blessing behind him?' In this clause I put believers who have sinned away their peace and assurance: 2 Sam. xii. 22, 'Who can tell if God will be gracious unto me, that the child may live?' He speaketh doubt fully; Zeph. ii. 3, 'It may be that ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's fierce anger;' Amos v. 15, 'Hate the evil and love the good; it may be the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.'

In such cases the soul is divided between the expectation of mercy and the sense of their own deservings, and can speak neither the pure language of faith nor the pure language of unbelief—half Canaan, half Ashdod. There is a twilight in grace as well as in nature. ‘God in these eases raiseth no other confidence, to heighten mercy, and try how we can venture upon God, and refer ourselves to his will, when we have any business for him to do for us: Mat. viii. 2, ‘Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean;’ 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26, ‘And the king said to Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it, and his habitation: but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good to him.

3. In the promises of spiritual and eternal mercies, when God’s conditions are performed by us, we maybe confident, and must give glory to God in believing and being persuaded that he will fulfil them to us: 2 Tim. i. 12, ‘I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which 1 have committed unto him against that day;’ Rom. viii. 38, 39, ‘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.’ I am persuaded; there is no doubt: the stronger our confidence, the better.

4. When God raiseth in our minds some particular express hope (as in some cases he may do) to these things that are of a temporal nature and are conditionally promised, and where our qualification is clear he will not disappoint us, 2 Cor. i. 12. Though the promises of temporal things have the limitation of the cross implied in them, and are to be understood in subordination to our eternal interest and God’s glory, without which they would not be mercies but judgments, yet his usual course is to save, deliver, and supply them here: Ps. ix. 10, ‘And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.’ And when God by his Spirit doth particularly incline his people to hope for mercy from him, he will not fail their expectations. Where the qualification is uncertain, yet the faith of general mercy wrestleth against discouragements; as in the case of the woman of Canaan: there is the plea of a dog, and the plea of a child, in grievous temptations to fasten our selves upon God. God will make good the hope raised in them by his Spirit.

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Use. For direction, what to do in all our distresses, bodily and spiritual. Our necessities should lead us to the promise, and the promise to God.

1. Be sure of your qualification; for David pleadeth here partly as the servant of God, and partly as a believer: first, ‘Remember thy word unto thy servant;’ and then, ‘wherein thou hast caused me to hope.’ There is a double qualification—with respect to the precept of subjection, with respect to the promise of dependence: the precept is before the promise. They have right to the promises, and may justly lay hold upon them, who are God’s servants; they who apply themselves to obey his precepts, these only can regularly apply his promises. None can lay claim to rewarding grace

but those that are partakers of his sanctifying grace. Clear that once, that you are God's servants, and then these promises, which are generally offered, are your own, no less than if your name were inserted in the promise, and written in the Bible. Let us remember our promises made to God, and then desire him to remember his promises to us. The next part of the qualification is, if you be believers, and can wait and depend upon God, though he seemeth to delay, and forget his promise: 'Our eyes must wait upon the Lord, until he have mercy upon us,' Ps. cxxiii. 2. The benefit of some promises droppeth, like the first ripe fruit, into the mouth of the eater; but others must be tarried for. It is said, Acts vii. 17, 'When the time of the promise drew night, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.' The promise is recorded, Gen. xv. 5, of 'multiplying his seed like the stars of heaven.' Abraham was seventy-five years old when the promise was made, a hundred years old when Isaac was born; when Jacob went into Egypt they were but seventy souls, but at their coming forth they were 603,550. Now, if faith wait, Isa. xxviii. 16, 'He that believeth maketh not haste:' Lam. iii. 26, 'It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of God;' Hosea xii. 6, 'Keep mercy and judgment, and wait on the Lord continually.' God delayeth because he would have us make use of faith. Real believers are such as have ventured upon God's word, denied themselves for the hopes offered therein: 1 Tim. iv. 10, 'Therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God:' Heb. vi. 10, 'God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed towards his name.' God's servants must wait for his promises with patience and self-denial: Rom. ii. 7, 'To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life:' Luke viii. 15, 'Those in the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.'

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2. Then let us plead promises; let them not lie by us as a dead stock, but put them in suit, and put God in remembrance. When the accomplishment is delayed, it is a notable way of raising and increasing our confidence: 2 Sam. vii. 25, 'And now, Lord, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant and his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.' So ver. 28, 'And now, Lord, thou art that God, and thy words are true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant.' So may we do with any promise of mercy and grace which God hath made with his people in his covenant.

SERMON LVI.

This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me.—Ver. 50.

IN the former verse the man of God had complained of the delay of the promise, and that his hope was so long suspended; now in this verse he showeth what was his support, and did revive

him during this delay and the sore afflictions which befell him in the meantime. The promise comforted him before performance came, ‘This is my comfort in my affliction, thy word hath quickened me.’

1. Observe here, the man of God had his afflictions; for we are not exempted from troubles, but comforted in troubles. God’s promise, and hope therein, may occasion us much trouble and persecution in the world. Yet—

2. This very promise which occasioneth the trouble is the ground of our support; for one great benefit which we have by the word is comfort against afflictions.

3. This comfort which we have by the word is the quickening and life of the soul. The life of our soul is first received by the word, and still maintained by the same word: James i. 18, ‘Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth;’ 1 Peter i. 23, ‘Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.’

Doct. That all other comforts in affliction are nothing to those comforts which we have from the word of God.

David confirmeth it from experience; in his deepest pressures and afflictions, his soul was supported and enlivened by the word of God. The apostle Paul doctrinally asserts it: Rom. xv. 4, ‘Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.’ The general end of scripture is instruction; the special end is comfort and hope. *Id agit iota scriptura, ut credamus in Deum* (Luther)—the business and design of scripture is to bring us to believe in God, and to wait upon him for our salvation; to hope either for eternal life, which is the great benefit offered in the scriptures, or those intervening blessings which arc necessary by the way, and also adopted into the covenant. The reasons are taken—

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1. From the quality of those comforts which we have from the word of God.

2. From the provision which the word hath made for our comfort.

3. From the manner whereby this comfort is received.

First, From the quality of those comforts which we receive from the word of God.

1. It is a divine comfort: Ps. xciv. 19, ‘In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.’ In all the comforts we have, it is good to consider from whence it cometh. Is it God’s comfort, or a fancy of our own? A comfort that is made up of our own fancies is like a spider’s web, that is weaved out of its bowels, and is gone and swept away with the turn of a besom. But God’s comfort is more durable and lasting; for then it floweth from the true fountain of comfort, upon whose smiles and frowns our happiness dependeth. Now God’s comforts are such as God

worketh, or God alloweth. Take them in either sense, they come in with a commanding or overpowering efficacy upon the soul. If God exciteth it by his Spirit, who is the comforter, Ps. iv. 7, 'Thou hast put gladness into my heart.' There is little warmth in a fire of our own kindling: the Holy Ghost raiseth the heart to a higher degree of a delightful sense of the love of God than we can do by a bare natural act of our own understanding. Or whether it be of such comforts as God alloweth, if we have God's covenant for our comfort we have enough; no comfort like his comfort. In philosophy, man speaketh to us by the evidence of reason; in the scripture, God speaketh to us by way of sovereign authority: in his commands he interposeth his power and dominion; in his promises he empawneth his truth. And therefore scriptural comforts are God's comforts, and so more powerful and authoritative.

2. It is a strong comfort: Heb. vi. 18, 'That the heirs of promise might have strong consolation,' ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν. Other comforts are weak and of little force; they are not affliction-proof, nor death-proof, nor judgment-proof; they cannot stand before a few serious and sober thoughts of the world to come; but this is strong comfort, that can support the soul, not only in the imagination and supposition of a trouble, when we see it at a distance, but when it is actually come upon us, how great soever it be. If we feel the cold hands of death ready to pluck out our hearts, and are summoned to appear before the bar of our judge, yet this comfort is not the more impeached; that which supported us in prosperity can support us in adversity; what supports in life can support us in death; for the comforts of the word endure for ever, and the covenant of God will not fail us, living or dying.

3. It is a full comfort, both for measure and matter.

[1.] Sometimes for the measure; the apostle speaketh of 'comforts abounding by Christ.' 2 Cor. i. 5, and Acts xiii. 52, 'The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost;' and the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. vii. 4, ὑπερπερισσεύομαι τῇ χαρᾷ, 'I am filled with comfort, and am exceeding joyful in all your tribulations.' Paul and Silas could sing praises in the prison, and in the stocks, after they had been scourged and whipped, Acts xvi. 25. And our Lord Jesus Christ, when he took care, for our comfort, he took care that it might be a full comfort: John xv. 11, 'These things have I spoken, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.' The joy of believers is a full joy, needing no other joy to be added to it; it is full enough to bear us out under all discouragements. If Christians would improve their advantages, they might by their full joy and cheerfulness entice carnal men, who are ensnared by the baits of the world and the delights of the flesh, once to come and try what comforts they might have in the bosom of Christ, and the lively expectation of the promised glory.

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[2.] For the matter; it is full, because of the comprehensiveness of those comforts which are provided for us. There is no sort of trouble for which the word of God doth not afford sufficient consolation; no strait can be so great, no pressure so grievous, but we have full consolation offered

us in the promises against them all. We have promises of the pardon of all our sins, and promises of heaven itself; and what can we desire more? We have promises suited to every state—prosperity and adversity. What do we need, which we have not a promise of? Prosperity, that it shall not be our ruin, if we take it thankfully from God, and use it for God; for, 'to the pure all things are pure,' Titus i. 15. But especially for adversity, when we most need there are promises either of singular assistance or gracious deliverance. In short, the word of God assureth us of the gracious presence of God here in the midst of our afflictions,. and the eternal enjoyment of God hereafter; that he will be with us in our houses of clay, or we shall shortly be with him in his palace of glory; and so here is matter of full comfort.

(1.) His presence with us in our afflictions: Ps. xci. 15, 'I will be with him in trouble;' and Isa. xliii. 2, 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee;' and many other places. Now if God be with us, why should we be afraid? Ps. xxiii. 4, 'When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not be afraid, for thou art with me;' and in many other places. We see in the body, if any member be hurt, thither presently runneth the blood to comfort the wounded part; the man himself, eye, tongue, and hand, is altogether employed about that part and wounded member, as if he were forgetful of all the rest. So we see in the family, if one of the children be sick, all the care and kindness of the mother is about that sick child; she sits by him, blandisheth him, and tendeth him, so that all the rest do as it were envy his disease and sickness. If nature doth thus, will not God, who is the author of nature, do much more? For if an earthly mother do thus to a sickly and suffering child, will not our heavenly Father, who hath an infinite, incredible, and tender Jove to his people? Surely he runneth to the afflicted, as the blood to the hurt member; he looketh after the afflicted, as the mother to the sick child. This is the difference between God and the world; the world runneth after those that flourish, and rejoice, and live in prosperity, as the rivers run to the sea, where there is water enough already; but God 'comforteth us in all our tribulations,' 2 Cor. i. 4. His name and style is, 'He comforteth those that are cast down,' 2 Cor. vii. 6. The world forsaketh those that are in poverty, disgrace, and want; but God doth not with draw from them, but visiteth them most, hath communion with them most, and vouchsafeth most of his presence to them, even to those that holily, meekly, and patiently bear the afflictions which he layeth upon them; and one drop of this honey is enough to sweeten the bitterest cup that ever they drank of. If God be with us, if 'the power of Christ will rest upon us,' then we may even glory in infirmities, as Paul did.

(2.) Of our presence with God, when our afflictions are over; that is our happiness hereafter; we shall be there where he is: John xii. 26, 'There where I am shall my servant be;' and John xvii. 24, '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.' When we have had our trial and exercise, we shall live with him for ever; therefore is our comfort called everlasting consolation: 2 Thes. ii. 16, 'Who hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.' Nothing more can be added or desired, if we have but the patience to tarry for it, that we may come to the sight of God and

Christ at last. Surely this will lighten the heart of that sorrow and fear wherewith it is surcharged. Here is an everlasting ground of comfort; and if it doth not allay our fears and sorrows, the fault is not in the comfort, for that is a solid and eternal good; but on the believer's part, if he doth not keep his faith strong, and his evidences clear.

4. It is a reviving comfort, which quickeneth the soul. Many times we seem to be dead to all spiritual operations, our affections are damped and discouraged; but the word of God puts life into the dead, and relieveth us in our greatest distresses. Sorrow worketh death, but joy is the life of the soul. Now when dead in all sense and feeling, 'the just shall live by faith,' Hab. ii. 4; and the hope wrought in us by the scriptures is 'a lively hope,' 1 Peter i. 3. Other things skin the wound, but our sore breaketh out again and runneth; faith penetrates into the inwards of a man, doth us good to the heart; and the soul reviveth by waiting upon God, and gets life and strength.

Secondly, The provision which the word hath made for our comfort; it might be referred to four heads.

1. Its commands.

[1.] Provisionally, and by way of anticipation. The whole scripture is framed so that it still carrieth on its great end of making man subject to God and comfortable in himself. Our first lesson in the school of Christ is self-denial: Mat. xvi. 24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' Now this seemeth to be grievous, but provideth for comfort; for self-denial plucketh up all trouble by the root; the cross will not be very grievous to a self-denying spirit. Epictetus summed up all the wisdom that he could learn by the light of nature in these two words, ἀνέχου καὶ ἀπέχου—bear and forbear; to which answereth the apostle's 'temperance, patience,' 2 Peter i. 6. Certainly were we more mortified and weaned from the world, and could we deny ourselves in things grateful to sense, we should not lie open to the stroke of troubles so often as we do. The greatness of our affections causeth the greatness of our afflictions. Did we possess earthly things with less love, we should lose them with less grief. Had we more entirely resigned our selves to God, and did love carnal self less, we should less be troubled when we are lessened in the world. Thus provisionally, and by way of anticipation, doth the word of God provide against our sorrows. The wheels of a watch do protrude and thrust forward one another; so one part of Christian doctrine doth help another: take any piece asunder, and then it is hard to be practised. Patience is hard if there be no thorough resignation to God, no temperance and command of our affections; but Christianity is all of a piece; one part well received and digested befriendeth another.

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[2.] Directly, and by way of express charge, the scripture requireth us to moderate our sorrow, to cast all our care upon God, to look above temporal things, and hath expressly forbidden distracting cares, and doubts, and inordinate sorrows: 1 Peter v. 7, 'Cast all your care upon God, for he careth for you;' and Phil. iv. 6, 'Be careful for nothing.' We have a religion that maketh it unlawful to be

sad and miserable, and to grieve ourselves inordinately: care, fear, and anguish of mind are forbidden, and no sorrow allowed us but what tendeth to our joy: Isa. xxxv. 4, 'Say to them that are of fearful hearts, Be strong, fear not;' Isa, xli. 10, 'Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God.' To fear the rage, and power, and violence of enemies, is contrary to the religion which we do profess: 'Fear not them which can kill the body,' Mat. x. 26, 28. Now surely the word, which is full fraught with precepts of this nature, must needs comfort and stay the heart.

2. The doctrines of the word do quicken and comfort us in our greatest distresses, all of them concerning justification and salvation by Christ; they serve to deaden the heart to present things, and lift it up to better, and so to beget a kind of dedolency and insensibility of this world's crosses; but especially four doctrines we have in the word of God that are very comforting.

[1.] The doctrine concerning particular providence, that nothing falleth out without God's appointment, and that he looketh after every individual person as if none else to care for. This is a mighty ground of comfort; for nothing can befall me but what my Father wills, and he is mindful of me in the condition wherein I am, knoweth what things I stand in need of, and nothing is exempted from his care, ordering, and disposal. This is a ground both of patience and comfort: Ps. xxxix. 9, 'I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.' So Hezekiah: Isa. xxxviii. 15, 'What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it.' It is time to cease, or say no more; why should we contend with the Lord? Is it a sickness or grievous bodily pain? What difference is there between a man that owneth it as a chance or natural accident, and one that seeth God's hand in it? We storm if we look no further than second causes; but one that looketh on it as an immediate stroke of God's providence hath nothing to reply by way of murmuring and expostulation. So in loss of good children; how do we rave against instruments, if we look no further! But if we consider the providence of God, Job i. 23, not *Dominus dedit, diabolus abstulit*, but 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord,' So for contumely and reproaches; if God let loose a harking Shimei upon us, 2 Sam. xvi. 11, 'The Lord bid him curse.' To resist a lower officer is to resist the authority with which he is armed. So in all other cases, it is a ground of patience and comfort to see God in the providence.

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[2.] His fatherly care over his people. He hath taken them into his family, and all his doings with them are paternal and fatherly. It allayeth our cares: Mat. vi. 32, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye hath need of all these things.' Our sorrows in affliction are lessened by considering they come from our Father: Heb. xii. 5-7, 'Ye have forgotten the exhortation that speaketh upon you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is that whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons;' and so those whom God doth love tenderly, he doth correct severely.

[3.] His unchangeable love to his people. God remaineth unchangeably the same. When our outward condition doth vary and alter, we have the same blessed God as a rock to stand upon, and to derive our comforts from, that we had before: he is the God of the valleys, as well as of the hills. Christ in his desertion saith, 'My God, my God,' Mat. xxvii. 46. Surely we deserve that the creature should be taken from us, if we cannot find comfort in God: Hab. iii. 18, 'Although the fig-tree should not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, &c., yet will I rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation;' 'Nothing can separate us from the love of God,' Rom. viii. 36. Men may separate us from our houses, countries, friends, estates, but not from God, who is our great delight. In our low estate we have a God to go to for comfort, and who should be more to us than our sweetest pleasures.

[4.] The scripture showeth us the true doctrine about afflictions, and discovereth to us the author, cause, and end of all our afflictions. The author is God, the cause is sin, the end is to humble, mortify, and correct his children, that they may be more capable of heavenly glory. God is the author; not fortune, or chance, or the will of man; but God, who doth all things with the most exact wisdom, and tender mercy, and purest love. The cause is just: Micah vii. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.' The end is our profit, for his chastisements are purgative medicines, to prevent or cure some spiritual disease. If God should never administer physic till we see it needful, desire to take it, or be willing of it, we should perish in our corruptions, or die in our sins, for want of help in due time: 1 Cor. xi. 32, 'But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.' Now, should we not patiently and comfortably endure those things which come by the will of our Father, through our sins, and for our good?

3. The examples of the word, which show us that the dearly beloved of the Lord have suffered harder things than we have done, and with greater patience. Christ: 1 Peter ii. 21, 'Who suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.' The servants of the Lord: James v. 10, 'Take, my brethren, the prophets of the Lord, who have spoken the word of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.' We complain of stone and gout; what did our Lord Jesus Christ endure when the whole weight of his body hung upon four wounds, and his life dropped out by degrees? We complain of every painful disease, but how was it with Christ when his back was scourged, and his flesh mangled with whips? We are troubled at the swellings of the gout in hands or feet; how was it with him when those sinewy parts were pierced with strong and great nails? We complain of the want of spiritual consolations; was not he deserted? We mourn when God maketh a breach upon our relations; was not Abraham's trial greater, when he was to offer his son with his own hands? Heb. xi. 17, 'By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promise offered up his only-begotten son.' Job lost all his children at once by a blast of wind. The Virgin Mary near the cross of Christ, 'Woman, behold thy son,' John xix. 26. She was affected and afflicted with that sight, 'as if a sword pierced through her heart.' We complain of poverty; Christ 'had not where to lay his head.' If we lose our coat to keep our

conscience, others of God's children have been thus tried before us: Heb. x. 34, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.' The Levites 'left their inheritance,' 2 Chron. xi. 14. Thus God doth not call us by any rougher way to heaven than others have gone before us.

4. The promises of scripture. To instance in all would be endless. There are three great promises which comfort us in all our afflictions—the promises of pardon of sins, and eternal life, and the general promises about our temporal estate.

[1.] The promises of pardon of sin. We can have no true cure for our sorrow till we be exempted from the fear of the wrath of God. Do that once, and the heart of sorrow and misery is broken. Others may steal a little peace when conscience is laid asleep, but not solid comfort till sin be pardoned: Isa. xl. 1, 2, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned;' Mat. ix. 2, 'Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee;' Rom. v. 1, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

[2.] The promises of eternal life. Nothing will afford us so much content as one scripture promise of eternal life would do to a faithful soul. Heaven in the promise seen by faith is enough to revive the most doleful and afflicted creature: Mat. v. 12, 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.' Nothing can be grievous to him that knoweth a world to come, and hath the assurance of the eternal God that shortly he shall enjoy the happiness of it: Rom. v. 2, 'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' This comforts against troubles, sicknesses, wants. Everlasting ease, everlasting joy, surely will counterbalance all that we can endure and suffer for or from God. There all our fears and sorrows shall be at an end, and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes.

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[3.] The general promises concerning our temporal estate. There are many particular promises concerning the supply of all our necessities, removing of our grievances and burdens, or else that God will allay our troubles and enable us to bear them, mix with them the taste of his goodness and fatherly love. But I shall only speak of those general promises, that we may be confident that he will never utterly fail his people: Heb. xiii. 5, 'He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;' that he will not give us over to insupportable difficulties: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'There hath no temptation taken you but what is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.' He will dispose of all things for the best to them that love him, Rom. viii. 28. These things are absolutely undertaken, and these things should satisfy us.

Thirdly, From the manner wherein this comfort is received. They are applied by the Spirit, who is a comforter, and received by faith.

1. Applied by the Spirit, which is dispensed in a concomitancy with this word: Rom. xv. 13, ‘Now the God of hope till you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.’ The Holy Ghost is purposely given to be our comforter. If we are fit to receive it, he will not be wanting to give solid joy and delight to the penitent and believing soul.

2. It is received by faith. The word of God cannot deceive us. Faith is contented with a promise, though it hath not possession; for, Heb. xi. 1, ‘Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.’ Sickness with a promise, poverty with a promise, captivity with a promise, is better than health, riches, liberty without one; yea, death with a promise is better than life. What you possess without a promise you may lose when most secure: Luke xii. 19, 20, ‘I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then whose shall those things be that thou hast provided?’ But in the eye of faith, that which we hope for is more than that which we possess; for we have God’s word; it is set before us.

Use 1. For information.

1. How likely it is that the children of God will be exercised with afflictions, because God in his word hath laid in so many comforts before hand; a full third of the scriptures would be lost, and be as bladders given to a man that stands on dry land, and never meaneth to go into deep waters: ‘Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward,’ Job v. 7. Many think they come into the world not to bear crosses, but to spend their days in pleasure; but alas! how soon do they find themselves mistaken, and confuted by experience! If life be anything lengthened out, it is vexed with the remembrance of what is past, or trouble of what is present, or fear of what is to come. The first part of our life we know not ourselves; in the middle, we are filled with cares and sorrows; our last burdened with weakness and age. But now the godly are more appointed to troubles, because God will try their faith, perfect their patience, train them up for a better world. They are now hated by the world: 2 Tim. iii. 12, ‘Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;’ Acts xiv. 22, ‘We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.’ He that would not be exempted from the hopes of Christians, he must not look to be exempted from the troubles of Christians.

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2. The excellency of the word of God and the religion it establisheth. It containeth store of sure comforts; and when all other comforts can do us no good, then the word of God affordeth us relief and support. Bare human reason cannot find out such grounds of comfort in all their philosophy; it doth not penetrate to the inwards of a man. It will tell us it is in vain to trouble ourselves about what we cannot help: Jer. x. 19, ‘It is an evil, and I must bear it;’ that we are not without fellows, others suffer as much as we do, &c.; but the word of God giveth us other consolations—the pardon of sin, the promises of a better life; that if we lose temporal things we shall have eternal; that we would not fear the threatenings of men, having the promises of God, &c., nor death, which hath

life at the back of it; these are comforts indeed. When David was even dead in the nest, the word, that was not so clear then in these points as now, revived him. What would he have said if he had known the gospel so fully as we do? How should we be affected that live in so much light?

Use 2. For reproof to those that seek other comforts,

1. In the vanities of the world. This is too slight a plaster to cure man's sore or heal his wound: the comforts of this world appear and vanish in a moment; every blast of a temptation scattereth them. It must be the hope and enjoyment of some solid satisfaction that can fortify the heart and breed any solid and lasting comfort, and this the world cannot give unto us; but in the word we have it. Alas! what is a dream of honour, or the good- will and word of a mortal man? Everlasting glory is as much above all these as the treasures of a kingdom before a child's toys. May-games, vain pleasures, are gone before we well feel that we have them.

2. Or in philosophy. That cannot give a true ground of comfort. That was it the wise men of the world aimed at to fortify the soul against troubles; but as they never understood the true ground of misery, which is sin, so they never understood the true ground or way of comfort, which is Christ. That which man offereth cannot come with such authority and power as that which God offereth. The light of reason cannot have such an efficacy as divine testimony. This is a poor moonlight, that rotteth before it ripeneth anything. In short, they were never acquainted with Christ, who is the foundation of comfort; nor the promise of heaven, which is the true matter of comfort; nor faith, which is the instrument to receive comfort; so that you leave the fountain of living water for the dead puddle of a filthy ditch, if you think the writings of the heathens will comfort you and revive you, and neglect the word of God that brings rest for the soul.

3. Those are to be reproved that are under a spiritual institution, and profess to keep to it, and do so little honour it, either by their patience or comfort, or hope under troubles. Wherefore were the great mysteries of godliness made known to us, and the promises of the world to come, and all the directions concerning the subjection of the soul to God, and those blessed privileges we enjoy by Christ, if they all be not able to satisfy and stay your heart, and compose it to a quiet submission to God when it is his pleasure to take away your comforts from you? What! 'Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?' Will not all the word of God yield you a cordial or a cure? Oh! consider what a disparagement you put upon the provision Christ hath made for us, as if the scripture were a weaker thing than the institutions of philosophy, or the vain delights of the world! But what may be the reasons of such an obstinacy of grief?

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[l.] Sometimes ignorance. They do not study the grounds of comfort, or do not remember them; for oblivion is an ignorance for the time: Heb. xii. 5, 'Have ye forgotten the exhortation that speaketh to you as children?' They are like Hagar, have a well of comfort nigh, and yet ready to die for thirst. The scripture hath breasts of comfort, so full as a breast ready to discharge itself, and yet they ate not comforted.

[2.] They indulge and give way to the present malady, hug the distemper, and do not consider the evil of it; as 'Rachel refused to be comforted,' Jer. xxxi. 15.

[3.] They do not chide themselves, ask the soul the reason, cite it before the tribunal of conscience, which is one way to allay passions: Ps. xlii. 5, 'Why art thou so disquieted, O my soul?' They look to the grievance, not to the comfort, as that which is of use; they aggravate the grievance and lessen the love of God: 'Are the consolations of God so small with thee?' Job xv. 11. It is spoken to them who have high thoughts of their troubles, low thoughts of God's comforts.

[4.] Uncertainty in religion. Principles must be fixed before they can be improved, and we can feel their influence and power. But people will be making essays, and try this and try that. God's grounds of comfort are immutably fixed; God will not change his gospel laws for thy sake: and therefore, unless we would have a mountebank's cure, we must stand to them: Jer. vi. 16, 'Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' When we have tried all, we must come home at length to these things; and our uncertainty in religion will be none of the meanest causes of our troubles.

[5.] They look to means and their natural operation, and neglect God; and God only will be known to be the God of all comfort: 2 Cor. i. 3, 4, 'Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comforts, who comforteth us in all our tribulation.'

Use 3. To exhort us—

1. To prize and esteem the scriptures, and consult with them often: there you have the knowledge of God, who is best worth our knowing; and the way how we may come to enjoy him, wherein our happiness lieth. It is a petty wisdom to be able to gather riches, manage your business in the world. Ordinary learning is a good ornament, but this is the excellent, deep, and profound learning, to know how to be saved. What is it I press you to know?—the course of the heavens, to number the orbs and the stars in them, to measure their circumference and reckon their motions, and not to know him that sits in the circle of them, nor know how to inhabit and dwell there? Oh, how should this commend the word of God to us, where eternal life is discovered, and the way how to get it! Other writings and discourses may tickle the fancy with pleasing eloquence, but that delight is vanishing, like a musician's voice. Other writings may represent some petty and momentary advantage; but time will put an end to that, so that within a little while the advantage of all the books in the world will be gone; but the scriptures, that tell us of eternal life and death, their effects will abide for ever: Ps. cxix. 96, 'I have seen an end of all perfections, but thy commandments are exceeding broad.' When heaven and earth pass away, this will not pass; that is, the effects will abide in heaven and hell. Know ye not that your souls were created for eternity, and that they will eternally survive all these present things? and shall your thoughts, projects, and designs be confined

within the narrow bounds of time? Oh, no! Let your affections be to that book that will teach you to live well for ever, in comparison of which all earthly felicity is lighter than vanity.

2. Be diligent in the hearing, reading, meditating on those things that are contained there. The earth is the fruitful mother of all herbs and plants, but yet it must be tilled, ploughed, harrowed, and dressed, or else it bringeth forth little fruit. The scripture containeth all the grounds of hope, comfort, and happiness, the only remedy of sin and misery, our rule to walk by till our blessedness be perfected; but we have little benefit by it unless it be improved by diligent meditation: Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' This must be your chief delight, and you must be versed therein upon all occasions: Ps. cxix. 97, 'Oh, how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.' When we love it and prize it, it will be so, for our thoughts cannot be kept off from what we love and delight in.

3. Reader, hear, meditate with a spirit of application, and an aim of profit: Job v. 27, 'Hear it, and know thou it for thy good:' as the rule of your actions and the charter of your hopes:' Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we then say to these things?' That you may grow better and wiser, and may have more advantages in your heavenly progress, take home your portion of the bread of life, and turn it into the seed of your life. It is not enough to seek truth in the scriptures, but you must seek life in the scriptures. It is not an object only to satisfy your understandings with the contemplation of truth, but your hearts with the enjoyment of life; and therefore you must not only bring your judgment to find the light of truth, but your affections to embrace the goodness of life offered. Think not ye have found all, when you have found truth and learned it. No; except you find life there, you have missed the best treasure. You must bring your understandings and affections to them, and not depart till both return full.

SERMON LVII.

The proud have had me greatly in derision; yet have I not declined from thy law.—Ver. 51.

IN these words are—

1. David's temptation.

2. His constancy and perseverance in his duty notwithstanding that temptation.

First, In the temptation observe—

1. The persons from whom the temptation did arise, *the proud*. The wicked are called so for two reasons:—

[1.] Because either they despise God and contemn his ways, which is the greatest pride that can fall upon the heart of a reasonable creature: Rom. i. 30, 'Haters of God, despiteful, proud.'

[2.] Or else, because they are drunk with worldly felicity. In the general, scoffing cometh from pride. What is, Prov. iii. 34, 'He scorneth the scorners, and giveth grace to the lowly,' is, James iv. 6, 'He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.'

2. Observe the kind or nature of the temptation; he was *had in derision*. This may be supposed either for dependence on God's promises, or for obedience to his precepts. Atheistical men, that wholly look to the pleasing of the flesh and the interest of the present world, make a mock of both. We have instances of both in scripture.

[1.] They make a mock of reliance upon God when we are in distress; think it ridiculous to talk of relief from heaven when earthly power faileth: Ps. xxii. 7, 8, 'They laugh me to scorn, saying, He trusted in the Lord.' The great promise of Christ's coming is flouted at by those mockers: 2 Peter iii. 3, 4, 'There shall come in the last days mockers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the creation.' Such scoffers are in all ages, but now they overflow. These latter times are the dregs of Christianity, in which such kind of men are more rife than the serious worshippers of Christ. At the first promulgation of the gospel, while truths were new, and the exercises of Christian religion lively and serious, and great concord among the professors of the gospel, they were rare and infrequent. Before men's senses were benumbed with the frequent experiences of God's power, and the customary use of religious duties, and the notions of God were fresh and active upon their hearts, they were not heard of; but when the profession of Christianity grew into a form and national interest, and men fell into it by the chance of their birth rather than their own choice and rational conviction, the church was pestered with this kind of cattle. But especially are they rife among us when men are grown weary of the name of Christ, and the ancient severity and strictness of religion is much lost, and the memory of those miracles and wonderful effects by which our religion was once confirmed almost worn out; or else questioned and impugned by subtle wits and men of a prostituted conscience. Therefore now are many mockers and atheistical spirits everywhere, who ask, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' question all, and think that there are none but a few credulous fools that depend upon the hopes of the gospel.

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[2.] Their obedience to his precepts. And so whosoever will be true to his religion, and live according to his baptismal vow, is set up for a sign of contradiction to be spoken against. It is supposed the mocking by the heathen of the Jews is intended in these words, Lam. iv. 15, 'Depart ye; it is unclean; depart, depart, touch not: when they fled away and wandered.' The words are somewhat obscure, but some judicious interpreters understand them of the detestation of the Jewish religion, their circumcision, their sabbaths, &c. But however that be, certainly the children of God are often mocked for their strict obedience, as well as their faith.

3. Observe the degree, *greatly*. The word noteth *continually*. The Septuagint translates it by σφόδρα; the vulgar Latin by *usque valde* and *usque longe*. They derided him with all possible bitterness, and day by day they had their scoffs for him; so that it was both a grievous and a perpetual temptation.

Secondly, His constancy and perseverance in the duty; that is set forth—

1. By the rule in the word, *thy law*. If we have God's law to justify our practice, it is no matter who condemneth it; we have God's warrant to set against man's censure. It must be God's way wherein we seek to be approved; otherwise our reproach is justly deserved, if it be for obstinacy in our own fancies.

2. The firmness and strictness of his adherence: *I have not declined*. The word signifies either to turn aside or to turn back. Sometimes it is put for turning aside to the right hand or to the left; as Deut. xvii. 11, 'Thou shalt not decline from the way which they shall show to thee, to the right hand or to the left;' sometimes for turning back: Job xxiii. 11, 'My feet have held his steps; his way have I kept, and not declined; neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips.' As it is taken for turning aside, it noteth error and wandering; as it is taken for turning back, it noteth apostasy and defection. Now David meaneth that he had neither declined in whole nor in part. Understand it of his faith: all their scoffs and bitter sarcasms did not discourage him, or tempt him to forsake his hold, or let go the comfort of the promise. Understand it of his obedience: he still closely cleaved to God's way. A declining implieth an inclining first. Well, then, David did not only keep from open apostasy, but from declining or turning aside in the least to any hand. Testimonies we have of his integrity in scripture: 1 Kings xiv. 8, 'David kept my commandment, and followed me with all his heart, to do only that which was right in my sight.' His great blemish is mentioned elsewhere: 1 Kings xv. 5, 'David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything which he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.' However, the derision of his enemies. made him not to warp.

Doct. That a Christian should not suffer himself to be flouted out of his religion, either in whole or in part; or no scorn and contempt cast upon us should draw us from our obedience to God.

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In the managing of it observe—

1. That a holy life is apt to be made a scorn by carnal men.

2. That this, as it is a usual, so it is a grievous temptation.

3. That yet this should not move us either to open defection or partial declining.

First, That a holy life is apt to be made a scorn by carnal men, and they that abstain from iniquity are as owls among their neighbours, the wonder and the reproach of all that are about them. To

evidence this, I shall give you an account of some of the scorns which are cast upon religion, with the reasons of them.

1. Some of the scorns are these:—

[1.] Seriousness in religion is counted mopishness and melancholy. When men will not flaunt it and rant it, and please the flesh as others do, but take time for meditation, and prayer, and praise, then they are mopish.

[2.] Self-denial, when, upon hopes of the world to come, they grow dead to present interests, and can hazard them for God, and can for sake all for a naked Christ; the world thinketh this humorous folly. To do all things by the prescript of the word, and live upon the hopes of an unseen world, is by them that would accommodate themselves to present interests counted madness.

[3.] Zeal in a good cause is in itself a good thing (Gal. iv. 18, 'It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing'), but the world is wont to call good evil. As astronomers call the glorious stars by horrid names, the serpent, the dragon's tail, the greater or lesser bear, the dog-star; so the world is grossly guilty of misnaming. God will not be served in a cold and careless fashion. See Rom. xii. 11, ζέοντες πνεύματι, 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' But this will not suit with that lazy and dull pace which is called temper and moderation in the world.

[4.] Holy singularity; as Noah was an upright man in a corrupt age: Gen. vi. 9, 'Noah walked with God.' And we are bidden 'not to conform ourselves to this world,' Rom. xii. 2. Now, because they would have none to upbraid them in their sins, and to part ways, and the number of the godly is fewer, they count it a factious singularity in them that walk contrary to the course of the world and the stream of common examples.

[5.] Fervour of devotion and earnest conversing with God in humble prayers is called imposture and enthusiasm. The world, who are wholly sunk in flesh and matter, are little acquainted with these elevations and enlargements of the spirit, think all to be imposture and enthusiasm. And though praying by the Spirit be a great privilege,—(Jude 20, 'Praying in the Holy Ghost;' Rom. viii. 26, 'Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities with groanings which cannot be uttered;' Zech. xii. 10, 'I will pour upon you the spirit of grace and of supplication')—yet it is little relished by them; a flat dead way of praying suiteth their gust better. Christ compareth the duties of the gospel, fasting, with prayer in the Spirit, to new wine, which will break old bottles, Mat. ix. 17; but the duties of the Pharisees to old, dead, and insipid wine; there is no life in them.

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[6.] Serious speaking of God and heavenly things is, in the phrase of the world, canting. Indeed, to speak swelling words of vanity, or an unintelligible jargon, betrayeth religion to scorn; but a pure lip and speech seasoned with salt, and that holy things should be spoken of in a holy manner, our Lord requireth.

[7.] Faith of the future eternal state is esteemed a fond credulity by them who affect the vanities of the world, and the honours and pleasures thereof. They are all for sight and present things, and Christianity inviteth us to things spiritual and heavenly. Now, to live upon the hopes of an unseen world, and that to come, they judge it to be but foppery and needless superstition. Thus do poor creatures, drunk with the delusions of the flesh, judge of the holy things of God.

[8.] The humility of Christians, and their pardoning wrongs and forgiving injuries, they count to be simplicity or stupidness, though the law of Christ requireth us to forgive others, as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us.

[9.] Exact walking is scrupulosity and preciseness, and men are more nice than wise; which is a reproach that reflecteth a mighty contempt upon God himself, that when he hath made a holy law for the government of the world, that the obeying of this law should be derided by professed Christians; the scorn must needs fall on him that made the law, and gave us these commands. If he be too precise that imperfectly obeyeth God, what will you say of God himself, who commandeth more than any of us all performeth? Thus the children of God are not only reproached as hypocrites, but derided as fools; and it is counted as a part of wit and breeding to droll at the serious practice of godliness, as if religion were but a foppery.

2. The reasons of this are these:—

[1.] Their natural blindness: 1 Cor. ii. 14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' They are incompetent judges: Prov. xxiv. 7, 'Wisdom is too high for a fool.' Though by nature we have lost our light, yet we have not lost our pride: Prov. xxvi. 16, 'The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.' Though their way in religion be but a sluggish, lazy, and dead course, yet they have a high conceit of it, and censure all that is contrary, or but a degree removed above it. From spiritual blindness it is that carnal men judge unrighteously and perversely of God's servants, and count zeal and forwardness in religious duties to be but folly and madness.

[2.] Antipathy and prejudicate malice. The graceless scoff at the gracious, and the profane at the serious; there is a different course, and that produceth difference of affections: John xv. 19, 'The world will love its own, but because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you:' and they manifest their malice and hatred this way by evil-speaking: 1 Peter iv. 4, 'Speaking evil of you.'

[3.] Want of a closer view. Christians complained in the primitive times that they were condemned unheard, διὰ τὴν φήμην, and διὰ τὸ ὄνομα, without any particular inquiry into their

principles and practices. And Tertullian saith, *nolentes auditis*, &c.—they would not inquire, because they had a mind to hate. A man riding afar off seeing people dancing, would think they were mad, till he draws near and observes the harmonious order. They will not take a nearer view of the regularity of the ways of God, and therefore scoff at them.

[4.] Because you do by your practice condemn that life that they affect: John vii. 7, 'The world hateth me, because I testify that their deeds are evil:' Heb. xi. 7, 'Noah by faith, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world.' Now they would not have their guilt revived; and therefore, since they will not come up to others by a religious imitation, they seek to bring others down to themselves by scoffs, reproaches, and censures.

[5.] They are set awork by Satan, thereby to keep off young beginners, and to discourage and molest the godly themselves; for bitter words pierce deep and enter into the very soul.

Secondly, It is a grievous temptation; it is reckoned in scripture among the persecutions: Gal. iv. 29, 'As he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so is it now.' He meaneth those bitter mockings that Isaac did suffer from Ishmael: Gen. xxi. 9, 'And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.' When the wicked mock at our interest in God, shame our confidence, the church complaineth of it: Ps. cxxiii. 4, 'We are filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud:' the insinuations of those that live in full pomp, over the confidence and hope the saints have in God. So we read, Heb. x. 33, that the servants of God were 'made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions:' again, of 'cruel mockings,' Heb. xi. 36. It is more grievous when they mock and persecute at the same time; there is both pain and shame. The parties mocked were God's saints; the parties mocking were their persecutors and enemies, which sometimes proved to be their own brethren, of the same nation, language, kindred, religion. In short, these mockings issue out of contempt, and tend to the disgrace and dishonour of the party mocked; they make it their sport to abuse them. David saith, 'Reproach hath broken my heart,' Ps. lxix. 20.

Thirdly, This should not move us either to open defection or partial declining, for these reasons:—

1. It is one of the usual evils wherewith the people of God are tempted. Now a Christian should be fortified against obvious and usual evils. Let no man that is truly religious think that he can escape the mockage and contempt of the wicked. Jesus Christ him self 'endured the contradiction of sinners,' Heb. xii. 3; and the rather, that we might not wax weary and faint in our minds. This is a part of his cross, which we must bear after him. The Pharisees derided his ministry: Luke xvi. 14, 'The Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things, and derided him.' They flouted at him when he hung on the cross: Mat. xxvii. 39-44, 'They that passed by him reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him

with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save: if he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him: he trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also which were crucified with him cast the same in his teeth.' So Acts xvii. 32, 'Some mocked, and said, What will this babbler say?' Well, then, since it is a usual evil which God's children have suffered, it should be the less to us. Little can the wicked say if they cannot scoff, and little can we endure if we cannot abide a bad word. There needs no great deal ado to advance a man into the chair of the scorner; if they have wickedness and boldness enough, they may soon let fly.

2. This, as well as other afflictions, are not excepted out of our resignation to God. We must be content to be mocked and scorned, as well as to be persecuted and molested. It is mentioned in the beatitudes, Mat. v. 11, 'Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil falsely against you for my sake.'

3. Railing and calumniating will never prevail with rational and conscientious men to cause them to change their opinions. To leave the truth because others rail at it, is to consult with our affections, not out judgments. Solid reasoning convinceth our judgments, but raillery is to our affections; and a rational conscientious man is governed by an enlightened mind, not perverse and preposterous affections: Eph. v. 17, 'Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' Therefore an honest man will not quit truth because others rail; no, he looketh to his rule and warrant. A man will not be railed out of errors; nay, often they are the more rooted because ill-confuted.

4. It is the duty of God's children to justify wisdom: Mat. xi. 19, 'Wisdom is justified of her children.' What is it to justify wisdom? Justification is a relative word, opposed to crimination, so to justify is the work of an advocate; or to condemnation, so it is the work of a judge. The children of wisdom discharge both parts; they plead for the ways of God, and exalt them: so much as others deny them, they value them, esteem them, hold them for good and right. When they are never so much condemned and despised, the more zealous the saints will be for them: 'I will yet be more vile.'

5. Carnal men at the same time approve what they seem to condemn; they hate and fear strictness: Mark vi. 20, 'Herod feared John, because he was a just man and an holy, and observed him.' They scoff at it with their tongues, but have a fear of it in their consciences; they revile it white they live, but what mind are they of when they come to die? Then all speak well of a holy life, and the strictest obedience to the laws of God: Num. xxiii. 10, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his;' Mat. xxv. 8, 'Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.' Oh, that they had a little of that holiness and strictness which they scoffed at whilst they were pursuing their lusts! How will men desire to die? as carnal and careless sinners, or as mortified saints? Once more, they approve it *in thesi*, and condemn it *in hypothesi*. All the scoffers at godliness with in the pale of the visible church have the same Bible, baptism, creed, pretend to believe in the same God and

Christ, which they own with those whom they oppose. All the difference is, the one are real Christians, the other are nominal; some profess at large, the others practise what they profess; the one have a religion to talk of, the others to live by. Once more, they approve it in the form, but hate it in the power. A picture of Christ that is drawn by a painter they like, and the for bidden image of God made by a carver, they will reverence and honour and be zealous for; but the image of God framed by the Spirit in the hearts of the faithful, and described in the lives of the heavenly and the sanctified, this they scorn and scoff at.

6. Their judgment is perverse, not to be stood upon. They count the children of God foolish and crack-brained. The crimination may be justly retorted; their way is folly and madness, for they go dancing to their destruction. Though there be a God by whom and for whom they were made, and from whom they are fallen, and that they cannot be happy but in returning to him again, yet they carry it so as if there were no misery but in bodily and worldly things, no happiness but in pleasing the senses. The beginning, progress, and end of their course is from themselves, in themselves, and to themselves. They pour out their hearts to inconsiderable toys and trifles, and will neither admit information of their error, nor reformation of their practice till death destroy them. They neglect their main business, and leave it undone, and run up and down, they know not why, like children that follow a bubble blown out of a shell of soap, till it break and dissolve. Now should those that are flying from wrath to come, and seeking after God and their happiness, be discouraged because these mad and merry worldlings scoff at them for their diligent seriousness? Surely we should deride their derisions and contemn their contempt, who despise God and Christ and their salvation. Should a wise man be troubled because madmen rail at him? If they ‘glory in their shame,’ Phil. iii. 19, we must not be ashamed of our glory, nor ashamed to be found praying rather than sinning. If they think you fools for preferring heaven before inconsiderable vanities, remember they can no more judge of these things than a blind man of colours.

7. If some dishonour, others will honour us, who are better able to judge: Ps. xv. 4, ‘In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.’ Some have as low an opinion of the world as the carnal world hath of the certainty of God’s word. They who labour to bring piety and godliness into a creditable esteem and reputation will pay a hearty honour and respect to every good and godly man: 2 Cor. vi. 8, 9, ‘By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report, as deceivers, yet true; as unknown, yet well known; as dying, but behold we live; as chastened and not killed;’ contumeliously used by some, and reverently by others; vilified and contemned, counted deceivers by some, yet owned by others as faithful dispensers of the truth of God; not esteemed and looked on by some, by others owned and valued: thus God dispenseth the lot of his servants.

8. A Christian should be satisfied in the approbation of God, and the honour he puts upon him: John v. 44, ‘How can ye believe, that receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?’ If God hath taken him into his family, and hath put his image upon him,

and admitted him into present communion with him, and giveth him the testimony of his Spirit to assure him of his adoption here, and will hereafter receive him into eternal glory, this is enough, and more than enough, to counterbalance all the scorn of the world and the disgrace they would put upon us. If God approve us, should we be dejected at the scorn of a fool? Is the approbation of the eternal God so small in our eyes, that everything can weigh it down, and cast the balance with us? Alas! their scorning and dishonouring is nothing to the honour which God puts upon us.

9. There is a time when the promised crown shall be set upon our heads, and who will be ashamed then—the scoffer or the serious worshipper of Christ? God is resolved to honour Christ's faithful servants: John xii. 26, 'He that honoureth me, him shall my Father honour.' He will honour us at death, that is our private entrance into heaven; but he will much more honour us publicly, at the day of judgment, when we shall be owned: Rev. iii. 5, 'I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels:' and Christ shall be admired for the glory he puts upon a poor worm: 2 Thes. i. 10, 'When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.' The wicked shall be reckoned with, called to an account by Christ: Jude, 14, 15, 'The Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodlily committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him:' yea, judged by the saints: 1 Cor. vi. 2, 'Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?' Ps. xlix. 14, 'The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning:' that is, in the morning of the resurrection the saints shall be assumed by God to assist in judicature, and shall arise in a glorious manner, when the earth shall give up her dead. If this be not enough for us to counterbalance the scorn of the world, we are not Christians.

Use. To persuade us to hold on our course, notwithstanding all the scorns and reproaches which are cast upon the despised ways of God. Now, to this end I shall give you some directions.

1. 'Be sure that you are in God's way, and that you have his law to justify your practice, and that you do not make his religion ridiculous by putting his glorious name upon any foolish fancies of your own. A man that differs from the rest of Christians had need of a very clear light, that he may honour so much of Christianity as is owned, and may be able to vindicate his own particular way wherein he is engaged. The world is loath to own anything of God, and needless dissents justify their prejudice. I know a Christian is not infallible; besides his general godly course, he may have his particular slips and errors; yet because the world is apt to take prejudice, we should not but upon the constraining evidence of conscience, enter upon any ways of dissent or contest, lest we justify their general hatred of godliness by our particular error.

2. Take up the ways of God without a bias, and look straight for ward in a course of godliness: Prov. iv. 25, 'Let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyelids straight before thee:' that is, look not asquint upon any secular encouragements, but have thine eye to the end of the journey; make God as thy witness, so thy master and judge.

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3. Take heed of the first declinings. God's saints may decline some what in an hour of temptation, and yet be sincere in the main. Now evil is best stopped in the beginning: Heb. xii. 3, 'Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners, lest ye be weary and faint iii your minds.' Weariness is a lesser, and fainting a higher degree of deficiency. I am weary before I faint, before the vital power retireth, and leaveth the outward part senseless.

4. Since the proud scoff, encounter pride with humility. Mocking is far more grievous to the proud, who stand upon their honour, than to the lowly and humble. Therefore be not too desirous of the applause of men, especially of the blind and ungodly world; make no great matter of their contempt, and scorn, or slander.

SERMON LVIII.

I have remembered thy judgments of old, Lord; and have comforted myself.—Ver. 52.

THE man of God had complained in the former verse that the proud had him greatly in derision. His help against that temptation is recorded in this verse; where observe—

1. David's practice, *I have remembered thy judgments of old*.

2. The effect of that meditation, *and have comforted myself*.

The explication will be by answering two questions:—

1. What is meant by *mishphatim*, *judgments*? The word is used in scripture either for laws enacted, or judgments executed according to those laws. The one may be called 'the judgments of his mouth,' as Ps. cv. 5, 'Remember the marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth:' the other, the judgments of his hand. As both will bear the name of judgments, so both may be said to be 'of old.' His decrees and statutes, which have an eternal equity in them, and were graven upon the heart of man in innocency, may well be said to be 'of old;' and because from the beginning of the world God hath been punishing the wicked, and delivering the godly in due time, his judiciary dispensations may be said to be so also. The matter is not much whether we interpret it of either his statutes or decrees, for they both contain matter of comfort, and we may see the ruin of the wicked in the word if we see it not in providence. Yet I rather interpret it of those righteous acts recorded in scripture, which God as a just judge hath executed in all ages, according to the promises and threatenings annexed to his laws. Only in that sense I must note to you, judgments imply his mercies in the deliverance of his righteous servants, as well as his punishments on the wicked; the seasonable interpositions of his relief for the one in their

greatest distresses, as well as his just vengeance on the other, not withstanding their highest prosperities.

2. What is meant by comfort? Comfort is the strengthening the heart against evil, when either—(1.) Faith is confirmed; (2.) Love to God increased; (3.) Hope made more lively.

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Now these providences of God, suited to his word, comforted David, had more power and force to confirm and increase these graces, than all their theistical scoffs to shake them; for he concluded from these in stances, that though the wicked flourish they shall perish, and though the godly be afflicted they shall be rewarded; and so his faith, and hope, and love to God, and adherence to his ways was much encouraged. Comfort is sometimes spoken of in scripture as an impression of the comforting Spirit, sometimes as a result from an act of our meditation; as here, 'I comforted myself.' These things are not contrary but subordinate. It is our duty to meditate on God's word and providence, and God blesseth it by the influence of his grace; and the Spirit may be said to comfort us, and we also may be said to comfort ourselves.

Doct. That the remembrance of God's former dealings with his people, and their enemies in all ages, is a great relief in distress.

The man of God is here represented as lying under the scorns and oppressions of the wicked. What did he do to relieve himself? 'I remembered thy judgments of old, and have comforted myself.' So elsewhere, this was his practice: Ps. lxxvii. 5, 'I considered the days of old, the years of ancient times:' again in the 11th and 12th verses, 'I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy works of old: I will meditate also of all thy works, and talk of thy doings:' yet again, Ps. cxliii. 5, 'I remember the days of old, I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the works of thy hands.' Thus did David often consider with what equity and righteousness, with what power and goodness, God carried on the work of his providence toward his people of old. The like he presseth on others; Ps. cv. 5, 'Remember the marvellous works which he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth.' Surely it is our duty, and it will be our comfort and relief.

I shall despatch the point in these considerations:—

1. That there is a righteous God who governeth the world. All things are not hurled up and down by chance, as if the benefit we receive were only a good hit, and the misery a mere misfortune. No; all things are ordered by a powerful, wise, and just God; his word doth not only discover this to us, but his works: Ps. lviii. 11, 'So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth the earth;' that is, many times there are such providences that all that behold them shall see, and say that godliness and holiness are matters of advantage and benefit in this world, abstracted from the rewards to come, and so an infallible evidence that the world is not governed by chance, but administered by an almighty, all-wise, and most just providence. So elsewhere: Ps. ix. 16, 'The Lord is known by the judgments which he executeth;' by some eminent

instances God showeth himself to be the judge of the world, and keepeth a petty sessions before the day of general assizes. Upon this account the saints beg the Lord to take off the veil from his providence, and to appear in protecting and delivering his children, and punishing their adversaries: Ps. xciv. 1, 2, ‘O thou judge of the earth, show thyself.’ He is the supreme governor of the world, to whom it belongeth to do right.

2. This righteous God hath made a law according to which he will govern, and established it as the rule of commerce between him and his creatures. The precept is the rule of our duty, the sanction is the rule of his proceedings; so that by this law we know what we must do, and what we may expect from him. Man is not made to be law less and ungoverned, but hath a conscience of good and evil, for without the knowledge of God’s will we cannot obey him; nor can we know his will, unless it be some way or other revealed. No man in his wits can expect that God should speak to us immediately and by oracle; we cannot endure his voice, nor can we see him and live. Therefore he revealed his mind by the light of nature and by scripture, which giveth us a clearer and more perfect knowledge of his will. Certainly those that live under that dispensation must expect that God will deal with them according to the tenor of it. The apostle telleth us, Rom. ii. 12, ‘As many as have sinned without the law, shall perish without the law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.’ God hath been explicit and clear with them, to tell them what they should do and what they should expect.

3. In the course of his dispensations he hath showed from the beginning of the world unto this day that he is not unmindful of this law, that the observance of this rule bringeth suitable blessings, and the violation of it the threatened judgments: Rom. i. 18, ‘The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.’ The impious and the unrighteous are breakers of either table, and the wrath of God is denounced and executed upon both, if there be any notorious violation of either; for in the day of God’s patience he is not quick and severe upon the world: Heb. ii. 2, ‘Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward:’ thereby his word is owned. Execution, we say, is the life of the law; it is but words without it, and can neither be a ground of sufficient hope in the promises, nor fear in the comminations. When punishments are inflicted it striketh a greater terror: when the offenders are punished, the observers rewarded, then it is a sure rule of commerce between us and God.

4. That the remembrance of the most illustrious examples of his justice, power, and goodness, should comfort us, though we do not perfectly feel the effects of his righteous government.

[1.] I will prove we are apt to suspect God’s righteous administration when we see not the effects of it. When the godly are oppressed with divers calamities, and the wicked live a life of pomp and ease, flourishing in prosperity and power, according to their own heart’s desire, they are apt to think that God taketh no care of worldly affairs, or were indifferent to good and evil, as those profane atheists, Mal. ii. 17, ‘Every one that doth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in him, or where is the God of judgment?’ as if God took pleasure in wicked men, and

were no impartial judge, or had no providence at all, or hand in the government of the world. Temptations to atheism begin ordinarily at the matter of God's providence. First men carve out a providence of their own, that God loveth none but whom he dealeth kindly with in the matters of the world; and if his dispensations be cross to their apprehensions, then his providence is not just. Nay, the people of God themselves are so offended that they break out into such words as these, Ps. lxxiii. 11-13, 'How doth God know? is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed ray heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.' They dispute within themselves, Doth God indeed so discern and take notice of all this? How cometh it about that he permitteth them? for it is visible that the wicked enjoy the greatest tranquillity and prosperity, and have the wealth and greatness of the world heaped upon them: then what reward for purity of hearts or hands, or the strict exercise of godliness? Till God doth arise, and apply himself to vindicate his law, these are the thoughts and workings of men's hearts; at least, it is a great vexation and trouble even to the godly, and doth tempt them to such imaginations and surmises of God.

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[2.] I shall prove that the remembrance of his judgments of old is one means to confirm the heart, for so we are enabled to tarry till God's judgments be brought to the effect. We see only the beginning, and so, like hasty spectators, will not tarry till the last act, when all errors shall be redressed. We shall make quite another judgment of providence when we see it altogether, and do not judge of it by parts. Surely then they shall see 'there is a reward for the righteous; there is a God that judgeth the earth.' At first none seem so much to lose their labour, and to be disregarded by God as the righteous, or to be more hardly dealt withal; but let us not be too hasty in judging God's work, while it is a-doing, but tarry to the end of things. In the word of God we have not only promises which are more firm than heaven and earth, but instances and examples of the afflictions of the righteous and their deliverance; therefore let us but suspend our censure till God hath put his last hand unto the work, and then you will see that if his people seem to be forsaken for a while, it is that they may be received for ever. All is wont to end well with the children of God, let God alone with his own methods; after a walk in the wilderness, he will bring his people into a land of rest.

But more particularly why his judgments of old are a comfort and relief to us.

1. It is some relief to the soul to translate the thoughts from the present scene of things, and to consider former times. One cause of men's discomfort is to look only to the present, and so they are over whelmed; but when we look back, we shall find that others have been afflicted before us, it is no strange thing, and others delivered before us upon their dependence on God, and adherence to him. You were not the first afflicted servants of God, nor are likely to be the last. Others have been in the like case, and after a while delivered and rescued out of their trouble: Ps. xxii. 4, 5, 'Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them; they cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.' In looking back we see two

things—the carriage of the godly, and their success, or the salvation of God: ‘The patience of Job and the end of the Lord,’ James v. 11. They trusted God, and trusted him patiently and constantly in all their troubles. At last this trust was not in vain; they were delivered, and not confounded; depending on God for rescue and deliverance, they never failed to receive it. Now, in looking back we look forward, and in their deliverance we see our own; at least, you are fortified against the present temptation, whilst you see his people in all ages have their difficulties and conflicts, and also their deliverances; so that you will not miscarry, nor be over-tempted by the present prosperity of the wicked: Ps. lxxiii. 17, ‘I went into the sanctuary, and there understood I their end:’ that is, entering into a sober consideration of God’s counsels and providences, we may easily discern what is the ordinary conclusion of such men’s felicities at last; they pay full dear for their perishing pleasures.

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2. Because these are instances of God’s righteous government, and instances do both enliven and confirm all matters of faith. Here you see his justice. God hath ever been depressing the proud and exalting the humble, gracious to his servants, terrible to the wicked. These examples also of rescuing others who have been in like condition before us show us what the wisdom and omnipotency of God can do in performing promises. When the performance of them seemeth hopeless, and all lost and gone, then they are infallible evidences of his tenderness, care, and fidelity towards all that depend upon him. Now, though we have nothing of our own experience to support us, yet the remembrance of what hath been done for others, the experiences of the saints in scripture, are set down for our learning, for the support of our faith and hope. They trusted in God, and found him a ready help; why may not we? God is the same that he was in former times, and carrieth himself in the same ways of providence to righteous and unrighteous as heretofore; still promises are fulfilled, and threatenings are executed. They on whose behalf God showed himself so just, powerful, wise, good, and tender, had not a better God than we have, nor a more worthy Redeemer, nor a surer covenant. If they had a stronger faith, it is our own fault, and we should labour to increase it: the saints are as dear to God as ever. And as to the wicked, they that inherit others’ sins shall inherit others’ judgments. It is true, we live not in the age of wonders; but God’s ordinary providence is enough for our turn, and those very wonders show that he hath power and love enough to protect and deliver us. Well, then, these are instances of his righteous government, and instances which concern us, which is my second reason.

3. By these judgments of old you see the exact correspondency between his word and works. Where his voice is heard, but his hand not seen, his word is coldly entertained; but by his providence he establisheth the authority of his law. The word spoken by angels was λόγος βέβαιος, ‘a steadfast word,’ Heb. ii. 2. A word may be said to be steadfast either in respect of the unalterable will of the lawgiver, or in respect of execution, or with respect to the party to whom it is given, who firmly and certainly believeth it. The one maketh way for the other. God is resolved to govern the world by this rule, therefore he doth authorise it, own it by the dispensations of his providence; accordingly the world learneth to reverence it: Hosea vii. 12, ‘I will chastise them, as their congregation hath

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heard.' God's word against sin and sinners will at last take effect, and end in sad chastisements; and they that would not believe their danger are made to feel it. Now his promises will have their effect as well as his threatenings: Micah ii. 7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' The word of God doth not only speak good, but do good. The word's saying of good, is indeed doing of good. The performance is so certain, that when it is said it may be accounted done. We are apt to despise the word of God as an empty sound. No; it produceth notable effects in the world. The sentences that are there, whether of mercy or judgment, are decrees given forth by the great judge of the world; whereupon execution is to follow, as is foretold. Now, when we see it done, and can compare the Lord's word and work together, it is a mighty support to our faith, whether it be in our or in former ages. For you see the word is not a vain scarecrow in its threatenings, nor do we build castles in the air, when we do depend upon its promises: the judgments of his mouth will be the judgments of his hand, and providence is a real comment upon and proof of the truth of his word.

4. God's judgments of old, or his wonderful works, were never in tended only for the benefit of that age in which they were done, but the benefit of all those who should hear of them by any credible means whatsoever. Surely God never intended they should be buried in dark oblivion, but that after-ages may be the better for the remembrance of them. Witness these scriptures: Ps. cxlv. 4, 'One generation shall praise thy works unto another, and remember thy mighty acts;' Joel i. 3, 'Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.' So Ps. lxxviii. 3-7, 'That which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us, we will not hide them from their children; showing the generations to come the praises of the Lord, and his wonderful works which he hath done: for he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children, that the generation to come might know them, even the children to come, which should be born; who should arise and declare to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of the Lord, but keep his commandments, and might not be as their fathers,' &c. From all which places and many more I observe—

[1.] That we should tell generations to come what we have found of God in our time, and that we should use all ways and means to transmit the knowledge of God's notable and wondrous providences for his people to posterity.

[2.] That this report of God's former works is a special means of edification, for therefore God would have them recorded and told for the special benefit of the ages following.

[3.] And more particularly that this is a great means and help of faith. For in one of the places it is said 'that they may set their faith and hope in God:' and from all we may conclude that, by remembering God's judgments of old, we may be much comforted; as in remembering God's works when the church was first reformed in Luther's time, the delivering of England from the Spanish invasion, gunpowder-treason, &c., for the confirming our faith and confidence m God. All God's

judgments that were done in the days of our forefathers, and in all generations, if they come to our knowledge by a true report, or record, are of use to warn us and comfort us; yea, the bringing Israel out of Egypt and Babylon, or any notable work done since the beginning of the world till now.

Use. The use is to press us to take this course as one remedy to comfort us in our distresses. In distresses of conscience the blood of Christ is the only cure; but in temptations arising from the scorn and insultation of enemies, remember what God hath done for his people of old, and let his providence support our faith: Ps. xxiii. 4, 'Thy rod and thy staff comfort me.' *Pedum pastorale*—for the protection and guiding of the sheep and driving away the wolf, the rod and staff are the instruments of the shepherd. More particularly consider—

1. What is to be observed and remembered. All the eminent passages of God's providence, when acts of power have been seasonably interposed for the rescue of his people, judgments of all kind, public, universal, private and personal, our own experiences: 2 Cor. i. 10, 'Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' The experiences of others, not in one, but in every age; for in every place and age God delighteth to leave a monument of his righteousness, and all is for the consolation and instruction of the church. Judgments in our time, judgments in former times, blow off the dust from old mercies, and the inscription of them will be a kind of prophecy to your faith. But especially cast your eye often upon the Lord's manner of dealing with his saints in scripture, their consolations and deliverances received after trouble; partly because the word of God is a rich storehouse of these instances and examples, and partly because of the infallibility of the record, where things are delivered to us with so much simplicity and truth; partly also because of the manner and ends in which and for which they are recorded. But if I would have recourse to scripture, should I not rather make use of the promises? *Ans*. We must not set one part of scripture against another; but examples do mightily help us to believe promises, as they are a pledge of the justice, faithfulness, care and love of God towards his people; and—I know not by what secret force and influence—invite us to hope for what God hath done for others of his servants.

2. How they must be considered. Seriously, as everything that cometh from God. A slight consideration will not draw forth the profitable use of them. When they are looked on cursorily, or lightly passed by, the impression of God upon his works cannot be discerned, therefore they must be well considered, with all their circumstances: Ps. cxliii. 2, David sufficed not to say, 'I remember thy works of old,' but 'I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the works of thy hands;' Ps. lxxvii. 12, 'I remember thy works of old; I will meditate also of all thy works.' And surely this should be a delightful exercise to the children of God, as it is for the son of a noble and princely father to read the chronicles where his father's acts are recorded, or the famous achievements of his ancestors: Ps. cxi. 2, 'The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.' Some works of God have a large impression of his power and goodness, and they are made to be

remembered, as it after followeth there. He is ready to do the like works when his church standeth in need thereof. Now they must be sought out, for there is more hid treasure and excellency in them than doth at first appear. He that would reap the use and benefit of them should take pleasure to search out matter of praise for God and trust for himself. Of all other study, this is the most worthy exercise and employment of godly men, to study and find out the works of God in all their purposes and designs; there is more pleasure in such meditations than in all other the most sensual divertisements.

3. The end is to be strengthened and confirmed in the way of our duty, in dependence upon God, and adherence to him; or that faith may be strengthened in a day of affliction, and our hearts encouraged in cleaving to the ways of God.

[1.] Dependence upon God, which implieth a committing ourselves to his power, a submitting ourselves to his will, and a waiting his leisure; all these are in trust, and all these are encouraged by remembering his judgments of old.

(1.) Committing ourselves to his power is trust and dependence: ‘Our God is able to deliver us ‘from the fiery furnace, Dan. iii. 17; Rom. iv. 21, ‘Being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.’ Now this is abundantly seen in his judgments of old: Isa. li. 9, ‘Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art not thou he which hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon; which hast dried the sea, and the waters of the great deep?’ If God will but take to himself his great power, and bestir himself as in ancient days, what should a believer fear?

(2.) Submitting ourselves to God’s will is a great act of dependence, submitting before the event. Now, how may a believer acquiesce in God’s providence, and enjoy a quiet repose of heart? He knoweth not what God will do with him, but this he knoweth, he hath to do with a good God, who is not wont to forsake those that depend upon him; he hath wisdom and goodness enough to deliver us, or to make our troubles profitable to us. Now his judgments of old do much help to breed this composedness of mind: Ps. ix. 10, ‘They that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.’ They that know anything of God’s wont, and have learned from others, or experimented themselves, or by searching into the records of time have found with what wisdom and power, justice and mercy, God governeth the world, will be firmly grounded in their trust and reliance on these, without applying themselves to any of the sinful aids or policies of the world for succour, or troubling themselves about success; for God never forsook any godly man in his distress, that by prayer and faith made his humble and constant applications to him.

(3.) If you take in the third thing, tarrying or waiting God’s leisure; for ‘he that believeth will not make haste,’ Isa. xxvi. 16. God will tarry to try his people, to observe his enemies, till their sins are full, and tarry to bring about his -providences in the best time: 1 Peter v. 6, ‘Humble yourselves,

therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you,' *i.e*. deliver you, 'in due time.' It may be he will not at all afford temporal deliverance, but will refer it to the time when he will 'judge the world in righteousness,' Acts xvii. 31. Now, what will relieve the soul, engage it to wait? His judgments of old; at the long run the good cause hath prevailed, the suppressed truth hath got up, the buried Christ hath risen again, and after labours and patience the fruit sown hath been reaped; therefore in due time he will look upon our afflictions; in the sanctuary we understand the end of things: the beginnings are troublesome, but the end is peace.

[2.] Adherence to God; this followeth necessarily from the former, for dependence begets observance. Till a man trusts God he can never be true to him; for the 'evil heart of unbelief' will 'draw us from the living God,' Heb. iii. 12; but if we can depend upon him, temptations have lost their force. The great cause of all defection is the desire of some present sensible benefit, and we cannot tarry God's leisure, nor wait for his help in the way of our duty. Now, if God's people of old have trusted, and were never confounded, it is a great engagement in the way of his judgments to wait for him without miscarrying.

A case of conscience may be propounded: How could David be comforted by God's judgments, for it seemeth a barbarous thing to delight in the destruction of any? It is said, Prov. xvii. 5, 'He that is glad of calamities shall not be unpunished.'

Ans. 1. It must be remembered that judgment implies both parts of God's righteous dispensation—the deliverance of the godly and the punishment of the wicked. Now, in the first sense, there is no ground of scruple; for it is said, Ps. xciv. 15, 'Judgment shall return to righteousness:' the sufferings of good men shall be turned into the greatest advantage; as the context showeth that God will not cast off his people, but judgment shall return unto righteousness.

Ans. 2. Judgment, as it signifieth punishment of the wicked, may jet be a comfort, not as it importeth the calamity of any, but either—

1. When the wicked are punished, the snare and allurement to sin is taken away, which is the hope of impunity; for by their punishments we see it is dangerous to sin against God: Isa. xxvi. 9, 'When thy judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness,' the snare is removed from many a soul.

2. Their derision and mockage of godliness ceaseth; they do no longer vex and pierce the souls of the godly, saying, 'Aha! aha!' Ps. xl. 15, 'It is as a wound to their heart when they say, Where is your God,' Ps. xlii. 10.

3. The impediments and hindrances of worshipping and serving God are taken away: when the nettles are rooted up the corn hath more room to grow.

4. Opportunity of molesting God's servants is taken away, and afflicting the church by their oppressions, and so way is made for the enlarging of Christ's kingdom.

5. As God's justice is manifested: Prov. xi. 10, 'When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth; but when the wicked perish, there is shouting;' Ps. lii. 6, 'The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him: Lo! this is the man that made not God his portion:' Rev. xviii. 20, 'Rejoice over Babylon, ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her.' When the word of God is fulfilled, surely then we may rejoice that his justice and truth are cleared.

SERMON LIX.

Horror hath taken hold on me, because of the wicked which forsake thy law.—Ver. 53.

THE man of God in the former verse had showed what comfort he took in remembering God's judgments of old, meaning thereby his righteous dispensations in delivering the godly, and punishing the wicked. He now showeth that, seeing God's horrible judgments on the wicked, he was seized and stricken with a very great fear.

In the words observe—

1. A great passion described.

2. The cause of it assigned.

1. A great passion described, *horror hath taken hold on me*. The word for horror signifieth also a tempest or storm. Translations vary; some read it, as Junius, a storm overtaking me; Ainsworth, a burning horror hath seized me, and expoundeth it a storm of terror and dismay; the Septuagint, ἀθυμία κατέσχε με, faintness and dejection of mind hath possessed me; our old translation, I am horribly afraid. All translations, as well as the original word, imply a great trouble of mind, and a vehement commotion like a storm. It was matter of disquiet and trembling to David.

2. What is the matter? The reason is given in the latter clause, *because of the wicked which forsake thy law*. Now this reason may be supposed to be—

[1.] Either because of the storm of trouble raised by them, or persecution from them; and so it would note the outrageousness of those who have cast off the yoke, all fear of God, and respect to his law; and so also the imbecility and weakness of the saints, who are not able to stand against violent evils and assaults of temptation. But this is not so consistent with David's constancy and comfort, asserted in the former verses.

[2.] Because of the detriment and loss which might accrue to the public; they bring on common judgments and calamities. It is a Jewish proverb that two dry sticks will set a green one afire: 'One sinner destroyeth much good,' Eccles. ix. 18, much more mercy.[1] Now the godly, which believe God's 'word, are troubled when they see wickedness increaseth; they know this will turn to loss and ruin in the issue; therefore it causeth a grievous horror and indignation to seize upon them, for they have a tender and public spirit.

[3.] Besides the common calamities which they might bring upon others, the sore punishment which they would bring upon themselves was a horror to him, which showeth a charitable affection to enemies. The punishment, which had not as yet seized upon them, nor did they think of it, yet being prepared for their wickedness by the justice of God, was a grief and trouble to David, as it is to all good men, to see the wicked run on to their own destruction and condemnation. These two last senses I prefer.

Doct. It argueth a good spirit to be grieved to see God's laws broken, and to be stricken with fear because of those judgments which come from God by reason of the wickedness of the wicked. The reasons are:—

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First, Here is matter of great commotion of spirit to any attentive and serious beholder; for the cause assigned in the text is, 'because they forsake thy law.' There are two things in the law—the precept and the sanction, by penalties and rewards. Now, they that forsake the law violate the precept and slight the sanction; and so two things grieve the godly—their sin and their punishment, how grievously they sin, and what grievous punishments they may expect!

1. That the law is violated, that they should forsake God, and all thoughts of obedience to him, and so make light of his law. 'Sin is ἀνομία, 1 John iii. 4, the transgression of the law;' a contempt of God's authority. If we consider the intrinsic evil of sin, we shall see that it is not a small thing, but a horrible evil in itself; a thing not to be laughed at, but feared, whether our own or others.

[1.] There is folly in it, as it is a deviation from the best rule which the divine wisdom hath set unto us. If we should look upon the law of God as a bare direction or counsel given us by one that is wiser than we, it is a contempt of the wisdom of God, as if he knew not how to govern the world, and what is good and meet for man, so much as he himself; and so a poor worm is exalted above God: Micah vi. 8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good.' Now shall we slight his direction, and in effect say our own way is better? Reason requireth that they who cannot choose for themselves should obey their guides, and since they are not wise for themselves, content themselves with the wisdom of others who see farther than they do, as Elymas the sorcerer, when he was struck blind, 'sought about for somebody to lead him by the hand,' Acts xiii. 11. Can a blind man feel out his

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[1] Qu. 'many'?—ED.

way better than another who hath eyes to choose it for him? God is wiser than we, and all who would not contemn their creator should think so. He hath reduced the sum of our duty into a holy law; now for us after all this to run of our heads, and to consult with our foolish lusts and the suggestions of the devil, who is our worst enemy, is extreme folly and madness, and so doth every one who breaketh the laws of God.

[2.] Laws are not only to direct, but have a binding power and force from the authority of the lawgiver. God doth not only give us counsel as a friend, but commandeth us as a sovereign; and so the second notion whereby the evil of sin is set forth, is that of disobedience and rebellion; and so it is a great injury done to God, because it is a depreciation and contempt of his authority. As Pharaoh said, Exod. v. 2, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?' or those rebels, Ps. xii, 4, 'Our tongues are our own; who is Lord over us?' We will speak and think and do what we please, and own no law but our own lusts. Now, though sinners do not say so in so many direct and formal words, yet this is the interpretation of their sinful actions. Whenever they sin, they despise the law which forbiddeth that sin, and so by consequence the authority of him that made it: 2 Sam. xii. 9, 10, 'Wherefore hast thou sinned in despising the commandment?' Tush! I will do it; it is no matter for the law of God that standeth in the way, is the language of the corrupt and obstinate heart. Now no man can endure to have his will crossed by an inferior, and will God take it at their hands? And therefore the children of God, who have a great reverence of God's authority, when they see it so openly violated and contemned, are filled with horror. Will not God be tender of his power and sovereignty? will he see his authority so lightly esteemed, and take no notice of it?

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[3.] It is shameful ingratitude. Man is God's beneficiary, from whom he hath received life and being, and all things, and therefore is bound to love him and serve him according to his declared will. We continually depend upon him every moment: 'In him we live, and move, and have our being,' Acts xvii. 28; and surely dependence should beget observance, and therefore men should be loath to break with God, or careful to reconcile themselves to him on whom they depend every moment: Acts xii. 20, 'Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon; but they came with one accord to him, and having made Blastus, the king's chamberlain, their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.' Therefore it is extreme unthankfulness, stupidity, and brutishness for them to carry themselves so unthankfully towards God, who giveth them life and being, and all things. The brutes themselves, who have no capacity to know God as the first cause of all being, yet take notice of the next hand from whence they receive their supplies: Isa. i. 3, 'The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib;' and in their kind express their gratitude to such as feed them, and make much of them; but wicked men take no notice of the God who hath made them, and kept them at the expense and care of his providence, and hath been beneficial to them all their days; but as they slight their lawgiver, so they requite their great benefactor with unkindness and provocation.

[4.] It is a disowning of his propriety in them, as if they were not his own, and God had not power to do with his own as he pleaseth. The creature is absolutely at God's dispose, not only as he hath a jurisdiction over us as our lawgiver and king over his subjects, but as a proprietary and owner over his goods. A prince hath a more absolute power over his lands and goods than over his subjects. God is not only a ruler but an owner, as he made us out of nothing, and bought us when worse than nothing, and still keepeth us from returning into our original nothing; and shall those who are absolutely his own with draw themselves from him, and live according to their own will, and speak and do what they list? What is this but a plain denial of God's propriety and lordship over us? as those, Ps. xii. 4, 'Who have said, With our tongues will we prevail, our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?' Surely it should strike us with horror to think that any creatures should thus take upon them. Sin robbeth God of his propriety in the creatures. If we consider his natural right, sin is such an injury and wrong to God as theft and robbery. If we consider our own covenant, as we voluntarily acknowledge God's propriety in us, so it is adultery, breach of marriage vow; and with respect to the devoting and consecrating ourselves to him, so it is sacrilege.

[5.] It is a contempt of God's glorious majesty. What else shall we make of a plain contest with him, or a flat contradiction of his holy will? For whilst we make our depraved will the rule and guide of our actions against his holy will, we plainly contend with him whose will shall stand, his or ours, and so jostle him out of the throne, and pluck the crown off his head and the sceptre out of his hands, and usurp his authority; and so slight the eternal power of this glorious king, as if he were not able to avenge the wrong done to his majesty, and we could make good our party against him: 1 Cor. x. 22, 'Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?' Isa. xlv. 9, 'Woe to him that striveth with his Maker; let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth.' Surely they that strive with their Maker will find God too hard for them. Now all these and many more considerations should make a serious Christian sensible, when he considereth how God is dishonoured in the world.

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2. Their punishment. This relateth to the sanction by penalties and rewards. They that forsake the law have quite divested themselves of all hope, and cast off all dread of him. The law offereth death or life to the transgressors and observers of it: Deut. xxx. 15, 'Behold, I have set before you good and life, death and evil.' Now this is as little believed as the precept is obeyed; and thence cometh all their boldness in sinning and coldness in duty.

[1.] God allureth us to obedience by promises of this world and the next, which, if they were believed, men would be more forward and ready to comply with his will. As to the promises of the next world, lie hath told us of eternal life. Surely God meaneth as he speaketh in his word, he will make good his word to the obedient; but the sinner thinketh not so, and therefore is loath to undergo the difficulties of obedience, because he hath so little sense and certainty of fulfil ling the promise. The apostle telleth us, Heb. xi. 6, 'That without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently serve him;'

implying that if the fundamental truths of God's being and bounty were believed, we could not be so careless as we are, not so barren and unfruitful as we are; but unbelief lieth at the bottom of all our carelessness: 1 Cor. xv. 58, 'Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.' They that know what a reward is prepared for the righteous, cannot but be serious and diligent themselves, and pity others, and be troubled at their neglect. Oh! what a good God they deprive themselves of, and throw away their souls for a trifle! But because the Lord knoweth how apt we are to be led by things present to sense, that work strongly upon our apprehensions; and that things absent and future lie in another world, and wanting the help of sense to convey them to our minds, make little impression upon our hearts; therefore God draws us to our duty by present benefits. Even carnal nature is apt to be pleased with these kinds of mercies, protection, provision, and worldly comforts: Ps. cxix. 56, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts:' Mat vi. 33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and all these thing shall be added to you;' 1 Tim. iv. 8, 'Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.' But alas! the naughty heart cannot depend on God for the effects of his common goodness. Men distrust providence, and therefore take their own course, which is a grief and trouble to a gracious heart, to see they cannot depend on God for things of a present accomplishment.

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[2.] The other part of the sanction is his threatenings and punishments. Now in what a direful condition are all the deserters of God's law! Besides the loss of heaven, there is eternal fire, which is the portion of the wicked: Ps. xi. 6, 'Upon the wicked he will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup.' They may flourish for a time, yet at length sudden, terrible, and irremediable destruction shall be the portion of their cup. God's judgments are terrible and unavoidable, both here and hereafter: Eph. v. 6, 'For these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience;' Rom. ii. 9, 'Tribulation, wrath, and anguish upon the soul of man that doth evil.' Alas! these things are slighted by wicked men, or else they would not venture as they do; you cannot drive a dull ass into the fire that is kindled before him: Prov. i. 17, 'In vain is the snare laid in the sight of any bird;' and would a reasonable creature wilfully run into such a danger if he were sensible of it, and venture upon so dreadful threatenings if he did believe them? No; they think it is but a vain scarecrow, a deceitful terror, or a false flash of fire, and therefore embolden themselves in their rebellion. But God's people, that know the certainty of these things, they cannot but conceive a great horror at it when they think of the end of these men, their judgments in this world, but especially their eternal condemnation in the world to come. Well, then, forsaking the law, despising the precept, and slighting the sanction, should be a matter of great horror to a tender and gracious spirit.

Secondly, It argueth that they have a due sense of things, though others have not.

1. They have a due sense of the evil of sin: Prov. xiv. 9, 'Fools make a mock of sin;' they sport at it, and jest at it, and count it nothing; but gracious and tender hearts have other apprehensions;

they know that this is a violation of the holy and righteous and good law of God, and that it will be bitter in the issue, and that they which had pleasure in unrighteousness shall be damned. They look upon it with sad hearts, though it be committed by others, that the wicked go dancing to hell, and are angry with those who mourn for them, and dislike that vain course which they affect.

2. They have a due sense of the wrath of God. The prophet that threatened it saith, that 'rottenness entered into his bones, and his bowels quivered,' Hab. iii. 16. A lion trembleth to see a dog beaten before him. It is a trouble to the godly to think of the horrible punishments of the wicked, which they dread not, nor dream of; but the saints have a reverence for their Father's anger. Search the scriptures, and you shall find that the godly are more troubled at God's judgments than the wicked themselves who are to feel them: Dan. iv. 19, 'Daniel was astonished for an hour, and his thoughts troubled him,' when he was to reveal God's judgments against Nebuchadnezzar. So the prophet, Jer. iv. 19, 'My bowels, my bowels; I am pained at the very heart;' ver. 22, 'But my people are foolish, they are sottish children;' they, that brought the evil upon themselves, are senseless and stupid: Ps. xc. 11, 'Who knows the power of thine anger? according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.' Few lay to heart the terrible effects of God's heavy wrath; but the righteous do; they are truly affected with it, and with the cause of it, which is sin. God's wrath affects men according to the reverence and fear wherewith they entertain it, but to the wicked it is but a vain and empty terror.

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3. The certainty of the threatenings. God's people see wrath and judgment in the face of sin, whereas those who are drowned in sensuality and carnal delights scoff at God's menaces and jest at his judgments, neither crediting the one nor expecting the other, as if it were but a mere mockery: Isa. v. 19, 'Come, say they, let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it.' In their security they will believe nothing but what they feel.

4. The bane which cometh to communities and societies from the increase of the wicked, especially when their wickedness groweth to an height; that is, when it is committed with boldness: Isa iii. 9, 'They declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not;' when men have lost all shame and modesty, and will not be restrained by any law. Surely if we know the evil of sin, the terribleness of God's wrath, believe the truth of his threatenings, and then consider the danger that will come to our dearest country, we cannot but be greatly moved. If a man were sailing in a bark, and see it guided so that it must necessarily run against a rock and suffer shipwreck, he would be sorry and deeply affected.

Thirdly, It cometh from a good cause.

1. In the general it argueth a good constitution of soul: 2 Peter ii. 8, 'For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.' Passively he was vexed with the impurity of the Sodomites, and actively he vexed himself. So far as we are carnal we are pleased with sin, so far as we are spiritual we are vexed with it: Isa. lxiii. 10, 'They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit.' The better any are, the more affected

with public sins and judgments. Christ weepeth over Jerusalem for their impenitency and approaching desolation: Luke xix. 41, 42, ‘As he came near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.’ This was in the midst of the acclamations and hosannahs of the multitude, when he was welcomed with a triumph. Paul telleth the Corinthians, 2 Cor. xii. 21, ‘I am afraid, when I come among you, my God will humble me, and I shall bewail many which have not repented of the fornication, lasciviousness, and uncleanness which they have committed.’ The more holy any one is, the more he is affected and struck at heart with the sins of others.

2. A deep resentment of God’s dishonour. When his glory is obscured, it is a wound to the hearts of his children; as a child cannot endure to hear or see his father disgraced. Surely God’s glory is dear to the saints: Ps. lxix. 9, ‘The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.’ Injuries done to God and religion affect them no less nearly than personal injuries which are done to themselves. So affectionately zealous are they for God’s honour, which is obscured by the wickedness of the wicked, who forsake the perfect righteous law of God, and, usurping God’s authority, make a new law to themselves.

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3. Compassion to men. Though they are wicked men, yet they are men, made after God’s image, remotely capable to know and love God, and live with him for ever, whom they should otherwise embrace as brethren; to see them treasure up wrath against the day of wrath should be a grief and a trouble to us; to think of the everlasting; destruction which they will bring upon themselves should afflict us. Thus the apostle: Phil iii. 18, 19, ‘Of whom I have told you often, and now tell you weeping, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction.’ To see men go by droves to hell, it should work on our bowels. If this brought Christ out of heaven to die for sinners, surely this should make us sadly resent their condition.

4. This produceth good effects; it is a disposition of great use and profit to us.

[1.] It deterreth us from sinning ourselves, and so we are kept from being tainted with the contagion of evil examples; for what we mourn for in others we will not commit ourselves. The heart is made more averse from sin every day by this practice, whereas those that take pleasure in the sins of others do the same things, Rom. i. 32, consent with them to dishonour God, and so howl among the wolves, as the Latin proverb is; but when this is a trouble to us, it maketh us avoid their example, notwithstanding terrors and allurements to the contrary; terrors from the angry world, who cannot endure that any should part company; and allurements from our commodious living among the offenders. Thus Lot escaped in Sodom, because ‘his righteous soul was vexed;’ and Noah ‘was upright in his generation,’ because he reproved the deeds of the wicked.

[2.] When we see their punishment in their sin, and fear a storm when the clouds are gathering, it puts us upon mourning and humiliation, which is a necessary duty in evil times: Jer. xiii. 17, ‘If you will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride.’ None do so feelingly bewail

the sins of the times as those who have a tender holy heart, affected with God's dishonour, and compassion over the souls of men. Others do personate a mourning, and act a part in a fast, as the mourning women among the Jews did at funerals, or as the boys in the streets would act their festivities and lamentations: Mat. xi. 16, 17, 'Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the market, and calling to their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.' Therefore it is of great use to us to get this frame of spirit.

J3;] It maketh us more careful to reform others, so far as it lieth within our power. Certainly without this disposition a man will never seek the conversion of souls for which Christ died; but have it once, and then you will take all occasions to do good to the souls of your children, and relations, and neighbours. When Paul was stirred in spirit, παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα, exasperated within himself, because he saw the whole city given to idolatry, 'He disputed with them daily in the market-place,' and took all occasions to reclaim them. So if you were affected with the evil of sin, horribleness of wrath, certainty of the word of God, and the bane that cometh to any society by having the wicked amongst them, would you let your children, and servants, or friends go on in a damning course? Would you not have compassion on them, and pluck them out of the fire? Surely this should be the temper of every minister when he hath to do with sinners, that his ministry may not be a sleepy ministry; of every parent and house holder, that all under his roof may be found in the way of the Lord; of every Christian towards his friends.

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[4.] It justifieth our zeal in reproving. Surely reproof had need to be managed with great tenderness and compassion, that it may not seem to flow from hatred and ill-will to the persons reproved, nor from petulancy of spirit, nor a desire of venting reproaches, but from pure zeal to the glory of God, grief to see him dishonoured, souls in danger to be lost, or hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; therefore holy men, in their sharpest invectives against sin, or oppositions of it, have always mingled compassion: Mark iii. 5, 'Our Lord looked about with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.' There was more of compassion than passion in our Lord Jesus Christ; he was angry, but grieved. So Paul, when he disputed earnestly against the Jews, yet telleth us, Rom. ix. 2, 'I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart;' as much love to the persons of his countrymen as zeal against their errors. So *flens dico*, 'I tell you weeping, they are enemies to the cross of Christ,' Phil. iii. 18. Though he discovereth them to be enemies to the cross of Christ, yet he wept for their sakes and the church's sake.

[5.] Those that are grieved and troubled even to some degree of horror and trembling of heart, for the prevailing of iniquity in those places and persons among whom they live, are delivered from the common judgment. So 2 Peter ii. 7, 'He delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:' and 'those that mourned and sighed for all the abominations which were committed in the midst of the land,' were marked out for preservation. The Lord hath a special care of them in times of public calamity.

Use 1. Of reproof; it condemneth—

1. Them that take pleasure in nothing so much as in the company of the ungodly, where they hear God dishonoured, his laws broken: if they were horribly afraid of the wicked which forsake God's law, how could this be? All conversation with the wicked is not forbidden, for then we must go out of the world; and to some we are bound by the law of necessity, or some civil and religious or natural bond; yet we are to eschew all unnecessary and voluntary fellowship and familiarity with them: Ps. xxvi. 4, 'I have not sat with vain persons, nor gone in with dissemblers.' So Prov. xxii. 24, 25, 'Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a froward man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.' Certainly we are not to delight in the openly wicked as the only company that is pleasant to us, for what can a tender Christian get among them but a wound to his soul?

2. Those that are not affected with their own sins, much less with the sins of others. It is but a deceit of heart to declaim against the sins of the times, and not to mourn bitterly for our own sins: this is to translate the scene of our humiliation, and to put it far off from ourselves. Surely that grief will be most pungent and afflicting which doth most concern ourselves, and we know more by ourselves than possibly we can by other men; therefore we should often think of the merit of our own sins, their heinous nature, their dreadful consequences, if God be not the more merciful to keep us humble and thankful.

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Use 2. To persuade us to be of this temper, to be deeply affected when we see God's laws broken. It requireth—

1. The general grace of a soft heart, which must be asked of God: 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27, 'Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself, when thou heardest the words of the Lord against this place.' There was a high peace and calm at that time, but a tender heart relenteth at the threatenings. Beg of God to soften thy heart.

2. There needeth eminent holiness for such a frame, that we shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, Phil. ii. 15. The mourners must not be infected and tainted themselves, but save themselves from an untoward generation, condemn the sins of the times by their conversation.

3. We must have a fear animated by faith: 'By faith Noah was moved by fear' concerning things unseen, Heb. xi. 7. The danger of the flood was unseen as yet, and they married and gave in marriage. We must not judge of things by the present, or by carnal appearance: there is a righteous judge in heaven. Faith in his word will show us our danger, for God's threatenings are all fulfilled, and the more we seek to establish ourselves by carnal means, the more our ruin is hastened.

4. There must be a grief set awork by a love to God and the souls of men. In calamities the true temper for humiliation is a due sense of our Father's anger, and brethren's miseries: in sins our

Father's dishonour, and man's destruction; those who are the same flesh with ourselves. Now it should trouble us to see them in the way to eternal ruin: 'Of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted with the flesh,' Jude 22, 23.

SERMON LX.

Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.—Ver. 54.

DAVID had in the former verse expressed his great trouble, because of the increase of the wicked, and their defection from the law of God. Now he showeth what comforted him: the children of God have a great deal of divine consolation from the word in the midst of all their sorrows and evils of the present life. David's comfort is here expressed—

1. By the matter or object of it, *thy statutes*.

2. The degree of his rejoicing, intimated in the word *songs*. The effect is put for the cause, joy and mirth, which usually break forth into singing, or the sign and indication for the thing signified.

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3. The place where he rejoiced, in the house of his pilgrimage; ἐν τόπῳ παροικίας μοῦ, wheresoever I sojourn.

1. By God's 'statutes' is meant his word in general, more especially the precepts and promises: in the one we have the offer of life; in the other, the way and means how to attain it. In the word is both our charter and our rule; in both regards it is matter of rejoicing: Ps. xix. 8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the soul.' Nothing is commanded there but what is equitable in itself, and profitable to us.

2. By 'songs,' a metonymy of the effect for the cause, or the sign for the thing signified; such pleasure, joy, and contentment as other men had in songs, David had in the word of God. Travellers use to lighten and ease the tediousness of the way by songs: Thy word doth comfort me wonderfully. Or you may take it literally, the themes and arguments of his singing. Profane spirits must have songs suit able to their mirth; as their mirth is carnal, so the songs of carnal men are obscene, filthy and fleshly: but a holy man, his songs suit his mirth and joy; he rejoiceth in the Lord, and therefore his songs are divine: 'Thy statutes are my songs.' Singing of psalms is a delectable way of edification, which God hath not only instituted in the scriptures, but heathens saw a use of it by the light of nature. Ælian, lib. iii. Nat. Hist. cap. 39, telleth us of the Cretans, τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς ἐλευθέρους μανθάνειν τοὺς νόμους μετά τινος μελωδίας. It is a spiritual channel wherein our mirth may run: James v. 13, 'Is any merry? let him sing psalms,' ἐνθυμεῖ τις;—there is the harmony, that is a

natural delight; the matter, that is a spiritual comfort. I cannot exclude this, because it is one way of expressing that delight which we take in the word; but I prefer the former, for David speaketh of the comfort he took in keeping God's precepts when they were violated by others.

3. 'In the house of my pilgrimage.' You may take it literally for the time of David's exile, when banished by Saul, or driven from his palace by Absalom: when he fled from place to place, and wandered up and down in great distress, then God's statutes, by which his life was directed, innocency vindicated, hopes confirmed both of present sup port and seasonable deliverance, were as songs to him, his real and cordial solaces. Wheresoever the believer is, or whatsoever his case and condition be, he hath still matter of rejoicing in the word of God. So had David when he was exposed to continual wanderings, without any fixed habitation. Indeed the children of God in Babylon say, Ps. cxxxvii. 4, 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' The meaning is not to exclude their own spiritual delight and solace; but they would not gratify the carnal pleasure of their enemies with a temple song, or subject religion to their sportive fancies and humours. Rather metaphorically for the whole course of his life, whether spent in the palace, or in the wilderness; in whatsoever place he was, he was still in the house of his pilgrimage: so he accounted his best and his worst condition; compare ver. 19, 'I am a stranger in the earth,' and Ps. xxxix. 12, 'I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were;' with 1 Chron. xxix. 15, 'We are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers.' Not only when hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, but also when he was at rest, and able to offer so vast a quantity of treasure for the building of the house of God.

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Two points are observable:—

Doct. 1. That the godly count this world, and their whole estate therein, the house of their pilgrimage.

Doct. 2. That during this estate, and the inconveniences thereof, they find matter of rejoicing in the word of God.

Doct. 1. That the godly count, this world and their whole estate therein, the house of their pilgrimage.

I shall not handle this doctrine in its full latitude, having spoken largely thereof in the 19th verse; only now a few considerations.

1. Here is no fixed abode; there where we live longest we count our home and dwelling; not an inn which we take up in our passage, but the place of our constant residence in this world. We are only in passage, and so should consider it: Heb. xiii. 14, 'Here we have no abiding city, but we look for one to come, whose builder and maker is God.' Here we stay but a little while, passing through to a better country. The mortality of the body and the immortality of the soul showeth that we are all strangers here; for if here we do not live for ever, and yet we have souls that will live for

ever, there must be some other place to which we are tending. The body is dust in its composition and resolution: Eccles. xii. 7, ‘Then shall the body return to the earth as it was.’ Nature may teach us so much, but faith, that assureth us of the resurrection of the dead, doth more bind this consideration upon us. We are mortal, and all things about us are liable to their mortality; and therefore here we must be still passing to another place.

2. Here we have no rest: Micah ii. 10, ‘Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest:’ that is hereafter; Heb. iv. 9, ‘There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.’ Our home we count the place of our repose. Now there is no rest and content in this world, which is a place of vanity, misery, and discomfort. Yea, to the children of God there are stronger motives than crosses to drive them from the world—daily temptations, and our often falling by them. Crosses are grievous to all, but sin is more grievous to the godly; and nothing makes them more weary of the world than the constant in dwelling and frequent outbreaking of corruption and sin: Rom. vii. 24, ‘O miserable man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’ The apostle was exercised with many crosses, but this doth make him complain in the bitterness of his soul, not of his misery, but of his corruption, which he found continually rebelling against God. Many complain of their crosses that complain not of sin. To loathe the world for crosses alone, is neither the mark nor work of grace. A beast can forsake the place where he findeth neither meat nor rest; but because we are sinning here, whilst others are glorifying God, this is the trouble of the saints.

3. They believe and look for a better estate after this life is over: 2 Cor. v. 1, ‘We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.’ No man can be a right sojourner on earth who doth not look for an abode in heaven; for that which doth most effectually draw off the heart of man from this world is the expectation of a far better state in the world to come: 2 Cor. iv. 18, ‘While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.’ Heathens could call the world an inn, but they had only glimmering conceptions of another world. A Christian, that believeth it, and looketh for it on God’s assurance, he is only the joyful stranger and the pilgrim. Common sense will teach us the necessity of leaving this world, but faith can only assure us of another; they are believers and expectants of heaven.

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4. They do not only look for it, but seek after it. We read of both looking and seeking: Heb. xi. 14, ‘They declare plainly that they seek a country:’ Heb. xiii. 14, ‘Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.’ Seeking implieth diligence in the use of means. All the life of a Christian is nothing but the seeking after another country, every day advancing a step nearer to heaven; and therefore their πολίτευμα, their ‘conversation’ is said to be ‘in heaven,’ Phil. iii. 20. This is their great business upon earth, to do all to eternal ends: all other works and labours are but upon the bye, and subordinate to this. Their main care is to obtain this blessed condition; therefore they use word and sacraments, that they may grow in grace, faith, repentance, new obedience. Every degree

in grace is another step towards heaven: Ps. lxxxiv. 5, ‘Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee, in whose hearts are the ways of them;’ ver. 7, ‘They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.’ Some of the saints are *in patria*, others *in via*, still bending homeward.

5. Because they are so, the children of God are dealt with as strangers. Difference of scope and drift will procure alienation of affection: 1 Peter iv. 4, ‘Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you;’ and John xv. 19, ‘If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.’ Other cannot be expected but that the servants of the Lord should be ill rewarded and treated here, not only out of the world’s ignorance—they know not our birth, breeding, expectations, hope: 1 John iii. 2, ‘Beloved, now are we the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is’—but enmity, as the different carriage of the one puts a disgrace upon the course of life which the other doth affect; the one fixeth their home here, the other looketh for it elsewhere; and the world is sensible this is an excellency, and therefore those that are at the bottom of the hill, envy and malign those that are at the top.

Use. Are we thus minded? There are two sorts of men in the world—the one is of the devil and the other is of God; for all men seek their rest and happiness on earth, or rest in heaven. Naturally men were all of the first number, for the rational soul without grace accommodateth itself to the interests of the body; but when sublimated and transformed by grace, the world cannot satisfy it, and it can find nothing there which may finally quiet its desires, for the new life infused hath other aims and tendencies. As saints are new-born *from* heaven, so *for* heaven; and therefore the new nature cannot satisfy itself in the enjoyment of the creature, with the absence of God. The apostle saith, ‘While at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord,’ 2 Cor. v. 6, 7. In this life we are not capable of the glorious presence of God; it is not consistent with our mortality; and our being present with him in the spirit is but a taste that doth provoke rather then cloy the appetite: Rom. viii. 23, ‘Ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.’ These tastes do but make us long for more; they are sent down from heaven to draw us up to that place of our rest where this glory and blessedness is in fulness. Now which sort are ye of? the city of God, or under the dominion of Satan and the power of worldly lusts?

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1. There are some that take up here, and never consider whence they are, nor whither they are going; as Christ saith, ‘I know whence I am, and whither I go.’ They look altogether for the present, and if they be well for the present, they are contented. Alas! in what a miserable case are these men, though they mind it not! they seem to me to be like men that are going to execution. A man that is going to the gallows for the present is well, hath a great guard to attend him, an innumerable multitude of people to follow him: you would think that hardly could a man be such a sot and fool as to think all this should be done for his honour, and not for his punishment, and should only

consider how he is accompanied, but not whither he goeth. Many such fools there are in the world, that only consider how they are attended and provided for, but never consider whither they are going. O wretch! whither goest thou? may we say to one that should pride himself in the resort of company to his execution. Dost thou not see thou art led to punishment, and after an hour or two these will leave thee hanging and perishing infamously as the just reward of thine offences? So many that shine now in the pomp and splendour of worldly accommodations, and are merry and jocund as if all would do well, alas! poor creatures, whither are they going? Job xxi. 12, 13, 'They take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ; they spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down into hell.' Ye still live, and are going to punishment, but mind it not; but your wealth, and honours, and servants, and friends will all leave you to your own doom; and yet you are merry and jocund as if your journey would never end, or not so dismally; as if you were hastening to a kingdom, and not to an eternal prison: one moment puts an end to all their joy for ever.

2. There are others that wean their hearts from this world, and make it their care that they may carry themselves becoming their celestial extraction. As their souls were from above by creation, so all their hopes, and desires, and endeavours are to attain to that region of spirits; much more as being renewed by grace do they aim at the perfection and accomplishment of that life which is begun in them; and so being 'made partakers of the divine nature, do they escape the corruption that is in the world through lust,' 2 Peter i. 4, they are convinced of a better estate than the world yieldeth, and believe it, and look for it, and long for it, and labour for it. Now of which number are you? or, if you cannot decide that—because more goeth to the assuring of our interest than the world usually taketh to be necessary for that end and purpose—of which number do you mean to be? Will you be at home in the world, or seek the happiness of the world to come? that is, in other terms, do you mean to be pagans under a Christian name, or Christians indeed? You have but the name if you be not strangers and pilgrims here upon earth. All Christ's disciples indeed are called to sit loose from the world, and to have a high and deep sense of the world to come. As to the other world, they are 'no mere strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God,' Eph. ii. 19. They are of a family, part of which is in heaven and part on earth: Eph. iii. 15, 'Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.' Some of their brethren have got the start of them, and are with God before them, but the rest are hastening after as fast as they can. They are sufficiently convinced that the earth is no place for them; they are strangers there, and the contentments thereof uncertain and perishing; but they are no strangers to heaven and the blessed society of the saints, whose privileges they have a full right to now, and hope one day to have as full a possession, and an intimate communion with their Father and all their brethren.

Now, that you may resolve upon this, and carry yourselves suitably, I shall—

1. Give you some motives.

2. A direction or two.

1. Motives.

[1.] He that taketh up his rest in this world, or any earthly thing, is but a higher kind of beast, and unworthy of an immortal soul. The beasts have an instinct that guideth them to seek things convenient for that life which they have, and therefore a man doth not follow the light of reason that seeketh to quiet his mind with what things the world affordeth, and only relisheth the contentments of the carnal and bodily life, that is satisfied with his portion here, Ps. xvii. 14. All their business and bustle is to have their wills and pleasure for a little while, as if they had neither hopes nor fears of any greater things hereafter: Ps. xlix. 20, 'Man, that is in honour, and void of understanding, is as the beast that perisheth,' because he merely inclineth to present satisfactions; for reason is as a middle thing between the life of faith and the life of sense. It were no great matter whether you were men or dogs or swine, if reason be only given you for the present world and present satisfactions; all your sense of the world to come and conscience is as good as nothing.

[2.] None are of so noble and divine a spirit as those that seek the heavenly kingdom. Amongst men, the ambitious who aspire to crowns and kingdoms, that aim at perpetual fame by their virtues and rare exploits, are judged persons of greater gallantry than covetous muck-worms and brutish epicures; yet their highest thoughts and designs are very base in comparison of Christians, 'who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for life, glory, and immortality,' Rom. ii. 7, and whom nothing less will content than the enjoyment of God himself. Their desires are after him: Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and who is there on earth I desire besides thee?' So that as man, being immortal, should provide for some place of perpetual abode, so herein the Christian excelleth other men, that nothing less will satisfy him than what God hath promised his people hereafter. The threshold will not content him—nothing but the throne.

[3.] What a sorry immortality, mock eternity, do they choose, instead of the true one, when they neglect the pursuit of this heavenly country! If they look no higher than this world, all that they can rationally imagine is perpetuating themselves, and their names, and posterity, by successive generations: Ps. xlix. 11, 'Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their lands by their own names.' This is styled *nodosa eternitas*, when they live in their children after death. But alas! to how few men's share can this fall! and those who may in likelihood expect it, who are lords of fair rents, fair lands, houses and heritages, how often are they disappointed! But if their hopes should succeed, and they should make themselves this way eternal, yet when the pageantry of this world is over, the great ungodly men of the world, who have names, lands, families in the general resurrection shall be poor, base, contemptible; whereas he that made it his business to look after the world to come shall be glorious for ever.

[4.] When once our qualification is clear, every step of our remove out of this world is an approach to our abiding city: Rom. xiii. 11, 'Our salvation nearer than when we first believed;' and 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.'

[5.] Every degree of grace makes your qualification clearer: Col. i. 12, ‘Giving thanks to the father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light;’ and 1 Tim. vi. 19, ‘Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.’ Evidences are in creased when ripening for heaven more and more.

2. Let us carry ourselves as such as count our best estate in this world as the house of our pilgrimage.

[1.] Let us with great joy and delight of heart entertain the promises of the life to come, resolving to hold and hug them, and esteem them, and make much of them till the performance come: Heb. xi. 13, ‘These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.’

[2.] Let us take heed of what may divert us and besot us, and hinder us in our heavenly journey: 1 Peter ii. 11, ‘Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.’ A relish of the pleasures that offer themselves in the course of our pilgrimage spoileth the sense that we have of the world to come, and weakens our care and pursuit of it.

[3.] Let us be contented with those provisions that God in his providence affordeth us by the way, though they be mean and scanty: 1 Tim. vi. 8, ‘Having food and raiment, let us be content, for we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.’ We came into the world contented with a cradle, and must go out contented with a grave; therefore, if we want the pomp of the world, let it not trouble us: we have such allowance as our heavenly Father seeth necessary for us till our great inheritance cometh in hand.

[4.] If the world increase upon us, we should take the more care that we may have the comfort of it in the world to come: Rev. xiv. 13, ‘Their works follow them:’ Luke xvi. 9, ‘Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations.’ There is no other way to show our weanedness in a full estate, nor to keep our hearts clean, or to express our deep sense of the world to come, but this.

Doct. 2. That during this estate, and the inconveniences thereof, God’s children find matter of rejoicing in his word.

1. Let us consider how this point lieth in this text.

[1.] The Psalmist had a sufficient sense of the inconveniences of the house of his pilgrimage, his absence from God, for therefore he counts it a pilgrimage; the many affronts and dishonours that are done to God in the world, which go near to a gracious heart who espouseth God’s quarrel and interest; therefore he saith, ‘Horror hath taken hold upon me, because men keep not thy law.’

Nay, and possibly his own afflictions and troubles, for many interpreters suppose him now expelled from Jerusalem, and driven to wander up and down in the forests and wildernesses; yet then could he comfort himself in God, and pass over his time in meditating on his precepts and promises. The troubles and inconveniences of our pilgrimage are easily disregarded by them that have no sense of them, or are slight-hearted, or whose time of trial is not yet come; but then is strength of grace seen when we can overcome sense of trouble by the encouragements which the bare naked word of God offereth. If David were now in exile, it was a trouble to him not to enjoy the ordinances and means of grace with the rest of God's people; but to deceive the tediousness of it by God's word, that is the trial. If we can depend upon the promise, when nothing but the promise is left us, there are no difficulties too great for the comfort of God's word to allay.

[2.] The Psalmist speaketh not of what he would do, but what he had done: 'Thy statutes have been my songs.' Experience of the comfort of the word is more than a resolution to seek it there. In his resolution he would have been a pattern of duty, but now he is a precedent of comfort. That which hath been may be; God, that hath given u promise and comfort to his saints before, will continue it in all ages.

[3.] The Psalmist speaketh not of an ordinary joy, but such as was ready to break out into singing, which noteth the heart is full, and can hold no longer without some vent and utterance; as Paul and Silas were so full of joy that they sang at midnight in the stocks.

2. Now I come to the reasons why God's pilgrims find matter of rejoicing in his word during the time of their exile and absence from God, and all the inconveniences that attend it.

[1.] Some on the word's part.

[2.] Some on the part of him that rejoiceth.

[1.] On the word's part, God's pilgrims can rejoice in it.

(1.) There they have the discovery and promise of eternal life. It telleth them of their country. A firm deed and conveyance is a comfort to us before we have possession: 2 Peter i. 4, 'To us are given exceeding great and precious promises, that being made partakers of the divine nature, we may escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust.' In the word there are promises neither of small things, of things of a little moment, nor of things that we have nothing to do with, but of great moment and weight, and given to us. The promises make the things promised certain to those to whom they do belong, though they be not yet actually in their possession; and therefore the children of God are delighted in them, and so far as that their hearts are drawn off from worldly things. They that adhere to them, and prize the comfort which they offer, have something in them above natural men, or the ordinary sort of those that live in the world.

(2.) There they have sure direction how they may attain this blessedness which the promises speak of, and that is a great comfort in the midst of the darkness and uncertainty of the present life. The word of God is said to be ‘a light that shineth to us in a dark place,’ 2 Peter i. 19. The love of the world will mislead us, our own reason will often leave us comfortless, the examples of the best are defective, but the word of God will give comfortable direction to all that follow the direction of it, under all their crosses, confusions and difficulties: Ps. cxix. 105, ‘Thy word is a light unto my feet, and a lantern to my paths.’ Light is comfortable; it is no small satisfaction that I am in God’s way, and have his word for my warrant.

(3.) It propoundeth the examples of their countrymen, and sets forth their heroical acts, and encourageth us to imitate their fortitude and self-denial: Heb. vi. 12, ‘Be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises:’ many things are to be done and suffered before we attain the end. Now, it is a great comfort to trace the footsteps of the saints all along in the way in which we go: Heb. xii. 1, ‘Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.’ If God did call us to walk in an untrodden path, it might be cumbersome and solitary. Now it is very obliging and encouraging to consider in what way they have been brought to heaven before us.

(4.) It hath many seasonable cordials against fainting by the way. Alas! when we are in deep pressures, our hearts are apt to sink; but the word assureth us that we shall have all things necessary for us,. that our heavenly Father seeth what is best for us, and that if we faithfully wait upon him, our afflictions and rubs in the way shall be a means to bring us to our journey’s end: 2 Cor. iv. 17, ‘Our light affliction, that is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory:’ and that for the present our trials are not inconsistent with his love.

[2.] On the believer’s part there are reasons of this comfort and rejoicing.

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(1.) There needeth a spiritual frame of heart, for a carnal man’s rejoicings and relishes are suitable to the constitution of his mind: Rom. viii. 5, ‘They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit.’ It is an infallible rule to the world’s end. Every one cannot say, ‘Thy statutes are my songs.’ No; they must have other solaces; and a man’s temper is more discerned by his solaces than by anything else. They that have not purged their taste from the dregs of sense, the trash of the flesh-pots of Egypt will ever be pleasing to them in the heavenly pilgrimage; and being inveigled with the baits of the flesh, the promises are like withered flowers to them, or as dry chips; it is the spiritual heart that is refreshed with spiritual songs.

(2.) This word must be received by faith, for it is faith that enliveneth our notions of things, and maketh them work with us: Heb. xi. 13, ‘These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that

they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth.' Our affections follow persuasion: 1 Peter i. 8, 'Whom having not seen we love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:' Rom. xv. 13, 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.'

(3.) This word must be improved by reading and hearing, but especially by meditation and singing.

(1st.) Meditation, when it is sweet and lively, stirreth this joy. Delight begets meditation, and meditation begets delight. There is a κυκλογένεσις in moral as well as natural things: Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night:' and Ps. cxix. 97, 'Oh, how love I thy law! it is my meditation day and night:' and ver. 15, 16, 'I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways: I will delight myself in thy statutes; I will not forget thy words.' These follow one another. Affections are not excited but by deep and pondering thoughts.

(2d.) By singing psalms we draw forth this delight: Col. iii. 16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord;' Eph. v. 18, 19, 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.' Drunkards, when tilled with the spirit of wine, sing wanton songs; and those who are filled with the wine of the Spirit will praise God with spiritual songs. This is a duty of importance, a delightful way of being instructed by our refreshment. God would give us strength, but this is neglected, or cursorily performed by Christians. We will complain of the want of a spirit in prayer; we should do so in singing. Coldness in this holy exercise argueth a deadness of faith and a coldness in true religion. We should express our joy this way.

(4.) Above all, this comfort is found in ready practice and obedience. There is a comfort, I confess, in speculation, but not so deep and intimate as in practice. The one is out a taste inviting to the other, which giveth us a fuller draught. The bare contemplation and view of any concerning and weighty truth is very ravishing to those that bend their minds to knowledge: Prov. xxiv. 13, 14, 'My son, eat thou honey, because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to thy soul.' Every truth is *objectum intellectus*, much more divine truth; but now in practice the impression is doubled: we get comfort and joy raised in our consciences; our lives and light do not jar; we are at full quiet in our minds, apprehending ourselves to be in God's way: Ps. cxix. 14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches.'

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Use 1. To show you that the people of God need not envy the wicked for their delights and pleasures; they have chaster and sweeter delights; God's statutes are their songs. Where the heart is spiritual, they can find delight enough in the word, both as their charter and their rule, and need

not turn aside to vain mirth; a portion in the promises will yield pleasure enough: ver. 111, ‘Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.’

2. To reprove those that reckon these things a burthen. The holy talking of heaven and godliness maketh worldly men ever heavy and out of humour; it is not their delight. But it should not be so with the children of God. A child of God should only be heavy when he displeases God, but delight in all the means that enable him to live to God.

3. When we are saddened by the evil of the present world, let us make use of this remedy; let us meditate on God’s statutes. We shall find ease and refreshing by exercising ourselves to know God in Christ.

4. To refute the vain conceit which possesseth the minds of men, that the way of godliness is a gloomy way. As soon as a man beginneth to think of salvation, or the change of his life, or the leaving of his sins, embracing the service of God, presently his mind is haunted with this thought: Seest thou not how those that serve God are melancholy, afflicted; sorrowful, never rejoice more? and wilt thou be one of them? This is the opinion of the world, that they can never rejoice nor be merry that serve God. But certainly it is a vain conceit. No men do more and more truly rejoice than they which serve God. Consult the scriptures, who have more leave, shall I say, or command, to rejoice? Ps. xxxvii. 4, ‘Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart:’ Phil. iv. 4, ‘Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.’ Ask reason who have more cause or matter to rejoice than they that have provided against the fears or doubts of conscience by reason of sin? What is more satisfactory to a soul in doubts and fears than the knowledge of pardon and reconciliation with God? For the satisfaction of the desires of nature which carry us after happiness, who have a more powerful exciter of ‘joy than the Holy Ghost? Acts xiii. 52, ‘The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.’ Who more qualified with joy than those who have a clear right to the pardon of sin, and so can see all miseries unstinged? Rom. v. 1-3, ‘Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God; and not only so, but we glory in tribulation also.’ How joyful are those that see themselves prepared for everlasting life! 2 Cor. v. 1, ‘For we know that if our earthly tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.’ Yea, when a Christian knoweth his duty, his way is plain before him; it is a mighty satisfaction: Ps. xix. 8, ‘The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.’ Look into the lives and examples of the saints; who have more true joy than they? The disciples esteem the grace of the gospel such a great treasure, that though they suffer persecution for it they are filled with joy: Acts viii. 8, ‘And there was great joy in that city,’ Thes. i. 6, ‘Having received the word with much affliction and joy in the Holy Ghost:’ 2 Cor. vii. 4, ‘I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.’ Preachers, though with great hazard they perform their office, should be joyful: Acts xx. 24, ‘Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy;’ Phil. ii. 17, 18, ‘Yea, and if I be offered

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for the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all; for the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me.' The world will reply—I know not what this spiritual consolation meaneth; it seemeth hard to relinquish that which I see, that which I feel, that which I taste, for that which I see not, and it may be shall never see.

Ans. 1. By concession, the joy of the saints is the joy of faith. God is unseen, Christ is within the heavens, great hopes are to come: 1 Peter i. 8, 'In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;' 2 Cor. v. 7, 'For we walk by faith, not by sight.'

2. Thus you see that the world cannot alway rejoice in those things which they take to be the proper objects of joy: they have alternative vicissitudes, now rejoice, now mourn; nor can it be otherwise, for they rejoice in things which cannot always last. If they rejoice when their worldly comforts increase, they are sad when they wither; if they rejoice when their children are born, they weep when they die: but a Christian hath always his songs, for he must always rejoice in the Lord, who is an eternal God: Phil. iv. 4, 'Rejoice in the Lord always;' in Christ, who 'hath obtained eternal redemption for us,' Heb. ix. 12; in the promises, which give an eternal influence: Ps. cxix. 111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.' The flesh cannot afford anything so delightful as a Christian hath; the word will hold good for ever.

3. We cannot altogether say that a Christian doth rejoice in that which he cannot see; for all that they see is their everlasting Father's wealth: 1 Cor. iii. 21, 'All are yours, for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' If they look to heaven, they can rejoice and say, Glory be to thee, O Lord, who hast prepared this for our everlasting dwelling-place. If they look to the earth, Glory be to thee, Lord, who dost not leave us destitute in the house of our pilgrimage. If they consider their afflictions, they rejoice that God is not unmindful of poor creatures, who are beneath his anger as well as unworthy of his love: Job vii. 17, 18, 'What is man that thou shouldst magnify him, and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him, and that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment?' that God should trouble himself about us, that we may not perish with the ungodly world. The same love that sendeth them prosperity sendeth adversity also, which they find by the seasonableness of it.

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SERMON LXI.

I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law.—Ver. 55.

WE often read and sing David's psalms, but we have little of David's spirit. A man's employment is as the constitution of his mind is, for all things work according to their nature. A man addicted

to God, that is to say, one who hath taken God for his happiness, his word for his rule, his Spirit for his guide, and his promises for his encouragement, his heart will always be working towards God day and night. In the day he will be studying God's word; in the night, if his sleep be interrupted, he will be meditating on God's name; still entertaining his soul with God. The predominant affection will certainly set the thoughts awork. The man of God had told us in the former verse what was his chief employment in the day-time, and now he telleth us how his heart wrought in the night. Night and day he was remembering God and his duty to him. In the day the statutes of God were his solace, and as songs to him in the house of his pilgrimage; in the night the name of God was his meditation: 'I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law.' In which words observe—

1. David's exercise, *I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night*.

2. The effect and fruit of it, *and have kept thy law*.

The one may be considered as the means, the other as the next and immediate end. Remembering and thinking is but a subservient help and means to promote some higher work.

1. In the first branch you have—

[1.] The act of his soul, *I have remembered*.

[2.] The object about which it was conversant, *thy name, O Lord*.

[3.] The season, *in the night*.

For the act of his soul, 'I have remembered.' Remembrance is an act of knowledge reiterated, or a second agitation of the mind unto that point unto which it had arrived before. Or, more plainly, remembering is a setting knowledge awork, or a reviving those notions which we have of things, and exercising our thoughts and meditations about them.

[2.] The object was God's 'name;' that is, either God himself, as Ps. xx. 1, 'The name of the God of Jacob defend thee;' or that by which God is known, his wisdom, goodness, and power, especially those notions by which he hath manifested himself in the word.

[3.] The season, 'In the night.' Some take the night metaphorically for the time of trouble and affliction. It is often a dark time with the people of God, a very dark night, and then it is comfortable to them to think of his name, according to that of the prophet, Isa. l. 10, 'He that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him stay him self upon the name of his God.' I think it is meant literally; that the man of God took such pleasure in the name of God, that what time others gave to sleep and rest he would give to the contemplation of his glory. In the solitude and darkness of the night he sustained and supported his spirit with the thoughts of God, and thereby took up a courage and constancy of resolution to keep his law.

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2. The other branch, ‘I have kept thy law;’ that is, with a good and sincere heart set himself to the keeping of it; this is spoken partly to intimate his own seriousness in this work, and partly God’s blessing upon his endeavours therein.

[1.] His seriousness and sincerity in the work. There is a twofold remembrance of things:—

(1.) Notional and speculative.

(2.) Practical and affective.

The notional and speculative remembrance of things is when we barely think of them, without any further profit or benefit; but the practical, powerful and affective remembrance is to be affected with matters called to mind as the nature of them doth require: as when we remember God so as to love him, and fear him, and trust in him, and make him our delight, and cleave to him, and obey him. And we are said to remember his commandments, when our hearts are set upon the practice of them. *Verba notitiae connotant affectus*: we must not think of God indifferently, and by the by, but we must be answerably affected, and act accordingly. Thus did David, ‘I remembered thy name, and kept thy law.’

[2.] God’s blessing upon his endeavours; for he presently addeth in the next verse, ‘This I had, because I kept thy precepts.’ Our heavenly Father, who ‘seeth what is done in secret, will reward it openly,’ Mat. vi. 6. And the blessing of time well-spent in secret, or a few serious thoughts of God in the night, will publicly appear in their carriage before men. If we be frequently and seriously with God when we are solitary, the fruit and benefit of it will be manifest by our holiness and heavenliness when we are in company. Your most private duties do not lose their reward. As a man’s pains in study will appear in the accurate order, strength, and rationality of his discourse, so his converse with God in private will be seen in the fruits of it, in his holy, profitable and serious conversation.

The points are three:—

Doct. 1. Remembering God is an especial help to the keeping of his law.

Doct. 2. God is best remembered when his name is studied.

Doct. 3. Those that have spiritual affections will take all occasions to remember his name. ‘I have remembered thy name in the night season,’ saith holy David.

Doct. 1. That remembering God is an especial help to the keeping of his law.

First, What it is to remember God.

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1. It supposeth some knowledge of God, for what a man knoweth not he cannot remember. The memory is the cofferer and treasurer of the soul; what the understanding taketh in, the memory layeth up; and actually we are said to remember when we set the mind awork upon such notions as we have formerly received. And particularly to remember God is when we stir up in our minds clear and heart-warming apprehensions about his nature and will.

2. It supposeth some faith, that we believe him to be such as the word describeth him to be; for spiritual remembrance is the actuation of faith, or, in this case, the improvement of that wisdom, power, goodness, holiness, justice, and truth, which we believe to be in God. Otherwise, without faith, those thoughts which we have of the greatest matters affect us no more than a dream doth a sleeper.

These things are supposed in remembrance.

3. It expresseth a reviving of these thoughts, or an erection of the mind to think upon what we know and believe. Man, that hath an ingestive, hath also an egestive faculty, and can lay out as well as lay up, bring forth truths out of the mind when it is useful for us, and whet and inculcate them upon the heart; he may call to mind or ponder upon them.

4. Let us see the kinds of this remembrance.

[1.] I must repeat that distinction; it may be done notionally and speculatively, or else affectively and practically. Notionally, when men have a few barren notions, or dry sapless opinions or speculations about the nature of God; always men's remembrance is as their knowledge is, and faith is. Now there is μόρφωσις της γνώσεως, a form of knowledge, Rom. ii. 10, and 'dead faith,' James ii. 20. Affectively and practically we remember God when there are such lively and powerful impressions of his name upon our hearts as produce reverence, love, and obedience. It is not enough to grant the doctrine, own the opinions that are sound and orthodox concerning God, but we must have a reverential and superlative, esteem of him. All men confess a God with their mouth, and think they believe in him; but 'the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,' Ps. xiv. 1. What testimony do their hearts and actions give? A man's course of life and conversation is like an eye-witness; his profession is as a testimony by report. Now one eye-witness deserves more credit than many by hearsay. *Plus valet unus oculatus testis, &c*. How would you walk if you believed there were no God? Could you be more neglectful of God, and careless and mindless of heavenly things, than you are? Now your transgressions speak louder than your professions in the eye of an understanding believer: Ps. xxxvi. 1, 'The transgression of the wicked saith within his heart that there is no fear of God before his eyes.' Practice belies profession: Titus i. 16, 'They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.' Cold and dead opinions are easily taken up, and men talk by rote one after another, yea, and study to defend them, and yet count God an idol. Denial in works is the strongest way of denial, for actions are more weighty and deliberate than speeches.

[2.] There is a threefold remembrance of God for practical uses.

(1.) There is a constant remembrance. We should carry the thoughts of God along with us to all our businesses and affairs, and ever wall; as in his eye and presence: Prov. xxiii. 17, 'Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long;' not only in prayer, but at all times, in all our other occasions. Some graces, like the lungs, are always in use; so Ps. xvi. 8, 'I have set the Lord always before me.' He that liveth always in the sight of God cannot be so secure and senseless as others are. A drowsy inattentive mind is easily deceived into sin, but he that doth often remember God, his conscience is kept waking; for he is all eye, and seeth all things; all hand, and toucheth all things; all foot, and walketh everywhere; all ear, and heareth all things. *Sic agamus cum hominibus tanquam Deus videat; sic loquamur cum Deo tanquam homines audiant.* The latter clause was the least that a heathen could think of; but surely, if there be any weight in the former part of the direction, the latter is needless. Thus we should never forget God.

(2.) Occasional, when God is brought to mind either by some special occasion offered, or by some notable discovery of himself in his word or works. Occasion offered; as when Ahasuerus could not sleep, Esther vi. 1, it was the providence of God he should read in the chronicles, and so come to the knowledge of Mordecai. So it befalleth God's children; they cannot sleep sometimes, and so occasion is offered in the silence and solitude of the night to invite them to holy thoughts of God, which may be of great use and comfort: Job xxxvii. 7, 'He sealeth up the hand of every man, that all men may know his work.' In deep snow or rain their work is hindered, that they, sitting at home, may have time to consider of God and his providence. Sometimes it falleth out so that we know not what to do with our thoughts, and it will look strangely in the review if we should prostitute them to vanity rather than give them to God, like the act of a spiteful man, that will rather destroy and waste a commodity than let another have it. Or when some notable discovery of God is in his ordinances and providences, word, or works; we should always season our hearts with the thoughts of God, we should see him in every creature, and observe him in his daily providences. The name of God is upon all things that he hath made, but especially any notable providence that falleth out, which is an especial demonstration of his wisdom, justice, and power: Ps. cxi. 4, 'He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered.' So in his ordinances, when God maketh any nearer approach to us by way of conviction, counsel, or comfort: 1 Cor. xiv. 25, 'And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' Many times our minds in reading or hearing are illustrated with a heavenly light, or our hearts touched with some delightful relish, and the word cometh in with more than ordinary authority and power upon the heart; these are especial occasions which we must take to consider God and the great affairs of our souls.

(3.) Set and solemn, when from the bent, purpose, and inclination of our own hearts, without any outward impulsion, we set ourselves to remember the God that made us. From first to last there

is great use of meditation and serious thoughts of God in the spiritual life. Our first awaking is occasioned by them: Ps. xxii. 27, ‘They shall remember and turn to the Lord.’ For a great while we live without God in the world, till we recollect ourselves, and consider where we are and whither we are going. We are like men drunk or asleep, and do not make use of our reason and common principles that may be learned from the inspection of the creature and everything about us; and when once we are brought into the communion of the life of God, and have grace planted in our hearts, it cannot be carried on unless we take time to remember God. Our faith, our love, our desires, our delight, they are all acted and exercised by our thoughts; so that the spiritual life is but an imagination, unless we do frequently and often take time for serious meditation of him. It is not consistent with any of the three vital graces, faith, hope, and love, that a man should be a stranger to the remembrance of God; therefore God complaineth of it as a strange thing: Jer. ii. 32, ‘My people have forgotten me days without number;’ do no more regard me than if they had never known me, Besides, the habits of grace are so weak, and our temptations so strong, and the difficulties of obedience so great, that I cannot see how we can keep afoot any interest of God in ourselves, if we seldom think of God, and do not sometimes sequester ourselves to revive this memorial upon our souls. Can a sluggish heart be quickened, or weak and inconstant resolutions be strengthened, or the sparks of love ever blown up into a flame, and fainting hopes cherished, unless we seriously set our minds awork to consider of God and our obligations to him? Will a sleepy profession, without constant and lively thoughts do it? It cannot be. Oh, no! If you mean to keep in the fire, you must ply the bellows and blow hard. Whet truths upon the understanding, and agitate your minds in this holy work.

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Secondly, My next work is to show that this is a notable help to godliness; and that appeareth enough in that forgetting God is assigned as the cause of all mischief, and remembering God the engagement to all duty. We forget God, do not meditate upon his name, and so fall into sin: Ps. ix. 17, ‘The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.’ Some deny God, but most forget him; they cast away the knowledge of God out of their minds. So Ps. l. 22, ‘Consider this, all ye that forget God;’ that is the description of the wicked. So it is the charge upon Israel, as their great sin and cause of their defection: Deut. xxxii. 18, ‘Thou art unmindful of the rock that begat thee; thou hast forgotten the God that formed thee.’ Oblivion is an ignorance for the time. Truths lose their efficacy when not remembered. On the other side, remembering God is made to be the immediate and next cause of our duty: Eccles. xii. 1, ‘Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.’ Youth would not miscarry so shamefully if they did oftener remember God, nor be led away by vain and sensual delights, if the thoughts of God did more dwell in their minds. So Deut. viii. 11, 12, ‘Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments.’ Our lives will declare whether we do remember God. Those that do often and seriously keep God in their thoughts, will be most careful to keep his commandments.

Thirdly, The reasons of the point.

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1. It doth encourage us, and quicken us to diligence in our work. As soldiers fight best in their general's presence, and scholars ply their books when under their master's eye, so by living always in the sight of God we study to please him. The oftener we consider him the more we see no service can be holy and good enough for such a God as he is; a God not to be provoked and resisted, so not to be neglected and slighted: Mal. i. 14, 'Cursed be the deceiver that hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen:' implying that when they came with a sickly sacrifice, they did not remember his excellency and greatness. Either they had no or mean thoughts of God; but if they had remembered what an one he is, they would employ the best of their strength, time, and affection in his service.

2. The madness of our natures is bridled and restrained by thoughts of God: 3 John 11, 'He that doth evil hath not seen God.' 'Will he force the queen before my face?' Esther vii. 8. You will not sport with sin, nor play with the occasions of it, nor dare to venture upon God's restraints. It is said of an archangel, οὐκ ἐτόλμησε, 'he durst not bring against him a railing accusation,' Jude 9, because they be held the face of God. So if we had a deep sense of God impressed upon our hearts, we would be more awe-ful. You make very bold with God when you dare knowingly venture upon the least sin. Will you affront God to his face? Children that are quarrelling or falling out, when the father or mother cometh, all is hush and silent.

3. It comforts and reviveth us in the midst of our faintings and discouragements, because of the evils of the present world: Jonah ii. 7, 'When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord.' When the burden of affliction presseth us sore, the stoutest hearts are broken and lose all courage; but when we come to ponder seriously what God is, or what he will be to his people, or hath at any time been to ourselves, it cheereth and reviveth the heart. So Ps. xlii. 6, 'O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember thee.' By this way the saints recover themselves, Ps. lxxvii. 10, 'And I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.' So also, Mat. xvi. 9, 'Do ye not remember the five loaves of the five thousand, nor the seven loaves of the four thousand?'

Use. To press us to remember God more. When we will not look upon another, we take it to be a great sign of aversation and hatred. The devils, that are most opposite to God, abhor their own thoughts of God, for they 'believe and tremble.' God thinketh of us; he is not far from every one of us; why are we so far from him? We cannot open our eyes but one object or other will represent God to us. What dost thou see, hear, and feel, but the effects of his power and goodness? He is before thee, behind thee, within thee, round about thee; and shall he not find room in thy heart, when every trifle findeth room there? He that filleth every place, shall thy heart be empty of all thoughts of him? To press you to this—

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1. Consider we are naturally apt to forget God, do not like to retain him in our knowledge, Rom. i. 28, backward to any remembrance of him: Ps. x. 4, ‘The wicked, through the pride of their countenance, will not seek after God; God is not in all their thoughts.’

2. How much God hath done to put us in remembrance of him, by creatures, providences, ordinances, and his Spirit.

[1.] Creatures, all of them, sun, moon, stars, worms, grass, put us in mind of him: Ps. xix. 1, 2, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork; day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge.’ The creatures have a double use—their natural use and their spiritual use. Their natural use is the special end for which they were made; their spiritual use is to set forth God to us. We look upon them amiss if we look upon them as separated from and independent of God. Our food is not only to nourish nature, but that we may taste the sweetness and goodness of God in it. All the creatures bring this message to our consciences: Remember God that made us and all things else. They all read a divinity lecture to those that have a mind to hear it, and preach the goodness, power, and wisdom of God by a loud and audible voice. It is true we are deaf, but they cease not to cry to us: Job xii. 8, ‘Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and to the beasts of the field, and they shall declare to thee. Not only the shining heavens, but the dull earth, that heaviest and grossest element; the brute creatures that have no reason, the mute fishes that can make no sound, we must ask them, parley with them by our own thoughts; and so, though they have neither voice nor ears, they will answer us, and resolve our consciences the question we put to them, Is there a God? Yea, and declare his excellent attributes, that he is eternal, infinite, wise, powerful, and good. We may easily make out these collections. Christ saith the stones would cry if these held their peace. We should hear the creature as we would hear God himself speaking to us. They speak to all countries in their own language. At first God spake to the world not by words but things. Thus hath God engraven his name upon his works, as those that make watches, or any curious pieces, write their names upon them; as he that carved a buckler for Minerva had so curiously inlaid his own name that it could not be rased out without defacing the whole work. So the creatures are but a draught and portraiture of ‘God’s glory.

[2.] Providences, these do more awaken us. God’s daily benefits should bring him to our remembrance: Acts xiv. 17, ‘Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness;’ Deut. viii. 18, ‘But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for he it is that giveth thee power to get wealth.’ Especially the sanctified remembrance of God’s dealing with his people is the way to keep the heart in the faith, love, and fear of God; and the forgetting his works is the cause of all defection and falling off to carnal courses and confidences: Ps. lxxviii. 11, ‘They forgat his works and wonders that he showed them,’ Ps. cvi. 21, ‘They forgat God their Saviour, which had done great things in Egypt;’ Judges viii. 34, ‘And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had

delivered them out of the hands of their enemies on every side.' It is a base ingratitude not to remember, prize, and esteem God for all this.

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[3.] Ordinances. Ministry was instituted to put you in remembrance, and give you still new and fresh occasions to think of God: 2 Peter i. 12, 'I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance.' Our business is not always to inform you of what you know not, but to inculcate and revive known truths, there being much forgetfulness, stupidness, and senselessness upon our spirits: 2 Peter iii. 1, 'That I may stir up your minds by way of remembrance.' The impressions of God on our minds are soon defaced; we need to quicken and awaken your affections and resolutions to choose and cleave to God: 1 Tim. iv. 6, 'If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ.' So sacraments are instituted to bring God to remembrance: 1 Cor. xi. 24, 'This do in remembrance of me:' that we may remember his love and our covenanted duty. The sabbath was instituted for a remembrance and memorial of his creating, redeeming goodness.

[4.] The great office and work of the Spirit is to bring to remembrance: John xiv. 26, 'He shall bring all things to your remembrance.' We are apt to forget God, and instructions, and rebukes in their season: the Holy Ghost is our monitor.

3. God will not forget them that remember him. He will remember them at every turn: Mal. iii. 16, '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 thought upon his name.' If he do not openly reward you with temporal deliverances, yet he taketh notice of every thought and every word you speak for him, and taketh pleasure in you. It is upon record; if you have not the comfort of it now, you shall have it in a little time. Because they thought of him they spake of him, and owned him in an evil time; and therefore God is represented as hearing and booking: and the books shall one day be opened, and then you shall have your public reward.

Doct. 2. God is best remembered when his name is studied.

First, When is his name studied? In the general, when we look upon him as he hath manifested himself in his word and works. More particularly, God is discovered sometimes by the name of his essence, sometimes by his attributes.

1. By the name of his essence. When Moses was very inquisitive to know his name—and God can best tell his own name—let us see what answer was made him: Exod. iii. 12, 13, 'When they shall say unto me, What is his name? and God said, I am that I am.' God was sending Moses upon a strange message; he was giving him commission to go and speak to a king to dismiss and let go six hundred thousand of his subjects, to lead them to a place which God should show. Now Moses thought for such a message he had need have good authority, therefore desireth a significant name. 'I am that I am.' The form of the words showeth it was a wonderful incomprehensible name: 'Ask

not my name, for it is Wonderful,' Judges xiii. 18. This is enough to satisfy sober inquiry, though not wanton curiosity, enough for faith to work upon: the great I AM hath sent me. It showeth his unsearchableness. It is our manner of speech when we would cover anything and not answer distinctly, we say. It is what it is; I have said what I have said. Finite understandings cannot comprehend him that is infinite, no more than you can empty the sea with a cockleshell. He is the great and only being, in comparison of whom all else is nothing: Isa. xl. 17, 'All nations before him are nothing, they are counted less than nothing and vanity.' You have not a true and full notion of God if you conceive him only as the most eminent of all beings: no being must appear as being in his sight and in comparison of him. As long as you only conceive God to be the best, you still attribute something to the creature, for all comparatives include the positive. The creature is nothing in comparison with God; all the glory, perfection, and excellency of the whole world do not amount to the value of a unit in regard of God's attributes: join never so many of them together, they cannot make up one number, they are nothing in his regard, and less than nothing. All created beings must utterly vanish out of sight when we think of God. As the sun doth not annihilate the stars, and make them nothing, yet it annihilates their appearance to our sight; some are of the first magnitude, some of the second, some of the third, but in the day-time all are alike, all are darkened by the sun's glory: so it is here; there are degrees of perfection and excellency if we compare one creature with another, but let once the glorious brightness of God shine upon the soul, and in that light all their differences are unobserved. Angels, men, worms, they are all nothing, less than nothing to be set up against God: this magnificent title, I AM, darkeneth all, as if nothing else were. God did not tell Moses that he was the best, the highest, and the most glorious, but 'I am, and there is none else besides me:' nothing that hath its being of itself, nothing that can be properly called its own. Thus the incomprehensible self-existence of God puts man into his original nothing: none but God can say, I am, because all things else are but borrowed drops of this self-sufficient fountain; other things are near to nothing. God most properly is, who never was nothing, never shall be nothing, who may always in all difference of time say, *I am*, and nothing else but God can say so. The heaven and earth six thousand years ago could not say, We are. Adam could once have said, *I am*, as to his existence in the compounded nature of man, but now he cannot say it. All the gene rations past were but are not, and the present is but will not be; and within a little while who of us can say, I am? No; our 'place will know us no more:' but God eternally saith, 'I am:' not, I have been, or I shall be, but 'I am.' Look a little backward, and you shall find man's beginning; step a little forward, and you shall overtake his dissolution. But God is still I am; he is one that is before all, after all, and in all. He beholdeth from the mount of eternity all the successions and changes of the creature, and there is no succession or mutation in his knowledge. Well, then, here is an answer for Pharaoh, and the Israelites, and all of you to study on, 'I am that I am.' I am the fountain of all being, that do unchangeably and eternally exist in myself, and from myself.

2. God hath described his name by his attributes. To go over all, the compass of a sermon will not permit. I shall single out three from all the rest—his power, wisdom, and goodness; they are manifested in all that God doth.

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[1.] In creation. Basil, Ἐποίησεν ὡς ἀγαθὸς τὸ χρήσιμον, ὡς σοφὸς τὸ κάλλιστον, ὡς δυνατὸς τὸ μέγιστον—the goodness of God is seen in the usefulness of the creatures to man; the power of God in the stupendousness and wonderfulness of his works; his wisdom in the apt structure, constitution, and order of all things: first he createth, then distinguished, then adorneth. The first work was to create the heavens and earth out of nothing; there is his power: his next work is a wise destination and ordination of all things; he distinguisheth night from day, darkness from light, waters above the firmament from waters beneath the firmament, the sea from the dry land; there is his wisdom: then he decketh the earth with plants, and furnisheth it with beasts, and storeth the sea with fishes, the firmament with stars; there is his goodness. Let us examine these more particularly, beginning—

(1.) With his goodness. The creation is nothing else but an effusion of the bounty and goodness of God. He made the world, not that he might be happy, but that he might be liberal; he made the world not by necessity, but at his pleasure: Rev. iv. 11, ‘Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.’ God was happy enough without us; fee had a fulness and absolute sufficiency within himself; his great aim was to raise up objects out of nothing, to whom he would communicate his goodness. The heavens and earth were made that man might have a place for his exercise, and a dwelling for his rest, and in both might love, honour, serve, and glorify his Creator. God sits in his palace among his best creatures, and thither also will he translate man at length, if he be obedient, and observe the ends of his creation: thus his goodness appeareth.

(2.) His power. He brought all things out of the womb of nothing. The powerful *fiat* was enough: Isa. xl. 26, ‘Lift up your eyes on high, who hath created these things, and bringeth out their host by number, and calleth all things by their names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power?’ The force of the cause appeareth in the effect, and God’s power in the life and being of the creature. There is no artificer but he must have matter to work upon, or else his art will fail him and he can do nothing; all that man can do is to give some shape and form, or to fashion that in some new model which had a being before: but God made all things out of nothing; the inclination and beck of his will sufficeth for his great works. We have great toil and sweat in all things that we do, but behold what a great work is done without any pain and travail! It is troublesome to us to carry up a little piece of stone or timber to any building of ours, but God stretched out all these heavens in such an infinite compass by the word of his power, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.

(3.) His wisdom. The admirableness and comely variety of God’s works doth easily offer it to our thoughts. In the frame of the work you may easily find out a wise workman: Ps. cxxxvi. 5, ‘Sing praises to him that by wisdom hath made the heaven and the earth, for his mercy endureth

for ever:' so Prov. iii. 19, 'The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth, by understanding hath established the heavens: 'the wisdom of God appeareth in the order of making, and order of placing all the creatures. In making them, in simple things God began with those that were most perfect; as his first creature was light, which of all qualities is the most pure and defecate, and is not stained by passing through places most impure: then all the other elements. In mixed bodies God took another method, from imperfect to perfect; first things that have a being, as the firmament, then life, as plants, then sense, as beasts, then reason, as men: first God would provide the places of heaven and earth, then the creatures to dwell in them; first the food, then the creatures to be sustained by it. Provision was made for the inhabitants of the earth, as grass for beasts, and light for all living and moving creatures. Plants have a growing life, beasts a feeling life. Then man was made, last of all creatures, as most excellent. Thus God would teach us to go on from good to better. Man's palace was furnished with all things necessary, and they were placed and disposed in their apt cells for the beauty and service of the whole, and then like a prince he was sent into the world to rule and reign. There are not so many animals in the earth as in the sea, to avoid the great waste of food which would be consumed by the beasts of the land to the prejudice of man. But there is no end of these considerations. Only let me tell you, power is most eminently discovered in the creation: Rom. i. 20, 'The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.' The first apprehensions which we are possessed with, and which are most obvious, are the infinite greatness and power of the Creator.

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[2.] These are manifested in the whole structure of his word; his power in the histories and prophecies, which declare what God hath and shall do; his wisdom in the precepts and counsels, and discovery of such mysteries; his goodness in promises, institutions, and provisional helps. More particularly in the law part of his word, his goodness; that showeth man what is good: Micah vi. 8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good:' his power, in threatening such punishments and promising such rewards, and in the wonderful efficacy of his word in the conscience; his wisdom, in stating such a rule, that hath such an admirable fitness for the governing and regulating of mankind. But though all three shine forth in the law, and all in each part, yet his wisdom is most eminent: Deut. iv. 6, 'Keep these statutes, for this is your wisdom and understanding.' In the gospel, still these three attributes appear—the wonderful wisdom, power, and goodness of God. His wisdom in the orderly disposure of the covenant of grace: 2 Sam. xxiii. 5, '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.' And contriving the excellent design and plot of salvation by Christ: 1 Tim. iii. 16, 'Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up to glory.' His power in the incarnation, resurrection, and miracles of Christ; therefore Christ is called 'the wisdom and power of God.' But above all his love is magnified in the gospel: Rom. v. 8, 'God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners,

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Christ died for us:' 1 John iv. 9, 10, 'In this was manifested the love of God toward 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;' Titus iii. 4, 'But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeareth.'

SERMON LXII.

I have remembered thy name, Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law.—Ver. 55.

[3.] THESE are discovered in daily providence. To rub up and revive our thoughts, God is pleased anew to set before us the glorious effects of his wisdom, goodness and power; his wisdom in the contexture of providence, his power in the management of it, his goodness in the effects of it. His wisdom in the beauty and order of his works, in guiding the course of nature, and disposing all things about his people. He doeth all things well: Eccles. iii. 11, 'He hath made everything beautiful in its time,' or in the true and proper season; therefore, we that look upon providence by pieces, stumble at the seeming confusion and uncertainty of what falleth out, as if the affairs of the world were not under a wise government; but stay a little while till all the pieces of providence be put together in one frame, and then you will see a marvellous wisdom in them. In the work of creation, all things were 'very good,' Gen. i. 31; so for these six thousand years, as well as for the first six days. Those things which seem confused heaps when they lie asunder, when put together will appear a beautiful structure and building. So for his goodness. What part hath God been acting in the world for so long a time but that of mercy? He may be traced more by his acts of goodness than vengeance: Acts xiv. 17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, ἀγαθοποιῶν, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with joy and gladness.' The whole world is a theatre of mercy. If at any time we wrest punishment out of his hand, it is with an aim of mercy: as he threateneth that he may not punish, so he punisheth that he may not punish for ever. For his power, that is notably discovered to us every day. If we would draw aside the covering of the creature, you might soon see the secret almighty power of God which acteth in everything that falleth out; the same everlasting arm that made the creatures is under them to support them: Heb. i. 3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power.' As they started out of nothing by his command, so they are kept from returning into nothing by the same powerful word, command, and decree of God: 'Thou hidest thy face, and they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, and they die; thou sendest out thy Spirit, and they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth,' Ps. civ. 29, 30, All things hold their life of him. If God withdraweth in any measure the wonted influence of his power from them, they presently find a change in themselves. It is even with the being and faculties of the creature as. with the image of the glass, which, when the face removeth, it is seen no more. The Lord doth as it were breathe into them a being, and when he taketh in his breath they

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perish, and when he sendeth it out again they are renewed. Now, though God doth constantly discover his wisdom, power, and goodness, yet in some providence one of these doth more especially appear; his wisdom in some notable contrivance and chain of causes, which to a common eye seemed to have no tendency to such effects as are produced by them; as when out of the sins and perverse doings of men, or the disorders and confusions of the world, he raiseth his own glory, or by some unthought-of, unheard-of means bringeth about the deliverance of his people, taking the wise in their own craftiness. Sometimes his power, when by weak and contemptible means he bringeth great things to pass, and a straw becometh a spear in the hand of the Almighty. Sometimes in his goodness, in filling us with blessings, or doing notable acts of grace for his people's sake.

[4.] These three attributes suit with God's threefold relation to us. By his almighty power he becometh our creator; as most wise, our supreme governor; as most good, our gracious benefactor. We depend upon him for our present supplies, and from him we expect our future hopes. His creation gives him a right to govern us, his wisdom a fitness, and his bounty doth encourage us voluntarily to give up ourselves to his service.

[5.] These three attributes do most bind our duty on us, as they beget in us love, fear, and faith, or esteem, reverence, and trust, which are the three radical graces that result from the very being and owning of God, and are the *cultus naturalis* enjoined in the first commandment. His wisdom as a lawgiver begets reverence and fear; his goodness is the object of love, and his power of trust. If he be most wise, there is all the reason in the world that he should rule and govern us; for who is fitter to govern and make laws than he that is most wise? If he be most good, infinitely good, there is all the reason in the world that you should love him, and no show of reason why you should love the world and sin before him. If powerful and all-sufficient, there is all the reason you should believe in him, as one that is able to make good his word, either by promise or threatening. Faith goeth upon that: Rom. iv. 21, he was 'strong in faith, being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform.' He is God all-sufficient, therefore his promises are not to be distrusted, his threatenings not to be slighted. There is no resisting or standing out against him, in the twinkling of an eye he can tear you in pieces, pluck away the guilty soul from the embraces of the unwilling body. A spark of his wrath makes thee a burthen to thyself. So for promises; one word of his mouth can accomplish all the good that is contained in them. And it is observable that the respects of the creature, that are peculiarly due to one of these attributes, are sometimes in scripture directed to another. It is said, Hosea iii. 5, 'They shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days:' and love him for his power and greatness, and believe in him for his wisdom. Again, they trust him for his goodness, love him for his wisdom, fear him for his power; all these changes are in scripture.

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Secondly, Why God is best remembered when his name is studied? The reason is, because the study of his name doth increase those three fundamental radical graces before mentioned.

1. The studying of his name increaseth our love: ‘Thy name is as an ointment poured forth, therefore the virgins love thee,’ Cant. i. 3. Ointment kept close in the box doth not diffuse its savour, but ointment poured forth is full of fragrancy and reviving, it perfumeth the whole house: John xii. 3, ‘The house was filled with the odour of the ointment.’ So when the name of God is not considered, we are not comforted and strengthened and quickened; but pour it forth, take it abroad in your serious thoughts and believing meditations, and that doth attract and draw hearts to him. When we consider the mercy, grace, power, wisdom, truth, and justice of God, these affect all those that have any spiritual discerning. This is the way to draw esteem from carnal hearts; he hath authority to make laws, for he is the wise God; power to back this authority, for he is the almighty Creator, who can frown thee into nothing; but yet he is good and gracious, ready to receive you, and pardon, and do you good, though you have rebelled against him. To pour out this name is our duty, and then poor creatures will be prevailed with: it is our duty to do it in the discoveries of the gospel, your duty to ponder upon it in your private meditations. The wisdom of God in the word showeth your duty, his power what need you have to bind it on your hearts; and your case is not without hope, for you have to do with a good God: there is no mercy to such as fear not his powerful justice, and no justice for such as flee from it to his mercy. See how God poureth out his name: Exod. xxxiv. 5-7, ‘And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord; and the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed the Lord, 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 clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children unto the third and fourth generation.’

2. The studying of God’s name increaseth our faith and trust: Ps. ix. 10, ‘They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.’ God is first known, and then trusted, and then served. If God were known more he would be more trusted, and if he were more trusted we would not be so double-minded and unstable in the profession and practice of godliness. We little study God, and because we study his name so little, our faith is weak, and therefore we are so uncertain in our conversations. It is well when all our comfort and duty is immediately fetched out of the name of God, or his nature considered by us.

3. The studying of God’s name increaseth our reverence and fear: Ps. cxi. 9, ‘Holy and reverend is thy name;’ Ps. lxxxvi. 11, ‘Unite my heart to the fear of thy name.’ The more you study the nature of God, the more awe-ful, serious, humble, watchful will you grow. Thus you see serious and becoming thoughts of God do much increase our faith, fear, and love.

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Use. The use is to exhort you more—

1. To study the name of God, and to dwell upon the meditations of the Almighty, and to possess your mind with him till no place be left for sin or vanity.

[1.] The name of his being. God is not only the best of beings, but properly that which is; because he is a self-being, that gave being to all things else, and from everlasting to everlasting. We are but as it were of yesterday, and our being is from him, and our life in his hands; we cannot live an hour without him, nor fetch a breath without him, nor think a thought, nor speak a word, nor stir a hand or foot without him. There is a continual providential influence and supportation: as the beams of the sun vanish as soon as the sun is clouded, so do we fail when God suspends his influence. A watch goeth of itself, a mill of itself when the workman taketh off his hand from them: it is not so with us and God; for, Acts xvii. 28, 'In him we live, move, and have our being.' What Paul said of spiritual life, Gal. ii. 20, is true also of life natural, 'I am, yet not I, but God is all in all.' He is in us, and liveth in us, or we could not subsist for a moment. We need not seek God without in the workmanship of heaven and earth, for we have God within ourselves, and may feel him and find him in our own life and motion; as the child in the womb liveth by the life of the mother, before it is quickened and liveth apart by a life and soul of its own; or as a pipe sounds by the blowing of the musician; if he stop his breath it is altogether silent; so we live and breathe in God, and all the tune able variety of our motions cometh from his breathing in us. Now, if God be so near us, shall we not take notice of his presence, and carry ourselves accordingly? Shall we offend him and affront him to his face, and displease him without whom we cannot live? But alas! how seldom do we reflect upon this! How is it that we move and think not with wonder of the first mover in whom we move? How is it that we live and persevere in being, and do not consider of this fountain and self-being who gave our life to us, and still continues it? Oh, the negligence of many souls professing the knowledge of God and godliness! We speak, walk, eat, and drink, and go about all our business, as if we had a self-being and independent, never thinking of that all-present and quickening Spirit that acts us, moveth in us, speaketh in us, maketh us to walk, eat, drink, and do all the functions of nature; like the barbarous people who see, hear, speak, and reason, and never once reflect upon the principle of all these—a soul within.

[2.] Let us think often of the name of God, his attributes.

(1.) Of his wisdom, that we may compose ourselves to worship, adore him, serve him according to his will and pleasure, and may admire him in the justice and equity of his laws, and the excellent contrivance of his providence, that so we may submit to the directions of the one and the determinations of the other. To the directions of his word: Can we count God to be a wise God, and refuse his counsel? Doth not our practice give our profession the lie when we rather walk after our hearts' counsels, and the examples and fashions of the world, than observe the course God hath prescribed to us in the word? Who, then, is thought wise—God or men? So for submission to the determination of his providence. The flesh would fain be pleased, and therefore quarrelleth many times at God's dispensations as harsh and severe; but in good earnest who is wiser—God or men? Do we think we are fitter to sit at the helm, and govern and steer all affairs, than the wise Creator of heaven and earth? Shall we sit as judges upon his actions, and think that might have been prevented, this might have been better ordered, either for God's interest or our own comfort? Men

will be teaching God how to govern the world; for we prescribe to him as if he did not understand what were fit for us: he pleaseth us not in his wisest dispensations, and we bear it out as if we could mend his works: Job xxi. 22, 'Shall any teach God knowledge?' Those that disallow of God s proceedings take upon them to be God's teachers. It was a blasphemous speech of Alphonsus, *Si Deo a consiliis adfuisset in creatione mundi, multa se consultius ordinaturum*—if he had been of God's counsel when he made the world, he would have ordered many things better. Many abhor such a gross speech, yet think almost to the same effect. If they had the governing of the world, such men should not prosper; such and such things should not be done.

(2.) The name of his power. Oh! think often of that almighty power that maketh and conserveth all things, that giveth a being to you and every creature, and will do so to his promises, though never so unlikely; for what cannot he do that bringeth all things out of nothing by his word? Therefore our confidence in him should be more strong and steadfast; for why should we have any jealousies and distrusts of him who is omnipotent? In your greatest wants he is all-sufficient, and can supply you: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am the almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' In your greatest dangers he can deliver you: Dan. iii. 17, 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.' In your lowest estate he is able to raise you up: Rom. xi. 23, 'And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in; for God is able to graff them in again.' Whatever difficulties oppose themselves against the thing promised, he can remove them, for nothing is too hard for the Almighty: Phil. in. 21, 'He is able to subdue all things to himself.' How weak and despicable soever the visible means be, God can work by them: 2 Chron. xiv. 11, 'It is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or them that have no power.' All is alike to omnipotency. Instruments or means may be too great for God's honour to be used, never too small or weak for him to work by.

(3.) The name of his goodness. God is infinitely good, effectually good, independently good, and all-sufficiently good. If good be amiable in our eyes, so should God be. He hath all that is lovely in the creatures in a more eminent degree, and therefore our affections, that are scattered to them, should be united in God. He is the supreme good, and the fountain of all goodness. Oh! how should we love this God, and that above all things in the world, or else we do not love him aright. This is that which draweth in your hearts to him, and upon this should your thoughts dwell. He showed his goodness to you in creation, when he made you a little lower than the angels; but much more in redemption, when he preferred you above the angels; for 'he did not take hold of angels, but took hold of the seed of Abraham.' What should you be doing but admiring of this, and showing forth the virtue and force of this love? 'God is love, and dwelleth in love,' 1 John iv. 16. Oh! shall the paltry things of this world draw off your love from God, who is goodness itself? Let this prevail with you to lay down all your doating upon the creature, that you may no more follow the shadow, but cleave to the substance. We owe all that we are, all that we have, all that we hope for, to his goodness; and therefore let us consecrate and dedicate ourselves to his service and glory.

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2. To study it so as some good may come of it. We should keep our thoughts on this holy subject—

[1.] Till we admire God. The degree of the saints' knowledge here below is only to proceed to admiration: Ps. viii. 1, 'O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!' When we have studied God, silence will be the best eloquence, and admiration advance him more than speech. Admire the name of his being. Creatures in their highest glory may be described, an account may be given of them; but his nature is Wonderful, can be admired, but not told. Admire his wisdom: Ps. civ. 24, 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.' Admire his love: Oh, how excellent is thy loving-kindness! Ps. xxxvi. 7; '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!' Ps. xxxi. 19. The name of his power: Ps. cxlv. 3, 'Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.' The object is too big for the faculty: it is a contempt of God when we think of him and do not admire him. Oh, the riches of his wisdom, height of his power, breadth of his love!

[2.] Till we make some practical improvement of him; otherwise to know God is but a vain speculation, a work of curiosity rather than of profit. By the sight of God the heart must be—

(1.) Drawn off from the creature, self, and sin.

(2.) Drawn unto God.

(1.) Drawn off—

(1st.) From the creature. That is a true sight of God which abaseth all things beside God, not only in opinion but affection; that attracteth and uniteth the soul to God, and draweth it off from all created excellences. The sight of God's purity darkens the purity of the angels, and staineth the pride of all created glory: Job iv. 18, 'Behold, he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly.' So that is a true sight of God's excellency that draweth off the heart from the vain, changeable, and empty shadow of the creature; and God is not truly amiable to us till this effect be in some measure wrought in us: 1 John ii. 15, '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.' So that our love to God will be known by the decay of our love to earthly things.

(2d.) From self. A sight of God will best discover thyself unto thyself, that in the light of God's glorious majesty thou mayest distinctly behold thine own vileness and misery. Esaias, when he saw God in vision: Isa. vi. 5, 'Then said I, Woe is me. for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, and mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts.' That is the use he made of this glorious sight: he knew, doubtless, something of this before, but now is affected as if he had never seen it. The glory of God shining on him doth not lift him up in arrogancy and conceit of the knowledge of such profound mysteries, but he is more

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abased in himself; this light made him see his own uncleanness. So Job xlii. 5, 6, ‘I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; therefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes.’ As long as it was hearsay, Job thought himself some thing, and might reflect upon himself and actions with a kind of complacency and delight; but now he could not look upon himself with any patience. Self-love maketh us loathe other men’s sins more than our own, and hindereth us from representing ourselves to ourselves in a true shape. It is the mere speculative knowledge of God, and science falsely so called that puffeth up; but a true knowledge of God breedeth self-loathing.

(3d.) From sin: it draweth off the heart. This remembrance will represent filthiness as filthiness without a covering. Sin is a deformity to God, as contrariety to his laws, the purity and goodness of his essence, and wisdom of his laws; yea, an act of rebellion and disloyalty against his sovereignty. Sin still is greatened by the consideration of God and a reflection upon his nature; as against his authority, purity, goodness, so there is unkindness, disobedience, and a blot in it. Well may the apostle say, 3 John 11, ‘He that doth evil hath not seen God.’

(2.) The heart must be drawn unto God by love, fear, and trust; for unless we meditate upon God to this end, ‘Though we know God, we do not glorify him as God,’ Rom. i. 21, till your hearts be moved and inclined to love, fear him, and obey him. His being calls for it, that we should seek after communion with God, who is such a self-sufficient, all-sufficient, and eternal being. Whom would we own, or whose favour would we seek? The favour of poor creatures, who are now one thing, now another? or the favour of God, who can still say, I am that I am! what I was I am, and I will be what I am? Friends are changeable, their affections dry up, and they themselves die, and their favour and all their thoughts of doing us good perish. There is no end of his duration or affection. His attributes call for love; his power rendereth him the most desirable friend and dreadful adversary. What more dreadful than power that cannot be resisted, wisdom that none can be hid from? and what more lovely than his love? Surely if we did study his name, his promises, and threatenings, it would have more power with us: how would we seek to him, and submit to his blessed will, and depend on him, as those that have nothing in our selves, nor anything else in the world had being without him! We would then believe all opposite powers to be nothing, and wink at either the dreadfulness or loveliness of the creature, while the eye of our souls is wholly taken up with the sight of God; our desires would be to him, and our delights in him, and being deadened to the creature, would wholly cleave to him.

Doct. 3. Those that have spiritual affections will take all occasions to remember God’s name. In adversity, for their comfort: Isa. xxvi. 8, 9, ‘Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee: the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee: with my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early;’ Isa. l. 10, ‘Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.’ In prosperity, for a regulation and restraint to their affections, that they might not too freely run out

on the creature to the wrong of God. It is said of the wicked, Ps. lv. 19, ‘Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God;’ but God’s children remember him in their comforts: Deut. viii. 10, 11, ‘When thou hast eaten and art full, thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee; beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God;’ so ver. 18, ‘Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for he it is that giveth thee power to get wealth.’ In company they will be speaking of God: Eph. v. 4, ‘ἀλλὰ εὐχαριστία, but rather giving of thanks.’ Alone they will be thinking of God; so that when they are alone, they are not alone; God is with them in their solitude: John xvi. 32, ‘Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every one to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.’ By day they redeem time, God’s statutes are their songs; by night when they cannot sleep: ‘When I awake I am still with thee,’ Ps. cxxxix. 18. Oh, what an advantage it is to have the heart thus thronged with thoughts of God in the night! When others sleep, good men are awake with God.

1. Observe this, that which David speaketh of himself was a secret duty. Those duties which we perform in secret, and wherein we avoid the applause of men, are most sincere, and by them many times we obtain most blessing: Mat. vi. 6, ‘Thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.’ David was the same in secret that he was in the light. Other witnesses of our respect to God we need not than God himself: it is enough that he seeth us and approveth us. Our desire and scope should be to please him, not to appear devout to men, or to be esteemed as such by them. Therefore, besides public ordinances, we should give ourselves to spiritual exercises in secret.

2. This was a spiritual duty transacted in the heart by his thoughts. The darkness of the night doth riot hinder the delight of the soul; it is day within though night without. When a child of God shall see God, and be seen of him, though the sun shineth not upon the world, it is enough, their hearts are enlightened with God’s Spirit.

3. It was a duty done ἀκαίρως, unseasonably to a vulgar eye. When others were buried in sleep, David would awaken sometimes to remember God. It is their solace; and spiritual affections and heroical grace must not be limited to the ordinary dull way of expressing duty to God. They have special affections and special dispensations: Ps. lxiii. 6, ‘My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, when I remember thee on my bed, and meditate of thee in the night-watches.’

4. It is not unseasonable. In the night, without distraction, we can more freely command our thoughts, for the senses being exercised, scatter the mind to several objects: Job xxxv. 10, ‘None saith, Where is God, my maker, who giveth songs in the night?’ That is matter of rejoicing and comfort to poor oppressed creatures. So Ps. xlii. 8, ‘I will sing of his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me.’ Day and night he was filled with a sense of God’s love. The reasons are—

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[1.] They are fitted for it, having knowledge and a deep impression of the majesty of God upon their hearts: ‘My reins instruct me in the night-season,’ Ps. xvi. 7. These things that make a deep

impression in the day, the thoughts will return upon in the night; now God and his words are impressed upon them.

[2.] They delight in it: Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord.' They delight themselves in beholding the face of God, though not by immediate vision, yet by meditation. They are so affected with thoughts of his excellency, goodness, kindness, that it is their solace to draw their hearts off from all things and persons in the world to that divine object.

[3.] They profit by it. (1.) As to comfort, it easeth us of many sorrowful, troublesome, and weary thoughts. We must fetch our comforts from God; the divine nature is the first fountain of them, therefore called 'the God of all comfort,' 2 Cor. i. 3. (2.) As to duty and obedience. The reasons of our duty and subjection are most enforced from the nature of God; therefore the more we remember the nature of God, the more we are quickened to obedience: there we see his infinite power, supreme authority, exact holiness, tender love: 'Let the potsherds of the earth contend with one another,' Isa. xlv. 9. Our business is to keep God our friend. He hath two properties that make him most comfortable or most terrible, according as he is at peace or war with us eternity and omnipotency.

Use. Let us take more occasions to think of God, and that with admiration. Many take no more notice of him than if he were not at. all; but let us take all occasions: Ps. iv. 4, 'Commune with your own hearts upon your bed.' All the time we can spare from our necessary, civil, and natural actions should be employed in calling to mind what we have seen, or heard, or felt of God. A loathness and backwardness to this duty is an ill sign.

SERMON LXIII.

This I had, because I kept thy precepts.—Ver. 56.

IN this psalm the dependence of the verses is neither to be neglected, nor too curiously sought after. Many of the sentences have no other connection than pearls upon the same string, though some are as links in the same chain, fastened one to the other by an apt method and order. The design of the penman was to cast all his experiences into the order of the Hebrew alphabet; and as there are in the Hebrew twenty-two letters, so twenty-two parts or octonaries. Each octonary beginneth with the same letter. This sentence which I have read seemeth to be independent of the preceding verse, and is the sudden effusion or eruption of a gracious heart engaged in the meditation of the fruit of obedience: 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.' In the words you have—

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1. David's assertion of his integrity, *I have kept thy precepts*.

2. The gain of this course indefinitely proposed, *this I had*.

3. The link between both in the causal particle, *because*. David doth not here tell you what he had, but this and that: this hope, this comfort, this quickening, this deliverance; all this I had; that is, whatever is good and comfortable. The feminine pronoun *Zeth* is put neutrally, the Hebrew wanting the neuter gender.

The points are two:—

First, He that continueth faithful in a course of obedience will find at length that it will turn to a good account.

Secondly, That it is of great use to observe what good cometh to us by keeping close to God's ways.

For the first point, he that continueth faithful in a course of obedience will find at length that it will turn to a good account. Here three things are to be explained:—

1. What it is to keep God's precepts.

2. What is the good that accrueth to us thereby.

3. The connection between both these, or the reasons and grounds upon which we may expect this good.

1. Let us inquire what it is to keep God's precepts. The phrase is often used in scripture, implying a diligent observance of it, and obedience thereunto. The term *keep* relateth to a charge or trust committed to us. Look, as on our part we charge Christ with our souls—2 Tim. i. 12, 'I know that he is able to keep that I have committed to him'—so Christ chargeth us with his word, that we may be chary and tender of it. We charge him with our souls, that he may sanctify and save them in his own day; so he chargeth us with his precepts, that we may lay them up in our hearts, and observe them in our practice. As we would have Christ to be faithful to his trust, so should we be in ours, and that even to a tittle: James ii. 10, 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in point, he is guilty of all.' Now, there is a twofold keeping of God's precepts—legal and evangelical.

[1.] The legal keeping, that is when we keep and perform the commandments so exactly as is answerable to the rigour of the law. What is that? The law requires perfect and absolute obedience, without the least failing in any one point: Gal. iii. 10, 'Cursed is he that continueth not in all things that is written in the book of the law to do them.' The least offence, according to that covenant, layeth us open to the curse; as for one sin once committed the angels were turned out of heaven, and Adam out of paradise. In this sense there is no hope for us.

[2.] There is an evangelical keeping God's precepts, and that is filial and sincere obedience; and so they are said to keep God's precepts, not they who have no sin in them, but they who study to be free from sin, and desire to please God in all things. David had many failings, and some of

them of a high nature; yet he saith, I have kept thy precepts. His purpose and endeavour was to please God in all things. The apostles had many failings; they were weak in faith, passionate, full of revenge, calling for fire from heaven; a great many failings we may find upon record against them; yet Christ returneth this general acknowledgment: John xvii. 6, 'They have kept thy word.' God accepteth of our endeavours; when our defects are repented of, he pardoneth them: James v. 11, 'You have heard of the patience of Job;' and we have heard of his impatience too, his cursing the day of his birth, and his bold expostulation with God; but God putteth his finger upon the scar, and mentions that which is commendable. This sincere obedience is known by our endeavours after perfection, and our repentance for defects. For let me tell you here, that perfect obedience is required under the gospel: the rule is as strict as ever it was, but the covenant is not so strict. The rule is as strict as ever it was; we are still bound to perpetual, personal, and perfect obedience, otherwise our defects were no sins: 'For where there is no law, there is no transgression,' Rom. iv. 15. But the covenant is not so strict. This perfect obedience is not so indispensably required under the sanction and penalty of the old covenant; for the gospel, though it alloweth or approveth of no sin, yet it granteth a pardon of course to some sins as they are retracted by a general repentance. As sins of infirmity, such as are sins of ignorance, which had we known we would not have committed; and sins of incogitancy and sudden surreption, which may escape without observation of them; and sins of violent temptation, which by reason of some sudden assault sway our passions against the right rule; such sins as do not arise out of an evil purpose of the mind, but out of human frailty; they are consistent with an interest in this covenant, which alloweth a means of recovery by repentance, which the law doth not. The law for one offence once committed doth condemn a man without leaving him any way or means of recovery; but the gospel saith, 'I came to call sinners to repentance,' Mat. ix. 13. It accepteth repentance, and doth not cast men off for sins of infirmity. Where there is a general purpose to please God, and a hearty sorrow when we offend him, this is the sincerity which the gospel accepteth of. In the law, complete innocence is required; in the gospel, repentance is allowed: and so he is said to keep God's statutes that doth not voluntarily and impenitently go on in a course of known sin.

2. Let me now show the good that cometh to us thereby. David saith indefinitely, 'This I had;' not telling us what good or privilege it was, only in the general it was some benefit that accrued to him in this life. He doth not say, This I hope for, but, This I had. And therefore I shall not speak of the full reward in the life to come. In heaven we come to receive the full reward of obedience. But a close walker, that waiteth upon God in a humble and constant obedience, shall have sufficient encouragement even in this life. Not only he shall be blessed, but he is blessed; he hath something in hand as well as in hope. As David saith in this 119th Psalm, not only he *shall be* blessed, but he *is* blessed. As they that travelled towards Zion, they met with a well by the way: Ps. lxxxiv. 6, 'Who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well: the rain also filleth the pools.' In a dry and

barren wilderness through which they were to pass, they were not left wholly comfortless, but met with a well or cistern; that is, they had some comfort vouchsafed to them before they came to enjoy God's presence in Zion, some refreshments they had by the way. As servants, that beside their wages have their vails, so, besides the recompense of reward hereafter, we have our present comforts and supports during our course of service, which are enough to counter balance all worldly joys, and the greatest pleasures that men can expect in a way of sin. Let me instance in the benefits that believers find by walking with God in a course of obedience, that every one can say, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.'

[1.] Peace of conscience, a blessing not to be valued; and this we have because we keep his precepts: Isa. xxxii. 17, 'The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.' They shall be free from those unquiet thoughts wherewith others are haunted. A wicked man's soul is in a mutiny, one affection warreth against another, and all against the conscience, and conscience against all; but in a heart framed to the obedience of God's will there is peace. *Pax est tranquillitas ordinis*—when every thing keeps its place there is peace; when the elements keep their place, and the confederacies of nature are preserved, then there is peace: so when a man walketh in a holy course there is peace; when the thoughts and affections are under rule and government, there is a serenity and quiet in the soul. Now, this is never brought to pass in the soul but by obedience and holy walking according to the rule of the new creature: Gal. vi. 16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy shall be upon them, as upon the whole Israel of God.' Such an accurate and orderly life is the only way of obtaining this peace and harmonious accord in the soul. So Ps. cxix. 165, 'Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them:' not only peace, but great peace—a peace that passeth all understanding, a peace better felt than expressed; and this resulteth from obedience, or the government of our hearts and ways according to the will of God. Look, as cheerfulness and liveliness accompanieth perfect health, or the tunable motion of the spirits in the body, so this serenity and quiet in the soul, the regular and orderly motion of our faculties; there is a sweet contentment of mind resulting from it. 'The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.' In a troublesome world we need to have our hearts and minds kept and guarded from assaults of temptations, and diffident vexing cares and fears; and therefore it is mightily necessary in those times to get the peace of God, without which the soul is upon the rack. Oh, this sweet peace and calm that is in our hearts in the midst of all tempests and tossings from without! A man is provided and fortified against the apprehension of injuries, troubles, dangers, and those heart-cutting cares which otherwise are apt to seize upon us. This a believer can say, This peace of conscience I had in the midst of all the troubles from without. Now this peace others cannot have: Isa. lvii. 21, 'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked:' they have not this inward tranquillity and serenity of mind; their affections are so unruly, and their consciences so unquiet, they are never able to rest.

But how can this be? None seem to be less troubled than wicked men. I answer—There is a difference between a dead sea and a calm sea; a stupid conscience: they may have, but not a quiet conscience: their consciences are stupefied by drenching their souls in worldly delights and pleasures; but the virtue of this opium is soon spent, their consciences are easily awakened by the convictions of the word, the sting of afflictions, the agonies of death. Well, then, this may the composed heart say, I had this peace, this serenity of mind, because I kept thy precepts.

[2.] Next to peace of conscience there is joy in the Holy Ghost; this is the fruit of peace, as peace is the fruit of righteousness: Rom. xiv. 17, 'The kingdom of God consisteth not in meat and drink, but in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' First righteousness, and then peace, and then joy in the Holy Ghost. As joy of heart and gladness is the fruit of temporal or civil peace, when every man may sit under his own vine and his own fig-tree, and reap the fruit of his labour without the danger of annoyance; so now, when a man can enjoy himself as being reconciled to God, or being at peace with him, and hath tasted of the clusters of Canaan, he can 'rejoice in hope of the glory of God,' Rom. v. 11. This is that joy in the Holy Ghost which God doth graciously dispense to those that obey his word and hearken to the motions of his Spirit. Oh! how may a believer triumph and say, 'This I had because I kept thy precepts!' Joy is the fruit of holiness, and the oil of grace maketh way for the oil of gladness: Ps. cxix, 14, 'I rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches.' David experienced the joys of obedience, and the joys of a crown: now saith David, 'I rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches:' not in the contemplation, but in the way. This was a joy that did result from practical obedience, which is more than the possessions and treasures of the world. Many picture religion in their fancies with a sour and austere face, and think it inviteth men to nothing but harsh and unpleasant courses. Oh, no! It inviteth you to the highest contentment the creature is capable of, the joy in the Holy Ghost, which is 'unspeakable and glorious.' A sensualist, that runs after the dreggy delights of the flesh, is the veriest fool in the world; for he can never have any true joy, it is but frisks of mirth (while conscience is asleep), but when it is gone, it leaveth a sting behind it.

[3.] Increase of grace. This is another benefit we get by keeping God's precepts: 'They go from strength to strength,' Ps. lxxxiv. 7; as they that went to the feast at Jerusalem; they went from troop to troop; so they are brought forward in their way to heaven. God, that punisheth sin with sin, rewardeth also grace with grace. The one is the most dreadful dispensation that God can use. When men have gone on in a course of sin, God often punisheth one sin with another, so that they are plunged deeper and deeper every day in the gulf of profaneness. But it is most comfortable when godliness increaseth upon our hands, and God is still perfecting his own work in us: Rom. vi. 19, 'As you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity, so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.' It standeth us upon to observe the

growth of grace, as we were formerly conscious of the growth of sin. Shall we be more earnest to damn ourselves than to save ourselves? There is no man but in his carnal estate might observe how he departed from God by degrees, and his heart was hardened by degrees. At first he had some light and conscience, till he sinned it away and turned his back upon the ordinances, which might revive it and keep it awake; and then his sin betrayed him further and further into a customary course of profaneness. I say, a carnal man may trace the growth of sin in his own heart step by step, and say, 'This I had because I slighted such a check of conscience, despised such an ordinance, fell into such an enormous practice:' for God forsaketh none till they first forsake him. So may a child of God trace his gradual increase in holiness: this I had by hearkening to the counsel of God at such a time against the reluctancy of my flesh. There is no duty recovered out of the hands of difficulty but bringeth in a considerable profit to the soul: Prov. iv. 18, 'The way of the just is a shining light, which shineth more and more to the perfect day.' Look, as the day decreaseth the night increaseth, till it cometh to thick darkness; so by every sin men grow worse and worse, till at last they stumble into utter darkness. But the way of the just is a growing light; it increaseth always into more durable resolutions and exact practice of godliness, till it come to the high noon of perfection. David taketh notice of the fruit of obedience: Ps. xviii. 24, 'The Lord accept of me according to the cleanness of my hands.'

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[4.] Another benefit that we have is many gracious experiences and manifestations of God vouchsafed to us in the way of obedience. In the present world God and believers are not strange to one another; a man that walketh close with him will meet him at every turn: Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.' The Psalmist there preferreth his present condition before the greatest happiness of carnal men. Why? Because he had opportunity of beholding the face of God, or enjoying the comforts of his presence. But how? In righteousness, in a strict course of obedience. If God be a stranger to others, they may thank themselves: John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me is loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him.' Holiness is the only way to clear up our right to these great comforts of the gospel; and if you would get experience of them, make conscience of obedience, and be exact and punctual with God, and you will not want your refreshments and visits of love, and expressions of his grace and favour to you: those sensible proofs and manifestations God will not give to us but in a way of obedience; so the promise runneth, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, to him will I manifest myself:' so ver. 23, 'If a man love me, and keep my commandments, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and take up our abode with him.' These are taken into sweet fellowship and communion with God, and the blessed Trinity will take up their abode in his heart. But pray, mark, Christ, that is so tender and willing to communicate the influences of his grace, yet standeth upon his sovereignty, and therefore still insisteth upon keeping his precepts, if they would par take of his comforts.

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[5.] Protection in their work. They are under the special care and conduct of his providence while they keep his precepts: 'He keepeth them as in a pavilion; thou shalt hide them in the secret

of thy presence from the pride of men,' Ps. xxxi. 20. And who are they that are kept? Those that fear him and trust in him,' ver. 19. Pray, mark, when they had no visible defence, when they seemed to be left open as a prey to the oppressions and injuries of their potent adversaries, yet there is a secret guard about them, and they are kept the world knoweth not how: God's favour and providence is their sure guard and defence. Whatever contentious and proud men design and threaten against them, yet they never have their full will upon them. Many a child of God hath ridden out the storm, and may come and say 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.' This it is to keep close to God and hold fast our integrity. Elsewhere the Lord expresseth himself to be 'a wall of fire round about his people,' Zech. ii. 5, which should affright at a distance, and consume near at hand. In those countries, when they lay in the fields, they made fires about them to keep off the wild beasts; so God, when he seeth it fit to excuse his people from trouble, he can in the most unsafe times, and when they are weakest, protect them by his secret hand, bridling their enemies and making their attempts ineffectual. Satan is sensible of this privy guard: Job i. 10, 'Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?' The world seeth not this invisible guard, but the devil seeth it. There is no gap open for mischief to enter and break in upon them. This can God do when he pleaseth; and a man that holdeth fast his integrity, and goeth on in his duty referring himself to God's keeping, shall have experience of it, and when the danger is over, say, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.'

[6.] In public and common judgments God maketh a difference; and some of his choice ones are marked out for preservation, and are as brands plucked out of the burning, whilst others are consumed therein. This is done oftentimes, I cannot say always. The Jews have a proverb that two dry sticks may set a green one on fire: a good man may perish in the common judgment, that is the meaning of the proverb. And sometimes their condition may be worst; as Jeremiah: the whole city was besieged, and he in the dungeon. Chaff and corn is threshed in the same floor, but the corn is ground and baked. But this is the best way we can take to be hid in the common calamity, though there be not an absolute certainty; for the comfort is but propounded with a possibility: Zeph. ii. 3, 'Seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.' Though God hath a peculiar eye to the godly, yet their temporal safety is not put out of all doubt; it may be, or it may not be; but their eternal comforts are sure and safe. Yet strict and humble walking is the only way; and in some cases God showeth that there shall be a distinction between Ins people and others, and when others are overwhelmed, they shall be preserved; as Eccles. viii. 12, 'Surely I know it shall be well with them that fear the Lord, which fear before him; but it shall be ill with the wicked;' and Isa. iii. 10, 'Say unto the righteous it shall be well with him, for they shall eat of the fruit of their doings; but say unto the wicked it shall be ill with them, for the work of his hands shall be given to him;' and Jer. xv. 11, 'Verily it shall be well with this remnant: I will cause the enemy to treat them well in the day of evil and affliction.' All these places speak of delivering them from trouble, or moderating the trouble to them. If there be an uncertainty in the thing, yet a probability; but whenever it is done, it is a singular favour, and we must own it as the

fruit of obedience: ‘This I had, because I kept thy precepts.’ We must expect the temporal reward of godliness with much submission, and venture upon his providence.

[7.] So much of sanctified prosperity as shall be good for them: Mat. vi. 33, ‘First seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and these things shall be added.’ God will cast them into the bargain; and though he may keep them low and bare, yet ‘no good thing will he withhold,’ Ps. lxxxiv. 11. So that a child of God surveying all his comforts may say, This and that and the other mercy I had from the Lord’s grace; these comforts and these deliverances came in ‘because I kept thy precepts.’

3. The next thing is to show you what connection there is between these two, obedience and this good, or the reason of the Lord’s dealing thus.

[1.] God doth it partly out of his general justice, as he is governor of the world: his holy nature doth delight in holiness, and therefore it is requisite, *ut bonis bene sit, et malis male*—that it should be well with them that do well, and evil with them that do evil, and such dealing a man should have from God as he dealeth out to God: Ps. xviii. 25, 26, ‘With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful, and with the upright thou wilt show thyself upright, and with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure, and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward.’ In the general, that it should be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked; there is an argument in the governing justice of God: but then, to come to particulars, that it should be so ill with the wicked, here is *exacta ratio justi*; but that it should be so well with men imperfectly righteous, this is moderate justice mixed with undeserved mercy.

[2.] There is his gracious promise and covenant; heaven and earth are laid at the feet of godliness: 1 Tim. iv. 8, ‘Godliness hath the promise of this life and that which is to come.’ Something during our service in this world.

The second point is, that it is of no small benefit to see and observe what good we have by obedience to God.

1. It will increase our esteem of his grace. That the little and slender obedience that we yield to his law should have such respect and acceptance with him as to be recompensed with so much peace, and comfort, and protection, and so many blessings: ‘Lord, what am I, and what is my father’s house?’ Oh, what a good master have we! When the saints are crowned, they cast their crowns at the Lamb’s feet, Rev. iv. 10. We hold all by his mercy: Luke xvii. 10, ‘When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants;’ not in compliment, but in truth of heart, we are unprofitable servants. That God should respect us, it is not for the dignity of the work, but merely for his own grace.

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2. It is of use that we may justify God against the reproaches and prejudices of carnal men, who think God is indifferent to good and evil, and that all things come alike to all, that it is in vain to

be strict and precise, that there is no reward to the good: Mal. iii. 14, ‘It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances?’ Yea, the temptation may befall God’s own children, and be forcibly borne in upon their hearts: Ps. lxxiii. 13, ‘Verily I have cleansed my hands in vain.’ We think all is lost labour. Now, to produce the sweet consolations of God, and his temporal supplies, and the manifold blessings bestowed upon us, it is a good stay to our hearts, and enables us to justify God against the scorns and reproaches of the world.

3. It is of use to check our murmurings. If we endure anything for God, we are apt to repine, and pitch upon that evil we receive from his hand, passing over the good. A little evil, like one humour out of order, or one member out of joint, disturbeth the whole body; so we, by poring upon the evil we endure, pass over all his other bounty: Mal. i. 2, ‘Wherein hast thou loved us?’ God cannot endure to have his love suspected or undervalued; and yet people are apt to do so when dispensations are anything cross to their desires and expectations. But now it is a great check, to consider that if we have our troubles, we have also our consolations; and we should rather look upon the good that cometh to us in pleasing God, than the temporal and light afflictions we meet withal in his service: Job ii. 10, ‘Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and not evil?’

4. It is an encouragement to us in well-doing, the more proofs and tokens we have of his supportation. We are wrought upon by the senses; as Jer. ii. 19, ‘Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings reprove thee: see what an evil and bitter thing it is to for sake the Lord;’ and ver. 23, ‘See thy way in the valley, and know what thou hast done.’ As parents, when their children smart for eating raw diet, they upbraid them with it: It is for eating your green fruit; so doth the Lord come to his people: Now you see the evil of your doings. So, on the contrary, it doth engage us to strict walking to see how God owneth it; so doth God appeal to us by experience: ‘Have I been a land of darkness to you, or a barren wilderness?’ Jer. ii. 31; Micah ii. 7, ‘Do not my words do good to them that walk uprightly?’ Look about you, survey all your comforts; did sin procure these mercies, or godliness? Have you not found sensible benefit by being sincere in my service?

Object. But is this safe, to ascribe the comfort and blessings that we have to our own obedience? Is it not expressly forbidden, Deut. ix. 4, ‘Say not in thy heart, For my righteousness hath the Lord brought me to possess the land’?

Ans. 1. David doth not boast of his merits, but observeth God’s mercy and faithfulness in the fruits of obedience. There is his mercy in appointing a reward for such slender services: Gal. vi. 16, ‘As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them.’ All the comfort we have is from mercy; yea, undeserved mercy. Those that walk according to this rule stand in need of mercy. Their peace and comfort floweth from mercy; they need mercy to cover the failings they

are conscious to in their walkings. And then consider his truth and faithfulness. The reward of well-doing cometh not by the worthiness of the work, but by virtue of God's promise: 'His word doth good to them that walk uprightly,' Micah ii. 7. God hath made himself a debtor by his promise, and oweth us no thanks for what we can do; it is only his gracious promise.

Ans. 2. David speaketh not this to vaunt it above other men, but to commend obedience, and to encourage himself and invite others by remembering the fruits of it. There is a great deal of difference between carnal boasting and gracious observation. Carnal boasting is when we vaunt of our personal worth; gracious observation is when, for God's glory and our profit, we observe the fruits of obedience, and the benefits it bringeth along with it. That God never gave us cause to leave, but to commend his service, and, by what we have found, to invite others to 'come and taste that the Lord is gracious.'

Use 1. To encourage us in the ways of the Lord and keeping of his precepts. It is no unprofitable thing: before we have done we shall be able to say, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.' Two things God usually bestoweth upon his people—a tolerable passage through the world, and a comfortable going out of the world; which is all a Christian needeth to care for: here is only the place of his service, not of his rest.

1. He shall have a tolerable passage through the world. A child of God may have a hard toilsome life of it, but he hath his mixtures of comfort in his deepest afflictions; he hath peace with God, that keeps his heart and mind, and maketh his passage through the world tolerable, because God is engaged with him: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'Faithful is he that hath called you, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able to bear.' He is freed from wrath, and hath his discharge from the curse of the old covenant; he is taken into favour with God, and hath as much of temporal relief as is necessary for him; his condition is made comfortable to him.

2. A comfortable passing out of the world: Isa. xxxviii. 3, 'Remember, O Lord,' saith Hezekiah, 'I have walked before thee with an upright heart.' When you lie upon your death-beds, and in a dying hour, how comfortable will this be, the remembrance of a well-spent and well-employed life in God's service! They that wonder at the zeal and niceness of God's children, when they are entering into the other world, they cry out then, Oh, that they had been more exact and watchful! Oh, that they might die the death of the righteous! They should live so. Men then have other notions of holiness than ever they had before. But, Christians, here is your comfort; the word of God, that hath been your rule, is now your comfort and cordial, and stands by you to the very last.

Use 2. To persuade us to observe the difference between the ways of God and the ways of sin. When a man cometh to cast up his account on the one side and on the other, oh what a difference is there! Certainly there will a time come when you must cast up your account and use this recollection, either when your eyes are opened by grace in conversion, or when your eyes are opened by punishment. On sin's side consider, when you look back to what is past—(the Lord grant you

may make this reflection!)—Rom. vi. 21, 'What fruit had you in those things whereof you are now ashamed?' You cannot look back without horror of conscience; as the unclean person, when he looketh back, and considereth that his flesh and body is consumed by sin, Prov. v. 11-13. He speaketh there of some noisome disease that hath gotten into his body. But then, on the other side, the side of godliness, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts,' Oh! what peace, what serenity of mind, what hopes of eternal life, what comfortable entertainment shall you have in heaven! Determine before hand what it will come to. Thus you see the difference between a sinful and godly course.

SERMON LXIV.

Thou art my portion, Lord: I have said that I would keep thy words.—Ver. 57.

DAVID doth in this place make out his right and title, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord,' &c. Here is—

1. David's protestation, *thou art my portion, O Lord*.

2. David's resolution, *I have said that I would keep thy words*.

In the first of these, in David's protestation, you may take notice of his claim, and of the sincerity of it.

1. Of his claim to God, 'Thou art my portion.' A part or portion, in the original use of the word, signifies a less quantity taken from a greater; a part is used in opposition to the whole. But with respect to the matter in hand, it is not used in such a sense, but for our lot and happiness; not *sensu mathematico*, not with reference to a whole, but *politico et forensi*, with respect to choice, interest, and possession; and the allusion is taken either from the distribution of the land of Canaan, where every one had his portion appointed to him by lot, and measured to him by rod and lines: therefore it is said, 'The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage;' or else it is an allusion to the partage of an ordinary estate, where every child hath his portion assigned him to live upon. Thus he lays claim to God himself.

2. The sincerity of this claim may be gathered, because he speaks by way of address to God. He doth not say barely, 'He is my portion,' but challengeth God to his face, 'Lord, thou art my portion.' Elsewhere it is said, Lam. iii. 24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul.' There he doth not speak it by way of address to God, but he adds, My soul saith. But here to God himself, who knows the secrets of the heart. To speak thus of God to God argues our sincerity, when to God's face we avow our trust and choice; as Peter, John xxi. 17, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee;' he appeals to God's omnisciency; such an appeal is there to God for the

truth of this assertion; as in that other place, when the believing soul lays claim to God, the integrity of that claim is also asserted, not only by the lips or mouth, but also the soul. There is *oratio mentalis, vocalis, vitalis*: there is the speech of the heart, in the real inclination of it; and the speech of the tongue, in outward profession; and the speech of the life, by answerable practice. All three must be joined together; what the tongue utters, the heart and life must consent to. All will say, God is their portion; but it is not what the tongue says, but what the heart saith; and what the heart saith will appear in the course of your actions; there is the real proof and evidence of it. Thus much for David's protestation, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord;' he speaks to God himself.

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Secondly, Take notice of David's resolution, 'I have said that I would keep thy word.' It is good to see what kind of inference the saints draw from this principle, that God is their portion. Sometimes they infer thence dependence upon God, sometimes subjection and obedience to him; for this principle doth not only establish our comfort, but our duty. Sometimes to establish dependence: Lam. iii. 24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.' I will look for all from him, live upon him as a man doth upon his portion. But here David infers duty and obedience: 'I have said that I would keep thy words.'

In this resolution we may observe—

1. The formality or manner of making, *I have said*: it is by way of practical decree.

2. The matter of it, *I will keep thy word*s.

1. For the formality or manner of it, 'I have said,' I decreed within myself, I have fully concluded; here was not a light or inconsiderate purpose, but such as was deliberate, fixed, a practical decree upon a debate. Whoever would enter upon a strict course displeasing to flesh and blood, must seriously consider and then fixedly determine: deliberation and determination are both necessary. There must be consultation or deliberation, that he may sit down and count the charges; otherwise, if profession of godliness be lightly taken up, it will be as lightly left. Then there must be determination, or binding the heart by firm purpose; and if we join the next verse, supplication or begging God's strength, then all is done. Now this firm purpose I have said will help against inconstancy, or against backwardness or unreadiness of heart. Against inconstancy: Many good motions we start, but they die away for want of corning to a resolution, or issuing forth a practical decree for God: James i. 8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' But David, when he had considered all things, then 'I have said that I will keep thy words;' he was fully resolved. Then it will help against laziness, listlessness, and backwardness of heart. David, when he was grown shy of God, and his heart hung off from him, some great distemper was upon his soul, and he was loath to look God in the face, what course did he take then? He issues forth a practical decree: Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord.' He thrusts himself forward, and charges himself to go to God: I am resolved I will break off silence, and open my case to God. Thus

we must excite ourselves by renewing a decree in the soul; determine, I will do thus and thus for God, whatever comes of it.

2. For the matter, 'I will keep thy words.' Keeping God's word notes an exact and tender respect, when a man keeps it as a jewel, as a precious treasure, that it may not be hazarded; or keeps it 'as the apple of his eye,' Prov. vii. 2. The eye is soon offended with the least dust; BO when we are chary of the word of God, loath to offend God in anything, then are we said to keep his word.

Two points lie clear in the text:—

1. That God alone is the godly man's portion.

2. That those which have chosen God for their portion will manifest it by a fixed resolution and strict care of obedience.

It must needs be so; if God be his portion, his great business will be to keep in with him.

Doct. 1. That God alone is the godly man's portion.

This will appear by scripture and by reason.

1. By scripture: Ps. xvi. 5, 'The Lord is the portion of mine in heritance and of my cup.' There is a double metaphor; first, an allusion to the shares of the land of Canaan, so God is the portion of mine inheritance, saith David; and an allusion to the manner of a feast, where every man had his allowance of meat set by his cup: but snares and brimstone are said to be the portion of a wicked man's cup. As every man had his allowance set by his flagon of wine, especially in a solemn feast, so God is the portion of my cup. So Ps. lxxiii. 26, 'The Lord is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever, when my flesh and my heart faileth,' that is, when my body yields to the decay of nature; yea, when all our courage seems to be lost, borne down by difficulties that we endure in the flesh, God is a portion that will never fail.

2. To give some reasons of it. It will appear to be so—

[1.] By considering what is requisite to a man's portion.

[2.] Why a godly man looks upon God under this notion.

First, If a man were left to his free choice, what he would choose to take for his portion; not what is his portion in his strait, when he can have no better, but if he were left to his free choice:—

1. He would require that it be something good, or apprehended to be so.

2. That it be something to which he hath a title and interest, to which he can lay claim, or is in possession or expectation of according to right.

3. He would choose that which is suitable to the capacities, necessities, and desires of him whose portion it is.

4. That it be sufficient to supply all his wants, so as he may live upon it.

5. That it be such a thing wherein he may find satisfaction and acquiescence, so that he needs seek no more and ask no more.

6. Such a thing wherein he may take complacency and great delight, where he may be well pleased and rejoiced.

Now, all these things are to be found in God, and with good reason the saints make this choice, and say, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord.'

[1.] That which is to be chosen for our portion must be good: 'There is none good but one, and that is God,' Mat. xix. 17. It is Christ's own proposition: he is good of himself, good in himself, yea, good itself. There is no good above him, besides him, or beyond him. But if anything else be good, it is either from him or with him. But that I may more distinctly speak to this—

(1.) God is primitively and originally good; the creature is but derivatively good. He is good of himself, which nothing else is, the fountain-good, and therefore is called 'the fountain of living waters,' Jer. ii. 13. The creatures are hut dry pits or broken cisterns. Other things, what good they have it is of him. God must needs be infinitely better and greater than they, for all things which are good they have from God.

(2.) God is the chiefest good, and other things are only good in subordination. All creature goodness is but a stricture of that perfect good which is in God; and therefore, if we find any good in them, that should lead us to the greater good, even to the Creator. Who would leave the substance to follow the shadow? or desire the picture to the dishonour and neglect of the person whom it represents? Certainly so they do that run after the creature and neglect God, that seek happiness in sublunary enjoyments, to the wrong and neglect of God. That small good which the creatures have is not to hold us on to them, but to lead us to him, as the streams will direct us to the fountain, and the steps of the ladder are not to stand still upon, but to ascend higher. If your affections be detained in the creature, you set the creature in God's stead; you pervert it from its natural use, which is to set forth the invisible things of God, his excellency, his goodness, his godhead, and his power to do you good, and to send you to him that made them. But how usually doth that which should carry us to God divert and detain us from him! If a prince should woo a virgin by a messenger, and she should leave him, and cleave to the messenger, and those he sent as spokesmen and servants, this were an extreme folly. By the beauty and sweetness of the creatures, God's end is to draw us to himself as the chiefest good; for that which we love in other things is but a shadow and an obscure resemblance of that which is in him. There is sweetness in the creature, mixed with imperfection; the sweetness is to draw us to God, but the imperfection is to drive us from setting our hearts on

them. There is some what good in them: look up to the Creator; but there is vanity and vexation of spirit, and this is to drive us off from these sublunary things.

(3.) He is infinitely good. In this portion one hath not the less because another enjoys it with him. Here is a sharing without division, a partaking without prejudice of a co-partner, for every man hath his portion whole and entire; it is no less to us because others enjoy it too. We straiten others in worldly things so much as we are enlarged ourselves; for these things are finite, and cannot be divided but they must be lessened, and therefore are not large enough. But this good is infinite, and sufficeth the whole world, and every one possesseth it entire; as the same speech may be heard of all, yet no man heareth less because another heareth it with him; or as the same sun shines upon all; I have not the less light because it shines upon another as well as me. So God is all in all. If there be any difference, the more we possess him the better; as in a choir of voices, every one is not only solaced with his own voice, but with the harmony of those that sing in concert with him. Worldly inheritance is lessened by a multitude of co-heirs. In outward estates many a fair stream is drawn dry or runs low by being parted and dispersed in several channels; but God, that is infinite; cannot be lessened.

(4.) He is an eternal good, and so the most durable portion: ‘He is my portion for ever,’ Ps. lxxiii. 26. The good things of this life are but like flowers; they be for a season and then they wither, they are perishing and of a short continuance; we carry away nothing of it in our hands when we go to the grave. When we leave all other portions and inheritances, then we begin, to take possession of this portion; yea, at that time when men see the vanity of making other things their portion, a child of God sees the happiness of his portion—at death. Death blows away all vain deceits; then carnal men begin to perceive their error. When their portion comes to be taken away from them, then what indignation have they upon themselves for the folly of their choice, how the world hath deceived them! A godly man hath the beginning here, then he comes to have a consummate and most perfect enjoyment of it. Death cannot separate us from our portion. Indeed it separates us from all things that withhold us from it, but it is a means to perfect our union with God, and make way for our full fruition of him. Well, then, if this be that which is required in a portion, that it be good, there is none good but God; he is originally, independently, chiefly, infinitely, and eternally good, and therefore there is reason why we should choose God for our portion.

[2.] That a thing be our portion, it is necessary that we have an interest in it and title to it; not only that it be good, but that we may claim it as ours; for that is that which sweeteneth everything to us, that it is ours to use. Now God is not only good, but he is also ours; he makes over himself to us in covenant, Gen. xvii.; therefore we may lay claim to him, as a man to his patrimony or inheritance to which he is born, and say, Lord, thou art mine: Zech. xiii. 9, ‘I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God.’ As God owns an interest in them, so they own him: He is my God; ‘I will be thy God:’ so saith God in the covenant. It is more than if God had said, I will be thy friend, thy father; these are notions of a limited sense. But ‘I will be thy God,’

that hath an infinite importance, a greater weight and efficacy in that expression: ‘I will be thy God,’ that is, I will do thee good in the way of infinite and eternal power. And that is the reason why Christ proves the resurrection from thence: Mat. xxii. 32, ‘I am the God of Abraham,’ &c.; for to be a God to any is to be a benefactor to them, and a benefactor becoming an infinite and eternal power. Therefore certainly it assures us of greater things than this life affords, something becoming a God to give. If God be Abraham’s God, a God to his whole person (his soul is not Abraham), then it strongly proves the resurrection of the body; then Abraham, both body and soul, must have a happiness greater than this life can afford. Hence that expression of the apostle, Heb. xi. 16, ‘God is not ashamed to be called their God.’ These words seem as if they did express God’s condescension, as if he would be called the God of a few patriarchs. No; the meaning of the words is this, in regard of the slenderness of their present condition, God could not with honour. What! be a God to Jacob, and suffer him to have such a wandering life? He might be ashamed to be their God if he had not better things to bestow upon them, ‘But he hath provided for them a city,’ a heavenly kingdom. Not only given them that which they enjoyed in houses, their flocks and herds, which were multiplied; these were slender things to take up the whole significancy of that expression, I will be their God. But now God is not ashamed to be called their God; that is, God can with honour and without shame take that title upon him, for he hath everlasting happiness in the world to come to bestow upon them. Thus whatever God is, hath, or can do, it is thine. Look, as the apostle saith, Heb. vi., that ‘when God had no greater thing to swear by, he swore by himself,’ so we may say, when he had no greater thing to bestow upon his people, he gives and bestows him self, as fully and wholly makes over himself to every believing soul, so that they have as full a plea and sure right to God as any man hath to his patrimony to which he was born. I will act answerably, becoming an infinite power and goodness, for thy good. This is the significancy of that ample and glorious expression which God useth in the covenant of grace. As when a covenant was made between the king of Israel and the king of Judah, the tenor of it was, ‘My horses are as thy horses, my strength as thy strength,’ 1 Kings xxii. 4. So whatever is God’s is ours for our benefit, and what is ours is God’s for his service. Mark, God not only saith, I will be yours, but, be a God, that is, I will act like a God. In pardon of sin: Hosea xi. 9, ‘I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man.’ He will not pardon as a man, but, as a God. Man’s patience is soon spent and soon tired. What! seven times a day forgive my brother? But he will pardon as a God. And so, when he sanctifies, he will sanctify as a God: 2 Peter i. 3, ‘By his divine power he hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.’ And so in defence and maintenance, which is part of the covenant: I will feed, maintain, protect thee as a God; that is, not as one that is to be limited in the course of second causes. When he pleases he can give us water, not only out of the fountain, but out of the rock; when there is nothing visible to supply and maintain you, then, I will be a God; then he will glorify us like a God, like an infinite and eternal power. For as God is an infinite God, so he gives us a far more exceeding weight of glory; and as an eternal God, he gives us an eternal weight of glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17. The glory he bestows upon us suits with the infiniteness and eternity of his essence. As it is said of Araunah, that was of the royal extraction of the Jebusites, ‘He gave

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like a king to a king,' worthy of his blood and descent; he had a generous mind: so God will give like a God; therefore, he not only saith, I will be thine, but, be thy God. You think it much when you view a large compass, and can look abroad and say, All this is mine; but one that hath chosen God for his portion hath much more to say: God is mine.

[3.] That which a man would make his portion if he were free to choose, it should be a proper and suitable good, our own good. The heart of man aims at not only *bonum*, good in common, but also *bonum congruum*, a suitable fitting good. Every element moveth to its own place, and every living creature desires food proper to itself. So man is not only carried to good, but good that suits to his capacity and necessity. The soul, being a spirit, must have a spiritual good. Indeed, as it acts in the body, and accommodates itself with the necessities of the body, and seeks the good of the body, so it may be carried out to honours, pleasures, and profits, for these are the conveniences of the bodily life: but as it is a spirit, and can live apart from the body, it must have something above these, a spiritual object; and as it is immortal, it must have an immortal good. Now, for a spiritual immortal good do we grope and feel about until we find it, and then there is a great deal of satisfaction: Acts xvii. 27, 'That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.' So we are groping and feeling about, as the blind Sodomites did for Lot's door, for some good that may suit the capacity of our souls: we were made for God, and therefore cannot have full contentment without God. But I speak not now of man as man, but suppose him to have a new nature put into him, that carries him after satisfaction: 'We are made partakers of the divine nature,' 2 Peter i. 4. It is called so because it comes from God and tends to him. Now, there must be something suitable to this nature. Pleasure is when those things are enjoyed that suit with us, when the object and the faculty are suited. When every appetite hath a fit diet to feed upon, then a marvellous deal of pleasure and contentment results from thence: Rom. viii. 5, 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit.' All things seek a suitable good. Now, they that are after the spirit, that have a new spiritual divine nature put into them, renewed souls, they must have an object proper, and therefore must have something above the concernments of the body, and above the fleshly nature; for everything delights in that which is suitable, as a fish in the stream, and an ox to lick up the grass; and man must have a suitable good as a rational being; but as a spiritual being, must have another good. Grace restores us to the inclinations of nature when it was innocent; therefore the soul, that came from God, must centre in God, and it cannot be quiet without him.

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[4.] That which a man would make his portion, it must be sufficient to supply all his wants, that he may have enough to live upon. Now, saith the Lord, 'I am God all-sufficient,' Gen. xvii. 1; sufficient for the necessities of this life, and that which is to come. He is the fountain of all blessings, spiritual, temporal, eternal; not only their power for ever, but their portion for ever, satisfied with him now and in the life to come: Ps. cxlii. 5, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord, in the land of the living.' They expect all from him; not only peace and righteousness, grace and glory, but food, maintenance, defence, to bear them out in his work. The creature is but God's instrument, or as an empty pipe,

unless God flow in by it. If God help them not, the creature cannot help them. These are streams that have water only so long as the spring fills them. Well, then, here is a portion that is every way sufficient. All other portions are accompanied with a want, but this alone sufficeth all Some things give health, wealth, but not peace; some things give peace, but not honour. But God is all to us—health, wealth, peace, honour, grace, and glory: 'All things are yours, because you are Christ's, and Christ is God's,' so runs the Christian charter; there is *omne bonum in summo bono*—all things in the chiefest good. So Rev. xxi. 7, 'He that overcometh shall inherit all things,' How so? 'For I will be his God.' He that hath God hath him that hath power and command of all things, and therefore shall inherit all things, 'For I will be his God.' And that is the reason of the apostle's riddle, 2 Cor. vi. 10, 'As having nothing, yet possessing all things;' that is, all things in God, when they have nothing in the creature. Many times they are kept bare and low, but God carries the purse for them; all things are at his dispose; and we are kept more bare and low that we may be sensible of the strange supplies of his providence. Alas! without him in the midst of our sufficiencies we may be in straits.

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[5.] That a man would choose that for his portion wherein he may be contented, satisfied, and sit down as having enough. Now this is only in God. When we choose other things for our portion, still our sore runs upon us; there are some crannies and vacuities of soul that are to be filled up; if we could satisfy our affections, we cannot satisfy our consciences; nothing can content the desires of the soul but God himself; other things may busy us, and vex us, but cannot satisfy us: 'All things are vanity and vexation of spirit.' If a man would make a critical search, as Solomon did; he set himself to see what pleasures and honours would do to content the heart of man, and what riches and learning would do; he had a large estate and heart, and so was in a capacity to try all things, to see if he could extract satisfaction from them; yet he concludes, 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.' Whosoever will follow this course will come home with disappointment. But in this portion there is contentment; we need no more but God, and there is nothing besides him worth our desire. Necessities that are not supplied by him are but fancies; it is want of grace if we want anything else when we have God for our portion: Ps. xvii. 14, 'From the men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure.' A carnal man's happiness is patched up with a great many creatures; they must have dainty fare, costly apparel, this and that, and still their sore runs upon them; they have a fulness of all things, and yet they are not filled. But now, saith David, ver. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Though God do not make out himself in that latitude and fulness as he will hereafter, yet at present to have communion with God is enough: 'I shall be filled.' There are some desires that are working after God, but they will be filled hereafter. It is true we are not now perfect, but that is no fault of our portion, but the defect of our capacity. Though we have not that fulness that we shall have hereafter, yet we have it initially. Here we have the first-fruits, have it virtually, hope and look for it; there is something begun in the soul that will increase towards this satisfaction. Certainly this is a portion that can alone be possessed with content. God is satisfied

with himself and sufficient to his own happiness, therefore surely there is enough in him to fill the creature. That which fills an ocean will fill a bucket; that which will fill a gallon will fill a pint; those revenues that will defray an emperor's expenses are enough for a beggar or poor man. So, when the Lord himself is satisfied with himself, and it is his happiness to enjoy himself, there needs no more; there is enough in God to satisfy. If our desires run out after other things, they are desires not to be satisfied, but to be mortified. If we hunger after other contentments, they are like feverish desires, not to be satisfied, but to be abated in the soul; for he that fills all things hath enough to fill up our hearts.

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[6.] Complacency and delight. That which a man would take pleasure in, there where he may have abundant matter of rejoicing and delight, this a man would choose for his portion. Now in God he hath the truest and sincerest delight. This is matter of rejoicing; as David saith, Ps. xvi. 5, 6, 'The Lord is my portion.' What then? 'I have a goodly heritage.' Here is that which will revive and refresh my heart enough. There is no rejoicing that is sincere but this. As the discomforts of the new creature are more real than all other discomforts, and pierce deeper—'a wounded spirit who can bear?'—so the joys of the new creature, none go so deep: Ps. iv. 6, 'Thou hast put more gladness into my heart,' &c. Others do but tickle the senses, a little refresh the outward man, please the more brutish part, but this the heart. And this is such a joy as can be better felt than uttered: 2 Peter i. 8, it is 'unspeakable,' and none can know the strength and sweetness of it till it be felt: 'a stranger' cannot conceive it, 'doth not intermeddle with his joy,' Prov. xiv. 10. One drop of this is more than an ocean of carnal pleasure. When we have other things without God, we can never be serious. Take the merriest blades in the world, and dig them to the bottom; still there is something of sadness and remorse that doth sour all their content: conscience is secretly repining, and ready to embitter their joy. Though men strive to bear it down, yet it is ever returning upon them; therefore they cannot be truly cheerful. The most jolly sinners have their pangs that take off the edge of their bravery. Carnal rejoicing makes a great noise, like thorns under a pot, but it is but a blaze and gone. But this is a solid joy and comfort, wherewith a man may look death in the face with cheerfulness, and think of the world to come and not be sad. Alas! a little thing puts the merriest sinner into the stocks of conscience. He that makes it his business to add one pleasure to another, and spend his days in vanity, how soon is his mirth removed! Therefore, if a man would choose a portion to have joy at the highest rate, he should choose God for his portion.

Secondly, How comes a godly man to look upon God under this notion, that no less will content him but God himself? Why, he hath another apprehension, and another manner of heart to close with him, than carnal men; his understanding is enlightened, and his heart inclined by grace.

1. He sees more into the worth of spiritual and heavenly things. He hath faith, which is the evidence of things not seen, of things that do not lie under the judgment of sense and present reason; he can spy things under a veil, and his eyes are opened to see 'what is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,' Eph. i. 17, 18; and therefore he is convinced of the fulness and sufficiency

that is in God, and the emptiness and straitness that is in the creature; God hath given him counsel, his reins instruct him, Ps. xvi. 7. All by nature are blind, ignorant, apt to dote upon the creature; but by grace their eyes are opened, that they have another manner of discerning, that they do not see things only by discourse, but their hearts are affected. Others may discourse, but they have not this divine light and spiritual understanding, by which spiritual things may be discerned; as matters of opinion they may, but not as matters of choice. A carnal man may argue out with reason the worth and excellency of God, but he hath not a refined apprehension and persuasive counsel, which is in God's people.

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2. Their hearts are inclined to choose him for their portion. They do not only see an alluring worth in the object, but there is an attracting virtue, by which the heart is drawn unto God: John vi. 44, 'No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.' The great article of the covenant of grace is to take God for our God. Now all the articles of the new covenant are not only precepts but promises. The conditions *of* the covenant are conditions *in* the covenant; God gives what he requires. And therefore, as the great article of the covenant is to take God for our God, so the great blessing of the covenant is to have a new heart, or a new placing of our desires and affections. Sin lieth in a conversion from God to the creature; grace, in turning us to God again. The change is mainly seen in fixing our chiefest good and our last end. God gives his people a heart to close with him, and accept of him as their portion, to fix upon him as their chiefest good and their last end.

Use 1. To reprove them that do not take God for their portion. Godly men must have God himself; they prefer him above all, and saving grace above other benefits, Ps. iv. 6, 7. There is the dispositions of the godly and the carnal. 'The many say, Who will show us any good?' But, 'Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us.' A carnal man is for good in common, any good, but not for the light of God's countenance; nothing will satisfy the saints but the light of God's countenance; they prefer him above his gifts, and among his gifts they prefer saving graces and renewing mercies, such as begin, and confirm them in their union with God in Christ. But carnal men go no further than the world; they choose not God, but his gifts; and among these not the best, but the common sort, such as suit with the appetite of the fleshly nature, and the more brutish part of these—riches, pleasures, and honours; and these too, not as coming from God, but as coming to them by chance. They not only say good in general, but 'who will show me,' &c. As they look after uncertain blessings, so they look after an uncertain author, as they fall out in the course of second causes. If they have these, they bless their hearts, and content themselves. To convince these men of the baseness of their choice, and make them bethink themselves, their choice is part of their punishment. There cannot be a greater punishment than that they should have what they choose, that they should be written in the earth, Jer. xvii. 13; they shall have this and no more; that God should say to them, Silver and gold you shall have, but 'in this matter no lot nor portion,' Acts viii. Their bellies shall be filled with hid treasure, they shall have gorgeous apparel, dainty fare, substance enough to leave to their babes, but be deprived of heaven. It is the greatest misery that can be, to

be condemned to this kind of happiness; that we should thus degrade ourselves, and sit upon the threshold when they might sit upon the throne, and lick only the dust of his footstool. But wicked men will not be sensible of this now, but one day they shall, of the misery of this their foolish choice; at death usually: Jer. xvii. 11, 'At his latter end he shall be a fool.' Then his heart will rave against him: O fool, madman! that thou wert not as careful to get the favour of God, as to get this worldly pelf! when he must go into another world, and he is launching out into the great gulf of eternity. And in hell they will be sensible: Luke xvi. 25, 'Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things,' &c. The conscience of their foolish choice is a part of their torment, when their heart shall return upon them and say, This was because thou wouldst look after temporal things; when snares, and brimstone, and a horrible tempest is poured out upon them. What thoughts have they of their portion when they are cast out with the devil and damned spirits! Carnal men think the difference between them and others will ever hold out when they glitter in the world. Oh, but the time is coming when death will undeceive them! And at the day of judgment they will be sensible of it, when they shall be refused as the outcasts of the world, and when the saints shall have their portion, when the Lord shall take the godly to himself, receive them into his bosom, and welcome them to heaven, and call them to his right hand; and they shall be banished out of his presence with a 'Go, ye cursed;' when they shall become the loathing of God, the scorn of angels and blessed spirits; when it shall be said, as in Ps. lii. 7, 'Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in. the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.' Oh, then, how will conscience return upon the wretchedness and folly of their hearts, and be exercised upon it! This will vex and gall them in hell, with anxious thoughts of it to all eternity. As by the fire that never shall be quenched is signified the wrath of God, so by the worm that never dies the violent working of conscience upon the folly of choosing perishing vanities.

Use 2. It exhorts us to this necessary duty, to choose God for our portion. It is not a slight thing, but that upon which your eternal happiness doth depend; it is the fundamental article of the covenant of grace: and the question God puts you to is, whether you will choose him for your portion? therefore he begins the commandments with this, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' God is not your God unless he be set uppermost in your souls; he cannot be your portion unless he be your chiefest good. There is no possibility of entering into covenant with God unless you subscribe to this main article. Again, as it is a very necessary work, so it is an evidence and fruit of God's election; if a man would come to know the thoughts of God concerning him before all the world, what his destiny is. God's election or choosing of you is manifested by your election or your choosing of God, for all God's works leave an impression upon the creature. He chooseth us that we might choose him: 'I will say, You are my people, and you shall say, I am your God.' Again, you must have something for your portion. There is no man hath a sufficiency in himself. The soul is like a sponge, always thirsting, and seeking of something from without to be filled—a chaos of

desires. Man was made to live in dependence. Now, of all portions in the world, there is none worth the having but God himself; nothing else can make you completely blessed, and satisfy all the necessities and all the capacities of soul and body. When you have outward things, what have you for your conscience? If these things could fill up your affections, they bear no proportion with conscience; your sore will run upon you, and your inward griefs will not be cured. But this is such a portion, that besides internal grace, there shall be a competent measure of outward things. God will provide for you: Ps. xxiii. 1, 'The Lord is my shepherd.' What then? 'I shall not want.' This interest will give you temporal things and the comforts of this life, so that you have the fountain of all other mercies. While others do but drink of the streams, and of streams where they are muddy, where they partake of the soil through which they run, you go to the clear fountain. Alas! others do but pluck the leaves and flowers, but you have the fruits and very root itself, the perpetual fountain and well-spring of comfort, and root of all the blessedness the heart can wish for. Again, all other comforts grow upon this interest, and when all other things are lost, this can supply you again. All worldly things, when we have them, yet they have not a root; but you have the root, so that when other things fail, this will yield you all manner of supplies. Yea, this is that which seasons and makes all other things comfortable, when we have them and the love of God with them. This man of God had a kingdom and a great deal of wealth; he was a victorious king, as we may see by his offering, 1 Chron. xxix., what cart-loads of gold and silver he offers to God: yet in the midst of all this fulness he saith, 'Thou art my portion.' Other portions may turn to a man's hurt, as they are occasions of sin, as they expose to envy and danger. Many a man is undone both here and hereafter by making the creature his portion; but never any man was undone by making God his portion. It was the end of our creation. God, passing by all other creatures, set his heart upon man. He made all things for man, and man for himself. All other things were either subject to our dominion, or created for our use; but man was made immediately for God, for the enjoyment of God; made for himself, and for none else besides himself. We should have no rest in ourselves until we come to the enjoyment of God. God was not refreshed from his work, he rested not until he made man; therefore man should not rest until he comes to God. God takes us for his portion, and therefore you should take God for your portion: Deut. xxxii. 9, 'For the Lord's portion is his people;' Zech. ii. 12, 'And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again.' If God shall choose a company of men to be his portion, certainly it becomes them again to choose him. God is willing to communicate his goodness, therefore why should we be satisfied with other things? He reasons with us, is angry that we will run to other things. Why will you lay out your time and strength in that which will not satisfy you? Isa. lv. 2. He doth invite you to come and choose him. He complains, and takes it grievously when he offers himself in the gospel: Ps. lxxxi. 11, 'Israel would none of me.' Oh! shall the God that made us thus passionately offer himself to us, and shall he be refused? Let this persuade you to choose God for your portion.

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Use 3. For trial. Have you chosen God for your portion? This will be seen—

1. By your endeavours to get anything of God into your hearts. No man seeketh after God; there is the great complaint. If you did choose God, you would pursue all ways and means that you might gain him, and count all things but dung for Christ, as the apostle doth; then nothing would detain you from him, you would not be satisfied: Oh! I must have God; and God would be followed after: Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee?'

2. By your prayers. What do you pray for? When you come to God, what do your hearts run upon? what do you seek for from God? Is it God himself? To seek to God and not for God is but a carnal design upon God: Hosea vii. 14, 'They howl upon their beds for corn, and wine, and oil.' They are but brutish desires, that terminate in other things, that are carried out more after them than God's favour and grace; therefore his favour must be sought in the first place.

3. By your behaviour under trouble when other things fail: Lam. iii. 24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore I will hope in him.' When they were driven from their other portions (for that is spoken of), when all manner of calamities did befall them, and they were cast out, and their inheritance turned to strangers, then, 'Lord, thou art our portion.' When you have nothing left but God, can you live upon God? and can he be all in all to you? 1 Sam. xxx. 6, 'David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.' When the Amalekites carried away all, yet this was his comfort, God was left still. And so Hab. iii. 18, 'When the labour of the olive shall fail,' &c. What then? 'Then I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.' When you can count yourself happy enough in God, *Deus meus et omnia*—if I have God, I have all; then you have chosen God for your portion.

4. By your delight in God: Ps. xxxvii. 4, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.' When this is the great rejoicing of your souls, that you can get but one beam of God's love and his favour darted upon your consciences, this is that which revives more than all other temporal things whatever.

5. In mourning for his absence; if your God be gone, that is the grief of your souls. God can supply the want of the creature, but no creature can supply the want of God; therefore it is ground of trouble if he hide his face. This lamenting and mourning after a withdrawn God is frequently spoken of in scripture. But the great evidence lies in the words, 'Thou art my portion, Lord!' What then? 'I have said, that I would keep thy words.' Hence observe—

Doct. 2. Those which have chosen God for their portion will manifest it by a fixed resolution and strict care of obedience.

They are loath to break with God, rather break with anything else. It must needs be so, because—

1. Holiness is a means of maintaining communion between us and God, and keeping up an interest in him as our only happiness: 1 John i. 6, 7, 'If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another: but if we walk in darkness, and say we have fellowship with him, we lie, and do not the truth.' Unless there be a care to please him, certainly you do not choose

him for your portion; for if all your comfort and happiness lies in God, all your diligence and care Will be to please God. God was the portion of the Levites, it is said, because they ministered before him, Num. xviii. 20. So it is true of the spiritual Levites, they that are careful to walk with God, minis ter before him, and keep close with him; God will be their portion. All sincere Christians are purified as the sons of Levi.

2. Because this is the only evidence. They that love God will love his word, and if they love it they will live by it, and square their actions accordingly. By careless walking you blot your evidences, and so weaken your comfort.

3. Because God is your portion, therefore it should encourage us to keep his word: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk before me and be thou perfect.' If we have an all-sufficient portion, all our business should be to keep in with God. All warping comes from doubting of God's all-sufficiency, as if God alone were not enough for us. Carnal fear, love, hope, doth draw us off from God to the creature, we are afraid to lose worldly enjoyments, so break with God. Therefore, if we look upon God as all-sufficient, it will necessarily follow we should encourage ourselves to serve him.

4. If we do not keep his word, our lusts will carry us forth else where. There are certain corrupt principles within you will draw you off from God to another portion: Ezek. xiv. 5, 'They are all estranged from me through their idols.' What kind of idols were these? Idols of wood and stone? No; the prophet explains them, 'They have set up their idols in their heart,' ver. 3. Christians, a man may be an, idolater in opinion, and grossly, when he worships stocks and stones; and he may be an idolater spiritually and in practice. And which is most incurable of these two, think you? Certainly the spiritual idolater. A man may easily be convinced of his false worship by reason and argument, what a brutish thing it is to worship stocks and stones, things that have no life, nor can help him; but he cannot be convinced of his spiritual idolatry, or cured of that but by grace. Covetousness is idolatry, because it draws off our love, fear, trust, from God and his service, to riches, and so proves a snare to the soul. Idolatry in our affections is more dangerous than gross idolatry in our opinions and outward worship, when our affections carry us out to another good.

5. Again, out of gratitude, when God doth all for us, can we deny him anything? Dost thou love God as the chiefest good, and wilt not thou fear to offend him? Whoever chooseth God for his portion will have David's disposition, 'I have said I will keep thy words;' he will be exact and punctual to keep in with God.

SERMON LXV.

I entreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.—Ver. 58.

IN the former verse I took notice of two parts—David's protestation, 'Thou art my portion:' and his resolution, 'I will keep thy words.' To either of the branches this verse may be supposed to have respect. To the former thus, as a second evidence: if we make God our portion, this will necessarily follow, we shall desire his favour above all things else. Our portion is that good which we choose, renouncing all things else; therefore, when our hearts are set upon it, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee?' Ps. lxxiii. 25. When you entreat his favour with your whole heart, that is the evidence God is your portion. Or you may refer it to the latter clause thus, 'I said I will keep thy words,' therefore I entreat thy favour. We cannot carry on a good purpose without God's favour, unless he assist us therein. When we are most resolved, we must expect opposition and assaults both from within and without. The devil will seek all he can to oppose you, and to shake your resolutions, and your lusts will rage anew upon a severe restraint. Therefore those that resolve to enter into a strict course must seek relief from God's favour and mercy, as David here, 'I entreated thy favour with my whole heart.' In the words we have an account of David's practice upon a choice and resolution; he betook himself to prayer.

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Here you have—

1. The object or principal thing sought, *God's favour*.

2. The manner, *with my whole heart*, with a sincere affection. He doth not say, with his lips only, but his heart; and not with his heart only, but with his whole heart.

3. The sum of his request, or the fountain of all that he expected from God, *be merciful to me*.

4. The rule or ground of his expectation, *according to thy word*. The meaning is, that God, according to his promise, would graciously help him.

First, For the first, 'I entreated thy favour;' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'I painfully sought thy face;' meaning that he did with importunate and humble suit beg the smile of God's countenance. By face is meant favour: Prov. xxix. 26, 'many seek the ruler's favour;' it is, the ruler's face, that he may look cheerfully upon them: and I painfully sought, so the word signifies; it notes such importunity as is necessary for so great a blessing. The note is this—

Doct. God's people, those that have made him their portion, they earnestly and constantly, above all things, desire his favour.

1. This God calls for: Ps. cv. 4, 'Seek the Lord, seek his face ever more.' None have such communion with God but they need seek more: Ps. xxvii. 8, 'Thou saidst, Seek my face; thy face, Lord, will I seek.' 'Thou saidst:' it is that which God speaks in all his ordinances; the whole drift of the word is to press us to get and keep the sense of God's love ever fresh in our hearts.

2. The nature of the saints carries them to it. This is the difference between them and carnal men, Ps. iv. 6, 7. The light of his countenance is spoken of either with allusion to the sun, whose light displayed cheers the plants; or with allusion to the smiles of a friend. One good look from God the children of God prefer above all the world. All earthly things cannot please them so much as a smile from God, nor put such gladness in their hearts. But more especially do they seek it most painfully—

[1.] When they have never as yet attained any sense of it, but lie under doubts, fears, and anxious uncertainty; then, if God will but look upon them, make out his love to their consciences, what a comfort will that be to them! A man may want assurance and have grace, but he cannot slight assurance and have grace. He that is without it may be one of God's children, but he that doth not look after it, and is satisfied without it, certainly is none of that number. Therefore this is the desire and earnest prayer of all God's people in common, that God would cause his face to shine upon them: Ps. lxxx. 1, 'Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth;' that is, that sittest upon the mercy-seat. Oh, that he would be good to them in Christ! for between the cherubims there was the mercy-seat, where God sat. The meaning is, that he would a little dart in beams of comfort to their consciences.

[2.] They thus painfully entreat the favour of God when they have lost it by sin; for then they are afflicted with a double evil—want of so great a comfort, and a sense of their own folly. A sense of God's favour may be withheld out of mere sovereignty, yet even then God's children will be earnest; but when it is withdrawn out of justice, as a correction for our folly and careless walking, there is greater cause of earnestness, that we may redeem and recover our loss again; then we are to be more earnest: 'Turn us again, Lord God of hosts, and cause thine anger towards us to cease,' Ps. lxxx. 7. By their former experience they know the sweetness of God's favour, and by their present loss the bitterness of the want of it. Basil hath a notable comparison. He saith, if an object be too bright, it must be set at a distance from the eye that we may see better; so worldly things must be set at a distance from us: therefore God seems to be at a distance, hides his face, that his people might know by the loss and want of it how to value their blessings.

How far do they discover their earnestness?

(1.) In that they seek it above all other things—above corn, wine, and oil. This is not their painful desire to be made great, rich, high, honourable, happy in the world. All the world doth them no good without the favour of God. As all the stars, though they shine together, do not dispel the darkness of the night, so no creatures can comfort us sufficiently when God hides his face from them: Ps. xxx. 1, 'Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled.' They cannot find God as they were wont. As at funeral feasts, dear friends have little comfort when they miss their old friend that was wont to bid them welcome at the house; so when God is gone, what comfort can they take in their portion? Many will say, Why are you pensive and sad? you have a great many friends, a great

estate! Oh! you do not know the wound of a gracious heart, and how little these things are in comparison of the favour of God!

(2.) They manifest it in this, their contentedness with him, though they are kept low and bare in outward things: Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' It is enough for them to have the face of God, though they do not flourish in worldly plenty as others do, when in the exercise of grace they can find God propitious, 'behold his face in righteousness.' If they have not the candle they have the sun. If they go to God, they are welcome upon all occasions. If the world frown upon them, God doth not so: they are beloved of him, and in favour with him, and that satisfieth them.

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What may be the reasons why the children of God so prize his favour?

(1st.) The worth of the thing itself: Ps. lxiii. 3, 'Thy favour is better than life,' better than all comforts, better in itself, for this is that which we are never weary of. A man may be weary of all out ward comforts: 'Days may come wherein there is no pleasure,' Eccles. xii. 1; 'At that time the soul abhors dainty food,' Job xxxiii. 20. Pleasure, nay, life itself, may be a burden, but none ever was weary of the love of God, that cannot be a bur*den; this doth not satiate and cloy us. Again, the love of God cannot be supplied and recompensed by other things: when a man loseth other things it may be made up in better. If a man be poor in this world, God hath chosen him to be rich in faith; if afflicted and destitute of outward provisions, yet they have inward comforts and graces, and they will supply and make up this loss. But the loss of God's favour cannot be supplied; when that departs from you, and a man loseth the hope he seemeth to have, what a sorry comfort is it, having forfeited the love of God, to seek our amends in the creature! Then this is more durable than the present life. Other comforts fail, but the love of God never fails. This is the original of all other comforts: Ps. xxx. 7, 'By thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong;' and Ps. xliv. 3, 'Their own arm did not save them, but the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.' Sure it is better to drink of the fountain than of the stream: all is from the favour of God. In short, it is the vitality and the cause of life, and the cause of all comfort. This is better than life.

(2d.) They are affected with that which is their true misery, therefore they most importunately beg the favour of God. Every man prays according to the sense that he hath, according to that which he counts his misery. He that hath a sense of no other calamity but to be poor, scorned, or exposed to contempt, or the absence of the creature, prays accordingly. Sometimes he howls like a dog in pain, or beasts that want food, Hosea vii. 14. But he that hath a deeper sense of his greatest necessities, he is affected with sin. which is the cause of all trouble; therefore he must have the favour of God and the grace of God. A godly and a carnal man differ as a child and a man in their apprehensions about pain and trouble. A child that is sick and would be eased of its present smart and pain, looks to nothing but that; but an understanding man knows the cause must be taken away. A child speaks according to the sense and apprehension it hath—take away his aching head or

burning heat; but the understanding man looks not only after present ease, but health, that the root of the distemper may be removed. So a worldly man would have affliction gone, and looks no further, but a godly man hath a deeper sense, he must have the favour of God; therefore his heart works painfully within him till this be obtained.

(3d.) They entreat the favour of God with all their hearts, because their business lies mainly with God. Their work is to walk closely with God, and keep up a strict communion with him. A carnal man's business lies with God sometimes in his trouble; but when he licks himself whole and is at ease, he can live without it. But a godly man's business is always with God, for God is always with him, in trouble and out of trouble. Therefore that is a notable speech, Ps. xci. 9, 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation:' a refuge, that is a place of retreat in time of war; a habitation, there is our residence in time of peace, when every one sits under his own vine and fig-tree. Now, a godly man makes God not only his refuge but his habitation; therefore it concerns him to prize the favour of God, and keep in with him, for he is otherwise at an utter loss; therefore he must study to get all clear: if God be angry with him, his business is at a stand, and he cannot walk cheer fully with him from whom he expects all.

Use 1. To reprove those that are indifferent whether they enjoy God's favour, yea or nay; so they may enjoy the creature they are satisfied. Surely God is not these men's portion, for their only care is what they shall eat, how they may be clothed, how to live well in the world; but were never acquainted with this kind of trouble about God's favour: Ps. x. 4, it is said, 'The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.' He never troubles himself how to keep in with God; it never goes to his heart. He is such an one as can bring to pass whatever he projecteth and desireth, without troubling himself with the fetters of religion and the care of a strict duty: he can live at large, and yet obtain his heart's desire, and thinketh them the only wise men, fit for his imitation, that can increase in worldly enjoyments without troubling themselves with such niceties as perplex others: he scorneth to trouble himself with prayer, and the observances which are necessary to waiting upon God. Again, it reproves those that lie stupid and senseless under God's active displeasure. These are not as gross as the former, but make some profession of respect to God, but have not yet a tender sense of God's accesses and recesses, his comings and goings. When the Lord hides himself from their prayers, and doth not give out the wonted influences of his grace and comfort, they mind it not, do not with earnestness seek to recover it again. If you did make this your business without interruption, when you have not the smiles of God, the want of this would create pain.

Use 2. Of exhortation, to press us, if we would have God for our God, then to seek his favour above all things. Wait with an affectionate earnestness in every ordinance for some new discovery, some comfortable intimation of God's word: Ps. cxxx. 6, 'My soul waiteth for thee.' What? for outward deliverances? No; but 'I wait for the Lord, and in his word do I hope.' Again, in every enjoyment it is not enough to have the creature with God's leave (so can all men have it, it is their

portion), but you must have it with God's love, as a token from God, wrapt up in the bowels of Christ. God gives many gifts to wicked men, but doth not give them his love. This we should look after, that we may find our comforts to be sprinkled with love, that if God deliver you out of any strait, he may love you out of it, Isa. xxxviii. 17.

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Secondly, For the manner, 'I have sought thy favour.' How? 'With my whole heart.' Note—

Doct. When we pray for the favour of God, it must be with our whole heart.

There is this intended in it—

1. The constant favour and presence of God, we must pray for it, for without prayer faith lies idle, Heb. iv. 16.

2. They that pray for it, their hearts must be set upon what they pray. It is not enough that our tongues babble out a cold form, as many learn to pray as parrots speak, by rote. They say, not pray a prayer: James v. 17, 'Elias prayed earnestly:' in the margin, and so in the original, he 'prayed in prayer.' A man may take up words of course, and say things after others, which are not indeed the real desires of his heart; so they pray as if they prayed not, slightly, without any warmth and affection.

3. It is not enough that our hearts concur, but our whole hearts must go along with this work. Many times we pray but with half a heart:—

[1.] Partly when prayer is a fruit of memory and invention, but not the fruit of conscience. Common illumination will tell us how prayer is to be formed according to the tenor of the Christian faith; so men may repeat words such as the understanding judgeth fit, without any answerable touch upon the heart. This is their sin who are more careful about notions in prayer than the affections.

[2.] A man prays but with a piece of his heart when he prays rather with his conscience than with his affections. Will you distinguish this, a dictate of conscience must be distinguished from a purpose of heart. Conscience may tell us what is to be done, yet the heart have no liking to it. Austin saith when he was a carnal man he had some kind of conscience, and prayed against his sins; but, saith he, I was afraid God would hear me. The favour of God is necessary, but the heart many times is not engaged in the pursuit of it. We oftener pray from our memories than our consciences, and oftener from our consciences than our affections; the heart is not put into the duty.

[3.] When our affections are divided to carnal things, and the comfortable part of spiritual things. No doubt there is no man but would have the favour of God, but it is with a condition that he may live as he does, and be as he is, and so the prevailing part of his soul bends him to his present course; he regards iniquity in his heart, and sin hath an interest and lies very near; he would have the favour of God abstractedly, but when he considers how his lusts must be parted with, there his heart is divided.

Use. Oh! then, look to it that you beg the Lord's favour with all your heart. God knows the heart. Rebekah dressed up Jacob so that his father mistook him. Ay! but God cannot mistake; his eye is not dim as Isaac's, he sees the heart; therefore let your heart, and whole heart, go out in the pursuit.

Quest. How shall we know when our hearts are thus thoroughly bent, if you seek him with all your hearts?

Ans. Then you will observe how you speed when you look after him; you will see what becomes of your requests. 'I will hearken what God will speak,' saith David, and 'will pray and look up;' as Elijah looked up to see the cloud a-coming. Again, if we pray with the whole heart there will be importunate arguings; desire will take no nay: Ps. lxiii. 8, 'My soul followeth hard after thee.' Oh! it will be a painful, grievous thing to your souls if you do not speed in your prayers. Not a slight motion, or cold wish, but such as deeply affects the heart, and not easily put off and satisfied with other things. Wicked men would have the favour of God, but they are easily put out of the humour. Again, then we pray with the whole heart when there is such a desire as not to be discouraged, but you venture again, when the Lord seems to put off and give a check to your requests: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.' Still desires grow hotter and hotter, and when there is a kind of impudence not to be put off. Again, such as do excite endeavours for the obtaining of God's love and a sense of his favour. It will cost us pain and trouble when we are hard at work, and will be diligent in this thing. But when you rest in a few cold prayers, you are never hearty with God: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired.' What then? 'That will I seek after,' and use a great deal of diligence to come by it.

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Thirdly, The fountain of all that we expect is mercy. All that seek God's favour must expect it upon terms of grace: 'Be merciful unto me.' We cannot say, Pay me what thou owest, or, Give me for my money. All whom God accepts to his grace and favour are unworthy: Isa. lv. 1, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price.' Secondly, They who are received to favour still need mercy to pardon failings, Gal. v. The best are but sanctified in part, and have the dregs of corruption always remaining, and frequently stirring in them.

Use. Let us thus deal with God: Hosea xiv. 2, 'Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.' The sum of all our requests is, that God would be merciful to us.

Fourthly, The rule and ground of confidence is 'according to thy word.' God's word is the rule of our confidence, for therein is God's stated course. If we would have favour from God and mercy, it must be upon his own terms. God will accept of us in Christ, if we repent, believe, and obey, and seek his favour diligently: he will not deny those who seek, ask, knock. We would have mercy, but will not observe God's directions. We must ask according to God's will, not without a promise,

nor against a command. God is made a voluntary debtor by his promise. These are notable props of faith, when we are encouraged to seek by the offer, to apply by the promise. We thrive no more in a comfortable sense of God's love, because we take not this course.

SERMON LXVI.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.—Ver. 59.

IN these words we have—

1. David's exercise, *I thought on my ways*.

2. The effect of it, *I turned my feet unto thy testimonies*.

In the former verse he beggeth mercy and the favour of God. Now those that beg mercy must be in a capacity to receive mercy. God is ready to show mercy, but to whom? To the penitent, that humbly seek it, and turn from the evil of their ways. We cannot expect God should be favourable to us while we continue in a course of sin. Therefore David showeth that he entreated God's mercy and favour upon God's terms, that he was one of those converted by grace: 'I thought on my ways,' &c. Some copies of the Septuagint have it τὰς ὁδους σοῦ διελογισάμην, 'I considered thy ways,' much to the same purpose; for a serious consideration of the excellency of God's ways is of use, as well as of the naughtiness of our own. But other copies read better, according to the original Hebrew, 'I thought on my ways,' our omissions, commissions, purposes, practices, the course of our thoughts, words, deeds.

In the other part, when we are said to turn our feet unto God's testimonies, it is meant of the conversion of the whole soul, evidenced by the course of our feet or practices. So Eccles. v. 1, 'Keep thy feet when thou goest into the house of God:' the meaning is, look to thy heart and affections. We are sometimes said to turn to God, and. sometimes to the testimonies or commands of God. We turn to God as the object or last end; to his testimonies as the rule of our conversation to lead us thither. So that by it is meant an effectual conversion of the whole man, to walk according to the rule of God's word.

The text issueth itself into this one point:—

Doct. That serious consideration of our own ways maketh way for sound conversion to God.

In the managing of this doctrine I shall discuss two things:—

1. The necessity of serious consideration in order to repentance.

2. How much it concerneth us after we have considered effectually to turn to the Lord.

First, The necessity of serious consideration in order to repentance. And there—

1. What is consideration.

2. The objects of it, or the things that must be considered.

3. I shall argue the necessity of this.

First, What is this consideration or thinking upon our ways? In the general, it is a returning upon our hearts, or a serious and anxious debating with ourselves concerning our eternal condition. For the understanding whereof, consider that a carnal man is mindless and altogether careless of his eternal interests, like a fool or madman, or one out of his wits. We were 'sometimes foolish,' ἀνόητοι. Titus iii. 3, like men asleep or distracted; they do not know what they are doing, nor what will be the issue of things, till God awaken their hearts to think of their condition, and then they begin to act like men again, and to be sensible of their case. Thus it is said of the prodigal, Luke xv. 17, εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἦλθὼν, that 'he came to himself;' as a man when he is drunk, we say he is not himself, he doth not consider what he doth, nor consider the danger of his actions. And the Psalmist, speaking of the conversion of the Gentiles, saith, Ps. xxii. 27, 'The ends of the earth shall remember, and turn unto the Lord;' that is, shall recollect themselves, and consider of the end of their lives, whence they are, whither they are going, and what shall become of them to all eternity, as if all this while they had forgotten the purpose for which they were sent into the world, who was their master, what was their business. Alas! before this serious consideration, men in seeing see not, and in hearing hear not, as a man that is musing of another matter is not affected with what you tell him; he heareth and doth not hear. It is the awakening of the heart which is God's first work, before he giveth other grace: Eph. v. 14, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' First awake, and then arise from the dead, before which men have but such languid notions of God and Christ and salvation by him as men have in a dream; but when we come to weigh and scan things with affection and application, then the soul is awakened.

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Now God bringeth us to this—

1. Partly by his word, which showeth our natural face, James i. 23, 24, or natural estate and condition before God. It is appointed for this purpose, to be the instrument to awaken men, to discover them to themselves. Now, because this may make but a weak impression, such as may soon be blotted out, ἀνδρὶ παρακύψαντι, they forget and fall asleep again; therefore to this God joineth his rod. Therefore—

2. Partly by afflictions; as the prodigal, when he was reduced to husks and rags, then he came to himself and was brought to his right mind. Again, 1 Kings viii. 47, 'If in the land of their affliction they shall bethink themselves and repent;' the Hebrew is, 'bring it back to their hearts.' Affliction

is sanctified to this end, to open the eyes; it bringeth us to ourselves. So Haggai, i. 5, 7, 'Now consider your ways,' now Θέσθε τὰς καρδίας ἐπὶ τὰς ὁδοὺς ὑμῶν, 'lay your hearts upon your ways;' when they sowed much and brought in little, and what they earned was put into a bag with holes; that is, when the hand of God was upon them, and the visible curse of his providence. When the word of God doth not effectually discover men to themselves, then he sends afflictions to put them upon a search, and by his rod whippeth them out of their sleepy dreams and carnal security.

3. By his Spirit; and the first effect of his operations is compunction: Acts ii. 37, 'When they heard this they were pricked in heart, and cried out, Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?' It makes them anxious and solicitous. I ascribe this work to the Spirit, because it was a time when the Spirit was newly poured forth. Well then, in the general, it is God's awakening the heart to a serious and anxious debate with itself concerning its eternal condition, before which we go on sleepily in a course of sin; but then the soul crieth out, What have I done, and what shall I do? how carelessly have I lived! and what shall become of me to all eternity?

More particularly, this thinking upon our ways involveth in its full latitude three grand duties:—

1. As it relateth to our past estate, or the ways wherein we have walked, self-examining, or a serious searching and inquiring in what condition we are before God. This is necessary to conversion and turning to the Lord: Lam. iii. 40, 'Let us search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.' There needeth a serious calling ourselves to an account, or a strict view and survey of our former courses, if we would amend what is amiss in them; and still, as we renew our repentance, this course must we take.

2. As it relateth to present actions, or the ways wherein we are to walk, so it implieth prudent consideration before we do anything; let us see our warrant, that we may do nothing but what is agreeable to God's word: Prov. iv. 26, 27, 'Ponder the paths of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established: turn not to the right hand or to the left; remove thy foot from evil.' We have a narrow line to walk by, but a foot of ground to go upon; and therefore we should not walk at hap hazard, but with much exactness: Eph. v. 15, 'See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise;' therefore we need to weigh all our actions in the balance of the sanctuary, that if anything displease God we may avoid it The conscience of our weakness, and the strictness of our rule, should make us take the better heed to ourselves.

3. With respect to the tendency and issues of things; and so it noteth fore-consideration or deliberation in order to choice. God biddeth his people 'stand upon the ways and see, and inquire after the old paths, which is the good way, and walk therein,' Jer. vi. 16; as travellers, when they are at a loss or in doubt of their way, seeing divers paths before them, are careful to inform themselves aright that they may take the next, readiest, and best way for their journey's end. An awakened conscience is like Hercules, *in bivio*; there are two ways present themselves—the way of sin and flesh-pleasing, and the way of God's commandments; or, as it is Mat. vii. 13, 14, 'the

broad way,' and 'the narrow way.' The broad way of sin seemeth pleasant and enticing, but it leadeth to death; the narrow way is rough and craggy, troublesome to flesh and blood, but the end is life and peace. Now the soul debateth upon the choice which of these is better, by weighing the loss and gain on either side, and the final issue and tendency of both these ways; or rather, the awakened soul is in the case of a man that is yet to choose; or like a man that is out of the way, and wants his usual marks. He bethinketh himself, If I go on in this broad beaten road of corruption, I am sure to go down to the chambers of death, and perish evermore. Oh! but let me make a stop; it is better to take God's direction than the way of mine own heart; it is a way that will undo me for ever. Hitherto I have gone awry; how shall I do to get into the right way? I would be happy, and this course will never make me so; surely it is better to take God's counsel than to please the flesh. No course will satisfy conscience, no course will make you happy, but a life led according to the word of God. Thus you see it implieth—

1. An examination of our past course, or a looking into our own estate.

2. A careful watch over future actions.

3. A consideration of the issue and event of things. I have viewed my life past. I have been wrong, and I see it will be bitterness in the issue; therefore I purpose to give up myself to a course of obedience, and therefore to consider well of my actions for the future. Now this is a work that is not once to be done, but always. As often as we look to ourselves, we shall find something that needeth amendment; and therefore we need to press the heart with new and pregnant thoughts to mind our duty, and to use constant caution, and taking heed to our ways that we may not go wrong. Ps. xxxix. 1, thus did David, to keep his heart right, 'I thought on my ways.'

Secondly, The objects of this consideration, or the things that must be considered; that may be gathered out of the former discourse. But—

1. Who made thee? Eccles. xii. 1, 'Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.' It is a great advantage to call to mind whose creatures we are; for this will shame us, that we have done no more than we have done for him, from whom we have all that we have; and this in youth, when the effects of this creating bounty are most fresh upon our senses. In good earnest consider, who was it that made thee a reasonable creature; not a stone, and without life; nor a plant, and without sense; nor a beast, and without reason; but a man, with reason, and understanding, and will, and affections; that thou mayest know him, and love him, and enjoy him. And hast thou never thought of the God that made thee? Art thou of those hare-brained fools that go on rashly in a course of sin, and 'God is not in all their thoughts'? Ps. x. 4. How canst thou look upon the body without thoughts of him whose workmanship it is? or think of thy soul without thinking of God whose image and superscription it bears, and without whom thou canst not so much as think? Shall it be troublesome to thee to have frequent thoughts of God, when thou canst go musing of vanity all the day long? Shall every trifle find a room in thy heart, when God findeth no room there? 'He is not far from

every one of us,' Acts xvii. 27, but we are far from him. He is before thee, behind thee, round about thee, yea, within thee, or else thou couldst not keep thy breath in thy body for a moment, and wilt thou not then take some time to season thy heart with thoughts of God? The first miscarriage of men came from this: Rom. i. 28, 'They liked not to retain God in their knowledge.' Thoughts of God and right opinions of God were a burden to them, and therefore they gave up themselves to an ungodly course and evil state of mind. And wilt thou put such a scorn and contempt upon thy Creator as never seriously to think of him? yea, when thoughts of God rush in upon thy mind, to turn them out as unwelcome guests? This is to degenerate into the state of devils, a part of whose torment it is to think of God: they 'believe and tremble;' the more explicit thoughts they have of the name of God, the more is their horror increased. Oh! then let thy meditations of God be sweet and serious, Ps. civ. 34. Everything that passeth before thine eyes proclaims an invisible God, an infinite and eternal power, that made thee and all things else. Shall the heavens above, the earth beneath thee say, Remember God; and every creature, every pile of grass thou treadest upon, call to thee, Remember God; and wilt thou be so stupid and scornful as not to cast a look upon him? Then we begin to be serious when thoughts of God are more fastened upon our hearts.

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2. Why did he make thee? Not in vain; for no wise agent will make a thing to no purpose, especially with such advice, 'Let us make man.' Certainly not for a life of sin, to break his laws, and follow your lusts, and satisfy your fleshly desires. Was this God's end, that the creature might rebel against himself? This is not consistent with his goodness, to make us for such an end; or if so, why did he make the rules of justice and equity natural to us, so that man is a law to himself? Rom. ii. 14. Nor for sport and recreation, to eat, drink, and be merry, or to melt away your days in ease and idleness. He spake rather like a beast than a man, 'Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry; thou hast goods laid up for many years,' Luke xii. 19. If merely for pleasures, why did he give us a conscience? The brute beasts are fitter for such a use, who have no conscience, and therefore no remorse to embitter their pleasures. What was the end for which God made us? Was it to gather wealth, and that the soul might cater for the body, and that we might live well here in the world? No; for then God's work would terminate in itself. And why were such noble faculties given us, such a high-flying reason, that hath a sense of another world, if this were all God's end, that we might grovel here upon earth, and scrape and heap up this world's riches? We see they are the basest of men who are given to this kind of pursuits. Surely this was not God's end. But why was it? Prov. xvi. 4, 'God hath made all things for himself,' for his glory; and so man to glorify him and enjoy him. The beasts were made to glorify him in their kind, but man to enjoy him. This is my end, to seek after God, to please him, to serve him: Ps. xiv. 2, 'The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God.' God, that hath fixed his end, observeth what man doth in compliance with it, what affection and care they have to find him, please him, glorify him. Reason will tell us as well as scripture that the first cause must be the last end, and we must end there where we began at first: 1 Cor. x. 31, 'Whether, therefore, ye cat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' Well, then, I was not

made for nothing, not to sin away my life, nor to sport it away, nor to talk it away, nor to drudge it away in the servile and basest offices of this life; my. end is to enjoy God, and my work and business is to serve and glorify him.

3. How little you have answered this end! God complaineth of our backwardness to this work: Jer. viii. 6, 'No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?' God, upon a review, found every day's work good, very good in themselves, and their correspondence and frame, Gen. i. 31; but when we consider our ways, we shall find that all is evil, very evil. We have too long gone on in a course of sin, and the more we go on, the more we shall go astray, and wander from the great end for which we were created, which was God's service and honour. Oh! consider your ways, especially when conscience is set awork by the word, or when we smart under the folly of our own wanderings, and God maketh us sensible of our mistake by some smart scourge. If we never seriously thought on our ways before, then is a time to think of them, and to count it a mercy that we are not left to go on in a course of sin without checks and disappointments. Oh! look upon the drift and course of your lives and actions, pry into every corner of them. What have I been doing hitherto? spending my days in vanity and sin? Have I remembered my Creator, made it my work to serve him, my scope to glorify him? Have I looked after this as the *unum necessarium*, the great law and business of my life, that I might enjoy communion with God? Oh! for how long a time hath God been kept out of his right, and I have been sowing to the flesh, and never minded the great errand for which I was sent into the world! None can excuse himself.

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4. The unkindness and baseness of such a course, that you may make it odious to the soul. God hath not only made me, but kept me, and provided for me day after day. 'The God which fed me all my lifetime,' saith Jacob, Gen. xlviii. 15. I have been fed at his table, clothed at his cost, defended, kept, when long ago God might have struck me dead in my sins; and yet all this while I have not thought of God, to pay the return of my thanks and obedience to my great benefactor. The very beasts are more dutiful in their kind to man, who, as God's instrument, provideth for them: Isa. i. 3, 'The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but my people will not know, Israel will not consider.' How senseless have I been of the great obligations wherein I stand bound to God! There is the fault; we do not know, and will not consider what hath been done to God for this.

5. What it will come to, or what will become of you, if you should still so continue, or if I should go on in this course, what will be my portion for ever? Nothing but an eternal separation from God, and endless torments with the devil and his angels: Ps. l. 22, 'Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' Oh! this is the means to awaken the conscience, and to affect the heart with high and right thoughts of God. What will be the end of those that go far away from God, if they do not make haste to come home to him? Eternal and merciless vengeance; for God will not always bear with forgetful sinners; they shall be torn in pieces, the soul sent to hell, and the body to the grave. Oh! it concerneth the poor impenitent wretch that now goeth on fearless in a course of sin, immediately to stop in his march, lest he be hurried away to

the place of torment, and there be no escaping. Now, urge this upon the heart, and exercise your thoughts in the remembrance of it; and if you have overcome and overwrestled some former qualms of conscience, now lay it to heart, and do so no more. It may be the hour is at hand when God will take away your souls from you, and all your sins shall be set in order before you, and the stupid conscience, that is now senseless, shall have a lively feeling of all your rebellions and unkindnesses done to God, as the paper which was but now white, when stamped with the printing-irons hath a story written upon it in legible characters.

6. How much it concerneth you to come out of this condition speedily, for God is not a God to be neglected or dallied with. When he calls in the seasons of grace he will be observed, otherwise you may call and he will have no regard: 'They shall call, and I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but not find me,' Prov. i. 28. When you receive many checks of conscience, entreaties of grace, motions of the Spirit in vain, God will be gone. God doth commonly give men a day, and no man or angel knoweth how long this day shall last. God gave Cain a day: 'If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted? if thou dost ill, sin lieth at the door.' Oh! then, when you begin to have thoughts of turning unto God, let them not be quelled. God reckoneth every hour, 'These three years,' 'this second epistle,' 'this second miracle:' and when his patience will expire you cannot tell.

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7. How happy it will be for you when once you change your course I The prodigal remembered the plenty in his father's house; you will find a manifest difference: Rom. vi. 21, 22, 'What fruit had you 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.' In the way, no such gripes of conscience, no shame, sorrow, fears; in the end, everlasting life. It was your mistaking that called the days of sin good days. Oh! but when fruitful in holiness you will have present comfort and serenity of mind, a taste of the clusters of Canaan in the wilderness, hope of a glorious state, and the best will be at last. Compare pain with pain, pleasure with pleasure. We do not compare aright the pains of godliness with pleasures of sin; and yet there you may see the discharging of our duty will yield more true comfort and peace than all the pleasures of sin can bring us.

8. What hopes by Christ: Heb. iii. 1, 'Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Jesus Christ:' what provision God hath made.

Thirdly, Let me argue the necessity of this consideration.

1. Otherwise men are rash, careless, and precipitant, and act as they are carried on by their own lusts; whereas, if they did consider, it would stop them in the course of sin. They rush like a horse into the battle, because 'no man saith, What have I done?' Jer. viii. 6. Men run on like a headstrong horse after their lusts and fancies; whereas, if they do seriously bethink themselves, and cast in a

few grave thoughts about things to come, it would be like the putting in of cold water into a boiling pot, abate the fervour of their lusts. Men are wicked because they are inconsiderate; there are arguments enough against sin if they would but pause and weigh them seriously; but we do not think of heaven and hell, and therefore they do not work upon us: Eccles. xi. 9, 'Remember that for all these things God will bring thee to judgment.'

2. This serious consideration is a good means to awaken us from the sleep of security. When we consider the end why we were made, the rule we are to walk by, and poise ourselves about conformity or inconformity to this rule, and do withal revolve the issues of things in our minds, it cannot but rouse us up out of our sloth and stupidness, and make us act more vigorously and regularly as to the ends of our creation. Oh! what shall I do? The first grace is awakening; that maketh way for other graces; Eph. v. 14, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. Whereas otherwise, when we consider not, we are stupid and sottish: Isa. xliv. 19 'None considered! in his heart, Is there not a lie in my right hand? I have burnt part in the fire,' Eccles. v. 1, they 'offer the sacrifice of fools,' for 'they consider not that they have done evil:' they do not weigh their actions. The reason why they go wrong and continue wrong is, they do not seriously ponder and debate with themselves what it will come to.

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3. By consideration we come to find where the work of God sticketh with us, and so conviction being the more particular, worketh the more kindly. A blunt iron that toucheth many points doth not so soon go to the quick as a needle that toucheth but one point: Mal. iii. 7, 'Return, and they said, Wherein shall we return?' We do not see the need of repentance so much as by prying narrowly into our own ways. In short, without this, life is not so regular, the heart is not overpowered with such strong and full reason to comply with God's counsel.

Secondly, How much it concerneth us, after we have considered our ways, to turn to the Lord, and diligently to pursue the course which he hath prescribed: 'I turned my feet unto thy testimonies.' A sound conversion is here described.

1. *I turned*, in the thorough purpose of his heart, that is the act on our part. It is by God's grace that we are turned, but we turn our selves when the purpose of our souls is fixed: 'Turn me, and I shall be turned.' God inclineth the heart, and we manifest it by binding ourselves by a thorough purpose. A wish, an offer, when it endeth only in that, we have not considered enough; but when the heart is bent, I am turned. The prodigal, when he took up, came to himself, and had reasoned the case, says, 'I will go to my father,' Luke xv. 18. It must be such a purpose as is diligently pursued.

2. The object or rule, *my feet unto thy testimonies*. By his feet is meant the course of his life. Our will and natural inclination should be no rule to us, but God's testimonies. We must entirely give up ourselves to the direction of his word: 'As many as walk according to this rule,' Gal. vi. 16. We are not to walk as we list. There is a fixed determinate rule, which must be kept with all

accurateness and attention; a godly man is very tender of breaking this rule; he makes conscience of keeping to this rule.

Now it concerneth us to make sure work of it.

[1.] Because convictions lost occasion the greater hardness of heart. No iron so hard as that which has been often heated and often quenched; and no heart so bad as theirs that seemed to have some serious and anxious thoughts about their eternal condition. The devil is the more busy and watchful about them because of their offer to escape; and God is the more provoked because they started aside when they were at the point of yielding; as better a match were never proposed, than to break off just as it is ready to be concluded. Always according to the closeness of the application, if it succeed not, so doth our hardness of heart increase. They that were ministerially stirred, when they pull away the shoulder, their hearts grow like an adamant stone: Zech. vii. 11, 12, ‘But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear; yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.’ When the Spirit is in a way of striving, Gen vi. 3, when you are any way affected, if resistance be continued, he withdraws. When men blunt the edge of conscience, deaden their affections, they lose all feeling: 2 Peter ii. 20, 21, ‘For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.’ They sin against former knowledge, experience, and sense of the truth. As their light is, so their resisting causeth hardness, and all the sensible work cometh to nothing. But that is not all, it turneth to loss; it maketh it more difficult than it was before in regard of us; it maketh us more careless. When we had some stirring in our consciences before, we healed it slightly, and we think to do so again.

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[2.] You will provoke God to use a rougher dispensation when the persuasions of the word and the strivings of the Spirit cannot bring you to repentance. They will not be won by arguments; God teacheth them by blows, as Gideon did the men of Succoth by briers and thorns. Therefore they shall shortly find themselves so involved in the fruit of their sins, as they shall not look off from it; their guilt shall lay hold of them at every hand: Hosea vii. 2, ‘They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their sins; now their doings have beset them round about.’ We should be much with our hearts, considering our case, how it is with us. God useth not the rod till forced to it: ‘He doth not willingly grieve nor afflict the children of men,’ Lam. iii. 33. When milder means work but half a cure, the rest is sup plied by some pressing judgments; his work is stopped, and therefore he promotes it this way.

[3.] It is a sign your consideration is not serious when you are off and on, and it produceth no good effect in the soul. A plaster may be sovereign, but when you are still pulling it off and putting

it on, it does no good. Light thoughts work not; when they are deep and ponderous, then they leave a durable impression. Still it is, 'Remember and turn:' Ps. xxii. 27, 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord.' Bethink and repent: 1 Kings viii. 47, 'If they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captives, and repent;' 'Search and try, and turn unto the Lord.' Some are *semper victuri*, always considering, about to live: but you must resolve: kindly convictions will not die, nor let the convinced sinner alone till they appear in the fruits of obedience.

[4.] The devil hath his purposes: Mat. xiii. 19, 'The wicked one catcheth away that which was sown in his heart;' he watcheth troubled sinners, that the work may die away.

Use 1. To reprove us—

1. For not considering our ways. When did you ever go aside, and seriously debate with yourselves about your turning to God? Did you ever lay it to your hearts how matters stand between you and God? There are certain seasons when God calleth you to it, and that is—

[1.] When the doctrine of life and the way of salvation hath been represented unto you with evidence and power, and you have felt some stirring and trouble in your consciences. Did you go home and say, Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we then say to these things?' God hath spoken to me this day; now shall all this be lost and come to nothing? Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall I escape if I neglect so great salvation?' Now I am called to mind Christ and salvation more. If I should give no heed to these things, or only give them the hearing for the present, oh! what will become of me? There is a special providence in every message, warning, offer, or instruction by the word. Acts xiii. 26, 'To you is this word of salvation sent;' he doth not say, We brought it, but, God sent it; as some message of God for your trial. Do we think of these things which we have heard and learned?

[2.] When God appeareth against you in a course of judgments, cutting off one comfort after another, now taking away a child, then blasting the estate: 'Now consider your ways;' Eccles. vii. 14, 'In the day of adversity consider:' then is the duty in season. Affliction doth not rise out of the dust; God hath some end in these providences; and what is his end but to make me mindful of my duty to him? See for what end these things come, and to what issue they tend, that we may hear the rod, and know the meaning of the providence. If you do not consider, God will make you consider before he hath done with you. Jer. xxiii. 20, 'The anger of the Lord shall not return till he hath performed all the thoughts of his heart, and then you shall consider it perfectly.' God will follow blow after blow till we do consider his mind and purpose. Jer. xxx. 24, 'The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return until he hath done it, and until he hath performed the intents of his heart.'

2. To reprove us for not taking this advantage. When we are set a-thinking of our ways, we have many thoughts and sensible stirrings, but they come to nothing, because we do not follow it close. You think, and have some workings of conscience, but do they end in a fixed purpose? Some break through all, as Saul forces himself, 1 Sam. xiii. 12. Break through all restraints of conscience.

Felix had his qualm, but he puts it off to another season. Oh! consider these things will one day be a witness against you, the sensible workings upon your hearts by the word and rod.

Use 2. To stir us up to this work, serious consideration in order to sound conversion.

1. Be frequent in it. If daily you called yourselves to an account, all acts of grace would thrive the better. Seneca of Sextius, *Quid hodie malum sanasti? cui vitio obstitisti?* You have God's example in reviewing every day's work, and in dealing with Adam before he slept. The man that was unclean was to wash his clothes at eventide.

2. Seriously set yourself to it: Deut. xxxii. 46, 'Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day.' It is a weighty matter of life and death: Ps. iv. 4, 'Commune with your hearts and be still.' This is the way to check sin, and to come on most hopefully in a course of obedience.

3. Drive your thoughts to a resolution, to rectify whatever is amiss; never leave thinking of your ways till you grow anxious about eternal life, nor let your anxiousness cease till you bring it to somewhat; grow to some resolution about the ways of God. Pray God to make your consideration effectual: 2 Tim. ii. 7, 'Consider what I have said, and the Lord give you understanding in all things:' this is but the means, God giveth the grace.

SERMON LXVII.

I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.—VER. 60.

IN the verse immediately preceding the man of God speaks of repentance as the fruit of consideration and self-examining: 'I considered my ways, and then turned my feet to thy testimonies.' But when did he turn? For though we see the evil of our ways, we are naturally slow to get it redressed. Therefore David did not only turn to God, but he did it speedily. We have an account of that in this verse, 'I made haste,' &c. This readiness in the work of obedience is doubly expressed—affirmatively and negatively. Affirmatively, 'I made haste:' negatively, 'I delayed not.' This double expression increaseth the sense, according to the manner of the Hebrews; as Ps. cxviii. 17, 'I shall not die, but live,' that is, surely live; so here, 'I made haste, and delayed not,' that is, I verily delayed not a moment; as soon as he had thought of his ways, and taken up resolutions of walking closely with God, he did put it into practice. The Septuagint reads the words thus: I was ready, and was not troubled or diverted by fear of danger. Indeed, besides our natural slowness to good, this is one usual ground of delays, we distract ourselves with fears, and when God hath made known his will to us in many duties, we think of tarrying till the times are more quiet and favour our practice, and our affairs are in a better posture. A good improvement may be made of that

translation; but the words run better, as they run more generally, with us, ‘I made haste, and delayed not,’ &c.; and from thence observe—

Doct. That the call of God, whether to amendment and newness of life, or to any particular duty, must be without delay obeyed.

To illustrate the point by these reasons:—

Reas. 1. Ready obedience is a good evidence of a sound impression of grace left upon our hearts. There is a slighter conviction which breedeth a sense of duty, but doth not urge us thoroughly to the performance of it; and so men stand reasoning instead of running, debating the case with God: and there is a more sound conviction which is accompanied with a prevailing efficacy, and when we have this upon our spirits, then all excuses and delays are laid aside, and we come off readily and kindly in the way of compliance with God’s call. This is doctrinally spoken of, Cant. i. 4, ‘Draw me, and we will run after thee.’ Running is an earnest and speedy motion. From whence comes it? From drawing; it is a fruit of drawing, or the sweet and powerful attraction which the Spirit of God useth in the hearts of the elect. Instances I might give you in several calls and conversions spoken of in scripture. When Christ called Andrew and Peter,[2] ‘They left their father and followed after him,’ Mark i. 20. So when Christ called Zaccheus, ‘he made haste, and came down from the tree, and received him joyfully,” Luke xix. 6. So Christ to Matthew, ‘Follow me, and straightway he followed him,’ Mat. ix. 9. Julian the apostate scoffs at these passages, as if it were irrational to conceive such a thing could be, that men should so soon leave their course of gain and calling; or else that Christ’s followers were a kind of sots and fools, weak, and poor-spirited creatures, that upon a word speaking they would come off presently all of a sudden: but impulsions of the Spirit carry their own reason with them, and draw the heart without any more ado. But such as he were not acquainted with the workings of the Holy Ghost in conversion, therefore scoff at these things. So Gal. i. 16, ‘Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.’ When our call is clear, there needs no debate. When men stand reasoning instead of running, there is not a thorough work upon them.

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Reas. 2. The sooner we turn to the ways of God the better we speed. How so?

1. Partly in this, that the work goes on the more kindly, as being carried forth in the strength of the present influence and impulsion of grace; whereas, if the heart grow cold again, it will be the more difficult. A blow while the iron is hot doth more than ten at another time when it grows cold again. So when thy heart grows cold, thou wilt not have that advantage as when thou art under a warm conviction. And indeed that is the devil’s cheat, to speak of hereafter, to elude the importunity of the present conviction that is upon you. John v. 4, You know when the waters were stirred, then

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[2] Read ‘James and John.’—ED.

was the time to put in, he that stepped in first had experience of the sanative virtue of the waters; so when the heart is stirred, we should not lose this advantage, but come on upon that call. There are several metaphors in scripture that do express this; sometimes, we must open when God knocks, Cant. v.; we must enter when God opens, lest the door be shut against us, Mat. xxv.; we must come forth when he bids us, as Lot out of Sodom, lest we perish: when a thing is done speedily and in season it is a great advantage.

2. The more welcome to God the sooner we turn to him. We value a gift not only by its own worth, but by the readiness of him that gives; if we have it at first asking, we count it a greater kindness, and give the more thanks; so the less we stand bucking with God, and demurring upon his call, the more acceptable is our obedience. Pharaoh did at length let Israel go, but was forced to it, and with much ado, no thanks to him. It is true indeed, if we turn at length seriously, heartily, we are accepted with God, but not so accepted as when we come in at first. Surely the fewer calls we withstand, the less we provoke God, and the more ready entertainment do we find. The spouse, that would not open at the first knock, but only at length, when her bowels were troubled, when she thought of her unkindness, then she went out to open to her beloved, but then her beloved was gone. You will not find God at your beck when you dally with him. Your comforts will cost you longer waiting for, when you make God wait for entrance, and would not give way to the work of his grace.

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3. You speed better, because your personal benefit is the greater, the sooner you turn to the Lord. You have more knowledge, more experience, you get more comfort, you would be more profitable to' others, more useful to God. If ever God touch your hearts, and once you come to experiment what an excellent thing it is to live in communion with God, you will be sorry you began no sooner. Paul complains that he was as a man 'born out of due time,' 1 Cor. xv. 8, and so had not the advantage of seeing Christ in the flesh, until he showed him self to him from heaven in the vision upon his conversion. You lose many a comfortable sight of Christ because you were so late acquainted with him. And it is said of Andronicus and Junius, Rom. xvi. 7, 'they were in Christ before me.' Certainly he that is first in Christ, and sooner called to grace, hath the advantage of us. An early acquaintance with God gives us advantages both in point of enjoyment and service. In point of enjoyment; peace, comfort, joy in the Holy Ghost. A man would not want these things, they are so valuable in themselves; the want of them is an incomparable loss to us. Certainly they would have been much better than all those flesh-pleasing vanities that you dote upon, and keep you from Christ. A man that hath for a long while wasted his time and strength in driving on a peddling trade, when he is acquainted with a more gainful course, Oh, saith he, that I had known this sooner! so, none have any taste of the ways of God, but they will wish so; Oh, that I had sooner renounced my carnal delights, and betaken myself to the service of God!

Then advantages in point of service. What honour might we have brought to God, what good done to others, if we had begun sooner! Oh, saith one, had I but the time to spend again which I

trifled away in the devil's service! What use might I have made of the vigour and freshness of my youth, and quickness of my parts for God, and the large tract of time which I spent in sin and vanity! Every day in a carnal state was a loss of opportunity of service, the glorifying of God, the great end for which you were made.

Reas. 3. There is danger and hazard in delay and putting off a business of such concernment, as conversion to God and his ways is, upon such uncertainties. For the understanding of the force of this reason—

1. Let us determine that this is a business of the greatest concernment, and that will show us the folly of our delays, for certainly the greatest work should first be thought of. Now if you will believe the word of God, that will tell you the salvation of your souls should be your main care: Mat. vi. 33, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,' &c.; Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after,' &c. Whatever is neglected, this is a business that must he looked after. And Luke x. 42, 'One thing is needful.' Let us argue from these places. Certainly that which is necessary should be preferred before that which is superfluous. A man would take care to get meat rather than sauce, and would prefer his business before his recreation, that which is eternal before that which is temporal. It is not necessary we should be great and rich in the world. Within a little while it will not be a pin to choose what part we have acted here. But it is necessary we should be gracious, holy, and acquainted with God in Christ; that is our business. Again, that which is eternal should be preferred before that which is temporal. You count him a fool that is very exact and careful to get his room in an inn furnished, when he neglects his house where his constant abode is. In the other world there is our long home; and if all our care should be here for the present estate, where we tarry but for a night, but a little while, and neglect eternity, our everlasting happiness, that were a very great folly. That which is spiritual, which concerns our soul, should be preferred before that which is carnal and corporal, and only concerns the body, for the better part should have the most care. As for instance, a man that is wounded and cut through his clothes and skin and all, will sooner look to have the wound closed up in his body than the rent made up in his garment. So the distempers of the inward man should be first cured before we look after the outward man, which is as it were the garment and clothing, for these outward things shall be added. Here is your work, to please God, not satisfy the flesh. This is that which concerns us not only for a while but for ever, and concerns the inward man. This is the grand business of concernment; therefore we should delay other things rather than delay the work of our salvation; yet usually all other things have a quick despatch, and this only is neglected and lies by the wall.

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2. That this business of concernment is left upon great hazard and uncertainty.

[1.] Life is uncertain. He that does seriously consider the uncertain shortness of the present life, how can he delay a moment, lest he be called home to God before his great errand for which he was sent into the world be done? Many of you, when you seriously think of it, would not for a thousand worlds die the next day so unprovided, unfurnished with promises, evidences, experiences;

and yet it may be so that that may be the time when they shall be called home to God. This life is but ‘a vapour,’ James iv. 4, a little warm breath turned in and out by the nostrils, that is soon choked and stopped; and ‘thou knowest not what will be on the morrow,’ Prov. xxvii. 1. As that devout person said when he was invited to a meal the next day, to come to-morrow to a feast, I have not had a morrow for these many years. We have no security for the next day but our own word, and he that hath nothing but his own word to secure him is very weakly secured. Life is short, and we make it shorter by continuing in sin. It is uncertain: if there were a fixed time and period wherein we knew our continuance should be in the world, then we should be tempted to wallow freely in our carnal lusts, and entertain sin a little longer, and put off repentance till hereafter. But God hath left life upon great uncertainties; the hand of providence may soon crop you off, long before you come to your flower. None are nearer to destruction than those that promise themselves a longer time in sin: Luke xii. 19, ‘Thou hast goods laid up for many years,’ but ‘Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.’ God loves to disappoint secure careless souls that promise themselves a longer life without his leave; he will break in upon a sudden. A poor careless sinner would fain keep his soul a little longer. No, it is demanded now: he doth not give it up, but it is taken away from him. Reason with thyself as Isaac, Gen. xxvii. 2 (I allude to it), ‘Behold now I am old, I know not the day of my death; make me savoury meats that my soul may bless thee before I die.’ So reason, I have spent so much time in the world, and I know not the day of my dissolution, when God will call me home; oh, let me go to God that he may bless me before I die!

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[2.] You know not whether the means of grace shall be continued to you or no, and such affectionate offers and melting entreaties: Acts xiii. 46, ‘Since you put away the word of God from you, you judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life.’ God will not always wait upon a lingering sinner, but will take the denial and be gone. They judge themselves unworthy of that grace, they pass sentence upon themselves: 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2,’ Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation: we beseech you receive not the grace of God in vain.’ God hath his seasons, and when these are past, will not treat with us in such a mild affectionate manner. The means of grace are removed from a people by strange providences, when they have slighted the offers of grace: Luke xiii. 7, ‘These three years I came seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?’ In that text there is—(1.) God’s righteous expectation, ‘These three years I came seeking fruit.’ He was the dresser of the vineyard; they were the three years of his ministry, as by a serious harmonising the evangelists will appear that he was just now entering upon his last half year they had his ministry among them. (2.) Their unthankful frustration, ‘I find none,’ nothing answerable to what means they enjoyed. (3.) God’s terrible denunciation, ‘Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?’ God will root up a people, or remove the means; and therefore will ye leave it upon such uncertainties?

[3.] There is an uncertainty of grace: 2 Tim. ii. 25, ‘If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.’ It is a mere hazard, it may be he will, it may be not. It is uncertain whether the Spirit of God will ever put in your heart a thought of turning to God

again: Gen. vi. 3, ‘My Spirit shall not always strive with man.’ The Spirit of God strives for a long while, follows a sinner, casts in many an anxious thought, troubles and shakes him out of his carnal quiet and security, but this will not always last. Ah, Christians! there are certain seasons, if we had the skill to take hold of them; there is an appointed fixed time when God is nearer to us than at another time, and we shall never have our hearts at such an advantage: Isa. lv. 6, ‘Call upon him while he is near, and while he may be found.’ There are certain seasons which are times of finding. Some are of opinion that there are certain seasons when a man may be rich if he will, when God offereth him an opportunity for an estate in the world, if he knew the time and how to take hold of it. Certainly to those that live under the means of grace there is a time of finding, when God is nearer to them than at another time, and therefore will you slip that, and leave it upon such great uncertainties?

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[4.] There is an uncertainty in this; we are not certain of having the use of our natural faculties; we may lose our understandings by a stupid disease, and God may bring a judgment upon those that dally with him in the work of repentance. It is a usual judgment upon them that while they were alive did forget God, when they come to die, to forget themselves, and have not the free use of their reason, but, invaded with some stupid disease, die in their sins, and so pass into another world.

Reas. 4. The fourth reason is the great mischief of delay.

1. The longer we delay the greater indisposition is there upon us to embrace the ways of God. O Christians! when we press you to holy things, to turn yourselves to the Lord, you begin to make some essay, and then are discouraged, and find it is hard and tedious to flesh and blood, and so you give over. Now mark, if it be hard to-day, it will be harder the next, so the third onward, for it is hardness of heart that makes the work of God hard. Now the more we provoke God, the more we resist his call, the more hard the heart is; the impulsions of his grace are not so strong as before, and the heart every day is more hardened. As a path weareth the harder by frequent treading, so the heart is more hard, the mind more blind, the will more obstinate, the affections more engaged and rooted in a course of sin: Jer. xiii. 23, ‘Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.’ Oh, to break off an inveterate custom is hard! A plant newly set is more easily taken up than a plant that hath taken root. When we grow old and rotten in the way of sin, it will be much harder for us than now it is: the longer we lie soaking here in sin, the farther off from God.

2. We provide the more discomfort for ourselves. Always the proportion of our sorrow is according to the measure of our sins. Whether it be godly sorrow, the sorrow of repentance, or despairing sorrow, those horrors which are impressed upon us as a punishment of our rebellion and impenitency, in both senses you still increase your sorrow the more you sin. For the sorrow of repentance, it is clear that sorrow must carry proportion with our offences. She that had much for given wept much. Certainly it will cost you the more tears, a greater humbling before God, the

longer you continue in a course of sin against him. And for the sorrow of punishment, you are ‘treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath,’ Rom. ii. 5. Your burden will be greater and more increased upon you. It is too heavy for your shoulders already to bear; why should we add to the weight of it? Either our sorrow of repentance will be greater, or the anxious sense of our punishment; for in both God observes, and God requires a proportion.

3. Consider how unfit we shall be for God’s service if we delay a little longer, when our strength is spent, and vigour of youth exhausted; when our ears grow deaf, eyes dim, understanding dull, affections spent, memory lost. Is this a time to begin with God, and to look after the business of our souls? Certainly he that made all, that was our Creator, deserves the flower of our strength, Eccles. xii. 1. When the tackling is spoiled and ship rotten, is that a time to put to sea? or rather when the ship is new built? Shall the devil feast upon the flower and freshness of your youth, and God only have the scraps and fragments of the devil’s table? When we are good for nothing else, then to think we are good enough for God and the business of religion, which requires all our might and all our strength, when we are spent, is it a time to begin our warfare, or in our youth?

4. There is this, the just suspicion which is upon a late repentance; it is seldom sound; it is no true repentance which ariseth merely from horror and fear of hell. It may be but the beginnings of everlasting despair, and their desires may be but offers of self-love after their own ease. All men seek the Lord at length, but wise men seek him betimes. The difference is made on some in time, on others out of time, upon their death-beds. The most profane would have God for their portion when they can sin no more, and enjoy the world no longer. >How can we tell this is a sound work? It seems to be a very questionable thing, merely proceeding from self-love and natural desires of happiness in all men. When we begin with God, we begin out of self-love, we come for our ease and interest, that we may be safe and happy; afterwards we come to a delight of spirit in his service, and having opportunity, show in our works the power of our affection to God, and manifest the soundness of our conversion. It is possible a death-bed repentance may be true, but it is very doubtful. There is but one instance, which is that of the thief upon the cross. The scriptures are a history of five thousand years; yet all that while we have but one instance of a man that repented when he came to die; and in that one instance there is an extraordinary conjunction of circumstances, such as will never fall out again. Christ was at the thief’s right hand, in the height of his love, drawing sinners to salvation; and probably this man had never any such call till then. Some may at the eleventh hour be converted, because they were not called till then. Every one came when they were called. Therefore, there being so great and just a suspicion that lies against a late repentance, certainly we should not delay.

Reas. 5. The reasons for delay are very inconsiderable. Solomon saith, Prov. xxvi. 16, that ‘the sluggard thinks himself wiser than seven men that can render a reason.’ Mark, as Solomon’s fool is not to be taken literally, but spiritually, so Solomon’s sluggard is not to be taken morally, but spiritually. They that are sluggish and slow of heart in the things of God, they think they have a

great deal of reason on their side, and will not be persuaded on the contrary but they shall do well enough for all that; and they can argue against the calls and injunctions of God. Yet how little can they say for themselves! See what reasons may be said for delay; I mean not that they plead and argue, but it is -that which sways them, that which lies next the heart is this; why they keep off from God, and are satisfied with their present estate.

1. The pleasures of sin are sweet, and they are loath to forego them, and to engage their souls in the severities of a strict obedience. Here is the bottom reason, this is, that which sways them. I will not speak to this plea as it lies against conversion itself, but only as it makes men to delay. If I were to plead for conversion itself, I would tell these carnalists of higher pleasure; that their delights shall not be abrogated, but preserved; their delight shall be transplanted from Egypt to Canaan, that it may thrive and prosper in a happier soil; that they may have purer contentments, and those chaste and happy satisfactions of enjoying communion with God. But I shall only deal with them as it relates to the delay of conversion. Therefore I thus argue: These pleasures of sin must one day be renounced, or you are for ever miserable; and if you must one day, why not now? For mark, sin will be as sweet hereafter as it now is, and salvation is always dispensed upon the same terms; you cannot be saved hereafter with less ado, or bring down Christ and heaven to a lower rate; and, therefore, if this be a reason now, it will ever lie as a reason against Christ and religion, then you will never tend to look after the ways of life; if you are loath to part with sin now, you will never part with it. The laws of Christianity are always the same. God will not bate you anything of repentance, and your heart is not like to be better, but worse, that is the sum of it; and therefore this reason signifies nothing when it conies to be tried in the balance of the sanctuary, and yet this is the main reason.

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2. They can plead other things; hope God will be merciful to them hereafter; though they indulge themselves a little longer in sin, he will at length save them. I answer—You cannot bend his mercy and make it save; it is a mere uncertainty, peradventure he will, peradventure not. Would you take poison, out of hope that afterward you may meet with an antidote? And this is the very case between God and us. I answer further—There are shrewd suspicions that God will not be merciful to those that run such a desperate adventure; for whoever delays his repentance doth in effect pawn his soul with the devil, and leaves it in his hands, and says, Here, Satan, keep my soul; if I fetch it not again by such a day, it is thine for ever: and can you think mercy will bring it out? Again, there are great causes of fear, because there is such a thing as judicial hardness of heart, by a sentence of obduration. There are some that God gives up to their own ways and counsels, and God inflicts this sentence upon those that continue in sin, notwithstanding conviction of their hearts to the contrary: Prov. i. 25, 26, ‘Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I will also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh.’ There are thousands in hell merely upon this account, that have forfeited the benefit of God’s mercy, and tenders of his grace, and have been shut up by hardness of heart, by God’s sentence of obduration; the most dreadful punishment that can light upon a creature on this side hell.

3. Ay! but we are willing, and would turn to the Lord now, but we have no leisure, and have not those conveniences that we shall have here after, for then we shall get things into a better frame and posture. Oh, no; it is mere hypocrisy to think you are willing when you delay, for there is nothing hinders but a want of will, and a loathness to comply with the commands of God. When we dare not flatly deny, then we delay. *Non vacat*, that is the sinner's plea, I am not at leisure; but *non placet*, there is the reality. Mat. xxii. 7, they which were invited to the wed ding varnished their denial over with an excuse. Delay is a denial, for if they were willing there would be no excuse. To be rid of importunate and troublesome creditors, we promise them payment another time, and we know our estate will be more wasted by that time; it is but to put them off: so this delay and putting off God is but a shift. Here is the misery, God always comes unseasonably to a carnal heart. It was the devils that said, Mat. viii. 29, 'Art thou come to torment us before our time?' Good things are a torment to a carnal heart, and they always come out of time. Certainly that is the best time when the word is pressed upon the heart with evidence, light, and power, and when God treats with thee about thine eternal peace.

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Reas. 6. There are very urgent reasons to quicken us to make haste.

1. The state wherein we are at present is so bad and dangerous that we can never soon enough come out of it. The state of a man in his carnal condition is compared in scripture to a prison: Rom. xi. 32, 'God hath concluded or shut them all up in unbelief.' And mark, it is a prison that is all on fire. Oh, when poor captives are bolted and shut up in a flaming prison, how will they run hither and thither to get out! So should we run and strive to get out of this flaming prison. You cannot be too soon out of the power of the devil, or from under the curse of the law, the danger of hell-fire, and the dominion of sin: Mat. iii. 7, 'Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' He doth not say, to go, nor to run, but to flee. Fleeing from wrath to come, that is the truest motion. And so Heb. vi. 18; they which had the avenger of blood at their heels fled for refuge to take hold of the hope set before them. If there be poison in our bowels we think we can never soon enough cast it out. If fire hath taken hold of a building, we do not say we will quench it hereafter, the next week, or next month, but think we can never soon enough quench it. Or if there be a wound in the body, we do not let it alone till it fester and rankle. Christians, you may apply all this to the present case; here the danger is greater. There is no poison so deadly as sin, which hath infected all mankind: no wound so dangerous, for that will be the death of body and soul: no fire so dreadful as the wrath of God; therefore we cannot soon enough come out of this condition.

2. We cannot be happy soon enough, for the state we make after is the arms of God, the bosom of Jesus, the hope of eternal life; we cannot soon enough get within the compass of such privileges. Oh! shall Christ lie by as a dead commodity or breaded[3] ware? It shows we know not the gift of

[3] Qu. 'braided,' that is, scorned, reproached; whence, upbraid?—ED.

God, John iv. If we had a due sense and value of his excellency, we would take the morning market, and let not Christ Jesus, with all his benefits, lie by as a commodity that may be had at the last, at any time of the day; we would look upon him as the quickest ware in the market, and flock to him 'as doves to the windows,' Isa. lx. 8. You would force your way that you might get into his heart; you would count all things but dross and dung that you might gain him. It will be sweet to be encircled in the embraces of Jesus Christ, to have 'his left hand under your head, and his right hand to embrace you," Cant ii. 6; and will you delay when he stands offering himself, and stretching out his hand all the day long to receive you?

SERMON LXVIII.

I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.—VER. 60.

I COME now to the application.

Use 1. To reprove the dallying with God which we are conscious to in the work of conversion, which is so common and natural to us. We are apt to put off God from time to time, from childhood to youth, from youth to man's age, from man's age to old age, and from old age to death-bed; and so the devil steals away one hour after another till all time be past.

I shall—(1.) Speak of the causes of this delay; (2.) Represent the heinousness of it, that you may not stroke this sin with a gentle censure, and think lightly of the matter.

First, Of the causes of this delay.

1. Unbelief, or want of a due sense or sight of things to come. If men were persuaded of eternal life and eternal death, they would not stand hovering so long between heaven and hell, but presently engage their hearts to draw nigh to God. But we 'cannot see afar off,' 2 Peter i. 9. Nature is purblind: to carnal hearts there is a mist upon eternity, they have no prospective whereby to look into another world, therefore it hath no influence upon them to quicken them to more speed and earnestness. If we had a due sense of eternal death, surely we would be fleeing from wrath to come; no motion should be earnest and swift enough to get from such a danger. If we had a due sense of eternal life, we would be 'running to take hold of the hope that is before us,' Heb. vi. 18.

2. Security. If men have a cold belief of heaven and hell, if they take up the current opinions of the country, yet do not take it into their serious thoughts, they 'put far away the evil day,' Amos vi. 3. Things at a distance do not startle us, as a clap of thunder afar off doth not fright us so much as when it is just over our heads in our own zenith. We look upon these things as to come, so put off the thought of them. Next to a want of sound belief, the want of a serious consideration is the

cause why men dally with God. If we had the same thoughts living and dying, our motions would be more earnest and ready. When death and eternity is near, we are otherwise affected than when we look upon it as afar off. One said of a zealous preacher, He preacheth as if death were at my back. Oh, could we look upon death as at our back or heels! If men did but consider that within a few days they must go to heaven or hell, that there is but the slender thread of a frail life upon which they depend, that is soon fretted asunder, they would not venture any longer to be out of a state of grace, nor dally with God. But we think we may live long, and time enough to repent by leisure; we put far off the day of our change, and so are undone by our own security.

3. Averseness of heart from God. That which makes us desirous to stay longer in a way of sin, doth indeed make us loath to turn at all; and what is that? Obstinacy and unsubjection of heart to God: 'The carnal mind is enmity to the law of God,' Rom. viii. 7. We manifest our enmity to the law of God by delays as well as by a down right opposition. Neh. iv. 6, it is said the work went on speedily. Why? 'For the people had a mind to the work.' Where there is an earnest bent of heart, there we cannot linger and dally any longer. But men have no love nor affection to God, therefore do they delay und keep off from him.

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4. The love of the world rooted in us, the love of present delights and present contentments. This is so deeply rooted in our nature, that here we stick, and are loath to come off kindly to the work of God. In Mat. xxii., when they were invited to the marriage-feast of the king's son, that is, to the privileges of the gospel, what did they plead? The farm, oxen, merchandise, and one had married a wife; they were loath to be divorced from their dearest lusts, and to renounce the satisfaction which they had in carnal things, that so they might walk with God in a way of strict obedience.

Secondly, Let me represent the heinousness of it. Because we are apt to stroke it with a gentle censure, and to speak of this with soft words, let us see what this delay and putting off God is, when he comes with a great deal of importunity and affectionate earnestness, inviting us to partake of his grace.

1. It is flat disobedience to God. You think it is but putting it off for a while; no, it is flat disobedience. Why? God is as peremptory for the time and season as he is for the duty itself. God doth not only say, Turn to me, but, To-day, 'even while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts,' Heb. iii. 7, 8. The Lord deals with us as the Roman ambassador dealt with Antiochus, when he was shifting and putting off the matter, that he might not give a direct answer to the Romans. The ambassador draws a circle round about him, saith he, *Intra hunc*, Let me have an answer before thou passest from hence. So God will not only have an answer, but a present answer. If he saith, To-day, it is flat disobedience for you to say, To-morrow. He saith, Now is the time of salvation. We are charged in his name and by his authority to do it now, in this instant.

2. It is ingratitude and unthankfulness for God's eternal love: Ps. ciii. 17, 'From everlasting to everlasting thy loving-kindness is great to them that fear thee.' From all eternity God was mindful of us, and before the world was. With reverence we may speak it: ever since he was God he was our God: from eternity to eternity his lovingkindness is great; and shall we adjourn and put him off to an odd corner of our lives, when he thought he could never soon enough think of us? Shall the whole duration of God be taken up by his love to us, and shall we be content to grieve the Spirit of God, and trample his laws under our feet for all this? Can you have hearts to abuse such a God, and to deal so unkindly with him?

3. It is base disingenuity: we do not deal with God as we would have God to deal with us. If we have any business or errand at the throne of grace, we would be heard presently, and are ready to complain if we have not a quick despatch: Ps. cii. 2, 'Lord, hear me speedily.' Here is our language when praying for any relief we stand in need of. To-day is a season for mercy, but to-morrow we make always to be the season for duty. We would have God to tarry our sinful leisure, till the heat of our lusts be spent, and fervours of youth be abated; yet we will not tarry his holy leisure. We are bound, but the Lord is free whether he will answer us or no; yet we murmur if God come not in at our beck. We are always in haste if in any danger and want any relief; we cry, How long? And shall God stand waiting till we turn from our evil ways? If any cry, How long? God may, as he doth Jer. xiii. 27, 'When shall it once be?'

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4. It is base self-love when we can be content to dishonour God longer, provided that at length we may be saved. Shall I say that this is to prefer our salvation before God? No, but it is to prefer our sins before God. And it shows that we are not willing to part with sin upon reasons of duty, or any real inclination of heart towards God, but only upon reasons of interest, that we maybe saved; yea, never to part with it at all if you might have your wills. Not but that a man may and ought to eye rewards and punishments. It is part of the exercise of our faith to eye the reward, and also to eye the punishment; but this manifests an inordinate respect to the reward when we would enjoy our personal happiness, and so that be obtained at length, we care not how God be disobeyed and dishonoured. You do but in effect say to God thus, Let me despise thy commands, and abuse thy mercies a little longer; then I will look after my salvation, when my lusts are satisfied. This is base self-love. Christ did not redeem us only that we might die well, but that we might live well; not only that we might be safe at last, but glorify God here upon earth; not only that we might enter into heaven, but do him service, and that all our days: Luke i. 74, 'Being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life.'

5. It is great injustice and injury to God, who hath been too long kept out of his right already. Oh, look back! How ungratefully have you spent all your former time! Too much time hath been spent already, and you would delay longer: 1 Peter iv. 3, 'The time past may more than suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,' &c. It is enough, and should be more than enough, and now

you should not stay a moment. As those that have delayed their journey, when they begin and set out, mend their pace that they may redeem their time and accomplish their journey; so should we, for the time past is more than enough to be spent in worldly vanity and carnal excess: Rom. xiii. 11-14, 'It is high time to awake out of sin.' God hath been encroached upon for a long time, and that should and will be a grief of heart to you, that you have not all this while acknowledged or paid your debt to your lord. The thought of this should prevail with us the more, because the payment of a debt to a man should not be delayed, to put off a poor man till to-morrow 'when thou hast it by thee,' Prov. iii. 28; and the wages of a servant should not abide with us, Lev. xix. 13. We are not to defraud a poor servant, nor to delay him, but to make him quick payment; and shall we defraud our great Creator of the debt we owe to him, and put him off from day to day?

Use 2. To exhort us with speed to turn to the Lord, and to comply with his motions. Let us not put off God from day to day. I shall urge it—(1.) As to the general case; (2.) As to particular duties which are pressed upon you.

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First, As to the general case. Oh! go and bethink yourselves, how do matters stand between God and thy soul? Debate it seriously, that if you have neglected God and his salvation already, you may now turn to him without delay. Let me press you further.

1. You can never part with sin soon enough; it is a cursed inmate, that will surely bring mischief upon the soul that harbours it. It will set its own dwelling on fire. If there be a mote in the eye, a thorn in the foot, we take them out without delay; and is not sin a greater mischief, and sooner to be looked into and parted with? Certainly the evil of sin is greater than all evil, and hereafter the trouble will be greater; therefore we can never soon enough part with it.

2. Let this move you: sin must have a quick despatch, and shall not God? It would defeat temptations if we would but delay them, it would stop the furies of anger, and suppress the motions of lust. Augustus the emperor advised those who were angry to repeat the Greek alphabet, meaning that they might take time to consider. So for uncleanness and other sins; if the practice and execution of many lusts were but delayed, we would not be so frequent in them as we are, to the dishonour of God and scandal of religion. Prov. vii. 22, it is said of the young man enticed by the harlot, that 'forthwith he went after her.' When our lusts are agog, all the checks of conscience and persuasions of the word will not prevail for a little respite. Now, shall sin have a more ready entertainment than God? Will you rush upon the practice of sin like a horse into the battle, and come on in the service of God like a snail? Will you be so eager and passionate upon the impulsion of every lust, and so hardly be entreated by the Spirit of God and by the word of God?

3. If you be not ready, God is ready. How ready is he, on the one hand, to receive you, and, on the other hand, to punish you! The one quickens us by hope, and the other by fear. For the consideration which works upon hope, God is ready: Mat. xxii. 4, 5, 'Come to the wedding, all things are ready.' He hath a Christ ready to receive you, a Spirit ready to sanctify and cure all your

soul distempers; he hath pardoning mercy to forgive all your sins, he hath power of grace to remedy all your distempers; and will not you be ready? Luke xv. 20, the prodigal said, 'I will go to my father.' Mark his language, 'I will go;' the father ran. When we do but relent, and with brokenness of heart come and lie at the feet of God, love's pace is very swift, and runs to snatch us out of the fire; therefore will you not be ready to cast yourselves into the arms of his compassion? Cant. ii. 8, Christ is represented as 'leaping upon the mountains, and skipping upon the hills.' Christ thinks he can never be soon and early enough with a returning sinner, to revive a poor broken-hearted sinner; therefore, if God be so ready, so should you. On the other side, to work upon your fear, if you delay, God is ready to punish you. The wrath of God hangs over your heads like a sharp sword by a slender thread, and will you sit still and keep your place? 'The judge is at the door;' he is ready to judge, James v. 9. Are you ready to be judged? God is ready to condemn, to execute, and are not you ready to implore mercy, to seek the Lord's favour? ready to fall flat, and beg terms of grace in and through Christ Jesus? Rahab, when the Lord had by his messengers threatened destruction to Jericho, only Rahab's house was to be safe. She hanged out a scarlet thread ere the spies were departed, Josh. ii.; she did not delay till the army came and the city was surprised. When the Lord is marching against sinners with vengeance and fury, you cannot come soon enough to God to prevent it, Luke xiv. 32. That king that had twenty thousand marching against him, doth not stay till they were in his quarters, but while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassage, and desireth conditions of peace. God is ready to execute all his vengeance and curses of the law; therefore, while you may, seek conditions of peace. You have been spared long; it may be for the next sin you may pay for all. A thief that hath long escaped, when he is taken at length, all his villany is recompensed into his bosom; if he had not stolen the last time, he had escaped. God hath spared you hitherto; it may be upon the next sin he will strike you, and hold his hands no longer. If God now strike, in what a woful case would you be?

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4. There was never any that came to God too soon; many have come too late, the foolish virgins are an instance. When they brought little children to Christ, Christ received them. There are none so little but the great God can form and fashion them into a temple for himself. Usually God chooseth his people from among the youth. There may be some converted in old age, but few; usually it is in our youth, or as soon as we come to our maturity. Reason thus: I may be too late, I cannot be too early; let me no longer dally with God.

Secondly, As to the particular duties which are pressed upon you, let me caution you and direct you.

1. By way of caution.

[1.] When you have any stirrings of heart, any anxious thoughts about your eternal condition, beware you do not believe the devil, that hereafter will be a more convenient season. I shall give directions suitable to the grand enemies of our salvation, the devil, the world, and the flesh, Now, do not believe the devil. This was Felix's case. Paul was reasoning of justice and temperance, graces

that he was little acquainted withal, and Paul quickens all by a remembrance of judgment to come, and then Felix trembled. But how doth he put off this heart-work? Hereafter we shall have ‘a more convenient season,’ Acts xxiv. 25. Oh! never will it be better with you than now when the waters are stirred. Still there is something in the sinner’s way when God hath any business for him. When young, we want wisdom; when old, we want strength; in the middle of business, we want leisure; in the midst of leisure, we are corrupted and want a heart. We are lazy, and then every molehill seems a mountain. Remember, if the devil can but get us to delay, he hath us fast enough. If he can but get us to put it off to-day, then to-morrow, then the next day, shall be as that. Austin, when he had conviction upon him, he prays from his conscience, Lord, mortify my lusts, but not yet. Satan’s morrow will never come. There is no end of delays. He tells you of to-morrow and another season, but that season will never come.

[2.] Let not the world choke the word. It is notable the choking the good seed which was scattered among thorns. Christ expounds it of the world. Now what of the world choketh it? Mat. xiii. 22, he instanceth in ‘the cares of the world:’ and Luke instanceth in ‘the pleasures of this life:’ he adds ‘voluptuous living,’ Luke viii. 14; and Mark hath it more generally, ‘the cares of this life,’ Mark iv. 19; ‘and the lusts of other things choke the word.’ The meaning of all those places is this: Many a man hath some beams of light darted into his bosom, and he begins to have serious and anxious thoughts of his eternal condition. Ay! but then the pleasures and cares of the world interpose, and they must be first served, and so the conviction is lost. Sometimes a man is full of business, and cannot attend to carrying on this work; at other times he is loath to forego his voluptuous course; there is some sport he must attend upon, and so the word is lost When you have conviction upon you, you are under God’s arrest; when you go and get out of the chains of conscience without God’s leave, you break prison. All business must give way to your great business, and follow that close till you come to some issue: Mat. viii. 21, ‘Follow me,’ saith Christ. ‘Suffer me first to go bury my father.’ ‘Nay,’ saith Christ, ‘let the dead bury the dead, but do thou follow me.’ How specious soever the work be, we must call off our souls. Let not these beams of conviction which are darted into your bosom be quenched.

[3.] Consult not with the flesh, as a friend in the case, when your heart begins to work towards God: Gal. i. 16, ‘Immediately I consulted not with flesh and blood.’ It is notable the word signifies to lay down a burden, to lay down our cares and difficulties in a friend’s bosom. When a man hath any trouble upon him he communicates it to his friend. Now, you have a burden upon you, you begin to be sensible you are in a wrong course, and must turn to God. Do not lay down your burdens in the flesh’s bosom; they will tell you this is but a pang and melancholy qualm, and would furnish you with a great many seeming reasons to put it off, frivolous excuses, slothful pretences, carnal fears, and idle allegations; therefore consult not with the flesh as with a friend in the case.

[4.] Be not discouraged with tediousness and difficulty, which, upon a trial, you will find in the ways of God. Many that carry on their convictions to a resolution, and their good resolutions to

some performance, when they find it to be a difficult and tedious business, a thing that is irksome to the flesh, they throw up all, and there is an end of the conviction that was upon them. A bullock at first yoking is most unruly until he be accustomed to it; so afterwards duty will be more sweet and easy: if you will but take Christ's yoke upon trial, you shall find it is a sweet yoke, Mat. xi. 29. And remember, difficulties in the service of God should rather excite than discourage. Will you serve God with that which cost you nothing? Will you think to go to heaven, and not enter in at the strait gate? Remember, this is one of our waymarks. Counterbalance difficulty with reward, and punishment and pains of duty with the pains of hell, the pleasure of sin with the reward of eternal life: urge your souls with the equity in Christ's ways, and the filthiness and turpitude in those sinful courses.

[5.] If you have discouragements from God, and he seems to with draw or withhold his grace, remember he is not at your beck: if he gives nothing he oweth nothing. If he should not give present comfort, strength, and help, usually it may be so for your trial. We are never brought to a thorough obedience until we come to this resolution: Let God do what he will, I will do what he hath commanded; till we yield to God's sovereignty, and venture through his denials and the suspensions of his grace. As the woman of Canaan, he first answereth her not a word; when he answers, his speech is more discouraging than his silence, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and give it to dogs.' She ventures through all these discouragements. Christ yields at length: 'O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt.' God will bring his creatures to such a thorough obedience. You may have no visits of his love, no beam of his grace; though you meet with a dumb oracle, and he seems to cast you off, and you have many fears, yet venture through with a holy obstinacy that you will not give over; as Job xiii. 15, 'Though he kill me, yet will I put my trust in him.' When you follow God with such an obstinacy of obedience, though he should appear never so contrary, yet we will encourage ourselves in waiting upon him. Thus be severe to your purpose.

2. For positive directions.

[1.] Observe the call of God. There are certain seasons when God more especially doth approach the heart of a sinner, when Christ knocks: Rev. iii. 20, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' How doth Christ knock? By the motions of his grace, when the word sets conscience awork. One time or other God meets with the heart of every man that lives under the gospel, so that his conscience tells him, I must be another man, or I am an undone man for ever. Then Christ knocks when conscience is thus set awork; when the waters are stirred, then is the time to put in for cure. Now observe this, that you may welcome the authority of his truth. To resist Christ in this work is a dangerous thing. For a woman to destroy the child in the womb is murder; so to resist Christ in this work that is going on towards the new birth is spiritual murder.

[2.] Be sure this work come to some effect. To stifle convictions, that is very dangerous. There is no iron so hard as that which hath been often heated and often quenched; so no hearts so hard as those that have had many convictions and have quenched them: 1 Thes. v. 19, 'Quench not the

Spirit.' You have great qualms of conscience. Felix he trembles; ay! but it came to nothing. Many men's hearts are roused, but it does no good. A man that sleeps upon a bridge may dream that he is falling into the water, and so dream that he may shake every limb of him, and so shake and tremble that he may cry out in his sleep. Ay! but the man doth not awake, and rouse up that he may avoid the danger. So the word of God may work so far that they begin to fear they are even dropping into the pit; they have anxious thoughts about their eternal condition, but still they sleep till their security overcome their fear, and so this work comes to nothing. And therefore, be not contented to have some motions upon thy soul now and then, some involuntary impressions, but see what they come to: Eph. v. 14, 'Awake, thou that sleepest,' &c. When Christ hath awakened thee, and thou beginnest to be startled in the sleep of thy security, rouse up thyself and be serious.

[3.] Actuate thy thoughts by a sound belief and application of eternity, that you may not lose your convictions. First by a belief, and then by an application. This is that which doth actuate and enliven all those truths that set on the work of God. First, by a belief of eternity. Surely there is good and evil, there is hope and fear, therefore there is heaven and hell. Say, there are two states, a state of nature and a state of grace; and these two states have respect to two covenants—a covenant of works, that worketh bondage, and binds me over to punishment, and a covenant of grace; and both these do issue themselves at length into heaven and hell. This is the great sum of our religion. And conscience and reason will tell me there is a world to come; there must be a time when God will deal more severely with sinners than he doth in the present life. Enliven your thoughts by strengthening your belief of eternity, for this is that which doth set home all the exhortations of his word, and which makes our thoughts serious. And then, secondly, by a serious application of these things to yourselves. If you would have these hopes, apply the offer of heaven to work upon your hope, and the commination of hell to work upon your fear. The offer of heaven: If I would be blessed in Christ, surely I must mend my course. Now, Acts iii. 26, 'He hath sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.' When there is an offer that comes in with power upon the heart, then Christ is sent to turn me from my sins, that I may be the inheritor of an everlasting blessing; and shall I not let go my sins? I have often flattered myself with this, Sure I am willing to be saved; but I cannot be saved if I live in my sins, otherwise I am no more willing to be saved than the devils, for they are willing to be saved from the wrath of God for ever. A creature is willing to be eased of his torment, and every one would have eternal life: Evermore give me this life. Now, let Christ do his work to turn you from your sins. So by working upon your fear: Here God hath threatened me with eternal damnation if I do not hearken. Now scourge thy soul with that smart question, Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall I escape if I neglect so great salvation?' How shall I escape the damnation of hell if I turn back upon his offer, if I deal slightly with God in a business which so nearly concerns my soul?

[4.] Issue forth a practical decree for God in the soul. When the heart is backward, we have no remedy left but to decree for God. David makes a decree in the court of conscience: Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord.' I said, I determined, I would go and lie at God's foot,

and humble myself; so I said—set down a resolution which shall be like the laws of the Medes and Persians, never to be reversed—that thou wilt for this present and ever hereafter wait upon the means, and give way to the work of God upon thy soul; resolve that you will go and lie at God's feet, and say, 'Lord, turn me: I am as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke,' Jer. xxxi. 18. thou hast forbidden me to despair, and commanded thy creature to come to thee for grace—here I cast myself at the footstool of thy mercy; and resolve you will keep up your endeavours in all the means of grace in hearing the word, prayer, &c. Though no sensible comfort comes, yet in obedience perform holy duties: 'At thy command,' says Peter, 'I will cast out the net,' Luke v. 5. Be diligent and frequent in waiting upon God, and look with more seriousness and earnestness of soul after the business of eternal life.

SERMON LXIX.

The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.—VER. 61.

IN the words observe

1. David's trial.

2. His constancy under that trial.

1. His trial is set forth by two things:—

[1.] The persons from whom it came, *the bands of the wicked*.

[2.] The evil done him, *have robbed me*.

[1.] The persons, 'The bands חֶבְלֵי of the wicked.' חֶבֶל signifieth a cord, and also a troop or company, not of soldiers only, but others: 1 Sam. x. 5, 'Thou shalt meet a company or troop of prophets:' it is the same word. Those that interpret it cords or ropes, understand it some one way, some another. Aben Ezra, the griefs and sorrows prepared for the wicked have taken hold of me, and parallels it with Ps. cxvi. 3, 'The sorrows of death compassed me, the pains of hell gat hold of me.' Others understand it of the snares the wicked laid for him. But the word is better translated by the Chaldee paraphrase, *catervae*, the bands; in our old translation, 'The congregations of the wicked: 'he meaneth the multitude of his enemies leaguing together against him.

[2.] The evil done him, they 'have robbed me.' A man may suffer in his name by slander, in his dwelling by his exile, in his liberty by imprisonment, in limbs or life by torture and execution, in his estate by fine and confiscation. Many are the troubles of the righteous; this last is here intended.

There are the depredations of thieves and robbers, but they do not spoil for religion's sake, but the supply of their lusts; the plunderings of soldiers by the license of war, when laws cease, so men are robbed or have their goods taken from them by violence; or else it may be by pretence of law, by fine and confiscation, as it is said: Acts viii. 3, 'Saul made havoc of the churches, and entering into every house, haling men, committed them to prison:' Acts ix. 1, 'Saul, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, desires letters of the high priest, that if he found any of this way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.' At that time the favourers of the gospel suffered much rapine and spoil of goods. Applying it to David's case, some think it fulfilled when the Amalekites spoiled Ziklag, 1 Sam. xxx., and took the women captives, and the spoil of the city. Some understand it of the time when Absalom and his party rifled his house and defiled his concubines, 2 Sam. xv.

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2. His constancy. No calamity had wrought upon him so far as to forsake God's truth, or go against his conscience in anything.

Doct. That no temporal loss which can accrue to us by the violence of evil men should make us forsake our duty to God.

1. That this temptation may be greater or less as it is circumstantiated. It is here represented by David by this word, the bands or the troops of the wicked, which implieth—

[1.] Their multitudes. One froward wicked man may do much harm in his neighbourhood, as there are some whom God reserveth as scourges to his people and goads and thorns to their sides; but when many rise up against us, the temptation is the greater: Ps. iii. 1, 'Lord, how are they increased which trouble me? many are they which rise up against me.' The sincere are but few themselves, and they have many enemies: 1 John v. 19, 'We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.' There was a whole world against a handful of Christians, but we must not 'follow a multitude to do evil.'

[2.] Their confederacy, 'The bands of the wicked:' Ps. lxxxiii. 5-7, 'They have consulted together with one consent, they are confederate against thee, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek.' Though the wicked be at enmity one with another, yet they will all agree to destroy the people of God.

[3.] These were set on mischief; for the bands of the wicked are spoken of here as a society opposite to that which is spoken of afterwards, ver. 63, 'I am a companion of them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy commandments.' There are two seeds which have enmity one against another, 'the seed of the woman,' and 'the seed of the serpent,' Gen. iii. 15. The far greatest part of the world live an ungodly sensual life, and therefore cannot endure those that give an example of a holy self-denying life, John xv. 19; therefore the life of godliness is usually made matter of common hatred, scorn, and opposition, for the sensual and ungodly cannot endure the godly and the heavenly. The more exactly any man setteth himself to obey God, the more he crosseth the lusts

and carnal interests of the wicked, and so the more he commonly suffereth in the world. The world is full of malice and prejudice against them; they slander them, oppress them, represent them under an odious character; and they often meet with disturbances from the assaults and injuries of wicked men.

[4.] The hurt they did him was spoiling and taking away the conveniences of the temporal life, they 'robbed me.' Though it go no further, yet to be deprived of those necessary and convenient comforts is matter of sorrow in itself. It goeth near to the hearts of worldlings to part with them, and therefore by this means they think to discourage the people of God; and many times God permitteth it that their lives, liberties, and estates shall be much in their power: Ps. xliv. 10, 'They that hate us spoil for themselves.' God leaveth them in their hands to dispose of them at their pleasure, which is a great and sharp temptation to his people. The Amalekites 'left no sustenance in Israel,' Judges vi. 4.

2. When a man is said to forsake his duty to God by such trials.

[1.] When he loseth his patience and meek submission to his will. Thus the Lord tried Job by the Sabaeans and Chaldaeans, Job i. 15, 17, who 'took away his oxen, and camels, and all his stock:' yet Job meekly submitteth to the Lord's will: ver. 21, 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' Not ὁ Χαλδαῖος ἀφήλατο, but Job eyeth God both in giving and taking: if he take, he gave before, or else we had it not to lose. When we look to instruments we are full of wrath: a bucket of water cast upon us enrageth us more than a soaking shower that cometh from heaven. Let us see God, without whom nothing cometh to pass.

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[2.] When he loseth his comfort and confidence in God, for that is a sign we live upon the creature, and cannot trust God without the creature. Man knoweth how to put a cheat upon his own heart. When he hath all things at full, then he talketh of living by faith; as those women who 'would eat their own bread, and wear their apparel, only call us by thy name,' Isa. iv. 1. So they, though all their happiness be bound up with the creatures, yet have the wit to give God the name. Now God will take away the creature to see how we can live upon himself alone: 1 Sam. xxx. 6, 'David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.' He still maintained his hope in the Lord when all was gone, when the emptiers had emptied him.

[3.] When we desert the truth, or go against conscience in any thing. David telleth us here, when 'the bands of the wicked,' &c.; that is, 'the congregations,' says the old translation, as decreeing an unjust sentence against him; or 'bands,' says the new, as appointed to attack him; or troops, when the wicked combined against him by troops. So the primitive Christians 'suffered the spoiling of their goods,' Heb. x. 34; the Jews endeavoured to make them poor and miserable, that they might forsake their Christianity. But we must, with Joseph, leave our coat to keep our conscience; and these trials, in short, should be but the exercise of our patience and hope, and we should be provoked to do nothing but what best becometh God's servants.

3. That we should not forsake our duty to God for temporal losses.

[1.] We entered upon the profession of Christianity on these terms: Mat. xvi. 24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me,' Life, wealth, and honours must be forsaken: Luke xiv. 26, 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' Only relations and life are there mentioned, goods are not; but afterwards, ver. 33, 'He that forsaketh not all he hath,' *voto et praeparatione animi*. Yet Christ may permit some to break through at a cheaper rate, but all must resolve on it, prepare for such a temptation. God hath not excepted it out of his covenant and dispensations; he may when he pleases suffer a righteous man to be stripped to the skin, therefore we must not except it out of our resignation. The wise merchant 'sold all,' Mat. xiii. 45, 46. When a man cometh to accept of Christ, there is a competition. Without this—

(1.) No true faith. True faith includes in it an election and choice or esteem and valuation of Christ, not only as good, but as more excel lent, more necessary for us, more beneficial to us than all other things. It is *praelatio unius rei prae altera*, a preference of Christ above other things: Phil. iii. 7-9, 'I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,' &c. Christ is apprehended as more necessary for the soul; it cometh to him under an apprehension of a deep want, and with a broken-hearted sense of misery; we are undone without him. We are not so though we want or lose the world; God can repair us here, will at last save us without these things: Luke x. 42, 'But one thing is needful.' Christ is esteemed more excellent; the rarest comforts of the world are but base things to his grace, but dung and dross in comparison; not only uncertain, but vain and empty as to any real good: Job xxvii. 8, 'For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he has gained, when God taketh away his soul?' Christ is more beneficial to a poor sinner; in him alone true happiness is to be found; therefore we must suffer anything rather than offend our Saviour: Rom. viii. 39, 'No creature is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

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(2.) No true love. Religion without self-denial in one kind or an other is Christianity of our own making, not of Christ's. We cull out the easy safe part of religion, and then we call this love to God and love to Christ. No; the true Christian love is to love God above all. Now, one branch of loving God above all is to part with things near and dear to us when God calleth us so to do. We must be contented to be crucified to the world with our Lord and Master: Mat. x. 37, 'He that loveth father, or mother, or son, or daughter, more that me, is not worthy of me.' An underling love Christ will not like or accept.

[2.] On this condition we possess and enjoy the good things of this world, namely, to part with them when God calleth us thereunto. We are not absolute owners, but tenants at will: Haggai ii. 8, 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.' The absolute disposal of the riches and wealth of the world belongeth unto God, who hath all these things, with the power to dispose of them as he pleaseth. Therefore he is to be eyed, acknowledged, and submitted unto in

the ordering of our lot and portion: Hosea ii. 9, ‘I will return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.’ God still retaineth the dominion of the creatures in his own hand, and we have but the stewardship and dispensation of them: he will give and he will take away at his own pleasure. They are deposited in our hands as a trust, for which we are accountable; therefore, if God demand, there should be an act of voluntary submission and subjection on our part If we enjoy them as our own, by an original right exclusive of God, we are usurpers but not just possessors. We have indeed a subordinate right to prevent the encroachment of our fellow-creatures, but that is but such a right as a man hath in a trust, or a servant to his working tools. Surely God may dispose of his own as he will. If we give it for God’s glory, or lay out our wealth in his service, God’s right must be owned: 1 Chron. xxix. 14, ‘For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.’ If God take it away by immediate providence, it was his own: Job i. 21, ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.’ If by men, if we lose anything for God, it is his own that we lose.

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[3.] Our gain in Christ is more than our loss in the world, both here and hereafter. So his promise: Mark x. 29, 30, ‘Verily I say unto you, 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 a hundred-fold 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.’ Our religion promiseth us spiritual recompense in this world, and eternal in the other, but exempteth us not from persecutions. He that hath a heart to quit anything for Christ, shall have it abundantly recompensed in the world, with a reward much greater in value and worth than that which he hath forsaken, sometimes more and better in the same kind; as Job’s estate was doubled, and Valentinian, that left the place of a tribune or captain of soldiers for his conscience, and got that of an emperor. If not this, he giveth them a greater portion of his Spirit and the graces thereof, more peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and this is a hundred-fold better than all that we lose. Now this we have with persecution: John xvi. 33, ‘These things have I spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace; in the world you shall have tribulation.’ But then, for the world to come, then all shall be abundantly made up to us in eternal life, when we shall reign with Christ in his heavenly kingdom. This is all in all to a Christian; that which is lost for God is not lost. Surely in heaven we shall have far better things than we lose here.

[4.] Because the wicked never overcome but when they foil us of our innocency, zeal, and courage. The victory of a Christian doth not consist in not suffering, or not fighting, but in keeping that which we fight for: a Christian is ‘more than a conqueror,’ Rom. viii. 37. *Scias hominem Christo deditum mori posse, vinci non posse*. He may lose goods, lose life, yet still he overcomes whilst he is faithful to his duty. Those that were ‘as sheep appointed to the slaughter,’ and ‘killed all the day long,’ they were oppressed and kept under, yet were ‘more than conquerors.’ The way to conquer is by patience and zeal, though we be trodden down and ruined; not by getting the best of opposite factions, but by keeping a good conscience, and patience, and contentedness in sufferings. If God

be honoured, if the kingdom of Christ be advanced by our sufferings, we are victorious: Rev. xii. 11, 'They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death.' That is an overcoming indeed, to die in the quarrel, and be the more glorious conquerors. As long as a Christian keepeth the faith, whatever he loses in the contest he has the best of it: 2 Tim. iv. 7, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,' &c. Our victory is not to be measured by our prosperity and adversity, but our faithful adherence to God. Though the devil and his instruments get their will over our bodies and bodily interests, yet if he get not his will over our souls, we conquer, and not Satan. Christians have not only to do with men who strike at their worldly interests, but with Satan, who hath a spite at their souls: Eph. vi. 12, 'For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.' God may give men a power over the bodily lives of his people, and all the interests thereof; the devil aimeth at the destruction of souls. He will let you enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, that deprive you of your delight in God and celestial pleasures. He can be content you shall have dignities and honours if they prove a snare to you; if he seeketh to bring you to trouble and poverty, it is to draw you from God.

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[5.] Fainting argueth weakness, if not nullity of grace: Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faintest in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.' A zealous, constant mind will overcome all discouragements: 2 Tim. i. 7, 'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind.' Trees, well rooted, will abide the blasts of strong winds. It is hard to those that are guided by flesh and blood to overcome such temptations, but to the heavenly mind it is more easy.

Use 1. Of information.

1. That loss of goods for adhering to God's word by the violence and rapine of evil-minded men is one temptation we should prepare for: such trials may come. Such as mind to be constant must prepare themselves to quit their goods. We all study to shift off the cross, but none studieth to prepare for the cross. Profession goeth at too low a rate when people leap into it upon the impulsion of carnal motives, or some light conviction or approbation. God taketh his fan in his hand, and the chaff is distinguished from the solid grain. All love ἀδάπανον εὐαγγέλιον, a cheap gospel: the gospel will have many summer friends, gaudy butterflies, that fly abroad in the sun shine; but what cost are we content to be at for the gospel's sake?

2. That where men make conscience of their ways, they are not apt to be reduced by penalties, for they are guided by a higher principle than the interests of the flesh. Conscience looks to the obligation of duty, what we must do or not do; not to the course of our interests—not what is safe, but what is duty. Oh! but their sufferings may make them serious and wise, and so reflect upon their error, and change their mind. *Ans*. It rather puzzleth the case when a man is divided between his conscience and his interests. The unsound are blinded by their interests; but a gracious heart in

a clear case is more resolute, in a doubtful is more afraid and full of hesitancy, lest he gratify the flesh, and so the case is more perplexed. Men sooner come to themselves and relinquish errors if interest be not in the case.

Use 2. To exhort us to keep a good conscience, and to be faithful with God, though our temporal interests should be endangered thereby. The conscience of our duty should more comfort us than the loss of temporal things should trouble our minds. But because this is not a by-point that I am now upon, nor a small thing that I press you to, but necessary for every candidate of eternity or true disciple of Jesus Christ, I must direct to get this constancy of mind.

1. I will show you what is necessary to it by way of disposition or qualification.

2. What is necessary to it by way of consideration.

1. By way of disposition.

[1.] There is required a lively faith concerning the world to come, with some assurance of our interest therein. That faith is necessary to draw off the heart from the conveniences and comforts of this life appeareth by that, Heb. x. 34, ‘Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing of yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and a more enduring substance.’ There is both faith implied, and also some assurance of our interest; they knew there was substance to be had in the other world. They that live by sense count present things only substance, but the world to come only fancy and shadows; but the gracious heart, on the contrary, looketh upon this world as ‘a vain show,’ Ps. xxxix. 6, the world to come to be only the enduring substance, or that true solid good which will make us everlastingly happy. And there is some assurance of our interest; they had this substance; that is, by virtue of God’s promise they had a title and right to it, and some security for the full possession of it in due time, by the first fruits and earnest of the Spirit. This they knew in themselves; they discerned their own qualifications, and fulfilling the conditions of the promises; and the Spirit did in some measure testify to them that they were the sons of God; and from all this flowed their suffering of the loss of worldly goods, and their suffering of it joyfully.

[2.] A sincere love to Christ is necessary, for then they will not quit his interest for what is most near and dear to them in the world: Rom. viii. 35, ‘What shall separate us from the love of Christ?’ Love there is not only taken passively, for the love wherewith Christ loveth us, but actively, for the love wherewith we love Christ. For the things mentioned there, ‘tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword,’ belong not to the latter; for tribulation is not wont to withdraw God from loving us, but us from loving God. It is we that are assaulted by tribulation, and not Go<J nor Christ: it is our love which the temptation striketh at. A man that loveth Christ sincerely will be at some loss for him. Christ is rather held by the heart than by the head only. They that make a religion of their opinions will find no such effect, if they have a faith that never went deeper than their brains and their fancies, that reacheth not their heart, and doth

not stir up their love to Christ, that will not enable them to hold out against temptations. Though men may sacrifice some of their weaker lusts and petty interests, yet they will not forsake all for his sake: he that loveth Christ will not leave him. Why doth a sinner deny himself for his lusts? he loveth them, and sacrifices his time, strength, estate, conscience. So a Christian that knoweth Christ hath loved him, and therefore loveth Christ again; he will not easily quit him and his truth. A bare belief is only in the head, which is but the entrance into the inwards of the soul; it is the heart which is Christ's castle and citadel. A superficial assent may let him go, but a faith which worketh by love produceth this close adherence. Well, if we would endure spoiling of our goods, it is our wisdom to consider what we love most, and can least part withal. Christ is infinitely to be valued, as more precious than all the wealth in the world.

[3.] A well-grounded resolution in the truth: 1 Thes. v. 21, 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.' When we take up the ways of God upon fashion, or half conviction, or probable reasons, and do not resolve upon sound evidence, we are in danger to be shaken when it is a costly thing to be a sincere Christian; but when conscience is soundly informed, then all things give way to conscience. If the wicked spoil us of our goods, they should not spoil us of our best treasure, which is a good conscience. Whatever power they have by God's permission over our outward estates, they have no power over our consciences; that is the best friend or the worst enemy. No bird singeth so sweetly as the bird in our bosoms; here heaven or hell is begun, and the solaces of the outward life are nothing to this.

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[4.J A contempt of the world. Our earthly affections must be mortified, and that upon a twofold account:—

(1.) That we may freely part with them; for if they be overvalued, our affliction will be according to the degree of our affection: Mark x. 22, 'He was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions.' We cannot so freely resign them to God, and leave all for treasure in heaven.

(2.) That we may more entirely depend upon God: Heb. xiii. 5, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.' Till the heart be purged from carnal affections, the promises of God have little force and respect with us. A little satisfieth a contented and a weaned mind, and he can the better cast himself upon God's providence.

[5.] A sound belief of God's providence; this hath a great influence upon a free parting with our estates for our conscience' sake: Heb. xi. 8, by faith Abraham left his country, kindred, possessions, and trusted himself blindfold with God's providence. This principle was made use of when the king was troubled about the hundred talents: 2 Chron. xxv. 9, saith the man of God, 'The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.' God's providence is enough for a gracious heart Indeed it is hard to maintain such a faith in providence when exposed to great injuries. We are apt

to doubt of it; goodness seemeth to be neglected by him: Ps. lxxiii. 14, ‘Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.’ Doth God know? But a Christian must believe in hope against hope.

2. Remedies by way of consideration.

[1.] They cannot rob us of spiritual and eternal riches, of the fear of God, love of God; treasures in heaven are out of their reach: Mat. vi. 19, 20, ‘Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through or steal.’ Your joy shall no man take from you,’ John xvi. 22. Heavenly things can never be taken from their owners.

[2.] If they cannot take away our God and Christ, we shall be certainly happy. All things in the world depend on God and Christ: ‘The favour of the Lord maketh rich,’ Prov. x. 22; without his blessing nothing prospereth. All judgment is in the hands of Christ, John v. 22. He hath the government of the world, or dominion over all things which may conduce to help or hinder his people’s happiness. Things are not left to their arbitrament or uncertain contingency, but are under the government of a supreme providence, in the hand of him that loves us.

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[3.] Tried friendship is most valuable: James i. 12, ‘Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.’

[4.] If we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified with him: Rom. viii. 17, ‘If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.’

SERMON LXX.

At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee, because of thy righteous judgments.—VER. 62.

IN these words observe three things:—

1. David’s holy employment, or the duty promised, *giving thanks to God*.

2. His earnestness and fervency, implied in the time mentioned, *at midnight I will rise*; rather interrupt his sleep and rest than God should want his praise.

3. The cause or matter of his thanksgiving, *because of thy righteous judgments*, whereby he meaneth the dispensations of his providence in delivering the godly and punishing the wicked according to his word. Where observe—

1. The term by which these dispensations are expressed, *judgments*.

2. The adjunct, *righteous judgments*.

1. For the term, 'judgments,' they are so called partly because they are God's judicial acts belonging to his government of the world; partly because they are dispensed according to his word, the sentences of which are also called judgments. There are the judgments of his mouth and of his hand: Ps. cxix. 13, 'With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.'

2. The adjunct, 'righteous,' or the judgments of thy righteousness; so called because they are holy, just, and full of equity.

Doct. 1. One special duty wherein the people of God should be much exercised is thanksgiving.

Doct. 2. That, God's providence rightly considered, we shall in the worst times find much more cause to give thanks than to complain.

Doct. 3. That a heart deeply affected with God's providence will take all occasions to praise God and give thanks to his name, both in season and out of season.

Doct. 1. One special duty wherein the people of God should be much exercised is thanksgiving. This duty is often pressed upon us: Heb. xiii. 15, 'Let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually, which is the fruit of our lips;' giving thanks unto his name. There are two words there used, praise and thanksgiving: generally taken, they are the same; strictly taken, thanksgiving differeth from praise. They agree that we use our voice in thanksgiving, as we do also in praise, for they are both said to be the fruit of our lips. What is in the prophet Hosea, chap. xiv. 2, 'calves of our lips,' is in the Septuagint, 'the fruit of our lips:' and they both agree that they are a sacrifice offered to our supreme benefactor, or that they belong to the thank-offerings of the gospel. But they differ in that thanksgiving belongeth to benefits bestowed on ourselves or others; but in relation to us, praise to any excellency whatsoever. Thanksgiving may be in word or deed; praise in words only. Well, then, thanksgiving is a sensible acknowledgment of favours received, or an expression of our sense of them, by word and work, to the praise of the bestower. The object of it is the works of God as beneficial unto us, or to those who are related to us, or in whose good or ill we are concerned. As public persons, as magistrates: 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2, 'I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplication, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority.' Pastors of the church: 2 Cor. i. 11, 'You also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf.' Or our kindred according to the flesh, or some bond of Christian duty: Rom. xii. 15, 'Rejoice

with them that do rejoice.' Another place where this duty is enforced is Eph. v. 20, where we are bidden to 'give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;' where you see it is a duty of a universal and perpetual use, and one wherein the honour of God and Christ is much concerned. A third place is 1 Thes. v. 18, 'In everything give thanks, for this is the will of, God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' See what reason he urgeth; the express will of God requiring this worship at our hands. We are to obey *intuitu voluntatis*. God's will is the fundamental reason of our obedience in every commandment; but here is a direct charge, now God hath made known the wonders of his love in Christ.

I shall prove to you that this is a necessary duty, a profitable duty, a pleasant and delightful duty.

1. The necessity of being much and often in thanksgiving will appear by these two considerations:—

[1.] Because God is continually beneficial to us, blessing and delivering his people every day, and by new mercies giveth us new matter of praise and thanksgiving: Ps. lxviii. 19, 'Blessed be the God of our salvation, who loadeth us daily with his benefits, Selah.' He hath continually favoured us and preserved us, and poured his benefits upon us. The mercies of every day make way for songs which may sweeten our rest in the night; and his giving us rest by night, and preserving us in our sleep, when we could not help ourselves, giveth us songs in the morning. And all the day long we find new matter of praise: our whole work is divided between receiving and acknowledging.

[2.] Some mercies are so general and beneficial that they should never be forgotten, but remembered before God every day. Such as redemption by Christ: Ps. cxi. 4, 'He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered.' We must daily be blessing God for Jesus Christ: 2 Cor. ix. 15, 'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.' I understand it of his grace by Christ. We should ever be thus blessing and praising him; for the keeping of his great works in memory is the foundation of all love and service to God.

2. It is a profitable duty. The usefulness of thanksgiving appeareth with respect to faith, love, and obedience.

[1.] With respect to faith. Faith and praise live and die together; if there be faith, there will be praise; and if there be praise, there will be faith. If faith, there will be praise, for faith is a bird that can sing in winter: Ps. lvi. 4, 'In God will I praise his word, in God have I put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me:' and ver. 10, 'In God I will praise his word, in the Lord I will praise his word." Hi's word is satisfaction enough to a gracious heart; if they have his word, they can praise him beforehand, for the grounds of hope before they have enjoyment. As Abraham, when he had not a foot in the land of Canaan, yet built an altar and offered sacrifices of thanks giving, because of God's grant and the future possession in his posterity, Gen. xiii. 18. Then, whether he

punisheth or pitieth, we will praise him and glory in him. Faith entertaineth the promise before performance cometh, not only with confidence, but with delight and praise. The other part is, if praise, there will be faith; that is, supposing the praise real, for it raiseth our faith to expect the like again, having received so much grace already. All God's praises are the believer's advantage, the mercy is many times given as a pledge of more mercy. In many cases *Deus donando debet*. If life, he will give food and bodily raiment. It holdeth good in spiritual things. If Christ, other things with Christ. One concession draweth another; if he spares me, he will feed me, clothe me. The attributes from whence the mercy cometh is the pillar of the believer's confidence and hope. If such a good, then a fit object of trust. If I have found him a God hearing prayer, 'I will call upon him as long as I live,' Ps. cxvi. 2. Praise doth but provide matter of trust, and represent God to us as a storehouse of all good things, and a sure foundation for dependence.

[2.] The great respect it hath to love. Praise and thanksgiving is an act of love, and then it cherisheth and feedeth love. It is an act of love to God, for if we love God we will praise him. Prayer is a work of necessity, but praise a mere work of duty and respect to God. We would exalt him more in our own hearts and in the hearts of others: Ps. lxxi. 14, 'I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.' We pray because we need God, and we praise him because we love him. Self-love will put us upon prayer, but the love of God upon praise and thanksgiving; then we return to give him the glory. Those that seek themselves will cry to him in their distress; but those that love God cannot endure that he should be without his due honour. In heaven, when other graces and duties cease, which belong to this imperfect state, as faith and repentance cease, yet love remaineth; and because love remaineth, praise remaineth, which is our great employment in the other world. So it feedeth and cherisheth love, for every benefit acknowledged is a new fuel to keep in the fire: Ps. xviii. 1, 'I will love thee, O Lord, my strength;' Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I will love the Lord, who hath heard the voice of my supplications:' Deut. xx-x. 20, 'That thou mayest love the Lord, who is thy life, and the length of thy days.' The soul by praise is filled with a sense of the mercy and goodness of God, so that hereby he is made more amiable to us.

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[3.] With respect to submission and obedience to his laws and providence.

(1.) His laws. The greatest bond of duty upon the fallen creature is gratitude. Now grateful we cannot be without a sensible and explicit acknowledgment of his goodness to us: the more frequent and serious in that, the more doth our love constrain us to devote ourselves to God: Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.' To live to him: 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, '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, and rose again.' And therefore praise and thanksgiving is a greater help to the spiritual life than we are usually aware of; for, working in us a sense of God's love, and an actual remembrance of his benefits (as it will do if rightly performed), it doth make us shy of sin,

more careful and solicitous to do his will. Shall we offend so good a God? God's love to us is a love of bounty; our love to God is a love of duty, when we grudge not to live in subjection to him: 1 John v. 3, 'His commandments are not grievous.'

(2.) Submission to his providence. There is a querulous and sour spirit which is natural to us, always repining and murmuring at God's dealing, and wasting and vexing our spirits in heartless complaints. Now, this fretting, quarrelling, impatient humour, which often showeth itself against God even in our prayers and supplications, is quelled by nothing so much as by being frequent in praises and thanksgivings: Job i. 21, 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' It is an act of holy prudence in the saints, when they are under any trouble, to strain themselves to the quite contrary duty of what temptations and corruptions would drive them unto. When the temptation is laid to make us murmur and swell at God's dealings, we should on the contrary bless and give thanks. And therefore the Psalmist doth so frequently sing praises in the saddest condition. There is no perfect defeating the temptation but by studying matter of praise, and to set seriously about the duty. So Job ii. 10, 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' Shall we receive so many proofs of the love of God, and quarrel at a few afflictions that come from the same hand, and rebel against his providence when he bringeth on some needful trouble for our trial and exercise? and having tasted so much of his bounty and love, repine and fret at every change of dealing, though it be useful to purge out our corruptions, and promote our communion with God? Surely nothing can be extremely evil that cometh from this good hand. As we receive good things cheerfully and contentedly, so must we receive evil things submissively and patiently.

3. It is a most delightful work to remember the many thousand mercies God hath bestowed on the church, ourselves, and friends. To remember his gracious word and all the passages of his providence; is this burdensome to us? Ps. cxlvii. 1, 'Praise ye the Lord, for it is pleasant:' and Ps. cxxxv. 3, 'Sing praises unto his name, for it is pleasant' Next to necessity, profit; next to profit, pleasure. No necessity so great as spiritual necessity, because our eternal well-being or ill-being dependeth on it; and beggary is nothing to being found naked in the great day. No profit so great as spiritual; that is not to be measured by the good things of this world, or a little pelf, or the great mammon, which so many worship; but some spiritual and divine benefit, which tendeth to make us spiritually better, more like God, more capable of communion with him; that is true profit, it is an increase of faith, love, and obedience. So for pleasure and delight; that which truly exhilarateth the soul, begets upon us a solid impression of God's love, that is the true pleasure. Carnal pleasures are unwholesome for you, like luscious fruits, which make you sick. Nothing is so hard of digestion as carnal pleasures. This feedeth the flesh, warreth against the soul; but this holy delight that resulteth from the serious remembrance of God, and setting forth his excellences and benefits, is safe and healthful, and doth cheer us but not hurt us.

Use. Oh, then, let us be oftener in praising and giving thanks to God! Can you receive so much, and beg so much, and never think of a return or any expression of gratitude? Is there such a being as God, have you all your supplies from him, and will you not take some time to acknowledge what he hath done for your souls? Either you must deny his being, and then you are atheists; or you must deny his providence, and then you are epicureans, next door to atheism; or you must deny such a duty as praise and thanksgiving, and then you are anti-scripturists, for the scripture everywhere calleth for it at our hands; or else, if you neglect this duty, you live in flat contradiction to what you profess to believe, and then you are practical atheists, and practical epicureans, and practical anti-scripturists; and so your condemnation will be the greater, because you own the truth but deny the practice. I beseech you, therefore, to be often alone with God, and that in a way of thanksgiving, to increase your love, faith, and obedience, and delight in God. Shall I use arguments to you?

1. Have you received nothing from God? I put this question to you, because great is our unthankfulness, not only for common benefits, but also for special deliverances—the one not noted and observed, the other not improved. Humble persons will find matter of praise in very common benefits, but we forget even signal mercies. Therefore, I say, have you received nothing? Now, consider, is there no return due? You know the story, Luke xvii. 15-19, Christ healed ten lepers, and but one of them 'returned and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down at his feet giving thanks, and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.' All had received a like benefit, but one only returned, and he a Gentile and no Jew, to acknowledge the mercy. They were made whole by a miraculous providence, he was made whole by a more gracious dispensation: 'Thy faith hath made thee whole;' he was dismissed with a special blessing. God scattereth his benefits upon all mankind, but how few own the supreme benefactor! Surely a sensible heart seeth always new occasions of praising God, and some old occasions that must always be remembered, always for life, and peace, and safety, and daily provision; and always for Christ, and the hopes of eternal life. Surely if we have the comfort, God should have the glory: Ps. xcvi. 8, 'Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name, bring an offering, and come into his courts.' He that hath scattered his seed expecteth a crop from you.

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2. How disingenuous is it to be always craving, and never giving thanks! It is contrary to his directions in the word; for he showeth us there that all our prayers should be mingled with a thankful sense and acknowledgment of his mercies: Phil. iv. 6, 'In everything let your requests and supplications be made known with thanksgiving.' Do not come only in a complaining way: Col. iv. 2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' They are not holy requests unless we acknowledge what he hath done for us, as well as desire him to do more. Nothing more usual than to come in our necessities to seek help; but we do not return, when we have received help and relief, to give thanks. When our turn is served, we neglect God Wants urge us more than blessings, our interest swayeth us more than duty. As a dog swalloweth every bit that is cast to him,

and still looketh for more, we swallow whatever the bounty of God casteth out to us without thanks, and when we need again, we would have more, and though warm in petitions, yet cold, rare, infrequent in gratulations. It is not only against scripture, but against nature. Ethnics abhor the ungrateful, that were still receiving, but forgetting to give thanks. It is against justice to seek help of God, and when we have it to make no more mention of God than if we had it from ourselves. It is against truth; we make many promises in our affliction, but forget all when well at ease.

3. God either takes away or blasts the mercies which we are not thankful for. Sometimes he taketh them from us: Hosea ii. 8, 9, 'I will take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and I will recover my wool and flax.' Why? 'She doth not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and gave her silver and gold.' Where his kindness is not taken notice of, nor his hand seen and acknowledged, he will take his benefits to himself again. We know not the value of mercies so much by their worth as by their want; ὥσπερ ὀφθαλμοι τὸ ἄγαν λαμπρὸν οὐκ ὁρῶσι—a thing too near the eye cannot be seen. God must set things at a distance to make us value them. If he take them not away, yet many times he blasts them as to their natural use: Mal. ii. 2, 'And if you will not hear, and if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, saith the Lord of hosts, 1 will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings; yea, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart.' The creature is a deaf-nut; when we come to crack it, we have not the natural blessing as to health, strength, and cheerfulness, Acts xiv. 17; or if food, yet not gladness of heart with it; or we have not the sanctified use, it is not a mercy that leadeth us to God. A thing is sanctified when it is *a bono in bonum*, if it cometh from God and leadeth us to God: 1 Cor. iii. 21-23, 'All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' You have a covenant right, a holy use.

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4. Bless him for favours received, and you shall have more. Thanks giving is the kindly way of petitioning, and the more thankful for mercies, the more they are increased upon us. Vapours drawn up from the earth return in showers to the earth again. The sea poureth out its fulness into the rivers, and all rivers return to the sea from whence they came: Ps. lxvii. 5, 6, 'Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee: then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us.' When springs lie low, we pour a little water into the pump, not to enrich the fountain, but to bring up more for ourselves. It is not only true of outward increase, but of spiritual also: Col. ii. 7, 'Be ye rooted in the faith, and abound therein with thanksgiving.' If we give thanks for so much grace as we have already received, it is the way to increase our store. We thrive no more, get no more victory over our corruptions, because we do no more give thanks.

5. When God's common mercies are well observed or well improved, it fits us for acts of more special kindness. In the story of the lepers—Luke xvii. 19, 'Thy faith hath made thee whole,'—he met not only with a bodily cure, but a soul cure: Luke xvi. 11, 'If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?' When we

suspect a vessel leaketh, we try it with water before we fill it with wine. You are upon your trial; be thankful for less, God will give you more. Means or directions:—

[1.] Heighten all the mercies you have by all the circumstances necessary to be considered. By the nature and kind of them: spiritual eternal blessings first; the greatest mercies deserve greatest acknowledgment: Eph. i. 3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'—Christ's spirit, pardon of sins, heaven, the way of salvation known, accepted, and the things of the world as subordinate helps. Luke x. 20, 'Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.' Then consider your sense in the want of mercies; what high thoughts had you then of them? The mercies are the same when you have them and when you want them, only your apprehensions are greater. If affectionately begged they must be affectionately acknowledged, else you are a hypocrite either in the supplication or gratulation. Consider the person giving, God, so high and glorious. A small remembrance from a great prince, no way obliged, no way needing me, to whom I can be no way profitable, a small kindness melts us, a gift of a few pounds, a little parcel of land. Do I court him and observe him? There is less reason why God should abase himself to look upon us or concern himself in us: Ps. cxiii. 6, 'He humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth.' We have all things from him. Consider the person receiving; so unworthy: Gen. xxxii 10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant;' 2 Sam. vii. 18, 'Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?' Consider the season; our greatest extremity is God's opportunity: Gen. xxii. 14, 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen,' when the knife was at the throat of his son; 2 Cor. i. 9, 10, 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust, that he will yet deliver us.' Consider the end and fruit of his mercy; it is to manifest his special love to us, and engage our hearts to himself: Isa. xxxviii. 17, 'Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption,' or 'thou hast loved me from the grave;' otherwise God may give things in anger. Consider the means by which he brought them about, when unlikely, unexpected in themselves, weak, insufficient. The greatest matters of providence hang many times upon small wires: a lie brought Joseph into prison, and a dream fetched him out, and he was advanced, and Jacob's family fed. Consider the number of his mercies: Ps. cxxxix. 17, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!' The many failings pardoned, comforts received, dangers prevented, deliverances vouchsafed. How he began with us before all time, conducted us in time, and hath been preparing for us a happiness which we shall enjoy when time shall be no more.

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[2.] Satisfy yourselves with no praise and thanksgiving but what leaveth the impression of real effects upon the soul; for God is not flattered with empty praises and a little verbal commendation. There is a twofold praising of God—by expressive declaration or by objective impression. Now, neither expression nor impression must be excluded. Some platonical divines explode and scoff at

the verbal praise more than becometh their reverence to the word of God: Ps. l. 23, ‘He that offereth praise glorifieth me.’ But then the impression must be looked after too, that we be like that God whom we commend and extol, that we depend on him more, love him more fervently, serve him more cheerfully.

Doct. 2. That God’s providence rightly considered, we shall find in the worst times much more cause to give thanks than to complain. I observe this because David was now under affliction. He had in the former verse complained that ‘the bands of the wicked had robbed him,’ yet even then would he give thanks to God.

1. Observe here, the matter of his thanksgiving was God’s providence according to his word, seen in executing threatenings on the wicked, and performing his promises to the godly. God’s word is one of the chiefest benefits bestowed on man, and therefore should be a subject of our praises. Now, when this is verified in his providence, and we see a faithful performance of those things in mercy to his servants, and in justice to his enemies, and the benefits and advantages of his law to them that are obedient, and the just punishment of the disobedient, and can discern not only a vein of righteousness but of truth in all God’s dealings, this is a double benefit, which must be taken notice of, and acknowledged to God’s praise. O Christians! how sweet is it to read his works by the light of the sanctuary, and to learn the interpretation of his providence from his Spirit by his word: Ps. lxxiii. 17, ‘I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end;’ by consulting the scriptures he see the end and close of them that walk not according to God’s direction: his word and works do mutually explain one another. The sanctuary is the place where God’s people meet, where his word is taught, where we may have satisfaction concerning all his dealings.

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2. That when any divine dispensation goeth cross to our affections, yea, our prayers and expectations, yet even then can faith bring meat out of the eater, and find many occasions of praise and thanksgiving to God; for nothing falleth out so cross but we may see the hand of God in it working for good.

[1.] Though we have not the blessing we seek and pray for, yet we give thanks because God hath been sometimes entreated, he hath showed himself a God hearing prayer, and is only delaying now until a more fit time wherein he may give us that which is sought: Ps. xliii. 5, ‘Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.’ Now we are mourning, but he is our God, and we are not left without hope of a blessed issue. God, that hath been gracious, will be gracious again. He is our gracious father when we are under his sharpest corrections, a father when he striketh or frowneth; therefore we are not without hope that he will give us opportunities again of glorifying his name.

[2.] We bless God for continuing so long the mercies which he hath taken from us. Former experiences must not be forgotten: ‘Ebenezer, hitherto the Lord hath helped us.’ If he shall afflict us afterward, yet ‘hitherto he hath helped us,’ 1 Sam. vii. 12. If he take away life, it is a mercy that

he spared it so long for his own service and glory; if liberty, that we had such a time of rest and intermission.

[3.] God is yet worthy of praise and thanksgiving for choicer mercies yet continued, notwithstanding all the afflictions laid upon us. That we have his Spirit supporting us under our trials, and enabling us to bear them: 1 Peter iv. 13, 14, 'Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. For if ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth on you.' And that we have any peace of conscience: Rom. v. 1, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' That the hope of eternal life is not diminished but increased by our afflictions: Rom. v. 4, 5, 'We glory in tribulation, knowing that 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.' That many of our natural comforts are yet left, and God will supply us by ways best known to himself.

[4.] That evils and afflictions which light upon us for the gospel's sake, or righteousness' sake, and Christ's name's sake, are to be reckoned among our privileges, and deserve praise rather than complaint: Phil. i. 29, 'To you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.' If it be a gift, it is matter of praise.

[5.] Take these evils in the worst notion, they are less than we have deserved: Ezra ix. 13, 'And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve.' Babylon is not hell, and still that should be acknowledged.

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[6.] That no evil hath befallen us but such as God can bring good out of them: Rom. viii. 28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' All things that befall a Christian are either good, or shall turn to good; either to good natural: Gen. l. 20, 'Ye thought evil, but God meant it for good;' or good spiritual: Ps. cxix. 75, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me;' or good eternal: 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

Use 1. For information, that God's righteous judgments are matter of praise and thanksgiving. An angel is brought in speaking, Rev. xvi. 5, 'Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shaft be, because thou hast judged thus.' Indeed, the formal object of thanksgiving and praise is some benefit: Ps. cxxxv. 3, 'Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good.' We praise God for his judgments, because they are just and right; we praise God for his mercies, not only because they are just and equal, but comfortable and beneficial to us, and so a double ground of thanksgiving.

Use 2. For reproof, that we make more noise of a little trouble than we do of a thousand benefits that remain with us. We fret and complain and manifest the impatiency of the flesh; like a great machine or carriage, if one pin be out of order, all stoppeth, or one member hurt, though all the rest of the body be sound; or as Haman, the favours of a great king, pleasures of a luxurious court, all this availeth him nothing as long as Mordecai was in the gate, Esther v. 13; not withstanding his riches, honours, multitude of children, great offices, this damped all his joy: Mal. i. 2, 'I have loved you, saith the Lord; yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?' *Non quod habet numerat, &c.* Oh! let us check this complaining spirit; let us consider what is left, not what God hath taken away; what we may or shall have, not what we now want; what God is, and will be to his people, though we see little or nothing in the creature.

Doct. 3. That a heart deeply affected with God's providence will take all occasions to praise and give thanks.

1. It is certain that our whole life should be a real expression of thankfulness to God. The life of a Christian is a life of love and praise, a hymn to God: 1 Peter ii. 9, 'But ye are a chosen gene ration, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you but of darkness into his marvellous light.' Christianity is a confession; the visible acting of godliness is a part of this confession; we are all saved as confessors or martyrs. Now the confession is made both in word and deed.

2. There are special occasions of thanksgiving and praise to God, as the apostle bids Timothy preach: 2 Tim. iv. 2, εὐκαίρως ἀκαίρως, 'in season, out of season,' meaning thereby that he should not only take ordinary occasions, but extraordinary; he should make an opportunity where he found none. So we should press Christians to praise God not only in solemn duties, when the saints meet together to praise, but extraordinarily redeem time for this blessed work; yea, interrupt our lawful sleep and repose, to find frequent vacancies for so necessary a duty as the lauding and magnifying of God's mercy.

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3. As for rising up at midnight, we can neither enforce it as a duty upon you, nor yet can we condemn it. It was an act of heroical zeal in David, who employed his time waking to the honour of God, which others spent in sleeping; and we read that Paul and Silas 'sang praises at midnight,' Acts xvi. 25, though then in the stocks, and they had been scourged the day before. And it is said, Job xxxv. 10, 'None saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?' that is, giveth matter of praise if we wake in the night. And David saith elsewhere, Ps. xlii. 8, 'The Lord will command his lovingkindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me:' day and night he would be filled with a sense of God's love, and with songs of praise. Therefore we cannot condemn this, but must highly commend it. Let men praise God at any time, and the more they deny themselves to do it, the more commendable is the action; yet we cannot enforce it upon you as a necessary duty, as the Papists build their nocturnal devotions upon it. That which we disapprove

in them is, that those hours instituted by men they make necessary; that they direct their prayers to saints and angels which should only be to God, that they might mingle them with superstitious ceremonies and, observances; that they pray and sing in an unknown tongue without devotion, appropriating it to a certain sort of men, to clerks for their gain, with an opinion of merit. The primitive Christians had their *hymnos antelucanos*, but in persecution, their ἀλεκτροφωνίας, saith Clem. Alexandrinus; but what is this to superstitious night-services?

4. Though we cannot enforce the particular observance upon you, yet there are many notable lessons to be drawn from David's practice.

[1.] The ardency of his devotion, or his earnest desire to praise God, 'at midnight:' then, when sleep doth most invade us, then he would rise up. His heart was so set upon the praising of God, and the sense of his righteous providence did so affect him, and urge him, or excite him to this duty, that he would not only employ himself in this work in the day-time, and so show his love to God, but he would rise out of his bed to worship God and celebrate his praise. That which hindereth the sleep of ordinary men is either the cares of this world, the impatient resentment of injuries, or the sting of an evil conscience: these keep others waking, but David was awaked by a desire to praise God; no hour is unseasonable to a gracious heart; he is expressing his affection to God when others take their rest. Thus we read of our Lord Christ, that he spent whole nights in prayer, Luke vi. 12. It is said of the glorified saints in heaven, that they praise God continually: Rev. vii. 17, 'They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.' Now, holy men, though much hindered by their bodily necessities, yet they will come as near as present frailty will permit; we oftentimes begin the day with some fervency of prayer and praise, but we faint ere even.

[2.] His sincerity, seen in his secrecy. David would profess his faith in God when he had no witness by him, at midnight, then no hazard of ostentation. It was a secret cheerfulness and delighting in God when alone; he could have no respect to the applause of men, but only to approve himself to God who seeth in secret. See Christ's direction, Mat. vi. 6, '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:' his own practice: Mark i. 35, 'Rising early in the morning, he went into a desert to pray.' Both time and place implied secrecy.

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[3.] We learn hence the preciousness of time. It was so to David. See how he spendeth the time of his life. We read of David, when he lay down at night, he 'watered his couch with his tears,' after the examination of his heart; Ps. cxix. 62; at midnight he rose to give thanks; in the morning he prevented the morning-watches, seven times a-day praising God, morning, noon, night. These are all acts of eminent piety. We should not content ourselves with so much grace as will merely serve to save us. Alas! we have much idle time hanging upon our hands; if we would give that to God it were well.

[4.] The value of godly exercises above our natural refreshings; the word is sweeter than appointed food: Job xxiii. 12, 'I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.' David preferreth his praises of God before his sleep and rest in the night. Surely this should shame us for our sensuality. We can dispense with other things for our vain pleasures; we have done as much for sin, for vain sports, broken our rest for sin. Some monsters of mankind turn night into day, and day into night for their drunkenness, gaming, vain sports, &c., and shall we not deny ourselves for God?

[5.] The reverence to be used in secret adoration. David did not only raise up his spirits to praise God, but rise up out of his bed to bow the knee to him. Secret duties should be performed with some solemnity, not slubbered over. Praise, a special act of adoration, requireth the worship of body and soul

Use. Let David's example condemn our backwardness and sluggishness, who will not take those occasions which offer themselves. Mark, lie gave thanks when we fret; at midnight he rose to do it with the more secrecy and fervency; this not to pray only, but to give thanks.

SERMON LXXI.

I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.—VER. 63.

IN this verse two things are observable:—

1. A description of the people of God; they are described by their principle, and by the course of their lives and actions, *fear* and *obedience*.

2. David's respect to them, *I am a companion of all them*.

More particularly:—

1. In the person speaking: the disparity of the persons is to be observed. David, who was a great prophet, yea, a king, yet saith, 'I am a companion of them that fear thee.' Christ himself called them his 'fellows:' Ps. xlv. 7, 'Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows; and therefore David might well say, 'I am a companion.'

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2. David saith *of all them*. The universal particle is to be observed; not only some, but all: when any lighted upon him, or he upon any of them, they were welcome to him. How well would it be for the world if the great potentates of the earth would thus think, speak, and do: 'I am a companion of all them that fear thee.' Self-love reigneth in most men. We love the rich and despise the poor, and so 'have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ in respect of persons,' James ii. 1; therefore this

universality is to be regarded. ‘Hearing of your faith and love to all the saints,’ Eph. i. 15, to the mean, as well as the greatest. Meanness doth not take away church relations, 1 Cor. xi. 20. There are many differences in worldly respects between one child of God and another, yea, in spiritual gifts, some weaker, some stronger, but we must love all, for all are children of one Father, all owned by Christ, ‘He is not ashamed to call them brethren,’ Heb. ii. 11. This, I say, is observable, the disparity of the persons—on the one side David, on the other all the people of God.

First, Let us take notice of the description of the people of God. They are such as fear him and keep his precepts, that is, obey him conscientiously, out of reverence to his majesty and goodness, and due regard to his will delivered in his word. The same description is used: Acts x. 35, ‘In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.’ Note hence—

Doct. 1. The fear of God is the grand principle of obedience: Deut. v. 29, ‘Oh, that there were such an heart within them, that they would fear me and keep my commandments always.’ Here consider—

1. What is the fear of God.

2. What influence it hath upon obedience.

1. What is the fear of God? There is a twofold fear of God—servile and filial.

[1.] Servile, by which a man feareth God and hateth him, as a slave feareth his cruel master, whom he could wish dead, and himself rid of his service, and obeyeth by mere compulsion and constraint. Thus the wicked fear God because they have drawn an ill picture of him in their minds: Mat. xxv. 24, 25, ‘I knew thou wast a hard man, and I was afraid.’ They perform only a little unwilling and unpleasing service, and as little as they can, because of their ill conceit of God. So Adam feared God after his sin when he ran away from him, Gen. iii. 10. Yea, so the devils fear God, and rebel against him: James ii. 29, ‘The devils also believe and tremble.’ This fear hath torment in it to the creature, and hatred of God, because by the fear of his curse and the flames of hell he seeketh to drive them from sin.

[2.] Filial fear, as children fear to offend their dear parents; and thus the godly do so fear God, that they do also love him, and obey him, and cleave to him, and this preserveth us in our duty: Jer. xxxii. 40, ‘I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me.’ This is a necessary frame of heart for all those that would observe and obey God. This fear is twofold:—

(1.) The fear of reverence.

(2.) The fear of caution.

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(1.) The fear of reverence, when the soul is deeply possessed with a sense of God’s majesty and goodness, that it dareth not offend him. His greatness and majesty hath an influence upon this

fear. ‘Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it?’ Jer. v. 22. His goodness and mercy: Hosea iii. 5, ‘They shall fear the Lord, and his goodness;’ Jer. x. 6, 7, ‘There is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might: who would not fear thee, O king of nations?’ Both together engage us to live always as in his eye and presence, and in the obedience of his holy will, studying to please him in all things.

(2.) The fear of caution is also called the fear of God, when we carry on the business of salvation with all possible solicitude and care. For it is no easy thing to please God and save our souls: Phil. ii. 12, ‘Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.’ In the time of our sojourning here we meet with many temptations; baits without are many, and the flesh within us is importunate to be pleased, and our account at the end of the journey is very exact: 1 Peter i. 17, ‘And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.’ A false heart is apt to betray us, and the entertainments of sense to entice and corrupt us, and we are assaulted on every side, and salvation and eternal happiness is the thing in chase and pursuit; if we come short of it we are undone for ever: Heb. iv. 1, ‘Having a promise of rest left with us, let us fear lest we come short of it.’ There is no mending errors in the other world; there we shall be convinced of our mistakes to our confusion, but not to our conversion and salvation.

2. The influence it hath upon keeping God’s precepts.

[1.] In general, this is one demonstration of it, that the most eminent servants of God have been commended for their fear of God: Job, chap. i. 1, is said to be ‘a man perfect and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil.’ He had a true godliness, or a filial awe of God, which kept him from sin, and the temptations whereby it might insinuate itself into his soul. So Obadiah, Ahab’s steward, is described to be a man ‘that feared God greatly,’ 1 Kings xviii. 3; and of one Hananiah it is said, Neh. vii. 2, that ‘he feared God greatly, above many others.’ Men are more holy as the fear of God doth more prevail in their hearts, their tenderness both in avoiding and repenting of sin increaseth according as they entertain the awe and fear of God in their hearts, and here is the rise and fountain of all circumspect walking. As the stream is dried up that wanteth a fountain, so godliness ceaseth as the fear of God abateth.

[2.] More particularly.

(1.) It is the great pull-back and constant preservative of the soul against ski, as the beasts are contained in their subjection and obedience to man by the fear that is upon them: Gen. vii. 2, ‘The dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, that they shall not hurt you;’ so the fear of God is upon us: Exod. xx. 20, ‘God is come to prove you, that his fear may be before your faces, that

ye sin not.' Joseph is an instance: Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Abraham could promise himself little security in a place where no fear of God was: Gen. xx. 11, 'I thought surely the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife's sake.' Therefore, Prov. xxiii. 17, 'Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.'

(2.) It is the great excitement to obedience.

(1st.) Duties of religion will not reverently and seriously be performed unless there be a deep awe of God upon our souls: 'God will be sanctified in all that draw nigh unto him,' Lev. x. 3. Now, what is it to sanctify God in our hearts, but to fear his majesty and greatness and goodness? Isa. viii. 13, 'Sanctify the Lord God of hosts in your hearts, and make him your fear.' Therefore David desireth God to call in his straggling thoughts and scattered affections: Ps. lxxxvi. 11, 'Unite my heart to the fear of thy name;' so the serious worshippers are described to be those that 'desire to fear his name,' Neh. i. 11.

(2d.) Duties towards men will not be regarded in all times and places, unless the fear of God bear rule in our hearts; as servants, when their masters are absent, neglect their work: Col. iii. 22, 'Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.' A Christian is alike everywhere, because God is alike everywhere. He that feareth God needeth no other theatre than his own conscience, nor other spectators than God and his holy angels. So to hinder us from contriving mischief in secret, when others are not aware of it: Lev. xix. 14, 'Thou shalt not curse the deaf man, nor lay a stumbling-block before the blind, but shalt fear the Lord thy God.' The deaf hear not, the blind seeth not; but God seeth and heareth, and that is enough to a gracious heart to bridle us when it is in our power to hurt others; as Joseph assureth his brethren he would be just to them, 'for I fear God,' Gen. xlii. 18. Nehemiah did not convert the public treasures to his private use: Neh. v. 15, 'So did not I, for I fear God.' This grace, when it is hazardous to be faithful to men, makes us to slight the danger: Exod. i. 17, 'The midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them;' that kept them from obeying that cruel edict, to their own hazard. Neither hope of gain nor fear of loss can prevail where men fear God.

(3d.) It breedeth zeal and diligence in the great and general business of our salvation, and maketh us more careful to approve ourselves unto God in our whole course, that we may be accepted of him: 2 Cor. vii. 1, 'Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' God is a great God, and. will not be put off with anything, or served with a little religiousness by the by, but with more than ordinary care and zeal and diligence. Now, what inclineth us to this but the fear of God, or a reverence of his majesty and goodness? So Phil. ii. 12, let us 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling.' Salvation is not to be looked after between sleeping and waking; no, it requireth our great est attention, as having a sense of the weightiness of the work upon our hearts.

Use. The use is to press us to two things:—

1. To fear God.

2. To keep his precepts if we would come under the character of his people.

1. To fear God. Be not prejudiced against this grace; it is generally looked upon as a left-handed grace.

[1.] It is not contrary to our blessedness: Prov. xxviii. 14, ‘Blessed is he that feareth always.’ It doth not infringe the happiness of our lives to be always in God’s company, mindful of our duty to him. The angels in heaven always behold the face of our heavenly Father, and in that vision their supreme happiness consists. There is a fear of angels and a fear of devils. The angels ever fear and reverence God, the devils believe and tremble: the angels’ fear is reverence, the devils’ fear is torment. God doth not require that we should always perplex ourselves with terrors and scruples—that were a torture, not a blessedness; but God hath required that we should always have a deep sense of his majesty and goodness impressed upon our hearts. In heaven this fear will not cease; it is an essential respect due from the creature to the Creator; and as we shall love him, so fear him always; and if a godly man were put to his choice, he would not be without this fear of God. To live always in an admiration of his excellent majesty, a thankful sense of his goodness, and a regard to his eye and presence, this is our happiness.

[2.] It is not contrary to our comfort and joy in the Lord. Fear to offend God, and joy in his favour may well stand together: Ps. ii. 10, ‘Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.’ There is a sweet mixture in a gracious heart of holy awe and seriousness, with a delightful sense of God’s goodness: these graces may easily be combined and brought to kiss one another: Ps. cxii. 1, ‘Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments.’ When we do most carefully abstain from what displeaseth him, we have most sense of his love, and do most cheerfully practise what he requireth of us. All other pleasures and delights are but May-games and toys to that of a strict obedience, which giveth the soul a continual feast: Acts ix. 31, ‘They walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.’ None have such a comfortable life as they who are most careful to avoid sin. We need this mixture: we should grow slight and secure without fear, and slavish without comfort: there must be fear to weaken the security of the flesh, and joy of faith to revive the soul.

[3.] It is not contrary to courage and holy boldness, by which we should bear up under troubles and dangers. There is a spirit of fear opposite to a sound mind, 2 Tim. i. 7, when men are ashamed of the gospel, or afraid of the persecutions which accompany it: πνεῦμα δουλείας, a cowardly spirit, a worldly fear of adversities, and dangers, losses, reproaches. So we are commanded, ‘Fear not their fear, but sanctify the Lord God of hosts in your hearts, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread,’ Isa. viii. 12, 13. No; this is the fear of the world; but I press to the fear of the Lord: Luke xii. 4, 5, ‘Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power

to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.' This is the hest cure of the fear of the world, as one nail driveth out another. The fear to offend God inflameth our courage, and doth not abate it.

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[4.] It is not contrary to the grace of the gospel. No; it is the fruit of it: Ps. cxxx. 4, 'There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' The heart is shy of a condemning God, but closeth with and adhereth to a pardoning God; and nothing breedeth this fear to offend so much as a tender sense of the Lord's goodness in Christ.

2. It presseth us to keep his precepts; that is the only evidence that the fear of God is rooted in our hearts. The heart must be prepared to keep all; they are all equally good, and they are all equally necessary; not one of them is in vain; and they are all joined together, like rings in a chain, and we are not sincere till we regard all: Ps. cxix. 6, 'Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.' The judgment must approve all: Ps. cxix. 128, 'Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.' The will must be set and fixed in a serious purpose to keep all, making conscience of the least as well as the greatest, the difficult as well as the easy: Heb. xiii. 18, 'I trust we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly.' Earnest endeavours must be used to grow up to a more exact conformity to all: Phil. iii. 14, 'I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' Some corruption may remain after all our endeavours, but none must be reserved or cherished in the heart: Ps. lxvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart.' There will be a secret love to some sins more than others, but it must not be indulged, but checked and striven against, and prayed against: Ps. cxix. 133, 'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' And this praying and striving must produce some effect, that in some measure it may be said of us what was said of Zachary and Elizabeth: Luke i. 6, 'They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' And we must increase and grow in this more and more: Col. i. 11, 'Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;' and 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'As ye have received of us how to walk, and to please God, so do you abound more and more.' The entertaining of some bosom sin, which we are loath to part withal, darkeneth our whole comfort.

Secondly, David's professed respect to these sort of men, 'I am a companion of them that fear thee,' of *them*, and of *all them*.

Doct. 2. That we should associate ourselves and keep communion with those who are truly gracious. Consider—

1. In what sense we are to be companions of them that fear the Lord.

2. Why it must be so, or the reasons.

1. In what sense may David or any other be said to be a companion of those that fear the Lord, or what it importeth.

[1.] We must join with them, or be engaged in the profession of the same faith and obedience unto God. The faith of all Christians is a ‘common faith,’ and their salvation a ‘common salvation’ to them all: Titus i. 4, ‘Titus, my own son, after the common faith;’ Jude 3, ‘I gave diligence to write to you of the common salvation.’ The communion with the saints which we believe in the Creed is in the first and chiefest place a communion in faith and charity, and this kind of communion all the members and parties of the catholic church have one with another. They are all quickened by the same Spirit, live by the same faith, wait for the hope of the same glory, and so they are companions in the same religion.

[2.] As many as cohabit and live in a convenient nearness must often meet together to join in the same worship; for God hath instituted the assemblies of the faithful that we may openly and with mutual consent worship God in Christ, in prayer, thanksgiving, praises, word, sacraments, &c.; and the assembling of ourselves for these ends must not be forsaken for negligence or fear: Heb. x. 25, ‘Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhort one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.’ Now in this sense we are companions of those that fear God, as we join in worship with them: Ps. xlii. 4, ‘I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude of them that kept holy-day.’ To make one in the public assemblies and societies of the godly, whereby God may be publicly honoured, and souls converted, comforted, and saved, is to be a companion of them that fear God and keep his precepts.

[3.] To love them, and prize them, and converse with them intimately upon all occasions, that by this society ye may excite one another to further proficiency in obedience. This is to be a companion with them that fear God: so the prophet kept company with those good men that he had described, that he himself might be confirmed by them, and that he might aid and confirm them. David said, Ps. xvi. 2, 3, ‘My goodness extendeth not to thee, but to the saints on the earth, and the excellent, in whom is all my delight,’ that is, his love and kindness was towards the godly, esteeming them more excellent and precious, how mean soever in condition, above the ungodly world, how great soever their rank and quality be, and taking pleasure in their society; them he valued, and them he esteemed above all the greatest men in the world, and in them was all his joy and delight. So Ps. xv. 4, ‘In whose eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.’ Mark these two opposite expressions, ‘the excellent of the earth,’ and ‘a vile person.’ Thus it is to look on things, not with the eye of sense, but faith and grace. So Paul longed to see the Romans, to be comforted by the mutual faith of him and them, Rom. i. 12. Well, then, to be a companion is to love tenderly, to prize and esteem one another for the grace of God which is in them, desiring one another’s good, especially spiritual: ‘Rejoicing with them that do rejoice, and mourning with them that mourn,’ Rom. xii. 15; praying for one another, giving thanks for one another, preventing the evil, endeavouring the good of one another, by counsel, help, and mutual assistance. So that, ‘I am a companion,’ is that I contract a friendship with them that fear God.

[4.] To be a companion with them is to own them in all conditions, and to take part and lot with them: Rev. i. 9, 'I, John, who am a brother and companion in tribulation, and the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.' We must have a fellowship with them not only in their privileges, but in their sufferings; not only companions in the kingdom, but companions in the tribulation and patience of Jesus Christ. So Heb. x. 33, 'Partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of those that were so used:' in the one was their passion, in the other their compassion, in that they not only suffered themselves, but owned their brethren when they suffered, and did receive them, and comfort them, and stand by them; so near is the union, and so dear and tender is the affection, of Christian brethren among themselves. So it is said of Moses, Heb. xi. 25, 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.' Alas! there are many summer friends to the gospel, painted butterflies, who are gone as soon as the sunshine of prosperity is gone. Brethren do almost forget that they are brethren, stand aloof, and are loath to own the afflicted.

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2. Reasons why David was a companion of all the saints.

[1.] Our relation enforceth it: all that are in the church are of one kindred and lineage, descended from one common father, animated by one common spirit, and knit together in the profession of one common faith in Christ, and therefore must be companions one to another. As natural relation enforceth natural love, so Christian relation Christian love. To make this evident, let me tell you men may be considered in a twofold respect—as men, or as Christians and believers; and so there is a twofold love due to them, ἀγάπη, and φιλαδελφία—2 Peter i. 7, 'Brotherly kindness and charity.' Our common neighbour hath the same nature that we have, and is of the same stock, for all come of one blood; besides our particular relation to them, either natural by kindred, consanguinity, or affinity, or political as members of the same kingdom, or other various respects of benefit, vicinity, or familiarity. As Christians and believers; this is common to all of them that they have spiritual kindred, as they are partakers of the same divine nature, or image of God, 2 Peter i. 4, which they have from the same stock and original, Christ, the second Adam: 1 Cor. xv. 45, 'The first Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit;' and as they make but one family, Eph. iii. 15, 'Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named;' only this difference there is between Christ and Adam—we derive our original from Adam by the succession of many intervening generations; we are not his immediate children, as Cain and Abel were; but every believer doth immediately derive his life from Christ, hath it at the next hand; and besides this, there is an immediate communion by which every believer is joined to one another. There are several particular respects which do vary the degree of Christian love,—as men are public and private persons; some in remote churches, others in the same congregation; some excel in grace, others of a lower rank; some more, some less useful in advancing the kingdom of Christ. Thus you see the parallel between both these loves; Christian charity supposeth natural love as the foundation of it, for grace is built upon nature, but also it sublimateth it, and raiseth it to a higher degree of

excellency than nature could reach; for the light of the gospel doth not abolish the light of nature, but perfecteth it, as the reasonable soul compriseth the vegetative and sensitive. We have other objects, see clearer arguments and reasons for love: Gal. vi. 10, ‘As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially them who are of the household of faith;’ 2 Peter i. 7, ‘And add to godliness brotherly-kindness, to brotherly-kindness charity.’

[2.] The new nature inclineth us to it, and this love floweth from an inward propension and cordial inclination, needing no other out ward allurement and provocation to procure it: 1 John v. 1, ‘Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.’ The same love that inclineth us to love God inclineth us to love the brethren also: 1 John iv. 9, ‘As touching brotherly love, ye need not that I should write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.’ God’s teaching is by effectual impression, or inclining the heart: it must needs be so, because all believers live in the communion of the same Spirit As some philosophers say there is an *anima mundi* which holdeth all the parts of it together, so there is a spirit of communion which uniteth all the members of Christ’s mystical body, and inclineth them one to another.

[3.] Gratitude to Christ maketh us to prize all that belong to him, and to own them, and to be companions with them in all conditions: 1 John iii. 16-18, ‘Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But 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? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth:’ 1 John iv. 11, ‘Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.’ God loved us greatly, sent his own Son to die for us; now, how shall we express our thankfulness but by a dear and tender love to those who are Christ’s? As David, when Jonathan was dead, inquired, ‘Is there none of Jonathan’s posterity to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’ and at length he found lame Mephibosheth; so, is there none upon earth to whom we may show kindness for Christ’s sake, who is now in heaven? Yes; there are the saints. Now these should be dear and precious to us, and we should be companions with them in all conditions.

[4.] Because of the profit and utility redounding. A true friend is valuable in secular matters, much more a spiritual friend: Prov. xxvii. 17, ‘As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the countenance of his friend.’ When a man is dull, his friend puts an edge upon him; he is a mighty support and stay to us: Prov. xvii. 17, ‘A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity;’ Prov. xxvii. 9, ‘The perfume of an ointment rejoiceth the soul, so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel:’ and in some cases he telleth us, ‘A friend is better than a brother.’ Now, if an ordinary true friend be so valuable, what is a Christian friend? A holy, heavenly, faithful friend is one of the greatest treasures upon earth; therefore we should seek out such and associate with them.

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Use. Let us see, then, whom we make our companions; let us avoid evil company lest we be defiled by them, and frequent good company that we may be mutually comforted and quickened: 'I am a companion of them that fear thee.' Interpreters suppose it was spoken in opposition to the bands of the wicked mentioned ver. 61. If they unite, so should we. This, then, is our business, the rejecting of evil company, and the choice of good companions. To enforce this, take these considerations:—

1. Friendship is necessary, because man is ζῶοω πολίτικον, a sociable creature. Man was not made to live alone, but in company with others, and for mutual society and fellowship; and they that fly all company and live to and by themselves are counted inhuman: Eccles. iv. 9-12, there the benefit of society is set forth, 'Two are better than one; for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; he hath not another to lift him up again: if two lie together they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? and if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him.' Thus far Solomon. The Egyptians in their hieroglyphics expressed the unprofitableness of a solitary man by a single millstone, which alone grindeth no meal, but with its fellow is very serviceable for that purpose. The Lord ap pointed mankind to live in society, that they might be mutually helpful to one another: he never made them to live in deserts, as wild beasts love to go alone, but as the tame, in flocks and herds. The Lord hath given variety of gifts to the sons of men,—to all some, but to none all,—that one might stand in need of another, and make use of one another; and the subordination of one gift to another is the great instrument of upholding the world. Man is weak, and needeth society; for every man is insufficient to himself, and wants the help of others: and man is inclined by the bent of his nature; we have a certain desire to dwell together and live in society.

2. Though man affects society, yet in our company we may use choice, and the good must converse with the good, for these reasons:—

[1.] Because like will sort with like. Friendship is very much founded in suitableness, and maintained by it: *idem velle et nolle, est amicitia*. The godly will have special love to the godly, and they that fear God will be a companion of those that fear him; they are more dear and precious to them than others; as a wicked man easily smelleth out a fit companion: Ps. l. 18, 'When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers,' Like will to like, and therefore the godly should be dear and precious to one another. Every man's company wherein he delighteth showeth what manner of man he is himself. The fowls of heaven flock together according to their several kinds. Ye shall not see doves flocking with the ravens, nor divers kinds intermixed. Every man is known by his company. They that delight in drinking, love swilling and drunken companions; in gaming, love such as make no conscience of their time; in hunting, love such as are addicted to such exercise; in arms, love men of a soldierly and military spirit; they that delight in books love scholars and persons of a philosophical breeding. That which every man is

taken withal he loveth to do it with his friend; so certainly they that love and fear God delight in those that love him and fear him, and their company is a refreshing to one another.

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[2.] If they be not like, intimacy and converse will make them like: every man is wrought upon by his company. We imitate those whom we love, and with whom we often converse: Prov. xiii. 20, 'He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.' As a man that walketh in the sunshine is tanned insensibly, and as Moses' face shined by conversing with God, ere we are aware we adopt their manners and customs, and get a tincture from them. So Prov. xxii. 24, 25, 'Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways and get a snare to thy soul.' A man would think that of all sins, wrath and anger should not be propagated by company, the motions and furies of it are so uncomely to a beholder; yet secretly a liking of the person breedeth a liking of his ways, and a man getteth such a frame of spirit as those have whom he hath chosen for his companions. This should be the more regarded by us, because we are sooner made evil by evil company than good by good company: 1 Cor. xv. 33, 'Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners;' evil words or ὁμιλίαι κακαὶ, evil converses, corrupt good manners. We convey a disease to others, but not our health. Oh, how careful should we be of our friendship, that we may converse with such as may go before us as examples of piety, and provoke us by their strictness, heavenly-mindedness, mortification, and self-denial, to more love to God, zeal for his glory, and care of our salvation! Especially doth this concern the young, who, by their weakness of judgment, the vehemency of their affections, and want of experience, may be easily drawn into a snare.

[3.] Our love to God should put us upon loving his people and making them our intimates; for religion influenceth all things, our relations, common employments, friendships, and converses; it is a smart question that of the prophet, 2 Chron. xix. 2, 'Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?' Surely a gracious heart cannot take them into his bosom. He loveth all with a love of good-will, as seeking their good, but not with a love of complacency, as delighting in them. Our neighbour must be loved as ourselves; our natural neighbour as a natural self, with a love of benevolence; and our spiritual neighbour as our spiritual self, with a love of complacency. In opposition to complacency we may hate our sinful neighbour, as we must ourselves: 'The wicked is an abomination to the righteous,' Prov. xxix. 26. The hatred of abomination is opposite to the love of complacency, as *odium inimicitiae to amor benevolentiae*. So David saith, Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22, 'Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies;' I cannot cry up a confederacy with them. They that have a kindness for God will be thus affected.

3. There is a threefold friendship—sinful, civil, and religious.

[1.] Sinful, when men agree in evil, as drunkards with drunkards, or robbers with robbers: Prov. i. 14, 'Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse.' When men conspire against the truth

and interest of Christ in the world, or league themselves against his people, as Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek, Ps. lxxxiii. 3, divided in interests, but united in hatred; as Herod and Pilate against Christ. This is *unitas contra unitatem*, as Austin, or *consortium factionis*, a bond of iniquity, or confederacy in evil. Again—

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[2.] There is a civil friendship, built on natural pleasure and profit, when men converse together for trade or other civil ends. Thus men are at liberty to choose their company as their interests and course of their employments lead them. The apostle saith, a man must go out of the world if he should, altogether abstain from the company of the wicked: 1 Cor. v. 9, 10, 'I wrote to you in an epistle not to company with fornicators;. yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world.' But—

[3.] There is religious friendship, which is built on virtue and grace, and is called 'the unity of the Spirit:' Eph. vi. 3, 'Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' Now this is the firmest bond of all. Sinful societies are soon dissolved; drunkards and profane fellows, though they seem to unite and hold together, yet upon every cross word they fall out and break; and civil friendship, which is built on pleasure and profit, cannot be so firm as that which is built on honesty and godliness. This is among the good and holy, who are not so changeable as the bad and carnal, and the ground of it is more lasting. This is *amicitia per se*, the other *per accidens*, from constitution of soul and likeness Of spirits. The good we seek may be possessed without envy; the friends do not straiten and intrench upon one another. Self-love and envy soon breaketh our friendship, but these seek the good of another as much as their own delight in the graces of one another.

[4.] In religious friendship we owe a love to all that fear God: Acts iv. 32, 'The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul.' Love is called σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος, 'the bond of perfectness,' Col. iii. 14. All things are bound together by a holy society, and preserved by it.' There is in love a desire of union and fellowship with those whom we love: 1 Sam. xviii. 1, 'Jonathan's soul was knit to the soul of David, and he loved him as his own soul;' and the apostle biddeth all Christians to be 'knit together in brotherly love,' Col. ii. 2; without this they are as a besom unbound, they fall all to pieces.

[5.] Though there must be a friendship to all, yet some are to be chosen for our intimacy. Our Lord Christ had Peter, James, and John, Mat. xvii. 1; Mat. xxvi. 37, 'He took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee.' When he raised Jairus' daughter, 'he suffered none to go in but Peter, James, and John,' Luke viii. 51, ἐκλέκτων ἐκλεκτότεροι. This may be because of suitableness, or special inclination, or their excellency of grace, *sicut se habet simpliciter ad simpliciter, ita magis ad magis.*

[6.] Our converse with these must be improved to the use of edifying, to do one another good by reproof, advice, counsel: Lev. xix. 17, 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; thou shalt in anywise reprove him, and not suffer sin to be upon him.' This is kindness to his soul: Rom. i.

11, ‘I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established.’

SERMON LXXII.

The earth, Lord, is full of thy mercy; teach me thy statutes.—VER. 64.

IN this verse I observe—

1. David’s petition, *teach me thy statutes*.

2. The argument or consideration which encourageth him to ask it of God, *the earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy*. The sum and substance of this verse will be comprised in these five propositions:—

1. That saving knowledge is a benefit that must be asked of God.

2. That this benefit cannot be too often or sufficiently enough asked; it is his continual request.

3. In asking we are encouraged by the bounty or mercy of God.

4. That God is merciful all his creatures declare.

5. That his goodness to all creatures should confirm us in hoping for saving grace or spiritual good things.

Prop. 1. That saving knowledge is a benefit that must be asked of God, for three reasons:—

1. God is the proper author of it.

2. It is a singular favour where he bestoweth it.

3. Prayer is the appointed means to obtain it.

1. God is the proper author of it. The fountain of wisdom is not in man himself, but God giveth it to whom he pleaseth. We were at first endowed by him with a reasonable soul and faculty of understanding: John i. 4, ‘In him was life, and this life was the light of man.’ All life is of God, especially that life which is light. The reasonable soul and the natural faculty of understanding cometh from him, and if it be disordered, as it is by sin, it must be by him restored and rectified; it is all God’s gift. Now man is fallen from that light of life wherein he was created, his Maker must be his mender, he must go to ‘the Father of lights’ to have his light cleared, James i. 17, and his understanding freed from those mistakes and errors wherewith it was obscured. All knowledge is

from God, much more saving grace or a sound knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel. Many scriptures speak to this: Job xxxii. 8, ‘There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding.’ Though the dial be right set, yet it showeth not the time of the day except the sun shineth; so the spirit of man will grope and fumble in the clearest cases without a divine irradiation. God enlighteneth the mind, directeth the judgment, giveth understanding what to do or say. So he challengeth it as his prerogative: Job xxxviii. 26, ‘Who hath put wisdom into the inward parts, or given understanding unto the heart?’ The exercise of the outward senses is from God, who gives the seeing eye, the hearing ear, much more the right exercise of the internal faculties; an understanding heart is much more from the Lord: Prov. ii. 6, ‘The Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding;’ Dan. ii. 21, ‘He giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.’ Certainly all true wisdom is from above: James iii. 17, ‘The wisdom that is from above is first pure,’ &c. He distinguished there between the wisdom that is not from above and that which is from above. Man hath so much wisdom yet left as to cater for the body and the concernments of the bodily life (called ‘thine own wisdom,’ Prov. xxiii. 4); therefore he saith, ver. 15, ‘This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.’ But for wisdom that concerneth the other world and our everlasting concernments, that is of God, that is from above; the wisdom that is exercised in pure, peaceable, fruitful, self-denying obedience. All that have any of this wisdom should acknowledge God, and all that would have it should depend upon him, and run to the fountain where enough is to be had. Man’s wit is but borrowed, and he holdeth it of God. *Vitia etiam sine magistro discuntur*—he needeth no teacher in what is evil and carnal, but in what is holy and spiritual he needeth it.

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2. It is a singular favour to them on whom God bestoweth this heavenly wisdom, and so puts a difference between them and others. It is a greater sign of friendship and respect to them than if God had given them all the world: Mark xiii. 11, ‘To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to others it is not given.’ This is no common benefit, but a favour which God reserveth for his peculiar people; so John xv. 15, ‘I have called you friends, for all things which I have heard of my Father I have made known to you.’ That is the highest argument of friendship, not to give you wealth, and honour, and greatness, but to give you an enlightened mind and a renewed heart. God may give honour and greatness and a worldly estate in judgment, as beasts fatted for destruction may be put into large pastures; but he doth not teach his statutes in judgment; it is a favour, though he useth a sharper discipline in teaching: Ps. xliv. 12, ‘Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest him out of thy law.’ If God will teach his child not only by the word but by the rod, and useth a sharp discipline to instruct in the lesson of Christianity, it is a greater favour than if God did let him alone, and suffer him to perish with the wicked in his wrath. The prosperity of wicked men is so far from being a felicity to them, that it is rather the greatest judgment; and to be punished and rebuked by God for all that we do amiss, and thereby to be reduced to the sense and practice of our duty, is indeed the greatest favour and mercy of God, and so the most valuable felicity and evidence of God’s tender care over us. So Prov. iii. 31, 32, ‘Envy

not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is an abomination to the Lord, and his secret is with the righteous.' You are depressed and kept bare and low, but your adversaries flourish and grow insolent; you cannot therefore say, God hateth you, or loveth them, If the Lord hath given you the saving knowledge of himself and his Christ, and only given them worldly happiness, it is a great token of his love to you and hatred to them, that you need not envy them, for you are dignified with the higher privilege.

3. Prayer is the appointed means to obtain it. There are other means by which God conveyeth this heavenly wisdom, as by study and search. Dig for wisdom as for silver, and for understanding as hid treasures, Prov. ii. 4. Dig in the mines of knowledge: attend upon the word which is able to make us wise unto salvation: Mark iv. 24, 'Take heed what or how ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear shall more be given.' But all are sanctified by prayer: Prov. ii. 3, 'Cry for knowledge, and lift up thy voice for understanding.' *Bene orasse est bene studuisse*, saith Luther; so to pray well is to hear aright. God giveth understanding by the ministry of the word, but he will be sought unto and acknowledged in the gift, otherwise we make an idol of our own understanding: Prov. iii. 5, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' Let us not make a God of our own wisdom; do not seek it in the means without prayer to the Lord. Let us not study without prayer, nor you hear without prayer, nor go about any business in your general and particular callings without prayer.

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Prop. 2. This benefit cannot be too often nor too sufficiently asked of God.

1. Because of our want We never know so much but we may know more of God's mind, and know it better and to better purpose. To know things as we ought to know them is the great gift: 1 Cor. viii. 2, 'If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know:' that we may be more sanctified, more prudent, and orderly in governing our hearts and lives, that we may know things seasonably when they concern us in any special business and temptation: Prov. xxviii. 26, 'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool; but he that walketh wisely shall be delivered:' that is, he that followeth his own conceit soon falleth into a snare; he that maketh his bosom his oracle, and his own wit his counsel, thinks himself wise enough without daily seeking to God to order his own business, never succeedeth well, but plungeth himself into manifold inconveniences.

2. From God's manner of giving; he is not weary and tired with constant supplicants: James i. 5, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.' The throne of grace lieth always open; the oftener we frequent it, the more welcome. We frown upon one that often troubleth us with his suits, but it is not so with God; we may beg and beg again.

3. The value of the benefit itself. Saving knowledge, or the light of the Spirit, keepeth alive the work of grace in our hearts. Habitual graces will soon wither and decay without a continual influence. The increase of sanctification cometh into the soul by the increase of saving knowledge: 2 Peter i. 2, 'Grace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord.' The more we grow thriving in knowledge, the more we grow in grace, and the heart and life is more engaged. As we learn somewhat more of God in Christ, our awe and love to him is increased: Eph. iv. 20, 21, 'Ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that you have heard him, and been taught of him as the truth is in Jesus;' that is, if ye are taught and instructed by Christ himself in the truth. It is not every sort of hearing Christ or knowledge which will do us good. Many learn him and know him who abuse that knowledge which they have of him; but if he effectually teach u by his Spirit, then our knowledge is practical and operative; we will practise what we know, be careful to please God in all things.

4. From the temper of a gracious heart: a taste of this knowledge will make us desire a further supply, that we may be taught more, and the soul may be more sanctified; therefore doth David deal with God for the increase of saving knowledge. We are contented with a little taste of heavenly doctrine, but holy men are not so. Show me thy mind, let me see thy glory: Hosea vi. 3, 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.' They are for growth as well as truth; they experimentally know how good God is, and the more they know him the more they see their ignorance, and that there is more behind to be known of him. Before they had but a flying report of him, now they are acquainted with him, and have a nearer inspection into his ways, and this is but little in comparison of what they desire. We are bidden, 2 Peter iii. 18, to 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Present measures do not satisfy them; they must grow in knowledge, as grow in grace, more love to Christ, more delight in his ways.

Prop. 3. In asking any spiritual gift we are encouraged by the bounty and mercy of God. David signifieth both.

1. His bounty or benignity, or that free inclination which is in God to do good to his creatures.

2. His mercy respects the creature as affected with any misery. Mercy properly is a proneness to succour and relieve a man in misery notwithstanding sin. Now the larger thoughts of mercy, the more hope; partly because we have no plea of merit, and therefore mercy is the fountain of all the good which cometh to us from God. We cannot come to him as a debtor, and therefore we must come to him as a free benefactor. Wherewith can we oblige God? We have nothing to give to him but what is his own already, and was first received from him: 'All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee,' 1 Chron. xxix. 14; we pay the great governor of the world out of his own exchequer. The apostle maketh the challenge, Rom. xi. 35, 'Who hath given him first, and it shall be recompensed to him?' The sun oweth nothing to the beam, but the beam all to the sun; the fountain oweth nothing to the stream, but the stream hath all from the fountain: so we have all from God, can bring nothing to him which was not his before, and came from him. Partly because there

is a contrary merit, an ill-deserving upon us, for which he might deny us any further mercies: Ps. xxv. 8, 'Good and upright is the Lord; and therefore he will teach sinners in the way:' if the sinner be weary of his wandering, and would be directed of the Lord for the time to come, God is upright, he will not mislead us; and he is good, will readily lead us in a right path. Sin shall not obstruct our mercies, and therefore must not keep the penitent supplicant back from confidence to be heard in his prayer, when he would be directed in the ready way to happiness. If you would fain be reduced to a good life after all your straying, humbly lay yourselves at God's feet: 1 Kings xx. 31, 'We have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; peradventure he will save thy life.' If God were most tenacious, we have cause to beat his ears continually with our suits and supplications, such is our want; but he is good, and ready to guide poor creatures; nay, he is merciful; and former sins shall be no obstruction to us, if at length we are willing to return to our duty.

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Prop. 4. The universal experience of the world possesseth all men's minds with this apprehension, that God is a merciful God: 'The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy:' the world and everything therein sets forth his goodness to us. The same is said in other places: Ps. xxxiii. 5, 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.' If earth, what is heaven? Ps. cxlv. 9, 'His tender mercy is over all his works.'

1. Let us see that every creature is a monument and witness of God's mercy and goodness. Things animate and inanimate, the heavens and earth, and all things contained therein, declare that there is a powerful, wise, and good God. There is no part of the world that we can set our eyes upon but it speaketh praise to God, and the thoughts of his bounty to the creatures, especially to man; for all things were either subjected to man's dominion, or created for his use and benefit. If we look to the heavens, all serveth for the use and benefit of mankind: Ps. viii. 3, 4, 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou are mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?' The lowest heaven affordeth us breath, winds, rain; the middle or second heaven affordeth us heat, light, influence; and the third heaven an eternal habitation, if we serve God. In earth, all the things daily in our view speak to God's praise, if we had the leisure to hear them: these creatures and works of his that are daily in our view represent him as a merciful God. This is the lesson which is most legible in them, whether we sit at home in our houses or go abroad, and consider land or water. Go to the animate creatures, the beasts of the field: Ps. xxxvi. 6, 'Thou preservest man and beast:' Job xii. 7, 8, 'But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air shall declare unto thee: or speak to the earth and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?' His providence reacheth to an innumerable multitude of creatures, giving them life and motion, and sustaining them, and relieving their necessities, and doth largely bestow his blessing upon them according to their nature and condition. And this goodness of God shineth forth in all his creatures; not only in what he doth to them themselves, but in what he doth about them for man's sake. They were defiled with man's sin, and

therefore he might in justice have abolished them, or made them useless to man, or instruments of his grief; but they are continued for our comfort, that we might live in a well-furnished world. Now, come to man himself, good, bad, wicked, godly: 'His sun shineth, his rain falleth on the evil and good, just and unjust,' Mat. v. 44. Great mercy is still continued to the fallen creature, even to the impenitent: Acts xiv. 17, 'Neverthelesss he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' What was God's witness? Ἀγαθοποιῶν, he doth good; much patience is used, men's lives continued while they sin, and means vouchsafed for their reclaiming; food, raiment, friends, habitations, health, ease, liberty afforded to them, and all to show that we have to do with a most merciful God, who is willing to be reconciled to the sinning creature. Go to the godly, and what is all their experience but a constant course of mercy? David's admiration declares it: Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18, 'How precious are thy thoughts to me, O Lord! how great is the sum of them! if I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.' He was in a maze when he thought of the various dispensations of God's providence; there was no getting out. The Lord filleth up his servants' lives with great and various mercies, even in their warfare and pilgrimage here in this world; abundance of invaluable mercies, that if we do but consider what we do receive, we must needs be confirmed in this truth by our own senses. Everything is a mercy to a vessel of mercy.

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2. Wherein God expresseth his mercy to them in creation and providence.

[1.] In creating them. It was great mercy that, being infinitely perfect in himself from all eternity, and so not needing anything, he took the creatures out of nothing, which therefore could merit nothing, and communicated his goodness to them: 'For thy pleasure they are and were created,' Rev. iv. 11.

[2.] In preserving and continuing them so long as he seeth good. The heavens continue according to his ordinance; the beasts, and fowls, and fishes continue according to his pleasure: all the living creatures need many things for their daily sustentation which their Creator abundantly supplieth to them, and therefore the whole earth is full of his mercy. One creature the scripture taketh notice of: Luke xii. 24, 'Consider the ravens, for God feedeth them:' and again, Job xxxvii. 41, 'He feedeth the young ravens when they cry and wander for lack of meat:' and Ps. cxlvii. 9, 'He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.' Why is the raven made such an instance of providence above other fowls, or other living creatures? Some say it is animal *sibi rapacissimum*; others, other things, τοὺς νεόττους ἐπιβάλλει, casts its young out of the nest as soon as they are able to fly, and put to hard shifts for themselves. All this showeth his mercy, how ready he is to supply the miserable.

Prop. 5. His goodness to all the creatures should confirm his people in hoping for saving grace or spiritual good things. Why, all the business will be to show you the force of this argument, and that it is a prop to faith.

1. We may reason from the less to the greater. Our Lord hath taught us so for food and clothing: Mat. vi. 28-30, ‘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?’ For fowls and lilies, they have no arts of tilling, spinning, are not of such account with God as mankind, as his people. So for protection: Mat. x. 29-31, ‘Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows.’ The reasoning is good; if he hath mercy for kites, he hath also for children, who are not only in a higher rank of creatures, but in a renewed state, and reconciled to him by Christ, become his friends and children, whom he tendeth as the apple of his eye; much more when they come for spiritual benefits pleasing to the Lord: 1 Kings iii. 9, 10, ‘Give, therefore, thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.’ Now all these amount to a strong probability, if not a certainty. It is a mistake to think that faith only goeth upon certainties. No; sometimes it is mightily encouraged by probabilities. These must not be left out; for if I want any spiritual blessing, is it not a great encouragement to remember God’s merciful nature shining forth in all his works? If kind to his creatures, will he not be kind to me? If he causeth his sun to shine upon the wicked, will he not lift up the light of his countenance upon my soul? If his rain fall upon their fields, will he not let the dew of his grace fall upon my barren heart? Though the argument be not absolutely and infallibly conclusive, yet here is such a concurrence of probabilities that we should go and try what he will do for our souls.

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2. They in their rank have their supplies, and we in our rank have our supplies; therefore his kindness to all creatures should encourage new creatures to expect their help from him; for God doth good to all his creatures according to their necessity and capacity; his giving them sup plies convenient for them is a pawn of God’s pleasure to bestow upon his servants greater gifts than these. All things that look to God have necessaries provided for them according to the condition of their nature; and therefore, if you have another nature, and besides the good things of this life do need the good things which belong to the life to come, he will give us gifts and graces as he giveth them their food; for these are as necessary for this kind of life as food for that. As they in their rank find mercy, so we in ours; his general goodness confirmeth us in expecting these more special favours; for as there is a general benignity to all creatures, so there is a special to his children: Ps. xxxvi. 6, 7, ‘Thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O Lord! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.’ His common kindness and his special love are often compared together; they agree in this, that both come from a good God. Therefore the argument holdeth strong, if good to all creatures, then good to new creatures. Why should we think that he would not show his goodness to us also? Again, they agree in this,

that in doing good God doth not consider the worthiness of the creature, but his own goodness and self-inclination to preserve what he hath made; as he did not disdain to give life to the meanest creatures, so he doth not disdain to preserve them. As they had their life from him at first, so they have their life still in him, the poorest worm not excepted: not a worm, not a gnat, not a fly but tastes of God's bounty. God disdaineth not to look after the most abject things. So the plea of unworthiness lieth not in bar against the new creature, for necessary supplies God giveth out of his own goodness. Now, they differ in the kinds of the mercy,—one common, the other saving; and the special subjects of them,—one is to all creatures, the other is to God's peculiar people; and in the manner of conveyance,—the one floweth in the channel of common providence, the other is conveyed to us by the golden pipe of the Mediator. Well, then, the creatures have their mercies, and wicked men their mercies, that they prize and value; and the people of God have also what they prize and esteem.

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3. God doth good to every one according to their necessity and capacity. He doth not give meat to the trees, nor stones to the beasts, but provideth food and nourishment convenient for them; so to his people, according to their condition of nature and special capacity. The general capacity is the condition of their natures, the special capacity is want or earnest desire. If we extremely need or earnestly desire these blessings, then we may reason from God's general goodness to all the creatures to that special act of goodness which we expect from him. Pray, mark how God's general goodness is expressed, Ps. cxlv. 15, 16, 'The eyes of all things wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season: thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' He keepeth a constant eye of providence, and if the desire be great, he doth not frustrate the natural expectation of hungry creatures, but giveth them that sort of food which is fit for them. Now God expecteth the same from new creatures: if necessity and vehement desire meet, he promises supply: 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it,' Ps. lxxxi. 10; and Ps. cxlv. 19, 'The Lord will fulfil the desire of them that fear him, he also will hear their cry, and will save them.' The beasts mourn and cry in their kind; we pray and cry in our kind: needy desires will be heard. He is in a capacity to receive spiritual blessings who is sensible of their necessity for the happiness of his immortal soul, and doth prize and value them, and earnestly desire them. The man of God was under a necessity, for he apprehended himself miserable, and at a loss without it; for he desired no other mercy. A gracious heart cannot be satisfied with low things. Be thus affected, and then this argument will be of use to you.

Use 1. For reproof. Since God is so merciful, how much are they to blame—

1. Who render themselves incapable of the benefit of mercy by impenitence persisted in against the means of grace! They slight his common mercy, and cut off themselves from his saving mercy. Abused goodness will be destructive: Rom. ii. 4, 5, 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to

repentance? but after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.'

2. The stupid and senseless, which do not take notice of the mercy of God which shineth forth in all the creatures! A man can turn his eye nowhere but in every place and quarter of the world he shall see plain testimonies of God's mercy. But alas! how much of this is lost and passed over for want of observation! Isa. i. 3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' All this goodness was left in the earth to invite our minds and hearts to God; therefore, as the bee sucketh honey out of every flower, so should we still dwell on the thoughts of God's goodness, represented to us in everything we see and feel.

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3. That think of God's mercy with extenuating and diminishing thoughts, and do not raise their hopes and confidence by a serious reflection upon that ample discovery which he hath made of it in all his works! If God be good to all his creatures, why should we be left out of the number? Surely God will not be backward to those that earnestly desire his grace; therefore those that deject themselves, that say, God will not hear me, or regard my prayers, are to be condemned.

Use 2. Information, the lively light of the Spirit is a special mercy, Our misery lieth in the ignorance of God and the transgression of his law; our happiness in being enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. It is God's great gift: Jer. xxiv. 7, '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 all their heart.'

Use 3. To exhort you to cherish in your souls good thoughts of God, and the fulness and largeness of his bounty and mercy. The devil seeks to weaken our opinion of God's goodness; he thought to possess our first parents with this conceit, that God was envious, so as to draw them away from God. It will be of use to you:—

1. In all afflictive providences. Those who are poor and destitute, or in prison and banishment, or bereft of children, or oppressed with guilty fears, or assaulted with any other calamity: Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him:' still he is a good God. Here is the glory of faith, to believe him as a gracious father when we feel him as an enemy. Satan will be sure to put in upon these occasions—to tell you that God is an enemy, harsh, severe, implacable in his dealings, one that regardeth you not in your misery, that giveth you no rest nor respite in your troubles; if he did not hate you, how could he deal thus with you? and so striketh a terror into the minds of men, that they are afraid of nothing so much as of God, and of coming to him by Christ. No; 'God is love,' a father when he frowneth as well as when he smileth: Heb. xii. 10, 'He verily chastiseth us for our profit;' and 'we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.' And in reason should it not be so? Did your parents hate you because they were careful of your breeding, and sometimes corrected you for your faults? There is more of compassion than passion in his severest strokes. He hath the bowels of a mother, but yet the wisdom of a father. His love must not

be exercised to the prejudice of his other attributes. He that pulleth you out of a deep gulf, though he breaketh your arm in pulling you out, doth not he love you? God is love, and the giver of all good things.

2. It is a great motive to repentance. As the prodigal thought of his father, so should we return: Jer. iii. 12, 'Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine auger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.' Come, lie at his feet, see what mine infinite love will do for you: 1 Kings xx. 31, 'We have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings.' When you first begin with God, this is an argument and ground of comfort, much more when you renew your repentance. Hard thoughts of God keep us off from him, but his loving and merciful nature inviteth us to him.

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3. It sweetens the duties of holiness: 1 John v. 3, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.' This makes our resistance of sin more serious: Ezra ix. 13, 'Seeing thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserved, should we again break thy commandments?'

4. To quicken and enliven your prayers for grace. You have to do with a merciful God: Ps. cxlv. 19, 'He will fulfil the desires of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them.'

SERMON LXXIII.

Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.—VER. 65.

THE addresses that are made to God in this psalm are mostly prayers; while we are in the world we are compassed about with divers necessities and wants, but yet there is an intermixture of thanksgivings. We must not always be complaining, but sometimes giving of thanks. David was often exercised with various calamities; but as soon as he got rid of any danger, or obtained any deliverance, he is ready with his thanks and praises. Blessed will that time be when our mournings are altogether turned into triumphs, and our complaints into thanksgivings. But now here in the world gratulation should not wholly be shut out, but find a room in our addresses to God, as well as acknowledgments of sin and supplications for grace. None have to do with God but they find him bountiful, and there is no reason but present mercies should be acknowledged. In this Verse you have the working of a thankful soul, sensible of the benefits already obtained in prayer, and making hearty acknowledgment of them to God: 'Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.' Observe—

1. An acknowledgment of some benefit bestowed, *thou hast dealt well with thy servant*.

2. The way in which it was bestowed, *according to thy word*.

First, An acknowledgment of some benefit bestowed. In it observe:—

1. The party giving, *thou, O Lord*.

2. The act of bounty, generally expressed, *thou hast dealt well*.

3. The party receiving, *with thy servant*.

The fountain of all that we have is the goodness and fidelity of God; the promise is the channel and pipe by which it is conveyed to us, and the object is God's servant. When all these concur, how sweet is it! A good God is ready to show us mercy, and this mercy assured to us by promise, and God's servants capacitated to receive mercy. There is an excellent cause, which is the benignity of God; a sure conveyance, which is the promise of God; and a prepared object, who are the servants of God.

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1. The party giving is God himself: all good is to be referred to God as the author of it.

2. The benefit received is generally expressed, 'Thou hast dealt well.' Some translations out of the Hebrew, *bonum fecisti*—thou hast done good with thy servant; the Septuagint, χρηστοτητα ἐποίησας μετὰ τοῦ δούλου σοῦ—thou hast made goodness to or with thy servant: out of them the vulgar, *bonitatem fecisti*. Some take this clause generally, whatever thou dost for thy servants is good; they count it so, though it be never so contrary to the interest of the flesh: sickness is good, loss of friends is good, and so is poverty and loss of goods to a humble and thankful mind. But surely David speaketh here of some supply and deliverance wherein God had made good some promise to him. The Jewish rabbis understand it of his return to the kingdom, but most Christian writers understand it of some spiritual benefit, that good which God had done to him. If anything may be collected from the subsequent verses, it was certainly some spiritual good. The Septuagint repeats χρηστότητατwice, in this and the following verse, as if he acknowledged the benefit of that good judgment and knowledge of which there he beggeth an increase. It was in part given him already, and that learned by afflictions, in the third verse of this portion: 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have learned thy word.' Now then, go on to increase this work, this goodness which thou hast shown to thy servant.

3. The object, to 'thy servant.' It is an honourable comfortable style; David delighteth in it. God is a bountiful and a gracious master, ready to do good to his servants, rewarding them with grace here, and crowning that grace with glory hereafter: Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.'

Secondly, The manner how this is assured and brought about, 'According to thy word.' That word, which is the encouragement of our prayer, is the rule of God's proceedings. Some things are

given by a common providence, other things are given us as servants of God, or according to the promises that are made us in the word.

Doct. 1. That God doth good to his servants.

Doct. 2. That the good which God hath done for us should be thankfully acknowledged.

Doct. 3. That in our thankful acknowledgments we should take notice of God's truth, as well as his benignity and goodness.

Doct. I. That God doth good to his servants. David giveth us here his own experience, and every one that is a faithful servant of God may come in with the like acknowledgments; for what proof God giveth of his goodness to any one of his servants, it is a pledge of that love, respect, and care that he beareth towards all the rest. Jacob acknowledged the same: Gen. xxxiii. 11, 'The Lord hath dealt graciously with me;' that was his account of providence.

1. From the inclination of his own nature: Ps. cxix. 68, 'Thou art good, and thou dost good.' The Psalmist concludeth this act from his nature. The sun doth not more naturally shine, nor fire more naturally burn, nor water more naturally flow, than acts of grace and goodness do naturally flow from God. If there be anything besides benefits in the world, the fault is not in God, but in us, who by sin, provoke him to do otherwise.

2. The obligation of his promise; so this good cometh in as a reward, according to the law of his grace. He hath engaged himself by his promise to give us all good things: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;' Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10, 'Oh, 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.' Therefore it is said, Micah ii. 7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' The words 'saying good' is a doing good; when it is said, it may be accounted done, because of the certain performance of what is said.

3. The preparation of his people; his servants are capable. God is good, and doeth good, *modo non ponatur obex*, except we tie his hands and hinder our own mercies. There are certain laws of commerce between God and his creatures, so between God and man; he meeteth us with his blessings in the way of our duty: Amos vi. 12, 'Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plough there with oxen?' Some ground is incapable of being ploughed; some are morally incapable of having good done to or for them. But when the creature is in a capacity, God communicateth his goodness to them, dealeth with men as they deal with him: Ps. xviii. 25, 26, 'With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful, with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright, with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure, with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward;' so Ps. cxxv. 4, 'Do good to those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.' God is and will be gracious and bountiful

to all those that continue faithful to him, and will never leave any degree of goodness unrewarded; the covenant shall not fail on his part.

Use 1. Let us be persuaded of this truth; it is one of the first things in religion, Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' Next unto his being, his bounty, or else our religion will be cold or none at all. Many conceive amiss of God, and draw an ill picture of him in their minds, as if he were hard to be pleased, always frowning. Did we look upon him as one that is good and willing to do good, we would have less backwardness to duty and weariness in his service. Satan drew off the hearts of our first parents from God by vain surmises, as if he were severe and envious: Gen. iii. 5, 'God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' This first battery was against the persuasion of God's goodness and kindness to man, which he endeavoureth to discredit. Yea, God's people may have the sense of his goodness strangely weakened. David is fain with violence to hold the conclusion which Satan would fain wrest out of his hands: Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a pure heart.' Therefore we had need to fortify our hearts and forearm ourselves with strong consolations and arguments.

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1. He doth good to his enemies, and therefore certainly he will much more to his servants: 'He is good to all;' Ps. cxlv. 9, 'The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.' The heathens had experience of it: Acts xiv. 17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' And will he be unkind to his servants, to whom he is engaged by promise? It cannot be.

2. Consider Christ's reasoning: Mat. vii. 11, 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' God will not deal worse with his children than men do with theirs. We are natural and sinful parents: if we have any faith, or reason, or sense, we cannot gainsay this conclusion. A father will not be unnatural to his child; the most godless men will love their children, and seek their welfare, and do good unto them. Surely our heavenly Father will supply all our necessities, satisfy all our desires: he is more fatherly than all the fathers in the world can be; all the goodness in men is but as a drop to the ocean.

3. Consider, he never giveth his people any discouragement or just cause to complain of him: Micah vi. 3, 'O my people, what have I done unto thee? or wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me;' Jer. ii. 5, 'Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanities and become vain?' Why:—

[1.] His commands are not grievous: Mat. xi. 30, 'My yoke is easy and my burthen is light;' 1 John v. 3, 'His commandments are not grievous.' He prescribeth and commandeth nothing but for our good: Deut. vi. 24, 'And the Lord commandeth us to do all the statutes, to fear the Lord our

God for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.' That he may with honour perform and make good all that he hath promised: Gen. xviii 19, '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.' The obstructions removed, and grace flows out freely.

[2.] Trials sent by him are not above measure: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to men; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it;' Isa. xxvii. 8, 'In measure when it shooteth forth wilt thou debate with it: he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.' He dealeth with much discretion and moderation, not according to the greatness of his power or the heinousness of their sin, but observeth our strength, what we are able to bear.

[3.] His punishments are not above deservings: Ezra ix. 13, 'Seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve;' Job xi. 6, 'Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.'

[4.] He is not hard to be pleased, nor inexorable upon every failing: Mal. iii. 17, 'And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.' Many think God watch eth occasions to destroy them, or at least to molest and trouble them. No; he passeth by many weaknesses, or else what would become of the best of his children? pardoneth many sins, where the heart is sincere: 2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19, 'The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the preparation of the sanctuary.'

4. If he doth not give them the good things of this world, he giveth them better in lieu of them. While they are here in this world they have those things not only that are good, but make them good, which cannot be said of all the things of this world; they may easily make us worse, but they cannot make us better. He giveth them such things as tend to the enjoyment of the chiefest good, which is himself. As he is a good God, he pardoneth their sins: Ps. xxv. 7, 'Remember not the sins of my youth, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord;' that is one of the effects of his goodness to them. He directs them in the way of life: Ps. xxv. 8, 'Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in the way.' He beginneth, carrieth on, and completeth their salvation: 2 Thes. i. 11, 'Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of his calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.' Thus he giveth the best things, though he deny some common things, which are no arguments of his special favour; and it is dangerous to have our eyes fastened upon other wants when we have these things, and to repine against God, who hath dealt graciously with us in the higher expressions of his love.

5. The evil things of this world, which are not good in themselves, he turneth to good: Rom. viii. 28, ‘All things shall work together for good to them that love God.’ He is able to bring light out of darkness, or give light in darkness, or turn darkness into light; to give inward joy and comfort under all calamities, to support and sustain under all heavy pressures, and to deliver out of all distresses.

6. He doth give them so much of the good things of the world as is convenient for them: Ps. xxxiv. 9, ‘Oh, fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him;’ Ps. lxxxiv. 11, ‘The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk up rightly.’ He giveth protection when it is necessary: Nahum i. 7, ‘The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth those that trust in him:’ Ezra vi. 22, ‘The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him.’ He hath a great inclination to diffuse his benefits.

7. His doing good is chiefly in the world to come: John xii. 26, ‘If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.’ Here he is with them in troubles, there they shall be with him in glory; here he can put marks of favour upon them, and distinguish between those that serve him and those that serve him not: Mal. iii. 17, ‘They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him:’ there he will manifest his favour in the face of all the world.

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Use 2. To persuade you to become the servants of God: you will have a good master if you be what you profess to be. Every Christian should say, as Paul did, Acts xxvii. 23, ‘The God whose I am, and whom I serve.’ He is God’s, and serveth God. (1.) He is God’s by creation, for he made him out of nothing: Ps. c. 3, ‘Know ye that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture;’ Col. i. 16, ‘All things were created by him and for him.’ By redemption; 1 Cor. vi. 20, ‘Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which is God’s.’ By covenant; Isa. xliv. 5, ‘One shall say, I am the Lord’s, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob, and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel;’ Ezek. xvi. 8, ‘I sware unto thee, and entered into covenant with thee, saith the Lord, and thou becamest mine;’ and so voluntarily he is God’s. Wicked men are God’s in right, but against their wills; the godly are willingly God’s. A man will never be hearty in his obedience and subjection till he look upon himself as God’s. See an instance in the wicked, whose ungodliness and rebellion against God cometh from looking upon themselves as their own: Ps. xii. 4, ‘Who have said, With our tongues will we prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?’ Their time their own, wealth their own, interest their own, bodies their own, souls their own, and therefore think they may employ all these things as they please. On the other side, take an instance of self-denial. Why so careful to serve and glorify God? Rom. xiv. 8, ‘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;' they have given up themselves to be employed at his command. (2.) Him they serve. How do they serve him? (1st.) They must serve God with the spirit as well as the body: Rom. i. 9, 'God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son.' So Phil. iii. 3, 'We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit:' Rom. xii. 11, 'Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord:' Rom. vii. 6, 'That we should serve in newness of spirit.' When the heart is renewed, disposed, and fitted for his fear and service, there is an honest purpose and endeavour to serve him. (2d.) You must serve him faithfully, devoting yourselves to do his will, and to seek his glory. Your intention, trade, and study must be to honour God and please him, that if it be asked for whom are you at work? for whom speaking or spending your time? whose business are you doing? you may answer, All is for God. If the pleasing of the flesh be their work or scope, they are said to serve their own bellies: Rom. xvi. 18. 'They that are such serve not the Lord Jesus, but their own belly.' (3d.) Cheerfully; having so good a master, let us take pleasure in our work. Here is all good—good master, good work, good wages. Certainly the more good any man findeth God to be, and the more good he himself hath received, the more good he ought to be: the goodness of God should melt us and awe us. There are two questions every one of you should put to yourselves, What hath God done for you? and, What have you done for God? When you thus serve God, you may plead it to God, as David, Ps. cxvi. 16, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant.' You may expect relief, and protection, and maintenance. Servants have their dole and portion from their masters' hands: Ps. cxxiii. 2, 'As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us.' He that doth God's will shall have his protection and blessing; you have a sanctified interest in all that falleth to your share: 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23, 'Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' Lastly, God will now and then visibly put some marks of distinction on them: Mal. iii. 18, 'Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.' For a while their glory may be clouded, they may be hardly dealt with in the world, but God hath his times of presenting all things in their own colours; but the chief time of manifestation is hereafter; when the servants of Christ come to receive their full reward, then they find him to be a good master indeed: John xii. 26, 'If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.'

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Doct. 2. That the good which God hath done for us should be thankfully acknowledged. We should not be always craving, always complaining; there should be a mixture of thanksgiving: Col. iv. 6, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;' together with the expression of our wants and desires, there must be thanksgiving for favours already received.

1. There is a time for all things, for confessing sin, for begging mercy, for thankful acknowledgments; though in every address to God there should be somewhat of all these, yet at certain seasons one is predominant: in a time when God is offended, confession of sin; in a time of great wants and straits, prayer; in a time of great receivings, thanks. The times that pass over us

bring upon us many changes; every change of dispensation must be sanctified by a suitable duty. As no condition is so bad but a good man can find an occasion of praising God and trusting in him, so no condition so good but matter of humbling and self-abasing will arise; yet there are special occasions that require the one or the other. *Opus diei in die suo.* James v. 13, 'Is any among you afflicted? let him pray: is any merry? let him sing psalms;' Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.'

2. It is a disingenuous spirit to ask mercy for supplying our wants or delivering us from troubles, and not acknowledge mercy when that supply or deliverance is received. Prayer is a work of necessity, but praise of mere duty. Self-love will put us upon prayer, but the love of God upon praise and thanksgiving; we pray because we need God, we praise because we love God, and have a sense of his goodness to us: Luke xvii. 15, 'One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.' Most turn back upon the mercy-seat, do not give glory to God when their turn is served.

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3. It is for the glory and honour of God that his servants should speak good of his name. When they are always complaining, they bring an ill report upon the ways of God, like the spies that went to view the promised land; but it is a great invitation to others when we can tell them how good God hath been to us: Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' This doth draw in others to come and take share with us.

4. It is for our profit; the more thankful for mercies, the more they are increased upon us; as vapours return in showers, the sea putteth out of her fulness into the rivers, and they again refund into the sea the water received thence: Ps. lxvii. 5, 6, 'Let the people praise thee, O Lord; then shall the earth bring forth her increase.' When the springs are low, we pour in a little water into the pump, not to enrich the fountain, but to bring up more for ourselves. It is not only true of outward increase, but spiritual also: Col. ii. 7, 'Be ye rooted in the faith, and abound therein with thanksgiving.' If we give thanks for so much grace as we have already received, it is the way to increase our store; we do no more thrive in victory over corruption, or the increase of divers graces, because we do no more give thanks.

5. It prevents many sins. I shall name two:—

[1.] Hardness of heart. When we are not thankful for blessings, they prove an occasion to the flesh, and so our table is made a snare, Ps. lxix. 22, and our welfare a trap. Men go on stupidly receiving blessings, but do not acknowledge the donor; but when we own God upon all occasions, the creature is sanctified, and the heart kept humble: 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5, '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;' an acknowledgment from whom it cometh.

[2.] It suppresseth murmuring, and that fretting, quarrelling, impatient, and distrustful humour which often showeth itself against God, even sometimes in our prayers and supplications. Nothing conduceth more to quiet our hearts in a dependence upon God for the future, and to allay our distrusts, discontents, and unquiet thoughts, than a holy exercise of thanksgiving: Phil. iv. 6, 'Be careful for no thing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.' Bless him for favours already received, and you will leave the burden of your care upon him for the future. God is where he was at first, and what he hath done he can do still.

Use. The use is, to press us to the serious and frequent discharge of this duty. It is a duty very necessary, very profitable, and very delightful; but usually we are backward, are not as careful to render thanks for the enjoyment of blessings as we are earnest and importunate in the want of them. It cometh to pass partly by the greediness of our desires, as a dog that swalloweth up every bit that is cast to him, and still looketh for more. *Vidisti aliquando canem*, saith Seneca, *missa a domino frusta panis aut carnis aperto ore captantem, et quicquid excipit. protinus integrum devorat, et semper ad spem futuri hiat.* This is an emblem of us; we swallow whatever the 'bounty of God throws forth without thanks, and still we look for more, as if all the former mercies were nothing; therefore are warm in petitions, but cold, raw, and infrequent in gratulations. Partly when we have mercies, we know not their value by the enjoyment as much as by the want. Ὄφθαλμοί τι ἄγαν λαμπρὸν οὐχ ὁρῶσι, saith Basil—a thing too near the eye cannot be seen, it darkeneth us with its splendour. God must set things at a distance to make us value them. Therefore we are more prone to complain than to give thanks. Partly from self-love; when our turn is served, we neglect God; as the raven returned to Noah no more, when there was floating carrion for it to feed upon, Gen. viii. 7. Wants try us more than blessings: Hosea v. 15, 'In their affliction they will seek me early.' Our interest swayeth us more than our duty. Partly from a dark legal spirit, which will not own grace when it is near us, when Christians look altogether in the glass of the law, to exclude the comfort of the gospel f and to keep themselves under the rack of perplexing fears.

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To remedy this—

1. Let us acknowledge God in all we do enjoy: Hosea ii. 8, 'She did not consider that I gave her corn, and oil, and flax.' We are unthankful to God and man, but more to God. Comforts that come from an invisible hand, we look upon them as things that fall out of course, and so do not praise the giver; therefore let us awaken our hearts to the remembrance of God. Whosoever be the next hand, it is by his providence; and there is reason he should be praised and owned. It is not he that brings the present, but he that sendeth it, that deserveth our thanks. Beasts will own their benefactor: Isa. i. 3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;' and if God be our benefactor, he must be owned and loved. If a man give us but a small sum, or a parcel of land, how do we court him or observe him! Less reason why God should look upon us, who is so high. A small remembrance from a great prince, no way obliged, who no way needeth me, to whom I can

be no way profitable, is much valued; and will not I acknowledge God in his gifts? When you were in distress you acknowledged, he alone could send you help, and had high thoughts of the mercy; then what promises did you make? The mercy is the same now that it was then, therefore you should have the same apprehensions of it.

2. Let us not give thanks by the heap, but distinctly; acknowledge God's mercies in all cases. Particulars are most affective: let us come to an account for God, and recollect the passages of our lives, what he hath done for body and soul: Ps. cxxxix. 17, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!' What he hath done for us before time, in time, and provided for us when time shall be no more; the beginning of this treaty with us, the progress of his work, the many failings we were guilty of, his patience in bearing with us, his goodness in hearing us, his giving, forgiving, keeping us from dangers, in dangers, and deliverances out of dangers. What supplies and supports we have had, what visits of love, warnings., awakenings of heart!

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3. Let us trace the benefits we enjoy to the fountain of them, the love of God; then we will say, Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'I will praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and truth.' This is not only to drink of the stream, but of the fountain; there the water is sweetest; when we see all this coming from the special love of God to our souls. Otherwise God may give in anger: Hosea xiii. 11, 'I gave them a king in mine anger;' as he gave the Israelites meat for their lusts: Isa. xxxviii. 17, 'Thou hast loved me from the grave;' this commendeth all experiences, maketh us love God again.

4. Compare yourselves with others your betters, who would be glad of your leavings,—their nature, disposition, endowments better than yours, yet receive less from God. He hath not dealt so with any nation. Whence is all this to me? John xiv. 22, 'Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?' Many would be glad of our relics.

5. Consider your unworthiness: Gen. xxxii. 10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant;' 2 Sam. vii. 18, 'Who am I, O Lord, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?' Pride is the cause of discontent. Where all is received freely, there is no cause of discontent: much of giving thanks if we have anything. When we look to desert, we may wonder more at what we have than what we want: if afflicted, destitute, kept low and bare, it is a wonder we are not in hell. All this is spoken because men are not thankful, We are eager till we have blessings, but when we have them, then barren in praises, unfruitful in obedience: like little children, forward to beg favours, but careless to acknowledge what they have received.

Doct. 3. That in our thankful acknowledgments we should take notice of God's truth, as well as his benignity and goodness. David owned the kindness as coming according to his word. So do the servants of God observe his accomplishing promises: Josh, xxiii. 14, 'And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one

thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all hath come to pass unto you, not one thing hath failed thereof.' So Solomon: 1 Kings viii. 56, 'Blessed be God that giveth rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised; there hath not failed one word of all his good promise which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.' Thus Joshua and Solomon observe how his word was made good to a tittle, and in the rigour of the letter; he hath not left undone anything, but accomplished all to the full. A great deal of benefit will come by it:—

1. For yourselves.

[1.] Your own faith will be confirmed by it, when you see that God is as good as his word, and bestoweth upon us the utmost that any promise of his giveth us to hope for: it is *dictum factum* with God; he is no more liberal in word than in deed. Look, as it confirmeth our faith in the truth of the threatenings, when we are punished as our congregation hath heard, Hosea vii. 12,—they that would not believe their danger are made to feel it,—so our faith in the promise. God showeth what he will be to his servants, and after a little waiting they find it to be so. Wait but a little while, and you shall find the effect of the promises: Ps. lvi. 8, 'In God I will praise his word, in the Lord I will praise his word:' that is, I have great cause to take notice of the promise; to a believer it is as good as performance: so Ps. xix. 9, 'The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.' Former experience begets confidence for the time to come: the Lord doth not deceive us with vain words. There is an effect in them; I shall find it; what God saith he doth.

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[2.] Your comfort is increased; receiving things in a way of promise sweeteneth a blessing. It is good to see whence things come to us, from the bounty of common providence, or from the promises of the covenant. There is a providential right and a covenant right. Devils hold their beings by a providential right, but the saints their blessings by covenant. The promise is made to God's servants, and the mercy conveyed by the promise is sanctified: 1 Cor. iii. 23, 'All are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's;' 1 Tim. iv. 3, they are to be 'received with thanksgiving of them that believe and know the truth.' Believers are called 'heirs of promise,' Some blessings the very nature of them showeth whence they come; but in others, as the deliverances and comforts of this life, the tenure of them is more comfortable than the mercies themselves; to have them 'not only from God's hand but heart. Wicked men have them as their portion, you as helps to your better portion: *heirs of promise* is an honourable title and relation. Such blessings are from love, and for our good.

2. As to others, you will invite, encourage, and strengthen them in believing. You are witnesses of his fidelity: Ps. xviii. 30, 'As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried.' I can assure you I have found more than letters and syllables in a promise, it is a tried word; I can tell you what God hath done for my soul.

Use. Let us look to the accomplishment of these promises, and trust God the more for the future. Make much of promises: Heb. xi. 13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.' They are sure declarations of the purposes of God. God's purposes are immutable, but promises declared lay an obligation upon him to keep them. Rejoice in them till performance cometh. Take heed of setting sense against them: Rom. iv. 18-21, 'Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be: and being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.' Naturally men are all for having before them. Take heed of haste: Ps. cxvi. 11, 'I said in my haste, All men are liars;' Ps. xxxi. 22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes.'

SERMON LXXIV.

Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.—VER. 66.

THE man of God had acknowledged that God had done good for him; now he beggeth the continuance of his goodness. God, that hath showed mercy, will show mercy. His treasure is not spent by giving, nor hath he the less for communicating to the creature. Man will say, I have given you already, why do you trouble me any more? But God upbraideth no man; the more frequent our suits are for grace, the more welcome we are: 'Thou hast done good for thy servant:' and now again, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.

In the words observe—

1. The blessing asked, *Teach me good judgment and knowledge*.

2. The reason urged, *for I have believed thy commandments*.

I begin with the prayer or blessing asked, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge.' Let us consider a little the different translations of this clause. The Septuagint hath three words χρηστότητα, παιδεῖαν, καὶ γνῶσιν, goodness, discipline, and knowledge; others, *bonitatem gustus et scientiae doce me*, teach me goodness of taste and knowledge; Ainsworth, Vatablus, *bonitatem sensus*, learn me goodness of reason and knowledge. In the original Hebrew **טוב טעם**, the Hebrew word signifieth taste or savour, so it is translated Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'Oh taste and see that the Lord is good.' The word also signifieth behaviour, as Ps. xxxiv. title, 'A Psalm of David when he changed his

behaviour before Abimelech.' For a man is tasted by his carriage, and some think it may mean goodness of inclination or manners. I think we fitly translate it judgment, it being coupled with a word that signifieth knowledge—taste, by a metaphor from the bodily sense, being applied to the mind; as meats are discerned by the taste, so things by the judgment; and so that which David beggeth here is a good or exact judgment, or the faculty of judging well.

Doct. That a judicious sound mind is a great blessing, and should earnestly be sought of God by all that would please him.

The man of God renewing this request so often, and his calling it here good judgment and knowledge, will warrant this observation, and sufficiently showeth how good it is to have the mind illuminated and endowed with the true knowledge of things. In handling this point, I shall show—

1. What is the use of a sound mind.

2. Why this should be so often and earnestly asked.

First, What is the use of a sound mind? There is a threefold act of judgment:—

1. To distinguish.

2. To determine.

3. To direct and order.

1. To distinguish and judge rightly of things that differ, that we may not mistake error for truth, and evil for good. So the apostle maketh it the great work of judgment to discern between good and evil: Heb. v. 14, 'But strong meat belongeth to those that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and bad.' The things that are to be judged are true and false, right and wrong, necessary or indifferent, expedient or inexpedient, fit or unfit; for many things are lawful that are not expedient: 1 Cor. vi. 12, 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient,' as to time, place, persons. Well, then, judgment is a spirit of discerning truth from falsehood, good from evil, that we may approve what is good, and disallow the contrary. So the spiritual man judgeth all things, 1 Cor. ii. 15; that is, though he hath not an authoritative judgment, he hath a judgment of discretion; and if he did stir up this gift of discerning, he might more easily understand his duty, and how far he is concerned in point of conscience and in order to salvation. So 1 Cor. x. 15, 'I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say.' The spiritually wise, if they would awaken the gifts of grace received in regeneration by diligence and prayer and needfulness of soul, might sooner come to a resolution of their doubts than they usually do. As bodily taste doth discern things savoury from unsavoury, profitable from noxious, so is judgment given us that we may distinguish between the poisons which the world offereth in a golden cup to impure souls, and that wholesome spiritual milk which we suck out of the breasts of scripture, between savoury food and hurtful diet, how neatly soever cooked. The soul's taste is more necessary

than the body's, as the soul is the better part, and as our danger is greater, and errors there cost us dearer.

2. To determine and resolve, *practicum dictamen*. The taste of the soul is for God, that bindeth our duty upon us, when there is a decree issued forth in the soul, that after we know our duty there may be a resolvedness of mind never to swerve from it. First the distinguishing work proceedeth; there is a clear and distinct approbation of God; then the determining followeth; this is the πρόθεσις καρδίας, Acts xi. 23, 'The purpose of heart;' 2 Tim. iii. 10, 'Thou hast known fully my doctrine, manner of life,' πρόθεσιν, purpose. The form of this decree and resolution you have in Ps. lxxiii. 28, 'But it is good for me to draw near to God.' This in the soul hath the authority of a principle. He that meaneth to be a thorough Christian must set the bent and bias and purpose of his heart strongly upon it: Ps. xxxix. 1, 'I said, I will take heed to my ways.' So Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said, I will confess mine iniquities.' These purposes have a powerful command upon the whole soul, to set it a-working whatever they purpose with this strong decree, how backward soever the heart be otherwise; they will excite and quicken us, and admit of no contradiction. It is our judgments lead us and guide and poise us. A man may have knowledge and learning, and play the fool if his judgment be not biassed: a man never taketh any course but his judgment telleth him it is best, and best for him all things considered. It is not men's knowledge leadeth them, but their judgments say to their wills, This is not for me; the other conduceth most to my profit, honour, or delight: but when the judgment is in some measure set towards God, then the man is for God.

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3. To direct as well as to decree; so good judgment and knowledge serveth for the right guiding of ourselves and all our affairs. Many are wise in generals that err in particulars, and have a knowledge of principles, but their affairs are under no conduct. Particulars are nearer to practice, and very learned men are deceived in particulars: Rom. ii. 20-22, 'An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law: thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?' Therefore, besides the general rule, the knowledge of God's will, it is necessary to have the gift of discretion, when particulars are clothed with circumstances. There is an infinite variety of circumstances which require a deal of prudence to determine them. A man may easily discourse on general truths concerning God, ourselves, the state of the church, the privileges of Christianity; but to direct them to particular cases, to govern our own hearts, and order our own ways, that is a harder thing: Hosea xiv. 9, 'Whoso is wise and prudent,' &c.; Prov. viii. 12, 'I, wisdom, dwell with prudence.' To direct is harder than to determine or distinguish. It is easier to distinguish of good and evil in the general, to lay down conclusions upon the evidence of the goodness of the ways of God; but to reduce our knowledge to practice in all cases, that is the great work of judgment, that we may know what becometh the time, the place, the company where we are, and may have that ordering of our conversation aright, Ps. l. 23; to

know how to carry ourselves in all relations, business, civil, sacred, light, serious; that we neither offend in excess nor defect; that we judge what is due to the Creator, and what is to be allowed to the creature; what is good, what is better, what is best of all; that we know how to pay reverence to superiors, how most profitably to converse with equals, what compassion to inferiors, how to do good to them; how to behave our selves as husbands, wives, fathers, children. Wisdom maketh us profitable in our relations: 1 Peter iii. 7, 'Let husbands dwell with wives according to knowledge.' There is much prudence and wisdom required to know how to converse profitably and Christianly with all that we have to do with. In short, how to love our friends in God, and our enemies for God; how to converse secretly with God, and to walk openly before men; how to cherish the flesh that it may not be unserviceable, yet how to mortify it that it may not wax wanton against the spirit; how to do all things in the fear of God, in meats, drinks, apparel, recreations; when and how to pray, what time for our callings, what for worship; when to speak, when to hold our peace; when to praise, and when to reprove; how to give, and how to take; when to scatter, when to keep back or withhold; and to order all things aright requireth a sound judgment, that we carry ourselves with that gravity and seriousness, that exactness and tenderness, that we may keep up the majesty of religion, and all the world may know that he is wise by whose counsel we are guided. But alas! where this sound judgment an4 discretion is wanting, we shall soon offend and transgress the laws of piety, charity, justice, sobriety. Piety and godliness will not be orderly; we shall either be guilty of a profane neglect of that course of duty that is necessary to keep in the life of grace, or turn religion into a sour superstition and rigorous course of observances. Charity will not be orderly; we shall give to wastefulness, or withhold more than is meet, to the scandal or prejudice of the world towards religion. Not perform justice; we shall govern to God's dishonour, obey to his wrong, punish with too much severity, or forbear with too much lenity; our reproofs will be reproaches, our praises flattery. Sobriety will not be orderly; we shall deny ourselves our necessary comforts, or use them as an occasion to the flesh; either afflict the body and make ourselves unserviceable, or wrong the soul and burden and oppress it with vain delights. It short, even the higher acts of religion will degenerate; our fear will be turned into desperation, or our hope into presumption; our faith will be a light credulity, or our search after truth will turn into a flat scepticism or irresolution; our patience will be stupidness, or our constancy obstinacy; we shall either slight the hand of God, or faint under it; so that there is need of good judgment and knowledge to guide us in all our ways.

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Secondly, Why this is so earnestly to be sought of God. The thing is evident from what is said already. But further—

1. Because this is a great defect in most Christians, who have many times good affections, but no prudence to guide and order them; they are indeed all affection, but no judgment; have a zeal, but without knowledge, Rom. x. 3. Zeal should be like fire, which is not only *fervidus*, but *lucidus*, hot, but bright. A blind horse may be full of mettle, but he is ever and anon stumbling. Oh! then, should we not earnestly seek of God good knowledge and judgment? The Spirit of God knoweth what is best for us. In the scriptures he hath indited prayers: Phil. i. 9, 'This I pray, that your love

may abound more and more, in knowledge, and in all judgment;' that our love and zeal should have a proportionable measure of knowledge and judgment going along with it; and Col. i. 9, 'That ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;' and again, Col. iii. 16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom.' These places show that it is not enough to have warm affections, but we must have a clear and a sound mind.

2. The mischief which ariseth from this defect is so great to themselves, to others, and the church of God.

[1.] To themselves.

(1.) Without the distinguishing or discerning act of judgment, how apt are we to be misled and deceived! They that cannot distinguish meats will soon eat what is unwholesome; so, if we have not a judgment to approve things that are excellent, and disapprove the contrary, our fancies will deceive us, for they are taken with every slight appearance; as Eve was deceived by the fruit because it was fair to see to, Gen. iii. 6, with 2 Cor. xi. 3, 'For I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.' Our affections will deceive us, for they judge by interest and profit, not duty and conscience. The affections are easily bribed by those bastard goods of pleasure, honour, and profit: 2 Cor. iv. 4, 'In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.' The consent of the world will deceive us, for they may conspire in error and, rebellion against God, and are usually the opposite party against God: Rom. xii. 2, 'And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.' Good men may deceive us; true and faithful ministers may err both in doctrine and manners, as the old prophet seduced the young one to his own destruction: 1 Kings xiii. 18, 'He paid unto him, I am a prophet also, and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thy house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him.' In what a woful plight, then, are Christians if they have not a judgment, and a test to taste[4] doctrines and try things, as the mouth tasteth meats! How easily shall we take good for evil and evil for good, condemning that which God approveth, and approving that which God condemneth!

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(2.) Without the determining act of judgment, how fickle and irresolute shall we be, either in the profession or in the practice of godliness. Many men's religion lasts but for a pang; it cometh upon them now and then, it is not their constant frame and constitution. For want of this purpose and resolute peremptory decree for the profession of godliness, there is an uncertainty, levity, and wavering in religion: men take up opinions lightly, and leave them as lightly again. Light chaff is carried about with every wind: Eph. iv. 14, '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,

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4 Qu. 'a taste to test'?—ED.

whereby they lie in wait to deceive.' If we receive the truth upon the credit of men, we may be led off again, and we shall be ready to stagger when persecution cometh, especially if we see those men from whom we have learned the truth fall away; if we have not ἴδιον στήριγμον, a steadfastness of our own: 2 Peter iii. 17, 'Beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.' Men should have a steadfastness proper to themselves, not stand by the steadfastness of another, the examples of others, the countenance or applause of the world, or the opinion of good men; but convincing reason, by which their minds may be enlightened, and their judgments set for God. So for practice; we are off and on, unstable in all our ways, Why? Because we content ourselves with some good motions before we have brought our hearts to this conclusion, to choose God for our portion, and to cleave to him. All in haste they will be religious, but sudden imperfect motions may be easily laid aside, and given over by contrary persuasions; but when our hearts are fixed upon these holy purposes, then all contrary solicitations and oppositions will not break us or divert us. Satan hath small hopes to seduce or mislead a resolved Christian; loose and unengaged men lie open to him, and are ready to be entertained and employed by any new master.

(3.) Without the directing act of judgment, how easily shall we miscarry, and make religion a burden to ourselves, or else a scorn to the world! Want of judgment causeth different effects, not only in divers, but in the same person: sometimes a superstitious scrupulousness, at other times a profane negligence; sometimes making conscience of all things, then of nothing: as the one weareth off, the other succeedeth: as the devil cast the lunatic in the Gospel sometimes into the water, sometimes into the fire; either fearful of sin in everything they do, or bold to run into all sin without fear; whereas a truth judiciously understood would prevent either extreme. So again for want of judgment; sometimes men are transported by a fiery and indiscreet zeal, at other times settle into a cold indifferency, and all things come alike to them. The way to prevent both is to resolve upon evidence: 1 Thes. v. 21, 'Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.' Certainly the clearer our judgment is the more steadfast is our faith, the more vehement our love, the more sound our joy, the more constant our hope, the more calm our patience, the more earnest our pursuit of true happiness; otherwise we shall never carry it evenly between vain presumption and feigned reverence, between legal fear and rash hopes, uncomely dejections and a loose disregard of God. Wisdom is the faculty by which we apply that knowledge we have unto the end why we should have it.

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[2.] It makes us troublesome to others, by preposterous carriage, rash censuring, needless intermeddling: Phil. i. 9, 10, '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 may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ:' our corruptions will otherwise break forth to the offence of others. An injudicious Christian increaseth the reproaches of the world, as if the servants of God were the troublers of Israel, by unseasonable reproofs, mistiming of duties, meddling with that which no ways appertaineth to him. All lawful things are not fit at all times, nor in all places, nor

to be done by all persons. Much folly, indiscretion and rashness remaineth in the best, whereby they dishonour God, and bring religion into contempt.

[3.] They trouble the church of God; it hath suffered not only from the persecutions of enemies, but from the folly, rashness, and indiscretion of its friends. There are different degrees of light, some babes, some young men, some grown persons in Christ Jesus: 1 John ii. 13, 'I write unto you fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning; I write unto you young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one; I write unto you little children, because ye have known the Father.' Now, children have their fancies, and young men their passions, and old men their humours. When the one would prescribe to the other, they hurry all things into confusion: the injudicious generally seek to carry it, and would govern the world. In young ones, there are great affections but little knowledge and judgment; they have a great zeal, but little prudence to moderate it; and when this is joined with perverseness and contumacy, it is not easy to be said how much evil it bringeth to the church of God; as a fiery horse routeth the troop, and bringeth disorder into the army. The devil loveth to draw things into extremes, to set gift against gift, prudence against zeal, the youth of Christianity against age, and so to confound all things, and so to subvert the kingdom of Christ by that comely vanity which is the beauty of it. In the general, all overdoing in religion is undoing.

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Use. The use is, let all this press us to seek this benefit of good judgment and knowledge. To this end—

1. Consider the value and necessity of it. Without it we cannot regularly comfort ourselves in the promises, but it will breed a carelessness and neglect of our duty; nor fulfil the commandments of God, but it will breed in us a self-confidence and disvaluing of the grace of God; nor reflect upon our sins, but we shall be swallowed up of immoderate sorrow; nor suffer for the truth, but we shall run into indiscreet reasoning and oppositions that will trouble all, and, it may be, subvert the interest of religion in the world; or else grow into a loose uncertainty, leaping from one opinion to another. This uncertainty cometh not so much, or not altogether, from vile affection, as want of information in religion, professing without light and evidence, having more of affection than principles. There is a twofold injudiciousness—total or partial. (1.) Total, when men are given up εἰς νοῦν ἀδόκιμον, into a reprobate sense, or an injudicious mind, Rom. i. 28: when utterly incapable of heavenly doctrine, or discerning the things of the Spirit. This is one of God's heaviest judgments. That is not the case of any of you, I hope. (2.) Partial, and that is in us all. Alas! we are ignorant of many things which we should know; at least, we have not that discretion and prudence which is necessary for directing our faith, tempering our zeal, ordering and regulating our practice, which is necessary to avoid evil, to do good, or to do good well. Or, if we have light, we have no sense or taste. Many never felt the bitterness of sin to purpose, of sweetness of righteousness; therefore we have need to cry to God, Lord, give me good taste and knowledge.

2. If you would have it, you must ask it of God. We can have no sound knowledge till God teach it us. By nature we are all blind, ignorant, vain; after grace received, though our ignorance be helped, it is not altogether cured; you must still fetch it from heaven by strong hand. Without his Spirit we cannot discern spiritual things: 1 Cor. ii. 14, '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;' that is, chiefly, the main things of the gospel, and universally all things, so far as conscience and obedience to God is concerned in them. It is the unction must teach us all things: 1 John ii. 20, 'But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things;' the things of God must be seen in the light of his own Spirit. The Spirit of God first giveth us the desire of these things, and then satisfieth us with them. It is the Spirit of God purifieth this desire, that it may be holy, as having a holy end, that we may avoid whatever is displeasing to God, and do whatever is pleasing in his sight; and that is the ready way to come to knowledge and sound judgment: John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth;' John iii. 21, 'He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.' Men that have a mind to maintain an opinion, or suffer an evil practice, are prejudiced and biassed by the idol that is in their hearts, and so do not see what may be seen, and what they seem to search after. Therefore David urgeth this as an argument in the latter end of the text, 'I have believed thy commandments;' that is to say, Lord, I know this word is thine, and I am willing to practise all that thou requirest. The great thing that is to be aimed at about knowledge is, not only that we may know, and be able to jangle about questions, or that we may be known and esteemed for our knowledge, but that we may practise and walk circumspectly, and in evil days and times know what the will of the Lord is concerning us; to desire knowledge as those that know the weight and consequence of these things, as I shall show more fully hereafter. Those that would have good judgment and knowledge must be willing to understand their duty, and practise all that God requireth, that they may neither do things rashly, and without knowledge and deliberation, for then they are not good, how good soever they be in themselves: Prov. xix. 2, 'Also, that the soul be without knowledge is not good:' or doubtingly, after deliberation; for he that doubteth is in part condemned in his own mind: Rom. xiv. 23, 'And he that doubteth is damned if he eat.' We must have a clear warrant from God, or else all is naught, and will tend to evil. Then it is the Spirit of God satisfieth these desires, when we earnestly desire of him to be informed in the true and perfect way: John vi. 45, 'They shall be all taught of God.' He hath suited promises to the pure and earnest desire of knowledge. Then it is the Lord who sendeth means and blesseth means; as he sent Peter to Cornelius, Acts x., and Philip to the eunuch, Acts viii. All is at his disposal, and he will not fail the waiting soul; he hath made Christ to be wisdom for this very end and purpose, that he might guide us continually: 1 Cor. i. 30, 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.'

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3. You must seek it in the word; that maketh us wise to salvation, and by the continual study of it we obtain wisdom and discretion; there we have the best and safest counsel: 'It maketh wise

the simple,' Ps. xix. 7. No case can be put, so far as it concerneth conscience, but there you shall have satisfaction: Col. iii. 16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom.' You must not content yourselves with a cursory reading, but mark the end and scope of it, that you may be made completely wise, by frequent reading, hearing, meditation upon it, and conferring about it. There you find all things necessary to be believed and practised, therefore you must hear it with application, read it with meditation. (1.) Hear it with application. The Lord blesseth us in the use of instituted means; both light and flame are kept in by the breath of preaching. Where visions fail, the people perish, men grow brutish and wild. It is a dispute which is the sense of learning, the ear or the eye. By the eye we see things, but by reason of innate ignorance we must be taught how to judge of them: James i. 19, 'Wherefore, my brethren, let every man be swift to hear;' take all occasions. And we must still apply what we hear. *Nunquid ego talis?* Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we then say to these things?' Job v. 27, 'Lo, this we have searched, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good;' Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' Return upon thine own heart. (2.) Reading scripture is every man's work who hath a soul to be saved. Other writings, though good in their kind, will not leave such a lively impression upon the soul. All the moral sentences of Seneca and Plutarch do not come with such force upon the conscience as one saying of God's word. God's language hath a special energy; here must be your study and your delight: Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night;' 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.' These make you wise unto salvation. Your taste is not right when you relish and savour human writings, though never so good, more than the word of God. A draught of wine from the vessel is more fresh and lively; that conviction which doth immediately rise out of the word is more prevailing. We suspect the mixture of passion and private aims in the writings of others; but when conscience and the word are working together, we own it as coming from God himself. Besides, those that are studying, and reading, and meditating on the word have this sensible advantage, that they have promises, doctrines, examples of the word ready and familiar upon all occasions; others are weak and unsettled because they have not scriptures ready. In the whole work of grace you will find no weapon so effectual as the sword of the Spirit. Scriptures seasonably remembered and urged are a great relief to the soul. No diligence here can be too much. If you would not be unprofitable, sapless, indiscreet with others, weak and comfortless in yourselves, read the scriptures. We have *Sic scriptum est* against every temptation. Besides, you have the advantage to see with your own eyes the truth as it cometh immediately from God, before any art of man, or thoughts of their head pass upon it, and so can the better own God in what you find.

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4. Long use and exercise doth much increase judgment, especially as it is sanctified by the Spirit of God. You get a habit of discerning, fixing, directing, guiding your ways: διὰ τὴν ἕξιν τὰ αἰσθητήρια γεγυμνασμένα ἐχόντες, Heb. v. 14, 'Who by reason of use have their senses exercised

to discern good and evil.' As men of full age, by long use and exercise of the senses of seeing, smelling, tasting, have acquired a more perfect knowledge to discern what food is good and wholesome and what is unwholesome, so by much attention, studying, and meditation, men who have exercised the intellectual faculty to find out the scope and meaning of the word of God do attain a more discerning faculty, and understand better the truth of the word, and can judge what doctrine is true and what false, and more easily apprehend higher points when taught unto them; they discern and know the differences of things to be understood. God's blessing doth accompany use and frequent exercise, and make it effectual to this end; by degrees we come to a solidness.

5. Sense and experience doth much increase judgment. When smarted for our folly, tasted the sweetness of conversing with God in Christ: 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' *Optima demonstratio est a sensibus.* Col. i. 6, 'Which bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day you heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.' God is not taught by experience, to whose knowledge all things are present, and at all times, and before all times; but we are. God is fain to teach us by briars and thorns, as Gideon taught the men of Succoth.

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6. Avoid the enemies to it or hindrances of it. I shall name two:—

[1.] A passionate or wilful addictedness to any carnal things. Most men live by sense, will, and passion, whereby they enthral that wisdom which they have, and keep it in unrighteousness. *Perit omne judicium cum res transit in affectum*—truth is a prisoner to their sinful passions and affections, rejecting all thoughts of their future happiness. A man cannot be wise to salvation, and passionately addicted to any temporal interest.

[2.] Pride; that maketh us either rash or presumptuous, either not using a due consideration, or not humble enough to subject our minds to it. Besides we cast off God's assistance: 'The humble and meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way,' Ps. xxv. 9. Men that lean on their own understandings reject him: Prov. iii. 5, 6, '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.'

SERMON LXXV.

For I have believed thy commandments.—VER. 66.

THIS latter clause may be considered absolutely or relatively; in itself, or as it containeth a reason of the foregoing petition.

First, Absolutely. These words deserve a little consideration, because believing is here suited with an unusual object. Had it been, For I have believed thy promises, or, obeyed thy commandments,

the sense of the clause had been more obvious to every vulgar apprehension. To believe commandments sounds as harsh to a common ear as to see with the ear and hear with the eye. But for all this, the commandments are the object; and of them he saith not, I have obeyed, but I have believed. To take off the seeming asperity of the phrase, some interpreters conceive that *commandments* is put for the word in general; and so promises are included, yea, they think principally intended, those promises which encouraged him to hope for God's help in all necessary things, such as good judgment and knowledge are. But this interpretation would divert us from the weight and force of these significant words. Therefore—

1. Certainly there is a faith in the commandments, as well as in the promises, as I shall fully prove by and by.

2. The one is as necessary as the other; for as the promises are not esteemed, embraced, and improved, unless they are believed to be of God, so neither are the precepts; they do not sway the conscience as the other do, nor incline the affections, but as they are believed to be divine.

3. The faith of the one must be as lively as the other. As the promises are not believed with a lively faith unless they draw off the heart from carnal vanities to seek that happiness which they offer to us, so the precepts are not believed rightly unless we be fully resolved to acquiesce in them as the only rule to guide us in the obtaining that happiness, and to adhere to them and obey them. As the king's laws are not kept as soon as they are believed to be the king's laws, unless also upon the consideration of his authority and power we subject ourselves to them, so this believing noteth a ready alacrity to hear God's voice and obey it, and to govern our hearts and actions according to his counsel and direction in the word.

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Doct. That the commandments of God must be believed as well as his promises; or, The precepts of sanctity and holiness bind the conscience to obey God, as well as the promises bind us to trust in God.

1. What we must believe concerning the commandments.

2. The necessity of believing them if we would be happy.

3. The utility and profit.

1. What we must believe concerning the commandments.

[1.] That they have God for their author, that we may take our duty immediately out of his hand, that these commands are his commands. The expressions of his commanding and legislative will, whereby our duty is determined and bound upon us, that is a matter of faith, not a matter of sense. We were not present at the giving of the law as being past, but we ought to be affected with it as if we were present, or had heard the thunderings of Mount Sinai, or had them now delivered to us by oracle or immediate voice from heaven. God doth once for all give the world sensible and

sufficient satisfaction, and then he requireth faith. See Heb. ii. 2-4, 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience obtained a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?' The apostle compareth the first promulgation of the law and the first publication of the gospel. After ages did not hear the sounding of the dreadful trumpet, nor see the flaming smoking mountain, were not conscious to all those circumstances of terror and majesty with which the law was given; yet it was λόγος βέβαιος, a steadfast word. God owned it in his providence: the punishment of transgressors is proof of God's authorising the doctrine. So we were not present when the miracles by which the gospel law was confirmed were wrought; yet there is a constant evidence that these things were once done; and God still owneth it in his providence, therefore we must receive the gospel law as the sovereign will and pleasure of our lawgiver, as if we had seen him in person doing these wonders, heard him with our own ears. It is not only those that were present at Mount Sinai that were bound, but all their posterity. God giveth arguments of sense once for all. This belief is the more required of us as to precepts and commandments, because they are more evident by natural light: Rom. ii. 14, 15, 'For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts.' There is *veritas naturalis* and *veritas mystica*. Some objects of faith depend upon mere revelation, but the commands of the moral law are clearer than the doctrines of faith; they are of duties and things present, not of privileges to be enjoyed hereafter, such as the promises offer to us. Now, it is easier to be convinced of present duties than to be assured of some future things promised.

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[2.] That these commandments be received with that reverence that becometh the sovereign will and pleasure of so great a lord and law giver. It is the work of faith to acquaint us with the nature of God and his attributes, and work the sense of them into our hearts. The great governor of the world is invisible, and we do not see him that is invisible but by faith: Heb. xi. 27, 'By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.' It is ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων, 'the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. xi. 1. Temporal potentates are before your eyes, their majesty may be seen, and their terrors and rewards are matter of sense. That there is an infinite, eternal, and all-wise Spirit, who made all things, and therefore hath right to command and give laws to all things, reason will in part tell us; but faith doth more assure the soul of it, and impresseth the dread and awe of God upon our souls, as if we did see him with bodily eyes. By faith we believe his being: Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is.' His power, so as to oppose it to things visible and sensible: Rom. iv. 21, 'Being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.' That there is no standing out against him who with one beck of his will can ruin us everlastingly, and throw the transgressor of his laws into eternal fire: a frown of his face is enough to undo us; he is not a God to be neglected, or dallied

with, or provoked by the wilful breaking of his laws. He hath truly *potestatem vitae et necis*—the power of life and death: James iv. 12, 'There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.' These considerations are best enforced by faith, without which our notions of these things are weak and languid. You are to charge the heart with God's authority, as you will answer it to him another day, not to neglect or despise the duty you owe to such a God. No terror comparable to his frowns, no comforts comparable to his promises or the sense of his favour.

[3.] That these laws are holy, just, and good: Rom. vii. 12, 'Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.' This is necessary, because, in believing the commandments, not only assent is required, but also consent to them, as the fittest laws we could be governed by: Rom. vii. 16, 'If, then, I do that which I would not, I consent to the law that it is good.' Consent is a mixed act of the judgment and will: they are not only to be known as God's laws, but owned and embraced, not only see a truth, but a worth in them. The mandatory part of the word hath its own loveliness and invitation; as the promises of pardon and eternal life suit with the hunger and thirst of conscience, and the natural desires of happiness; so the holiness and righteousness of God's laws suit with the natural notions of good and evil that are in man's heart. These laws were written upon man's heart at his first creation, and though somewhat blurred, we know the better how to read a defaced writing when we get another copy or transcript to compare with it. Especially when the heart is renewed, when the Spirit hath wrought a suitableness, there must needs be a consenting and embracing: Heb. viii. 10, 'This is the covenant that 1 will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.' There is a ready willing heart to obey them and conform to them in the regenerate, therefore an assent is not enough, but a consent; this is that they would choose and prefer before liberty; they acquiesce and are satisfied in their rule as the best rule for them to live by. But let us see the three attributes, *holy, just*, and *good*. (1.) They are holy laws, fit for God to give and man to receive. When we are convinced of this, it is a great help to bridle contrary inclinations, and to carry us on cheerfully in our work. They are fit for God to give, they become such a being as God is: his laws carry the express print and stamp of his own nature upon them. We may know how agreeable they are to the nature of God by supposing the monstrousness of the contrary. If he had forbidden us all love, and fear, and trust in himself, all respect and thanks to our creator, or bidden us to worship false gods, or change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to a corruptible man, as birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things, or that we should blaspheme his name continually, or despise his glory shining forth in the work of his hands, and that we should be disobedient to our parents, and pollute ourselves as the beasts with promiscuous lusts, and fill the world with adulteries, robberies, and thefts, or slander and revile one another, and leave the boat to the stream, give over ourselves to our passions, discontents, and the unruly lusts of our corrupt hearts; these are conceits so monstrous that, if the beasts were capable of having such thoughts transfused into them, they would abhor them, and would infer such a manifest disproportion in the soul as it would in the body to walk with our hands and do our work with our feet And they are fit for man to receive if

he would preserve the rectitude of his nature, live as such an understanding creature, keep reason in dominion, and free from being a slave to the appetites of the body. To be just, holy, temperate, humble, meek, chaste, doth not only concern the glory of God and the safety of the world, but the liberty of the reasonable nature, that man may act as a creature that hath a mind to know things that differ, and to keep him from that filthiness and pollution which would be a stain to him, and infringe the glory of his being. There is no middle thing; either a man must be a saint or a beast, either conform himself to God's will, and look after the interests of his soul, or lose the excellency of his nature, and become as the beasts that perish; either the beast must govern the man, or the man ride upon the beast, which he doth when he taketh God's counsel. (2.) Just, because it referreth to all God's precepts. I take it here not strictly but largely, how just it is for God to command, and how reasonable it is that we should obey the supreme being. His will is the reason of all things; and who should give laws to the world but the universal sovereign who made all things out of nothing? Whatsoever you are, you receive it from the Lord; and therefore, whatsoever a reasonable creature can do, you owe it to him: you are in continual dependence upon him, for 'in him you live, and move, and have your being,' Acts xvii. 28. And be bath redeemed you, called you to life by Christ: 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20, 'What, know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.' You owe all your time, and strength, and service unto him, and therefore you should still be doing his will and abounding in his work. (3.) He enjoineth nothing but what is good: Deut. v. 29, 'Oh, that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever:' Deut. vi. 24, '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.' God hath tempered his sovereignty towards the reasonable creature, and ruleth us not with a rod of iron, but with a sceptre of love: 'He draweth us with the cords of a man,' Hosea xi. 4; that is, with reasons and arguments taken from our own happiness. Man being a rational and free agent, he would lead and quicken us to our duty by the consideration of our own benefit; and when he might say only, Thus shall ye do; I am the Lord; yet he is pleased to exhort and persuade us not to forsake our own mercies, or to turn back upon our own happiness, and to propound rewards that we may be encouraged to seek after him in that way of duty which he hath prescribed to us. The reward is ever lasting glory, with the mercies of this life in order to it: Heb. xi. 6, 'God is, and he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.'

[4.] How indispensably obedience to his commandments is required of us. As long as the heart is left loose and arbitrary, such is the unruliness and self-willedness of man's nature, Rom. viii. 7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' The carnalist will not be held to his duty, but leaves that which is honest for that which is pleasing, and is governed by his appetite rather than his reason; therefore faith hedgeth up his way, showeth him 'that without holiness it is impossible to see God,' Heb. xii. 14; that there is no coming

to the end unless we take the way; that there is no hope of exemption or excuse for the breaches of his law allowed but the plea of the gospel, which doth not evacuate but establish obedience to God's commands, requireth a renouncing of our former course, and a hearty resolution, 'to serve God in holiness and righteousness all our days,' Luke i. 74, 75. Our duty is the end of our deliverance. In the kingdom of grace we are not our own masters, or at liberty to do what we will. Christ came not only as a saviour, but as a lawgiver; he hath his laws to try our obedience: Heb. v. 9, 'And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.' He came not to lessen God's sovereignty or man's duty, but to put us into a greater capacity to serve God. He came to deliver us from the curse and indispensable rigours of the law upon every failing; not from our duty, nor that we might not serve God, but serve him without fear, with peace of conscience and joy of heart, and requireth such a degree of grace as is inconsistent with any predominant lust and affection.

[5.] That God loveth those that obey his law, and hateth those that despise it, without respect of persons: Acts x. 35, 'In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him;' Ps. v. 5, 'Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity:' Prov. xi. 20, 'They that are of a froward heart are an abomination to the Lord, but such as are upright in their way are his delight.' The more obedient, the more God loveth us; the less obedient, the less God loveth us. Therefore, unless we love what God loveth, and hate what God hateth, do his commands carefully, and avoid the contrary, we cannot be acceptable with him, for God would not make a law in vain, but order his providence accordingly.

S6.] That one day we shall be called to an account for our conformity inconformity to God's law. There are two parts of government—legislation and execution: the one belongeth to God as king, the other as judge. Laws are but a shadow, and the sanction a mockery, unless there shall be a day when those that are subject to them shall be called to an account and reckoning. His threatenings are not a vain scare crow, nor his promises a golden dream; therefore he will appoint a day when the truth of the one and the other shall be fully made good; and therefore faith enliveneth the sense of God's authority with the remembrance of this day, when he will judge the world in righteousness.

2. The necessity.

[1.] The precepts are a part of the divine revelation: the object of faith is the whole word of God, and every part of divinely inspired truth is worthy of all belief and reverence. The word worketh not unless it be received as the word of God: 1 Thes. ii. 13, 'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.' Now we cannot receive the word as the word of God unless we receive all. There are the same reasons to receive one as the other; therefore, if any part take good rooting, the whole is received. There may be a superficial affection to one part more than another; but if there be a

right faith, we receive all. It is the engrafted word that is effectual to the saving of our souls, James i. 21; if we would engraft the word, the precepts must stir up answerable affections as well as the promises. Every part must affect us, and stir up dispositions in us which that part is apt to produce. If the promises stir up joy and trust, the precepts must stir up love, fear, and obedience. The same word which calleth upon us to believe the free pardon of our sins, doth also call upon us to believe the commandments of God for the regulating and guiding of our hearts and ways.

[2.] It is such a part as hath a necessary connection with the promises, as without which they can do us no good; therefore, if we mean to be happy, we must regard both; the one is as necessary and fundamental to our happiness as the other. Our consent to God's covenant is required, not as if we were to debate and alter the terms at our plea sure, but that we may take it as God hath stated it, and bind our duty upon us by our consent to God's authority. We cannot prescribe conditions and laws of commerce between God and us, but only God alone. Man did not give the conditions, or treat about the making of them, what they should be, but is only bound to submit to what God was pleased to offer and prescribe. We are not left free to model and bring down the terms to our own liking, to take hold of them, not to appoint them: Isa. lvi. 4, 'For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and do the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant:' for though he condescendeth to treat with us, yet still he keepeth the place of a sovereign: and therefore, if we believe promises, and do not believe God's commandments, it is not God's covenant, but one of our own devising, when we take and leave, and part and mingle, and chop and change at our own pleasures. The covenant requireth a total, universal, unlimited resignation of ourselves to the will of God: 'I will be your God, you shall be my people.'

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[3.] The gratitude that resulteth necessarily from faith, or believing the promises, will put us upon this; it apprehendeth love, and leaveth the stamp of it upon the soul, and worketh by love, Gal. v. 6. Now, how are we to express our love to God? Not in a fellow-like familiarity, but dutiful subjection to his laws: 1 John v. 3, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous;' and John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me:' not by glavering respects, or a fond remembrance and esteem of his memory, Mat. vii. 11. If we live to God, not to the world, not to the flesh, if faith be lively, it will put us upon this: 2 Cor. v. 15, 'And that he died for 'all, that they that live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.'

[4.] Our trust in the promises is always commensurable to our fidelity in the commandments. Faith in the one is maintained by faithfulness in the other, and assurance of acceptance with God cannot be greater than our care of obedience. When love to the world and the flesh tempt us to omit any part of our duty, then do we weaken our confidence thereby, and sin will breed distrust if we be serious and mind our condition: 'The fruit of righteousness is peace:' 1 John iii. 21, 'Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God;' and Heb. vii. 2, 'Being by interpretation king of righteousness, and after that also king of Salem, which is king of peace:' and

Christ saith, Mat. xi. 29, ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.’ Confidence and comfort follow grace, as heat doth fire; and fears and doubts follow sin, as pain doth the pricking of a needle, or any sharp thing wherewith a man pierceth himself; therefore, when sensual objects oversway us, and take us off from obedience to the command, they will also make us doubt of the mercy of God, as well as transgress our duty. We cannot trust him when we have offended freely and without restraint; sin will breed shame and fear.

At present all sinners feel it not; yet hereafter that sin that now weakeneth the faith we have in the commandments, will in time weaken the faith we have in the promises. Every part of our trust in God’s declared will cometh to be tried one time or another: our confidence in God’s mercy is not fully and directly assaulted till the hour of death, and the time of extraordinary trial. When the evil day cometh, then the consciousness of any one sin whereunto we have been indulgent, and of the delight and pleasure we took in transgressing God’s commandments, will be of force to withdraw our assent from God’s mercies: 1 Cor. xv. 56, ‘The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.’

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[5.] Faith in the promises, if it be not a conceit and a vain dream, is not only an act enforced by our necessity, but done in obedience to God’s will; therefore we believe because God hath commanded it: 1 John iii. 23, ‘And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ;’ John vi. 29, ‘This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.’ It sensibly appeareth many times, a poor soul hath no other motive or encouragement. It ventureth, notwithstanding all discouragements to the contrary, in the strength and sense of a command; as Peter, Luke v. 5, ‘Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net’ Now that which is done, if rightly done, merely in obedience to a command, cannot be the ground of disobedience in other things. We must not pick and choose. Certainly if we believe the promises on God’s command, we will make conscience of other things commanded also; for he is truly obedient to no precept that doth not obey all enforced by the same authority.

3. The utility.

[1.] That we may begin with God, to yield up our wills absolutely to his will; it is upon a belief that this is his will concerning us; for his will concerning our duty is revealed in his precepts: ‘He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?’ Micah vi. 8. Certainly an obedient creature desireth to know no more but what God will have him to do; and therefore it is needful we should believe what is God’s will, that we may resolve upon his will: Rom. xii. 1, 2, ‘I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service; and 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.' The first thing that we do in grace is to arm ourselves with a resolution to obey God's will, though it be never so contrary to our own, or to the wills of men, or the course of the world's fashions: 1 Peter iv. 1, 2, 'Forasmuch, then, as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.' Now, that this resolution may be made knowingly and with the greater strength, not only with the strength of inclination or our own resolved, renewed will, but in the sense of God's authority, a strong belief is necessary that this course of life is pleasing to God.

[2.] That we may hold on with God in an awe-ful, watchful, serious course of godliness, it is necessary that the belief of the commandments be deeply impressed upon us. Alas! otherwise we shall be off and on, forward and backward, according to the impulsion of our own inclinations and affections, and the sense of our interest in the world. Many of the commandments are crossing to our natural inclinations and corrupt humours, or contrary to our interests in the world, our profit, pleasure; and nothing will hold the heart to our duty but the conscience of God's authority: This is the Lord's will, then the gracious soul submitteth: 1 Thes. iv. 3, 'For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication;' and 1 Peter ii. 15, 'For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.' That is reason enough, and instead of all reasons, to a believer, to awe and charge his heart, that we may not shift and distinguish ourselves out of our duty, that we may shake off sloth and negligence, much more deceits, and fraudulency, and corrupt affections. Many shifts will be studied by a naughty heart that dispense with our credit, esteem, honour, preferment in the world for our loyalty to God. Nothing but a deep belief of the sovereignty of God and the sight of his will can be of sufficient power to the soul when such temptations arise, and our duties are so contrary to the inclinations of the flesh: Heb. xi. 8, 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went;' and ver. 17, 18, 'By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son; of whom it is was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called;' Gen. xii. 3, 'In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.' Oh! how have believers need to bestir themselves upon such an occasion, and to remember no evil can be compared with God's wrath, no earthly good with his favour: that transitory delights are dearly bought if they endanger the soul to compass them: 'That the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us!' Rom. viii. 18. The ordinary experience of believers in lesser temptations is enough to evince this, &c.

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Use. 1. For reproof.

1. That men do so little revive the belief of God's commandments, hence sins of omission: James iv. 17, 'Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin;' of commission: Jer. viii. 6, 'I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him

of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.' Would men venture to break a known law if they did consider that it was the command of God that hath power to save and to destroy? Surely want of faith in the precepts is a great cause of their coldness in duty, boldness in sinning: Prov. xiii. 13, 'Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed; but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' Now any one would fear God's commandment if he did consider it in all its circumstances.

2. Those that would strongly believe the promises, but weakly believe that part of the word that requireth their duty from them, all for privileges, seldom reflect upon their own qualification: it is a good temper when both go together: Ps. cxix. 166, 'I have hoped for thy salvation, and have done thy commandments;' so Ps. cxlvii. 11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.' But when asunder, all is naught. God's promises cannot comfort us if we be not of the number of them to whom they do belong; not only consider what God is, but what we are, and what is required of us—our qualification as well as his goodness, our duty as well as his mercy.

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Use 2. To believe the commandments with a lively faith. We should be tender of disobeying God's law. The law may be considered as a covenant of works, or as a rule of life. As a covenant of works, so it is satisfied by Christ for those that have an interest in him, and serveth to quicken us to get this interest in him. As it is a rule of life, so in the new covenant we give up ourselves to God to walk according to the tenor of it; as Israel by a voluntary submission: Exod. xix. 8, 'All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do.' So in the church of the New Testament we engage ourselves by a voluntary submission to walk according to the will of God, and confirm it by the sacraments, baptism, and the Lord's supper. Well, then, we are still to regard it as a binding rule, looking for grace to perform it. It is not only a rule given us for advice and direction, but for a strong obligation to urge and enforce us to our duty. So Ps. xl. 8, 'Thy law is in my heart; I delight to do thy will, O God.'

Use 3. Do we believe the commandments? Then—

1. We will not please ourselves with a naked trust in the promises, while we neglect our duty to God. That which God hath joined together no man must put asunder. The prophet saith, Hosea x. 11, 'Ephraim is an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn;' compared with Deut. xxv. 4, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.' We are addicted to our own ease, prize comforts, but loathe duty. Oh, make more conscience of obedience!

2. Their faith will be lively and operative, cause to keep God's charge and observe his commandments; otherwise it is but an opinion and a dead faith: James ii. 20, 'Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?' Many may discourse of the necessity of duty that have little sense of it; as the children in the furnace, the tire had no power over them, neither was one

hair of their heads singed, nor their coats changed; not a lust mortified, no good by their strict notions.

3. They must be obeyed as God's commands, abstaining from evil because God forbiddeth it, practising that which is good because God commandeth it *Notitia voluntatis*: 1 Thes. iv. 3, 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication;' 1 Thes. v. 8, 9, 'But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation: for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ;' 1 Peter ii. 15, 'For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.' Certainly no private respect, desire of our own plea sure and profit, should hinder us; but we must respect one command as well as another, otherwise our obedience is partial. *A quatenus ad omne valet consequentia*; if we believe the commandments, we must believe all. Where a disposition is allowed to break any one of God's laws, the heart is not right. God's sovereignty, once acknowledged, is alike potent to restrain every inclination to acts displeasing to God and contrary to our duty, one as well as another.

Secondly, The text may be considered relatively, with respect to the matter in hand; and so it may be conceived as a reason of asking, or as a reason of granting.

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1. As a reason of asking.

[1.] It giveth a character of them that believe; they that believe God's commandments will desire to know them more, to be more accurate in knowing their duty, and the weight and consequence of it;—they are willing to practise all that it requireth, and so are willing to 'prove what is the acceptable will of the Lord:' Eph. v. 17, 'Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is;' they would not do anything doubtingly: Rom. iv. 23, 'He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin;' nor according to the wills of men: Gal. i. 10, 'For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.' They would avoid all appearance of evil: 1 Thes. v. 22, Occasions to evil; Rom. xiii. 14, 'Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' They know the weight and consequence of these things.

[2.] It giveth us an intimation of the necessity of growth: none believe so much but they may believe more: 1 John v. 13, 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God:' and they may obey more, embrace the word more. David beggeth he may do so: always there is some new thing to be learned in the scripture.

[3.] That faith planted in the heart is nourished and increased by more knowledge and understanding: 2 Peter i. 5, 'Add to your faith, virtue; to virtue, knowledge.' There is an implicit and an explicit faith; *oportet discentem credere*, swallowing pills, not chewing them.

2. As a reason of granting. Believing God's commandments is a disposition that hath a promise of more knowledge to be communicated.

[1.] God by one act of grace maketh way for another. First, he giveth this first favour of receiving the word by faith as divine, worthy to be believed and obeyed; then, to understand it and apprehend it more perfectly, discretion and judgment to go about duties wisely.

[2.] God giveth according to the creatures' receptions; they that are dutiful and docile and willing to comply with their duty already known, shall know more.

Use. The use is, if we expect more illumination, let us believe as much as is manifested already to us, with a mind to practise.

SERMON LXXVI.

Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.—VER. 67.

IN this verse you may observe two things:—

1. The evil of prosperity, *before I was afflicted I went astray*.

2. The good of adversity, *but now have I kept thy word*. Before wandering, but now attentive to his duty. Or, if you will, here is the necessity of afflictions and the utility of them.

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1. The necessity, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray.' Some think that David in his own person representeth the wantonness and stubbornness of all mankind. If it should be so, yet the person in whom the instance is given is notable. If this was the disposition of the prophet and man of God, and he needed this discipline, we much more: if he could say it in truth of heart that he was made worse by his prosperity, we need always to be jealous of ourselves; and were it not for the scourge, we should forget our duty and the obedience we owe to God.

2. The utility and benefit of afflictions, 'But now have I kept thy word.' Keeping the law is a general word. The use of God's rod is to bring us home unto God, and the affliction driveth us to make better use of his word: it changeth us from vanity to seriousness, from error to truth, from stubbornness to teachfulness, from pride to modesty. It is commonly said, παθήματα μαθήματα; and the apostle telleth us that Jesus Christ himself learned obedience by the things which he suffered, Heb. v. 8; and here David was the better for the cross; so should we. Or rather, you may in the words observe three things:—

1. A confession of his wandering, 'I went astray.'

2. The course God took to reduce him to his duty, ‘I was afflicted.’

3. The success or effect of that course, ‘I have kept thy word.’

Theodoret expresseth this in three words, ἠῤῥώστησα, ἐτμήθην, ἐῤῥώσθηνI was sick; I was cut, or let blood; I was well, or recovered my health again.

1. The one giveth us the cause of afflictions; they are for sin, ‘I went astray:’ wherein there is a secret acknowledgment of his guilt, that his sin was the cause of the chastisement God brought upon him. ‘

2. The true notion and nature of affliction to the people of God. The cross changeth its nature, and is not *poena*, a destructive punishment, but *remedium delinquentium*, a medicinal dispensation, and a means of our cure.

3. The end of them is obedience, or keeping God’s word. The sum of the whole is, I was out of the way, but thy rod hath reduced me, and brought me into it again. Aben Ezra conceiveth that in this last clause he intimateth a desire of deliverance, because the rod had done its work; rather, I think he expresseth his frame and temper when he was delivered; and accordingly I shall make use of it by and by.

I might observe many points, but the doctrine from the whole verse is—

Doct. That the end of God’s afflicting, is to reduce his afflicted and straying people into the right way.

I shall explain the point by these considerations.

1. That man is of a straying nature, apt to turn out of the way that leadeth to God and to true happiness. We are all so by nature: Isa. liii. 6, ‘All we like sheep have gone astray.’ Sheep, of all creatures, are exceeding subject to stray, if not tended and kept in the better, unable to keep out of error, and having erred, unable to return. This is the emblem by which the Holy Ghost would set forth the nature of mankind. But is it better with us after grace received? No; we are in part so still. The best of us, if left to ourselves, how soon are we out of the right way? into what sad errors do we run ourselves? Ps. xix. 12, ‘Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret sins.’ Since grace, we all have our deviations; though our hearts be set to walk with God for the main, yet ever and anon we are swerving from our rule, transgressing our bounds, and neglecting our duty. Good David had cause to say, Ps. cxix. 176, ‘I have gone astray like a lost sheep: oh, seek thy servant!’ We go astray not only out of ignorance, but out of perverseness of inclination: Jer. xiv. 10, ‘Thus have they loved to wander; they have not restrained their feet.’ We have hearts that love to wander; we love shift and change, though it be for the worse; and so will be making excursions into the ways of sin.

2. This straying humour is much increased and encouraged by prosperity, which, though it be good in itself, yet, so perverse are we by nature, that we are the worse for it. That the wicked are the worse for it, is clear: Isa. xxvi. 10, 'Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will they not learn righteousness.' The sunshine upon the dung hill will produce nothing but stinks, and the salt sea will turn all that falleth into it into salt water; the sweet dews of heaven, and the tribute of the rivers all becometh salt when it falleth into the sea. So wicked men convert all into their humour: neither God's mercies nor judgments will have any gracious and kindly work upon them: but, if it be well with them, they take the more liberty to live loosely and profanely: the fear of God, which is the great holdback from all wickedness, is lessened and quite lost in them when they see no change: Ps. lv. 19, 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.' That little slavish fear which they have, which should keep them back from wandering, is then lost, and the more gently God dealeth with them, the more godless and secure they are. When they go on prosperously and undisturbedly, the more obdurate ever. But is it not so with the people of God also? Yes, verily. David, whose heart smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment when he was wandering in the wilderness, could plot the death of Uriah, his faithful servant, when he was at ease in his palace. We lose much tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against sin, much of that lively diligence that we should otherwise show forth in carrying on the spiritual life, when we are at ease, and all things go well with us. We are apt to indulge the flesh when we have so many baits to feed it; and to learn how to abound is the harder lesson of the two than to learn how to be abased, Phil. iv. 12; and therefore, did not God correct us, we should grow careless and negligent. The beginning of all obedience is the mortification of the flesh, which naturally we cannot endure. After we have submitted and subjected ourselves to God, the flesh will be seeking its prey, and be rebelling and waxing wanton against the spirit, till God snatch its allurements from us. Therefore the Lord by divers afflictions is fain to break us and bring us into order. We force him to humble us by poverty, or disgrace, or diseases, or by domestic crosses, or some inconveniency of the natural and animal life, which we value too much. Besides, our affections to heavenly things languish when all things succeed with us in this world according to our heart's desire; and this coldness and remissness is not easily shaken off. Many are like the children of Reuben and Gad, Num. xxxii., who, when they found convenient pastures on this side Jordan, were content with it for their portion, without seeking aught in the land of promise. So their desires insensibly settle here, and have less respect to the good of the world to come.

3. When it is thus with us, God seeth fit to send afflictions. Much of the wisdom of God's providence is to be observed;—partly in the season of affliction, in what state and posture of soul it surpriseth us, when we are wandering, when we most need it, when our abuse of prosperity calleth aloud for it; when the sheep wander, the dog is let loose to fetch them in again. God suiteth his providence to our necessities: 1 Peter i. 6, 'For a season ye are in heaviness, if need be.' Alas! we often see that afflictions are highly necessary and seasonable, either to prevent a distemper that is growing upon us, or to reclaim us from some evil course in which we have wandered from God.

Paul was in danger to be lifted up, and then God sendeth a thorn in the flesh. This discipline is very proper and necessary before the disease run on too far. Partly in the kind of affliction. All physic doth not work upon the same humour; divers lusts must have divers remedies. Pride, envy, covetousness, wantonness, emulation, have all their proper cures. All sins are referred to three impure fountains: 1 John ii. 16, 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.' From the lusts of the flesh do arise not only the gross acts of wantonness, fornication, adultery, gluttony, drunkenness, which the more brutish and base part of mankind are taken with, but an inordinate love of pleasures, vain company, and vain delights, carnal complacency, or flesh-pleasing, wherewith the refined part of the world are too often captivated and bewitched. The lust of the eyes, covetousness and worldly-mindedness, produce wretchedness, rapines, contentions, strife, or that immoderate desire of having or joining house to house, field to field, and building up ourselves one storey higher in the world. From pride of life cometh ambition, lofty conceit of ourselves, scorn and contempt of others, affectation of credit and repute in the world, pomp of having multitudes of servants, or greatness of train, fineness of apparel, and innumerable vanities! Now God, that he may meet with his servants when they are tripping in any kind, he sendeth out afflictions as his faithful messengers to stop them in their career, that the flesh may not sail and carry it away with a full and clear gale. Against the lusts of the flesh he sendeth sicknesses and diseases; against the lusts of the eyes, poverty and disappointments in our relations; against pride, disgraces and shame: and sometimes he varieth the dispensation, for his providence doth keep one tenor, and every cure will not fit every humour; all will not work alike upon all. He sendeth that affliction which is sure to work; he knoweth how to strike in the right vein: thus he cureth Paul's pride by a troublesome disease. None that study providence but may observe the wisdom of God in the kind of affliction, and how suitable it is to the work it is to do; for God doth all things in number, weight, and measure. Partly by the manner how it cometh upon us, by what instruments, and in what sort. How many make themselves miserable by an imagined cross! and so, when all things without are well, their own humours and passions make them a burden to themselves, and when they are not wounded in point of honour, nor lessened and cut short in estate, nor assaulted in their health, nor their relations diminished and cut off, but are hedged round about with all temporal happiness, there seemeth to be no room or place for any affliction or trouble in their bosoms, yet, 'in the fulness of their sufficiency, God maketh them a terror and burden to themselves, either by their own fears or misconceit, or the false imagination of some loss or disgrace: God maketh them uncomfortable and full of disquiet; and though they want nothing, yet they are not at ease, yea, more troubled than those that are called out to conflict with real, yea, the greatest evils. Haman is an instance: he was one of the princes of the kingdom of Persia, flowing in wealth and all manner of delights, in degree of dignity and honour next the king himself, and flourishing in the hope of a numerous and fair issue; yet because Mordecai, a poor Jew, did not do him expected reverence, 'All this availeth me nothing,' Esther v. 19. So soon can God send a worm into the fairest gourd, and a dissatisfaction into the most flourishing estate in the world, that men shall have no rest night and day, especially if a spark of his wrath light into

the conscience: Ps. xxxix. 11, ‘When thou with rebukes dost correct man for his iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity, Selah.’ There is a secret moth that eateth up all their contentment; they are under terror, discouragement, and want of peace: God teacheth them that nothing can be satisfactorily enjoyed apart from his blessed self: ‘A fire not blown shall consume them,’ Job xx. 26. Partly in the continuance of afflictions. God ordereth, taketh off, and layeth on afflictions at his own pleasure, and as he seeth it conducible to our profit. Variety of afflictions may meet together on the best and dearest of God’s children, there being in the best many corruptions both to be discovered and subdued, and many graces to be tried: 1 Peter i. 6, ‘Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations;’ and James i. 2, ‘My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.’ One trouble worketh into the hands of another, and the succession of them is as necessary as the first stroke. We often force God to renew his corrections, *ab assuetis nulla fit passio*—things to which we are accustomed do not affect us; therefore, under a general affliction there come in many special ones to rub up our sense, and make it work the better. Under public calamities we have a private one, and they come one in the neck of another like waves. When God hath begun he will make an end, and bring his discipline to some more comfortable and perfect issue. In all these things the wisdom of God is to be observed.

4. The affliction so sent hath a notable use to reduce us to a sense and care of our duty. This is often pressed in the scripture: ‘The fruit of all shall be to take away their sin.’ Afflictions are compared in scripture to fire that purgeth away our dross: 1 Peter i. 7, ‘Now for a season, if need be, ye are in manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.’ To the fan that driveth away the chaff: Mark iii. 12, ‘Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’ To a pruning-hook, that cutteth off the luxuriant branches, and maketh the others that remain the more fruitful: John xv. 2, ‘Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit.’ To physic, that purgeth away the sick matter: Isa. xxvii. 9, ‘By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.’ To ploughing and harrowing of the ground, that destroyeth the ill weeds, and fitteth it to receive the good seed: Jer. iv. 3, ‘Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.’ To the file that worketh oft’ our rust, and the flail that maketh our husk fly off. So Heb. xii. 11, ‘No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised therewith.’ The affliction hath a necessary tendency to so comfortable an effect But because generals do but beat the air, and do not so well fit themselves in the mind, I shall show you it is either the means of our first conversion, or subservient to the reformation of those that are converted.

[1.] It is a means of our first conversion. How many begin with God upon the occasion of afflictions! The time of sorrows is a time of loves. The hot furnace is Christ's workhouse, where he formeth the most excellent vessels of honour and praise for his own use. Manasseh, Paul, and the jailer in the Acts, were all chosen in the fire; as the Lord saith, Isa. xlviii. 10, 'I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction,' where God began to discover his choice by his working on their affections. All men are vessels capable of any form, therefore God puts them into the furnace. Most of us are taken in our month, as the ram that Abraham offered was caught in the thickets. When stout and stubborn sinners are broken with want and distress, then they come to themselves, and think of returning to their Father: Luke xv. 17, 18, 'And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father,' &c. Afflictions make us more serious; conscience is then apt to work. Before, we were guided by the wisdom of the flesh, and governed by our carnal appetite, never minded heavenly things, till God get us under, and then we bethink ourselves. Have you never known any instance in this kind? that whilst they were young, rich, strong, noble, all their humour was for vain pleasure, to-day hunting, to morrow hawking, another day feasting, and then brawling, fighting, drinking, carousing, dancing; all the warnings of parents, the good counsel of tutors and governors, the grave exhortations of ministers and preachers, will do no good upon them; they are always wandering up and down from God and from themselves, cannot endure a thought of God, of death, of heaven, of hell, of judgment to come; but when God casts them once into some grievous disease, or some great trouble, they begin to come to themselves, and then they that would hear nothing, understand nothing, despised all grave and gracious counsel given, as if it did not belong to them, scoffed at admonitions, thought the day lost in which they had not acted some sin or other, when the cross preacheth, and some grievous calamity is upon them, then conscience beginneth to work, and this bringeth to remembrance all that they have heard before, then they come to themselves, and would fain if they could come to Christ. Sharp affliction is a sound, powerful, rousing teacher: Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 'And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction, then he showeth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded.' Grace worketh in a powerful but yet in a moral way, congruously but forcibly, and by a fit accommodation of circumstances. One place more: Jer. xxxi. 18, 'Truly I have 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.' Affliction awakeneth serious reflections upon our ways; therefore take heed what ye do with the convictions that arise upon afflictions; to slight them is dangerous. Nothing breedeth hardness of heart so much as the smothering of convictions. Iron often heated grows the harder. On the other side, see they do not degenerate into despair, either the raging despair which terrifieth, or the sottish despair which stupefieth: Jer. xviii. 12, 'They said, There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.' The middle between both is a holy sensibleness of our condition, which is a good preparation for the great duties of the gospel. The work of conversion is at first difficult and troublesome, but pass over this brunt, and all things will

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be sweet and easy: the bullock at first yoking is most unruly, and fire at the first kindling casts forth most smoke; so when sin is revived it brings forth death: Rom. vii. 9, ‘For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.’ But yet cherish the work till God speak peace upon sound terms.

[2.] It is a great help to those that are converted already. How many are reduced to a more serious, lively practice of godliness by their troubles! We are rash, inconsiderate, inattentive to our duty, but the rod maketh us cautious and diligent. We follow the world, not the word of God; the vanities thereof take us off from minding the promises or precepts of the word, till the affliction cometh. In short, there are none of us so tamed and subdued to God but that we need to be tamed more. We are all for carnal liberty; there is a wantonness in us. We are high-minded, earthly-minded, till God come with his scourge to reclaim us. He chasteneth us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness, Heb. xii. 10; some lust still needeth mortifying, or some grace needeth exercising; our pride needs to be mortified, or our affections to be weaned from the world. The almond-tree is made more fruitful by driving nails into it, because that letteth out a noxious gum that hindereth its fruitfulness; so when God would have you thrive more, he makes you feel the sharpness of affliction. You have heard Plutarch’s story of Jason of Chaerea, that had his imposthume let out by a casual wound. There is some corruption God would let out. We are apt to set up our rest here, and therefore we need to be disturbed, to have the world crucified to us, Gal. vi. 14, that the cumber of the world may drive us to seek for rest where it is only to be found, and to humble us by outward defects, that we may look after inward abundance, that, by being poor in this world, we may be rich in faith, James ii. 5, and having nothing in, the creature, we may possess all things in God, 2 Cor. vi. 10, and be enlarged inwardly as we are straitened outwardly; in short, that we may be oftener with God. God sent a tempest after Jonah. Absalom set Joab’s barley-field on fire, and then he came to him, 2 Sam. xiv. 30. Isa. xxvi. 16, ‘Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them;’ Hosea v. 15, ‘In their affliction they will seek me early.’ It were endless to run out in discourses of this nature.

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5. The affliction of itself doth not work thus, but as sanctified and accompanied with the Spirit of God. If the affliction of itself and by itself would do it, it would do so always, but that we see by experience it doth not. In itself it is an evil and a pain that is the consequent and the fruit of sin, and so breedeth impatience, despair, murmuring, and blasphemy against God. As it is a legal curse, other fruit cannot be expected of it but reviving terrors of heart and repinings against the sovereignty of God. We see often the same affliction that maketh one humble, maketh another raging; the same poverty that maketh one full of dependence upon God, maketh another full of shifts and evil courses whereby to supply his want. No; it is understood of sanctified crosses, when grace goeth along with them to bless them to us: Jer. xxxi. 19, ‘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;’ after God had wrought a gracious change in him by his afflicting hand and Spirit working together. So Ps. xciv. 12, ‘Blessed is he whom thou chastenest, and instructest

out of thy law.' The rod must be expounded by the word, and both must be effectually applied by the Spirit. Grace is God's immediate creature and production; he useth subservient means and helps, sometimes the word, sometimes the rod, sometimes both; but neither doth anything without his Spirit.

6. This benefit, though gotten by sharp afflictions, should be owned, and thankfully acknowledged as a great testimony and expression of God's love to us. So doth David to the praise of God. It is a branch that belongeth to the thanksgiving mentioned ver. 65, 'Thou hast done well with thy servant, according to thy word:'—the first of this octonary. We are prejudiced against the cross out of a self-love, a mistaken self-love; we love ourselves more than we love God, and the ease of the body more than the welfare of the soul, and the world more than heaven, and our temporal pleasure and contentment more than our spiritual and eternal benefit; and therefore we cannot endure to hear of the cross, much more to bear it. Oh! this doth not become men; surely it doth not become Christians! Would you have your consolation here? Luke xvi.; your portion here? Ps. vii. Would you value yourselves by the flourishing of the outward man, or the renewing of the inward man? 2 Cor. iv. 16. Should we be so impatient of the cross? Afflictions are bitter to present sense, but yet they are healthful to the soul: they are not so bitter in present feeling as they will be sweet in the after-fruits. Now, we are greatly unthankful to God, if the bitterness be not lessened and tempered by this fruit and profit. Consider, when are we most miserable? When we go astray, or when we are reduced into the right way? when we are engaged in a rebellion against God, or when brought into a sense of our duty? Hosea iv. 17, 'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.' *Let him alone* is the heaviest judgment that can be laid upon a poor creature. Providence, conscience, ministry let him alone; the case is desperate, and we are incorrigible when we are left to our own ways. There needeth no more to make our case miserable and sad than to be suffered to go on in sin without let and restraint; there is no hope of such: God seemeth to cast them off, and to desert and leave them to their own lusts. It is evident he mindeth not their salvation, but leaveth them to the world, to be condemned with the world. Well, then, doth God do the elect any harm when he casts them into great troubles? If we use violence to a man that is ready to be drowned, and, in pulling him out of the waters, should break an arm or a leg, would he not be thankful? Yes, saith he, I can dispense with that, for you have saved my life. So may God's children bless his name. O blessed providence! I had been a witless fool, and gone on in a course of sin, if God had not awakened me. A philosopher could say that he never made better voyage than when he suffered shipwreck, because then he began to apply himself to the study of wisdom: surely a Christian should say, Blessed be God that he laid his chastenings upon me, and brought me to a serious heavenly mind: I should otherwise have been a carnal fool, as others are. Wicked men are left to their own swing. When the case of the sick is desperate, physicians let them alone, give them leave to take anything they have a mind unto. The apostle speaketh much to this purpose: Heb. xii. 6, 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' Sharp afflictions, which in their visible appearance seem tokens of God's hatred, are rather tokens of his love. There

is a twofold love of God—*Amor benevolentiae et complacentiae*—the love of good-will, whereby the Lord out of the purposes of his own free grace doth regenerate us, and adopt us into his family; and having loved us, and made us amiable, he doth then delight in us. The text alleged may be expounded of either. Oh! then, why do not we more own God in our afflictions? If he use us a little hardly, it is not an argument of his hatred, but his love. Thou darest not pray, Lord, let me have my worldly comforts, though they damn me; let me not be afflicted, though it will do me good. And if thou darest not pray so, will you repine when God seeth this course necessary for us, and taketh away the fuel of our lusts? Is it not a good exchange to part with outward comforts for inward holiness? If he take away our quiet, and give us peace of conscience, our worldly goods, and give us true riches, have we cause to complain? If outward wants be recompensed with an abundance of inward grace, if we have less of the world that we may have more of God, a healthy soul in a sickly body, it is just matter of thanksgiving: 3 John 2, 'I wish, above all things, that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.' We can subscribe to this in the general; all will affirm that afflictions are profitable, and that it is a good thing to be patient and submissive under them; but when any cross cometh to knock at our door, we are loath to give it entrance; and if it thrust in upon us, we fret and fume, and our souls sit uneasy, and all because we are addicted so unreason ably to the ease of the flesh, the quiet, happiness, and welfare of the carnal life, and have so little regard to life spiritual.

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7. At the first coming of the affliction we do not see this benefit so well as in the review of the whole dispensation: 'Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I have kept thy word.' So Heb. xii. 11, 'Now 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.' There is a perfect opposition; the root and the fruit are opposed—affliction and fruit of righteousness, the quality of the root, and the quality of the fruit: ου χαρᾶς εἶναι ἀλλὰ λύπης, καρπὸν εἰρηνικὸν, the appearance and the reality, δοκεῖ and ἀποδίδωσις. Then the season, πρὸς τὸ παρὸν and ὕστερον. God's physic must have time to work. At first it may not be so, or at least not appear; for things are before they appear or can be observed for the present. We must tarry God's leisure, and be content with his blows, till we feel the benefit of them: it is first matter of faith, and then of feeling; though we do not presently understand why everything is done, we must wait. The hand on the dial doth not seem to stir, yet it keeps its course; while it is paving we see it not, but that it hath passed from one hour to another is evident. So is God's work with the soul; and spiritual renovation and increase is not so sensible at the first though it be carried on ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρᾳ, day by day, 2 Cor. iv. 16, but in view of the whole it will ap pear. What are we the better? Doth sin decay? and what sin? Do we find it otherwise with us than it was before?

8. This profit is not only when the affliction is upon us, but after it is over the fruit of it must remain. Their qualms and pangs most have: Ps. lxxviii. 34-37, 'When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God: and they remembered that God was their

rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' Many have a little forced religion in their extremities, but it weareth off with their trouble. Sin is but suspended for a while, and the devil chained up; they are very good under the rod, they are frighted to it; but after the deliverance cometh, the more profane. It is true many may begin with God in their troubles, and their necessities drive them to the throne of grace; and Christ had never heard of many, if -fevers and palsies, and possessions and blindness, deafness and dumbness, had not brought them unto him, thanks to the disease. But if a course of godliness begins upon these occasions, and continues afterwards, God will accept it; he is willing to receive us upon any terms. Men will say, You come to me in your extremity; but he doth not upbraid us, provided we will come so as to abide with him, and will not turn the back upon him when our turn is served. If you do so, take heed; God hath other judgments to reach you: as John said, Mat. iii. 11, 12, 'He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' So that which cometh after is mightier than that which went before; the last judgment is the heaviest: 'The axe is laid to the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire,' Mat. iii. 10. He will not only lop off the branches, but strike at the root; as the Sodomites that escaped the sword of Chedorlaomer perished by fire from heaven. The Israelites that were not drowned in the Red Sea, were stung to death by fiery serpents: 'As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him,' Amos v. 19. When you avoid one judgment, you may meet an other, and find a stroke where you think yourselves most secure.

Use 1. Let us consider these things, that we may profit by all the chastenings of the Lord. It is now a time of affliction, both as to public judgments and as to the private condition of many of the people of God. We have been long straying from God, from our duty, from one another; it was high time for the Lord to take his rod in his hand, and to scourge us home again. Upon these three nations there is somewhat of God's three great judgments—war, pestilence, and famine; they are all dreadful. The pestilence is such a judgment as turneth populous cities into deserts and solitudes in a short time; then one cannot help another: riches and honours profit nothing then, and friends and kinsfolks stand afar off: many die without any spiritual helps. In war, what destructions and slaughters, expense of blood and treasure! In famine, you feel yourselves to die without a disease, know not where to have fuel to allay and feed the fire which nature hath kindled in your bodies. But, blessed be God, all these are in moderation. Pestilence doth not ragingly spread, the war is at a distance, the famine only a scarcity. Before God stirreth up all his wrath, he observeth what we do with these beginnings. Besides, the people of God are involved in a heap of miseries on all hands; the op pressed, dejected party burdened with jealousies, and ready to be haled to prison and put under restraint. Holy men sometimes have personal afflictions added to the public calamities.

Jeremiah was cast into the dungeon when the city was besieged. The chaff and grain both are threshed together, but the grain is, besides, ground in the mill and baked in the oven. Besides, who thinks of his strayings, and returning with a more serious resolution to his duty? If we would profit by afflictions we must avoid both the faulty extremes: Heb. xii. 5, 'My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.' Slighting and fainting must be avoided.

1. Let us not slight them. When we bear them with a stupid senseless mind, surely that hindereth all profit. None can endure to have their anger despised, no more than their love: a father is displeased when his child slights his correction. That we may not slight it, let us consider:—

[1.] Their author, God. We think them fortuitous, from chance, but they 'do not rise out of the dust,' Job v. 6. Whoever be the instruments, or whatever be the means, the wise God hath the whole ordering of it. He is the first cause; he is to be sought to, he is to be appeased, if we would stop evil at the fountain-head; for all creatures willingly or unwillingly obey him, and are subject to his empire and government: Amos iii. 6, 'Is there any evil in the city, and I have not done it, saith the Lord?' Isa. xlv. 7, 'I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things;' Job i. 21, 'The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away.'

[2.] The meritorious cause is sin: Lam. iii. 39, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?' That first brought mischief into the world, and still continueth it. God never afflicts without a cause; either we need it, or we deserve it: Micah vii. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.' We should search for the particular sins that provoke God to afflict us; for while we only speak of sin in general, we do but inveigh against a notion, and personate mourning; but those we can charge upon our selves are most proper and powerful to break the heart.

[3.] The end is our repentance and amendment, to correct sin past, or prevent sin to come.

(1.) For correction, to make us more penitent for sin past. We being in a lower sphere of understanding, know things better by their effects than their nature: Jer. ii. 19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts.' Moral evil is represented to us by natural evil; pain showeth what sin is.

(2.) For prevention of sin for time to come. The smart should make us cautious and watchful against sin: Josh. xxii. 17, 18, 'Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed to this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord, but that ye must turn away this day from following the Lord? And it will be, seeing ye rebel to-day against the Lord, that to-morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.' Afflictions also should stir up

in us heavenly thoughts, heavenly desires, and more lively diligence in the exercise of those graces which before lay dormant in us through our neglect. Only I must tell you, that sometimes the affliction may be merely for prevention, and may go before sin. God hath always a cause, but he doth not always suppose a fault in act, but sometimes in possibility; looking into thy actions or thy tem per, what thou hast done, or wouldst do, to cure or prevent a distemper in thy spirit, as well as a disorder in thy conversation.

2. Let us not faint. When the afflictions sit close and near, then we are apt to fall into the other extreme, to be dejected out of measure. An over- sense worketh on our anger, and then it is fretting; or on our sorrow, and then it is fainting. The former is the worse of the two, for that is to set up an anti-providence, or a being displeased with God's government, a practical disowning of his greatness and justice. All men will acknowledge God is great, yet what worm is there will submit to him any further than themselves please? We say we deserve nothing but evil from his hands, but yet are maddened like wild bulls in a net when the goad is in our sides. We say, Any other cross but this. We do not dislike trial, but this trial that is upon us. God thought this fittest for us; our murmuring will not ease our trouble, but increase and continue it. Certainly without submission troubles will do us no good: 'Patience worketh experience,' Rom. v. 4. Fainting, properly so taken, is when we look upon God's work through a false glass, and mis-expound his dispensation. God puts forth his hand, not to thrust us off, but pull us to himself: Hosea v. 15, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.' The very affliction giveth us hope that he will not let us go on securely in our sins. It is not our being afflicted and made miserable by trouble which God aimeth at: Lam. iii. 33, 'He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.' Nor is it that which we should chiefly be affected with under affliction. We should mind another lesson taught by it, which if we neglect, our sense of trouble will be but perplexing. It is to subdue sin, to make us more mindful of heavenly things, to have our hearts humbled. No affliction should be counted intolerable which helpeth to purge our sin. We evidence our love to sin if we are overmuch troubled at it, or peevishly quarrel with God. Fainting showeth our weakness: Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.'

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Use 2. Something concerning the profit of it: value it, observe it.

1. Value it. What do you count a profit or benefit, to flow in wealth, or excel in grace; to live in ease, or to be kept in a holy, heavenly, and humble frame? Heb. xii. 10, '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.' Not that we might have the pelf of this world, but that we might be partakers of his holiness. It is better to have holiness than to have health, wealth, and honour; the sanctification of an affliction is better than to have deliverance out of it. Deliverance taketh away *malum naturale*—some penal evil which God bringeth upon us; sanctification, *malum morale*—the greatest evil, which is sin. I am sure this is that which we should look after. Deliverance is God's work, the

improvement of the trouble is our duty: do you mind your work, and God will not be wanting to do his part.

2. Observe it, and see how the rod worketh, what thoughts it begets in you, what resolutions it stirreth up, what solaces you run to, and seek after to this end.

[1.] In what temper and frame of heart you were when the affliction surprised you. Usually affliction treadeth upon the heels of some sin. If it be open, and in our practice, it discovereth itself; if secret, and in the frame of our hearts, it must be searched after. Usually it is some slightness and carelessness of spiritual and heavenly things; your hearts were grown in love with the world, you began to neglect your souls, grew more cold in the love of God, more formal in prayer, and indifferent as to your spiritual estate; you did not watch over your hearts; therefore the holy and jealous God cometh and awakeneth you by his smarting scourge. The foregoing distemper observed, will help you to state your profit.

[2.] How that is cured by God's discipline, or what benefit you have gotten by it? You are more diligent in your duty, careful in your preparations for a better state. A Christian should be able to give an account of the methods by which God bringeth him to heaven. David could give an account, as here, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word;' and ver. 71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes;' not good that I should be, as accepting the punishment, but that I have been, as owning the profit.

SERMON LXXVII.

Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.—VER. 68.

THE Psalmist in the first verse of this portion had expressed himself in a way of thankfulness to God for his goodness, ver. 65; then interrupteth his thanksgiving a little, and beggeth the continuance of the same goodness, ver. 66; and after that returneth again to show how this good came by means of affliction, ver. 67; and therefore once more praiseth God for his goodness, and reneweth his suit. God is ever good to his people, but most sensibly they have proof of it in their afflictions, when to appearance he seemeth to deal hardly with them; yet all that while he doth them good. Sanctification of afflictions is a greater mercy than deliverance out of them. We may learn our duty by the discipline of a smart rod: 'Thou dealest well with thy servant;' for, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I have kept thy word.' And then he falleth into thanksgiving and prayer again, 'Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.' Here is—

1. A compilation and confession of God's goodness, both in his nature and actions.

2. A petition for grace, *teach me thy statutes*.

First, The compellation used to God, 'Thou art good, and doest good.' Divers have been the glosses of interpreters upon these words. Aben Ezra, *Bonus es non petenti, et benefacis petenti*—thou art good to them that ask not, but surely dost good to them that ask. Others, thou art good in this world, dost good in the world to come. Others better, God is good of himself and doeth good to us. Goodness is communicative of itself; he is good, that noteth his nature and inclination; and he doeth good, that noteth his work, whereby he giveth proof of his goodness. *Unumquodque operatur secundum suam formam*—every thing acteth according to its nature. So doth God; as is his being, so is his operation; he is good, and doeth good; the work must needs be answerable to the workman. The point is:—

Doct. It becometh all those that have to do with God to have a deep sense of his goodness.

1. What is God's goodness.

2. How it is manifested to us.

3. Why those that come to God should have a deep sense of it. First, What is God's goodness? There is a threefold goodness ascribed by divines to God:—

1. His natural goodness, which is the natural perfection of his being.

2. His moral goodness, which is the moral perfection of his being.

3. His beneficial communicative goodness, called otherwise his benignity, which is of chief regard in this place. Besides the perfection and excellency of his nature, there is his will and self-propension to diffuse his benefits; the perfection of his nature is his natural and moral goodness, the other his bounty. All must be spoken to distinctly.

1. God is naturally good. There is such an absolute perfection in, his nature and being, that nothing is wanting to it or defective in it, and nothing can be added to it to make it better. As Philo saith, Ὁ ὀντως ὢ τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν—the first being must needs be the first good. As soon as we conceive there is a God, we presently conceive that he is good. In this sense it is said, Mark x. 18, 'Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, and that is God.' He is good of himself, good in himself, yea, good itself. There is none good above him, or besides him, or beyond him; it is all from him and in him, if it be good. He is primitively and originally good, αὐτάγαθος, good of himself, which nothing .else is; for all creatures are good only by participation and communication from God. He is essentially good; not only good, but goodness itself: the creature's good is a superadded quality; in him it is his essence. He is infinitely good; the creature's goodness is but a drop, but in God there is an infinite ocean and sea, or gathering together of goodness. He cannot be better, he is *summum bonum*—the chiefest good; other things are good in subordination to him, and according to that use and proportion they bear to him. He is not good as the means, but as the

end. Things good as the means are only good in order, proportion, measure, and respect; but God i absolutely good; beyond God there is nothing to be sought or aimed at; if we enjoy him we enjoy all good to make us completely happy. He is eternally and immutably good, for he cannot be less good than he is; as there can be no addition made to him, so no subtraction, or aught taken from him.

2. God is morally good, that is, the fountain and pattern of all that virtuous goodness which is in the creatures. So Ps. xxv. 8, 'Good and upright is the Lord:' and Exod. xxxiii. 19, 'He said, I will make all my goodness go before thee, and proclaim my name.' As the creature hath a natural goodness of beauty, power, dominion, wisdom, so it hath a moral goodness of purity and holiness. Accordingly we must conceive in God his holiness, purity, veracity, justice, as his moral perfection and goodness, as his will is the supreme pattern and fountain of all these things in the creature.

3. God is communicatively and beneficially good; that implieth his bounty and beneficence, or his will and self-propension to diffuse his benefits. It may be explained by these considerations:—

[1.] That God hath in him whatsoever is useful and comfortable to ns. That is one notion we apprehend him by, that he is 'God all-sufficient,' Gen. xvii. 1, or that he hath all things at command, to do for us as our necessities shall require: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly:' Gen. xv. 1, 'Fear not, Abraham; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.' The privative and positive part is expressed in both these places, whether we need life or comfort, or would be protected from all dangers, bodily or spiritual. Why should we seek good out of God? Riches, pleasures, honours might more happily be had if we could possess all things in God: Jer. ii. 13, 'My people have committed two great evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.' God is the fountain of all those things which are necessary to give us all good and defend us from all evil. *Possidet possidentem omnia*: 2 Cor. vi. 10, 'As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.'

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[2.] That he hath a strong inclination to let out his fulness, and is ready to do good upon all occasions: 'Thou art good and dost good.' *Bonum est primum, et potissimum nomen Dei*, saith Damascene—the chiefest name by which we conceive of God is his goodness. By that we know him, for that we love him and make our addresses to him: we admire him for his other titles and attributes, but this doth first insinuate with us, and invite our respects to him. The first means by which the devil sought to loosen man from God was by weakening the conceit of his goodness; and the great ground of all our commerce with him is that God is a good God: Ps. c. 4, 5, 'Enter ye into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his name; for the Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting.' He presently inviteth the world to come to him, because he is good. As God is all-sufficient in himself, so he is communicative of his riches unto his creatures, and most of all

to his own people. Goodness is communicative, it diffuseth itself, as the sun doth light, or as the fountain poureth out waters.

[3.] He is the fountain of all that good we have or are. We have nothing but what we have from God: James i. 17, 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights:' and Jer. ii. 13, he is called 'the fountain of living waters.' As rivers are supplied by the sea, so the gathering together of all goodness is in God. All candles are lighted at his torch; there is nothing in the creature but what is derived from him: 'Who hath given to him first, and it shall be recompensed to him again?' Rom. xi. 35, as the sun oweth nothing to the beam, but the beam oweth all to the sun, and the sea oweth nothing to the river, but the river oweth all to the sea.

[4.] There will a time come when he will be 'all in all,' 1 Cor. xv. 28, when God will immediately and in a fuller latitude communicate himself to his creatures, and there will need nothing beside himself to make us happy. Here we enjoy God, but not fully or immediately. We enjoy him in his creatures, but it is at the second or third hand; the creature interposeth between him and us: Hosea ii. 21, 22, 'And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith 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.' In ordinances it is but a little strength and comfort that we get, such as is consistent with pain and sorrow; it is not full, because it is not immediate. A pipe cannot convey the whole fountain, nor the ordinances the full of God in Christ, only a little supply either as we need, or are able to receive; but then God will be all in all, he will do his work by himself; the narrowness of the means shall not straiten him, nor the weakness of the vessel hinder him to express the full of his goodness in full perfection.

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Secondly, How is his goodness manifested to us?

1. In our creation, in that he did raise us up out of nothing to be what we are, and form us after his own image. God made us, not that he might be happy, but liberal, that there might be creatures to whom to communicate himself; our beings and faculties and powers were the fruits of his mere goodness. When God made the world, then was it verified, 'He is good, and doeth good.' Gen. i.; for as the goodness of his nature inclined him to make it, so his work was good: after every day's work there cometh in his approbation, Behold it was good; and when he had made man, and set him in a well-furnished world, and compared all his works together, then they were 'very good,' ver. 31. That he still fashioneth us in the womb, and raiseth us into that comely shape in which we afterwards appear, it is all the effect of his goodness.

2. In our redemption; therein he commendeth his love and goodness in providing such a remedy for lost sinners. There is φιλανθρωπία—Titus iii. 4, 'But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared.' In creation he showed himself φιλάγγελος; in redemption, φιλάνθρωπος, God is brought nearer to us as subsisting in our nature: 1 Tim. iii. 16, 'Great is the mystery godliness, God manifested in the flesh.' And so God had greater advantages to communicate

himself to us in a more glorious way by the Redeemer, that we might for ever live in the admiration of his love.

3. In daily providence; so the goodness of God is twofold:—

[1.] Common and general to all creatures, especially to mankind: Ps. cxlv. 9, 'The Lord is good to all, his tender mercy is over all his works.' Upon all things and all persons he bestoweth many common blessings, as natural life, being, health, wealth, beauty, strength, and supplies necessary for them. There are none of God's creatures but taste of his bounty, and have sufficient proof that a good God made them and preserveth them. The young ravens: Ps. cxlvii. 9, 'He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry,' ἐπιβάλλει τοὺς νεόττους ἡ κόραξ. So the wicked: Mat. v. 45, 'He maketh his sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust;' Acts xiv. 17, 'Nevertheless he left not him self without witness, in that he did good, ἀγαθοποιῶν, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' These common mercies argue a good God that giveth them, though not always a good people that receiveth them. This goodness of God showeth itself daily and bountifully.

[2.] Special; God is good to all, but not to all alike. So he is good to his people, whom he blesseth with spiritual and saving benefits. So Lam. iii. 25, 'The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.' So Ps. lxxxvi. 5, 'For thou, O Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.' For this kind of goodness, a qualification is necessary in the receiver. Satan will tell you God is a good God, but he leaveth out this—to those that love and fear him, and wait upon him. This peculiar goodness yieldeth spiritual and saving blessings, such as pardoning of sins: Isa. lv. 7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and lie will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon:' instruction in the ways of God in the text, 'Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.' And, in short, all the means and helps that are necessary unto everlasting glory: 2 Thes. i. 11, 'Wherefore also we pray always for you, that God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.' Once more, to the objects of his peculiar love common blessings are given in love, and with an aim at our good: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' So that the ordinary favours which others enjoy are sanctified to them. They are from love, and *in bonum*, for good. God is ready to help them onwards to their everlasting hopes, and that estate which they expect in the world to come, where, in the arms of God, they shall be blessed for evermore.

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Thirdly, Why ought those that come to God to have a deep sense of this?

1. What is this deep sense?

[1.] It must be the fruit of faith, believing God's being and bounty, or else it will have no force and authority upon us: Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' If we have but cold notions or dead opinions of the goodness of God, they will have little power on us. It is faith sets all things awork; there must be a sound belief of these things if we would practically improve them.

[2.] It must be the fruit of constant observation of the effects of his goodness vouchsafed to us, so that we may give our thanks and praise for all that good we do enjoy. Careless spirits are not sensible of the hand of providence, never take notice of good or evil; therefore the Psalmist saith, Ps. cvii. 8, 'Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!' He repeateth the same, ver. 15, 21, 31, and concludeth all ver. 43, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe those things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.' We are more backward to the observation of the goodness of God than we are to any duty; therefore doth the Psalmist stir up all sorts of persons to note the invisible hand of providence that reacheth out supplies to them: whether they have business by sea or by land, whether in sickness or in health, in all the varieties of the present life, he is still stirring them up to mind their mercies, and inviteth them by God's late favours to the praise and acknowledgment of his goodness, his communicating his goodness so freely to undeserving and ill-deserving persons, and following them with more and more mercies. There are none of us but have reasons enough and obligations enough lying upon us to make observations in this kind; every experience and new proof should put us upon this acknowledgment. Certainly they are the wisest sort of men who do observe God's providence.

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[3.] It is the fruit of deep and ponderous meditation. Glances never warm the heart; it is our serious and deliberate thoughts which affect us; therefore the children of God should be thinking of his goodness displayed in all his works, especially in redemption by Christ: Eph. iii. 18, 19, 'To comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of God which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.' To be ravished with love, affected with love, always thinking of love, speaking of love, expressing their sense of love, that is a work behoving saints. We should often meditate upon and set our minds awork upon this goodness by frequent and serious thoughts of it, for the strengthening of our faith and quickening of our love to God.

[4.] It is the fruit of inward and spiritual taste: 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' So Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.' Do not be content with hearsay, but get a taste; that is, an inward and experimental knowledge of the goodness of God in Christ, that we may know it, not only by guess and imagination, but by sense and feeling: the one half of it cannot be told you. *Optima demonstratio est a sensibus.*

2. Why we need to labour so much after a deep sense of this.

[1.] To check our natural legalism, and the dark and distrustful prejudices of our own hearts. There is a secret guiltiness in us that breedeth misgiving thoughts of God. We have many suspicious thoughts of him, being guilty creatures, because we only represent him to ourselves as a consuming fire, or as clothed with justice and vengeance, watching an opportunity of doing us harm, and shut out all thoughts of goodness and mercy; yet when he proclaimeth his name, he telleth Moses he would make his goodness pass before him. God is wonderfully good in his nature, and he delighteth in the communications of his goodness: nothing pleaseth him better than his word; the business of it is to represent him good. Mercy pleaseth him: Micah vii. 18, '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.' 'Mercy rejoiceth over judgment;' Ps. cxviii. 1, 'Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; because his mercy endureth for ever.' His works speak him good; there is no part of the world that we can set our eyes upon but it offereth matter of praise to God for his bounty to his creatures, especially to man: Ps. xxxiii. 5, 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord:' the whole earth is full of his goodness, and will you draw an ill picture of him in your minds, as if he were harsh and severe, and his service were intolerable? No; 'The Lord is good, and doth good.'

[2.] That we may justify God against the prejudices of the unbelieving world, and invite them from our own experience to make trial of God. So Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' A report of a report signifieth little; what we have found ourselves we can confidently recommend to others. When we have felt his dealing with ourselves, we can entreat them to see what waiting upon God will come to; let any man make the experiment, keep close to God in obedience and reliance, and he shall find him to be a gracious master; others that have dark thoughts of God, like the spies, they bring an ill report upon his ways.

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[3.] To humble the creature. We have not a right sight of God unless all created perfections vanish before him. The creatures are but some shadows, pictures, resemblances, or equivocal shapes of God. Whatever name they have of good, wise, strong, beautiful, true, or such like, it is but a borrowed speech from God, whose image they have; and if the creature usurpeth its being as originally belonging to themselves, it is as if the picture should call itself a true and living man. 'I am, and there is none beside me,' holdeth true of God's being, and all his perfections, natural or moral. The creatures may be good, or better, or best, compared among themselves; but we are frail and nothing if compared with God: 'There is none good but one, and that is God.' That goodness which we have in participation from him will appear no goodness in comparison of him. 'The heavens themselves are not clean in his sight: 'Job xxv. 5, 6, 'Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea the stars are not pure in his sight: how much less man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm?' And elsewhere, Job iv. 18, 'Behold, he putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly'—mutability in the angelical nature. When Isaiah had seen God, and heard the angels cry out, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts,' Isa. vi. 5, 'Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a

people of unclean lips; and mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts.' The consideration of his goodness obscureth all the glory and praise of the creature; as when the sun is up the lustre of the stars is no more seen. When we compare ourselves with one another, one may be called bad, another good; but with God no man is good. He is good, but we are evil; he is heaven, but we are hell; he is all perfection, we are all weakness. In respect of his goodness, nothing in us deserveth that name, as lesser light in the view of a greater is darkness. When Job had seen God, he could not look upon himself with any patience: Job xlii. 5, 6, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' That is a true sight of God that abaseth and lesseneth all things besides God, not only in opinion, but in affection and estimation. Alas! the best of us are scarce dark shadows of his goodness.

[4.] God's goodness is the life of our faith and trust. So long as the goodness of God endureth for ever, we have no cause to be discouraged. If we want direction, in the text it is said, 'Thou art good, and dost good; teach me thy statutes.' If we want support and deliverance, Nahum i. 7, 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him.' In every strait the people of God find him to be a good God. When we feel the burden of sin, and fear God's wrath, Ps. lxxxvi. 5, 'The Lord is good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon him.' David, when his old sins troubled him, the sins of his youth, Ps. xxv. 7, 'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.' When his enemies consulted his ruin, Ps. li. 1, 'Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually.' They cannot take away the goodness of God from you, whatever they plot or purpose against you. Thus may faith triumph in all distresses upon the sense of the goodness of God. In the agonies of death, the goodness of God will be your support. *Non sic vixi ut pudeat me inter vos vivere; nec mori timeo, quia bonum habeo Dominum.* We have a good master, who will not see his servants unrewarded. The goodness of God, and his readiness to be gracious to every one that cometh to him, is the fountain of the saint's hope, strength, and consolation.

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[5.] The goodness of God is the great motive and invitation to repentance: Rom. ii. 4, 'Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' How so? God is good, but not to those that continue in their sins: Ps. lxviii. 19-21, 'Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation, Selah. He that is our God is the God of salvation, and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death: but God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.' If goodness be despised, it will be turned into fury. How great soever the riches of the Lord's bounty and grace offered in Christ are, yet an impenitent sinner will not escape unpunished. God is good; oh! come, try, and see how good he will be to you, if you will turn and submit to him. There is hope offered, and goodness hath waited to save you; so that now you may seek his favour with hope to speed. While he sits upon the throne of grace, and alloweth the plea of the new covenant, do not stand off against mercies. God hath laid out the riches of his

gracious goodness upon a design to save lost sinners; and will you turn back upon him, and despise all his goodness provided for you in Christ? In point of gratitude, the least kindness done men melteth them as coals of fire. The borrower is servant to the lender. God hath not only lent us, but given us all that we have; therefore it should break our hearts with sorrow and remorse that we should offend a God so good, so bountiful, so merciful. The odiousness of sin doth most appear in the unkindness of it; that infinite goodness hath been abused, and infinite goodness despised, and that you are willing to lose your part in infinite goodness, rather than not satisfy some base lust, or look after some trifling vanity. Saul wept at the thoughts of David's kindness, 1 Sam. xxiv. 16. Every man will condemn the wrongs done to one that hath done us no evil, but much good; and will you sin against God, who is so good in himself, so good to all his creatures, and so good to you, and waiteth to be better and more gracious; and return evil for all his good, and requite his love with nothing but unkindness and provocation? Oh, be ashamed of all these things! What heart is that that can offend, and so willingly offend, so good a God! Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God '(there is argument and endearment enough in that) 'that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service,' that ye consecrate, dedicate yourselves to his glory, address yourselves cheer fully to his service. Let the soul be warmed into an earnest resolution to please him for the future, lest you make goodness your enemy, and justice take up the quarrel of abused grace.

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[6.] The goodness of God is the great argument to move us to love God. If he be good, he is worthy to be loved, and that with a superlative love; for God is both the object and the measure of love. A less good should be loved less, and a greater good more. All that is not God is but a finite and limited good, and must be loved accordingly. God only is infinite and eternal, and therefore he is to be loved of all, and above all, with our chiefest and most worthy love, by preferring his glory above all things that are dear to us, and being content for his sake to part with all that we have in the world. But if any lower thing prevail with us, we prefer it before God, and so contemn his goodness in comparison of it. If the object of love be good, none so properly deserveth our love as God. For (1.) He is originally good, the fountain of all good; therefore if we leave God for the deceitful vanities of this present life, we leave 'the fountain of living waters,' for a 'broken cistern,' Jer. ii. 13. The creatures are but dry pits and broken cisterns. (2.) He is *summum bonum*, the chiefest good. Other things, what good they have, they have it from him; therefore it is infinitely better and greater in him than in them; all the good that is in the creature is but a spark of what is in God. If we find any good there, it is not to detain our affections, but to lead us to the greater good, not to hold us from him, but to lead us to him, as the streams lead to the fountain, and the steps of a ladder are not to stand still upon, but that we may ascend higher. There is goodness in the creature, but mixed with imperfection; the good is to draw to him, the imperfection to drive us off from the creature. (3.) He is in finitely good. Other things may busy us and vex us, but they cannot satisfy us; this alone sufficeth for health, wealth, peace, protection, grace, glory. Necessities that are not satisfied in God are but fancies, and the desires that are hurried out after them, apart from God, are

not to be satisfied, but mortified. If we have not enough in God, it is not the default of our portion, but the distemper of our hearts. In choosing God for our portion, one hath not the less because another enjoyeth it with him: here is a sharing without division, and a par taking without the prejudice of copartners. We straiten others in worldly things so much as we are enlarged ourselves; finite things cannot be divided, but they must be lessened; they are not large enough to be parted; but every one possesseth all that is good in God who hath God for his portion; as the same speech may be heard of all, and yet no man heareth the less because others hear it with him, or as no man hath the less light because the sun shineth on more than himself: the Lord is all in all; the more we possess him the better. As in a choir of voices, every one is not only solaced with his own voice, but with the harmony of those that sing in concert with him. Many a fair stream is drawn dry by being dispersed into several channels, but that which is infinite will suffice all. (4.) He is eternally good: Ps. lxxiii. 26, 'God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.' The good things of this life are perishing and of a short continuance; we leave other good things when we come to take full possession of God. At death wicked men perceive their error, when the good they have chosen cometh to be taken from them; but a man that hath chosen God then entereth into the full possession of him; that which others shun, he longeth for, waiting for that time when the creature shall cease, and God shall be all in all. Oh! let all these things persuade us to love God, and so to love him that our hearts may be drawn off from other things. Let us love him because of the goodness and amiableness of his nature, because of his bounty in our creation, redemption, and daily providence, and because he will be our God for ever.

[7.] God's goodness is our consolation and support in all afflictions. God is a gracious father, and all that he doth is acts of grace and goodness; even the sharpest of his administrations are absolutely the best for us: Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'Truly God is good to Israel;' all his work is good; as in the six days, so in constant providence, it is either good or it will turn to good: Rom. viii. 28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' God may change our condition, yet he doth not change his affection to us; he is all good, and doth that which we shall find good at length.

[8.] It is the ground of prayer; if we lack any good thing, he hath it, and is ready to communicate it. The goodness of God, as it doth stir up desire in us, so hope; as it stirreth a desire to communicate of his fulness, so a hope that surely the good God will hear us. He is not sparing of what he can do for us: James i. 5, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.' Our wants send us to the promises, and the promises to God.

Use 1. To press us to imitate our heavenly Father; you should be good and do good, as he is good and doth good; for every disposition in God should leave an answerable character and impression upon their souls that profess themselves to be made partakers of a divine nature; therefore it should be our great care and study to be as good and do as much good as we possibly can. He is one like God that is good and doth good; therefore still be doing good to all, especially to the

household of faith: Gal. vi. 10, ‘As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith;’ with Mat. v. 44, 45, ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; 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;’ Luke vi. 35, ‘But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil;’ 2 Peter i. 7, ‘Add to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.’ Not doing good to our own party, or those of our friendship, but to all. So generally all good is to be done, as well as that of bounty and beneficence: Luke vi. 45, ‘A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things;’ and it is said of Barnabas, Acts xi. 24, ‘He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.’ A good man is always seeking to make others good, as fire turneth all things about it into fire. The title signifies one not only of a mild disposition, but of a holy, heavenly heart, that maketh it his business to honour God. So Joseph of Arimathea is said to be ‘a good man, and a just;’ this is to be like God.

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Use 2. Direction to you in the business of the Lord’s supper: God is good, and doeth good.

1. Here you come to remember his goodness to you in Christ. Now the goodness of God should never be thought on, or commemorated, but your hearts should be raised in the wonder and admiration of it: Ps. xxxi. 19, ‘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!’ and Ps. xxxvi. 7, ‘How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.’ This should be delightful work to you, and not gone about with dead and careless hearts. We cannot express ourselves many times; strong passions do not easily get a vent; little things may be greatened by us, but great things indeed strike us dumb. However, our hearts should be deeply affected and possessed with this; we should be full of such admiring thoughts.

2. We come for a more intimate and renewed taste. By taste, I mean spiritual sense, to have ‘the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given to us,’ Rom. v. 5. We come to the feast of the soul that our hungry consciences may taste of the fatness of God’s house, Ps. lxv. 4; that our thirsty souls may drink of the rivers of his pleasure, Ps. xvi. 11; to have some pledge of the joys of heaven, if not to ravishment and sensible reviving, yet such as may put us out of relish with carnal vanities; some gracious experiences that may make us long for more, and go away lauding God.

3. To stir up our love to God as the most lovely and suitable object to our souls; in him is nothing but good. God is goodness itself: he is one that has deserved your love, and will satisfy and reward your love. All the good we have in an ordinance it is from him, and to lead up our souls to him. Our business now is to ‘love God, who loved us first,’ 1 John iv. 19; to love him by devoting ourselves to him, and to consecrate our all to his service.

4. To desire more communion with him, and to long after the blessed fruition of him, when God shall be all in all, not only be chief, but all, when we shall perfectly enjoy the infinite God, when the chiefest good will give us the greatest blessings, and an infinite eternal God will give us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The word, sacraments, and prayer convey but little to you in comparison of that, when God is object and means, and all things. The soul is then all for Christ, and Christ all for the soul. Your whole employment is to love him, live upon him. Here we give away some of our love, some of our thoughts and affections, on other things; Christ, is crowded, hath not room to lay forth the glory of his grace; but there is full scope to do it.

SERMON LXXVIII.

Teach me thy statutes.—VER. 68.

SECONDLY, we come to David's petition, 'Teach me thy statutes;' which I shall be brief in, because it doth often occur in the verses of this psalm. David's petition is to understand the word that he might keep it. Teaching bringeth us under the power of what is taught, and increaseth sanctification both in heart and life, as well as illumination or information.

Doct. One chief thing which they that believe and have a sufficient apprehension of God's goodness should seek of him in this world, is understanding the way of salvation.

This request is enforced out of the former title and compellation.

1. Because the saving knowledge of his will is one principal effect of his bounty and beneficence. As he showeth love to man above other creatures, in that he gave him such a life as was light, John i. 4—that is, had reason and understanding joined with it—so to his people above other men, that he hath given them a saving knowledge of the way of salvation since sin: Ps. xxv. 8, 'Good and upright is the Lord; he will teach sinners the way.' It is a great discovery of God's goodness that he will teach sinners, a favour not vouchsafed to the fallen angels: it is more than if he gave us the wealth of the whole world; that will not conduce to such a high use and purpose as this. More of his good will and special love is seen in this, to teach us the way how to enjoy him. Eternal life is begun by this saving knowledge: John xvii. 3, 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.'

2. This is one principal way whereby we show our sense of God's goodness. That is a true apprehension of God's goodness which giveth us confidence and hope of the saving fruits of it, when, the oftener we think of it, the more of sanctification we seek to draw from this fountain of goodness. That is an idle speculation that doth not beget trust, an empty praise, a mere compliment that doth not produce a real confidence in God, that he will give us spiritual blessings when we

heartily desire them. True knowledge of God's name breedeth trust: Ps. ix. 10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee:' and more particularly for this kind of benefit. It is a general encouragement: Mat. vii. 11, 'If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' But it is limited to the Spirit: Luke xi. 13, 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Spirit to them that ask it?' Without this faith there is no commerce with God.

3. It is an argument of the good temper of our souls not to serve our carnal turns, but promote the welfare of our souls, when we would enjoy and improve the goodness of God to get this benefit.

[1.] They are affected according to the value of the thing. Of all the fruits of God's goodness which a holy man would crave for himself and challenge for his portion, this he thinketh fittest to be sought—sanctifying grace to understand and keep the law. If this be not the only, yet it is the chiefest benefit which they desire in the world. For other things, let God deal with them as he will; but they value this among the greatest things which God bestoweth on mankind. Observe here how much the spirit of God's children differeth from the spirit of the world; they account God hath dealt well with them when he bestoweth upon them wealth and honour: Ps. iv. 6, 'Who will show us any good?' but the other desire grace to know God's will, and to serve and please him: there is the thing they desire and seek after, as suiting their temper and constitution of soul. A man is known by his desires, as the temper of his body by his pulse.

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[2.] They would not willingly sin against God, either out of ignorance or perverse affections; therefore, if God will direct them and assist them in the work of obedience, their great care and trouble is over. It is a good sign that a man hath a simple, honest spirit, when there is rooted in his heart a fear to offend God, and a care to please him. He may err in many things, but God accepts him as long as seeking knowledge in order to obedience, Eph. v. 15-17. All that God requireth, both for matter and manner, is, that we would not comply with sin; seeing the time is evil and full of snares, we should not be unwise in point of duty.

[3.] They have a holy jealousy of themselves. David desired to use every condition well, whether he were in prosperity or trouble. The context speaketh of afflictions that were sanctified; but a new condition might bring on a new alteration in the soul. Prosperity would make him forget God, and trouble overwhelm him, if God did not teach him. In what state soever we be, we must desire to be taught of God, otherwise we shall fail: Phil. iv. 11, 12, 'For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content: I know how to be abased, and how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed.' Unless the Lord guide us, we shall be as Ephraim was, 'a cake not turned,' Hosea vii. 8, baked but on one side, quite dough and raw on the other side; fail in the next condition, though passed over one well.

[4.] A sense of the creature's mutability. Comparing it with the former verse, I observe, that though he kept God's commandments, yet he craveth further grace, and desireth that he may be still taught, because he knew not all that he might know, and was ready to err both in practice and judgment: and this must teach us to desire God's guidance and direction, not only when we have erred, but when we do well. Many, when they have smarted for their errors, will desire God to teach them; but David kept this continual dependence upon God for daily grace, both for turning away of evil, and also for doing good: Prov. iii. 5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths:' which we are to follow in our places and callings. We are apt to ascribe too much to our present frame and resolutions. God must still be called to for his counsel and blessing in every business.

[5.] An evangelical frame. He pleadeth not merit, appealeth not to justice, but to God's grace and goodness. This should be the special groundwork of our prayers. The Lord doth all 'to the praise of his glorious grace,' Eph. i. 7; and he will not have that glory in fringed, either in part or in whole. The Spirit of God is very tender of it in scripture, and we should be very tender of it in our addresses to God, that all conceits of our own worth be laid aside, and that we wholly fly to God's goodness and mercy. The whole work of sanctification, from its first step to its last period, is all of grace, all must be ascribed to God's free goodness.

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[6.] The will of God revealed in scripture is a subject that is never perfectly known. While we are in the way to glory there is always some new thing to be learned of it and from it, even by those that are the greatest proficients in the knowledge of it; and therefore we must be still scholars in this school, and when we have learned never so much we must still be learning more. This is continued, lasting work, for David is ever and anon at his old request, 'Lord, teach me thy statutes;' and not without reason, since it is not sufficient to know God's will in some few great and weighty actions of our lives, but in all, whether of greater or lesser concernments. And when we know generals, yet we are so apt to err in particular cases, and since the commandment of God is so exceeding broad, Ps. cxix. 96. Every day we may see more into it, and may be more fully informed of the mind of God. We every day see more in a promise than we did before, in a precept than we did before; therefore the apostle saith, 1 Cor. viii. 2, 'And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.'

Use. Here is a pattern and precedent for us; especially now w& have engaged our souls to God, let us seek this directive grace. It implieth pardon, and that maketh way for joy and comfort; for God teacheth pardoned sinners. A sure light and direction prevents many troubles of spirit and anxious doubts. It is a pledge and assurance of our getting home to God; those whom God guideth are sure to be safe in the issue.

1. It showeth what should be the matter of our prayers. David beggeth not to increase him in riches and honours, nor to flow in temporal delights. No; if God would show himself a good God to him, he desireth it may be in giving him the spirit of understanding, and some increase of holiness;

this he would take as the principal sign of God's favour and grace to him. The world generally imploreth God's goodness to another end; they think they are dealt liberally with when every man hath his lust satisfied: they pray from the intemperateness of the flesh; but David professeth it was enough to him if he might find God answering him in that one thing which most others neglect and pass by in their prayers, or, if they mention it, it is for fashion's sake, and to comport with the usual way of praying. But because 'there is great deceit, and we often pray for what we have no mind to have granted, let us see if this be our temper.

[1.] We must discover it in our thanksgiving and blessing God for this gift, though he denieth us other which make a fair show in the world: Mat. xi. 25-27, 'At that time Jesus answered and said,' I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.' Christ showeth that the mystery of grace is at God's disposing, who manifests it as he seeth good; that if he hath cut us short in other things, and been liberal to us in this, we should not only be contented, but highly thankful; and how contemptible soever we be in the world, yet it is matter of praise and thanksgiving in that God hath bestowed his grace and love to us according to his will and pleasure.

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[2.] By our patience and contentedness in the want and loss of other things for this thing's sake; want, if God's providence be so; loss, if occasioned by our adherence to truth. Want: we have no reason to envy carnal men: Ps. xvii. 14, 15, 'From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. But as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' We have no reason to repine; our present condition of entertaining communion with God in a practice of holiness countervaileth all their happiness, especially our future hopes to increase in knowledge and abound in the work of the Lord; and to own and stand up for a hated and despised truth will bring more comfort to our souls than all the pleasure the wicked have in their sensual delights. Are they the happy men that go on in opposition against the ways of God? Prov. iii. 31-33, 'Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways: for the froward is an abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he blesseth the habitation of the just.' They are not happier than the godly; it is a greater happiness to know more of God's mind than anything they enjoy: John xv. 15, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I call you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.'

[3.] By our constancy in prayer, and earnest supplication to know more of the mind of God. They will not be put off with other things. God gave the Spirit to the rest of the apostles, but he

gave the purse to the son of perdition. Men may have a fit of devotion in their prayers, but their general course is not answerable: Mat. vi. 33, ‘First seek the kingdom of God.’ If we seek it in good earnest we shall show it in our conversation and demeanour: Prov. iv. 7, ‘Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding.’ This must be the chiefest thing that beareth sway in our endeavours, that we may know more of God’s mind in following our suits incessantly, we must not be put off; though God giveth other things, you must not cease your importunity. Lord, I expect something else from thy goodness; see Ps. cxix. 132, 133, ‘Look upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do to them that fear thy name. Order my steps in thy word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me;’ and Ps. xxvii. 7, ‘Hear me, God. when I cry with my voice; have mercy upon me, and answer me;’ if we do not suffer this desire to languish and die, but still it he recommended to God daily. My business is rightly to understand and perfectly to do thy will; this is my one and great request, which I will ever and ever urge. I cannot give over this prayer till thou beest all in all, and showest me the utmost of thy bounty. We desire many things, but we are soon put out of the humour; as children, that seem passionately and pettishly to desire a thing, but by presenting other things to them they are diverted and stilled; but it is not so with God’s people. As Naomi said of Boaz, Ruth iii. 18, ‘For the man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day;’ so a child of God will not be satisfied till his desire be in some measure accomplished.

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2. In what manner we should pray.

[1.] With earnestness. Slight prayers bespeak their own denial: Prov. ii. 1-5, ‘My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.’

[2.] With confidence: he is wont to do it for you. Ask nothing contrary to his nature. We should come with a confidence of speeding; there is in him a propensity and inclination to help us. What would ye do to a hunger-bitten child if he cometh to you for a knife or an apple? You would deny him them, but not meat to satisfy his hunger. If for bread to play with, or meat when he hath enough, you would deny him, not gratify his fancy: if he come to be taught his book, you would readily hear him. So when we come not for temporal things, but spiritual comforts, when spiritual comforts are not asked out of course, and for form’s sake, yea, not only for comforts, but necessary grace to do his will, surely it cannot be that he should cast off them that love him, and would fain be conformed to his will, that come humbly, and long, and pray, and seek for his grace.

[3.] That this confidence must be evangelical. He sets before his eyes God’s goodness, or readiness to be gracious to all that call upon him; so that all the hope we have to prevail should not be taken from anything in us, but something in God himself. We must expect and ask blessings from God, for God, and because of God’s sake. It is not for any good we deserve, or have done, or

can do, that God taketh care of his weak foolish children, but for the glory of his name, his grace and constant goodness. God is our fountain, our reasons are his goodness, our end his glory. This is the true way of addressing ourselves to God, deprecating sins for which he may harden us, and remembering his mercies on which we ground our hope. So doth David: Ps. xxv. 5, 6, 'Lead me in thy truth, teach me; for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day. Remember, O Lord, thy loving-kindnesses and thy mercies; for they have been ever of old.' His eternal love is assigned as the cause of all: Ps. xxiii. 3, 'He leadeth us in paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.

3. What should be the grounds and impelling principle of prayer.

[1.] A strong bent to please God, and that all your affections and actions may be ordered so as to be acceptable in his sight. Those that stand in awe of God are loath to offend him; they may expect direction and light in all difficult cases: Ps. xxv. 12, 'What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose;' ver. 14, 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.'

[2.] A desire to enjoy him; for these things are valuable as they lead us to God. Our solid joy lieth not in outward things, but in our communion with God: Ps. cxxxix. 24, 'Lead me in the way everlasting;' and Ps. lxxiii. 24, 'Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to thy glory.' Their business is to be happy hereafter, and well guided here, that they may attain that happiness. Now there is an inseparable connection between our walking in the time of this life, and receiving into heaven after this life; and he that is resolved to walk by the rule of God's direction, may promise himself to be received into glory after his journey is ended. So Ps. xliii. 3, 'Send out thy light and thy truth to lead me to thy holy hill.' They would fain take the nearest way to heaven, and follow God's counsel in all things. We have his word continually to guide us in this way, but we need also the assistance of his Spirit. The promised rest is much in their eye, and doth mightily prevail with him: they would have God to be their guide here, that he may be their rest hereafter.

SERMON LXXIX.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.—VER. 71.

THE context speaketh of afflictions by occasion of persecutions. The proud had forged a lie against him, and involved him in many troubles, when in the meantime 'their heart was as fat as grease.' They wallowed in ease and pleasure, but David kept right with God; and yet his afflictions do not cease. God doth not presently take away opposition, because of our proud, unhumbled, unmortified spirits, though we hold fast our integrity for the main: therefore he comforteth himself

in his spiritual protection under the affliction, though the affliction was not removed: ‘It is good,’ &c.

In the words there is—

1. An assertion, *it is good for me that I have been afflicted*.

2. The reason, *that I might learn thy statutes*. Or, here is a general truth explained by a particular instance. In the general, he saith it is good, and then what good he got by it.

Doct. That affliction, all things considered, is rather good than evil.

The assertion is a paradox to vulgar sense and the ears of the common sort of men. How few are there in the world that will grant that it is good to be afflicted! Yea, the children of God can scarcely subscribe to the truth of it till the affliction be over. While they are under it they feel the smart, but do not presently discern the benefit; but in the review they find God hath ordered it with much wisdom and faithfulness; and in the issue they say, as David doth, ‘It is good for me that I have been afflicted.’ Carnal sense is not easily persuaded, but the new nature prevaileth at length, and then they readily subscribe to the truth of it.

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The word is clear on this point: Job v. 17, ‘Behold, happy is the man whom the Lord correcteth.’ The first word, *behold*, summoneth our attention and observation. What is the matter? As those that are before Joseph cried, *Abreck*, ‘bow the knee,’ Gen. xli. 43, to show some eminent person was at hand, so this *behold* calleth for reverence and admiration; there is some strange truth to ensue and follow. Happiness in the lowest notion, it includeth a freedom from misery; and yet the scripture pronounces the man happy whom the Lord correcteth. There have been among the heathens many opinions about happiness. Two hundred and eighty-eight Austin reckoneth up; but none ever placed it in correction, in sickness, disgrace, exile, captivity, loss of friends, much less in God’s correction, who is our supreme judge, to whom we ultimately appeal when others wrong us. And yet the corrected man, and the man corrected by the Lord, is happy, though not with a consummate happiness; he hath not the happiness of his country, but he hath the happiness of the way. The man is kept by the way, that he may come to his country. His afflictions take nothing from him but his sin. Therefore his solid happiness remaineth not infringed, rather the more secured. So Ps. xciv. 12, ‘Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of thy law.’ To be chastened of God for what we have done amiss, and by that means to be reduced to the sense and practice of our duty, is one of the greatest blessings on this side heaven that can light upon us. It is an evidence of God’s tender care over us, and that he will not lose us, and suffer us to perish with the unbelieving and sinful world.

The truth lieth clearly in the scripture; but to reconcile it with our prejudices—

1. I shall show by what measure we are to determine good and evil.

2. Prove that affliction is good.

First, For the measure.

1. This good is not to be determined by our fancies and conceits, but by the wisdom of God; for God knoweth better what is good for us than we do for ourselves, and foreseeth all things by one infinite act of understanding, but we judge according to present appearance; therefore all is to be left to God's disposal, and his divine choice is to be preferred before our foolish fancies, and what he sendeth and permitteth to fall out is fitter for us than anything else. Could we once assuredly be persuaded of this, a Christian would be completely fortified, and fitted not only for a patient but a cheerful entertainment of all that is or shall come upon him. Besides, he is a God of bowels, and loveth us dearly, better than we do ourselves; and therefore we should be satisfied with his dispensations whatever they are, whether according to or against our will. The shepherd must choose the pastures for the sheep, whether lean or fat, bare or full grown; the child is not to be governed by his own fancy, but the father's discretion; nor the sick man by his own appetite, but the physician's skill. It is expedient sometimes that God should make his people sad and displease them for their advantage: John xvi. 6, 7, 'Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your hearts: nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away.' We are too much addicted to our own conceits: Christ's dealing is expedient and useful when yet it is very unsatisfactory to us: he is to be judge of what is good for us, his going or tarrying, not we ourselves, who are short-sighted and distempered with passions, whose requests many times are but ravings, and ask of God we know not what, as the two brethren, Mat. xx. 22, and seek our bane as a blessing, as children would play with a knife that would cut and wound them, pray our selves into a mischief and a snare. It were the greatest misery if God should carve out our condition according to our own fancy and desires. Peter said, Mat. xvii. 4, 'Master, it is good for us to be here:' he was well pleased to be upon Mount Tabor, but little thought what service God had to do for him elsewhere, how much poor souls needed him and the other apostles' help. We would always be in the mount with God, enjoy our comforts to the full, even to surfeit; but God knows that is not good for us. His pleasure should satisfy us though we do not see the reason of it. So Jer. xxiv. 5, God speaketh of the basket of good figs (whereby were represented the best of the people) whom I have sent into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. What can there be seemingly more contrary to their good than a hard and an afflicted lot out of their own country? Yet God, that foresaw all things, knew it was for their good; worse evils would befall the place where they had been. So to be kept under, to have no service for the present, no hopes to rise again for the future, and to be laden with all manner of prejudices and reproaches, this is for good. We think not so, but God knoweth it is so, most for his glory and our benefit. So the selling of Joseph into Egypt, Gen. 1. 20, 'God meant it to good.' Alas! what good to have the poor young man sold as a slave, to be cast into prison for his chastity and continency, and exposed to all manner of difficulties 1 But alas! many had perished if he had not been sent thither. So God taketh away many beloved comforts from us; he meaneth it for good. We think it is all against us; no, it is for us. So Ps. xxxiv. 10, 'They that seek the Lord

shall not want any good thing.' Many times they want food and raiment, want liberty, at least in some degree; they may want many things that are comfortable; though they have things sparingly, though they have of the meanest, yet they have that which is good for them. So Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'No good thing will he withhold.' He may keep us low and bare, feed us *cibo extemporali*, as Lactantius; but that is good for us. If it were good for us to have larger revenues and incomes, we should not want them. The true and absolute ground of all submission is to think that which God sendeth is good, be it prosperity or adversity, the having or wanting children, or other comforts.

2. The next measure is this, that good is to be determined by its respect to the chief good or true happiness. Now, what is our chief happiness but the enjoyment of God? Our happiness doth not consist in outward comforts, riches, health, honour, civil liberty, or comfortable relations, as husband, wife, children; but in our relation to and acceptance with God. Other things are but additional appendages to our happiness, Mat. vi. 33. Affliction taketh nothing from our essential solid happiness, rather helpeth us in the enjoyment of it, as it increaseth grace and holiness, and so we enjoy God more surely. That is good that sets us nearer to God, and that is evil which separateth us from him; therefore sin is evil, because it maketh an estrangement between us and God, Isa. lix. 2; but affliction is good, because many times it maketh us the more earnestly to seek after him: Hosea v. 15, 'In their afflictions they will seek me right early.' Therefore every condition is good or evil as it sets farther off or draws us nearer to God; that is good that tendeth to make us better, more like unto God, capable of communion with him, conduceth to our everlasting happiness. So 'It is good that a man bear the yoke from his youth,' Lam. iii. 27, that he be trained up under the cross, in a constant obedience to God and subjection to him, and so be fitted to entertain communion with him. If afflictions conduce to this end, they are good, for then they help us to enjoy the chief good.

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3. That good is not always the good of the flesh, or the good of outward prosperity; and therefore the good of our condition is not to be deter mined by the interest of the flesh, but the welfare of our souls. If God should bestow upon us so much of the good of the outward and animal life as we desire, we could not be said to be in a good condition if he should deny us good spiritual. We should lose one half of the blessings of the covenant by doting upon and falling in love with the rest: the flesh is importunate to be pleased, but God will not serve our carnal turns. We are more concerned as a soul than a body: Heb. xii. 10, 'He verily for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.' Certain it is God will chasten us for our profit. What do we call profit? The good things of this world, the great mammon which so many worship? If we call it so, God will not; he meaneth to impart to us spiritual and divine benefit, which is a participation of his own holiness. And truly the people of God, if they be in their right temper, value themselves not by their outward enjoyments, but their inward, by their improvement of grace, not the enjoyment of worldly comforts: 2 Cor. iv. 16, Tor this cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day.' A discerning Christian puts more value upon holiness wrought by affliction than upon all his comforts. So that though affliction be evil in itself, it is good as sanctified.

4. A particular good must give way to a general good, and our personal benefit to the advancement of Christ's kingdom. The good of the church must be preferred before our personal contentment. Paul could want the glory of heaven for a while, if his continuance in the flesh were needful for the saints: Phil. i. 24, 'To abide in the flesh is more needful for you.' We must not so desire good to our selves as to hinder the good of others. All elements will act contrary to their particular, for the conservation of the universe. That may be good for the glory of God which is not good for our personal contentment and ease. Now the glory of God is our greatest interest; if it be for the glory of God that I should be in pain, bereft of my comforts, my sanctified subjection to the will of God must say it is good. John xii. 27, 28, there you have expressed the innocent inclination of Christ's human nature, 'Father, save me from this hour:' and the overruling sense of his duty, or the obligation of his office, 'But for this cause came I to this hour.' We are often tossed and tumbled between inclination of nature and conscience of duty; but in a gracious heart the sense of our duty and the desire of glorifying God should prevail above the desire of our own comfort, ease, safety, and welfare. Nature would be rid of trouble, but grace submits all our interests to God's honour, which should be dearer to us than anything else.

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5. This good is not to be determined by present feeling, but by the judgment of faith. Affliction for the present is not pleasant to natural sense, nor for the present is the fruit evident to spiritual sense, but it is good because in the issue it turneth to good: Rom. viii. 28, 'All things work together for good.' While God is striking we feel the grief, and the cross is tedious, but when we see the end, we acknowledge it is good to be afflicted: Heb. xii. 11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; but afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness.' A good present is the cause of joy, and an evil present is the cause of sorrow; but there are two terms of abatement: the sorrow is from the present sense, and the conceit of the sufferer. When we are but newly under the affliction, we feel the smart, but do not presently find the benefit; but within a while, especially in the review, it is good for me; it is matter of faith under the affliction, it is matter of sense after it. Good physic must have time to work. That which is not good may be good; though it be not good in its nature, it is good in its seasonable use, and though for the present we see it not, we shall see it. Therefore good is not to be determined by feeling, but by faith. The rod is a sore thing for the present, but the bitter root will yield sweet fruit. If we come to a person under the cross, and ask him, What I is it good to feel the lashes of God's correcting hand, to be kept poor and sickly, exercised with losses and reproaches, to part with friends and relations, to lose a beloved child? sense will complain. But this poor creature, after he hath been exercised and mortified, and gotten some renewed evidences of God's favour, ask him then is it good to be afflicted? Oh, yes! I had else been vain, neglectful of God, wanted such an experience of the Lord's grace. Faith should determine the case when we feel it not.

Secondly, That according to these measures you will find it good to be afflicted.

1. It is good as it is *minus malum*, it keepeth us from greater evils. Afflictions to the righteous are either cures of or preservatives from spiritual evils, which would occasion greater troubles and crosses. They prevent sin: 2 Cor. xii. 7, 'And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelation, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.' They purge out sin: Isa. xxvii. 9, 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged out.' We are apt to abuse prosperity to self-confidence: Ps. xxx. 6, 7, 'In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong.' And luxury: Deut. xxxii. 15, 'But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked; thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation.' The godly have evil natures as well as others, which cannot be beaten down but by afflictions. We are froward in our relations. Hagar was proud in Abraham's house, Gen. xvi. 4, her mistress was despised in her eyes; but very humble in the desert, Gen. xxi. 16. David's heart was tender and smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment, 1 Sam. xxiv. 5; but how stupid and senseless was he when he lived at ease in Jerusalem! 2 Sam. xii. His conscience was benumbed till Nathan roused him. Before we are chastened we are rebellious, frail, fickle, mutable, apt to degenerate without this continual discipline: we are very negligent and drowsy till the rod awakeneth us. God's children have strange failings and negligences, and sometimes are guilty of more heinous sins. It is a great curse for a man to be left to his own ways: Hosea iv. 17, 'Let him alone;' so Ps. lxxxi. 12, 'I gave them up to their own hearts' lust.' Men must needs perish when left to themselves, without this wholesome, profitable discipline of the cross.

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2. It is good, because the evil in it is counterpoised by a more abundant good. It is evil as it doth deprive us of our natural comforts, pleasure, gain, honour; but it is good as these may be recompensed with better pleasures, richer gain, and greater honour. There is more pleasure in holiness than there can be pain and trouble in affliction: Heb. xii. 11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous, but afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.' More gain than affliction can bring loss: Heb. xii. 10, 'But he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' More honour than affliction can bring shame, surely then it is good. There is a threefold profit we get by affliction: —

[1.] The time of affliction is a serious thinking time: Eccles. vii. 14, 'In the day of adversity consider:' 1 Kings viii. 47, 'Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive.' We have more liberty to retire into ourselves, being freed from the attractive allurements of worldly vanities and the delights of the flesh. Adversity maketh men serious; the prodigal came to himself when he began to be in want, Luke xv. 17. Sad objects make a deep impression upon our souls; they help us to consider our own ways and God's righteous dealings, that we may behave ourselves wisely and suitably to the dispensation: Micah vi. 9, 'The man of wisdom will hear the rod.'

[2.] It is a special hearing time; in the text, ‘That I might learn thy statutes:’ and it is said of Christ, Heb. v. 8, that ‘He learned obedience from the things that he suffered:’ he did experimentally understand what obedience was in hard and difficult cases, and so could the better pity poor sinners in affliction: we have an experimental knowledge of that of which we had but a notional knowledge before. We come by experience to see how false and changeable the world is, how comfortable an interest in God is, what a burden sin is, what sweetness there is in the promises, what a reality in the word. Luther said, *Qui tribulantur*, &c. The afflicted see more in the scripture than others do; the secure and fortunate read them as they do Ovid’s verses. Certainly when the soul is humble, and when we are refined and raised above the degrees of sense, we are more tractable and teachable, our understandings are clearer, our affections more melting. Our spiritual learning is a blessing that cannot be valued. If God write his law upon our hearts by his stripes on our backs, so light a trouble should not be grudged at

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[3.] It is an awakening, quickening time.

(1.) Some are awakened out of the sleep of death, and are first wrought upon by afflictions. This is one powerful means to bring in souls to God, and to open their ears to discipline. God began with them in their afflictions, and the time of their sorrows was the time of loves. The hot furnace is Christ’s workhouse, the most excellent vessels of honour and praise have been formed there: Isa. xlviii. 10, ‘I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.’ Manasses, Paul, the jailer, were all chosen in the fire; God puts them into the furnace, and chooseth them there, melts them, and stamps them with the image of Christ. The hog’s trough was a good school to the prodigal. Well, then, doth God do you any harm by affliction when he saves you by it? If we use violence to a man that is ready to be drowned, and in pulling him out of the waters should break an arm or a leg, would he not be thankful? If you have broken my arm, you have saved my life. So God’s children: It is good that I had such an affliction, felt the sharpness of such a cross. Oh, blessed providence! I had been a witless fool, and gone on still in a course of sin and vanity, if God had not awakened me.

(2.) It quickeneth others to be more careful of their duty, more watchful against sin, and doth exercise and improve us in heavenly virtues and graces of spirit, which lay dormant in us through neglect, since pleasing objects, which deaden the heart, are removed. Even God’s best children, when they have gotten a carnal pillow under their heads, are apt to sleep; their prayers are dead; thoughts of heaven cold, or none; little zeal for God or delight in him: Isa. xxvi. 16, ‘Lord, in trouble they have visited thee; they pour out a prayer when thy chastening is upon them;’ Hosea v. 15, ‘In their afflictions they will seek me early.’ Because they do not stir up themselves, God stirreth them up by a smart rod. The husbandman pruneth the vine, lest it run out into leaves; the baits of the flesh must be taken from us, that our gust and relish of heavenly things may be recovered.

Use 1. The use is to caution us against our murmurings and taxing of God’s providence. How few are there that give him thanks for his seasonable discipline, and observe God’s faithfulness and the benefit they have by afflictions, but rather murmur, repine, and fret through impatience! If

it be good to be afflicted, let us accept of it, for good is matter of choice: Lev. xxvi. 41, 'If their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity.' Now all affliction on this side hell is good, as it is a lesser evil; *hic ure, hic seca*, if God will cut here, burn here, lance here, as a chirurgeon, that we may not be destroyed for ever; corrected, that we may not be condemned, 1 Cor. xi. 32. It is good, as it is a means to good; for the end putteth a loveliness also upon the means, though things in themselves be harsh and sour. We must not consider what things are in themselves, but what they are in their reduction, tendency, and final use. So all things are yours, crosses, deaths, 1 Cor. iii. 18; all their crosses, yea, sometimes their sins and snares, by God's overruling. We lose the benefit of our affliction by our murmurings, repinings, faintings, carnal sorrows and fears; an impatient distrustful mind spoileth the working of God: 'Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience.' It is not the bare affliction worketh, but the affliction meekly borne. Let us not misconstrue God's present way of dealing with us. There may be a seeming harshness in some of his dealings, but yet, all things considered, you will find them full of mercy and truth. Murmuring is a disorder in the affections, misinterpreting in the understanding, to prevent it.

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1. Consider you must not interpret the covenant by God's providence, but God's providence by his covenant. Certain it is that all new covenant dispensations are mercy and truth, Ps. xxv. 10, our crosses not excepted; by them God is pursuing his covenant and eternal purpose concerning our salvation. There is sometimes a seeming contradiction between his promises and his providences, word and works; his voice is sweet like Jacob's, but his hand rough like Esau's. Go unto the sanctuary, and God will help you to reconcile things, Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17; otherwise the difficulty will be too hard for you. The children of God, that have suspected or displeased him, have always found themselves in error, Isa. xlix. 14, 15. His promise is the light side, his providence the dark side of the cloud: Ps. lxxvii. 19, 'Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the deep waters, and thy footsteps are not known.' We cannot trace him, nor find out the reason of everything that God doeth; only, in the general, that 'he doeth all things well,' Mark vii. 37; nay, what is best.

2. We must distinguish between a part of God's work and the end of it. We cannot understand God's providence till he hath done his work. He is an impatient spectator that cannot tarry till the last act, wherein all errors are reconciled: John xiii. 7, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou shalt know.' No wonder if we are much in the dark, if we look only to present sense and present appearance. Then his purposes are hidden from us; he bringeth one contrary out of another, light out of darkness, meat out of the eater. God knoweth what he is a-doing with you, when you know not: Jer. xxix. 11, 'I know my thoughts, to give you an expected end.' When we view providences by pieces, we know not God's mind; for the present we see him (it may be) rending and tearing all things; therefore let us not judge of God's work by the beginnings, till all work together. Our present state may be very sad and uncomfortable, and yet God is designing the choicest mercies to us: Ps. xxxi. 22, '1 said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee;' Ps. cxvi. 11, 'I said in my haste, All men are

liars.' Haste never speaketh well of God nor his promises, nor maketh any good comment upon his dealings.

3. We must distinguish between that which is really best for us, and what we judge best for us: Deut. viii. 15, 16, 'Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee out water out of the rock of flint; who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not; that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at the latter end.' Other diet is more wholesome for our souls than that which our sick appetite craveth. It is best with us many times when we are weakest: 2 Cor. xii. 10, 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' Worst when strongest: 2 Chron. xxvi. 16, 'When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his own destruction.' Lot chose Sodom, a fair and pleasant situation, but you know what inconveniences he met with there. Many times the buffetings of Satan are better for us than a condition free from temptation; so is poverty, emptiness, better than fulness, loss of friends than enjoyment of them.

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Use 2. For information.

1. By what note we may know whether God chastens us in anger, yea or nay; whether our crosses be curses. The cross that maketh thee better cometh with a blessing. It is not the sharpness of the affliction we should look to, but the improvement of it. The bitter waters may be made sweet by experiences of grace; if we are made more godly, wise, religious, it is a good cross; but if it leave us as careless and stupid, or no better than we were before, that cross is but a preparation to another; if it hath only stirred up our impatience, done us no good, God will follow his stroke, and heat his furnace hotter.

2. It informeth us that it is our duty not only to be good in afflictions, but we must be good after afflictions. David, when escaped, saith, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' Wicked men are somewhat good in afflictions, but as soon as they are delivered they return to their old sins; as metals are melted while they are in the furnace, but when they are taken out, they return to their natural hardness; but the godly are better afterwards.

3. That every condition is as the heart is. Afflictions are good if we have the grace to make a good use of them. Look, as the good blessings of God by our corruption are abused to wantonness, and so made hurtful to us, so crosses, that are evil in themselves, when sanctified are good. All things are sanctified to us when we are sanctified to God. Other things that would be snares prove helps and encouragements, are great furtherances. The creature is another thing to the saints; if they are advanced, their hearts are enlarged to God; if afflicted, they grow more humble, watchful, serious. All things work together for the worst to the wicked. If God make Saul a king, Judas an apostle, Balaam a prophet, their preferment shall be their ruin. Hainan's honour, Ahithophel's wit, and Herod's applause turned to their hurt—if in prosperity, they contemn God; if in adversity, deny and blaspheme him: Prov. i. 32, 'For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the

prosperity of fools shall destroy them.' As the salt sea turneth all into salt water, so a man is in the constitution of his soul; all things are converted to that use.

Use 3. To persuade us to make this acknowledgment, that affliction is good. There needs many graces before we can thus determine.

1. Faith. It is not present, but it must be believed, hoped, and waited for. It is not fit all should be done in a day, and as early as we would; in the Lord's time the fruit will appear. The word doth not work by and by, so not the rod. Faith can see good in that in which sense only can find smart: Phil. i. 19, 'I know this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ:' and 'We know that all things shall work together for good,' Rom. viii. 28. Though it doth not appear, yet we know.

2. Love. The children of God, out of their love to God and present submission to God, do count whatsoever he doth to be good: Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'Yet God is good to Israel.' Though he seemeth to deal with his people hardly, yet love pronounceth the dispensation to be good; it can see a great deal of love in pain, and smart, and chastenings. I have read once and again of such a rabbi, that, when told of an affliction, would say, This is good, because it cometh from God.

3. Spiritual wisdom and choice to esteem things according to their intrinsic worth. A high value of holiness, profiting in sanctification, is more than enough to recompense all the trouble we are put to in learning it. This will make us yield to be lessened in our worldly comforts for the increase of spiritual grace: as Paul would cheerfully part with his health that he might have more experience of Christ: 2 Cor. xii. 10, 'I will take pleasure in infirmities, necessities, and distresses, for Christ's sake.' Surely the loss of outward things should trouble us the less, and we should be the sooner satisfied in God's dispensation, if he will take away our earthly comforts, and make us more mindful of that which is heavenly; if by an aching head God will give you a better heart, by the death of friends promote the life of grace.

4. Diligence and needfulness—(1.) To observe afflictions; (2.) To improve them.

[1.] To observe what falleth out, from what hand it cometh, to what issue it tendeth; otherwise, if we observe it not, how can we acknowledge it, give God the glory of his wisdom and goodness? In heaven, when we shall know as we are known, it will be a great part of our lauding of God to look back on his providence conducting us through troubles, as it is pleasant for travellers in their inn to discourse of the deepness and danger of the ways. And now, when we rather are known than know, Gal. iv. 9, it is useful and comfortable to take notice of God's dealing with us. Oh, what a deal of wisdom, faithfulness, and truth may we see in the conduct of his providence! Gen. xxxii. 10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands;' Ps. cxix. 75, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted

me.' What necessity of his chastisement to prevent our pride, security, negligence! with what wisdom was our cross chosen! how did God strike in the right vein! you were running on apace in some neglect of God till he awakened you. This observation will help us to love God, who is vigilant and careful of our welfare. It will allay all the hard thoughts that we have of the seeming severity of his dispensations.

[2.] Diligence to improve it for the bringing about of this good. We must not be idle spectators, but active under God; we must more stir up ourselves, and exercise ourselves to godliness. The affliction of itself is a dead thing; there must be help: Phil. i. 19, 'For I know this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ;' 2 Cor. i. 11, 'Ye also helping together by prayer for us.' It is not the nature of the cross, nor the power of inherent grace, without the actual influence of the Spirit, that makes troubles profitable. We must excite ourselves also, for the saints are not only passive objects, but active instruments of providence. We are not merely to be passive: Heb. xii. 11, 'It yieldeth the pleasant fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.' God exerciseth us with the rod, and we must exercise ourselves under the rod. We are engaged to use all holy means to this end, searching, praying, rousing up ourselves, learning our proper lessons; then we will come and make our acknowledgment, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.'

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SERMON LXXX.

The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.—VER. 72.

THESE words may be conceived as a reason of what was 'said in the foregoing verse. David hath told us there that it was good for him that he was afflicted, because of the benefit obtained by his afflictions; he had learned God's statutes, knew more of his duty, and had a heart to keep closer to it. Now this gain was more to him than his loss by affliction; for he doth not value his happiness by his temporal interests so much as by his thriving in godliness. All the wealth in the world was not so much to him as the spiritual benefit which he got by his sore troubles; for 'the law of thy mouth,' &c.

The text is a profession of his respect to the word, a profession which containeth in it the very spirit of godliness, a speech that becometh only such a man's mouth as David was, one that is sincerely godly. Many will be ready to make this profession, but other things do not suit; the profession of their mouths is contradicted by the disposition of their hearts, and the course and tenor of their lives. Observe here two things:—

1. The things compared.

2. The value and preference of the one above the other.

[1.] The things compared. On the one side there is *the law of God's mouth*; on the other, *thousands of gold and silver*.

[2.] The value and preference of the one above the other, *it is better to me,* it is better in itself. There was reason for his esteem and choice. Many will say it is better in itself, but David saith it is better *to me*. Let us explain these circumstances as they are laid.

[1.] The things compared.

(1.) On the one side there is 'the law of God's mouth:' it is God's own word, and we should be as sure of it as if we had heard him utter and pronounce it with his own mouth, or had received it immediately by oracle from him. And indeed that is one way to raise this esteem: 1 Thes. ii. 13, 'Receiving it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which worketh effectually in you that believe.' In the word we must consider two things—the authority of it, and the ministry of it. If we consider the authority of it, so it cometh from God's mouth; if we consider the ministry of it, so it cometh by man's mouth, for he speaketh to us by men: 2 Peter i. 21, 'Holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' If we look to the ministry only, and not to the authority, we are in danger to slight it; certainly shall not profit by it. Many do so, as Samuel thought Eli called him, when it was the Lord, 1 Sam. iii. 7, 8; but when we consider who is the author of it, then it calleth for our reverence and regard.

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(2.) On the other side, 'thousands of gold and silver.' Where wealth is set out—(1.) By the species and kind of it—gold and silver; gold for hoarding and portage, silver for present commerce. (2.) The quantity, 'thousands,' that is, thousands of pieces, as that addition is used, Ps. lxviii. 30, 'They shall submit themselves with pieces of silver,' or talents, as the Chaldee paraphrase expoundeth it. 'Money answereth all things,' Eccles. x. 19. It can command all things in the world, as the great instrument of commerce.

[2.] The value and preference of the one above the other, 'it is better,' and it is 'better to me.' It is better in itself, that noteth the intrinsic worth of the word; it is better to me, that implieth his own esteem and choice. To say, in the general only, It is better, implieth but a speculative approbation, which may be in carnal men: Rom. ii. 18, 'And approvest the things that are more excellent:' but to say, It is better to me, implieth a practical esteem, which is proper only to the regenerate. It is more dear, precious, and sweet to them than the greatest treasure. Could we have such a holy affection to the word, and say also, To me, and to me, we should thrive more in a course of godliness; for a man is carried on powerfully by his choice and esteem, his actions are governed and determined by it.

Doct. The word of God is dearer to a gracious heart than all the riches in the world.

Let me bring proofs: Ps. xix. 10, ‘More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold.’ So speaking of spiritual wisdom, which is only to be had by the word of God, he saith, Prov. iii. 14, ‘That the merchandise thereof is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.’ So Prov. viii. 11, ‘For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things which are to be desired are not to be compared with it.’ These expressions are frequently used, because the greatest part of mankind are miserably bewitched with the desire of riches; but God’s children are otherwise affected, they have a better treasure.

Let me prove two things:—

1. That the word of God, and the benefit we get by it, is better than thousands of gold and silver.

2. That the children of God do so esteem it. Both must be proved; the one to show the worth and excellency of the word, the other to show the gracious disposition of the hearts of God’s children. There is no question but that if these things were well weighed, the law of God’s mouth, and thousands of gold and silver, we should find there is a great inequality between them; but all men have not a judgment to choose that which is most worthy. Many take glass beads for jewels, and prefer toys and trifles before a solid good. Gold and silver draw the hearts of all men to them, and their affections blind their judgment; and then, though the weights be equal, if the balances be not equal, wrong will be done. We do not weigh things with an equal balance, but consider them with a prejudiced mind, and a heart biassed and prepossessed with worldly inclinations.

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First, then, for the things themselves; surely gold and silver, which is digged out of the bowels of the earth, is not worthy to be compared with the law that cometh out of the mouth of God. If you compare the nature, use, and duration of these benefits that you have by the one and the other, you will see a vast difference.

1. The nature. The notion of riches is abundance of valuable things. Now there are true riches and counterfeit riches, which have but the resemblance and show. The true riches is spoken of Luke xvi. 11, and is opposed to that mammon and pelf which the world doteth upon. Grace giveth us the true riches and wealth. It is good to state what are the true riches and the false. The more abundance of truly valuable things a man hath, the more he hath of true riches. A child counteth himself rich when he hath a great many pins and points and cherry-stones, for those suit his childish age and fancy. A worldly man counteth himself rich when he hath gold and silver in great store by him, or lands and heritages, or bills and bonds; but a child of God counteth himself rich when he hath God for his portion, Christ to his redeemer, and the Spirit for his guide, sanctifier, and comforter; which is as much above a carnal man’s estate in the world as a carnal man’s estate is above a child’s toys and trifles, yea, in finitely more. Well, then, surely the word of God will make us rich, because it revealeth God to be our God, according to our necessity and capacity: Ps. xvi. 5, 6, ‘The Lord is my portion: I have a goodly heritage;’ and it revealeth unsearchable riches of grace in Christ, Eph, ii. 1, iii. 8, pardon of sins, and life eternal. They that have Christ want nothing, but are completely

happy. So for the Spirit; what are all the riches of the world to those treasures of knowledge, comfort, and holiness which we have by the Spirit! What is in one evangelist, 'He will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him,' Luke xi. 13, is in another, Mat. vii. 11, 'He will give good things to them that ask him.' The Spirit is instead of all good things, so that the word is able to enrich a man more than all the wealth of the world can. It giveth us abundance, and abundance of better things; so that a man is not absolutely poor that wants gold and silver, but he that wants the benefits which the word of God offereth and conveyeth to us. Gold and silver are but one sort of riches, and but the lowest and meanest sort You do not count a man poor if he have lands, though he hath not ready-money; much less is a man poor if he hath gold, though he hath not silver. So a Christian is not poor if he hath God and Christ and the Spirit, though he say, with the apostle Peter, 'Silver and gold have I none,' Acts iii. 6. Angels are not poor though they have not flocks and herds and yearly revenues; they have an excellency suitable to their natures. So a Christian is not poor while he possesseth him who possesseth all things. But that I may not seem only to say that the treasures of grace are the true riches, I shall prove it by two arguments:—

[1.] That is the true riches which can buy and purchase all other things, but all other things cannot buy and purchase it. Now all the riches in the world cannot buy and purchase those benefits which the word offereth to us. They cannot purchase the favour of God; 'For what hope hath the hypocrite, if he hath gained, when God comes to take away his soul?' Job xvii. 8. Many a carnal wretch doth not make a saving bargain of it; but be it so, he looketh for worldly gain and hath it. What will this stead him when God puts the bond of the old covenant in suit, and demandeth his soul from him? He is loath to resign it, but God will have it: 'What can he give in exchange for his soul?' Money cannot purchase the grace of the Redeemer: 1 Peter i. 18, 'Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things;' and Ps. xlix. 6-8, 'The redemption of the soul is precious.' Men would, if they could, give a thousand worlds for the pardon of their sin, when they come to receive the fruit of it; but all will not do: the wrath of God must be appeased, and the justice of God satisfied, by another kind of ransom. They cannot purchase the grace of the Spirit. Simon Magus would give money for the gifts of the Holy Ghost, but Peter said to him, 'Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money,' Acts viii. 20. His request was base and carnal; yet thus far it yieldeth a testimony to the truth in hand, that he thought the gift of the Holy Ghost better than money, or else he would not have offered his money for it; yea, the lowest and far less necessary gift than his sanctifying, guiding, and comforting work. Well, then, all other things cannot purchase these benefits. But, on the other side, these benefits procure all other things. Grace giveth us an advantage in worldly things above others, for certainly 'Man doth not live by bread only,' Mat. iv., and his life doth not lie in worldly abundance: the natural, much more the sanctified and comfortable, use of the creatures dependeth on the favour of God and his fatherly care and providence, which is assured to the heirs of promise: Mat. vi. 33, 'First seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things shall be added;' 1 Tim. iv. 8, 'Godliness hath the promise of this life and that which is to come;' Prov. iii. 15, 16, Wealth is not to be compared with

wisdom; because ‘in her right hand is length of days, and in her left hand riches and honour.’ A child of God that is obedient to the word hath more advantage for the world than a wicked man hath: he hath a promise which the other hath not, a warrant to cast his care upon God; he gets more by the want of worldly things than a wicked man by the possession of them, for his want is sanctified, and worketh for good.

[2.] The world cannot recompense and supply the want of that grace we get by the word, but this can easily supply the want of the world. The worth and value of things is known by this, what we can least want. Now there is no earthly thing but may be so supplied as that its want should be better to us than its enjoyment. Sickness may be better to us than health, because of experiences of grace, 2 Cor. xii. 10. Poverty may be better than wealth, because we may be rich in grace, James i. 9; so James ii. 5; so 1 Tim. vi. 6, ‘Godliness with contentment is great gain.’ Slender provision with a contented heart is much better than a great deal more wealth. Godliness can supply the room of wealth, but wealth cannot supply the room of godliness. If the want of wealth helps us to an increase of grace and communion with God, it helpeth us to that which is of higher and greater value than the enjoyment of wealth could afford. But now, on the other side, the world will not give us a recompense for the want of godliness: Mat. xvi. 26, ‘What is a man profited if he shall gain the world and lose his soul?’ What shall be given to the party for that loss? His soul is lost, not in a natural sense, but in a legal sense, forfeited to God’s justice. We may please ourselves in our carnal choice for a while, but death bloweth away all our vain conceits: Jer. xvii. 11, ‘At his latter end he shall be a fool.’ He was a fool before all his lifetime, but now in the judgment and conviction of his own conscience. His conscience shall rave at him, fool, madman I to hazard the love of Christ for worldly things. These things cannot be recompensed by any other. What poor rewards can the world yield you for the loss of Christ and heaven! Alas! then, you lose your treasure, and have nothing to comfort you but rattles and baubles, which will no more comfort us than fine flowers will a man going to execution. Thus in the nature of riches.

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2. Let us come to the use and end of these things, the use of the law of God’s mouth, and the use of wealth. The use of wealth is to support and maintain the present life and the bodily state during our pilgrimage and passage through the world; but the use of the word is to guide and direct us in the way to the blessedness of the world to come. The world supplieth our bodily necessities; ‘But the law of God is perfect, converting the soul,’ Ps. xix. 7. It discovereth a man’s soul-misery and remedy, as it directeth to Christ, and enforceth our obedience to God, and prescribeth a universal adherence to him and dependence on him. Our souls are fallen off from God by sin into a most doleful state, and have no other way of recovery than is prescribed in this blessed word of God. There are three uses of the word of God, and they do all commend and endear it to our respects:—

[1.] It is the great means to sanctify and convey a divine principle and nature in us; it is not only the rule, but the seed of the new life: 1 Peter i. 23, ‘He hath begotten us, not by corruptible, but incorruptible seed,’ &c.; James i. 18, ‘He hath begotten us by the word of truth;’ 2 Peter i. 4,

‘To us are given great and precious promises, that we might be made partakers of the divine nature;’ John xvii. 17, ‘Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.’ All this is said of the word: it is the means to sanctify us, the immortal seed, the beginning of the new life, the divine nature to make us live after a godlike manner; therefore it is ‘better than thousands of gold and silver.’ A child of God findeth a greater treasure in one chapter of the Bible than worldly men in all their lands and honours and large revenues. A poor Christian meeteth with more true gain in a sermon than others can in their trades while they live. God begetteth him at first by the word of truth, and giveth him there the supply of the Spirit; therefore ‘be swift to hear,’ much in reading, and meditation day and night. Oh! there is the true treasure, the pearl of price; there their souls become acquainted with God.

[2.] It directeth us and keepeth us from being carried away with every deceit of sin: Ps. cxix. 105, ‘Thy word is a light unto my path, and a lamp unto my feet.’ Here are directions for all cases: here is a general direction, it is a light to our path; and showeth us what to do in particular actions, it is a lamp to our feet. So ver. 133, ‘Order my steps in thy word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.’ It is the word prevents the reign of any one sin. To have a sure rule to walk by in the midst of so many snares and temptations is a greater favour than to enjoy the greatest affluence of worldly felicity.

[3.] It supporteth us in all our afflictions and extremities. All the wealth in the world composed and put together cannot yield us that true contentment and satisfaction which the word of God doth to the obedient soul. Wealth cannot allay a grieved mind nor appease a wounded conscience. The word directeth us where we may find rest for our souls: Jer. vi. 16, ‘Go ask for the good old way, and you shall find rest for your souls.’ We lose ourselves in a maze of uncertainties till we come to the word of God: Mat. xi. 28, ‘Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and ye shall find rest for your souls.’ Here is ease for the great wound and maim of nature. The great maim of nature is sin. Now where shall we have a plaster for this sore, but only in the word of God? So for particular afflictions: Rom. xv. 4, ‘That ye, through the patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.’ Comfort is the strengthening of the mind, or the fortifying the mind when it is vexed and weakened with doubts, fears, and sorrows: ‘I had fainted in my affliction unless thy word had quickened me,’ Ps. cxix. 50. The comforts of the world appear and vanish in a moment, cannot firmly stay and revive the heart; every blast of temptation scattereth them. Philosophy and natural reason cannot give us true ground of comfort: that was it they aimed at, how to fortify the soul and keep it quiet notwithstanding troubles in the flesh; but as they never understood the true ground of misery, which is sin, so neither the true ground of comfort, which is Christ. That which man offereth cannot come with such power and authority upon the conscience as that which God offereth, and bare reason cannot have such an efficacy as divine testimony and the law of God’s mouth. This moonlight rotteth before it ripeneth fruits; but the word acquainteth us with Christ, who is the foundation of comfort; with the Spirit, who is the efficient cause of comfort; with the

promise of heaven, which is the true matter of comfort; with faith, the great instrument to receive it.

3. Let us look to the duration. There is a vanity and uncertainty in all these outward things; they soon take the wing, and leave us in sorrow. If they continue with us till death, then they have done all their work. Wealth may bring you to the grave, but it can stead you no further; then wealth is gone, but horror doth continue: Luke xvi. 24, 'Son, in thy lifetime thou enjoyedst thy good things.' These good things are only commensurate with life. Sometimes they do not last so long; but when we must leave the world, and launch out to those unknown regions, Job xxvii. 8, how miserable shall we be! Worldly comforts will fail us when we have most need of them, as Jonah's gourd when the sun scorched him. So in the hour of death, what will bags of gold do then? But now, on the other side, wisdom is better than gold and silver, because 'with her are durable riches and righteousness,' Prov. viii. 18, 19; therefore 'my fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver.' If a man would labour for anything, labour for that which is eternal, John vi. 27. No treasure can be compared to eternal life, and this the word assureth us of.

Secondly, Let us now come to examine why the children of God value it so.

1. Because they are enlightened by the Spirit, when others have their eyes dazzled with external splendour, and their judgment corrupted by their senses. It is not ignorance undoes the world so much as want of spiritual prudence. Spiritual and heavenly things can only be seen in the light of the Spirit, without which we can neither discern the truth or worth of them in order to choice: 1 Cor. ii. 14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit:' and therefore, till we have this illuminating and sanctifying light of the Spirit, we shall not make a good choice for ourselves. Eph. i. 17, 18, the apostle prayeth, 'That the Lord would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.' That saving knowledge of divine mysteries which causeth us to prefer and choose them above other things comes from the Spirit of wisdom and revelation; otherwise, in seeing we see not. There is a perfect contradiction many times between speculative and practical knowledge. The common wisdom and knowledge of divine mysteries is a gift that cometh from the Spirit, much more the spiritual discerning.

2. They are affected with their true necessities. Our real necessities are the necessities of the soul. Bodily wants are more urging and pressing upon us, but these are more dangerous; therefore gold and silver, which supplieth our bodily necessities, is not so welcome to them as the law of God's mouth, which provideth a remedy for their soul-defects. How to be justified, how sanctified, is more than what shall we eat and drink, and wherewith shall we be clothed. Usually soul-necessities are overlooked; we regard them not, or conceit we are well already: Rev. iii. 17, 'Thou thoughtest thou wast rich, and increased with goods, and hadst need of nothing:' and then we have no relish for the offered remedy. The word of God is the offered remedy to repair our collapsed state. The gospel is not only true, but worthy to be embraced, 1 Tim. i. 15; but who will embrace it but the

sensible sinner? for it is offered as a remedy to the sick and deliverance to the captive: it is not enough to see the excellency of things, but we must see our necessity of them. There are two hindrances that prejudice our salvation—either the necessity and excellency of the gospel is not considered, or the truth and reality of it is not believed.

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3. They measure all things with respect not to this world but the world to come. It is a high point of religion to do all things and regard all things for eternal ends: 2 Cor. iv. 18, 'Looking not to things seen, that are temporal, but to the things which are not seen, which are eternal:' making this our scope, and doing all to this end. Gold and silver are the most valuable things in the world: what cannot gold and silver buy in this world? But there is another world, and believers look to things unseen. Within a while it will not be a pin to choose whether we have enjoyed much or little of this world's good things; but much will lie upon this, whether we have obeyed God, and glorified God, and accepted of Christ. The use of gold and silver ceaseth in the world to come: these things are not current in Canaan, nor accounted of in our heavenly country; therefore money should be a vile thing instead of grace. We can carry away none of these things with us when we die, Eccles. v. 15; and surely that which hath no power to free us from death, to comfort us in death, or go with us into another world after death, is no happiness or solid tranquillity.

4. They have had trial and experience of the word, what a comfort and support it hath been to them: 1 Peter ii. 2, 3, '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.' There is an appetite followeth the new nature, and makes us desire spiritual food: Phil. i. 9, 10, 'And this I pray, that ye may abound in all knowledge and in all judgment, that ye may approve the things that are excellent.' When the Spirit giveth us a taste of the goodness of those things offered in the word of God, a taste of divine truth in our souls, when we find these comforts verified in us, then we come to approve the things that are excellent above all other things: Ps. cxix. 11, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.' We never know the worth of the word till we come to make trial of it by practice and experience. The pleasure of the word we find in practice, and the comfort and support of it in deep afflictions. It is not so with the world; try it, and loathe it; it is more in fancy than fruition, because the imperfections which formerly lay hid are discovered; but the more intimately acquainted with the word of God, the more we prize it; we see there is more to be gained there than in all the world besides.

Use 1. To reprove and disprove those that prefer gold and silver before the word of God. This is done by four sorts:—

1. This is grossly done by those that revolt from the profession of the truth for the world's sake: 2 Tim. iv. 10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, and embraced the present world:' that betray the cause of religion, as Judas sold his master for thirty pieces of silver; or by those who will transgress for a small hire. The devil needeth not offer great things to them, when they will accept of less with thanks; for two pence or three pence gain will profane the Sabbath or wrong their neighbour. Is the

law of God's mouth dearer to them than gold and silver? Surely no. They may flatter themselves with love to the word, but when they can violate it for a trifle, for a pair of shoes, it is a sign that a little gain gotten by iniquity of traffic is sweeter to them than all the comforts of the promise.

2. It is done by them that will not forsake anything for the word's sake but when they are put upon an apparent trial. Here is gold and silver, and there the law of God's mouth; what will you do? obey God, or comply with your interests? You show your love by leaving the one rather than the other; as Moses 'counted the reproach of Christ better treasure than the riches of Egypt,' Heb. xi. 26. Christ's worst is better than the world's best. The Thessalonians showed their love when they received the word in much affliction; but when you decline duty, and are loath to hazard your interests, it is evident what you prefer. To some this may be a daily temptation: If I should be conscionable in my calling, I should be poor; keep touch and honesty in all things, it would turn to my loss. How many are discouraged from the ways of God, and discharging a good conscience, by inconveniency!

3. This is also in part done by them who turn back upon the word and ordinances of God for gain's sake, and fix their residence there, where they can neither enjoy God nor his people, nor the comfort of his ordinances; as merchants who remove for traffic, and settle their abode there where the true religion is not professed, it may be, suppressed with extreme rigour; especially when they send youth thither, and novices and persons not grounded in the faith. This is like turning a child loose among a company of contagious persons, or setting an empty pitcher to crack before the fire. Commerce and traffic with infidels or persons of a false religion is lawful; but to make our constant residence where there is no liberty for reading and hearing the word of God, no liberty of worship and ordinances, cannot be excused from sin. You make religion to stoop to gain. I will not urge so high and heroical an instance as Moses: Heb. xi. 25, 'Choosing rather to suffer afflictions with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;' but of a Jew since the time of their degeneration. I have once and again read of one Rabbi Joseph, who, being allured with the hope and call to a place of great gain, to teach Hebrew where there was no synagogue, is said to have brought forth this scripture for his answer and excuse, 'The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.' Let us Christians remember it, and consider the pertinency of it

4. It is more refinedly done by them who by earthly things are drawn off from the pursuit of heavenly, and are night and day cumbered with much serving, and never take time to refresh their souls with the pleasure of the word; like Martha, cumbered about many things, while Mary sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word, Luke x. *Felix domus*, saith Bernard, *ubi Martha queritur de Maria*—it is a happy house where Martha complaineth of Mary. But alas! in most places it is otherwise; religion is encroached upon, all remembrance of God and meditation of his word is jostled out of doors by the cares of the world.

Use 2. To press us to make this profession seriously, heartily.

1. When we have wealth this profession should be made to draw off the heart from it to better things. When our store is increased, our hearts are apt to be enchanted with the love of these things: Ps. lxii. 10, 'If riches increase, set not your hearts upon them.' Our hearts are very apt to be set upon the world; but we must remember this is not the true treasure; there are other manner of riches that we should look after—to be rich towards God, lest I be a carnal fool, Luke xii. 21. Complacency in a worldly portion is a sure sign of a worldly heart, more than greedy desire.

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2. When we want wealth we should make this profession to induce us to contentment. The good disciples had the Spirit; to Judas, as the bad one, he gave the purse. If you have spiritual wisdom and knowledge, you have that which is most excellent: James ii. 5, 'God hath chosen the poor of the world to be rich in faith.'

3. When we lose wealth for righteousness' sake, we have that which is better. The knowledge of a hated truth is better than to shine with the oppressor: Prov. iii. 31, 32, 'Envy not the oppressor, nor choose any of his ways: for the froward is an abomination to the Lord; but his secret is with the righteous.' You have your losses exchanged for a greater good.

Use 3. Of trial. Let us examine ourselves and see what esteem and account we have of the word of God. If any say that we are all ready to profess that we esteem the word of God more than all riches, then let us bring it off from words to deeds. Do you prefer obedience before gain? do you seek after spiritual wisdom more than gain? Prov. iv. 7, 'Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding.' Is this your main business, to be wise to salvation? How many afflict and torment themselves to get silver and gold, but how few to understand and embrace God's law! How little doth this esteem of the word control contrary desires and affections!

SERMON LXXXI.

Thine hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.—VER. 73.

IN these words we have two things:—

1. The man of God's argument, *thy hands have made me and fashioned me*.

2. His request, *give me understanding to keep thy commandments*.

1. For his argument. He pleadeth as God's creature. Man is God's immediate workmanship, both as to his body and his soul. Some apply the words, 'Thy hands have made me,' to the creation

of the soul; and the other words, ‘and fashioned me,’ to the creation of the body; but we need not be so accurate. Both imply that he was wholly the work of God’s hand, a mere creature of his framing, and a creature exactly made; so made that he was also fashioned, ‘fearfully and wonderfully made,’ Ps. cxxxix. 14. The structure of man’s body darts a reverence and awe of God into the consciences of beholders; and he saith in the 15th verse, ‘I was curiously wrought:’ the Vulgar reads it *acupictus*—painted as with a needle. Man’s body is a curious piece of embroidery, that is to be seen in the bones, veins, and arteries, that spread and run throughout the body; which consideration increaseth the argument, not only as he was God’s work, but framed with a great deal of artifice.

2. Here is his request, ‘Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.’ In which he beggeth grace, that the faculty might be well disposed, ‘Give me understanding;’ and rightly exercised, ‘That I may learn thy commandments:’ that he might both know and keep his commandments. Surely he meaneth a saving knowledge: and therefore, when the work of grace is expressed by knowledge, a theoretical and notional knowledge is not understood, but that which is practical and operative; such a knowledge as doth work such a change both in the inward and outward man, as that mind, heart, and practice do express a conformity to God’s law. As Jer. xxiv. 7, ‘I will give them a 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 to me with their whole heart:’ that is, all the blessings of the covenant he expresseth by giving them a heart to know him: they shall so know me as to acknowledge me for their God, and carry themselves accordingly in dutiful obedience to me. I will regard them as their God, and they shall regard me as my people. So when it is said, Col. iii. 10, that ‘the new man’ is ‘renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him,’ it is meant of a saving knowledge or acknowledgment of God, such as doth produce a perfect conformity to his law in both the tables; it is such a knowledge as is set out in righteousness; these are parallel expressions, Eph. iv. 24 Well, then, this new nature David prayeth for, ‘Give me understanding;’ not as though he were altogether a stranger to it, but as seeking further 1 degrees of it; such a spiritual understanding of the will of God as might bring him into a more perfect and entire submission there unto: ‘I am thy creature:’ let me be thy new creature; give me a faculty so clearly renewed that I may know and keep thy commandments.

Doct. That as we are creatures, we are some way encouraged to ask of God the grace of the new creature.

I shall draw forth the sense of the text and the doctrine in these propositions.

1. That man was made by God, or is God’s immediate workman ship. We have the first notice of it, Gen. i. 26, ‘Let us make man after our own image and likeness.’ God put more respect upon him than upon the rest of the work of his hands. His creation is expressed in other terms than were used before: ‘He said, Let there be light, and it was light;’ ‘Let there be dry land,’ &c. But here God speaketh as if he had called a consultation about it, ‘Let us make man:’ not as if there were

more difficulty, or as if creating power were at a nonplus, but to show what special notice he taketh of us, and to point out the excellency which he did stamp upon man in his creation beyond the rest of the creatures. There was no creature but had some impress of God upon it, for everything which hath passed his hand carrieth God's signature and mark; it showeth that it came from a being of infinite power and wisdom and goodness. But man hath his image and likeness stamped upon him: there you may discern God's track and footprint, but here his very face. In his first moulding of him he would plainly and visibly discover himself. So again, when this making of man is explained,

Gen. ii. 7, 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.' Before we read that man was created, here we see in what sort: his body was framed with great art, though of base materials; a handful of dust did God enliven and form into a beautiful frame. But for the frame within, he had a more excellent and perfect soul than God gave to any other creature; by the union of both these, man became a living soul. Heaven and earth were married in his person; the dust of the earth and an immortal spirit, which is called the breath of God, were sweetly linked and joined together, with a disposition and inclination to one another, the soul to the body, and the body to the soul. When he had raised the walls of the flesh, and built the house of the body with all its rooms, then he puts in a noble and divine guest to dwell in it, and both make up one man.

2. The making of man now is the work of God, as well as the making of the first man was. God's hands did not only make and fashion Adam, but David. He saith, 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me.' The body of man is of God's framing: Ps. cxxxix. 15, 16, '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 imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.' Our bodies, you see there, though the matter were propagated by our parents, yet his hands made them and fashioned them. God is more our father than our natural parents are. Our parents know not whether the child will be male or female, beautiful or deformed cannot tell the number of the bones, muscles, veins, arteries: this God appointeth and frameth with curious artifice; so that of all visible creatures, there is none in any sort equalleth man in the curious composition of the body, whether we look upon the beauty and majesty of his person, or take notice of the variety, nature, and use of his several parts, with their composition and framing them together, with a wonderful order and correspondence one to another, as if they had been described by a model and platform set down in a book: so secretly and curiously was the matter framed in passing through all the changes in the womb till it came to a perfect formation. Then for the soul, God infuseth that: Eccles. xii. 7, 'Then shall our dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God that gave it.' God gave the body too, but especially the spirit, because there he worketh singly and immediately; therefore he is called 'the Father of spirits.' They do not run in the channel of carnal generation or fleshly descent, Heb. xii. 9. So Zedekiah swore by 'the God that made his soul,' Jer. xxxviii. 16. So Zech. xii. 1, 'He formed the spirit of man within him.' The parent doth instrumentally produce man in respect of his body, yet the soul

is from God, and immediately created and infused into the body by him, and being put into that dead lump of clay, doth animate and quicken it for the most excellent employment.

3. Man, that was created by God, was created to serve him: ‘He formed us from the womb to be his servants,’ as well as the first man, Isa. xlix. 5. Adam indeed was appointed for this use; all other creatures were made to serve God, but man especially by the design of his creation: other things ultimately and terminatively, but man immediately and nextly. God made all things for himself, Prov. xvi. 4; and Rom. xi. 36, ‘For of him and through him are all things; to whom be glory for ever, amen.’ Man is the mouth of the creation. Surely it is but reason that God should have the use of all that he gave us; that the author of life and being should have some glory by them; that he should dwell in the house he hath set up: he that made it hath most right to use it; that we should ‘glorify him with our bodies and souls, which are his,’ 1 Cor. vi. 20. Man is designed, engaged by greater mercies, furnished with great abilities, as at first endowed with God’s image; he hath faculties and capacities to know and glorify his creator. There are natural instincts given to other things, or inclinations to those things which are convenient to their own nature; but none of them are in a capacity to know what they are, and have, and where they are: they cannot frame a notion of him who gave them a being. Man is the mouth of the creation to speak for them: Ps. cxlv. 10, ‘All thy works praise thee, O Lord, and thy saints bless thee.’ He was made to love, and serve, and glorify God. The divine image inclined him to obedience at first.

4. We are not now what God made us at first, but are strangely disabled to serve him and please him: Eccles. vii. 29, ‘God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions:’ there is man’s original and his degeneration; what he was once made, and how far now unmade and departed from his primitive estate; his perfection by creation, and defection by sin: first made in a state of righteousness without sin, and now in a state of sin and misery without grace; was created with a holy disposition to enable and incline him to love, please, and obey God, but now hath found out many inventions, put to his shifts. Man was not contented to be at God’s finding, but would take his own course, and hath miserably shifted ever since to patch up a sorry happiness. So Rom. iii. 23, ‘All have sinned, and are come short of the glory of God.’ By glory of God is not meant his glorious reward, but his glorious image. Image is called glory, 1 Cor. xi. 7, ‘It is said of the man, that ‘he is the image and glory of God, as the woman is the glory of the man.’ So compare 2 Cor. iii. 18, ‘We beholding the glory of the Lord in a glass, &c. So here, we are ‘come short of the glory of God,’ that is, his glorious image. Hence it is that all our faculties are perverted, the mind is become blind and vain, the will stubborn and perverse, conscience stupid, the affections pre-occupied and entangled, and we find a manifest disproportion in all our faculties to things carnal and spiritual, sinful and holy. In the understanding there is a sharpness of apprehension in carnal things, but dull, slow, and blind in spiritual and heavenly things. Thoughts are spent freely and unweariedly about the one, but there is a tediousness and barrenness about the other; a will backward to what is good, but a strange bent and urging to what is evil. In that which is good we need a spur, in evil a bridle.

These things persevere with us; but how fickle and changeable in any holy resolution!—the memory slippery in what is good, but firm and strong in what is evil; the affections quick, easily stirred, like tinder, catch fire at every spark; but as to that which is good, they are like fire in green wood, hardly kept in with much blowing. Again, our delight is soon moved by things pleasing to sense; a carnal gust and savour is very natural to us, and rife with us, Rom. viii. 5, but averse from the chiefest good, and everything that leadeth to it. Surely, then, we have need to go to God and complain of corruption, sometimes under the notion of a blind and dark mind, begging the illumination of the Spirit; some times under the notion of a dead, hard heart, or an unpersuadable will, begging his inclining as well as enlightening grace. Surely they are strangely hardened that do not see a need of a spiritual understanding. Nay, God's children, after grace received, though sanctified betimes, yet halt of the old maim, dull in spirituals, alive and active in carnal matters. Carnal and worldly men act more uniformly and suitably to their principles than the children of God to theirs: Luke xvi. 8, 'The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light:' that is, more dexterous in the course of affairs. Grace for the present worketh but a partial cure: we have the advantage in matter of motive, we have better and higher things to mind; but they have the advantage in matter of principle; their principles are unbroken, but the principles of the best are mixed. We cannot do what we would in heavenly things; there is the back-bias of corruption that turns us away; and therefore they need to be instant with God to heal their souls; sometimes a blind mind, and sometimes a distempered heart.

5. We must be new made and born again before we can be apt or able to know or do the will of God; as Christ inferreth the necessity of regeneration from the corruption of nature—he had been discoursing with Nicodemus—'You cannot enter into the kingdom of God; for that which is born of the flesh is flesh,' John iii. 5, 6. Our souls naturally accommodate themselves to the flesh, and seek the good of the flesh, and all our thoughts and care, and life, and love run that way. Now, what was lost in Adam can only be recovered in Christ. It is not enough that God's hands have once made us and fashioned us, but there is a necessity of being made and fashioned anew, of becoming 'his workmanship in Christ Jesus,' Eph. ii. 10; and so the words of the text may be interpreted in this sense: Thou hast made me once; Lord, new make me: thy hands made me; O Lord, give me a new heart, that I may obey thee. In the first birth God gave us a natural understanding; in the second, a spiritual understanding, that we may learn his commandments; first that we may be good, and then do good. The first birth gave us the natural faculty, the second, the grace, or those divine qualities which were lost by Adam's sin. Better never been born, unless born again; better be a beast than a man, if the Lord give us not the knowledge of himself in Christ. The beasts, when they die, their misery and happiness dieth with them, death puts an end to their pain and pleasure; but, we that have reason and conscience to foresee the end and know the way, enter into perfect happiness or misery at death. Unless the Lord sanctify this reason, and give us a heart to know him in Christ, and choose that which is good, man is but a higher kind of beast, a wiser sort of beast, Ps. xlix. 12; for his soul is only employed to cater for the body, and his reason is

prostituted to sense; the beast rides the man. We are not distinguished from the brutes by our senses, but our understanding and our reason. But in a carnal man, the soul is a kind of sense; it is wholly employed about the animal life. There is not a more brutish creature in the world than a worldly wicked man. Well, then, David had need to pray, Lord, thou hast given me reason; give me the knowledge of thyself and thy blessed will.

6. When we seek this grace, or any degree of it, it is a proper argument to urge that we are God's creatures. So doth David here. I am now come to my very business, and therefore I shall a little show how far creation is pleadable, and may any way encourage us to ask spiritual understanding and renewing grace.

[1.] In the general, I shall lay down this: It is a good way of reasoning with God to ask another gift because we have received one already. It is not a good way of reasoning with man, because he wastes by giving; but a good way with God, and that upon a double account. Partly because in some cases *Deus donando debet*—God by giving doth in effect bind himself to give more; as by giving life, to give food; by giving a body, to give raiment, Mat. vi. 25. God, by bending such a creature into the world, chargeth his providence to maintain him, as long as he will use him for his glory. God loveth to crown his own gifts: Zech. iii. 2, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the burnings?' The thing pleaded there is, was not this a brand plucked out of the fire? One mercy is pleaded to obtain another mercy. So God bindeth himself to give perseverance, 2 Cor. i. 10; but this is not the case here; for by giving common benefits he doth not bind himself to give saving graces. And partly, too, because he doth not waste by giving: 'His mercy endureth for ever." The same reason is given for all those mercies, Ps. cxxxvi.; why the Lord chose a church, maintaineth his church, giveth daily bread: 'His mercy endureth for ever.' God is where he was at first: 'He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not,' James i. 5. He doth not say, I have given already. Now, a former common mercy showeth God's readiness and freeness to give; the inclination to do good still abideth with him; he is as ready and as free to give still; daily bread: 'His mercy endureth for ever:' spiritual wisdom: 'His mercy endureth for ever.' Indeed, the giving of daily bread doth not necessarily bind God to give spiritual wisdom; but that which is not a sure ground to expect may be a probable encouragement to ask. And learn this, that though nothing can satisfy unbelief, yet faith can pick arguments out of anything, and make use of the most common benefits of creation to strengthen itself.

[2.] God beareth much affection to man as he is his creature and the work of his hands; and the saints plead it when they would be spared and when they would be saved. As Job, chap. x. 3, 'Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands?' So ver. 8 of that chapter, 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me, and yet thou dost destroy ma' The sum and effect of these pleas is, it is strange that God should despise his own workmanship, especially a piece of such excellency as man is. Surely God is the readier to do good to man because he is the work of his hands. We see artificers, when they have made an excellent work, they are

very chary and tender of it, and will not destroy it and break it in pieces. An instinct of nature teacheth us to love that which is our own by natural production; so it is an argument moving the Lord to much compassion to tell him that we are his workman ship: Isa. lxiv. 8, 9, ‘But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, thou art our potter; we are all the work of thine hands: be not wroth with us very sore, O Lord.’ This raiseth in us some hope of speeding and prevailing with God. The words of the text are emphatical, *made and fashioned*. God hath bestowed much care upon us to make and fashion us, and therefore he will pity us and spare us: Job xiv. 15, ‘Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee; thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.’ All these places show there is an argument in it that may raise our faith when other arguments fail.

[3.] Creation implieth some hope, because God forsaketh none but those who forsake him first. He might destroy us for our original sin, as we destroy serpents of a venomous nature before they have actually done any harm. Though man hath lost his goodness, God hath not. Every one of us in person doth actually break with God before he breaketh with us: 2 Chron. xv. 2, ‘If ye forsake him, he will forsake you.’ 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, David telleth Solomon, ‘If thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever:’ he will not acknowledge thee. Take this rightly: that God giveth grace to any is his goodness; that to one more than another, is his distinguishing and elective love; that he denieth grace to any, is along of themselves, chargeable upon the creature, who abuse that common grace which, if improved, might have made them better; yea, though all deserve to be denied the grace of the Redeemer, yet it is not denied till after many wilful refusals, and by gross impenitency we turn the back upon God, when we will not implore our Creator’s bounty, but obstinately refuse it.

[4.] Seeing God is our creator, and the end of our creation is to serve God, we may the more confidently ask the grace which is necessary to enable us to serve him, that the same creating mercy which layeth on the obligation may help to discharge the debt. God is no Pharaoh, to require brick and give no straw, to appoint work and not to provide grace. Though he hath not absolutely promised to every individual person converting grace, yet he hath appointed certain means for the ungodly which they are bound to use in order to conversion; and if we consider the goodness of God, and the nature of those means, it is a great encouragement. Surely the assistances of grace are always ready: Mat. xxii. 5, ‘Come to the feast, all things are ready.’ None can tax him of backwardness. So our Saviour taxes the Jews: Mat. xxiii. 37, ‘I would have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing, but ye would not.’ When did God ever fail the waiting soul, or put away the creature that sought after grace to serve him? He is often beforehand with us, never behindhand; and we grossly and heinously forfeit all our means and helps before we lose them.

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[5.] There is encouragement to faith *a pari*, from the resemblance and likeness that is between his making us at first and his new-making of us in Jesus Christ. It is called a creation, Eph. ii. 10; Eph. iv. 24, ‘The new man, which after God is created,’ &c.; 2 Cor. iv. 6, ‘God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts.’ The author is the same God to whom

it belongeth to create. We have the human nature from him, and can have it from no other, much less can we have the divine nature from any other but him, Ps. li. 5, or else we should not have it at all. It is not implanted in our nature, or attainable by any industry of ours: ‘It is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth,’ Rom. ix. 16, but the immediate work of God; it is the work of his omnipotency. So dead and indisposed are we by nature to holiness and grace, that no less than creating power is required to work it in us. Besides, we were created freely, without any merit of ours; so we expect from the same goodness such saving knowledge as may change our hearts. There is this double encouragement—there is God’s omnipotent power, and his free giving us his image at first, Rom. iv. 17.

[6.] If we consider the manner of pleading, and the good frame of heart implied in the pleader, we may better understand the cogency of the argument; and though the argument itself doth not necessarily infer the help of grace, yet the manner of pleading showeth some preparative work of grace, and such meet the Lord in the stated order of commerce between him and his creatures, and shall receive his blessing. And then the argument will be strong in this petition, ‘Give understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.’ Here are many things implied, such as are wrought by God in those to whom God will vouchsafe the grace.

(1.) An acknowledgment of the debt, that man, being God’s creature, is obliged to serve him; as he was not made by himself, so not for himself; and should no more cease from intending God as an end, than he can cease from depending on God as a principle. Now, it is long ere we are brought to this. You know how the rebels are described and set out, Ps. xii. 4, ‘Our tongues are our own; who is lord over us?’ Now God hath gained one great end with us when we are sensible of our obligation to him, and are brought to acknowledge the debt, and that love, duty, and service we owe to him. Wherefore doth God press duty upon carnal men, who are no way competent or able to perform it? Divines tell us, to demand his right, as a creditor doth of a prodigal debtor, and to make us sensible that we stand bound to God in the debt of obedience.

(2.) Here is a will to pay, or a heart set upon service and obedience; for this is a speech becoming one heartily devoted to God, ‘Thy hands have made me,’ &c. He would willingly return to his creator’s service, and glorify him with what was made by him: I acknowledge that I am obliged, as I am the work of thine hands, to live in a faithful obedience to thee; Lord, I give up myself to this work. Mark, this is a good spirit; he doth not beg his own comfort, but ability for ser vice, that he might so know his master’s will as to do it. Now this is repentance towards God, when we are heartily willing to return to our duty more than to our comfort, Acts ii. 21; there is more hope of that soul that rather seeketh obedience than comfort, and where there is a resolved will and purpose to devote ourselves to the Lord, to please him, and serve him. This was God’s end in his new covenant grace, and Christ’s end in redemption, to restore us to obedience as well as to favour, and put us into a capacity of service again: Heb. ix. 14, ‘Purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God;’ 1 Peter ii. 24, ‘Who his own self bare our sins in his body on the tree, that

we, being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness.' He died to weaken the love of sin in our hearts, and to advance the life and power of grace and righteousness.

(3.) There is implied in it a confession of impotency, that God cannot be glorified and served by him unless he be renewed and strengthened by grace; not by him as a creature till he be made a new creature, or have renewed influences of grace from him. God permitted the lapse and fall of mankind, that they may come to him as needy creatures, and take all out of his hands. Man's great error, which occasioned his fall, was that he would live alone apart from God, be sufficient to his own happiness. We greedily caught at that word, 'Ye shall be as gods,' Gen. iii. 5. The meaning was, not in a blessed conformity, but a cursed self-sufficiency. Man would be his own god, desired to have his stock in his own hands, and would be no more at God's finding: Gen. iii. 22, 'The man is become as one of us,' to live as an independent being. Well, then, to cure this, God would reduce him to an utter necessity, that he might bring him to an entire dependence, and might come as a beggarly indigent creature, expecting all from God, putting no confidence in his own righteousness for his justification, nor natural power and strength for sanctification: Gal. ii. 19, 'I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.' The rigorous exaction of perfect obedience under the hazard of the curse of the law maketh them dead to the law; the curse of the law puts them so hard to it, that they are forced to fly to Christ to be freed from condemnation; and the spiritual nature of the law, as it is a rule of obedience, driveth them to see there is nothing in themselves tending to righteousness, and holiness, to the glory of God, without the power of his Spirit: they that 'serve in the newness of the spirit,' Rom. vii. 6. God bringeth us at last to this: Mat. xix. 26, 'With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' Well, then, when we are brought to see our impotency, we are at a good pass, and lie obvious to his grace.

(4.) It implies an earnest desire after grace; and that is a good frame of heart, when not satisfied with common benefits. David was not satisfied with his natural being, but seeketh after a spiritual being. What is that he prayeth so earnestly for, but an enlightened mind and a renewed heart, and all that he might be obedient to God? Thus we are more fitted to receive grace. A conscience of our duty is a great matter in fallen man, who is turned rebel against God and a traitor to his maker, who is impatient and self-willed, and all for casting off the yoke, Ps. ii. 3. Well, to have a heart set upon duty and obedience, that is the next step; the third was a sense of impotency; now this fourth a desire of grace: such the Lord hath promised to satisfy, Mat. v. 6. These open unto God, and are ready to take in his grace. Come as creatures earnestly desiring to do your creator's will, and in the best manner, and will God refuse you? Because I am thy creature, teach me to serve thee, who art my creator.

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(5.) There is one thing more in this plea, a persuasion of God's goodness to his creatures. This is the very ground and reason why this plea is used: Pa cxlv. 9, 'The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.' There is a great deal of fatherly care and mercy to his creatures, till by their impenitency, persisted in against the means of grace, they render themselves

incapable of it The first battery which Satan laid to man's heart tended to undermine the sense of God's goodness to the creature, as if God were envious: Gen. iii. 5, 'Doth not God know that in the day ye eat thereof;' as if God envied their happiness: this the devil would instil. To have good thoughts of God is a great means to reduce us and bring us back again to him. We frighten ourselves away from him by entertaining needless jealousies of him, as if he sought our destruction, or delighted in it Surely he will not destroy a poor soul that lieth submissively at his feet, and is grieved he can no better please him and serve him. The man that had hard thoughts of God neglected his duty: Mat. xxv. 24, 25, 'I knew thou wast an austere master, therefore I hid my talent in a napkin;' that is the legalism and carnal bondage that is in us, which makes us full of jealousies of God, and doth mightily hinder and obstruct our duty.

Use. The use is to press you to come to God as creatures, to beg relief and help for your souls: this will be of use to us in many cases.

1. To the scrupulous, who are upon regenerating, that are not sure that the work of grace is wrought in them. You cannot call God *Father* by the spirit of adoption; yet own him as a creator. Come to him as one that formed you: your desire is to return to him.

2. It is of use to believers when under desertions, and God appeareth against them in a way of wrath, and all God's dispensations seem to speak nothing but wrath: yet come to him as the creator. Lord, 'we are the work of thy hands.' If you cannot plead the covenant of Abraham, which was made with believers, plead the covenant of Noah, which was made with man and all creatures: Isa. liv. 9, '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;' there may be a great storm, but no deluge. When all is wrath to a poor soul, let it come to him in the covenant of Noah.

3. It will be of use in pleading for grace for your children, who are as yet, it may be, graceless and disobedient: 'Thy hands have made and fashioned them.' Desire him to renew his image upon them by the spirit of grace.

In short, the sum of all is, here is encouragement: God is good to all his creatures, especially to man, most especially to man seeking after him, and seeking after him for grace, that we and ours may obey him, and do him better service than ever yet we have done.

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SERMON LXXXII.

They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.—VER. 74.

THIS verse containeth two things:—

1. The respect of the faithful to David, *they that fear thee will be glad when they see me*.

2. The reason of this respect, *because I have hoped in thy word*.

First, The respect of God's faithful servants to David, and there take notice of the character by which God's servants are described, 'They that fear thee;' then their respect to David, they 'will be glad when they see me;' which may bear a double sense.

1. How comfortable it is for the heirs of promise to see one another, or meet together! *Aspectus boni viri delectat*—the very look of a good man is delightful; it is a pleasure to converse with those that are careful to please God, and awe-ful to offend him.

2. How much affected they are with one another's mercies: 'They will be glad to see me,' who have obtained an event answerable to my hope; they shall come and look upon me as a monument and spectacle of the mercy and truth of God. This sense I prefer, though not excluding the other. But what mercy had he received? The context seemeth to carry it for grace to obey God's commandments; that was the prayer immediately preceding, to be 'instructed and taught in God's law,' ver. 73. Now they will rejoice to see my holy behaviour, how I have profited and glorified God in that behalf. The Hebrew writers render the reason, Because then I shall be able to instruct them in those statutes, when they shall see me, their king, study the law of God. It may be expounded of any other blessing or benefit God hath given according to his hope; and I rather understand it thus: they will be glad to see him sustained, supported, and borne out in his troubles and sufferings; they will be glad when they shall see in me a notable example of the fruit of hoping in thy grace, and this hope leaveth not ashamed.

Secondly, The reason is, 'Because I hoped in thy word:' and there compare this with the first clause. God's children are described to be those that fear God, and David is described to be one that hopes in his word. Both together make up a good character and description of the Lord's people; they are such as fear God and hope in his word. They are elsewhere coupled: Ps. xxxiii. 18, 'Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, that hope in his mercy:' and Ps. cxlvii. 11, 'The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, that hope in his mercy.' A sincere Christian is known by both these; a fear of God, or a constant obedience to his commands, and an affiance, trust, and dependence upon his mercies. Oh, how sweetly are both these coupled; a uniform sincere obedience to him, and an unshaken constant reliance on his mercy and goodness! The whole perfection of the Christian life is comprised in these two—believing God and fearing him, trusting in his mercy and fearing his name; the one maketh us careful in avoiding sin, the other diligent to follow after righteousness; the one is a bridle from sin and temptations, the other a spur to our duties. Fear is our curb, and hope our motive and encouragement; the one respects our duty, the other our comfort; the one allayeth the other. God is so to be feared, as also to be trusted; so to be trusted, as also to

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be feared. And as we must not suffer our fear to degenerate into legal bondage, but hope in his mercy; so our trust must not degenerate into carnal sloth and wantonness, but so hope in his word as to fear his name. Well, then, such as both believe in God and fear to offend him are the only men who are acceptable to God and his people. God will take pleasure in them, and they take pleasure in one another: 'They that fear thee will be glad when they see me.' The first part of the character, 'They that fear thee:' the fear of God is an excellent grace, a strong bridle to hold the soul from sin; not that servile, but filial and child-like fear, that is afraid to sin against God or break his laws: Prov. xxviii. 14, 'Blessed is the man that feareth always;' this grace should always bear rule in our hearts: 1 Peter i. 17, 'Pass the time of your sojourning in fear:' our whole course must be carried on under the conduct of this grace. Look, as the fear of man is a bridle upon the beasts to keep them from hurting man, Gen. ix. 2, 'The fear and dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth:' so when the fear of God is rooted in our hearts, we are kept from disobeying and dishonouring God. Joseph is an instance of the power of this holy fear: Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Secondly, the other character, 'I hope in thy word:' a Christian liveth by faith, whereas the brutish worldling liveth by sense; the one liveth by bread only, the other by the word of God; the one is a higher sort of beast, the other is a kind of earthly angel, for he liveth with God, and dwelleth with God, and expecteth all out of God's hands: Ps. cxxx. 5, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope:' there is his charter and inheritance, and his solace and support; he fetcheth all from the word. Both these graces, as they are very acceptable unto God, so are they most lovely and beautiful to behold by men; to be among the company of them that fear God, and hope in his word, is the most pleasant thing to a gracious heart that car* be; for while others are taken up about toys and trifles, they are taken up about the only serious matters. If Balaam was constrained to say of God's people, 'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!' oh, how pleasant is it much more to the people of God, to see one another, to come among them that fear God, and are loath to offend him, and also that hope in his word! They can speak of the life of faith, and blessedness to come, and take off the veil of the creature, and are mainly taken up with another world; their business is not to offend God here, and hope fully to enjoy him hereafter: Rom. i. 12, 'Comforted by the mutual faith both of you and me.'

Doct. That God's mercies bestowed upon some of his children should be and are an occasion of joy and comfort to all the rest. When David was a pattern of God's gracious help and deliverance, he saith, 'They that fear thee will be glad when they see me.' I shall give you some scriptures: Ps. cxlii. 7, 'The righteous shall compass me about, for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.' When any one of God's children are delivered, all the rest flock about him, to assist and join in thanksgiving, and to help one another to praise the Lord. So Ps. xxxiv. 2, 'My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof and be glad:' that God had preserved and reserved David still. So Ps. lxiv. 10, 'The righteous shall be glad in the Lord and trust in him, and the upright in heart shall glory:' that is, when David was delivered, when God had showed mercy to him, then

all the upright would come, and make their own profit and advantage by such an experience and deliverance.

The reasons of the point.

1. They are all members of one body, they are all called into one body, and the good and evil of one member is common to the whole. This reason is rendered by the apostle: 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26, ‘But that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the rest rejoice with it;’ ver. 27, ‘Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.’ The meaning of that place is, that the church altogether is the body of Christ, and every several person a member, and every member should be as solicitous for one another as for itself; they have the same common interests and concernments, whether of suffering or rejoicing. You know in the natural body, when the toe is trode on, the tongue crieth out, You have hurt me. We are concerned in the good or ill of our fellow-members; their joy is joy to us, and their sorrow sorrow to us: to this sense some expound that place, Heb. xiii. 3, ‘Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them, and them that suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.’ Some understand it of Christ’s mystical body; when they suffer, our souls are bound with them. But I think it bears another sense there: to be ‘in the body’ is to be in the flesh, during which state we are liable to many vexations and miseries; and therefore, if God doth so order it that the whole body, or all the members of the church, should not be afflicted at one time, but whilst some are afflicted others are free, and when we are not involved by passion there may be compassion. While we are in the body we are obnoxious to the same adversities, and should pity and comfort them as ourselves, and use all means to do 4hem good; but if it be not the truth of the place, yet it is a truth, the more any partake of the spiritual life the stronger is spiritual sympathy: they ‘rejoice with them that rejoice, and mourn with them that mourn,’ Rom. xii. 15; are bound with them that are in bonds, and enlarged with them that are enlarged. One part of us is in bonds when they are in bonds, one part of us is enlarged when they are enlarged; still we should have common interests and affections with our brethren; and for those that fear God to be selfish and senseless of the condition of others, it is a kind of self-excommunication, or an implicit renouncing the body: because we are in the body, we should be affected as they are. Look, as there was the same spirit in Ezekiel’s vision in the living creatures and the wheels, 1 say the same spirit was in both; when one moved the other moved: so there is the same spirit in Christ’s mystical body. We should be affected as they are; it is a kind of depriving ourselves of the privileges of the mystical body if we are not.

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2. It is for the honour and glory of God; God hath most glory when praised by many. Therefore they flock together, 2 Cor. i. 11, ‘That for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many in our behalf.’ God loveth to have us act with joint consent both in prayer and praise, because he would interest us in one another’s mercies and comforts, and so knit our hearts together in more holy love. Prayers made by many are mighty with God—when we come

to God with many supplicants, make up a great party to besiege heaven: so praises rendered by many are the more honourable to God, and acceptable with him: 2 Cor. iv. 15, 'That the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God.' When many are engaged, and many are affected with it, God's glory is the more diffused, the revenue of the crown of heaven increased. One string maketh no music; when there are many, and all in tune, there is harmony. There are three things in it—many righteous persons, and joining together with one spirit in the same work, then the Lord hath more honour than he could have in a single person. In heaven God is praised in concert; we are brought all together, that we may make one body and congregation to laud, and praise, and serve God for evermore: so here, they that fear God and hope in his mercy, they often flock together to congratulate and join in thanksgiving for the mercies which any one of them hath received. When Christ was born there was a whole concert of angels: Luke ii. 13, 'A multitude of the heavenly host praising God, saying, Glory to God on high, on earth peace, good-will towards men.' It is a kind of heaven upon earth when all the people of God are led by one spirit to praise and glorify God: a closet prayer or thanksgiving is not so honourable as that of the congregation.

3. It is for the profit and comfort of all; partly because by this means they come to understand one another's experiences for their mutual support and edification. What God is to one that feareth him, he is to all that fear him sincerely, affected to them all; therefore the goodness of God to one believer bringeth joy and comfort to all the rest. They are spectacles and monuments of mercy for the saints to look upon, that they may learn thereby to depend upon God. Look, as in converting Paul, a persecutor, the apostle saith, 1 Tim. i. 16, 'Christ did show forth all long-suffering in me, for a pattern to them that should after believe on him,' in pardoning so great a sinner, in saving such a distressed soul, to invite others to Christ; so in all other cases, when God delivereth one, he inviteth others to the same hope; they are precedents of mercy to the rest, as David implieth here they would be encouraged by his example cheerfully to expect the same deliverance from God. In the example of one sufferer there is a pawn given to all the rest; it is for the edification and encouragement of others to be acquainted with our experiences of God's mercy to us: Ps. lxvi. 16, 'Come near, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul;' all are concerned, for they have the same necessities, have interest in the same God, the same promises, the same mediator, and the same covenant; so that to be acquainted with the passages of divine providence towards others is a great help to teach us more of God, that we may learn to magnify his power. And partly by this means their hearts are more knit to one another in spiritual love; when they pray for one another as for their own souls, and rejoice as in their own deliverance, it maintaineth unity among us. God loveth to pleasure many of his children at once, and to interest them in the same mercy; and so we receive the mercy others intercede for, and give thanks for it. Love in the spirit is seen in praying and praising God for one another. And partly, too, because it doth oblige us to more frequent acts of worship; we can never want an errand to the throne of grace, or an opportunity of worship for ourselves or others, to pray with them, or to offer praise with them and for them.

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4. Joy is communicative; mourning apart is good: Peter ‘went out and wept bitterly,’ Mat. xxvi. 75. And Jeremiah saith, when he would weep for the people, Jer. xiii. 17, ‘My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride;’ and Zech. xii. 12, 13, ‘They shall mourn every family apart, the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart,’ &c. Sorrow affecteth solitude and retiredness, where no eye seeth but God’s; but joy doth best in company and in consort, as the Woman called her neighbours to rejoice with her, Luke xv., because she bad found the lost groat. So we must stir up one another to rejoice in God. Besides, mercies may be told to many, but not our griefs; therefore the godly will be flocking together to help them in praises as well as prayers. It is not only commendable to beg their help in prayer, but we should call upon them to praise God with us: Ps. xxxiv. 3, ‘O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.’ We are bound to be witnesses of one another’s thankfulness, and to assist one another in the praises of God.

Use. Information of five things:—

1. It showeth us the lawfulness, yea, the conveniency, yea, in some sort, the necessity, of public thanksgiving for private mercies. It is lawful; we read of paying vows in the great congregation, Ps. xxii. 22, xl. 9. It is highly convenient and useful, partly that the people of God may flock together, and make a crown of praise for God: Ps. xxii. 3, ‘He inhabiteth the praises of Israel;’ he delighteth to be in the midst of his people when they praise him. And partly that by the thankfulness of others we may be quickened to remember our own mercies, as one bird sets all the flock a-chirping. And partly that we may quicken others by our help; and partly to show a Christ-like love to them, by being affected with their miseries, and rejoicing in their mercies. Well, these things should quicken us to join with others in their thanksgiving for their private mercies, so to raise a spiritual affection in us in the performance of those duties. And as it is lawful, so it is necessary; other men’s mercies may be our mercies as well as theirs; you are concerned in the mercy if you have prayed for it. We are to love God for hearing our prayers for others as well as ourselves. Eli gave thanks and solemnly worshipped God for Hannah’s sake, because he had before prayed for her, and therefore praised God for her, who had heard his prayers in her behalf: compare 1 Sam. i. 28. When Hannah told him what the Lord had done, Eli falls a worshipping the Lord; he had prayed for her before in ver. 7, ‘The Lord grant thee thy petition which thou askest of him.’ Every answer of prayer is a new proof or fresh experience of God’s love and special respect to us; it is a sign that God regardeth us and is mindful of us, nay, it is a sign of God’s favour, when he will not only hear us for ourselves, but for others also. If a man come to a king, he will say, If you had asked for yourself I would have granted you; it is a special honour to intercede for others, which God putteth upon his choice servants: Gen. xx. 7, ‘Abraham shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live;’ Job xlii. 8, ‘My servant Job shall pray for you, and him will I accept.’ God will hear his servants for others when he will not hear them for themselves. If our prayers had returned into our own bosoms, as David’s for his enemies, Ps. xxxv. 13; if God as an answer had given you only the comfort of the discharge of your duty: Luke x. 6, ‘If they be not worthy, your peace shall return to you again:’ this were matter of

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praise, much more now the mercy is obtained. All this is spoken to show that there should be more life and spiritual affection in those duties which we perform in the behalf of others.

2. It informeth us of the excellency of communion of saints; there is such a fellowship and communion between all the members of Christ's mystical body, that they mourn together, and rejoice together; the grace vouchsafed to one is cause of rejoicing to all the rest; they drive on a joint trade for heaven, and rejoice in one another's comforts as if they were their own, in one another's gifts and graces as if they were their own, in one another's supports and deliverances as if they were their own. We read of joy in heaven at the conversion of sinners; they rejoice at our welfare, praising and lauding God; so there is also joy on earth when any spiritual benefit is imparted; if any be gotten to a godlike nature, they give thanks to God: 'They that fear thee will be glad when they see me;' Acts iv. 32, 'The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul;' there was a great multitude, many thousand souls. Here was the primitive simplicity, the Christians were so united as if they had but one heart and soul among them; and it was a usual saying, *Aspice ut se mutuo diligunt Christiani*—see how the Christians love one another. It was otherwise afterwards; no wild beasts are so fierce to one another as one Christian has been to another. Surely it concerneth all that fear God and hope in his word to be of one heart and of one mind as much as may be. Lesser differences should not make void this Christ-like love. The bonds of Christ's communion are the essentials of religion, if they fear God and hope in his word. Though Christians may be distinguished by several denominations, yet an angry brother cannot cast us out of our Father's family. We set up walls of partition between Christian and Christian, but God will not measure his fold by our enclosure: *Lingua Petiliani non est ventilabrum Christi*—it is well Petilian's tongue is not Christ's fan. Surely when we meet with our ever lasting companions they should be dear to us, and for some private differences we should not omit the necessary duties of Christianity. This mutual and cordial respect we should have for one another.

3. It informs us of the mischief and evil of a private spirit, which doth not take notice of the favours of God done to others, nor is affected with others' mercies. Most men 'seek their own things,' Phil. ii. 21. Nature is sensible of nothing but natural bonds, the lines of its communication are too narrow, either their own flesh, the smart and ease of their own bodies, or their own kindred. Now, the saints have a more diffusive love, they can strive with God earnestly in prayer for those whose face they never saw in the flesh, Col. ii., and can be thankful for their mercies as far as they come to their notice. All Christians are not only of the same kind, but of the same body; though they have not a private benefit by the mercy, yet they can heartily praise God for it; the angels praise God for us, Luke ii., for his good-will to men, they are only spectators, not the parties interested. When the Lord set afoot that blessed design, it was good will to men, yet the multitude of the heavenly host rejoiced and praised God. We had both honour and benefit by Christ's incarnation. So to praise God for the good of others argueth a good spirit like the angels, but to envy the good of another and be grieved thereat is devilish, like the spirit of the devil. In heaven we shall not only rejoice in our own, but in one another's salvation, because there shall be no envy,

no privateness of affection. Why are we so selfish and senseless now? 'Who is afflicted and I mourn not?' said Paul. Now to those that mourned for others' calamity, their deliverance is a kind of relief. Will you lose your evidence of being in the body for want of rejoicing in their mercies, gifts, and deliverances?

4. It informeth us—(1.) How much it concerneth us to preserve an interest in the hearts of God's people, and to behave ourselves so that they that fear God may be glad of our mercies, and bless God for them. The communion of saints is a sweet thing; we must not forfeit this privilege by our inordinate walking, pride, contention, sourness and bitterness of spirit, unusefulness to the church, as having an interest divided from the church. Those whose mercies are apprehended as a public benefit are the strictly conscientious, those that fear God and hope in his word, who labour to keep themselves from the snares of the present world, and look for the happiness of the world to come; the one is the fruit of fearing God, the other of hoping in his word—the tender conscience and the heavenly-minded Christian. Partly because they are our everlasting companions; we shall live for ever with them: they were chosen from all eternity to be heirs of the same grace together with us; therefore it is sweet to praise God for any good that befalleth them: Ps. lxvi. 16, 'Come near, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul;' Ps. xxii. 22, 'I will declare thy name unto my brethren.' But when a man walketh questionably, he obscureth the life of God in himself, or, like a string that is out of tune, spoileth the harmony. The saints may mourn for the wicked, but they cannot so easily bring their hearts to rejoice with them; they may give thanks for their mercies, it is true, 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2, but not with that cheerfulness, with that sense. The conscience of our duty engageth us to bless God that he hath spared them, reprieved them a little longer, given them more time to repent, and correct their errors; but it is very sweet to join with them who are our brethren and companions, not only now, but to all eternity. And partly because our mercies proceed from the covenant, upon which is built all our hope and all our desire, and so we are edified by the support and help which God affordeth to them that fear him and hope in his word; thereby we see that they that wait long wait not in vain on the word of God's promise, and so learn to wait with patience ourselves, because those who depended on his promised assistance are then answered and supported; yea, it is a ground of hope to all that so many will be gratified by the deliverance of one, when we so work for the deliverance of one that at length both he and others will have cause to be glad. (2.) Another thing is, it doth encourage others' prayers and praises for us, when we are useful and profitable, and bring in that supply to the body which may be justly expected from us according to the measure of that part which we sustain in the body. Look, as in the natural body the blood and the life passeth to and fro, there is a giving and receiving between all the members that live in the communion of it, so mutual obligations pass between the children of God. Many are interested in their mercies that are of use in the church: Rom. v. 7, 'For a good man some would even dare to die,' such as David or Paul; yet this is no discouragement to the meanest or weakest, for they have their honour and use: 'When ye fail they shall receive you,' Luke xvi. 9; they have their ministry and service: 'Now the head cannot say to the foot, I have no need of thee,' 1 Cor.

xii. 21. (3.) The humble and the meek, for the proud procure their own just dislike and disappointment. Solomon telleth us, 'Only by pride cometh contention,' Prov. xiii. 10. Pride is the great impediment and let to all Christian offices. We cannot so heartily pray for one another, nor praise God for one another, when pride and contention prevaileth. We should overcome this stomach and spleen: 'Bless them that curse you;' as David fasted for his enemies when they sought his life, Ps. xxxv. 12. You should not lay this stumbling-block in the way of their duty; it is a great discouragement.

5. It informeth us how comfortable and how pleasant the converse and conference of godly persons is, and how much it excelleth the merriest meetings of the carnal. The special love which the godly have to one another doth exceedingly sweeten their converse, for the very presence of those we most dearly love is a pleasure to us to see, but much more their holy conference. When Christians meet together and find their own persuasions of the love, power, mercy and wisdom of God backed with the experience and testimony of others, it is a mutual strength and support to us; and therefore the apostle saith, Rom i. 12, 'That I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith of you and me.' When we converse with them that can speak, not by hearsay only, but by experience, of the power of the blood of Christ in purifying their consciences, and his Spirit to sanctify their hearts, it is a mighty prop: 2 Cor. i. 4, 'And that we may comfort others with the comforts where with we are comforted of God.' Report of a report is a cold thing, not valued, but a report of what we witness and experience ourselves comes warmly upon our hearts. Nay, many times it may fall out that people of less knowledge, but more feeling and experience, may abundantly confirm the more knowing, and excite them to a greater mindfulness of God and heavenly things. But alas! the meetings of carnal per sons, what are they to this? It may be they will fill your ears with stories of hawking and hunting, the best wine and delicious meats, of honours and purchases in the world, all which tend but to increase the gust of the flesh, and the carnal savour which is baneful to us; or else with idle stories, the clatter of vanity, which are impertinent to our great end; or else about the world, thriving in the world: nothing about those high and excellent and necessary things of the grace of God in Christ, and the truth of the promises, and the glory of the world to come: Ps. xxxvii. 30, 31, 'The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment: the law of God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide:' and 'The mouth of the righteous is as choice silver;' they have a sense of better things. But alas! from others you hear nothing but unsavoury vanity, which is as different from the discourse of the children of God as the melody of a bird from the grunting of a hog or swine.

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SERMON LXXXIII.

I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.—VER. 75.

WE have need all to prepare for afflictions, for we are to take up our cross daily. Now, to help you to a right carriage under them, these words, well considered, will be of some use to you; they are the confession of a humble soul abundantly satisfied with God's dispensations. In them observe:—

1. A general truth or point of doctrine concerning the equity of God's judgments, *thy judgments, O Lord, are right.*

2. A particular application or accommodation of this truth to David's case and person, *in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me*.

3. His sure and firm persuasion of both, *I know*. Let us explain these branches and parts of the text as they are laid forth.

1. The general truth, the Lord's judgments are right. In which proposition there is the subject and the predicate. The subject or things spoken are the Lord's judgments. The word is often put in this psalm and elsewhere for God's statutes, or precepts, or righteous laws; and in this sense some take it here, and make out the sense thus: 'Lord, I know that thy judgments,' viz., thy precepts, are holy, just, and good; and this persuasion is not lessened in me, though thou hast sharply afflicted me: I have as great a value and esteem for thy word as ever. But rather, by the Lord's judgments are meant the pas sages of his providence, as the latter clause showeth; those judicial dispensations whereby he doth punish the wicked, or correct his children. And let it not seem strange that the troubles and afflictions of the godly should be called judgments; for though there be no vindictive wrath in them, yet they are called so upon a double reason: partly because they are acts of God's holy justice, correcting and humbling his people for sin, according to the sentence of his word. Thus it is said, 1 Peter iv. 17, that 'judgment shall begin at the house of God;' where the trials and troubles of the godly are plainly called judgments. And partly because the Lord judiciously measureth and directeth them as the state of his children requireth and their strength will bear. So it is said, Jer. x. 24, 'Correct me, but in judgment' The first notion implieth God's justice, the second his wisdom. And mark, it is said distinctly in the text, 'Thy judgments, O Lord.' His enemies might unjustly persecute him, but 'thy judgments;' so far as the Lord hath a hand in it, all was just and right: this is the subject or thing spoken of. Secondly, Here is the predicate, or what is said of it, 'are right;' the Hebrew, *tsedec*; the Septuagint, ὅτι δικαιοσύνη τὰ κρίματα σου, are righteousness itself; thy dispensations are wholly made up of perfect justice; how smart soever they be, they are right as to the cause, right as to the measure, right as to the end. The first of these respects concerneth God's justice, the two other his wisdom. First, Right as to the cause; they never exceed the value of their impulsive: Job xxxiv. 23, 'He will not lay upon man more than is right, that he should enter into judgment with him.' God never afflicteth his people above their desert, nor gives any just

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occasion to commence a suit against his providence. Secondly, Right as to the measure, not above the strength of the patient. In his own people's afflictions it is BO: Isa. xxvii. 8, 'In measure when it shooteth forth thou wilt debate it; he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.' God dealeth with his own with much moderation, meting out their sufferings in due proportion. So Jer. xxx. 11, 'I will correct thee in measure.' Thirdly, Right as to their end and use. God knoweth how to strike in the right vein, and to suit his providence to the purpose for which it is appointed: the kind of the affliction is to be considered as well as the measure. The Lord chooseth that rod which is most likely to do his work. Paul had a thorn in the flesh, that he might not be exalted above measure, 2 Cor. xii. 7. He was a man inured to dangers and troubles from without, these were familiar to him, therefore he could the better bear them; but God would humble him by some pain in the flesh, which should sit near and close.

2. The particular accommodation of it to David, 'In faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' Pray mark, in the general case he observeth justice; in his own, faithfulness. The book called *Midrash Tillim* referreth these words to David's flight from Absalom, when he went to Mount Olivet weeping; it was an ill time then with David, he had no security for his life; being driven from his house and home, 'He went up Mount Olivet, going and weeping,' 2 Sam. xv. 30. Then, when so great and sore trouble was upon him, then he saith, 'I know that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' Mark the emphasis; lie doth not barely acknowledge that God was faithful, though, or not withstanding he had afflicted him, but faithful in sending them. Affliction and trouble are not only consistent with God's love plighted in the covenant of grace, but they are parts and branches of the new covenant administration. God is not only faithful notwithstanding afflictions, but faithful in sending them. There is a difference between these two; the one is like an exception to the rule, *quae firmat regulam in non exceptis*; the other makes it a part of the rule. God cannot be faithful without doing all things that tend to our good and eternal welfare: the conduct of his providence is one part of the covenant engagement: as to pardon our sins, and sanctify us, and give us glory at the last, so to suit his providence as our need and profit requireth in the way to heaven. It is an act of his sovereign mercy, which he hath promised to his people, to use such discipline as conduceth to their safety. In short, the cross is not only an exception to the grace of the covenant, but, a part of the grace of the covenant. The meaning is, God is obliged in point of fidelity to send sharp afflictions: Ps. lxxxix. 32, 'I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.' Sharp rods and sore stripes not only may stand and be reconciled with God's loving-kindness and truth, but they are effects and expressions of it; it is a part of that transaction, viz., his covenant love.

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3. The third thing to be explained is his sense of these truths, 'I know.' Knowing implies clearness of apprehension and firmness of persuasion; so that, *I know*, is I fully understand, or else, I am confident or well assured of this truth. But from whence had David his knowledge? how knew he all God's judgments to be right? Not from the flesh, or from natural sense. No; the flesh is importunate to be pleased, will persuade us to the contrary. If we consult only with natural sense, we shall never believe that, when God is hacking and hewing at us, he intendeth our good and

benefit, and that when sore judgments are upon us, his end is not to destroy, but to save, to mortify the sin, and save the person. Sense will teach us no such thing, but will surely misinterpret and misexpound the Lord's dealings; for the peace of God is a riddle to a natural heart, Phil. iv. 7. Whence then had David his knowledge? Partly from the word of God, and partly from his own observation and particular experience.

[1.] From the word of God; for it is a maxim of faith that God can do no wrong, that 'he is righteous in all his ways, and just in 'all his works,' Ps. cxlv. 17; and again, Deut. xxxii. 4, 'He is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment and truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he.' These are undeniable truths revealed in the word of God, and must satisfy us, whatsoever sense saith to the contrary. The causes and end of God's particular judgments are sometimes secret, but they are always just: Ps. xcvii. 2, 'Clouds and darkness are round about him, but righteousness and truth are the habitation of his throne.' Therefore when we see not the reason of God's particular dispensations, we must believe the righteousness and goodness of them.

[2.] David knew by his own observation and particular experience: he had much studied his own heart, and considered his own ill-deservings and soul-distempers, and therefore saw the Lord's discipline was necessary for him. We should better understand God's work, and sooner justify him both in point of justice and faithfulness, if we did use more observation, and did consider what need and profit there is of affliction: 'Tribulation worketh experience,' Rom. v. 4, 5. We see what need there was of affliction, and how seasonable the Lord's work was. This is a more sensible way of knowledge than the former. Faith is a surer ground, but spiritual observation hath its benefit. Natural conscience doth represent our guilt, but experience showeth God's faithfulness, how seasonably God took us in our month, and suited his providence to our present condition.

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Doct. That it would much quiet the minds of the people of God about all the sad dispensations of his providence, if they would seriously consider the justice and faithfulness of them.

So did David silence all his murmurings when the hand of God was sore upon him; so should we silence all our murmuring, all our suspicions of God's dealing, when we are under the cross. I know the Lord doth nothing unjust, but is faithful; he will not retract his covenant love, and I know his covenant love binds him to lay on us seasonable affliction and correction. I shall do two things:—

First, Illustrate the point by some considerations.

Secondly, Show that there is much of justice and faithfulness in all the troubles and afflictions of God's people.

Consid. 1. We are not only to grant in the general that God's judgments are right, but that he hath in faithfulness afflicted us. So doth David, when the stroke of God was heavy upon himself. Many will assert the righteousness of God when they speak to others in their afflictions, but do not indeed justify him in the afflictions that come upon themselves. We are hasty to censure, but

backward to humble our own souls before God: they will give him the praise of his justice when he chasteneth others, but think God dealeth harshly and rigorously with them when his scourge is upon their own backs. Such a difference is there between knowledge speculative and experimental, between that conscience which we have in others' concernments, and that knowledge which self-love giveth us in our own. David here doth not only own the general truth, but sees God's faithfulness when the stroke lighted upon himself. So Job iv. 3-5, you shall see this was objected to Job, that he could comfort others, but now the hand of God was upon him, his soul fainted. They that stand upon the shore may easily say to those that are in the midst of the waves and conflicting for life or death, Sail thus. When we are well, we give counsel to the sick; but if we were so, how would we take it ourselves? So can we say patiently, All is just, and keep silence to God?

Consid. 2. We must not only grant this truth, that God is faithful, when at ease, but when under the sharpest and smartest discipline. We use to praise God in prosperity, but we should bless him also when he seemeth to deal hardly with us; speak good of God when under the rod. When we view a cross at a distance, or in the doctrinal contemplation of this truth, we say that God may exercise us with the greatest evil, and that we need these methods to bring us to heaven; but when afflictions come thick, and near, and close, and we are deprived of our nearest and dearest comforts, credit, liberty, health, life, children, then we have other thoughts. It is more easy to speak of trouble than to bear it. We read of Jesus Christ that he learned by experience, Heb. v. 8. He had an actual experience by the things lie suffered; and he saith, 'Now is my soul troubled,' John xii. 27. There is a vast difference between the most exact apprehension in the judgment, and the experimental feeling of it in the senses: the one may be without so much vexation as the other will produce. Though Christ understood perfectly what his sufferings should be, and had resolved upon them, yet when he came to feel it, his very righteous soul was under perplexity, as a glass of pure water may be tossed and shaken. Affliction is another thing to present sense and feeling than it is to guess and imagination. Much more doth it hold good in us, for we have not such a perfect foresight of sufferings as Christ had. We suppose they may be avoided, or shifted off one way or other. I speak this that we may not depend upon our present resolutions when out of trouble, but labour to be more prepared than usually we are, that when trouble cometh upon us, we may glorify God.

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Consid. 3. This acknowledgment must be the real language of our hearts, and not by word of mouth only: thus we must give unto God the praise of his truth and righteousness. We tip our tongues with good words, and learn such modesty in our language, as to say God is just, and do not rave against his providence in wild and bold speeches; but justice and faithfulness must be acknowledged not with the tongue so much as with the heart. It is the language of the heart which God looketh after, when the soul keepeth silence to God, and a due and suitable impression is left upon it of his justice, by a meek and humble submission: Micah vii. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, for I have sinned against him.' When God is angry, and chastiseth for sin, we must stoop humbly under his afflicting hand, bear it patiently and submissively, for the rod is dipped in our own guilt; that stoppeth, our mouths and checketh repinings. So, seeing his faithfulness, it

maketh us ‘accept the punishment of our iniquities,’ Lev. xxvi. 41, that is, yield to it, as a man would to a bitter potion, or a medicinal preparative for his health; so to afflict is a means to get rid of sin, which would be the bane of the soul.

Consid. 4. It is not enough to acknowledge justice, but we must also acknowledge faithfulness; not only his just severity in the punishments of the wicked, but his fidelity and love in the correction of his children: it is not enough that we justify God, and forbear to murmur against his afflicting us, but we must see his love and faithfulness in it, and that he performeth his covenant love. His wisdom and justice, that suppresseth murmurings; his love and faithfulness, that giveth hope, and comfort, and courage: the one concerneth the honour of God, he righteth himself by his just judgments; the other concerneth our benefit and eternal welfare. Faithfulness is to us, and for our good. Pharaoh could own justice: Exod. ix. 27, ‘The Lord is righteous, but I and my people are wicked.’ But it is a higher thing to own faithfulness; that supposeth faith, as the other doth conviction. Guilt will sooner fly in our faces, and extort from us an acknowledgment of God’s justice, than we can own the grace of the new covenant, especially when carnal sense and smart seemeth to speak the contrary. The sight of his justice checketh murmurings, the sight of his faithfulness fainting and discouragement. God’s dispensations are just with respect to the sentence of the law, faithful with respect to the promises of the gospel. In short, the cause of all affliction is sin, therefore justice must be acknowledged; their end is repentance, and therefore faithfulness: the end is not destruction and ruin, so they might be acts of justice, as upon the wicked; but that we may be fit to receive the promises, such to whom God will perform the promise of eternal life, and so acts of faithfulness.

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Consid. 5. Faith must fix this as a ground not once to be questioned, much less to be doubted of or denied, that God is just, upright, and faithful in all his dealings, though weak man be not able to conceive the reasons of them. His justice may be dark, as when he permitteth us to the will of wicked men, who afflict us without a cause, and lay on without any mercy and pity, and God seemeth to befriend their cause, at least doth not restrain them, nor give check to their fury. We are apt to be tempted to thoughts of rigour and injustice in God’s dispensations, but we must consider not men’s dealing, but God’s. It is unjust as to men, but we have no cause to be angry with God, and complain of God, as if he did not do right No; though we do not see the reason of it, yet it is just. ‘God’s judgments are a great deep.’ We should believe the righteousness and goodness of God in the general, Ps. xxxvi. 7, before we can find it out. The people of God have maintained their principle, when they have been puzzled and embrangled in interpreting God’s providence: Jer. xii. 1, ‘Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee;’ and Ps. lxxiii. 1, ‘Yet God is good to Israel.’ In all such cases it is best to acknowledge our own. ignorance, and rather accuse ourselves of blindness than God of in justice. This is a fixed truth, that God is righteous, though we cannot so clearly make it out. And sometimes we are tempted to doubt of his fidelity and truth, when we feel nothing but the smart of the rod: the benefit is future, not an object of sense, but faith; and it must be evident to faith before it is evident to feeling: Heb. xii. 11, ‘No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; but afterwards it bringeth the quiet fruit of righteousness.’ When all is sharp

and hard to sense, faith can see all is for our profit, for our good. Here is nothing repugnant to God's truth, nothing but what is necessary to make good his truth. Faith must determine it to be, when sense will not find it so. God's works are misexpounded when we go altogether by present sense, whether internal or external: many times we know not what God is about to do, as Christ told Peter: John xiii. 7, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.' That which the Lord is doing tendeth not to ruin and wrath, though through our ignorance and mistake we so interpret it Alas! no wonder we are in the dark, when we so judge of his work, who is 'wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working;' who will not always satisfy our sense and curiosity, but chooseth such a way as will most suit his intent. But ever in all such cases faith must determine that God is just and faithful, and will cast all things for the best, though we see it not; we must assent by faith, when we cannot find it by sense internal or external: 'I know in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.'

Secondly, I am to show you, and to prove to you, that there is much of justice and faithfulness to be observed in all the afflictions which come upon us.

First, There is much of justice in all God's judgments. I prove it:—

1. From God's nature: Ps. cxix. 137, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments;' his work is as his being is, holy and righteous; all his providences carry a condecency and becomingness with his nature. We presume it of a righteous man that he will do righteous things; and shall not we believe so of the holy God? We cannot be infallibly persuaded of a righteous man, for a righteous man may leave his righteousness, because the creature is mutable; and the most righteous and innocent man hath mixed principles, and his rule is without him, and sometimes he may hit it, and sometimes swerve from it: but God is unchangeable, his will and nature is the supreme reason and measure of all things; his acts are accordingly, he cannot err. A carpenter who hath a line in his hand may chop right or miss; but if we could suppose a carpenter whose hand was his rule, he would always hit right. We maybe confident the judge of all the earth will do right; his righteousness and the righteousness of men differ infinitely more than a candle differeth from the sun: Zeph. iii. 5, 'The righteous God in the midst of thee will do no iniquity.' God will not, yea, he cannot; it is contrary to his nature. Abraham might seek to wriggle out of danger by a shift, Noah might fall into drunkenness, Lot pollute himself with incest, Moses trip in his faith, David destroy his innocent servant Uriah, Jonah fall into fear and rash anger, the angels may depart from their rule, if the divine goodness should cease to support them for a moment; but it is impossible that God, who is holiness and righteousness itself, can err and fail in any of his actions.

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2. God never afflicteth or bringeth on judgment without a cause: 'For this cause many are sick,' 1 Cor. xi. 30; there is something done on the creature's part before punishment is inflicted. If we consider God as the Lord dispensing grace, he acts sovereignly, and according to his own will and pleasure: 'Even so, Father, because it pleaseth thee,' Mat. xi. 27, for he may do with his own as he pleaseth; it is no wrong to show his grace to some, and pass by others. But if we consider God as a judge, he never punisheth without a foregoing cause on the creature's part. God, who is arbitrary

in his gifts, is not arbitrary in his judgments: there is a rule of commerce between him and his creatures, stated and set forth, and allowed and appointed by him, and consented unto by us: the directive and counselling part is the rule of our obedience, and the sanction or comminatory part is the rule of his judicial process. In acts of grace, and in dispensing with the violations of his law, he sometimes maketh use of his prerogative, but not in punishing, there he keepeth to his law; and therefore it is that the saints do give him the honour of his justice: Dan. ix. 7, 'O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face; for we have sinned, and done wickedly, and have rebelled in departing from thy precepts:' Neh. ix. 33, 'Thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: 'all our trouble is the penalty of his broken law justly inflicted on us. In short, the breach is first on our part, there is some violation of his law or contempt of his grace; but God loveth us first, there he hath the precedency; he beginneth in all acts of grace, but the reason of his judicial dispensations is first with us. We are first in the offence, and provide fuel for his wrath before it break out upon us.

3. When there is cause given, God doth not presently take it, but giveth sinners lime in his process against them, and doth not presently execute the sentence of his word till they are found incorrigible. He giveth them warning before he striketh; he wooeth and soliciteth by many kind messages to return to their duty, and speaketh to them sometimes in the rough, sometimes in the still voice: 'He bringeth his judgment to light every morning,' as the prophet speaketh, Zeph. iii. 5; lie doth so delight in mercy, and is so tender of the workmanship of his hands, especially his own people, that he never proceedeth to severity as long as there is some way unessayed to reclaim them, not yet made use of. As one that would open a door, and knows not the key; he tries key after key, one dispensation after another; he doth not take the sinner at first word, but followeth him with frequent warnings of his danger, with offers of advantage if he return; yea, at last he is loath to give them up to severe judgments, even then when he can scarce without imputation to his holiness forbear any longer: Hosea xi. 8, 'How shall I give thee up? I am God, and not man.' Such expostulations and speeches are very frequent in the prophets; and all these speeches do abundantly justify God when he judgeth: he would fain hold off the extremity of judgments deserved by them; the Lord maketh a stand, and would fain be prevented before he proceedeth to his strange work.

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4. The judgments inflicted are always short of the cause, surely they never exceed the value of it: Ezra ix. 13, 'Thou hast punished us less than we have deserved.' God doth not exact the whole debt of sinners which they owe to his justice. It was a heavy stroke that then lighted upon Jerusalem. Was their wound but a scratch, or affliction little? Doleful and sad ruin was brought upon that place, the city and the temple burnt to ashes, the people carried captive to a strange land; yet 'Thou hast punished us less than we have deserved.' They were in Babylon, they might have been in hell; our reward is always more than our desert, but our punishment is always less than our desert. We count it a favour if forfeiture of life be punished with banishment, or if a sentence of banishment be commuted into a fine, or the fine be mitigated and brought lower; and shall we think God dealeth rigorously with us? When he layeth on some heavy cross, lie might have cast us into hell, and laid

his hand upon us for ever. See Job xi. 6, ‘O know, therefore, that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.’ We have low thoughts of sin, and therefore have grievous apprehensions of God’s judgments. We do but sip of the cup, when God might make us drink of the dregs of it.

Secondly, I am to prove that the godly may discern much of faithfulness in their afflictions; this will appear to you by these considerations:—

1. In the covenant of grace God hath promised to bestow upon his people real and principal mercies; these are promised absolutely, other things conditionally. God doth not break his covenant if he doth not give us temporal happiness, because that is not absolutely promised, but only so far forth as it may be good for us; but eternal life is promised without any such exception unto the heirs of promise. Eternal promises and threatenings, being of things absolutely good or evil, are therefore absolute and peremptory; the righteous shall not fail of the reward, nor the wicked escape the punishment; but temporal promises and threatenings being of things not simply good or evil, are reserved to be dispensed according to God’s wisdom and good pleasure, in reference and subordination to eternal happiness. It is true it is said, 1 Tim. iv. 8, that ‘godliness hath the promise of this life, and that which is to come:’ but with this reference, that the less gives place to the greater; if the promises of this life may hinder us in looking after the promises of the life to come, God may take the liberty of the cross, and withhold these things, and disappoint us of our worldly hope. A man lying under the guilt of sin may many times enjoy worldly comforts to the envy of God’s children, and one of God’s children may be greatly afflicted and distressed in the world, for in all these dispensations God looketh to his end, which is to make us eternally happy.

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2. This being God’s end, he is obliged in point of fidelity to use all the means that conduce thereunto, that he may attain his eternal purpose in bringing his holy ones to glory: Rom. viii. 28, ‘All things shall work together for good to them that love God.’ Good! what good? It may be temporal, so it falls out sometimes a man’s temporal good is promoted by his temporal loss: Gen. l. 20, ‘Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good:’ they sold their brother a slave, but God meant him to be a great potentate in Egypt. It may be spiritual good: Ps. cxix. 71, ‘It is good for me that I have been afflicted.’ But, to be sure, eternal good, to bring about his eternal purpose of making them everlastingly happy. And in this sense the apostle saith, ‘All things are yours,’ 1 Cor. iii. 22. Ordinances, providences, life, death, all dispensed with a respect to their final happiness or eternal benefit; not only ordinances to work internal grace, but providences as an external help and means; for God having set his end, he will prosecute it congruously, and as it may agree with man’s nature, by external providences as well as internal grace. See Ps. cxxv. 3, ‘The rod of the wicked shall not always rest upon the back of the righteous.’ God hath power enough to give them grace to bear it, though the rod had continued; and can keep his people from iniquity, though the rod be upon them; but he considereth the imbecility of man’s nature, which is apt to tire under long afflictions, and therefore not only giveth more grace, but takes off the temptation. He could humble Paul without a thorn in the flesh, 2 Cor. xii. 7, but he will use a congruous means.

3. Among these means, afflictions, yea, sharp afflictions, are some of those things which our need and profit requireth; they are needful to weaken and mortify sin: Isa. xxvii. 9, 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged;' to increase and quicken grace: Heb. xii. 10, 'But he chasteneth us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' Without this discipline we should forget God and ourselves; therefore, that we may return to God, he afflicts us: Hosea v. 15, 'In their afflictions they will seek me early;' and come to ourselves: Luke xv. 17, the prodigal 'came to himself.' Afflictions are necessary for us upon the former suppositions, namely, that God hath engaged him self to perfect grace where it is begun, and to use all means which may conduce to our eternal welfare, that we may not miscarry and come short of our great hopes: 1 Cor. xi. 32, 'When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.'

The carnal reprobate world are left to a looser and larger discipline. Brambles are not pruned when vines are. New creatures require a more close inspection than others do. Self-confidence and spiritual security are apt to grow upon them; therefore, to mortify our self-confidence, to awaken us out of spiritual sleep, we need to be afflicted, and also to quicken and rouse up a spirit of prayer. We grow cold and flat, and ask mercies for form's sake: Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.' And that we may be quickened to a greater mindfulness of heavenly things. The best of us, when we get a carnal pillow under our heads, are apt to sleep secure. God will not let us alone to our ruin, but afflicts us that we may be refined from the dregs of the flesh, and that our gust and relish of heavenly things may be recovered, and that we may be quickened to a greater diligence in the heavenly life. Look, as earthly parents are not faithful to their children's souls when they live at large, and omit that correction which is necessary for them: Prov. xxix. 15, 'The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.' The mother is mentioned, because they are usually more fond and indulgent, and spare many times, and mar the child; but our heavenly Father will not be unfaithful, who is so wise that he will not be blinded by any passion, hath such a perfect love, and does so fixedly design our eternal welfare, that he rebuketh that he may reform, and reformeth that he may save.

4. God's faithfulness about the affliction is twofold—in bringing on the affliction, and guiding the affliction.

[1.] In bringing on the affliction, both as to the time and kind, when our need requireth, and such as may do the work: 1 Peter i. 6, 'Ye are in heaviness for a season, if need be.' When some distemper was apt to grow upon us, and we were straggling from our duty: Ps. cxix. 67, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray.' Some disappointment and check we meet with in a way of sin, which is a notable help in the spiritual life, where God giveth a heart to improve it.

[2.] As to guiding the affliction both to measure and continuance, that it may do us good and not harm: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able to bear, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear

it.' Violent temptations are not permitted where the Lord seeth us weak and infirm; as Jacob drove as the little ones were able to bear. So when the temptation continued is like to do us hurt, either God will remove it—2 Thes. iii. 3, 'Faithful is the Lord, who will establish and keep you, ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ, from the evil:' the persecutions of unreasonable men are there intended or else support them under it: 2 Cor. xii. 9, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.'

Use 1. To check and reprove divers evils which are apt to grow upon our spirits in our troubles.

1. Murmuring and repining thoughts against God's providence. Why should we murmur and complain, since we justly suffer what we suffer, and it is the Lord's condescension that he will make some good use of these sufferings to our eternal happiness, that we may be capable of everlasting consolation? His justice should stop murmurings: Lam. iii. 39, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?' If he complain, he can complain of none but himself; that evil choice he hath made for his own soul, which it may be he would never have thought of but upon this occasion. His punishment here carrieth no proportion with his offence; it is *punishment* in the singular number, *sins* in the plural; one punishment for many acts of sin: and *a living man*, on this side hell, what is this to everlasting torments? Life cannot be without many blessings to accompany it; while living we may see an end of this misery, or have time to escape those eternal torments which are far worse. The form of the words showeth why we should thus expostulate with ourselves, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain?' Why do we complain? God hath not cut us off from the land of the living, nor cast us into hell; it is the punishment of sin, and is far less than we have deserved. Again, the faithfulness of God checketh murmurings. God knoweth what way to take with us to bring us to glory; therefore trust yourselves in God's hands, and let him take his own methods: 'Commit your souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator,' 1 Peter iv. 19. He is πιστὸς κτίστης; as he is a creator, he doth not love to destroy the work of his hands; as he is faithful in his covenant, he will take the best and safest course to bring you to heaven.

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2. Let it check immoderate sorrow and uncomely dejection of spirit; he is just in the afflictions of his people, but yet so that he is also faithful; he is a father when he beateth and indulgeth, when he smiles and when he frowns. Afflictions do not make void our adoption, they rather increase our confidence of it, Heb. xii. 5. Whatever we do upon other reasons, we should not suspect his love because of our afflictions. God's strokes do not make void his promises, nor doth he retract his gift of pardon when he chastiseth. Mere crosses and troubles are not an argument of God's displeasure, but acts of his faithfulness; so that we have reason to give thanks for his discipline, rather than question his love. In the book of Job it is made a mark of his love, as in those words which are so frequent, Job vii. 17, 18, 'What is man that thou art mindful of him? that thou chastiseth him every morning, and triest him every moment?' We are not only beneath his anger, but unworthy of his care, as if a prince should take upon him to form the manners of a beggar's child; it is a condescension that the great God should deal with us, and suit his providences for our good.

3. This should check our fears and cares; his judgments are right and full of faithfulness; he will bear us through all our trials, and make an advantage of them, and perfect that grace which he hath begun, and finally bring us to eternal glory. The Lord's faithfulness in keeping promises is often propounded as a strong pillar of the saints' confidence: 1 Cor. i. 9, 'Faithful is God, by whom ye are called;' 1 Thes. v. 24, 'Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.' He dispenseth all things with respect to our eternal welfare. But I am afraid of myself; I have provoked the Lord to leave me to myself; but the Lord will pardon weaknesses when they are confessed: 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess our sins, he is just and faithful to forgive them,' speaking to reconciled believers; and when we fall, the Lord hath ways and means to raise us up again, that we perish not; by checks of conscience: 2 Sam. xxiv. 10, 'And David's heart smote him when he had numbered the people;' Ps. cxix. 59, 'I thought on my ways,' &c.; by the word, as Nathan roused up David, 'Thou art the man.' God, that foresaw all things, hath ordered them so that nothing shall cross his eternal purpose and promise made to us in Christ.

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Use 2. Let us acknowledge God's justice and faithfulness in all things that befall us. For motives, consider—

1. It is much for the honour of God, Ps. li. 4, that, under the cross, we should have good thoughts of God, and clear him in all that he saith and doth, see love in his rebukes.

2. It is for our profit; it is the best way to obtain grace to bear afflictions, or to get deliverance out of them. When God hath humbled his people, exercised their grace, he will restore to them their wonted privileges; he waiteth for the creatures' humbling, Lev. xxvi. 41, 42.

For means:—

[1.] You must be one in covenant with God, for to them the dispensations of God come marked not only with justice, as to all, but faithfulness: Ps. xxv. 10 'All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth to them that keep his covenant.'

[2.] You must examine yourselves; the Lord complains of the neglect of this, that when they were in affliction they would not consider: Jer. viii. 6, 'No man said, What have I done?' If you would consider, you would see cause enough to justify God: Lam. iii. 39, 40, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain? Let us search and try our ways, and turn to the Lord.'

[3.] You must observe providence, and your hearts must be awake and attend to it: Ps. cvii. 43, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord;' Eccles. vii. 14, 'In the day of adversity consider.'

[4.] You must be such as value not your happiness by the increase or decrease of worldly comforts, but by the increase or decrease of grace in your souls: 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'For this cause we faint not, because, though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day.' If

you value yourselves by your outward condition, you will still be imbrangled; you should more highly esteem of and be more solicitous about the welfare of your souls in a time of affliction than of all things else in the world: and you will more easily submit and more wisely consider of his doing, and the better understand your interest. When the main care is about your souls, you will value other losses the less, as long as your jewel is in safe hands.

[5.] You must resign your souls to God entirely without exception, refer yourselves to his methods, and let him take his own way to bring you to everlasting glory. When you do with quietness of heart put yourselves into God's hands, as being persuaded of his love and faithfulness, you will be the sooner satisfied in God's providence, seeing he doth all things well. The apostle bids them, 1 Peter iv. 19, put your souls in Christ's hands, and hold on your duty with courage and confidence, cheerfully and constantly. You have no reason to doubt but Christ will take the custody and charge of the soul that is committed to him: 2 Tim. i. 12, 'I know whom I have believed, that he is able to keep that I have committed to him.' Venture your souls in this bottom; he hath power to keep it, he hath pawned his faithfulness in the promise.

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SERMON LXXXIV.

Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.—VER. 76.

IN the foregoing verse he had acknowledged that God had afflicted him, and now he prayeth that God would comfort him. The same hand that woundeth must heal, and from whom we have our affliction we must have our comfort: Hosea vi. 1, 'Come, let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.' Affliction is God's judicial act, a kind of putting the creature in prison; which being done by the supreme judge, who hath an absolute power to save and to destroy, to ruin or pardon, there is no breaking prison or getting out without his leave.

He doth there not only speak of affliction, but of the justice and faithfulness which God showed in it.

1. Justice. Those that humbly confess the justice of his strokes may with the more confidence implore his mercy. Judgment hath done its work when the creature is humble and penitent, There lieth an appeal then from the tribunal of his justice to the throne of his grace. Though our sins deserve affliction, yet there is comfort in the merciful nature of God and the promises of the gospel. David first acknowledgeth that he was justly afflicted, and then he flieth to mercy and beggeth comfort.

2. He observeth also a faithfulness in all God's dispensations; he doth not afflict his children to destroy them, but to prepare them for the greater comfort. As one of his children and servants, David sueth out his privilege. God, that is just and true, will also be kind and merciful. To have judgment without mercy, and desolation without consolation, is the portion of the wicked: but, Lord, saith he, 'I am thy servant,' therefore 'I pray thee let thy merciful kindness be for my comfort.'

So that you see this request is fitly grafted upon the former acknowledgment. In it observe—

1. The original cause of all the good which we expect, *thy merciful loving-kindness*.

2. The effect now sued for, *be for my comfort*, or to comfort me.

3. The instrument or means of obtaining it, which is double:—

[1.] On God's part, the word, *according to thy word*.

[2.J On our part, prayer, *let, I pray thee*.

(1.) In the word there is the relief discovered and offered, and thereby we are encouraged and assured.

(2.) On our part there is prayer, in which we act faith and spiritual desire.

(3.) We have hope given in the word, and we sue it out by prayer.

(4.) The subject capacitated to receive this effect, from that cause, in this order, *thy servant*.

Doct. That the people of God have liberty, and much encouragement from God's merciful nature and promises, to ask comfort in their afflictions.

This point will be best discussed by going over the parts and branches of the text as they have been laid forth to you.

First, The primary and principal cause of all comfort is the merciful kindness of God. We read in 2 Cor. i. 3, that he is 'the father of mercies;' and then it presently followeth, that he is 'the God of all comfort.' The remedy of all our evils lieth in the mercy of God, and his kindness and goodness is the fountain of all our blessedness. I shall inquire—

1. What his merciful kindness is.

2. What special encouragement this is to the people of God.

1. What his merciful kindness is. You see here is a compound word, which importeth both his pity and his bounty. Here is merci fulness and kindness mentioned. First, His mercifulness. Mercy hath its name from misery. *Misericordia* is nothing else but the laying of the misery of others to heart, with intention of affording them relief and succour. In God it noteth his readiness to do good

to the miserable, notwithstanding sin. The motion cometh from within, from his own breast and bowels: for ‘our God is pitiful and of tender mercy,’ James v. 11; and the act of it is extended and reached out unto the creature in seasonable relief, for the throne of grace was erected for this purpose, Heb. iv. 11. Two things there are in mercy—(1.) A propension and inclination to commiserate the afflicted; (2.) A ready relief and succour of them according to our power, *affectus et effectus*. (1.) There is a compassion or being affected with the misery of others. This properly cannot be in God, in whom as there is no passion, so strictly speaking there is no compassion. Yet some thing analogous there is, a taking notice of our misery, something like a pity arising in his heart upon the sight of it, which the scripture frequently ascribeth to God, and we can best understand as we consider the divine perfections shining forth in the human nature of Christ: Exod. ii. 24, he ‘heard their groaning:’ and Isa. lxiii. 9, ‘In all their afflictions he was afflicted:’ Judges x. 16, ‘His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel:’ forms of speech taken from the manner of men, who use to be thus affected when they see a miserable object. God in his simple and perfect nature cannot be said either to joy or grieve, but he carrieth himself as one thus affected. Or these expressions were laid in aforehand to suit with the divine perfections ns manifested in Christ, who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. (2.) Mercy noteth the actual exhibition of help and relief to the miserable. When his people cry to him, he runneth to the cry: Ps. lxxviii. 38, ‘He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.’ Mark, there God’s forgiving the iniquity was not inflicting the temporal punishment or destroying the sinner presently; the cause of all was not any good in the sinner, but pity in God, that moved him to spare them for the time. So he doth sometimes for those that cry to him but in a natural manner, as a beast maketh its moan when it is in pain. But much more will his compassion show itself to his people, when they bemoan themselves in a spiritual manner: Jer. xxxi. 18, 20, ‘I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself.’ What then? ‘My bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.’ When Ephraim was bewailing his sins, God taketh notice of it, and returneth an answer full of fatherly affection, that he would surely show him mercy. God’s compassion proceedeth from love as the cause, and produceth relief as the effect. Secondly, the next word is kindness; that noteth the bounty of God, or his free inclination to do good without our merit, and against our merit. The cause is not in us, but himself. We draw an ill picture of God in our minds, as always angry and ready to destroy. No; the Lord is kind, and that many times to ‘the unthankful and to the evil,’ Luke vi. 35. We should all enlarge our thoughts more about God’s merciful nature, that we may love him more, that we may not keep off from him. As long as we think he delighteth in the creature’s misery, or seeketh occasions of man’s ruin and destruction, God is made hateful. No; you must conceive of him as one that is kind, that ‘doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men,’ Lam. iii. 33, but is ready to do good upon all occasions. We need not fear any hurt from God, but what we willingly bring upon ourselves. He destroyeth not humble souls that lie at his feet, and would have mercy upon his own terms.

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2. What encouragement this is to the people of God.

[1.] It is an encouragement, because the object of mercy is misery. Mercy is favour shown to a miserable person. Now, the more sense of our misery, especially of our true misery, which is sin, the greater hopes. So that the broken-hearted are more capable of his mercy than others are. God will 'revive the spirit of the contrite ones,' Isa. lvii. 15-17. He taketh care to comfort them and to look after them, whatever be neglected, Isa. lx. 2. None are so apt to presume of mercy as the careless, nor none less capable of mercy, or more deserve judgment. While we make nothing of sin it is easy to believe mercy. In a time of peace sin is nothing, vanity and carnality nothing, a negligent course of profession nothing, vain talk, idle mis-spence of time, pleasing the flesh with all it craveth is nothing, and there needeth no such niceness and strictness—God is merciful; but when the conscience is awakened, and we see our actions with their due aggravations, especially at the hour of death, and when earthly comforts fail, then it is hard to believe God's mercy. Sin is a blacker thing than they did imagine, and they find it another manner of thing than ever they thought of; and the same unbelief that now weakens their faith about their duty, and what belongeth to their duty, doth now weaken their faith about their comfort, and what belongeth to their comfort. Those that now question precepts will then question promises. Well, then, the careless and negligent are not capable objects of the tenders of mercy; but the sensible, and the contrite, and the serious, these are the fittest objects, though they think themselves farthest off from mercy. Those that have a deep sense of their own unworthiness most see a need of mercy, and most admire mercy, Gen. xxxii. 10. They see that mercy doth all, that there is somewhat of the pity and kindness of God in all things vouchsafed. They apprehend they are always in some necessity, or in some dependence, and they are unworthy, and that it is at God's mercy to continue or take away any comfort they have. Health, liberty, strength, all is dipped in mercy, continued in mercy, restored at mercy.

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[2.] It is an encouragement to us, because the scripture saith so much of this mercy in God. *Id agit iota scriptura, ut credamus in Deum*, saith Luther. It is natural to him: 1 Cor. i. 3, 'The father of mercies,' not *pater ultionum*, but *misericordiarum*; he is as just as he is merciful, but he delighteth in the exercise of one attribute more than the other—Micah vii. 18, the other his 'strange work.' There is a fulness and plenty, abundant mercy, 1 Peter i. 3; and Ps. li. 1, 'According to the multitude of thy tender mercies.' Our wants are many, and so are our sins; only plentiful mercy can supply and overcome them. They are tender mercies, compared with those of a father and a mother. Of a father: Ps. ciii. 13, 'As a father pitieth his children, so doth the Lord pity those that fear him.' We need not much entreat a father to pity his child in misery. An earthly father may be ignorant of our misery, as Jacob in Joseph's case: an earthly father pitieth foolishly, but God wisely, when it is most for our benefit; an. earthly father's pity may go no further than affection, and cannot always help his children and relieve their misery. But God, as he is metaphorically said to have the affection, so he hath an all-sufficient power to remove any evil present, or avert that which is imminent. With that of a mother: Isa. xlix. 15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee,' saith the

Lord. In the general, passions in females are more vehement, especially in human creatures; the mother expresseth the greatest tenderness and largeness of love. God hath the wisdom of a father and bowels of a mother. Mark, it is not to an adopted child, but to her own son, her sucking child that hangeth on her breast, cannot subsist without the mother's care. Mothers are wont to be most chary and tenderly affected towards them, poor helpless infants and children, that cannot shift for themselves; nature hath impressed this disposition on them. Suppose some of them should be so unnatural as to forget their sucking babes, which is a case rare to be found, yet 'I will not forget you,' saith the Lord. They are durable compassions: 'His compassions fail not,' Lam. iii. 22. They are continual mercies, supplying daily wants, pardoning daily failings, bestowing daily mercies. Oh, that the miserable and the wretched, those that find themselves so, could believe this and plead this, and cast themselves in the arms of this merciful Father! Surely the penitent are not more ready to ask than he to give: 'Therefore let us come boldly to the throne of grace,' Heb. iv. 16. Let not our sins keep us from him; our misery rather than our worthiness is an object of his mercy.

[3.] His mercy is more to his people than to others. There is a general mercy and a special mercy. (1.) There is a general mercy by which God sustaineth and helpeth any creature that is in misery, especially man: so Christ calleth him merciful as he showeth himself 'kind to the unthankful and evil,' Luke vi. 36. Had it not been for this mercy the world had been long since reduced into its ancient chaos, and the frame of nature dissolved. (2.) There is a special mercy which he showeth to his people, pardoning their sins, sanctifying their hearts, accepting their persons. So 'of his mercy hath he saved us,' Titus iii. 4, 5; 'Quickened us;' Eph. ii. 4, 5, 'God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.' This showeth God hath more mercy for his people than for others. Now this is a great encouragement, he that took pity upon us in our lost estate, and did then pardon our sins freely, will he not take pity upon us now we are in a state of grace, and have our sins pardoned? Surely he will show mercy unto us still in forbearing the punishment due unto us, or in mitigating his corrections, or sweetening them with his love. What matter is it who hateth us, when the Almighty pitieth us, and is so tender over us?

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Secondly, The satisfying effect, which is comfort. Here I shall show—

1. What is comfort.

2. That consolation is the gift and proper work of God, to be asked of him.

1. What is comfort. It is sometimes put for the object or thing comfortable. Sometimes for the disposition of the subject, or that sense and apprehension that we have of it.

[1.] The object or thing comfortable, and so comfort may note:—(1.) Deliverance and temporal blessings. These things are comfort able Jo the senses, and in a moderate proportion and with submission they maybe asked of God. That comfort is put for deliverance many scriptures witness.

Take these for a taste: Ps. lxxi. 21, ‘After deep and sore troubles thou shalt increase my greatness and comfort me on every side:’ so Ps. lxxxvi. 17, ‘Show me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it and be ashamed; because thou Lord hast holpen me and comforted me:’ so Isa. xii. 1, ‘In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger was turned away, and thou comfortedst me.’ In all these places comfort is put for temporal deliverance, which is an effect of God’s mercy, and may be an object of the saints’ prayers. It is lawful to deprecate afflictions. There are but few of the best of God’s children that can hold out under long troubles without murmuring or fainting. (2.) Another object of comfort is the pardon of sins, or a sense of God’s special love in Christ, wrought on our hearts. This is matter of comfort indeed. This is the principal effect of God’s merciful kindness in this life, and the great consolation of the saints, as offering a remedy against our greatest evil, which is trouble that ariseth from guilt and sin. This obtained filleth them with joy and peace, Ps. iv, 6, 7, ‘Puts gladness into our hearts.’ To feel God’s love in the soul, Rom. v. 5, is the heaven upon earth which a believer enjoyeth, which allayeth the bitterness of all his troubles. Heaven above is nothing but comfort, and the comforts of the Spirit are heaven below. God keepeth not all for the life to come. (3.) Another object of comfort is our happy estate in heaven, which puts an end to all our miseries: Rev. vii. 19, ‘God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes:’ Rev. xxi. 4, ‘There shall he no more death nor sorrow, nor crying nor any pain:’ Luke xvi. 19, ‘In thy lifetime thou receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.’ We have not our full comfort till we come to heaven. In the world there still is day and night, summer and winter; here is a mixture of mourning and joy, but there all comfort, Mat. v. 4. (4.) The highest and chiefest object of our comfort is the Lord himself: 1 Sam. xxx. 6, ‘David comforted himself in the Lord his God.’ Though all things else fail, this should satisfy us. Though we have little health, no friends, no outward supports to rejoice in, yet thou hast God, whose favour is life, and who is the fountain of happiness, and the centre of the soul’s rest. The prophet, when reduced not only to some straits but great exigencies: Hab. iii. 18, ‘Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.’ The joy of sense is in the creature, the joy of faith is in God. Thus we may consider comfort objectively. All that I shall say further is this, that we should take heed what we make to be the object of our solid comfort, Luke x. 24. They are carnal men that wholly place their comfort in earthly things, in the pleasures, and honours, and profits of the world: Luke vi. 24, ‘Woe to you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation.’ They have all here, and can look for no more, and if disappointed here, they are utterly miser able. There are consolations arising from good things exhibited, but more in good things promised. ‘Everlasting consolations,’ 2 Thes. ii. 16.

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[2.] Let us consider it subjectively. Comfort is the strengthening of the mind when it is apt to be weakened by doubts, fears, and sorrows. As by patience we are kept from murmuring, so by comfort we are kept from fainting. It is the strength, stay, and support of the heart against any grievance whereby it is likely to be overcome. There are three words by which that delightful sense of God’s favour as a stay and strengthening to the heart is expressed—comfort, peace, and joy. (1.)

Comfort is that sense of his love by which the sorrows that arise from the sense of sin and the fears of God's justice are not altogether removed and taken away, yet so mitigated and allayed that the soul is not overwhelmed by them, but hope doth more prevail. This is the nature of comfort, that it doth not altogether remove the evil, but so alleviate and assuage it, that we are able to bear it with some alacrity and cheerfulness: and this is the common state of believers, answerable to the ordinary measure of faith which God giveth his children. Though they are assaulted with sorrows, doubts, and fears, yet they have that true and solid ground of comfort in the promises which begets some hope and expectation towards God; and when the conflict groweth grievous, God of his mercy allayeth the storm by the working of his comforting Spirit. (2.) There is peace, which is another notion which implieth comfort, but withal a more full degree of it; for peace doth so settle and calm the conscience, that they are assaulted either with none or very light fears. It may be explained by external peace. External peace is that state of things which is not troubled with wars from abroad, or intestine tumults and confusions at home, for some long space of time. A truce is a shorter respite, but a peace is a long calm and quiet. So when we are not assaulted with doubts and troubles, but have much peace and quietness of spirit in believing: Rom. xv. 13, 'Now the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.' (3.) As peace exceedeth consolation, so doth joy exceed peace, and beget a more notable sense of itself in the soul. In peace all things are quiet, so as we feel no anxious tossings of mind, no gripes and fears of an accusing conscience; but in joy, true joy, more, some lively motions of heart accompanied with a more lively pleasure and delight. In peace the soul is in such a condition as the body is when nothing paineth us: but in joy,—as when the corporeal senses are mightily moved with such things as delight and please them, as at a feast,—the soul is filled with perpetual suavities, so great many times as cannot be told: 1 Peter i. 8, 'Joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

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Well, then, this is comfort, if you consider it with respect to the sense of God's love, or the hopes of glory; such a lightening and easing of the heart as showeth itself in alacrity in God's service, and courage in tribulations.

1. These comforts, though not absolutely necessary to salvation, yet conduce much to the well-being of a Christian, and therefore are not to be despised. It is as oil to the wheels, Job xv. 11. If neglected and not sought after with earnest diligence, they are despised, which cannot be without great sin.

2. It follows after holiness, as heat doth fire. The oil of grace will breed the oil of gladness. There are certain spiritual pleasures which do attend a course of obedience. Holiness is our work, comfort our reward; holiness is God's due, comfort our profit and interest: Acts ix. 31, 'Walked in the fear of God and comfort of the Holy Ghost.' Grace carrieth us out to honour God, love to him breedeth comfort. It is strange if it be not so; there is some unusual impediment.

3. Though our main comfort be in heaven, yet whilst we are here in the world we have some foregoing consolation, as an earnest and pledge of more to ensue, and as the solace of our pilgrimage, Ps. cxvii. 54. Here is not only the offer, but the sealing of pardon and peace to the soul.

4. Comfort is more needful at some time than at others, and God dispenseth it suitably to our trials, necessities, and wants. In great afflictions and temptations there is a larger allowance, because they need greater comforts, 2 Cor. i. 5; a drop of honey is not enough to sweeten a hogshead of vinegar. The Lord reserveth the comforts of his Spirit for such a time. The more humble and frequent in prayer, grace is more exercised, drawn forth into the view of conscience.

2. Comfort is to be asked of God, for it is his proper gift. It is his name: 'The God of all comfort,' 2 Cor i. 3; and 2 Cor. vii. 6, 'The God that comforteth those that are cast down.' It is well that our comforts are in the hand of God; we should have little of it if it were in the disposal of the creature.

Consider:—

1. That natural comforts are the gifts of God: 1 Tim. i. 17, 'He giveth us richly all things to enjoy,' and sets forth the bounds of our habitation, where and how much we shall have, and giveth and taketh these things at his pleasure, raising up some from the dunghill, pulling down others from the throne of glory, 1 Sam. ii. 7, 8. That prosperity may never be without a curb, nor adversity without a comfort, God will acquaint the world with such spectacles now and then: all things are at his dispose.

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2. That moderate delight and contentment that we have in our earthly blessings is his allowance. The creature without God is like a deaf-nut; when we crack it, we find nothing, Eccles. ii. 24, 25, and Eccles. iii. 13. It is the gift of God, and it is one of the chiefest earthly mercies, that in this valley of tears, where we meet with so many causes of grief and sorrow, we take comfort in anything. Without this, a crown of gold will sit no easier than a crown of thorns upon the head of him that weareth it; yea, a palace becomes a prison, and every place a hell to us. It is not abundance of honour that makes a man happy, but comfort, Luke xii. 15. If God send leanness into the soul, or a spark of his wrath into the conscience, all is as the white of an egg, unsavoury. A secret curse eateth out all the contentment of it. He that liveth in a cottage is happier than he that liveth in a palace, if he have comfort there.

3. For spiritual comfort, which ariseth either from the sense of his love, or the hope of glory, we cannot have one drop of it but from God. His Spirit is called 'the comforter.' All the world cannot give it if he doth not give it us: he hath an immediate and sovereign power over the hearts of men; if he frown, nothing can support us. When the sun is gone, all the candles in the world cannot make it day. We can procure our own sorrows quickly, but he only can comfort us. None but divine comforts are authentic.

Thirdly, The means of conveying and procuring this comfort 1. The means of conveying it on God's part is his word. David pleadeth that where the remedy of his misery was discovered and offered. We read often in this psalm how David revived his comfort by the word; and Rom. xv. 4, 'Comfort of the scriptures.' There is the matter of true spiritual comfort: 1 Cor. xiv. 31, 'That all may learn and all be comforted.' This follows from the former; God is the God of comfort, and we should not have the heart to come to him unless he had opened the way to him by his promise. The world cannot give it to us; philosophy cannot. The word of God can. And this comfort is both strong and full, for measure and matter. Matter; there the death of Christ is laid down as the foundation of comfort. If we consider God as holiness itself, and we nothing but a mass of sin and corruption, you will see there can be no reconciliation without satisfaction given. Mercy must see justice contented; one attribute must not destroy another. Justice hath no loss, it is fully satisfied in Christ, and that is the ground of our comfort, 2 Cor. i. 3. There are the promises of deliverance, protection, support, the liberties and privileges of Christians laid forth. These are the breasts of comfort, Isa. lxvi.; suck of these and be satisfied. In short, our great comforts are, God's presence with us while we are in these houses of clay, our presence with God in his palace of glory: 1 Thes. iv. 17, 18, 'We shall ever be with the Lord;' and 'Comfort one another with these words.'

2. The means on our part, receiving the sweet effects of God's mercy and word, and that is prayer. We cannot have it without dealing with God in a humble manner. Whatever God giveth he will have it sought out this way; Ezek. xxxvi. 37, 'I will yet be inquired after to do it for them;' so Isa. xxix. 10, 11. Now the reasons are these:—

[1.] Because in prayer we act faith and spiritual desire, both which are as the opening of the soul, Ps. lxxxi. 10, to raise our confidence, or draw forth the principles of trust.

[2.] We ask God's leave to apply in particular what is offered in the word in general: as in the next verse, 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me,' ver. 77. In everything we must ask God's leave though we have right; though in possession we ask leave, because we may be mistaken in our claim.

[3.] It is a fit way of easing the heart and disburthening ourselves, Phil. iv. 6, 7. When we pray most, and most ardently, we are most happy and find greatest ease.

[4.] God will be owned as the author of comfort, whoever be the instrument, Isa. lvii. 19; in prayer we apply ourselves to him. The word is a sovereign plaster, but God's hand maketh it stick; many read the scriptures, but are as dead-hearted when done as when they began. The Spirit is the comforter; we are very apt to look to the next hand, to the comfort, but not to the comforter, or the root of all, which is loving-kindness in God.

Fourthly, The subject capable, 'thy servant.' Here we may ask the eunuch's question, 'Of whom speaketh the prophet this, of himself or of some other man?' Of himself questionless, under the denomination of God's servant. But then the question returneth, Is it a word of promise made to

himself in particular, or God's servants in the general? Some say the former, 2 Sam. xii. 13, the promises brought to him by Nathan. I incline to the latter, and it teacheth us these three truths:—(1.) That God's servants are only capable of the sweet effects of his mercy and the comfort of his promises. Who are God's servants? (1st.) Such as own his right, and are sensible of his interest in them: Acts xxiii. 23, 'The God whose I am and whom I serve.' (2d.) Such as give up themselves to him, renouncing all other masters. Renounce we must, for we were once under another master, Rom. vi. 17; Mat. vi. 24; Rom. vi. 13; 1 and Chron. xxx. 8. (3d.) Accordingly frame themselves to do his work sincerely: Rom. i. 9, 'Serve with my spirit;' and Rom. vii. 6, 'In newness of spirit,' so as will become those who are renewed by the Spirit: diligently, Acts xxvi. 7, and universally, Luke i. 74, and wait upon him for grace to do so, Heb. xi. 28. These are capable of comfort. The book of God speaketh no comfort to persons that live in sin, but to God's servants, such as do not live as if they were at their own dispose, but at God's beck: if he say, Go, they go. They give up themselves to be and do what God will have them to be and do. (2.) If we would have the benefit of the promise, we must thrust in ourselves, under one title or other, among those to whom the promise is made, if _not as God's children, yet as God's servants. Then it is as sure as if our name were in the promise. (3.) All God's servants have common grounds of comfort: every one of God's servants may plead with God as David doth. The comforts of the word are the common portion of God's people; they that bring a larger measure of faith, carry away a larger measure of comfort.

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Oh, then, let us lift up our eyes and hearts to God this day, and, in as broken-hearted a manner, seek this comfort as possibly we can!

SERMON LXXXV.

Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.—VER. 77.

THE man of God had begged mercy before, now he beggeth mercy again. The doubling the request showeth that he had no light feeling of sin in the troubles that were upon him; and besides, the people of God think they can never have enough of mercy, nor beg enough of mercy; they again and again reinforce their suits, and still cry for mercy. After he had said, 'Let thy merciful loving-kindness be for my comfort,' he presently addeth, 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live.'

In the words we have two things:—

1. His request, *let thy tender mercies come unto me*.

2. A reason to back it, *that I may live*.

First, The request consists of three branches:—

1. The cause and fountain, *let thy tender mercies*.

2. The influence and outgoing of that cause, or the personal application of it to David, let them *come unto me*.

3. The end, *that I may live*.

1. The cause and fountain is the Lord's tender mercies: it is remarkable that in this and the former verse he doth not mention mercy without some additament; there it was merciful kindness, here tender mercy. Mercy in men implieth a commotion of the bowels at the sight of another's misery; so in God there is such a readiness to pity, as if he had the same working of bowels: Jer. xxxi. 20, 'My bowels are troubled for him,' or sound for him. Now some are more apt to feel this than others, according to the goodness of their nature, or their special interest in the party miserable. We expect from parents that their bowels should yearn more towards their own children than to strangers; so God hath the bowels of a father: Ps. ciii. 13, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' There needeth not much ado to bring a father to pity his children in misery, if he hath anything fatherly in him.

2. The outgoing of this mercy is begged, 'Let it come unto me;' where, by a fiction of persons, mercy is said to come or find out its way to him.

3. The effect, 'That I may live.' Life is sometimes taken literally, and, in its first sense, for life natural, spiritual, or eternal, by a metonymy for joy, peace, comfort: now which of these senses shall we apply to this place? Some take it for life natural, that he might escape the death his enemies intended to him. Certainly in the former verse he speaketh as a man under deep troubles and afflictions, and in the following words he telleth us that the proud dealt perversely with him, and therefore he might have some apprehensions of dying in his troubles, which he beggeth God to prevent. Some think he beggeth God's mercy to preserve him in life spiritual, and Bellarmine understandeth it of life eternal. But I rather take it in the latter sense, for joy and comfort, which is the result of life, where it is vital and in its perfection. *Non est vivere sed valere vita.* 1 Thes. iii. 8, 'We live, if ye stand fast in the truth.' A man that enjoy eth himself is said to live. But if we take it in this notion, a double sense may be started; for it may imply either a release from temporal sorrows, and so the sense will be, Have pity upon me, that I may once more see good and comfortable days in the world, for a life spent in sorrow is as no life. Or, he putteth life for some comfortable sense of God's mercy, or assurance of his love to him. Most interpreters, both ancient and modern, go this way. Νέκρον ἑαυτὸν ἡγεῖται τῆς θείας ἐστερημένον εὐμενείας, saith Theodoret. He counted himself but as a dead man without the sense of God's favour and good-will to him, but it would be as a new life or resurrection from the dead if God would show him mercy, and cast a favourable aspect upon him. This sense suiteth well with the context, for David was for the present deprived

of the tokens and effects of God's tender mercy; why else should he so earnestly beg for that to come to him which he had already; and it suiteth well with a gracious spirit such as David had.

The points are:—

1. That God's tender mercy is the fountain of his people's comfort and happiness.

2. That it is not enough to hear somewhat of the mercy of God, but we should by all means seek that it may come unto us.

3. That it is life to a believer to have a sense of God's mercy and love in Christ, and death to be without it.

4. Such as would taste or have a sense of God's mercy must delight in his law. This was David's plea.

The two last propositions I shall insist upon, the other being handled elsewhere, and so much consideration of them as is necessary for the opening and improving of this verse will occur in one or both of these points.

That it is life to a believer to have a sense of God's mercy and love in Christ, and death to be without it.

David was a dead man because he felt not God's mercy as formerly: he did eat, and drink, and sleep, and transact his business as others did; but he counted this as no life, because he felt not the wonted sense of God's love. Gracious spirits cannot live without divine comforts, they take no joy in the world unless God favourably look upon them.

Let me illustrate this note with these observations:—

1. Observe, he seeketh all his comfort from mercy, and tender mercy; so in the former, so in the present verse. I shall show you the necessity and utility of so doing.

[1.] The necessity of it. The best of God's children have no other claim. For a publican to come and say, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner,' Luke xviii. 13, is no such wonder; but for a David to use the same plea, that should be noted. From first to last the children of God have no other claim; it is mere mercy that took us into a state of grace at first, and mere mercy that keepeth us in it, and furnisheth us with all the supplies that are necessary to keep it up in vigour and comfort, and mercy that giveth us the final consummation and accomplishment of it at last. Our first entrance into the state of grace is always ascribed to mere mercy. Nothing moved the Lord to bestow life upon dead and graceless sinners but his mere pity and tender compassion: 1 Peter i. 3, 'Of his abundant mercy he hath begotten us to a lively hope:' Eph. ii. 4, 'God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he hath loved us, while we were yet dead in trespasses and sins, yet quickened us:' Titus iii. 5, 'Of his mercy he hath saved us, by washing us in the laver of regeneration.' Mercy was, then,

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exercised not only without our desert, but against our desert: God was not moved to bestow his grace by any goodness which he did foresee or find in us, but merely by his own pity; misery offered the occasion, but mercy was the cause of all the good done unto us. After conversion, all our supports and supplies are given us of his tender mercy: Gal. vi. 16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them.' New creatures and the most accurate walkers are not so free from sin but they still stand in need of mercy. All their receipts come to them not in the way of merit, but undeserved mercy. Our peace and comfort, when we walk most according to rule, is the fruit of mercy. The elect are called 'Vessels of mercy,' Rom. ix. 23, because, from first to last, they are filled up with mercy, and supplied by the free favour and love of God in Jesus Christ. Our final consummation is from mercy: the same mercy that lays the first stone in this building doth also finish the work: Jude 21, 'Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.' We take glory out of the hands of mercy, and it is mercy that sets the crown upon our heads, after we have done and suffered the will of God here upon earth. We can merit no more after grace than before.

[2.] The utility of it; this giveth boldness and more hopeful expectation; that will appear if we consider what mercy is. It is God's propension and inclination to do good to the sinful and miserable, so tar as his wisdom seeth convenient. As mercy is a perfection in the divine nature, so God is necessarily merciful as well as just; but the exercise of it is, I confess, free and arbitrary: it is not necessarily exercised but according to his will and good pleasure, to some more, to some less, as his wisdom thinketh fit. Yet this advantage we have by it, that mercy rather seeketh a fit occasion to discover itself than a well qualified object, as justice doth; for it doth not consider what is due or deserved, but what is needed. Therefore, first, the needy and miserable have some hope, for misery as misery is the object of mercy; and therefore when our afflictions are pressing and sore, our miseries and straits are some kind of argument which we may plead to God: Ps. lxxix. 8, 'Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us, for we are brought very low;' they plead their miserable condition. Mercy relents towards a sinful people when they are a wasted people: he heareth the moans of the beasts, and therefore certainly he will not shut up his bowels against the cries of his people; their very misery pleadeth for them. Secondly, the broken-hearted that have a sense of their misery have a greater advantage than others, and are more capable of God's mercy, because they are not only miserable, but miserable in their own feeling, especially if this feeling be deep and spiritual; they are sensible of the true misery, and they are more troubled about sin than temporal inconvenience: Mat. ix. 13, 'Go learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.'

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3. When we flee to his mercy, and seek it in the appointed way of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ: the Lord will not utterly destroy a sinner fleeing to his mercy; he hath engaged his word and oath, Heb. vi. 18; and this comfort we may make use of partly when the sense of guilt sits heavy upon the soul; go humble yourselves before the merciful God, and sue out his favour and reconciliation with you, as David doth, Ps. li. 1, 'Have mercy upon me, according to thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions:' you know not what a merciful God may do for his undeserving and ill-deserving people. And partly

when God is upon his judicial process, and calleth a people to an account for their sins, he still retaineth his merciful nature: Hab. iii. 2, 'In the midst of wrath he remembereth mercy:' his wrath and indignation doth not so far transport him as that he should forget his merciful nature, and deal with his afflicted people without all moderation. When God is justly angry for sin it is a special time wherein to plead for mercy.

Secondly, He beggeth that it may come to him. Let us see the meaning of the request, and then what may be observed upon it. Coming to him noteth a personal and effectual application.

1. A personal application, as in the 41st verse of this psalm, 'Let thy mercies come to me also, even thy salvation, according to thy word.' David would not be forgotten, or left out or lost in the throng of mankind, when mercy was distributing the blessing to them.

2. Effectual application, that noteth—(1.) The removing of obstacles and hindrances; (2.) The obtaining the fruits and effects of this mercy. First, The removing of obstacles. Till there be way made, the mercy of God cannot come at us, for the way is barricaded and shut up by our sins. As the Lord maketh a way for his anger, Ps. lxxviii. 50, by removing the hindrances, eating out the staff and the stay, taking away that which letteth, so the Lord maketh way for his mercy, or mercy maketh way for itself, when it removeth the obstruction; sin is the great hindrance of mercy. We ourselves raise the mists and the clouds which intercept the light of God's countenance; we build up the partition wall which separates between God and us, yet mercy finds the way. Secondly, The obtaining the fruits of mercy. The effects of God's tender mercies are common or saving. We read, Ps. cxlv. 9, 'The Lord is good to all, his tender mercies are over all his works;' not a creature which God hath made but the Lord pitieth it and supplieth its wants. But there are spiritual effects of the Lord's tender mercy, his pardoning our sins, restoring us to his grace and favour, and repairing his image in us: Eph. i. 3, 'Who hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;' such spiritual blessings as are a sure effect of God's favour, never given in anger. Riches may be given in anger, so may also temporal deliverance, but pardon of sin is never given in anger, nor the Spirit of the Lord Jesus to dwell in us. Of spiritual blessings, some are comfortable to us, others honourable to God; some fall in with our interest, others suit with God's end; as pardon is of the first sort, and the subjection of the creature to God of the latter. We are willing to be pardoned and freed from the curse of the law and the flames of hell, but to be renewed to the image of God and quickened to the life of grace, and put into a capacity to serve our Creator and Redeemer, that we are not so earnest for; and yet these are the undoubted pledges of the special mercy of God to us, and absolutely necessary to the enjoyment of other relative benefits. We must suppose David to intend both in his prayer, 'Let thy mercy come unto me.' Once more, these spiritual benefits may be considered as to the effects themselves, and the sense that we have of our enjoyment of them. Our safety dependeth upon the saving effects and fruits of God's special mercy, and our peace, joy, and comfort upon the sense of them. Both are comprised in that petition, 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me.' This being stated as the full meaning of the words, let us observe:—

[1.] That it is not enough to hear of somewhat of God's saving mercies, but we should beg that it may come unto us, be effectually and sensibly communicated unto us, that we may have experience of them in our own souls; the hearsay will do us little good without experience; the hearsay is the first encouragement: 'We have heard the kings of Israel are merciful kings:' that moved them to make the address in a humble and submissive manner for their life and safety: 1 Kings xx. 31, 'Let us, I pray thee, put on sackcloth upon our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go to the king of Israel.' We may reason at a better rate concerning the God of Israel. We have heard that the God of Israel is a merciful God, that he delights in mercy; but then, Let us try what he will do for us. Upon the participation of the saving effects and benefits of his mercy, our comfort and interest beginneth. (1.) We shall never have such admiring thoughts of mercy as when we have felt it ourselves; then we know the grace of God in truth, Col. i. 6. A man that hath read of honey, or heard of honey, may know the sweetness of it by guess and imagination, but a man that hath tasted of honey knoweth the sweetness of it in truth; so by hearing or reading of the grace and mercy of God in Christ, we may guess that it is a sweet thing, but he that hath had an experimental proof of the sweet effects and fruit of it in his own heart, and all that is spoken of God's pardoning and comforting of sinners is verified in himself, this giveth him a more sensible demonstration of the worth and value of this privilege, then more admiring thoughts of mercy, when he can say, as Paul, 1 Tim. i. 13, ἠλεήθην, I was saved by mercy. (2.) We shall more love God: Phil. i. 9, 'I pray that your love may abound in all sense:' the spiritual gust maketh love abound. (3.) We cannot speak of it with that fulness, life, sense, and affection to others, nor so movingly invite others to share with us, as when the effects of his goodness are communicated to us: Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.' A report of a report is a dead cold thing, but a report from experience is lively and powerful. Well, then, let it come to me.

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[2.] The sense or participation of God's saving mercies is to believers the life of their lives, the heaven they have upon earth, the joy and comfort of their souls, and the want of this is a kind of death to them; for so David expresseth himself, 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live.'

The reasons are taken partly from the object, and partly from the subject—from the thing itself, and from the disposition of a renewed heart.

1. From the thing itself, from the object; and there, first, the value of this privilege, compared with all that may be called life. Life is either natural, spiritual, or eternal.

[1.] Compare it with life natural, and there the Psalmist will tell you: Ps. lxiii. 3, 'Thy loving-kindness is better than life:' life is not life without it; without the feeling of this love, or the hope of feeling it, it is little worth. To have the light of the sun, which is the comfort of the senses, without the light of God's countenance, which is the comfort of the soul, is a sad and dark estate, especially to the children of God, that know they are made for another world, and for this only in

their passage thither. Natural life only giveth us a capacity to enjoy the comforts of sense, which are base, dreggy, and corruptive; but the special favour of God lets us into such consolations as perfect the soul, and affect it with a greater pleasure than our natural faculties are capable of. Life natural is a frail, brittle thing, but these saving effects of God's mercy lay a foundation of eternal happiness. Life natural may grow a burden, but the love of God is never burdensome; the days may come in which there is no pleasure, Eccles. xii. 1; Job xxxiii. 20, 'His life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty food:' in sickness and age, in troubles of conscience. Men do pretty well with their worldly happiness till God rebuke man for sin; then all the glory, profit, and pleasure of the creature doth us no good: Ps. xxxix. 11, 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth.' Judas haltered himself when filled with the sense of God's wrath: Job chose strangling rather than life. At death, when all worldly things cease, and are of no more use to us, the sense of God's love will be of great use to us. All the world understand the worth and value of God's love when death cometh; then a child of God feeleth it. Oh, saith he, I would not for all the world but that I had made sure of the love of God before this hour! How terrible else would it have been to leave all and leap out into an unknown world! Jer. xvii. 9, 'The unjust man at his latter end shall be a fool:' and Job xxvii. 8, 'What is the hope of the hypocrite, if he hath gained, when God cometh to take away his soul?'

[2.] Life spiritual: the soul hath no life but in communion with God, who is the fountain of this new life. Now the more sensible and close this is, the more they live; the vitality of this life lieth in the sensible participation of the effects of his special grace and mercy; then we have it more abundantly, John x. 10; not only living, but lively.

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[3.] For eternal life, a comfortable sense of God's mercy is the be ginning and pledge of the true and heavenly life, Rom. v. 4-6. The shedding abroad the love of God in the heart of a believer maketh this his hope sure and certain, he needeth not be ashamed, for he hath earnest beforehand.

(1.) God's favour furnisheth us with a remedy against all evils and miseries; *i.e.*, wants, troubles, sins. The want of other things may be supplied by the love of God, but the want of the love of God cannot be supplied with anything else; if poor in the world, yet we may be rich in faith, James ii. 5; if afflicted, destitute, yet this loss may be made up by the presence of God in the soul, 2 Cor. iv. 16. As our outward man decayeth, our inward man is renewed day by day. If they want the creature they have God; there is no want of a candle when they have the sun; if they want health, the soul may be in good plight, 3 John 2, as Gaius had a healthy soul in a sickly body. If they want liberty, they lie open to the visits of his grace; the Spirit of God is no stranger to them, nor can his company and comforts be shut out. Tertullian telleth the martyrs, You went out of the prison when you went into it, and were but sequestered from the world, that you might converse with God: the greatest prisoners are those that are at large, darkened with ignorance, chained with lusts, committed not by the proconsul, but God. If they want the favour of men, they have the favour of God: God smileth when the world frowneth; they may be banished, but every place is alike near to God and heaven.

Some climates are nearer and some further off from the sun, but all alike near to the sun of righteousness. *Ubi pater ibi patria,* that is our country where God is. We are harassed, beaten, afflicted in sundry manners, but the sting is gone; the rod that is dipped in guilt smarteth most, but a pardoned man may rejoice in tribulations, Rom. v. 1, 2. But now, on the contrary, suppose a man high in honour, wallowing in wealth, spending his time and wealth in ease and pleasure, but after all this God will bring him to judgment. The world is his friend, but God is his enemy and he is all his lifetime subject to bondage, Heb. ii. 14; not always felt, but soon awakened; and during the time of his comfort and delight, he is dancing about the brink of hell, liable to an eternal curse; and there is but the slender thread of a frail life between him and execution, a few serious sober thoughts undo him.

(2.) Sin; that is the great evil, both as to the guilt of it and the wages of it, the guilt and obliquity of it. No creature can provide a plaster for this sore; to get our consciences settled and our natures healed, this is the special fruit of God's mercy in Christ; his business is to save us from sin, Mat i. 21; Acts iii. 26, 'God having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from your iniquity:' Rom. xi. 26, 'There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:' have God's image repaired, and restored to his grace and favour. Those that have felt sin a burden, nothing will satisfy till the Lord looks graciously upon them.

(3.) The favour of the Lord is the fountain of all blessings. Get an interest in his special mercy, and then all things are yours. You have God for your God, who commandeth all things: 1 Cor. iii. 22, 'Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all things are yours:' Mat. vi. 33, 'First seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you:' Prov. x. 22, 'The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.'

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(4.) It sweetens every comfort; a piece of bread with the love of God is a plentiful feast. 'A little that a righteous man hath is better than the revenue of many wicked.' *Quid prodest regium alimentum si ad Gehennam pascal?*—what profiteth it to be fatted for slaughter?

2. Reasons from the subject, or disposition of the renewed heart.

[1.] They have once had an apprehension of their true misery by reason of sin and the curse. None prize the favour of God, but they have been burdened with the sense of sin and misery. We speak in vain to most men; it is only the sick will prize the physician, the condemned be earnest for a pardon.

[2.] They are renewed. Till a man be holy he cannot rejoice in spiritual things; the fool's heart is always in the house of mirth, Eccles. vii. 4. For masks, and plays, and merry meetings, feasts and banquets, and vain company, and idle games and pastimes, these are the life and joy of their

souls. A fool will make a foolish choice, as children prefer their rattles and toys before a solid benefit: Rom. viii. 5, ‘For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit:’ the desire showeth what is delightful and comfortable, but now the renewed heart, it is their all to be in favour with God. They have not the spirit of the world, 1 Cor. ii. 3; many have affections for anything but God.

Use 1. The use is—(1.) Reproof to those that care not for this sense of God’s mercy. David could not think himself alive till he was reconciled to God. Profane men are not much troubled with this care; though God be angry they can seek their delight elsewhere; they can rejoice in the creature apart from God; so they may have outward things they are at ease, and can sing lullabies to their souls, as that wretch in the parable, Luke xii. 19, ‘Eat, drink, and be merry.’ If they be in trouble, they seek to put away their troubles by carnal means. Let these consider, first, God can make the stoutest-hearted sinner who standeth aloof from him to see he is undone without him. It is no hard thing to put a sinner in the stocks of conscience, so that one favourable look would be valued more than all the world. Secondly, It may be, when punishment hath opened their eyes, God may hide his face and withhold the blessing from them when they seek it with bitter tears: Prov. i, 28, ‘They shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me.’ (2.) To shame the people of God that have such cold and careless thoughts about that which true believers count as dear as their lives.

1. This slightness cometh from carnal complacency, or inordinate delight in the creature, or letting out ourselves to worldly delights. Now this is vile ingratitude, when God’s gifts, and those of the worser sort, draw us from himself. Will you be of a Gadarene spirit, or as one of the vain fellows, as Michal told David scoffingly?

2. Consider how dangerous this is to our temporal and eternal felicity. Temporal felicity: The creature is blasted when our life is bound up with it; the world is eclipsed that the favour of God may be more prized, and the loss of the creature should more awaken us to seek after God. We most prize the evidences of God’s favour and reconciliation with him when we are in trouble, and God taketh away our worldly comforts, that the consolations of his Spirit may not seem as small things. Many have smarted for carnal complacency. Eternal felicity: When any carnal thing is valued more than God, it puts our eternal comforts upon a hazard; it is a selling the birthright for a mess of pottage, Heb. xii. 15. Well, then, let us be weaned from the world, for while we take too much delight in the creature God is the less esteemed.

Use 2. Instruction, to teach us how to carry ourselves with respect to this privilege, a sense of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts in the fruits and effects thereof.

1. Let us make it our chiefest care to get and preserve the fresh sense of God’s love upon our hearts, grudging at no labour: 2 Peter i. 10, ‘Give diligence to make your calling and election sure,’

&c. No cost: Mat. xiii. 46, ‘When he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it;’ Phil. iii. 8, 9, denying lusts and interests.

2. Not to hazard it on cheap terms. God forbid that I should sell my inheritance! Will you sell away Christ and heaven for such cheap rates, hazard your souls for carnal satisfaction?

3. Let us be sensible of the want of it as the greatest misery, Mat. ix. 15.

4. Rejoice in it above all things, Ps. iv. 6, 7. Be glad if this be promoted, though by sharp afflictions.

Doct. 2. All such as would have the comfortable effects and sense of God’s mercy must delight in his law.

1. Delight in the law implieth obedience, for it is not a delight that ariseth from speculation, or the contemplation of the truth revealed therein. ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart,’ Ps. xl. 8; and Ps. cxii. 1, ‘Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments;’ not in the knowledge of their duty, but in the practice of it. It is in the law as the rule of duty, and all tendeth to practice. They that delight in the speculation grudge at the practice. One that is observant of God’s will delighteth to believe and obey, as well as to know God’s word.

2. A ready and cheerful obedience must be willingly and heartily undertaken; love to the work for the work’s sake. A man is never truly converted to God till God hath his love, and his law hath his love; for the constitution of the heart is not seen in our opinions so much as in our affections, love, desire, and delight. Many men’s judgment is for God; that is, conscience is for God, but their hearts are for other things; when obedience is practically and cheerfully undertaken, and the delight of our souls in them. Men have a little compulsory religiousness; it is most when frightened into it. Men do something, but had rather leave it undone, and do not choose rather to walk holily if they had their own choice. A man is slavish when fear of being damned doth only sway him; the godly love holiness as holiness, they are constant with God.

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But why do they that have a comfortable sense of his mercy delight in his law?

1. These are only fit to ask mercy.

2. These are qualified to receive mercy.

1. These are only fit to ask mercy.

[1.] Because they are likely to ask it most feelingly. None prize the mercy of God, nor will ask it in such an earnest and broken hearted manner, as those that delight in his law. These see their want of it, they are sensible of more defects than others are: Rom. vii. 24, ‘O wretched man that I am!’ They mind their work, which others, that exercise themselves not unto godliness, mind not;

they have greater light and greater discoveries, more love; much work driveth them oftener to the throne of grace. None rest in duties so much as they that have least cause: Mal. i. 13, ‘What a weariness is it!’

[2.] These ask more regularly; therefore it is said, Ps. xxxvii. 4, ‘Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desire of thy heart.’ Why so unlimitedly? Because delight in the Lord retrencheth carnal desires and moderateth earthly desire; their hearts are not so set upon outward things as the hearts of other men are: John xv. 7, ‘If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.’ Why doth God make so large an offer? He trusteth such as keep communion with Christ. There is a conformity between their wills and God’s in the matter of their desire so far as we are renewed and hold communion with him; their unruly lusts will be subdued, and their unlawful desires for matter, manner, and end be laid aside, and they will acquiesce in the good pleasure of God, and the most excellent things. Therefore God maketh them this offer, Ask what ye will. Not that men are warranted to pray for what they will, or to expect an answer in whatsoever they desire, but as their delight in his law is prevalent, their wills are limited by his word and will, and the Spirit in them ‘maketh intercession according to the will of God,’ Rom. viii. 26, 27.

[3.] These may with most confidence ask mercy; others are excluded: Prov. xxviii. 9, ‘He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, his prayer is an abomination to the Lord.’ These are included: 1 John iii. 22, ‘And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.’ If we refuse God speaking to us in infinite wisdom, as he does in the word, no wonder if God refuse us stammering foolishly in prayer, Jer. ix. 21. Men that purpose to continue in their sins shall not be heard in other things, otherwise the grossest sinners may come to God to have their sins pardoned and removed, and expect to be accepted and heard through Christ; but the perpetual assistance and favour of God is not given to them. Such as would be heard and accepted, and come with assurance of welcome and audience, ought to be devoted to him, to worship him, to call on him.

2. These are qualified to receive mercy, according to the tenor of that covenant in which mercy is dispensed and magnified in the covenant of grace or the covenant of God’s mercy in Christ, Heb. v. 9, and x. 14. This being apt to be abused, let us explain, how obedience is a condition of the covenant A condition meriting and purchasing the blessings of the covenant it cannot be; for God giveth the ability to obey wholly and solely of his own grace: it is short of the rule, and infinitely inferior to the reward. A condition applicatory, whereby we apply ourselves to the covenant on our part, it is, and therefore necessary. It is a secondary condition, disposing us to communion, with God in and by the covenant. At first we must be turned by repentance towards God, through faith in the Redeemer, before we receive remission of sins, Acts xx. 18. Faith and repentance are conditions of pardon, and sincere obedience a condition of salvation. The first condition containeth a resolution of obedience for the future, though we have not actually so obeyed. The secondary

condition, that we should make good our resolution. We must keep covenant as well as make covenant. Faith is an entering into covenant, for it is a consent to take Christ as lord and saviour; and constant and delightful obedience is a constant keeping covenant, Ps. xxv. 10, and ciii. 17, 18. The making covenant was necessary for our entrance, the keeping covenant for our continuance. Consent to take any for king, husband, master, draweth another condition after it, that we carry ourselves in these relations dutifully: besides promising there must be performing; he that is my sovereign must be obeyed. There must be conjugal fidelity to the husband, and faithful service to the chosen master; so in the covenant between us and God, us and Christ.

Object. But you will say. How, then, shall we take comfort in the new covenant, who are so many ways faulty?

Ans. We must consider—(1.) What it exacts; (2.) What it accepteth.

1. What it exacts. To quicken us to more earnest endeavours and humble confession of failings, it exacteth perfect obedience, admits of no imperfection either of parts or degrees.

2. It accepteth a perfection of parts, there being truth of godliness, and a single-hearted inclination to observe the whole will of God; then our defects and weaknesses are covered by Christ's perfect righteousness. The unregenerate lie under the rule of exaction, but being out of Christ, are denied the benefit of acceptation.

Use 1. To inform us that petitions of mercy and the plea for new obedience are very consistent: 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me;' and his argument is, 'For I delight in thy word.' Mercy is nevertheless free, though the creature mind his duty; for when we have done all we are but unprofitable servants, Luke xvii. 10; and grace helpeth us to do what we do: Luke xix. 18, 'Thy pound,' not my industry; and 1 Cor. xv. 10, 'By the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain: but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." It was grace to appoint such reasonable terms, to accept of them, though done in that sorry fashion which our frailty permitteth us to tender to God.

Use 2. To quicken us to a delightful course of obedience, if we would have the sense of mercy. The same spirit that urgeth us to obey, a sense of God's love, urgeth us also to delight in his law. The same spirit that urgeth us to sue out the promise urgeth also to obey the precept

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1. Consider how God hath twisted his honour with our interest, and ordered both for his own glory. God's interest and honour is to be considered as well as our salvation. We must never look for such mercy and grace from God as shall discharge us from our duty and subjection to God, or give you liberty to dishonour and disobey him. No; 'Christ redeemed us to God,' Rev. v., and Luke i. 74, 75. Salvation is our benefit, obedience is God's right and interest. Happiness man is not averse from, but he sticketh at the terms. Some part of this happiness suiteth well enough with our natural desires, as pardon and life; but we care not for his law and the obedience we owe by virtue of it.

We are naturally more willing of what maketh for ourselves, for our comfort, than what maketh for the honour of God.

2. Consider, a great part of God's first mercy is expressed in healing our natures and preparing us for this delightful course of holiness, Heb. x. 16, 17; 1 Cor. i. 30; Titus iii. 4, 5.

3. Consider, this comfortable sense of God's mercy should induce us to this by way of argument: 1 John iv. 19, 'We love him because he first loved us;' 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, '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, and rose again;' and Gal. v. 6, 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith, which worketh by love.' And then, by way of gratitude, we ought to bend all the powers of our souls to holiness and obedience, and lay out our care and labour upon it.

4. Consider, the more holiness and obedience any one hath, the more acceptable to God. A holy soul is an object capable of God's love; the holy God delighteth in holiness, as well as the merciful God pitieth misery. The more holy we are, the more God loves us. Let us not make wounds for God to cure. As we increase in holiness we increase in favour with God. This is true of Christ, who never had any defect of holiness, but only was to increase in the exercise of it.

5. Consider how just it is with God to refuse our cries for mercy when we despised his precepts for duty. Besiege your hearts with these considerations, and press them daily upon you. We are marvellous apt to please ourselves with some loose apprehensions of mercy, without bending ourselves to our duty.

6. Consider how reasonable it is that, when mercy hath taken us, with all our faults, at our first entrance into covenant with God, we should afterwards study to please and make it our delight so to do.

7. Consider how impossible it is to cherish a sense of his mercy and love to us while we neglect duty. The soul hath two sentiments of religion which can never be defaced—a desire of happiness, and subjection to God—*ut anima sit subjecta Deo et pacata in se.* As we love our own comfort, so we will be troubled about our duty; the soul will not sit easy. Comfort follows holiness as light doth fire, and sin will cause trouble as the prick of a needle doth pain. The soul cannot be serious and mind things but it will be so. Indeed, at some times, by carelessness, our sense of the necessity of obedience is extinguished, and then a little serveth turn to keep the conscience quiet or stupid; but it will return again. Never leave till holiness and obedience be your delight as well as your care.

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Use 3. To press us to be earnestly dealing with this merciful God for comfort. We need it now in a time of judgment, when delivered over to judgments, Hosea xi. 8, as sometimes to sin, so to plagues; when God opens the floodgates, lets out judgments upon a people without restraint: 'I will

hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be,' Deut. xxxii. 20. So also the 30th verse, 'Their rock sold them, and the Lord hath shut them up.' Mercy can put a stop, but that will interpose no more. Again, when the people of God are much hated and maligned; now, 'We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair,' 2 Cor. iv. 8.

1. If it be God's nature to be merciful and kind, why should we be discouraged? Mercy is free, favour is shown to a miserable person. Mercy can recall the punishments due to us, and mitigate corrections, and sweeten our comforts.

2. But, then, you must be content that mercy should issue out in its own way and order; first giving us principal mercies, then necessary; first sanctifying, and then comforting: 'Saving us by washing us in the laver of regeneration.'

3. Reckon your comfort more by a sense of God's care than by removing temporal trouble. Spiritual comfort is more excellent than bodily.

4. You must sue it out by prayer, wherein, first, it must be with brokenness of heart. Let true spiritual misery be discerned and complained of. Let us lay our sins and sores before his pity. Secondly, with faith, for here is the word mentioned. Why are we so disconsolate? is there no balm in Gilead? It is our usual fault, we pore too much upon our troubles. There is a God of comfort, who answereth his name every way, and will keep his word with his people. Let us come to him in all our wants. Thirdly, with resolution of more faithful obedience, for God's servants are only capable; renew your covenant of serving God.

5. The godly have common comforts. What will serve one's turn will serve another's also. They have all the same fundamental work of grace in their hearts; they are all born of God, have his image stamped on them, have the same Redeemer; the same Spirit worketh in all, and the promises are made alike unto all, not upon personal considerations.

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SERMON LXXXVI.

Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.—VER. 78.

IN these words you have—(1.) David's prayer; (2.) David's resolution.

First, David's prayer; and there take notice of—

1. The petition itself, *let the proud be ashamed.*

2. The reason, *for they dealt perversely with me without a cause*.

In the prayer he beggeth the repression of his enemies. There take notice of—

[1.] The notion by which they are described, *the proud*.

[2.] The event or effect of God's providence desired concerning them, *let them be ashamed*.

The notion is considerable. The wicked, especially the persecutors of God's people, are usually characterised by this term in this Psalm, 'the proud,' ver. 51, 69, 122; and will give us this note:—

Doct. That pride puts wicked men upon being troublesome and injurious to the people of God.

But why are the persecutors and the injurious called the proud?

Ans. 1. Because wicked men shake off the yoke of God, and will not be subject to their Maker, and therefore desist not from troubling his people: Exod. v. 2, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice, and let Israel go?' What was in his tongue is in all men's hearts; they contemn God and his laws. Every sin hath a degree of pride and depreciation of God included in it: 2 Sam. xii. 9, 'Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?' There is a slighting of God's authority, and a lifting up our will against the will of God.

Ans. 2. Because they are drunk with worldly felicity, and never think of changes: Ps. cxxiii. 4, 'Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.' When men go on prosperously, they are apt wrongfully to trouble others, and then to shout at them in their misery, and to despise the person and cause of God's people, which is a sure effect of great arrogancy and pride. They think they may do what they please; they have no changes; therefore they fear not God, and put forth their hands against such as be at peace with them, Ps. lv. 19, 20; whilst they go on prosperously and undisturbedly, they cannot abstain from violence and oppression. This is certainly pride, for it is a lifting up the heart above God and against God, and without God. And they do not consider his providence, who alternately lifts up and casts down, that adversity may not be without a cordial, nor prosperity without a curb and bridle. But when men sit fast, and are well at ease, they are apt to be insolent and scornful. Riches and worldly greatness make men insolent and despisers of others, and care not what burdens they impose upon them; they are intrenched within a mass of wealth and power and greatness, and so think none can call them to an account. Solomon speaketh of two sorts of people: Prov. xviii. 10, 11, 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.' Every man is as his trust is; for, as the Psalmist speaketh of idols in general, 'They that trust in idols are like unto them,' so it is true of spiritual idols. If a man trust in vain things, his heart groweth vain, proud, and insolent; promiseth him an uninterrupted course of felicity, from poor, perishing things, that come and go at God's pleasure. If a man trust in God, then he is kept holy, humble, carried on with a noble and divine spirit, and

findeth more safety than another that hath all the strength and power of the world to support and back him. The name of the Lord is a real refuge, but wealth and honour and worldly greatness is but an imaginary refuge. He that hath nothing but the name of the Lord to trust in, worldlings think he buildeth castles in the air; but the godly knoweth that worldlings indeed build castles in the air, while they look big, and think their greatness shall bear them out. Alas! wealth is but a wall and a strong tower in their own conceit; not really so; but this puffeth them up, and they are quite other men when they are at top than what they were when they were under.

Ans. 3. Because they affect a life of pomp and ease and carnal greatness, and so despise the affliction and meanness and simplicity of the people of God. The false church hath usually the advantage of worldly power and external glory, and the true church is known by the divine power, gifts, and graces, and the lustre of holiness: Ps. xlv. 13, 'The king's daughter is glorious within;' is found out by faith, love, patience, sobriety, heavenly-mindedness, humility, purity, and the like, rather than by a splendid appearance; and holiness becomes God's house, Ps. xciii. 5, rather than gold and silver and costly furniture. The false church vaunts itself in costly temples, officers richly endowed with temporal revenues, and a pompous attendance; and so the simplicity of the gospel is corrupted and turned into a worldly domination. As, for instance, the church of Rome boasts of her grandeur and magnificence, and upbraids the Reformed with their abject condition. *Ministris eorum nihil vilius*, saith Campian. They can tell of the pompous inauguration of their popes, their stately train of cardinals, lordly prelates; whereas the poor ministers of the gospel live hardly and precariously. Whereas, indeed, the glory of the true church doth not make a fair show in the flesh, is not external, corporeal, and visible, but internal, incorporeal, and invisible, Cant. i. 5; and like its head, Jesus Christ, who, to appearance, was humble, poor, and afflicted; but in him were hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; yea, the fulness of the godhead dwelt bodily. External splendour pleaseth the flesh, and is not a sign of virtue so much as pride, Luke xvi. 19. What shall become of the primitive church for the first three hundred years, if outward greatness be a mark of it? The world is with them, but the faith with us; they have pure gold, but we pure doctrine (Naz. Orat. Con. Aroc.) So Hilary against Auxentius, *Unum moneo, cavete antichristum, male enim vos parietum amor cepit, male ecclesiam Dei in tectis artificiisque veneramini, male sub iis pacis nomen ingeritis: anne ambiguum est in iis antichristum cessurum? Monies mihi et sylvae et lacus et carceres, et voragines sunt tutiores; in its enim prophetae aut manentes, aut demersi, Dei Spiritu prophetabant*. Well, because of their affectation of worldly greatness, they are called proud; and so it is taken, Mal. iii. 15, 'Ye call the proud happy.' And because of this they hate and molest the people of God, because theirs is a contrary spirit. They hear Christ's voice: Mat. xi. 29, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly.' They hate them because they contemn that felicity which they affect, and so put a scorn on their way: 1 Peter iv. 4, 'Think it strange that you run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.'

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Ans. 4. They are called proud because of their insolent carriage towards the Lord's people, partly in their laws and injunctions, requiring to give them more honour, respect, and obedience

than in conscience can be afforded them; as Haman would have Mordecai to devote himself to him after the manner of the Persians, Esther iii. 5. The man, though a favourite, was an Amalekite, one that came of that stock whose remembrance God would have to be blotted out, Exod. xvii. 14; and possibly more worship and honour was required than was due to a man. God had forbidden to give divine honour to any but himself. Now, according to the custom of Persia, these honours did somewhat savour of divine worship—*Vide* Brisson, pp. 10-14, with the 18th. So Jeroboam would have his calves worshipped, 1 Kings xii. 32; and yet all that complied with him therein are charged for walking so willingly after the commandment, Hosea v. 11. We dare not offend God to please men; the good Levites are commended, 2 Chron. xi. 14. So it was pride in Nebuchadnezzar to command all men to bow before his image, Dan. iii. 15, 16. God's prerogative must not be incroached upon; there is a superior sovereign. Partly in vexing, molesting, and oppressing them at their pleasure; the formal Christian hateth the spiritual, Gal. iv. 29. Now this cometh from their pride: Ps. x. 2, 'The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor;' would not have their lazy course upbraided and disgraced by the seriousness and strictness of others: they malign what they cannot imitate. And it is carried on by their pride or abuse of power. God counteth it pride: Ps. xii. 5, 'For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy; the Lord will arise to deliver him; and set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.' It is the pride of the oppressor which God taketh notice of, his puffing, scoffing, and mocking at the hopes of God's despised ones; he never dreameth of any checks from any, but despiseth and contemneth all. And partly because of the insulting over their misery and low estate: Zeph. ii. 10, 'This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts.' But God taketh notice of it, and will call them to an account in due time: Prov. iii. 34, 'He scorneth the scorners, but giveth grace unto the lowly;' Ps. xiv. 6, 'You have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge:' *i.e.*, mocked at a man because he is resolved to trust in the Lord, laughed at those that made conscience of their duty, that consulted whether lawful or unlawful, not whether danger and profit, not whether safe or unsafe, but whether pleasing to God or not. They trust in the Lord that, in conscience of their duty, venture upon hazards, expecting their security from heaven; these thoughts seemed foolish to worldly wisdom; you shamed his counsel, scoff at it: Isa. li. 7, 8, 'Fear ye not the reproach of men, nor their revilings: for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool.' Those that make reckoning of the ways of God need not be discouraged with their spiteful vaunts.

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Use. Let us take heed of pride. The Lord, that hated the pride of Moab, doth also hate the pride of Jacob, Amos vi. 8.

1. Take heed of wittingly and willingly opposing any command of God: Ps. cxix. 21, 'Thou hast rebuked the proud, that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments:' Neh. ix. 16, 'But our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to his commandments;' so ver. 29. These proclaim a war with the Lord of hosts, especially when not reclaimed by grievous judgments: Isa. xxvi. 19, 'I will break the pride of your power.' And this is that we should lay to

heart at this day: Jer. xiii. 17, ‘But if ye will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride.’ When a people will not be brought to any serious consideration of God’s judgments, nor abate their haughty minds, he would bewail their foolish arrogancy, and the miseries ensuing thereupon. This standing out against God is the greatest pride.

2. Take heed of murmuring against his providence. Entertaining crosses with anger and blessings with disdain are sure notes of unmortified pride; when God’s dispensations still displease, and the heart swelleth against his sovereignty.

[1.] To entertain crosses with anger: 2 Kings vi. 33, ‘This evil is from the Lord: why should I wait any longer upon the Lord?’ Words of desperate distrust and murmuring.

[2.] Blessings with disdain: Mal. i. 2, ‘I hath loved you, saith the Lord; and they said, Wherein hast thou loved us?’ as if God owed them more than others, and were a kind of debtor to them: Hab. ii. 4, ‘Behold, his soul, which is lifted up, is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.’ The lofty and unsound are distinguished from the just, who can tarry God’s leisure; those men’s souls are lifted up who cannot acquiesce in their lot and portion assigned by God, but censure his way of proceeding, and are loath he should have the disposing of them at his pleasure.

3. Take heed of despising any of Christ’s little ones, and scorning and mocking at those that fear the Lord: Ps. cxix. 51, ‘The proud have had me greatly in derision.’ To make a mock of others upon any account is a sign of pride, though they be meaner in gifts, though differing in judgment, though walking in a lower dispensation; but especially to scorn at them because more godly: 2 Tim. iii. 3, ἀφιλάγαθοι, ‘Despisers of those that are good.’ This is to reflect upon God himself, whose image in his saints is made a byword, and a strict obedience to his will matter of scorn and derision. If a slave should mock a child because he is like his father, would this be well taken? So the jealous God will not long endure this horrible indignity, that his image should be scorned in his children: Isa. lxiii. 9, ‘In all reproaches he is reproached.’ But they will say, It is not their holiness, but their demure hypocrisy and affected preciseness, which they reproach and scorn. But God seeth the heart: it is as if a leper did upbraid others with pimples. The infirmities of the godly do not justify your contempt of godliness; and because of their faults, you must not scorn at their holiness and expect indemnity.

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4. Take heed of moral pride, which consists in a lofty conceit of our selves, joined with a contempt of others. This was the Pharisees’ sin: Luke xviii. 9, ‘He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.’ And it is notably personated in the Pharisee and publican who went up to pray, and is daily seen in them who are speaking of their own things, boasting of their own excellences, elevating their own, but extenuating the gifts of others. Most men are too great and too good in their own esteem. Self-love representeth ourselves to ourselves in a feigned shape and likeness, much more wise, and holy, and just, than we are; it maketh us loathe other men’s sins rather than our own, to extenuate other men’s gifts

and graces and cry up our own; but this should not be: Phil. ii. 3 ‘Let each esteem another better than themselves.’ Humility is content to sit in the meanest place: Eph. iii. 8, ‘Who am the least of all the saints:’ 1 Tim. i. 15, ‘Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief.’ We know our own weakness better than others, and they may have secret excellences which we see not. This moral pride discovereth itself in three things:—

[1.] In disdain of inferiors, or contempt of those who are of meaner gifts or rank and place in the world. Every member hath its use in the body, the toe as well as the head, neither can one say to another, ‘I have no need of thee,’ 1 Cor. xii. 21. All Christians have their peculiar gifts, by which they are rendered acceptable and useful to the body, as every country hath its proper commodities for the maintaining of trade and commerce between all parts of the world; or as to the beauty and use of the universe, there is need of hills and valleys; so all ranks of men contribute to the beauty, use, and service of the whole. The strong should not despise the weak, nor the weak prescribe to the strong. Now, it is impossible to keep all in their due order and proportion unless every one consider their own weakness and want, and the usefulness of others; as, among Christians, some are useful to preserve order, others to keep afoot the life and power of godliness, some to revive the pristine purity, others the old peaceable spirit. God hath so counterbalanced all parties that they may be mutually helpful, but not that we despise and contemn any other, and seek to destroy and subvert another, and so make way for great mischiefs. Every one hath enough to humble him, and enough to render him useful to human society. Therefore we must not set at ‘nought our brother, Rom. xiv. 10. God hath made him something which thou art not, and given him an ability to do something thou canst not do, or wouldst not submit unto. Contempt is the fruit of pride; there are none but deserve some respect: scorn is the bane of human society.

[2.] It betrayeth itself in contention with equals: ‘Wrath and contention cometh by pride,’ Prov. xiii. 10. Every one seeks to be eminent, and would excel, not in graces and gifts—that is ἀγαθέρις, a holy emulation—but in rank and place. We set too high a price upon our selves, and when others will not come up to our price we are troubled. We ascribe too much to ourselves; and when we meet not with that respect and honour which we affect, we fall into contention, and break out into strifes, supposing ourselves neglected. We see often what a makebait this is in the world, if others do not accommodate themselves to our sense, if they approve not all things we say, if their opinion differeth a little, or, it may be, nothing from ours. Men pertinaciously obstinate in their preconceptions will not change opinion upon apparent evidence; but humble men are always peaceable, they can better give and take those respects which are done to one another than others can. The apostle saith, Eph. v. 21, ‘Submit yourselves to one another in the fear of God.’ There is a service of love which every one oweth to another for their mutual good and advantage, and is called submission, though it be to equals, because our proud and lofty spirits look upon it as below us. There are none living whom God alloweth to live only to themselves. Now, that there may be an equality, we are to stoop and condescend to one another; others are to live to us, and we to them: 1 Peter v. 5, ‘Be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud,

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and giveth grace to the humble." This mutual subjection to another in the duties of love can never be obtained till we learn to moderate our esteem of ourselves, and heighten our esteem of others; we can neither advise nor instruct, nor esteem one another, nor maintain peace in our relations, and perform all Christian offices to each other, till this spirit prevail with us.

[3.] By undutifulness to superiors, or those that are preferred in honour before ourselves. Proud men would be admired of all, well thought of and spoken of by all, and preferred above all; and if it be not so, they are discontented, and a secret enmity and malignity invadeth their spirits and settleth itself there; it is an apparent fruit of natural corruption: James iv. 5, 'The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.' Men cannot endure either the real or reputed excellency of others; the proud creature would shine alone. Therefore we are secretly nibbling at the credit of others, blasting their reputation, and desire by all means to lessen them, or that they should be lessened; and where this disposition prevaileth into any degree of strength and tyranny, it groweth outrageous: Prov. xxvii. 4, 'Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?' For when we are grieved at the prosperity and excellency of others, we seek to undermine them by all the means we can devise; as when the brothers of Joseph sought to put him out of the way; and when Saul envied David, he was still plotting his destruction. So when the Pharisees envied Christ, 'If we let him alone, all men will run after him.' This brought them to crucify the Lord of glory. Anger venteth itself in sudden flashes, and wrath in some present act of violence, but envy is injurious and treacherous. Anger and wrath suppose some offence, but envy is troubled at the goodness and excellency of others. Anger and wrath are assuaged by degrees, and when the raging billows and tempest ceaseth, there is a calm; but this groweth by time, and is exasperated more and more the longer those whom we envy are in good condition. Now this affection reigned in us in our natural estate, Titus iii. 3, and remaineth in some degree in the best.

5. Another expression of pride is impatience of admonitions and reproofs; that is the cause of the wicked's hatred of the godly, because their lives are a real reproof: John vi. 7, 'The world hateth me, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil;' Heb. xi. 7. But surely it argueth a proud spirit when men cannot endure friendly counsel, and will not have their privy sores touched, but they grow fierce and outrageous, especially when they excel others in rank and power: as when the prophet reproved Amaziah, 2 Chron. xxv. 16, 'Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear, why shouldest thou be smitten?' so 2 Chron. xviii. 23, 'He smote him on the cheek, and said, When went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?' So the Pharisees hated Christ because of his free reproofs: John ix. 40, 'Are we blind also?' They cannot endure to hear of their faults, especially from one in an inferior condition, and think every reproof to be a reproach, though never so wisely and compassionately managed, and that it is beneath their rank to stoop to it; though Job despised not the cause of his maid-servants, Job xxxi. 13, if they had anything to say against him; and David stopped upon Abigail's motion, 1 Sam. xxv. 26.

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6. Take heed of building too securely upon earthly enjoyments, as if your estate were so firm and secure that it could not be altered, because you are high and great in wealth, power, honour, and esteem. Confidence in our outward estate is a sure note of pride: Ps. x. 4-6, 'The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in heart, I shall not be moved; I shall not be in adversity.' There the Psalmist chargeth pride on the wicked, and such a pride as ariseth from confidence in outward prosperity; and mentioneth a double effect, not only slighting their adversaries, but God himself. It is no matter for any terms of peace or moderation towards their adversaries, his ways are always grievous; therefore are they violent, fierce and high, and severe towards them. Do not need the protection of God; therefore cold, flat, negligent in prayer; yea, scorn to implore God by prayer for any blessing. They are so high in place and power, that they are able to oppress their underlings, and so think they can bring to pass what they would have to be done in despite of God. Now somewhat of this may be found in the people of God: Ps. xxx. 6, 'In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.' They drink in some of this poison, are apt to rest and sleep on a carnal pillow. By this you may see that none of us have perfectly put off this sin. Plato saith a man doth put it off, as τελευταῖον χιτῶνα, it groweth out of the conquest of other sins. But if we would not be proud—

[1.] Let us pray often, for in prayer we profess our subjection and dependence. Where prayers are fervent, earnest, frequent, it argueth great humility; where rare, cold, unfrequent, little humility; where none, no humility. Seeking to God, who is so excellent, mindeth us of our own baseness; seeking his daily relief and succour mindeth us of the changeableness of all worldly things, and the several vicissitudes of this life, Ps. x. 4. A man serious in prayer, living in a constant dependence upon God, must needs be a humble man.

[2.] Let us be contented with a little, and not seek great things for ourselves; for interest is the great makebait. I am sure a worldly portion is the usual fuel of pride. A worm may grow in manna, but usually it is some worldly excellency which giveth us such great advantages here below which puffeth us up. If riches increase by the fair allowance of God's providence, we are not to grow proud of them: 1 Tim. vi. 17, 'Charge them that are rich in the world, that they be not high-minded.' Moses saith, Deut viii. 12-14, 'Take heed when thou hast eaten, and art full, and thy gold and silver is multiplied, lest thy heart be lifted up.' Our hearts are mighty apt to be lifted up by a full estate.

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[3.] If we excel in gifts and graces, double caution is necessary; this is a real excellency, 2 Cor. xii. 7. Pride maketh us not only unthankful to God, but perverse to men: Prov. xxi. 24, 'Proud and haughty scorner is his name who dealeth in proud wrath.' Men conceited of their gifts make their own fancy and conceit their rule; and if anything be done that pleaseth not them, they rend and tear all, and trample upon the unquestionable interest of Jesus Christ to wreak their spleen.

It is a question whether real grace may make a men proud. Gifts, to be sure, may: 'Knowledge puffeth up;' yea, grace, through corruption. They need caution that have the great presence of God with them as to success when eminently employed in God's service. Credit by worldly eminency and esteem falleth in with their services, and secretly insinuates high thoughts of their own excellences.

[4.] Consider how much pride hath cost us. They that are proud and burdensome to other people, God will pull down their pride: Isa. xiii. 11, 'And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.' It is spoken of the Chaldeans, who in bravery and force offered violence to others. God loveth to pull down the pride and insolency of roysterers, that have been formidable and burdensome to other people. The Lord of hosts hath purposed to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt the honourable of the earth. What hath God been doing, not in former, but latter times?

[5.] Consider that Christianity was sent into the world not to set up a kingdom of power, but patience. Mat. xviii. 4, 'Whosoever, therefore, shall be humble as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven;' Luke i. 51-53, 'He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart; he hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree; he hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.'

[6.] Consider who made us differ: 1 Cor. iv. 7, 'For who made thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou hast not received? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?' Who would be proud of a borrowed garment? he becometh the more in debt. Nothing is ours but sin, all other things are the free gift of God. Shall the wall boast itself because the sun shines upon it? or the pen arrogate the praise of fair writing? The more we have received from God the more we are obliged to acknowledge his goodness, and confess our own unworthiness.

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Secondly, The event, or effect of God's providence desired, together with the reason of it. That which he desired was that they might 'be ashamed;' the reason, because they have 'dealt perversely without a cause.' Let us explain both.

1. The event of God's providence prayed for, that they may be ashamed; that is, that they may not prosper and succeed in their attempts; for men are ashamed when they are disappointed, and all their endeavours for the extirpation of God's people are vain and fruit less, and those things which they have subtlely devised have not that effect which they propounded unto themselves: Ps. lxx. 3, 'Let them be turned back for a reward of their shame, which say, Aha!'

2. The reason urged, ‘For they dealt perversely with me without a cause.’ The Septuagint hath it ἀδίκως, unjustly. Ainsworth readeth, With falsehood they have depraved me. It implieth two things—(1.) That they pretended a cause; (2.) David avoucheth his innocency to God; and so, without any guilt of his, they accused, defamed, condemned his actions, as is usual in like cases. Elsewhere he complaineth, Ps. lvi. 5, ‘They every day wrest my words, and their thoughts are against me for evil.’ They condemned him for wicked, perverted his sayings and doings. Men pretend causes of their oppression, heresy, schism, rebellion; but mere malice and perverseness of spirit incline them to seek the destruction of the people of God.

Doct. That when the proud are troublesome and injurious to God’s people, they may boldly commend their cause to God.

The reasons:—

1. The effects of their pride are grievous to be borne. Now, it is well when any grief findeth a spiritual vent, when it puts the godly upon praying: Phil. iv. 6, ‘In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God;’ Jer. xx. 12, ‘O Lord of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them; for unto thee have I opened my cause.’ We may exhibit our bill of complaint at God’s tribunal, carry the fact thither.

2. The Lord may be appealed unto upon a double account. Partly as he is an enemy to the proud, and as a friend to the humble: James iv. 6, ‘God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble:’ and Ps. cxxxviii. 6, ‘Though the Lord be high, yet he hath a respect to the lowly, and the proud he knoweth afar off.’ Partly as he is the portion of the afflicted and the oppressed: Ps. cxl. 12, ‘I know the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.’ When Satan stirreth up his instruments to hate whom the Lord loveth, the Lord will stir up his power to protect and defend them. So Ps. x. 14, ‘Thou hast seen it, for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself to thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.’ When they have laid forth their desires, poured forth their heart before the Lord, they quiet themselves. It is God’s office, practice, nature, to relieve poor helpless creatures that commit themselves to his custody.

3. Innocency giveth confidence in prayer, when we are molested and troubled without a cause. The testimony of conscience giveth boldness towards God and men, 2 Cor. i. 12; and Heb. xiii. 18, ‘Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.’ If God’s children would carry it more holily and meekly, they might cut off occasion from them that desire occasion, and in their addresses to God experience more humble confidence.

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But is not this a revengeful prayer? *Ans*. No.

First, Because directly they pray for their own deliverance, that they may more freely serve God by consequence. Indeed, by God's showing mercy to his people, the pride of wicked ones is suppressed, Ps. cxix. 134.

Secondly, As it concerneth his enemies, he expresseth it in mild terms, 'That they may be ashamed;' that is, disappointed, their counsels, hopes, machinations, and endeavours. And therefore it is not against the persons of his enemies, but their plots and enterprises; and shame and disappointment may do them good. They think to bring in the total suppression of God's people; that would harden them in their sins. Therefore God's people desire he would not let their innocency be trampled upon, but they disappointed, that the proud may be ashamed in the failing of their attempts

Thirdly, The prayers of the faithful for the overthrow of the wicked are a kind of prophecies; so that in praying, David doth in effect foretell that such as dealt perversely should be ashamed; as a good cause will not always be oppressed: Isa. lxvi. 5, 'But he. shall appear to your joy, but they shall be ashamed;' they met with despiteful usage at the hand of their brethren, for their loyalty and fidelity to God.

Fourthly, Saints have a liberty to imprecate vengeance, but such as must be used sparingly and with great caution: Ps. lxxi. 13, 'Let them be confounded and consumed who are adversaries to my soul.' Malicious enemies may be expressly prayed against.

SERMON LXXXVII.

But I will meditate in thy precepts. Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.—VER. 78, 79.

WE now come to David's resolution, *but I will meditate in thy precepts*. The word *precepts* is not taken strictly, but largely, for the whole word of God.

Doct. It is a blessed thing when the molestations we meet with in the world do excite us to a more diligent study of the word of God, and a greater mindfulness of spiritual and heavenly things.

1. I shall show what advantages we have by God's word and precepts, for the staying and bettering of our hearts.

2. How this cometh by deep and serious meditation.

3. How afflictions and troubles in the flesh do quicken us to it. First, In the word of God there are notable comforts and supports,

First, In the word of God there are notable comforts and supports, as also clear directions how to carry ourselves in every condition. I shall show what good thoughts do become as a ground of comfort and support and direction.

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1. That God hath a fatherly care over us. Be once persuaded of that, and trouble will not be so grievous and hard to be borne. This our Saviour opposeth to worldly cares and fears: Mat. vi. 32, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of these things;' and Luke xii. 32, 'Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you a kingdom.' There are two notions, and they are both Christian, which are the great support of the heart under any trouble—adoption and particular providence. The heirs of promise are cared for in their nonage; and, by the way, once be persuaded of this, and it will allay our distrustful cares. Carking and shifting is a reproach to your heavenly Father, as if your child should beg or filch. God knoweth our wants, is able to relieve them, willing to supply us; this God is my Father.

2. That the humble soul which casts itself into the arms of God's providence shall either have a full and final deliverance or present support: Isa. xl. 31, 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' To wait on the Lord is with patience and tranquillity of spirit to expect the performance of the promises. Now these shall have what they wait for, or a supply of strength enabling them to bear up or hold out when they seem to be clean spent: Ps. cxxiii. 2, 'Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master, and the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until he have mercy upon us;' it was in a time when they were filled with the contempt of the proud. Let us be patiently submissive to God's dispensations, there is hope of help.

3. That God doth wonderfully disappoint the designs of wicked men: Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13, 'The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him; for he seeth that his day is coming.' Haman's plot was destroyed, so was the conspiracy of them that would have killed Paul: 'There is no wisdom, nor counsel, nor understanding against the Lord,' Prov. xxi. 30. What is God now doing in heaven but defending his own kingdom? Ps. ii. Wherefore doth Christ sit at his right hand, but to promote the affairs of his church, and to blast the devices of the wicked? Mat. xvi. 18, 'The gates of hell shall never prevail against it.'

4. That the proud are near a fall: Prov. xvi. 5, 'Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, they shall not go unpunished,' Sometimes they seem to be supported by such combined interests, so woven in the laws and constitutions of a nation; but who can keep up him whom God will pull down? Pride is a sure note and forerunner of destruction, Prov. xvi. 18; Prov. xv. 25, 'The Lord will destroy the house of the proud; but he will establish the border of the widow.' Weak and oppressed innocence standeth upon surer terms than the proud, though they excel in wealth and opulency.

5. That God will never leave us wholly destitute, and to difficulties insupportable: Heb. xiii. 5, ‘I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;’ and 1 Cor. x. 13, ‘God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able to bear; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.’ To the eye of sense we are lost and gone and have no helper, but God is never wholly gone. Hagar set herself over against the lad, would not go too far from him. God seems to throw us away, but he keeps himself within sight, he will not totally or finally forsake us.

6. That God’s usual way is by contraries. The gospel way to save is to lope, John xvi. 25; Mat. xvi. 25, ‘He that will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it.’ Joseph was made a slave that he may be made governor of Egypt; his brethren sell him that they may worship him; and he is cast into prison that he may be preferred at court. Thus God by shame bringeth to honour, by misery to happiness, by sorrow to comfort, and by death to life, to teach us to hope against hope, Rom. iv. 18, and to trust in him though he kill us, Job xiii. 15; for death is ours, as well as other things. If calamities shorten our lives, they hasten our glory. Persecution is the nearest way to heaven in the eye of faith, and the sword of the enemy is but the key to open the prison doors and let out the soul, which hath long desired to be with Christ.

7. That it is better to suffer than to sin. In suffering, the offence is done to us; in sinning, it is done to God. The evil of suffering is but for a moment; the evil of sin for ever. In suffering we lose the favour of men; in sinning we hazard the favour of God. Suffering bringeth inconvenience upon the body, but sinning upon the soul. The sinful estate is far worse than the afflicted, Heb. xii. 28; the evil of sufferings for the present, the evil of sin for afterwards.

8. That holiness, faith, meekness, and patience are better treasures than any the world can take from us. Certainly a Christian is to reckon himself by the inward man; if he have a healthy soul, he may the better dispense with a sickly body, 3 John 2. If the inward man be renewed, 2 Cor. iv. 16, if sore troubles discover reality of grace. Sound and saving faith discovered to the soul is better worth than the world’s best gold, 1 Peter i. 9. If carnal sense were not quickest and greatest, we would judge so, and not look to the sharpness of the affliction, but to the improvement of it. If the bitter water be made sweet; if you be more godly, wise, and religious, it is enough: Heb. xii. 11, ‘No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.’ If the loss of worldly comforts make us apply ourselves to heavenly consolations; if, being disburdened of worldly incumbrances, we go on in our way of serving God with more liberty and delight, and, when our dangers are greatest, we draw near to God, and adhere to him most closely, and being persuaded of his love, vigilancy, and power, with these and such kind of thoughts will a man be stocked who is with seriousness and delight conversant in the scriptures, and so will go on undisturbed in the course of his obedience.

Secondly, These things must be improved by meditation; so saith David, 'I will meditate on thy precepts.'

1. Sleepy reason is unuseful to us, and truths lie hid in the heart without any efficacy or power till improved by deep, serious, and pressing thoughts. Non-attendancy is the bane of the world: Mat. xiii. 19, 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.' Those invited to the wedding, Mat. xxii. 5, made light of it. Men will not suffer their minds so long to dwell upon holy things as to procure a good esteem of them; then in 'seeing they see not, and in hearing hear not:' as when you tell a man of a business whose mind is taken up about other things. A sudden carrying a candle through a room giveth us not so full a survey of the object as when you stand a while beholding it. A steady contemplation is a great advantage. Attending is the cause of believing, when we grow serious: Acts xvi. 14, 'Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things spoken by Paul;' Acts xvii. 11, 'And these were more noble than they of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind.' If people would often return to consider, they would not be hardened in sin: Ps. iv. 4, 'Commune with your own heart upon your bed:' Hag. i. 5, 'Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.' God's complaint was, they would not consider his ways, Job xxxiv. 27; Isa. i. 3, 'My people doth not consider.' Running thoughts never work upon us, nor leave any durable impression, like the glance of a sunbeam on a wave. When the soul is besieged by a constant battery of truths, it yieldeth; but a mind scattered upon impertinent vanities groweth not up to any considerable strength of faith, or joy, or comfort, or holiness.

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2. God will not be served by the by and at hap-hazard. David taketh a resolution to study his duty. The more deliberate our resolutions are the better: Ps. cxix. 59, 'I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.' We shall never stumble upon a good course by chance: Isa. lvi. 4, 'And choose the things that please me;' not take them upon some sudden motion, but after mature and serious deliberation.

3. To divert the mind from other things. Afflictions and troubles stir up a multitude of thoughts in us: Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts.' Sometimes self-oppressing thoughts, carking thoughts, envious thoughts, and repining at God's providence; the object of our trouble is ever before us. Now, there is no way to get rid of these but by exercising them upon better things. Troubles make us concerned about matters of weight; they employ our minds usefully, which before were scattered to impertinent vanities: Ps. xxxix. 3, 'My heart was hot within me; whilst I was musing the fire burned.' That our minds may not be a prey to inordinate passions; we pore upon the trouble, and the heart is heated like an oven stopped up; and therefore keep the mind well employed.

4. Frequent meditation keepeth our principles in view and memory. We are apt to forget in our sorrows: Heb. xii. 5, 'And ye have forgotten the consolation.' It is not ready at hand to support us

in the time of trouble. A seasonable remembrance of truths is a great relief to the soul; it is the Spirit's office.

Thirdly, That afflictions and molestations have a great tendency and subserviency to promote and advance these holy thoughts where they are sanctified and work the right way.

1. They make us understand the word more fully and clearly than before. *Vexatio dat intellectum; qui tribidantur*, saith Luther, *sacras literas melius intelligunt; securi et fortunati eas legunt, sicut Ovidii carmen*. A full third part of the scriptures are lost to the secure and fortunate.

2. As they clear the sight, so they purge the taste, and give us a spiritual relish. Carnal comforts cloy the spiritual appetite; when, they are removed from us, then we taste heavenly things: Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.'

3. They quicken the heart to our duty, and so make us more awe-ful and watchful: Ps. xciv. 12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chasteneth, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law;' Ps. cxix. 167, 'My soul hath kept thy testimonies, and I love them exceedingly.' If God write his law upon our hearts by his stripes on our backs, it is a blessed effect. Our happiness is to be measured by our great end, which is conformity to God and enjoyment of God; and therefore it doth not consist in outward comforts, riches, honour, health, civil liberty, and comfortable protection, but acceptance with God, and enjoyment of God. Now, as afflictions increase grace and holiness, we are the more approved of God, and enjoy more of God.

Use. Let all our troubles drive us to the word of God; there we shall find—

1. Grounds of comfort and support.

2. Hopes of deliverance.

3. Quickenings to duty, which being concocted by serious thoughts, and blessed to us by the Spirit of God, will enable us to ride out the storm cheerfully, and allay our cares and fears, and then we shall put ourselves into the way wherein God hath engaged his protection, and so shall not be afraid of what man can do unto us.

I now come to the 79th verse, *let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies*. When troubled by the wicked, he prayeth for the help and comfort of the godly. There is an elegant allusion between the two words, יבשו, Let the proud be ashamed; and ישובו, Let the godly be turned to me; that is, let them desert the society of these proud men, and join to me.

In these words God's people are described by a double character—(1.) 'Those that fear thee;' (2.) 'Those that have known thy testimonies.' David's petition concerning those, that they may turn to him. I shall deliver the importance of these words in certain propositions.

1. Observe the godly are described by two properties—the fear or worship of God, and the knowledge of his word. Those are godly who fear to offend God, and have the sound knowledge of his will; those are fittest for God's use in the general, and for David's use in the particular condition in which he was. For God's use: Fear and knowledge do make up a godly man. Knowledge without fear breedeth presumption, and fear without knowledge breedeth superstition and blind zeal, as a blind horse may be full of mettle, but is ever and anon stumbling. Knowledge must direct fear, and fear must season knowledge, then it is a happy mixture and composition. *Deum cognoscere et colere*—to know God, and worship him, is the whole duty of man, saith Lactantius. When we know God's testimonies so as to regard, love, and believe them, and dare not dispense with our duty to him for all the world, this is a good frame; our knowledge and fear of God must be according to his word. And these were fittest for David's case; fit comforters and strengthened of the godly in persecution. There are many whom we cannot exclude from all fear of God, who yet know not his testimonies, run into error, darken and blemish a good cause; but those that know and fear understand their duty, and are loath to violate it; with these should our souls close. Well, then, David doth in effect say, Those whom thou hast joined to thyself, let them join to me; they will acknowledge the equity of that cause which God owneth, and will converse with him whom thou disdainest not to take into favour; because they reverence thy providence, and are taught out of thy testimonies; and so, weighing the cause, as well as regarding the event, will be sooner won to the truth when God showeth mercy to his people; other godly ones will be allured to join themselves to those whom they find to be so dear to God.

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2. Friendship and fellowship with such godly ones is a great blessing. Partly as it conduceth to mutual spiritual strength: Rom. i. 12, 'That I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me.' It is a comfort to see our Father's children wherever we come, and to behold their faith, zeal, self-denial, mortification; the godly are a strength to one another in evil times: Mal. iii. 16, 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.' There are many advantages attend the communion of saints; their very sight and presence is a confirmation to us. Many times that temptation befalleth' us which befell Elias; we think we are left alone, 1 Kings xix. 10, that godliness is gone out of the world. To have company is an encouragement; but we have not only company, but help. Every one hath his peculiar gift to help others, 1 Cor. xii. One hath quickness of parts, but not so solid a judgment; another is solid, but not of so ready, present, and good utterance: one is zealous, but ungrounded; another well-principled, but timorous: 1 Cor. xii. 21, 'The eye (the knowing man) cannot say to the hand (the active man in God's cause), I have no need of thee.' All have their use, by mutual gifts and graces, to profit one another, as the curtains of the tabernacle were coupled to one another by loops, Exod. xxvi. 3, or as a body fitly joined and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, Eph. iv. 16. Every Christian hath need of another's

help. And partly as it conduceth more to public safety and honour: Phil. i. 27, 28, ‘Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.’ When the members are cut off, the body is less powerful: Acts iv. 33, ‘And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus,’ when they were met with one heart. And the apostle prayeth, Rom. xv. 5, 6, ‘Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Jesus Christ; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ:’ as if God could not be glorified by them where there is not this amen. Well, then, if David did so earnestly desire the company of God’s children, so should we.

3. Though it be so great a blessing, yet often it falleth out that there are great discords and estrangements between those that fear God and know his testimonies; godly men may be strange one to another. David complaineth, Ps. lxix. 8, ‘I am become a stranger to my brethren, and an alien to my mother’s children:’ and Ps. xxxviii. 11, ‘My lovers and friends stand aloof from my sore;’ they stood afar off then when wicked men had wounded him. Now this may come to pass—

[1.] Through carnal fear, as the godly may be deterred by the fear of the proud; therefore he desireth they may recover their courage. An afflicted condition, as it might increase the violence of the proud, so it might diminish the affections of the godly. Affliction is harsh to flesh and blood, and good men in their sharpest conflicts may be deserted, not only of those who make fair profession, but are really godly, and stand in the gap alone. Christ himself hath paved the way; he was left alone; so Paul complaineth, 2 Tim. iv. 16, ‘At my first answer no man stood with me, but all did forsake me: I pray God it be not laid to their charge.’ The godly may forsake our fellowship, though they wish well to us when we are persecuted, as the rest of the herd forsake the wounded deer; they may shrink from us and our afflictions. It will be a great mercy if owned in our troubles. Paul took notice of Onesiphorus’s noticing ashamed of his chain, when some turned away, 2 Tim. i. 15, 16.

[2.] They may be alienated by prejudice. Persons truly godly may be deceived by the proud. His enemies had depraved his cause; as in the former verse, his enemies represented him as a strange person: so they might be seduced by their slanders, and so engage against him, till they were disabused and reduced, as now he beggeth God in mercy to do for him. The equity of my cause being known, let them join themselves to me; as Job to his friends: Job vi. 29, ‘Return, I pray you, let it not be iniquity; yea, return again, my righteousness is in it;’ that is, in this matter. Every good man would desire this; but David was the head of the party, and chief of the godly’s sight. Often it falleth out that the godly may take distaste and offence at us.

[3.] There may be some offence given by us. Chrysostom and Theodoret think it relateth to David’s sin after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and plotted the murder of Uriah. Theodoret thinks that he was withdrawn or separated from the communion of the church, according

to his foul act; and therefore prayeth for a redintegration, and that they might return to intimacy with him again, and lie gathereth it from Symmachus's translation, who doth not read it, Let them turn unto me, but Let them converse with me as freely as before. Thus the disciples were offended with Paul, till God hardened[5] their hearts towards him, Acts ix. 13. Saul was ashamed to see any of those whom he had persecuted; Ananias was afraid, as the lamb to come near the wolf, till God prepared both by an internal vision; so ver. 21-27.

[4.] From difference in judgment about lesser things. We should, Phil. iii. 15, 16, 'Be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things.' There should be a union in heart, way, and scope, Rom. xiv., but often it doth fall out that passion, because of lesser differences, may occasion an unkindness between very brethren: Acts xv. 37-39, 'And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other; and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus.' That paroxysm between Paul and Barnabas.

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[5.] From the providence of God permitting it for wise reasons. Job owneth God in it: Job xix. 13, 14, 'He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me.' So doth Heman: Ps. lxxxviii. 8, 'Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination to them.' Partly to humble us and try us, for our depending too much upon man, and making us ourselves again with our party. A winnowing storm may be sent to this purpose. We think our faith and resolution strong, now God will try how we can stand alone. And partly to drive us to God: 1 With thee the fatherless find mercy,' Hosea xiv. 3; Ps. lx. 11, 'Give us help from trouble; for vain is the help of man;' Ps. xii. 1, 'Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; the faithful fail from among the children of men.' We shall not have too much comfort by any creature, to turn us to believe in God alone. We are prone to look to the creature, and to have our hearts drawn away from God. And partly to conform us to Jesus Christ: John xvi. 32, 'Behold the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone:' Mat. xxvi. 56, 'But all this was done that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.' This is part of the bitter cup.

4. When this falleth out, we should use all due means to recover those that have deserted us, and draw them unto us again; the favour is worth diligence. A man would not be cast out of the hearts of God's people. The apostle saith, Heb. xii. 14, 'Follow peace with all men,' διώκετε

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5 Qu. 'softened'?—ED.

εἰρήνην, not only embrace it when it is offered to us, and fairly droppeth into our mouths, but pursue it with earnestness;. we must pursue it as a man pursueth something running from him to take it. It is explained, Ps. xxxiv. 14, 'Seek peace, and pursue it.' If the issue answer not our first attempt, we must seek it again; not giving up the cause for desperate, lest despair quench our endeavours.

5. One great means to recover a good understanding among God's people is prayer. David goeth to God about it, 'Lord, let them turn to me.' The Lord governeth hearts and interests, both are in his hands, and useth this alienation or reconciliation either for judgment or mercy. God, when he pleaseth, can divert the comfort of godly friends, and when he pleaseth he can bring them back again to us. The feet of God's children are directed by God himself: if they come to us it is a blessing of God; if not, it is for a correction. He made Jacob and Laban meet peaceably, Gen. xxxi., and in the next chapter Jacob and Esau.

Use. The use is direction to us in these times, when there are such distances and alienation of hearts and affections between the people of God.

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1. Let us not be troubled at it over-much. Godly men were estranged from David, either being misled by delusions and false reports, or loath to come to him because of his troubles and low condition. And partly because it is no strange thing for a good man to be forsaken of his friends; so Job, chap. vi. 15-17 'Mv 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 the way;' so David: Ps. xxxi 11 'I was a reproach among all mine enemies, and a fear to mine acquaintance;' yea, so Christ himself. I know the temptation is very great. Man is ζῴον πολίτικον, a sociable creature. To go alone in our duty is very hard; but we ought not to look on ourselves to be alone while God is with us, John xvi. 32. Christ is a pattern of all dispensations as well as trials: Heb. xiii. 5, 'I will not leave thee nor forsake thee.' He is so far from forsaking, that he will not leave us.

2. Let us recommend the case to God: Zeph. iii 9, 'That they may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent;' Rom. xv. 6, 7, 'That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God: wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.' *Non sunt ista litigandi, sed orandi tempora.* Beg a coalition of all those that fear God, that, laying aside prejudice, they may turn one to another. The spirit of concord is God's gift. Christ prayeth, John xvii. 21, 22, 'That they 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 thou hast sent me: and the glory which thon gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one as we are one.'

3. Let us carry it so that the children of God may have no occasion to turn from us. Scandalous sins are roots of bitterness: Heb. xii. 15, 'Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.' Encourage the godly to pray for you: Heb xiii. 18, 'Pray for us; for we

trust we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly.' To love you. Good men are not unworthy of our prayers, and incapable of the benefit of them; the more you excel in grace the more they will delight in you: Ps. xvi. 3, 'But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.'

SERMON LXXXVIII.

Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.—VER. 80.

IN this verse we have—(1.) a petition, *let my heart be sound in thy statutes*; (2.} An argument from the fruit and effect of granting it, *that I be not ashamed*; that is, then I shall not, otherwise I certainly, shall, be ashamed. He would avoid that inconveniency that was so grievous to him in the eyes of wicked men.

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First, In the petition I shall take notice—

1. Of the person praying, David.

2. His qualification, intimated in the word *my heart*.

3. The person prayed unto, intimated in the word *thy*.

Secondly, Here is the benefit asked, *a sound heart*; in which you have—

1. The nature of it.

2. The value of it.

Doct. That sincerity and soundness in a holy course is a great blessing, and earnestly to be sought of God in prayer.

First, This will appear if we consider the benefit asked, the nature and value of it.

First, The nature of it, what is a sound heart? It noteth reality and solidity in grace. The Septuagint hath it, Let my heart be without spot and blemish; what is here, Let my heart be sound. It implieth the reality of grace, opposed to the bare form of godliness, or the fair shows of hypocrites, and the sudden and vanishing motions of temporaries.

1. I shall briefly show what it is not, by way of opposition.

[1.] It is opposed to the form of godliness: 2 Tim. iii. 4, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying tire power thereof.' Their religion is only in show and outside, as apples, that may be fair to see to

in the skin, but rotten at the core; so their hearts are not sound within. When we are sound within as well as beautiful without, this is the sound heart; when not only in show and appearance we are for God, but in deed and truth. Solinus telleth us that the apples of Sodom are to sight very beautiful and fair, but the compass of the rind doth only contain a sooty matter, which flitters into dust as soon as touched. This is a fit emblem of a hypocrite, or a heart not sound with God. Or, as the priests under the law, they were to look whether the sacrifices were sound at heart, otherwise they were to be rejected, Lev. xxii. 22, 23. So David here begs a sound heart in God's statutes, lest it should be rejected of God. The world thinketh, if there be a little external conformity to the law of God, it is enough. Oh, no! There must be a sound heart; no other principle of obedience pleaseth God.

[2.] This sound heart is opposed to the sudden pangs and hasty motions of temporaries. The graces of temporaries are for matter true, but slightly rooted, and therefore are not sound. There wanteth two things in the graces of temporaries—(1.) A deep and firm radication; (2.) A habitual predominancy over all lusts.

(1.) A deep and firm indication. Temporaries are really affected with the word of God, and the offers of Christ, and life by him; but the tincture is but slight, and soon worn off; they have the streams of grace, but not the fountain; a draught, but not the spring: John iv. 14, 'The water that I shall give him shall be a well of water springing up to everlasting life.' A dash of rain or a pond may be dried up, but a fountain ever keepeth flowing. They have something to do with Christ; he giveth them a visit, but not that constant communion; he doth not 'dwell in their hearts by faith,' Eph. iii. 17, nor take up his abode there; it is but a slight tincture, not a deep and permanent dye of holiness, or a constant habitual inclination to that which is holy, just, and good. There is not the remaining seed, 1 John iii. 9. There is a great deal of difference between sudden motions stirred up m us by the Spirit, and the remaining seed; that is, a constant disposition of heart to please God.

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(2.) A habitual predominancy over all lusts. Temporaries still, with those kind graces which they have, retain their interest in the world, and their inclinations to the pleasures, honours, and profits thereof, unbroken and unsubdued; as Simon Magus cherisheth the same corruptions under his new faith that he did under his old sorceries, Acts viii.; still he did desire to be thought some great one among the people. You must not think that he altogether dissembled, but he had some sense upon him, for he believed, and beheld the miracles, and wondered; but the same inclinations remained with him. Evermore some temporal interest or worldly advantage is laid closer to the heart, and hath a deeper rooting therein than the word of promise; and this m time prevaileth over the interest of God. And therefore, whatever good affections we have, till we get a command over our base and carnal delights, our hearts can never be sound with God.

2. Positively. What the sound heart is not, or to what it is op posed, we have seen. You may from hence easily gather what it is; it is such a receiving of the word into the heart that it is rooted there, and diffuseth its influence for the seasoning of every affection, and beareth a universal

sovereignty over us. Sometimes it is described by its radication, and sometimes by its sovereign prevailing efficacy.

[1.] Sometimes it is described by its radication, and so it is called λόγος ἔμφυτος‘The engrafted word, that is able to save our souls,’ James i. 21. The root of the matter is within; it is not tied on, but engrafted: so m that promise of God, Heb. viii. 10, ‘I will put my law into their minds, and write it upon their hearts.’ There is something written: I will write my law; and there are tables, and they are the hearts and minds of men; that is, the understanding and the will, or the rational appetite; and this with God’s own finger: I will write upon their hearts and minds. There where is the spring and original of all moral operations, of all thoughts, affections, and inward motions, there is the law of God written; in those parts of the soul where the directive counsel and the imperial commanding power of all human actions lieth, there doth God write his laws, and engrave them in lively and legible characters. And what is the effect of this, but that a man becometh a law to himself? He carrieth his rule about with him and as ready and as willing a mind to obey it. So Ps. xxxvii. 31, ‘The law of God is m his heart; none of his steps shall slide.’ The truth is rooted m him, and his heart is suited and inclined to it. He knoweth and loveth what is commanded of God, and hateth what is forbidden of him: thus a man becometh a bible to himself. Indeed this planting and engrafting the law upon our hearts, it sometimes made our work, because we use the means. God doth not write his law upon our hearts by enthusiasm, rapture, and inspiration, as he wrote m the hearts of the apostles and prophets, but maketh use of our reason, reading, hearing, meditation, conference, and prayer. It is made our work, because we work under God: Ps. cxix. 11, ‘Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee:’ and Prov. vi. 21, 22, ‘Bind his commandments upon thy heart; tie them upon thy neck.’ When we look for the deep implanting of the word in our hearts, this is the sound heart here described.

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[2.] The efficacy of this word so radicated, and the power and do minion it hath over the soul to subdue it to the will of God, and that is when the heart is transformed into the nature of God: Rom. vi. 11, ‘Ye have obeyed from the heart the form of sound doctrine that was delivered unto you.’ When the form of the word is delivered to him, he delivereth up himself to be moulded and assimilated to the nature of it; as that which is cast into the fire is changed into the colour, heat, and properties of fire. Thus where the word is incorporated and rooted in us, the heart is assimilated to the object seen and discerned therein; the image of God is stamped and impressed upon us: 2 Peter i. 4, ‘Having these great and precious promises, that we might be partakers of the divine nature:’ and 2 Cor. iii. 18, ‘We are changed into his image’ (or likeness) ‘from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God.’ Well, then, you see what the sound heart is.

But yet more distinctly, if you would have me untold what this sound heart is, there is required these four things:—

1. An enlightened understanding; that is the directive part of the soul; and it is sound when it is kept free from the leaven and contagion of error: Prov. xv. 21, ‘A man of understanding walketh uprightly.’ A sound mind is a good help to a sound heart. Light breedeth an awe of God, and mindeth us of our duty upon all occasions: 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, ‘And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind.’ First know him, and then serve him. He can never shoot right that taketh his aim contrary. The understanding doth direct all the inferior powers of the soul; if that be infected with error, the affections must necessarily move out of order. A blind horse may be full of mettle, but is ever and anon apt to stumble; and therefore, ‘Without knowledge the heart is not good,’ Prov. xix. 2.

2. There is required an awakened conscience; that warneth us of our duty, and riseth up in dislike of sin upon all occasions: Prov. vi. 22, ‘When thou goest it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest it shall keep thee; when thou walkest it shall talk with thee:’ to have a constant monitor in our bosoms to put us in mind of God; when our reins preach to us in the night season, Ps. xvi. 7. There is a secret spy in our bosoms, that observes all that we do, and think, and speak, a domestical divine that is always preaching to us; his heart is his bible. Such an awakened conscience is a bridle before sin, to keep us from doing things contrary to God; and a whip after sin. If we keep it tender, so it will do. Indeed it is easily offended, but it is not easily pleased; as the eye, the least dust soon offends it, but it is not so easily got out again. Till men have benumbed their consciences, and brought a brawn and deadness upon their hearts, their conscience, according to its light, will warn them of their danger, and mind them of their duty. It is a great mercy to have a speaking, stirring conscience, otherwise it is stupid and senseless.

3. There is required a rightly disposed will, or a steadfast purpose to walk with God in all conditions, and to do what is good and accept able in his sight: Acts xi. 23, ‘He exhorted them with full purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord.’ Many have light inclinations or wavering resolutions, but their hearts are not fixedly, habitually bent to please God. Therein chiefly lieth this sound heart, that doth inseparably cleave to God in all things: 1 Chron. xxii. 19, ‘Now set your hearts to seek the Lord God of your fathers.’ This is the obediential bent, when the heart is set and fixed. So David speaketh of it: Ps. cxix. 112, ‘I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always to the end.’ When the heart is poised this way, not compelled by outward force, but inclined; and this always, not by fits and starts. Many have good motions, and temporise a little, but their righteousness is like the morning dew. Many approve what is good, and condemn themselves for not doing of it, but their hearts are not inclined; nay, further, they can wish it were better with them, but the heart is not swayed and overpowered by grace. Here is the ground of a cheerful, uniform, and constant obedience, when we do not force ourselves now and then to good actions, but the heart hath a habitual tendency that way.

4. There is required that the affections be purged and quickened; these are the vigorous motions of the will, and therefore this must be needfully regarded: purged they must be from that carnality

and fleshliness that cleaveth to them. This is called in scripture the circumcision of the heart, Deut. xxx. 6: 'The Lord thy God shall circumcise thy heart, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, that thou mayest live.' It was figured in the cutting of the foreskin, or the circumcision of the flesh, which, because it was an action done with pain, sometimes noteth the humbling of the heart and soul-affliction, Lev. xxvi. 41; but because it was done not only with pain, but the foreskin was cut off, so it noteth the purging the heart from that fleshliness and carnality that cleaveth to us: Acts xv. 9, 'Purifying their hearts by faith.' Sin is wrought out more and more by the blood of Christ applied to the conscience. And some times this is expressed in scripture by ploughing up the fallow ground, Jer. iv. 4. There are perverse inclinations, like briars and thorns, that grow in us, and the strength of vile affections; now unless these be abated and broken we shall soon be transported by them. It is an allusion to ground broken up for tillage: till the ground be ploughed, and the noisome weeds destroyed, the good seed will not grow. Secondly, the affections must be quickened, acted, and set a work by the love of God: Gal. v. 6, 'Prepared ready to serve the Lord,' Eph. ii. 20. *Amor meus est pondus meum*—love and delight in God's ways go together.

Thus much of the nature of the sound heart.

Secondly, Let me now come to show you the value and worth of this privilege. It is a great blessing; that will appear by two things:—

1. The respect that God hath to it.

2. The evil it freeth us from, 'That I be not ashamed.'

1. The respect that God hath to it. This is the thing that God delights in and looks after: 1 Chron. xxix. 17, 'I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness.' He can discern integrity, and preferreth it before all manner of service and pomp in worship that is yielded to him. Now this delight of God is not only in the thing itself, in the uprightness, but in the persons of the upright, upon account of their uprightness: so Prov. xi. 20, 'The upright is his delight.' That person that is upright for the main, though otherwise he hath many failings, is of great esteem with God. But can the holy God delight in any of the sinful sons of Adam? Before the fall God rejoiced in us, as in the work of his hands. But since sin marred us and defiled us, how can God take pleasure in us? The love of good-will may fall upon sinful unworthy creatures, but the love of complacency cannot fall upon these. A fit object the sinner is not, and exactly perfect none can be; there is therefore a middle person, the upright and sincere man; and this delight of God passeth from the person to his actions: 'The prayer of the upright is his delight,' Prov. xv. 8. Alas! our prayers are, as our persons, poor slender things at the best; yet a little findeth acceptance with God; it is welcome for the person's sake, who is accepted in Christ. Now, how will God manifest this delight? In his providence: 2 Chron. xvi. 9, 'The eyes of the Lord run to and fro, that he may show himself strong in the behalf of those whose hearts are upright with him.' He looks up and down in the world to find out such persons to do them good, that he may employ all his power and grace for them: so

God shows it in his word. God's work is to assure them of a blessing: Micah ii. 7, 'Do not my words do good to them that walk uprightly?' There he comforts, and strengthens, and revives their hearts. He doth not only speak good, but doth good to them that walk uprightly. Nay, that is not all, but by his Spirit and internal grace he doth more encourage them, and renew strength upon them in their way to heaven: Prov. x. 29, 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright.' The more they walk with God, the more easy and sweet they find it so to do. So that if all these promises will encourage us, we had need to look after this sound heart. What honour and esteem soever others purchase with men, these obtain favour with the Lord, and are more regarded in all his dispensations.

2. Let us come to the evil it freeth us from; in the argument of the text, 'That I may not be ashamed.' They whose hearts are not sound with God, one time or other they shall be put to shame; but others shall be kept from this effect, which is so grievous to nature. Let me open this. A man may be ashamed either before God or men, ourselves or others.

[1.] Before God, either in our addresses to him at the throne of grace, or when summoned to appear at the last day before the tribunal of his justice.

(1.) If you understand it of our present approach to him, we cannot come into his presence with confidence if we have not a sound heart: I John iii. 21, 'If our hearts condemn us not, then have we boldness towards God.' We lose that holy familiarity and cheerfulness, when we are unbosoming ourselves to our heavenly Father, when our hearts are not sound. An unsound heart, through the consciousness of its own guilt, groweth shy of God, and stands aloof from him, and hath no pleasure in his company. But when we sincerely set ourselves to keep a good conscience in all things, we have this liberty towards God; though our failings humble us, yet they do not weaken our confidence of our Father's mercy. St Paul thought himself a fit object of others' prayers on this account: Heb. xiii. 18, 'Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, willing in all things to live honestly.' That is his argument to prove that he was not altogether unworthy of their prayers, nor incapable of the benefit of their petitions. There are some whom no prayers or intercession can help or profit, some that have no encouragement to pray for themselves, or give others an encouragement to pray for them. But Paul was none of these. Why? Because the reason of his request is modestly expressed. He doth not say, I have, but 'I trust I have, a good conscience:' and he doth not justify himself in all things, but appeals to the bent of his will, 'Willing in all things to live honestly.' He was willing so to do, that is, to direct his life according to the will of God in all things; his heart was willingly disposed and predominantly bent unto righteousness, and he knew it to be so. Such may, without blushing, come into God's presence, and have encouragement to pray for themselves, and encourage others to pray for them.

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(2.) When we are summoned to appear before the tribunal of his justice. Many now with a bold impudence will obtrude themselves upon the worship of God, because they see him not, and have not a due sense of his majesty; but the time will come when the most impudent and outbraving sinners will be astonished, even then, when 'the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open and made

manifest, and hidden things brought to light,' 1 Cor. iv. 5. And every one is to receive his judgment from God, according to what he hath done, either good or evil. Conscience now, like a clock when the weights are down, is silent, and makes no noise; but then it shall speak, and tell men their own, and then they will be ashamed; unsound hearts will not be able to stand in the judgment. When God sets any judicial judgment afoot in the world now, it reviveth men's guilty fears: Isa. xxxiii. 14, 'The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrite: who among us shall dwell with devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' In some terrible judgments that are a foregoing pledge of judgment to come, men of an unsound heart are soon possessed with fears and frights, as the unsound parts of the body are pinched most in searching weather. When God's wrath is once kindled, none so terrified and amazed as they. Much more at the great day, when there is no allaying of their fear, and they must undergo the final judgment of the most impartial God. Who will be able to hold up the head, and to say, 'Then shall I not be ashamed'? They that unfeignedly give up themselves to do the whole will of God: Ps. cxix. 6, 'Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all thy commandments.' A man that desires to do the whole will of God will not be confounded and amazed with terror before the judge of all the earth. The philosopher defines shame to be a fear of a just reproof. Who more just than the. judge of all the earth? and when is there a greater reproof in the conviction of sinners than at the last judgment?

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[2.] Before men a man may be ashamed; and so before ourselves and others.

(1.) Ourselves. It was a saying of Pythagoras, Reverence thyself. Be ashamed of thyself. God hath a spy and deputy within us, and taketh notice of our conformity and inconformity to his will, and after sin committed, lasheth the soul with the sense of its own guilt and folly, as the body is lashed with stripes: Rom. vi. 21, 'What fruit have ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?' There is an emphasis in the particle *now*; that is, now after grace received, or now after the commitment of sin. Take either sense. Sin enticeth us before we fall into it, but afterwards it flasheth terror in the face of the sinner, and filleth his soul with horror and shame; or now, after grace received, a Christian cannot look back upon his past life without shame and blushing. Tertullian hath a saying, that a man's heart reproacheth him when lie doth evil. As soon as our first parents had sinned, they were ashamed of it, and sought fig-leaves to cover it; they seek to hide with the leaves what the fruit had uncovered. Well, then, there is an eye and an ear that seeth and heareth our secret sins, and lasheth the soul for them till we grow into a sturdy impudence. But now the upright man, that sets his heart to serve the Lord and do his will, hath comfort and peace in himself: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing, that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.' He can look his conscience in the face without fear and amazement. He hath sorrow for his failings, but can look upon himself as sound before God for the main.

(2.) Before others; and so our shame may be occasioned by our scandals or our punishment: it is hard to say which is intended here.

(1st.) By scandals. When the heart is not sound with God, disorders break out before men, and many that make a fair show for a while afterwards shipwreck themselves and all their credit; for God will at length uncase the hypocrite, Prov. xxvi. 26; God will pull off his disguise one time or other, and that which is counterfeit cannot long be hidden; there will a time of dissection come, when that which is hidden shall' be made manifest. The apostle telleth us that 'that which is lame is soon turned out of the way,' Heb. xii. 13. Men of an unsound heart have some temptations or other to carry them quite off from God, and then, as old Eli, they fall back, and break the neck of their profession, whereby they dishonour God and shame themselves. As Christ telleth us of the builders, that the house fell, and great was the fall of it; so these, by some shameful and scandalous fall, discover themselves to the world.

(2d.) There is a shame before others by their punishment and disappointment of their hopes. God's punishment, in the language of scripture, is a putting to shame: Ezek. xxxvi. 7, 'When the heathens that are about you shall bear their shame.' So Jer. xiii. 26, 'I will discover thy skirts that thy shame may appear.' So when God visits his people for scandalous and enormous offences: Ps. xliv. 9, 'Thou hast cast us off, and put us to shame.' The reason of that expression is this: A man in misery is a laughing-stock to others, and exposed to contempt and ignominy. Especially is this a shame to God's people, when they seem to be disappointed in the hope of protection and assistance which they expected from God; then God puts them to shame, makes them to be a despised people. And this is their portion whose hearts are not sound and upright with God; they are rejected of the Lord, and grow despicable. Well, then, the point is made good by what hath already been said; but now the other circumstance.

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Secondly, Here is the qualification of the person asking, David.

1. David was a holy, good man, Acts xiii. 22. 'He goes and begs 'Let my heart be sound.' The hearts of the best men are so perverted with natural corruption, which is not fully abolished in any, that they have need to pray for a sound heart: Eph. iv. 22, 'Put off the old man with his deceitful lusts.' The old man is not so put off but there will be many warpings and deceitful workings still, and therefore David prays thus. The more upright any man is, the more sensible of his weakness, and the more suspicious of his own heart's deceitfulness. The best have lodged sin, vanity, and pleasures, and the world in their hearts, which are the closets that should be kept entirely for the Lord. They find their purposes towards that which is good very weak, their resolutions variable, their inclinations to evil very strong: Prov. xx. 9, 'Who can say, My heart is clean?' And therefore they go to God, if there be any degree of insincerity, any spared sin, any remainings of lust not striven against and not bewailed, that lie would discover it, and mortify it, that they may be more steadfast, being sensible of their fickleness and turning aside in the several conditions they pass through.

2. This was the request of David, who was so much in the knowledge and study of God's law, and had so often said, 'Teach me thy statutes,' now 'Make me sound in thy statutes.' Sound

knowledge of the statutes of God, and a sound purpose of heart to follow them, must be joined together. Affection without knowledge is not good, much less knowledge without affection and practice. All our knowledge will but increase our punishment, Luke xii. 48, and take away all pretences of excuse. First a heart enlightened, and then a heart bent: David often prays for both in this psalm; so must we pray, that as we have greater knowledge than others, so we may have better affections than others, and our hearts more upright. 'If ye know these things, happy are you if you do them,' John xiii. 17. God's scope in giving the law, was not to make trial of men's wits, who could most sharply conceive; nor of their memories, who could most faithfully retain; nor of their eloquence, who could most neatly discourse; but of their hearts, who could most obediently submit to his statutes. Stars were not made for sight only, but influence. So man was not created to know only, but to walk according to his knowledge. God's precepts are best learned when most circumspectly practised.

3. This was the request of David, a man afflicted, opposed, and persecuted. Compare the text with the 78th verse, 'Let the proud be ashamed; for they have dealt perversely with me.' 'Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.' Above all things we should study to be sincere in our carriage and defence of a good cause. An unsound heart will not bear out, but fall off to its own shame: James i. 8, The apostle telleth us, that 'a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' Between God's supplies and carnal shifts he goeth backward and forward, or this way and that, as occasion requireth. We need truth of grace, that we may be able to endure all weathers; and when we are put to trial we should be the more earnest with God for soundness of heart.

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Thirdly, Here is the person of whom it is asked—of God: 'Make my heart sound in *thy* statutes.' Uprightness is the gift of God, and the work of his Spirit: Ps. li. 10, 'Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.' We are like a pewter vessel, battered by the fall; and till we be cast anew we cannot be right with God. God worketh it in us at first, and still keepeth us and guideth us by his Spirit, or else we shall soon turn aside to our old bent and bias again. God beginneth the work of holiness, and maintaineth it against remaining corruption and outward temptations; he still keepeth afoot a constant purpose, and steady endeavour in the heart, to walk so as may please God. Men of themselves have a kind of humour towards good for a fit; but to go on sincerely to the end needeth grace from above.

Use. To press us to look after this firm established spirit. Now to this purpose—

1. Heartily resign yourselves to be directed and guided by God in all things whatsoever: Ezra vii. 10, 'He prepared his heart to seek the Lord.' To do it needeth such a fixed purpose.

2. Let us offer ourselves to God's trial. Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24, 'Search me, O Lord, and try me, know my heart and know my thoughts, see if there be any way of wickedness in me.' We must not only rest upon the testimony of our own consciences, but desire our hearts may be searched by God over and over. Besides, there are many ill humours mixed with our best affections, which we see

not, and a secret approbation and indulgence we give to them. We are apt ever to deal favourably with ourselves; and therefore desire God to pry into your most retired and reserved thoughts.

3. Let us walk still as in God's eye: Ps. cxix. 168, 'I kept thy precepts and thy testimonies, for all my ways are before thee.' Whatever praise we have with men, we must see that our hearts be right with God, who is witness, approver, and judge, and searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, and will not be put off with shadows; God's all-seeing eye is a special means to make a man upright.

4. Observe how often we step awry, Jer. xvii. 9, in those actions we perform. How careless are we of the spiritual part; we regard the outside of the duty, but slightly pass over that affection that should accompany it. In resistance of our corruption, we rather deal with the fruit of it, that it break not out to our disgrace, than the root of it that secretly lurketh in our hearts. There is a great deal of guile of spirit in the best, and therefore we had need to 'make straight steps to our feet,' Heb. xii. 13. There is some defect in matter, manner, or aim. We are many times set awork by others, yet expect wages of God.

5. Let us be often and earnestly dealing with God for this sincere heart; it is called 'godly sincerity,' 2 Cor. i. 12. Why? Because it comes from God, and carries the soul to God again. 'The new man is created in righteousness and true holiness, after the image of God,' Eph. iv. 24, and hath a tendency in it to draw us to God again.

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SERMON LXXXIX.

My soul fainteth for thy salvation; but I hope in thy word.—VER. 81.

THIS verse is wholly narrative, and consists of two branches:—

1. The first clause showeth how he stood affected to God's salvation, *my soul fainteth for thy salvation.*

2. His support till that affection was satisfied, *but I hope in thy word.*

Before we can make any further progress in explaining and applying this scripture, we must first see what is this salvation which is here spoken of. Salvation in scripture hath divers acceptations; it is put—

1. For that temporal deliverance which God giveth, or hath promised to give, to his people. So it is taken Exod. xiv. 13, 'Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord that he will show you to-day:' that is, the wonderful deliverance which he will work for you. So Lam. iii. 26, 'It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord:' meaning by salvation, their

recovery out of captivity. It was their duty to wait for this deliverance; and though it were long first, yet, having a promise, they were to keep up their hope.

2. For the exhibition of Christ in the flesh: Ps. xcviii. 2, 3, ‘The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and truth to the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.’ Clearly that psalm containeth a prediction of the setting up of Christ’s kingdom, and a bringing of the Gentile world into subjection to it; which was first to be offered to the people of the Jews, and from thence to be carried on throughout all the regions of the world. So old Simeon expresseth himself, Luke ii. 29, 30, ‘Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation:’ meaning thereby Christ actually exhibited or born in the flesh, which was the beginning of the kingdom of the Messiah.

3. For the benefits which we have by Christ on this side heaven; as the pardon of sin, and the renovation of our natures; these are called salvation, as Mat. i. 21, ‘He shall save his people from their sins;’ and Titus iii. 5, ‘He hath saved us by washing in the laver of regeneration:’ and in the Old Testament, Ps. li. 12, ‘Restore unto us the joy of thy salvation:’ that is, the joy which we have because God hath freed us from our sins.

4. For everlasting life: Heb. v. 9, ‘He is become the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him:’ and 1 Peter i. 9, ‘Receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls:’ meaning thereby our final reward.

The text is applicable to all these. But (1.) Most simply we must expound it of salvation in the first sense, because the drift of the man of God in this octonary is to show how he was affected; since God heard him not at the first cry, or as soon as he prayed for deliverance: though he prayed for deliverance, yet the help promised and hoped for was delayed so long, till he was ready to faint, and had fainted altogether, but that the promise revived and kept up his hopes. (2.) If these words be supposed to be spoken by the church, and in her name, they fitly represent the longings of the Old Testament fathers after Christ’s coming in the flesh. For as David expresseth himself here, so doth old Jacob: Gen. xlix. 18. ‘I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.’ That speech cometh in there by way of interruption, for as he was blessing his children, he turneth to the Lord, desiring his salvation by Christ, of which Samson, be longing to the tribe of Dan (the tribe which he was then blessing), was a special type. So it is said of Abraham, John viii. 56, ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.’ Abraham knowing him to be the true Messiah, did earnestly desire to see that day, and to his great contentment got a sight of it by faith; it was a sweet and blessed sight to him. So Luke x. 24, ‘Many prophets and kings 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:’ that is, David, a king, and other prophets longed for this day. So Heb. xi. 13, ‘Having seen the promises afar off, they were persuaded of them, and embraced them.’ Oh! they hugged the promises, saying, These will one day yield a saviour to the world. So it is said of all the serious

believers of the Old Testament, Luke ii. 25, that ‘they waited for the consolation of Israel;’ that is, for the redemption of the world by the blood of Christ, and the pouring out of the Holy Ghost, upon which followed the calling of the Gentiles and the setting up of the kingdom of God in the world. These things the saints longed for, waited for; and because the Lord suspended the exhibition of them till the fulness of time, and did not presently satisfy their desires, they might be said to faint; but the promise kept up their faith in waiting and confidence. I cannot wholly exclude this sense, because the salvation promised at the coming of the Messiah was the greatest, and common to all the faithful. They had many discouragements in expecting it from the wickedness and calamities of that people from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ was to descend. But though they were ready to faint, they did not give over the hope of that salvation, having God’s word for it, and the remembrance of it kept afoot by the sacrifices and types of the law. (3.) Since Christ hath appeared in the flesh, and hath wrought salvation for us, we must wait, and long, and look for that part of salvation which is yet to be performed; as the deliverance of the church from divers troubles, the freedom of particular believers from their doubts and fears, and finally our eternal salvation, which shall be completed at Christ’s second coming. All that have the first-fruits of the Spirit are groaning for this and hoping for this, Rom. viii. 23-25. We are to desire heaven, yet patiently to stay God’s time, for here is fainting and hoping, or, as the apostle saith, hastening to and yet waiting for the coming of the Lord, 2 Peter iii. 12. One is the effect of desire, the other of hope; desire hastening, and hope waiting.

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These things being cleared, let us first apply the words to temporal deliverance. Observe—

Doct. 1. The afflictions of God’s people may be long and grievous before any comfort and deliverance cometh. For the affliction continued so long upon David that his soul even fainted.

There are three agents in the afflictions of the saints—(1.) God; (2.) Satan; (3.) Wicked men.

1. God hath many wise reasons why he doth not give audience, or a gracious answer at the first call.

[1.] Because he will try our faith, to see if we can depend upon him when it cometh to an extremity. Thus by silence and rebukes Christ tried the woman of Canaan, that her faith might appear the more gloriously: Mat. xv. 28, ‘Then Jesus answered, and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith.’ And by extremities he still trieth his children: our graces are never exercised to the life, till we are near the point of death; that is faith which can then depend upon God: Job xiii. 15, ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;’ and Ps. xxiii. 4, ‘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.’ Many of his children are reduced to great straits; there may be no meal in the barrel nor oil in the cruse before God helpeth them. There may be many mouths to eat little food: John vi. 5, 6, when there was a great deal of company, and little provision, Christ asketh one of his disciples, ‘Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? and this he said to prove him, for he himself knew

what he would do.' So many a poor believer is put to it. Children increase, trading groweth dead, supplies fail, what shall they do? They pray, and God giveth no answer. This he doth to prove them. It is a strong faith which can hold out in such straits and difficulties.

[2.] To awaken our importunity: Luke xviii. 1, 'And he spake a parable to them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint:' compared with Luke xi. 8, with the parable ensuing. So again an instance in the woman of Canaan, she turneth discouragements into arguments. When Christ said, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs,' she said, 'Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table,' Mat. xv. 26, 27. So the blind men, Mat. xx. 31, the more they were rebuked, cried the more. Rather than his people shall neglect prayer, or grow formal in it, God will cast them into great afflictions; as Christ suffereth the storm to continue till the ship was almost overwhelmed, that his disciples might awaken him, Mat. viii. 25.

[3.] To make us sensible of our weakness; as Paul, 2 Cor. i. 9, 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead. We are much given to self-confidence, therefore God will break it, and ere he hath done with us, make us trust in him alone. There is a twofold strength—natural and spiritual.

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(1.) Natural; which ariseth from that courage that is in man as he is a reasonable creature. This will hold out till all probabilities be spent: Prov. xviii. 14, 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?' Till a man be struck at the heart, his reason will support him.

(2.) Spiritual; faith, hope, patience. These may be spent when the affliction is deep and pressing, and God's help is long delayed. Faith is the strength of the soul; as faith decayeth or is tired, the soul faints. Faith may be damped, and give up our case for gone, Ps. cxvi. 11; Ps. xxxi. 22, they throw up all, and think it is in vain to wait any longer. Thus will God discover our weakness to ourselves; the weakness of our reason, the weakness of our faith. I remember Solomon saith, Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faintest in adversity, thy strength is small.' Grievous or long afflictions discover our strength or weakness. Some are of a poor spirit, give up at first assault, before their strength faileth them; before the probabilities which sense and reason offereth are spent. They are lazy, and love their ease. Some are negligent, do no make use of the helps of faith; but when evils continue long and sit close, the strongest faith is seen to be too weak; God by this will humble us.

[4.] God doth this for his own glory, and that his work may be the more remarkable and conspicuous: John xi. 6, 7,' Jesus loved Lazarus, and when he heard that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.' Little love in that, you will say; a man would hasten to his dying friend. Christ may dearly love his own, and yet delay to help them even in their extremity, till the fit time come wherein the mercy may be the more conspicuous. It is said, Eccles. iii. 11, 'God hath made everything beautiful in his time.' Before its time, God's work seemeth harsh and

rough; as a statue when it is first hewn out, but in its time it is a curious piece of workmanship. God in his own time and way knoweth best how to comfort his people.

2. It is the devil's design to tire and weary out the people of God, and therefore stirreth up all his malice against us: Luke xxii. 31, 32, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.' The devil, if he might have the shaking of us, and liberty to do his worst, he would drive us from the faith of Christ, and all hopes by him.

3. Men are unreasonable in their oppositions, and will not relent nor abate anything of their rigour: Zech. i. 15, 'I was a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.' They are still adding to the church's trouble, and would destroy those whom God would only correct and purge, as the slave layeth on unmercifully. Till God restrain it, their wrath never ceaseth. Well, then—

Use 1. Let it not seem strange to us that godly men, in their afflictions, though they fly to God and implore his mercy, are not presently delivered, nor always at the first instance. God hath many discoveries to make, much work to do. Would you have faith rewarded before it be tried? or the beautiful frame and link of causes disturbed for your sakes? Faith is not tried to purpose till the thing we believe is not seen, nor have any probability that ever we shall see it; yea, till we see nothing but the contrary, and hope against hope; we must stay till the mercy be ready for us, and we ready for it; a hungry stomach would have the meat ere it be roasted; our times are always present with us, when God's time is not come.

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Use 2. Let us prepare for grievous and tedious sufferings. We would turn over our hard lesson before we have sufficiently learned it; we love the ease of the flesh, would have no cross, or a very short one. Things will not be so soon or so suddenly effected as we imagine. We make greater provision for a long voyage. We should be strengthened to long-suffering, Col. i. 11, as for all sort of crosses, so for long and tedious crosses.

Use 3. If your affliction be long, observe your carriage under it. Doth faith and hope keep you alive still? Heb vi. 12, 'Be not slothful, but followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.' Do you keep up your prayerful affections? Rom. xii. 12, 'Continue instant in prayer.' We pray as men out of heart, for fashion's sake, and with little life, rather satisfying our consciences than expressing our hope and confidence. A damp on the spirit of prayer is an ill presage. Can you love God though you be not feasted with self-comforts and present benefits? Isa. xxvi. 8, 'Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee,' &c. Our affections are bribed when desired comforts are presently obtained; God will see if we purely love him.

Use 4. For a close to this point. Our sufferings are like to be long; I speak not as determining, but to awaken a spirit of prayer that they may be shortened. When Christ made as if he would go further, they constrained him to tarry, Luke xxiv. 28, 29. These are sad symptoms of it.

1. When reformation is rejected, and corruptions are settling again upon their own base: Hosea vii. 1, ‘When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered,’ &c.; Ezek. xxiv. 13, ‘In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee.’ This crime is not only chargeable on them who opposed the Reformation, but on those who, by multiplied scandals, dishonoured the cause of God. Instance in the Papists in Queen Mary’s time, who got in by fraud and violence, not by miscarriage of the Protestants. Then it was sharp and short, ours is like to be tedious and long.

2. When our deliverance is likely to prove a mischief and a misery, when we are not prepared to receive it. God will not give us things for our hurt. And we may fear as much from our brethren, our mutual bickerings, as from enemies; when God promises restoration he promiseth unity: Zeph. iii. 9, ‘For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent;’ Zech. xiv. 9, ‘And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.’ The dog is let loose when the sheep scatter.

3. When there is a damp upon the spirit of prayer, and men give over seeking to God for deliverance as a hopeless thing. God is near when the spirit of prayer is revived: Ezek. xxxvi. 37, ‘Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them: I will increase them with men like a flock:’ and Jer. xxix. 12, 1.3, ‘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;’ Dan. ix. 19, 20; and Ps. x. 17, ‘Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.’ *Et passim alibi.*

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4. When God is upon his judicial process, and there is not any course taken to reconcile ourselves to him. God hath been judging his people, judging the nation wherein they live. Judgment began at the house of God. What notable humiliation and reformation hath it produced there? There is God’s whole work to be done upon Mount Sion, Isa. x. 12. What fruit of all those terrible judgments? Incorrigibleness showeth our stripes will be many, our judgments long.

5. When dispensations tend to the removing of the candlestick, or look very like it: Rev. ii. 5, ‘Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.’ That is done either by destroying judgments, taking away the subject-matter of the church, or by their own apostasy and spiritual fornication, or sad errors and confusions; ill treatment of God’s people, opposing his interests by his enemies, and the sinful miscarriages and apostasies of professing friends, will help to wear out an unthankful, murmuring generation.

Doct. 2. When salvation is delayed, or deliverance long a-coming, the soul fainteth.

I shall show—(1.) The nature of this fainting; (2.) The causes of fainting; (3.) The kinds of fainting; (4.) The considerations which may preserve us from fainting.

1. For the nature of this fainting. Here we must inquire what is meant by the fainting of the soul. Fainting is proper to the body, but here it is ascribed to the soul, as also in many other places. The apostle saith, Heb. xii. 3, 'Lest ye be weary, and faint in your minds;' where two words are used, weariness and fainting, both taken from the body. Weariness is a lesser, fainting a higher degree of deficiency. In weariness, the body requireth some rest or refreshment, when the active power is weakened, and the vital spirits and principles of motion are dulled; but in fainting, the vital power is contracted, and retireth, and leaveth the outward parts lifeless and senseless. When a man is wearied, his strength is abated; when he fainteth, he is quite spent. These things, by a metaphor, are applied to the soul or mind. A man is weary when the fortitude of his mind, his moral or spiritual strength, is broken or begins to abate, when his soul sits uneasy under sufferings; but when he sinketh under the burden of grievous, tedious, or long affliction, then he is said to faint; when all the reasons and grounds of his comfort are quite spent, and he can hold out no longer.

2. The causes of fainting. The fainting of the body may arise either from labour, sickness and travel, or else from hunger and thirst. So the fainting of the soul is either, first, from the tediousness of present pressures; or, secondly, from a fervent and strong desire.

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[1.] From the tediousness of present sorrows and pressures; as Jer. viii. 18, 'When I would comfort myself against my sorrow, my heart fainteth within me.' And why? Because of the length of their afflictions, ver. 20, 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.' Sorrow doth so invade their spirits, that they are by no means able to ease themselves: expectations of this side, and that side, are cut off; they long look for help and relief, but none appeareth. So Lam. i. 22, 'My sighs are many, and my heart is faint.' They are overwhelmed with grief, and cannot bear up with any courage.

[2.] It may be caused by a fervent and strong desire: Ps. lxxxiv. 2, 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of God.' Vehement desires cause a languor. So it is taken here: It is long, O Lord, that I have waited and attended with great desire for deliverance from thee. Those who vehemently desire anything are apt to faint. Where love is hot, desire cannot be cold. The benefit of the church, liberty to serve God, do strongly move the saints; yea, the Spirit of God increaseth the vehemency of these motions; 'For he maketh intercession for the saints with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered,' Rom. viii. 20. He concurreth to the vehemency of the desire; but the fainting is from ourselves, from our weakness. The soul is so earnestly fixed in the expectation of God's salvation that it can no longer keep any equal tenour; so that this fainting is one of the love-errors of the children of God, like a disease which is incident only to the best tempers.

3. The kinds of fainting. (1.) There is a fainting which causeth great trouble and dejection of spirit. (2.) There is a fainting which causeth apostasy and defection from God and the cause of religion.

[1.] There is a fainting which causeth dejection and trouble; this is spoken of Heb. xii. 5, 'My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither faint when thou art rebuked of him.' There are the two extremes, slighting and fainting. Now this is a fault in the children of God, to be much perplexed in their troubles; but yet this may be incident to them, religion heightening their sense of evils, and their vehement desires of the comforts of God's presence increasing their trouble.

[2.] There is a fainting which causeth defection and falling off from God, out of cowardice and carnal fear, and casting off the profession of Christianity when they find it troublesome; they grow weary, incline to apostasy: this is not incident to the children of God: Rev. ii. 3, 'Thou hast borne, and hast patience, and hast laboured, and hast not fainted,' not given over the cause of God. There is a fainting which is a slacking or remitting somewhat in our spiritual course, when men begin a little to relent, and to give way to coldness and lukewarmness, and do not keep up their former zeal and fervency or diligence in heavenly things. This may befall sometimes the servants of God, abate somewhat of their former forwardness, Eph. iii. 13, when either they suffer themselves, or those who are primarily instrumental in the work of the gospel are cast into a suffering condition. And there is a fainting which makes totally and finally to abandon the ways of God: Gal. vi. 9, 'He shall reap in due time, if he faint not' There it is not taken for some remissness, which may befall the best of God's servants, but a total defection.

4. The considerations which may preserve us from fainting.

[1.] It argueth that you are lazy, love the ease of the flesh, have small strength, if you faint upon every appearance of difficulty and trouble: Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.' Sinners are not discouraged with every inconvenience occasioned by their sin, but can deny themselves for their lusts' sake; and shall we be soon discouraged in God's service?

[2.] Others that have borne far heavier burthens, do not sink under them. The Lord Christ: Heb. xii. 3, 'For consider him, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied, and faint in your minds.' Nay, many of his precious servants: Heb. xii. 4, 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.' If against sin, are we only to praise their courage, never show our own? or do we think to go to heaven without conflicts, when it doth cost them so dear?

[3.] We have given counsel to others: Job iv. 5, 'But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.' It is an easier matter to instruct others than to carry it well ourselves. The well will give counsel to the sick, and those that stand on land direct those that are apt to sink in deep waters. But should not we remember these things ourselves?

[4.] God promises to moderate the afflictions of his people, and to sweeten the bitterness of them, to take off the oppressing weight of their troubles, lest their souls faint: Isa. lvii. 16, 'For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.' The consideration of man's infirmity and weakness, unable to hold out, causeth the Lord to stay his hand; he will not utterly dishearten and discourage his people that wait for him. A good man will not overburden his beast.

[5.] When reason is tired, faith should supply its place, and we should hope against hope, Rom. iv. 18; for faith can fetch one contrary out of another, and get water out of the rock, as well as out of the fountain. When probable means miscarry, then it is a time for God to work; and faith should bear us out when sense and reason cannot.

[6.] Give vent to the ardour of your desires in prayer: Luke xviii. 1, 'He spake a parable to them, to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint:' and Jonah ii. 7, 'When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.' Keep up the suit, it will come to a hearing one day; though it be long ere God ariseth to the judgment, yet then make sure work of it.

[7.] By waiting upon God we learn to wait more: Isa. xl. 31, '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.' Eternal blessings eyed and prepared for will support a fainting soul in the worst evil: 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'For this cause we faint not; though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' The greatest troubles cannot make void our hope, if our spiritual state increase and our eternal hopes thrive.

Doct. 3. Though the soul be in a fainting condition, yet it will accept of nothing but God's salvation, 'Thy salvation:' Ps. xciv. 18, 'When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up;' and ver. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.' Men may seek to get out of their troubles from wicked men two ways—either by carnal compliance, or by the use of indirect means.

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[1.] By carnal compliance, when men violate and prostitute their consciences for their peace's sake. It is said of some, Heb. xi. 35, that 'They accepted not deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.' They might upon certain conditions have been freed from those cruel pains and tortures, but those conditions were contrary to the law of God. We have God's deliverance upon better terms than man's, and it is better in itself

[2.] By using indirect means to get off the trouble; this is making too much haste: Isa. xxviii. 16, 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' Ravishing the blessing, rather than waiting for the issues of God's providence. Those that do so, God will reckon them with the workers of iniquity: Ps. cxxv. 5, 'As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with

the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.' They that shift for themselves lose the benefit of God's protection. These are dealt with as open enemies. Now the reasons of the point are these:—

1. Because they are satisfied in God's providential government. God never puts power in the hands of wicked men but for his own holy ends. Therefore, while God continueth them, they are observing what God will do by them: 2 Sam. xvi. 11, 'Let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him.' God hath work for them to do, to mortify our wantonness, to break our stubborn humours.

2. Because God's salvation will come in the best time and in the best way: Ps. lxii. 1, 'Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation;' Isa. xxx. 18, 'God is a God of judgment: blessed are they that wait for him.' God doth all things with wisdom, and in the best manner.

Use. How afflicted soever we be, let us not seek to be delivered in a way not allowed by God, nor take any sinister courses, nor use any base shifts to rid ourselves out of danger. This is to distrust God, and to entangle ourselves the more, and to miscarry in a long voyage, after we are about to enter into the port. See the story of Saul's sacrificing, in 1 Sam. xiii., from the 8th verse to the 15th. If he had tarried a little longer all had been well. Before the day was quite over, Saul would sacrifice, and then Samuel cometh and telleth him God had rent the kingdom from him for his distrust and disobedience. So many will forestall the blessing.

Doct. 4. Hope keepeth us alive in the midst of faintings: 'My soul fainteth; but I hope.'

1. Observe here, that though the faith of God's children seems to faint, yet it doth not die nor wholly fail. Some seem greedily to catch at promises at first, but their ardour is soon spent; and when it is a troublesome business to wait upon God, they give it over. This is the faith and hope of temporaries, but the good ground 'bringeth forth fruit with patience,' Luke viii. 15. God's children tarry his leisure; and though now and then they are ready to faint, yet they recover. Their faith, hope, and patience seemeth to be almost spent, yet it is not utterly put out; as David here was not broken with long and tedious difficulties; though he saw no end of his miseries, yet he would still depend upon God. There is an abiding seed, 1 John iii. 8. Their state is secured by God's covenant, that there shall be no total rupture nor utter deficiency. Perseverance is a condition of the new covenant, not only required, but given, as all conditions of the new covenant are. There is *donum perseverantiae*, not only a power to persevere, but perseverance itself.

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2. That which keepeth our faith from dying, and sustaineth the soul of the faithful, and keepeth life in them, is the resuscitation of our hopes. What doth hope to the supporting of a fainting soul?

[1.] It draweth off the mind from things present to things future; and diversion is one way to cure trouble. While we pore only on our grievous troubles, they prove a temptation to us; but hope lifts up the head, and looketh above these things. That poring on the affliction and trouble causes fainting; see Lam. iii. 18-20; but remembering God's mercies and promises reviveth us. The

remembering the great depth of affliction and extremity overwhelmeth us: I have them in mind continually, and so am dejected; but when I begin to call to mind God's infinite mercies, I conceive some hope of recovery. That which was remembered is in ver. 22-26.

[2.] Hope representeth the excellency and certainty of these future things, and so causeth earnestness and patience.

(1.) The excellency. It is a question among divines what is the difference between faith and hope, because they are much of a like nature. One difference is, faith looks to the truth of the promise, hope to the goodness of the thing promised; for faith respects the person giving his fidelity, and hope the person receiving the benefit, and exciteth them to look for it. It is something worth the looking and waiting for, and such as will recompense present troubles, 2 Cor. v. 17, 18.

(2.) The certainty; for though it mainly comforts itself with the goodness of the thing promised, yet it causeth patience in waiting, because of the sureness. It seeth things that cannot be seen and perceived by sense: Rom. viii. 25, 'If we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.' It is good, and it will not fail; therefore we may and must tarry God's leisure.

(3.) The most noble and principal object of -hope is the great promise of eternal salvation. This must in chief be hoped for; partly because temporal salvation is not so surely promised, but under sundry cautions and reservations; as if it be for our good, if God's glory will permit it, and the beauty of his work, and the many things God hath to do before the deliverance be brought about; especially if it be a common salvation, wherein others are concerned as well as we; as if their hearts be prepared, &c. Partly because Christians are to be at a point of greater indifferency about outward things than the believers of the Old Testament, now life and immortality is brought to light, 2 Tim. i. 10. They were trained up by sensible things both in their worship and promises. The cross is one of our conditions: Mat. xvi. 24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' We must look for afflictions, and those not ordinary afflictions, but the loss of all, or else we do not count the charges aright; we must refer all to God's will. Christ may let some slip through at a cheaper and easier rate, but all must resolve on it. Partly because this is propounded as the great comfort, Luke xii. 32, 'Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom:' and accordingly used by the saints. David in his disappointments: Ps. xxxix. 7, 'And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.' He meaneth the hope of immortality, opposite to that vain show and false appearance which is in worldly things. This was that Job comforted himself with, that ancient believer: Job xix. 26, 'Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:' and the Maccabees, Heb. xi. 35, 'They were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.' Partly because that which God hath promised in the world to come is only satisfactory, and able to quiet a man's mind, and make him patiently wait upon God in all his troubles. Here is enough to countervail all difficulties, to support us under them, to recompense us for them; it is not long ere it will come to hand, it cannot

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enough be desired; it may be hoped for by the righteous in their greatest extremities: Prov. xiv. 32, 'The righteous hath hope in his death.'

Use. For instruction. When your souls are apt to faint, let hope look out for better times or better things.

1. For better times. God will not always chide: Ps. ciii. 9, 'He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever.' Nor shall the rod of the wicked always rest on the back of the righteous, Ps. cxxv. 3. Therefore rouse up yourselves, and say, as David, Ps. xlii. 5, 'Why art thou cast down, my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him,' &c. Let us not always pore on our grievous miseries. Observe the season, when apt to be corrupted with ease and prosperity, and to carry it negligently to God, and proudly and oppressingly to men. There may come a change. So when apt to faint, seek out arguments of encouragement, and hope that God will be good to us: Ps. lvi. 3, 'At what tune I am afraid, I will trust in thee.' That is our business at such a time, to strengthen our dependence, for still we must oppose the prevailing corruption.

2. Better things. That is the true Christian spirit that mainly looks after the world to come; that hope is freest from snares. An earthly hope maketh men carnal, often enticeth them to use ill means to get it accomplished. Desires and hopes of temporal happiness, that the world may smile upon us, doth not breed so good a spirit. This hope goeth upon* surer grounds, meeteth with fewer disappointments.

Well, then, hope for these things. We shall hear of few in whom the former part of the text is verified, if understood of eternal salvation, 'My soul fainteth for thy salvation.' This temper is very rare, and few have such a spirit as Paul had: Phil. i. 23, 'I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ,' &c. But all Christians should hope for eternal life, and prepare for it, and make this the great cordial and solace of their souls. God's people do too much please themselves with thoughts of temporal happiness; this is no good spirit. The ap petite of temporal honour, wealth and peace, is natural to us; we should be at a greater indifferency about these things, so as not to be very solicitous about them.

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Doct. 5. This hope is bred or nourished in us by the word of God.

1. Because that is the law of commerce between us and God. In the promissory part it showeth what salvation and deliverance we may expect from him; and in the mandatory part, upon what terms, and who are the persons qualified to receive this deliverance: and without heeding of these things, hope is a groundless presumption, as if we expect things not promised, or not in the way wherein they are promised. We must have an eye both on the promises and the precepts—the one to encourage us, the other to direct us. It showeth our hope is of the right constitution; Ps. cxix. 166, 'I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments;' Ps. cxlvii. 11, 'The Lord taketh

pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy;' and Ps. xxxiii. 18, 'Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy:' as a man that consulteth with his charter and conveyance is more assured of his right and title. The scripture is cast into the nature of a covenant or mutual indenture drawn up between us and God. There we find God hath deeply and strongly engaged himself to us, and we to him. This we have to show under his hand.

2. We should give such credit to the word of God as to believe it, when to sense there is no likelihood of the performance of it; for what is impossible to appearance, is not impossible to God, and the certainty of the promises doth not depend upon the probabilities of sense, but upon the all-sufficiency of God. *Firmia*[6]*dicta tanti existimantur, quantus est ipse qui diceret*. If God promise anything, who is almighty and who is faithful, it will be accomplished, and we may rest upon it in the greatest extremities, perplexities, and seeming impossibilities. We must not confine God within the bounds of created power.

3. God's word should be as good as deed, for his word and the beck of his will doth all things: 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' Micah ii. 7. Not say good, but do good; when it is said, it may be accounted done, the performance is so certain.

4. The best holdfast we can have upon God is by his word. What ever his dispensations be, though he withhold comfort and deliverance from us. yet it will do well in time. Therefore, whether he smileth or frowneth, his word should be our support. His dispensations vary, but his word is firm.

Use. Let the promises of God strengthen and revive our hearts.

If God hath said anything, his people should believe him. His word is a word of truth, Heb. xi. 11. Sarah's faith was built upon this; 'She judged him faithful who had promised.' His word is a word of power, for he is a God of all power and might: Heb. xi. 17-19. So Abraham's faith: 'By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.' His power, as is his being, is infinite. Therefore, having his word, this should give us rest and contentment of soul, though there be no appearance of performance; the promise is yea and amen, and continueth in one invariable tenour. Let not faith die.

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6 Qu. 'omnia'?—ED.

SERMON XC.

Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me.—VER. 82.

IN this verse the man of God expresseth—(1.) His earnest expectation of the comfort of the promises; (2.) His longing desire after it; as hope is wont to vent itself by serious thoughts, intermixed with strong desires of the blessing promised. His earnest expectation is expressed in the first clause, *mine eyes fail for thy word*. His longing and strong desire in the following words, *saying, When wilt thou comfort me?*

His earnest hope and expectation is first to be considered; and here his hope is described

1. By the effect, his looking after the accomplishment of the promise; as, Judges v. 28, when Sisera's mother expected him, 'She looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?' and Rom. viii. 19, 'The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth,' &c.—ἀποκαραδοκία τῆς κτίσεως, the lifting up or stretching out of the head, as we use to do when we look for anything, to see if we can spy it coming.

2. By the incident weakness, because of the delay of help, 'Mine eyes fail for thy word.' He had looked and looked long, till he was weary of looking; what he said before of the soul, here he speaketh of his eyes. There the object was salvation, here the word.

Observe, first, that hope keepeth the eye of the soul so fixed upon the promise, that it is ever looking for deliverance and salvation. Hezekiah useth almost, the same manner of speech, Isa. xxxviii. 14, 'Mine eyes fail with looking upward,' that is, to God for ease and relief; as when we expect anybody's coming, we send our eyes towards the place from whence he cometh. Reasons:—

1. The children of God make more of a promise than others do, and that upon a double account—partly because they value the blessing promised, partly because they are satisfied by the assurance given by God's word; so that whereas others pass by these things with a careless eye, their souls are lifted up to the constant and earnest expectation of the blessing promised. It is said of the hireling, that he must have his wages before the sun go down, Deut. xxiv. 15, 'Because he is poor, and hath set his heart upon it:' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'lifted up his soul to it,' meaning thereby both his desire and hope. He esteemeth his wage for it is the solace of his labours, and the maintenance of his life; and he assuredly expecteth it, upon the promise and covenant of him who setteth him awork. So it is with the children of God; they esteem the blessings promised, and God's word giveth them good assurance that they do not wait upon him in vain: 1 Tim. iv. 10, 'Therefore we both labour, and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.' They know God is good to all, much more to his covenant servants. They value his salvation, and venture their all upon his salvation and the truth of his word; and therefore lift up their souls to him in the midst of their pressures and difficulties.

2. It is some satisfaction to enjoy the blessing in idea and contemplation, before we have it indeed. Hope causeth a kind of anticipation and pre-union of our souls with the blessedness expected: as heirs live upon their lands before they have them. And that is the reason why joy is made to be the fruit of hope, though it be proper to fruition and enjoyment: Rom. xii. 12, 'Rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.' It refresheth them in their pilgrimage, and affecteth them in some measure as if it were in hand. So Rom. xv. 13, '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.' While believing, waiting, hoping, while conflicting with difficulties, the; carry themselves as if they had already obtained the thing promised; for by eying the promise they are cheered and revived. Hope giveth a foretaste, especially when the comforting Spirit addeth his impression thereunto.

3. The opening of the eye of faith argueth a closing of tie eye of sense, which giveth a double benefit—(1.) That we are not withdrawn by vain objects; (2.) Not discouraged with contrary appearances.

[1.] That we are not withdrawn by vain objects. Nothing doth quench zeal and holiness and joy in the Lord, nor cast water upon that sacred fire which should be kindled and kept ever burning in our bosoms, so much as keeping the eye of sense always open to behold the lustre and beauty of worldly vanities. Alas! then hope of heaven and salvation from God is a cold heartless thing; we think of it carelessly, desire and press after it very weakly. But now, when the eye of sense is shut, and the eye of faith kept always open, then hope advanceth itself with life and vigour, and present things seem less, and things to come greater and more glorious in our eyes: 1 Peter i. 13, 'Be sober, and hope to the end,' &c. Sobriety is the moderation of our affections in the pursuit and use of earthly things. The delights of the present life burden the soul, glue it to the earth, and to base and inferior objects; but when our souls are kept in the fresh, lively, and serious expectation of better things, all the things of the world appear more contemptible. It is not for eagles to catch flies, nor for the heirs of promise to be captivated by the delights of sense; so that every day our hope is more certain and powerful, our pursuit more earnest. The mind is not darkened with the fumes of lust, nor diverted from those noble objects.

[2.] The eye of sense being shut, we are not discouraged with contrary appearances, nor with fears and troubles ad the trials of the present life, because hope seeth sunshine behind the back of the storm. We have a notable emblem of the eye of faith an the eye of sense in the prophet and the prophet's man: 2 Kings vi. 15-17, 'When the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city, both with horses and chariots: and his servant said to him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open 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's man is affrighted with the dreadful appearance of enemies encompassing them round about, and is at his wit's end. 'What

shall we do?' But his master Elisha had the eye of faith, and could see great preparations which God had sent for their defence, which the servant could not see; therefore encourageth him, and in a prophetical vision showeth not only more horses and chariots, but chariots of fire, which were no other than the angels of God come together in the manner of a host, to rescue the prophet of God. What was represented to him in a prophetical vision is always evident to faith and to the eyes of a believing soul; they see God and his holy angels set for their deliverance. When God openeth the eyes of the mind, they can see the glory and power of the other world; and then, 'though troubled on every side, yet not distressed; though perplexed, yet not in despair; though persecuted, yet not forsaken; though cast down, yet not destroyed,' 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, though wrestling with difficulties, yea, brought to some extremities, yet this invisible assistance supporteth them; and though they have little human means, yet God carrieth them on to their expected end and issue.

Use 1. To reprove us for poring so much upon present things, and neglecting those to come, especially the great recompense of reward. Alas! men have either none, or cold thoughts of that blessed estate which is offered in the promises. Our thoughts fly up and down like dust in the wind; they may sometimes light upon good things, but they vanish, and abide not. We may have some cold ineffectual glances upon heaven and heavenly things, which fly away, and never leave the soul better. This argueth hope is very weak, if there be any at all; for hope is always longing and looking out for the blessing, sending spies into the land of promise, to bring it tidings thence; it will discover itself not by glances and wishes; for the worst men may have some of these in their good mood and sober thoughts; but by frequent, deep, and ponderous meditations: you do not eye the mark, Phil. iii. 14, nor mind your scope and great end, 2 Cor. iv. 18. Certainly that which must be intended in every righteous action, either formally or virtually—that is, by some noted explicit thought, or by the unobserved act of some potent habit—should be oftener thought of and longed for; you do not live by faith else. For what is living by faith, but with drawing the mind from present things to things to come, looking beyond and above the world to eternity? 2 Cor. v. 7; Heb. xi. 11. You are not acquainted with the influence of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, for he openeth the eyes of the mind. Why? That you may look above the mists and clouds of the lower world to those good things which we are to enjoy in heaven, Eph. i. 17, 18, and 1 Cor. ii. 12. Alas! we are taken up with trifles and childish toys, have our thoughts little exercised about these nobler objects. Therefore is it that our diligence is so little; for if they were oftener minded, they would be more diligently sought after: Phil. iii. 14, 'I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' Therefore is our patience so little; for the bitterness of the cross would be more sweetened if our minds and meditations were oftener set about heaven and heavenly things, Rom. viii. 18. Therefore are our conversations so worldly, Phil. iii. 19, our desires and longings so cold and weak, so little mind to get home, Phil. i. 23, πολλῷ μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον.

Use 2. To press us to eye the promised blessedness more than we do. The promise is our warrant, and the thing promised is the comfort, solace, and support of our souls. The promise must be laid

up in the heart with a firm strong assent, and the thing promised ever kept in view. I shall give you the qualifications of this expectation.

1. It must be a serious and earnest expectation: Phil. i. 20, ‘According to my earnest expectation, that in nothing I shall be ashamed.’ Earnest expectation is that which exciteth the heart to be ever looking and longing for the things promised. Our eyes are always looking to heaven, which is the seat and solace of our happiness. David describeth his earnestness notably: Ps. cxxx. 5, 6, ‘I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning.’ The priests, that officiated in their turns, never missed the performance of their daily offices there. So David was still awakening his desires, continuing his daily attendance on God, and renewing his longings and hopes.

2. It is a lively expectation: 1 Peter i. 3, ‘Begotten again unto a lively hope.’ It is called lively from the effect, such as will put life into us in our damps of spirit and greatest discouragements, quickeneth us to hasten home apace, being animated by some cheerful foretastes of what we expect.

3. It is a constant and unconquerable expectation, not broken with present difficulties, but sustaineth the soul, till our full and final deliverance cometh in hand: Ps. cxxiii. 2, ‘As the eyes of servants look unto the hands of their masters, and the eyes of a maiden unto the hands of her mistress; so our eyes wait on the Lord our God, until he have mercy on us.’ They never give over waiting and looking till God show mercy: 1 Peter i. 13, ‘Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;’ and Heb. vi. 11, ‘And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end.’

4. It is a sure and certain hope, as being built on God’s truth and faithfulness: it is compared to ‘an anchor sure and steadfast,’ Heb. vi. 18. Why? Because of God’s word and oath. God is the supreme verity, who can neither deceive or be deceived; therefore we should rest satisfied with his promise. To a promise, that it be certain and firm, three things are required,—that it be made seriously and heartily, with a purpose to perform it; that he that promiseth continue in this purpose, without change of mind; that it be in the power of him that promised to perform what is promised. Now of all these things there can be no doubt, if we believe the scriptures to be the word of God.

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[1.] Certainly God meaneth as he speaketh when he promiseth to give eternal life to the faithful servants and disciples of Jesus Christ. There is no question but that he is so minded, when he who is truth itself hath told the world of this; for what needed God to court the creature, or tell them of a happiness which he never meant to bestow upon them? If an honest man hath promised anything in his power, we look he should be as good as his word. Yea, we have his oath, which is πέρας ἀντιλογίας, and μεγίστη παρὰ ἀνθρώποις πίστις. He sent his Son with a commission from heaven to assure us; he is, ‘Amen, the faithful witness,’ Rev. iii. 14. He wrought miracles to confirm his

message, died, rose again, and revived: 1 Peter i. 21, ‘Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.’ This message afterwards was confirmed by all kinds of signs and wonders, wrought by them who went abroad in his name to assure the world of this. Not to believe God is serious, is to make him a liar.

[2.] That God doth continue his purpose, there can be no doubt in them who consider his unchangeable nature; he may change his dispensation, but not his purposed will: James i. 17, ‘Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;’ Mal. iii. 6, ‘I am the Lord, I change not; therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed.’

[3.] That he is able to perform it, since he can do what he will: Rom. iv. 21, ‘And being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was also able to perform.’ So Phil. iii. 21, ‘According to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.’ The most difficult thing in our hope is the raising of our bodies after being eaten by worms and turned to dust. It is a thing incredible, and to flesh and blood wholly impossible; but nothing is impossible to God. It is within the reach and compass of divine omnipotency. Well, then, the thing is sure in itself; let us labour and suffer reproach, wait with patience, renounce the desires and delights of the flesh, and with patience continue in well-doing, and then we may lift up our souls to it. Our reward is sure.

The second point is from the incident weakness, because of the delay of help: ‘Mine eyes fail for thy word.’ He had his eyes fixed upon the promise till they were quite wearied.

Doct. 2. Though his people wait for him, yet God may so long delay and suspend the performance of the promises till they count it a hopeless business.

First, Suspend. The reasons are these:—

1. Not because he is unwilling to give, but because he will have us better prepared to receive: Ps. x. 17, ‘Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.’ We understand it usually of preparing the heart for prayer, to ask the mercy; but it is also meant of preparing the heart to receive the mercy: 2 Chron. xx. 33, ‘The high places were not taken away, because the people had not yet prepared their heart to the God of their fathers;’ they were not fit to have a thorough reformation accomplished in their days. The baker watcheth when the oven is hot, and then puts in the bread. At another time it went on roundly, for God had prepared the people, 2 Chron. xxix. 36. When we are in a posture, mercy will not be long a-coming. Heaven, the great mercy, is not given us till prepared; as heaven is prepared for us, so we for it: Rom. ix. 23, ‘That he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory;’ and Col. i. 12, ‘Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.’ So other mercies; our unpreparedness lieth as a block in the way, and hindereth the free passage of God’s mercy to us, till he send his work before him, &c.; Isa. xl.

10, ‘Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.’

2. To awaken fervency of prayer, and that the blessing may be the more earnestly sought after and highly valued. A thing easily come by doth not stir up such a desire after it. Τὸ ἕτοιμον εἰς ἐξουσίαν ἀργὸν εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν. We despise easy-gotten favours, but that which is long and earnestly sought is dearer to us. Therefore the Lord, to commend his favours to us, and to set a price upon them, will have us pray much and long: 1 Sam. i. 27, ‘For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me the petition which I asked of him.’

3. God doth it to prove and exercise our faith. Many of his servants have gone to the grave and his promises not yet accomplished, and yet have gone to the grave in hope: Heb. xi. 13, ‘These all died in faith, not having received the promises’ (that is, things promised), ‘but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them.’ Then is faith tried when we can wait for the fulfilling of the promises: when we have no present enjoyment, and know not when we shall have, yea, likely never to see it in our days. The patriarchs lived and died believers; delay and non-enjoyment did not break their hearts, nor could death itself extinguish their faith. Death might bereave them of their friends, and their temporal estate, and all their earthly comforts, but of faith it could not.

4. That patience may have its perfect work. It is marvellous patience that can yet wait for the word, when it will yield us the expected comfort, though our eyes fail in waiting. Then is the greatest discovery of its perfection, when difficulties are many, hope long delayed. It hath but a part of its work before, to still the mind under lesser or shorter evils. The perfection of a thing is never discovered till it be put to a full trial. Patience is seen in waiting as well as suffering. To bear a little while is but the imperfect work of patience, some lesser degree of it; as to know a letter or two in the book is but an imperfect kind of reading; but to bear much and long, that is the perfect work. To lift up some heavy thing from the ground, argueth some strength; but to carry it for an hour, or all day, is a more perfect thing.

5. God delayeth the accomplishment of his promises, because many times the frame of his providence requireth it. All God’s works have their appointed hour and time, and God will not disturb the order of causes, or work sooner or later; but as the beautiful frame of his providence doth permit: John ii. 4, ‘Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.’ Our time wherein we would have him work, and his time wherein he will work, are often very different: for he will not manifest his help when it will please us best, but when his glory in working may be best seen: John vii. 6, ‘My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready.’

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Secondly, The other branch is, that God may delay so long till they be disheartened, and give it over as a hopeless business. David saith his eyes failed for the word. When a man is disappointed of the things he looketh for, then his eyes are said to fail. So the captive Jews complained, Lam.

iv. 17, ‘As for us, our eyes have yet failed for our vain help: in our watching, we have waited for a nation that could not save us.’

1. God may delay so long, till his enemies wax high and proud, as if above the reach of all evil, and God had forgotten them, or approved their ways: Ps. l. 21, ‘I keep silence, and thou thoughtest I was altogether like thyself.’ So long till all their fears are over: Job xxi. 9, ‘Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.’ And their oppressions are multiplied: Ps. x. 5, 6, ‘His ways are always grievous, for he hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved.’

2. God may delay so long, till a land be wasted by sundry successive common judgments that light upon good and bad, Jer. xii. 4. After the complaint of the prosperity of the wicked, the prophet subjoineth, ‘How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of the field wither?’ When they relent not, the land may fare the worse for them; and the godly, among the rest, suffer in these general calamities. God may plague the nation with dearth and famine, plague and pestilence, war and sword, fire and burning; and all this while no ceasing of their iniquities or oppressions.

3. God may delay so long till his people be strangely perplexed, and know not what to make of his providence. They wonder how his justice can endure it: Jer. xii. 1, ‘Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments; where fore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?’ Hab. i. 12, 13, ‘Art thou not from ever lasting, O Lord my God, mine holy one? We shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment, and O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and boldest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?’ They cannot reconcile his attributes and providences. We that are short-sighted, and short-spirited creatures, see not God’s reasons; yea, God may delay so long, till their hearts faint, and their eyes fail, as in these two verses; till their faith and patience be quite spent, and they have left looking for it: Luke xviii. 8, ‘Shall he find faith on the earth?’ God loveth to show his people their infirmity, and to weaken all their courage, before he will do anything for them.

4. God may delay so long in some cases, that there is no hope that God will do anything for them in this life; but all reasons for patience are only taken from the general judgment: James v. 7, 8, ‘Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord; and stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.’ They are put off till then, till the general harvest and restitution of all things; and in the mean time they must be content to sow in tears, that they may reap the fruit of their labours and sufferings at that time, and have their cause judged at his tribunal. He useth the similitude of an husbandman: ‘Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.’ In some cases there may be no hope of our release till then, as the husbandman hath no profit by his seed until the harvest.

Secondly, I shall speak of this failing of the eyes.

1. Certainly the failing of the eyes is a fault, because it argueth the limiting of God, which is a great sin: Ps. lxxviii. 41, ‘They limited -the holy one of Israel.’ They limit God to times, means, instruments, present likelihood, and when these fail, their hearts fail. God cannot endure that his people, who ought wholly to depend upon him, and submit to him, should prescribe to him how or when he should help, as if they had a power of God, or could set bounds to his wisdom, mercy, omnipotency: all which are, as if he could do no more than what they conceive probable, or should act when they conceive fitting; and if he doth not then, that he never will, or can do it. They prescribe to his wisdom, control his power, question his love and truth.

2. As it is a fault, so it is a punishment. Though David here saith, ‘Mine eyes fail with waiting,’ for that salvation and mercy which thou hast promised in the word, yet it is the usual judgment of the wicked, one of the curses of the law. It is said, Deut. xxviii. 32, ‘Thy sons and daughters shall be given to another people, and thine eyes shall fail, in looking and longing for them all the day long.’ They should look and long for some help, for the rescuing of their children, even till their eyes did fail in waiting, but all in vain: so Job xi. 20, ‘The eyes of the wicked shall fail them, they shall not escape, but their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost.’ They may look for good, but never get the sight of it. Again, Deut. xxviii. 65, ‘The Lord shall give thee trembling of heart and failing of eyes.’ But though failing of eyes be a curse of the law, yet Christ became a curse for us. It is said in his name, Ps. lxix. 3 (for that psalm belongeth to Christ), ‘Mine eyes fail in waiting for my God.’ And so it is altered to us; it is a correction to humble us, and fit us for better -things.

3. Though it be a sin and punishment, yet the fault is not in God’s delay, but in the weakness and faintness of our hope. There was a fault in our first resolution for faith and patience. The children of God usually set to themselves a shorter period than the Lord doth. And so God is not slack, but we are hasty: 2 Peter iii. 9, ‘The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.’ And there is a weakness in the exercise of our faith and patience. They that look long for good, and the succour of his promises, the delay is troublesome to them. ‘Hope deferred maketh the heart sick,’ Prov. xiii. 12. Hope belongeth to love; and the affections of pursuit and love maketh absence tedious when afflicted in the interim; but faith and dependence upon God should keep us waiting, and patience should enable us to tarry his leisure: Jonah ii. 4, ‘I said, I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward the holy temple.’ There is our fault, that we give over hope and calling upon God, and depending on him, and holding fast on his covenant and promise, which we should not do. When God seemeth to turn his back on the saints, yet they will not forsake him.

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4. The hopes of God’s children fail them long, though not for ever. He many times bringeth his children to a low ebb, and doth for a long time withhold his aid, yet he doth not altogether forsake them: Isa. liv. 7, 8, ‘For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather

thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy redeemer.'

Use. Well, then, let us not be over-troubled at the delay of the promised and expected blessings.

1. We are hasty for mercy, slow to duty: Ps. cii. 2, 'When I call, answer me speedily.' We cry, How long? But how justly may God cry, How long? We complain of the delay of the promise; God may more justly complain of the delay of our obedience. How long do we make God stay and wait till our leisure come? Jer. iv. 14, 'O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?' and Jer. xiii. 27, 'O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?' To-day, now is the time we set God for mercy, to-morrow for duty. God must tarry our sinful leisure, and we will not tarry his holy leisure. God is our sovereign, we are debtors to him. Ours is a debt, his a free gift. If God had been as quick with you as you with him, where had you been?

2. It argueth weakness; a short walk is a long journey to the weak and sickly. It is the impatience of our flesh and the weakness of our faith. We would make short work for faith and patience, but God seeth then our graces would not be found to any praise and honour. God is the best judge of opportunities, therefore all must be left to his will and pleasure. Faith will not count it long; for to the eye of faith things future and afar off are as present: Heb. xi. 1, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' It is said, Isa. xxviii. 16, 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' Sense and carnal confidence must have present satisfaction, but faith contents itself with promises. Love will not count it long; for seven years to Jacob seemed as a few days, Gen. xxix. 20. Sufferings for Christ would not be so tedious, where love prevaileth. Patience would not count it long. Cannot we tarry for him a little while? Heb. x. 37, 'Yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry,' ἔτι γὰρ μίκρον ὅσον ὅσον. We love our own ease, and therefore the cross groweth irksome and tedious.

3. God is a God of judgment: Isa. xxx. 18, 'And 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.' Mercy will not come one jot too soon nor one jot too late; in the fittest time for God to give and us to receive: Heb. iv. 16, εὔκαιρον βοήθειαν, 'In the time of need.' We think we stay for God, but he stayeth for us. If we were ripe for mercy, God is always ready, for he is a present help: Ps. xlvi. 1, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.'

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I come now to the second clause, his longing desire after it, *saying, When wilt thou comfort me?* that is, David was ever and anon repeating and saying, 'Lord, when?' The Hebrews express their wishes by way of question: Oh, that thou wouldest comfort me!

Doct. 3. When our hope and help is delayed, we may complain to God for want of comfort.

1. What is the comfort which David intendeth? In the general, consolation is opposed to grief and mourning. Sin hath woven calamities into our lives, and filled us with. griefs, troubles, and sorrows, so that we need comfort. Comfort is either eternal, spiritual, or temporal.

[1.] Eternal: 2 Thes. ii. 16, 'Everlasting consolation and good hope through grace:' Luke xvi. 25, 'Remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.'

[2.] Spiritual, which is of two sorts:—

(1.) Comfort against the trouble of sin; in which respect the Holy Ghost is called the Comforter. In this respect the Holy Ghost biddeth them comfort the penitent incestuous person, 2 Cor. ii. 7.

(2.) Against affliction: so God is said to 'comfort those that are cast down,' 2 Cor. vii. 6; and Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul:' 2 Cor. i. 3, 4, 'Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.'

[3.] Temporal; so God is said to comfort those whom he freeth from afflictions: Ps. lxxi. 21, after deep and sore troubles, 'Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.' So the Lord comforteth his people, not by word only, but also by deed; not only by speaking comfort to them, but also by relieving them, and refreshing them, and freeing them from their troubles. So Isa. lii. 9, 'Sing, ye waste places, for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.' Though God's people lay low for a time, yet his blessing can exalt them beyond all expectation, and bring about such happiness as may make them forget their sorrows and miseries. This is intended here: Lord, when wilt thou give that deliverance which I pray for, and wait for at thy hands? Let it not seem strange that temporal deliverance should be owned as a comfort to God's people. Partly because they are acts of God's providence and dispensations of his grace, sought not[7] in a way of faith and prayer: Zech. i. 17, 'The Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.' Partly because by these he seemeth to own them, and confirm them in the privilege of his peculiar care, and that they have an interest in his favour; which by sad afflictions seemed to be an nulled and made void. But hereby God giveth proof of his favour to them: Ps. lxxxvi. 17, 'Show me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed; because thou, Lord, hast holpeu me, and comforted me:' that in their affliction godliness may not suffer, nor wicked men be hardened in their insolency. Partly as hereby promises are made good, and so faith confirmed: Isa. lvii. 18, 'I will heal him, and restore comforts to him, and to his mourners.' Partly as they are helps and encouragements to love and praise God, and to live in a thankful course of

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[7] Qu. 'out'? or 'for'?—ED.

holiness, when not stopped or diverted by fear of enemies: Isa. xii. 1, ‘In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.’ We may serve God more cheerfully then. Partly because as they have seen his wisdom and justice in their troubles, so now his power and grace and truth in their deliverance. They are more comfortable, because there is much of God discovered in them, Ps. cxv. 1. Lastly, because they are comfortable to the natural life. They are not so divested of all human respects. Yet therein the saints moderate themselves; they do not count these things their highest consolation. So it is said of the wicked, Luke vi. 24, ‘Woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation:’ and Luke xvi. 25, ‘Thou receivedst thy good things.’ Yet a sense they have, otherwise how can we be humbled under crosses, or give thanks for blessings?

2. We may complain of the delay of comfort. God’s children have done so: Ps. vi. 3, ‘But thou, O Lord, how long?’ Ps. xiii. 1, ‘How long wilt thou forget me, Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?’ so ver. 2, ‘How long shall mine enemies triumph over me?’ Ps. xciv. 3, 4, ‘Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter, and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?’ Reasons:—

[1.] Partly because prayer giveth ease; it is a vent to strong affections.

[2.] It reviveth the work of faith, hope, and patience.

[3.] Though God knoweth when to bestow blessings, yet he will not blame the desires of his children after them.

Use. Well, then, let us seek comfort, and complain not of God, but to God. Complaints of God give a vent to murmurings; but complaints to God, to faith, hope, and patience.

1. Refer the kind of comfort to God, whether he will give temporal deliverance, a comfortable sense of his love, or hopes of glory, a clearer right and title to eternal rest.

2. Yea, refer the thing itself. Comfort is necessary, because a great part of our temptations lie in troubles as well as allurements. Sense of pain may discompose us, as well as pleasure entice us. The world is a persecuting as well as a tempting world. The flesh troubleth as well as enticeth. The devil is a disquieting as well as an ensnaring devil. But yet comfort, though necessary, is not so necessary as holiness. Therefore, though comfort is not to be despised, yet sincere love to God is to be preferred; and though it be not dispensed so certainly, so constantly, and in so high a degree in this world, we must be contented. The Spirit’s comforting work is oftener interrupted than the work of holiness; so much as is necessary to our employment for God in the world we shall have.

3. Comfort is raised in us by the Spirit of God: Acts ix. 31, ‘Then had the churches rest, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.’ For means we have his word, his promises, and also his providence. His word: Rom.

xv. 4, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.' His promises: Ps. cxix. 50, 'This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me:' Heb. vi. 17, 18, 'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' And also his providence, protection, and defence: Ps. xxiii. 4, 'Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' The rod and staff are spoken of as instruments of defence.

4. Consider how ready God is to comfort his people: Isa. xl. 1 , 2, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.' When time serveth, God sendeth these messages.

SERMON XCI.

For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy precepts.—VER. 83.

HERE is rendered a reason why he doth so earnestly beg for comfort and deliverance. The reason is taken from his necessity, he was scarce able to bear any longer delay of comfort. Not only his faith and hope was spent, but his body was even spent through the trouble that was upon him. He had told us, in the 81st verse, 'My soul fainteth for thy salvation:' in the 82d verse, 'Mine eyes fail for thy word:' and now, 'I am become like a bottle in the smoke,' &c.

Observe here—(1.) His condition represented; (2.) His resolution maintained. Or—

First, The heat of tribulation, *I am become like a bottle in the smoke*.

Secondly, His constant perseverance in his duty, *Yet do I not forget thy precepts*.

1. His condition is represented by the similitude of a bottle in the smoke, alluding therein to a bottle of skin, such as the Jews used; as in Spain their wine is put into borachos, or bags made of hog-skins, ἀσκῳ ἐν αἰγείῳ; in Homer; in a vessel or bottle of goat-skin. And Christ's similitude of old bottles and new bottles relateth thereunto, Mat. ix. 17; for he meaneth it of skin-bottles or bladders, if such a bottle be hung up in the smoke, and by that means becometh black, parched, and dry. The man of God thought this a fit emblem of his condition. The Septuagint reads ἐν πάχνῃ, 'in the frost.' *Kitor* signifieth any fume or vapour, whether of smoke or mist; as Ps. cxlviii. 8, 'Fire and hail, snow and vapour.' The word for vapour is the same with this which is here rendered smoke. Here it signifieth smoke rather than vapour or mist.

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2. His resolution, ‘Yet do I not forget thy precepts.’ I do not forget; that is, I do not decline from or neglect my duty; as Heb. xiii. 16, ‘To distribute and communicate forget not,’ that is, neglect it not. As on God’s part, when he will not perform what belongeth to him, being hindered by our disobedience, he threateneth to forget his people, Jer. xxiii. 39, that is, will not deliver them; so we forget God’s precepts when we do not fulfil, or neglect, our duty. Now, forget God’s precepts he might either as his comfort or his rule; both ways must the word be improved and remembered by us; yet because the notion of precepts is here used, I understand the latter. Often is this passage repeated in this psalm; as ver. 51, ‘The proud have had me greatly in derision, yet have I not declined from thy law.’ Though scorned and made a mockage by those that were at ease, and lived in pomp and splendour, yet his zeal was not abated. Ver. 61, ‘The bands of the wicked have robbed me; yet have I not forgotten thy law.’ Though plundered by the violence of soldiers; so ver. 109, ‘My soul is continually in my hand; yet do I not forget thy law:’ that is, though he was in danger of death continually. We have it again, ver. 141, ‘I am small and despised; yet do I not forget thy law:’ though contemned and slighted as a useless creature, and one that might be well spared in the world. So in the text, ‘I am become like a bottle in the smoke,’ though wrinkled and shrivelled with age and sorrow. Thus in all temptations David’s love to God and his ways was not abated.

Doct. That though our trials be never so sharp and tedious, yet this must not lessen our respect to God or his word.

In handling this point I shall show you three things:—

1. That God may exercise his children with sharp and tedious afflictions.

2. That these afflictions are apt to draw us into manifold sins and errors of practice.

3. That yet this should not be; a gracious heart should withstand the shock of temptations.

For the first, David is an instance, whose sad complaint we have had continued for three verses together. I shall only now open the similitude in the text, whereby he representeth his condition.

1. A bottle in the smoke is dry and wrinkled and shrunk up; so he was worn out and dried up with sorrow and long suspense of expectation. This noteth the decay of his bodily strength. So also elsewhere: Ps. cii. 3, ‘My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burnt as an hearth.’ And he saith, Ps. xxxii. 4, ‘Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.’ His chief sap, oil, was spent, *humidum radicale*. As a leathern sack, long hung up in a smoking chimney, so was he dried up, and shrivelled and wrinkled by long-continued troubles and adversity. We are told, Prov. xvii. 22, that a ‘merry heart doth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones.’ A cheerful heart helpeth well to recover health lost, but a sad one breedeth diseases, as we see grief is often the cause of death. Now so it may often be with God’s children. God may so follow them with afflictions that sorrow may waste their natural strength,

and they may have such hard and long trials as to make them go into wrinkles, and what by temporal sorrows, troubles of conscience or sickness, the infirmities of age may be hastened upon them.

2. A bottle in the smoke is blacked and smutched, whereby is meant that his beauty was wasted as well as his strength; and as he was withered, so he was black with extreme misery: Job xxx. 30, 'My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burnt with heat.' So Lam. v. 10, 'Our skin was black as an oven, because of the terrible famine.' So Lam. iv. 8, 'Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones, it is withered, it is become like a stick.' So here 'like a bottle in the smoke.' And you must consider that this was spoken of David, that ruddy youth, of whom it was said, 1 Sam. xvi. 12, 'Now he was ruddy, of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.' But great sorrows had made an alteration, and afflictions do quickly cause the beauty of the body to fade: Ps. xxxix. 11, 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth.' God's rod may leave sad marks and prints upon the body, which do not only waste our strength, but deface our beauty. Ob serve here the difference between the beauty and strength of the body and of the soul. The beauty of the soul groweth fairer by afflictions, whereas that of the body is blasted. David was a bottle shrivelled and shrunk up, yet the holy frame of his soul was not altered; his beauty was gone, but not his grace. Outward beauty is but skin-deep; turn it inside out, it is but blood and rawness. It fadeth by sickness, age, troubles of conscience, and great and manifold afflictions. Once more; in the sight of God a man is never the more uncomely, though he be as a skin-bottle in the smoke, if he doth not 'forget his statutes:' if he be outwardly deformed, but yet the hidden man of the heart be well adorned, even with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price, 1 Peter iii. 3, 4. Any great affliction soon maketh an impression upon the skin. This flower of beauty is soon blown off; age or sickness will soon shrivel it up, and make it look like a bottle in the smoke; but let us regard the beauty of the soul, which fadeth not.

3. A dried bottle in the smoke is contemned and cast aside and of no use; so was David no more esteemed and regarded among men than such a bottle would be; and to this Christ alludeth, Mat. ix. 17, 'Men do not put new wine into old bottles, lest the bottles break, and the wine runneth out and perisheth.' An old, dry shrivelled bottle is good for nothing, the force of wine will soon break and rend it, therefore it is cast away as a thing of no use. So many times, to the great grief of their hearts, may God's children be laid aside as useless vessels. The world may cast them off as unworthy to live among them: 'It is not for the king's profit to suffer them,' Esther iv. 8; and 1 Cor. iv. 13, περικαθάρματα, 'We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things.' So Heb. xiii. 13, 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.' At that time they were cast out of the synagogues, or cities and societies. Was not Christ himself cast off, 'despised and rejected of men'? Isa. liii. 3, 'The stone which the builders refused:' though he were the corner stone of the building, yet they laid him aside as if he were of no use, as rubbish, or a refuse stone. So are his people thrust out by the world, laid by, as not deemed worthy to be employed

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for any use: Acts xxii. 22, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live.’ This is the judgment which the world maketh on God’s servants.

Secondly, What are the usual sins which are incident to such sharp and tedious afflictions?

1. Impatience and murmuring against God. When our wills are crossed we cannot bear it. To be sick of the fret is a disease very incident to such as have not learned to deny their own wills, and entirely to give up themselves to the conduct of God’s providence: Gen. xxx. 1, ‘Give me children, or I die;’ Ps. xxxvii. 1, ‘Fret not thyself because of evil-doers.’ We should not vex and fret, but we are apt to do so, to murmur and repine against God, and that for small matters, as Jonah for a gourd: ‘I do well to be angry,’ Jonah iv. 9. So strangely are men transported! Pettish desires earnestly solicited, and finally disappointed, breed this impatience in us. In every frame of heart, when notably stirred, we should say, Is this well? God puts the question to Jonah, ‘Dost thou well to be angry?’ What! to be discontented with Gods own providence, especially in small matters? But we let loose the reins to our passions, and if we be crossed a little, then ‘Let me die.’ Some of this impatience was in good David, for it presently followeth the text, ver. 84, ‘How many are the days of thy servant?’ If the affliction must last yet longer, then even let me know when I shall die.

2. A spirit of revenge against the instruments of our trouble. When we dare not let fly against God, we vent our passions freely against men, and seek their hurt and loss, and think we are safe. Whereas Christianity establisheth a universal and diffusive charity, even to enemies, that we should pray for them, and seek their good: Mat. v. 44, ‘Love.your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.’ The command of love doth not extend only towards kindred and friends and acquaintance, but even to enemies. I say unto you, Christ will try our sincerity and obedience by this precept, by forgiving wrongs, and forbearing all unjust and unmerciful revenge, and our love by loving our enemies. It is hard to bring the revengeful heart of man to it. The faults they have committed against us do not exempt us from the general law of charity, from doing good to them according to our power. As we must not hate or curse, or requite injury with injury, so we must love, bless, do good, and pray for them, wishing them all the good in the world, especially that which they most want, the good of their souls; returning friendly words for railing and evil speaking; feeding and clothing them when hungry, thirsty, or naked; desiring pardon and grace. This is our rule; but how few Christians comply with it, and conquer their unruly passions 1 No; rather justify them by the greatness of their temptations, and if they be kept from retaliating of injuries, that is rare. Most have too great a coldness and indifference for enemies: Prov. xxiv. 29, ‘I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.’ This is to take the work out of God’s hands, to review[8] the arrogance of Adam, ‘Be as gods.’ Generally men are vindictive and transported with

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[8] Qu. ‘revive’?—ED.

uncomely passions when wronged by men: 2 Sam. xvi. 9, ‘Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.’ This was the ruffling humour of Abishai; but David was in a calmer, cooler frame and temper of spirit: No; ‘God bid him curse.’ Many a man can bear afflictions, but not injuries. No man is troubled at a shower of rain, but if one cast a bucket or basin of water upon us, we shall not let it pass, if it be in the power of our hands, without revenge.

3. Using indirect means for our relief. It is better to pine away in affliction than to be freed from it by sin, to be as a bottle in the smoke than to forget our duty; therefore no trouble should drive us to sin, or to use sinful means for our escape; though worn out with expectation, let our duty hold our hands from evil. Whatever our trouble be, from the hand of God or men, we have no reason to go to the devil to ease us of it; as Saul goeth to the witch of Endor: 1 Sam. xxviii. 7, ‘Seek me out a woman that hath a familiar spirit.’ And to the devil we go when we use bad means. Carnal shifts are very natural to us, and when we cannot trust God, and depend upon him, we presently are apt to take some indirect course- of our own. Affliction is often compared to a prison, and the sorrows which accompany it to fetters and chains. Now, God, that puts us into prison, can only help us out again, for he is the governor and judge of the world. Now, to use carnal shifts is an attempt to break prison. We are not able to hold out till God send a happy issue, but take some carnal course of our own. If the heart be not the better resolved, thus it will be. The devil will make an advantage of our afflictions, if he can; he tempted Christ when he was hungry, Mat. iv. 3, so he tempteth us when he seeth us needy, disgraced, reproached, trampled under foot. No; though our estate be low, and the fountain of our supplies be dried up, though our credit be smutched and blacked with slander and reproach, though we be cast out as useless things, as an old withered skin-bottle, counted unfit to hold wine, yet we must not forget God’s precepts. We need not take a sinful course for the vindication of our credit from unjust reproaches: Isa. li. 7, ‘Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law: fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings.’ You that make reckoning of keeping close to my word, that have my law not only in your heads, but in your hearts, God hath his times to vindicate you; you need not distrust the providence of God under straits. When Jacob was low, he tells Laban, ‘My righteousness shall answer for me,’ Gen. xxx. 33. The hand of God will help us and reward honest labours, without our being false or unfaithful to men. We need not make a foul retreat in the day of trial, nor shift for ourselves by complying with the lusts of men, nor wax weary of our duty as quite discouraged and disheartened, Heb. xii. 3, as we are apt to do when troubles are grievous, and long continued.

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4. Another evil is desponding and distrustful thoughts of God. David, after all his experiences, was surprised with this kind of thoughts: 1 Sam. xxvii. 1, ‘I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.’ He had a particular promise and assurance of the kingdom, and had seen much of God’s care over him, and yet after all this David doubted of the word of God, and bewrayed his weakness of faith and affiance in him, who had watched over him, and delivered him out of many great and imminent dangers in a marvellous manner, when there was less appearance of hope than now, 1

Sam. xxii. 5; so Ps. xxxi. 22, ‘I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless, thou heardest the voice of my supplications, when I cried unto thee.’ God hath no more care and thought of me than if I were not. This was said at the very time when deliverance was coming. Here David yielded a little to foolish haste, and lost the staidness of his faith: so Ps. lxxvii. 7, 8, ‘Will the Lord cast off for ever? will he be favour able no more? is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?’ Questions to appearance full of despair and despondency, yet there is some faith couched under them. Will the Lord cast off? It implieth the soul cannot endure to be thrust from him. Will he be favourable no more? It implieth some former experience, and desire of new proof. Is his mercy clean gone? I have deserved all this, but God is merciful. Will not mercy help? To appearance indeed despair carrieth it from faith; that is upper most

5. Questioning our interest in God merely because of the cross. Our Lord hath taught us to say *My God* in the bitterest agonies; but few learn this lesson: Judges vi. 13, ‘If God be with us, why is all this befallen us?’ As if they were never exercised with trouble who have God with them. Sometimes we question the love of God because we have no afflictions, and anon because we have nothing but afflictions; as if God were not the God of the valleys as well as of the mountains, and his love did change with our outward condition, and worldly prosperity were a mark of grace, which, when lost, our evidence were gone. How hardly soever God dealeth with his people, yet he loveth them: Heb. xii. 6, ‘Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth:’ so Rev. iii. 19, ‘As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.’ A father is a father when he smileth and when he frowneth; he may have love in his heart when a rod in his hand; and we have no reason to question our adoption merely because we are put under the correction and discipline of the family.

6. Not only despairing thoughts do arise, but atheistical thoughts, as if there were no God, no providence, no distinction between good and evil, and it were in vain to serve him: Ps. lxxiii. 13, ‘I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.’ The flesh is importunate to be pleased, and therefore, when it meeteth not with desired satisfaction, we are apt to question all, and to cast off the fear of God, and all regard of his service: Mal. iii. 14, ‘Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?’ When temptations are sore, and afflictions tedious, thoughts of so horrid a complexion may float in our minds.

These are the distempers which are incident to those who have been long afflicted, and are often disappointed in the issue which they expect.

Thirdly, That this should not be. David omitted not his duty for all this, though his troubles were long and tedious. How great soever our trials be, they should not weaken our love to God and our respect to his word. God’s precepts must not be forgotten, though we are withered and dried up with sorrows, as a skin-bottle is shrivelled in the smoke.

1. Because then we plunge ourselves into a greater evil, if we fall into sin because of trouble and affliction, and so make our condition so much, the worse. Job's friends charged this upon him, that he had chosen sin rather than affliction, Job xxxvi. 21, when he would rather give way to impatience than patiently bear what God had laid upon him. Many are so transported with their pains and grievances that they care not what they say or do, as if they were loosed from all bands of duty. On the contrary, it is said of Moses, Heb. xi. 25, 'Choosing rather to suffer afflictions,' &c. The least sin is worse than the greatest suffering. Suffering is an offence done to us; sin is an offence done to God. By suffering we lose some worldly comfort, but by sinning hazard the favour of God. Suffering is only an inconvenience to the bodily or animal life; sinning bringeth a blot and blemish upon the soul. The sinful state is far worse than the afflicted. And therefore, how calamitous soever our condition be, we must take great care it be not sinful. Wormwood is bitter, but not poison.

2. A sincere love to God will make us adhere to him when he seemeth to deal most hardly with us. Among all his corrections, God hath not a rod smart enough to drive away a gracious and loving soul from himself: Ps. xliv. 17, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, nor dealt falsely in thy covenant.' God is the same, and his ways are the same, though his dispensations be changed; so different a thing it is to love the ways of God upon foreign and upon intrinsic and proper reasons; and the intent of such dispensations is to put us upon trial,—what be our reasons and motives why we love God and his ways, and whether our love be strong enough to encounter with difficulties, whether it can overcome temptations from sense and the world. Till all probabilities be spent, and our afflictions grow long and tedious, we are not tried to the purpose. Our covenant vow to God bindeth us to own him in all conditions, whatever our portion be in the world.

3. By forgetting God's precepts we put away our own comfort from ourselves, and make our afflictions the more grievous. Take the word *precepts* either strictly, for his commandments or statutes, or more largely, as it may also include his promises. If any faint and fail in trouble, it is because they trust not the promises, or keep not the commandments of God: these two mutually strengthen one another. If you would not have your faith broken, labour to keep the commandments. In the 166th verse of this psalm, 'I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.' And if you would keep the commandments, confirm your faith in the promises of forgiveness of sin, of God's providence, and eternal life; for if thou canst believe these, no pleasure or pain shall make thee forsake thy obedience, Ps. cxxx. 4. A child of God dareth not warp and turn away from God, in part or in whole, nor slacken any part of his diligence in God's service. Faith in God's promises breedeth obedience, and obedience confirmeth faith in God's promises. We apprehend promises to check that sensitive lure which would entice us from God and our obedience to him. A greater benefit is offered to counterbalance the baits and troubles of the flesh. The more we obey the precepts the more we believe the promises; for together with our obedience, our confidence and sound comfort increaseth: so that to forget the word is to throw away our strength from ourselves.

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4. Afflictions rightly improved are a means to make us remember God's precepts rather than to forget them, Heb. xii. 11. The baits of the flesh are removed that the spirit may be more at liberty, 2 Cor. iv. 16. God seeth fit to afflict the bodies of his people sometimes. The body, being in good plight, is a clog to the soul; therefore they are withered and wrinkled that the soul may thrive the more. Our worldly portion is blasted that our heavenly treasure may be increased. When we are at full we wax wanton, neglectful, forget his precepts. Now, that we may remember them the more, God sendeth such afflictions which sit near and close. The moon is never eclipsed but when it is at full; so many have eclipsed the glory of the spiritual life when full and at ease: therefore in afflictions we should not forget his word.

Use 1. To reprove us who are so soon discouraged in the ways of God. If we surfer but a little sickness, and a little trouble and contempt in the world, a little loss of honour and interest, the mocks and scorns of foolish men, we cannot bear it, but murmur and are impatient. David could submit himself to the Lord, and find sweetness in the word, though he were 'like a bottle in the smoke.' Few now-a-days suffer any great matter for Christ. Surely when God's people have endured harder things, we should be ashamed of our tenderness. Were we only appointed to escape the afflictions and inconveniences of our pilgrimage? And must God make a new way to heaven for our sakes, wherein we shall meet with no difficulty in our passage? Or rather, in defiance of all sense, would we abide here for ever, and flourish in ease and plenty, and never see change? No; it becometh us betimes to prepare for the cross. None so strong now but they shall wither, so ruddy and beautiful but their beauty shall consume as a moth; nor so happy and flourishing in honour and esteem but they will be laid aside as a dried, withered bottle. We must look to have our turn, and bear it patiently.

2. Let us not for any afflictions and troubles whatsoever abate of our zeal and diligence and respect to God's service.

First, It is not obedience to God's precepts or godliness that is the cause of our sufferings and chastenings, but our sin and folly: Micah ii. 7, 'Are these his doings? do not my wools do good to him that walketh uprightly?' God delighteth not in dealing harshly with his people. The rod is not that he taketh pleasure in, if our case do not call for it: Lam. iii. 33, 'He afflicts not willingly.' We provoke him to it. And shall we grow weary of his service because we suffer justly for our sins? There is reason indeed why we should grow weary of sin, Jer. ii. 19; we find the bitterness of it; but no reason why we should grow weary of duty. Sin less and suffer less. Provoke not God, and nothing will proceed from him but what is good and comfortable; he doth not punish or chasten men for holiness and well doing; no, it is for want of holiness. Shall the physician be blamed for the trouble of physic, when the patient hath contracted a surfeit that makes it necessary? It was sin in general brought us into a state of suffering, and particular errors that actually bring it on.

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Secondly, The benefits and fruit of afflictions should allay and abundantly recompense the trouble of them, that they should not be a hindrance or a snare, but a help to godliness. They prevent

our surfeit of worldly prosperity, which would cost us dearer than all the troubles of the flesh which we meet with. Alas! what sad work doth honour and wealth and power make in the world! Blessed be God that he keepeth us under, low, humble, and contemned, like bottles in the smoke. Shall a little affliction, which saveth us from these opportunities of discovering our corruption, be so resented by us as that we should wax weary of God and forget his precepts? Great and long prosperity would be a sorer temptation to us than sharp and tedious affliction; the one keepeth us modest and humble, whereas the other would make us vain and proud and wanton. 'When Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked:' Deut. xxxii. 15, 'He forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation;' slighted God, and grew cold in duty, ready to sin. As a rank soil breedeth weeds, a pleasant estate doth but fill us with vanity and folly.

Thirdly, God in good time will send help and deliverance. If we remember to plead the promise, God will remember to fulfil the promise. And those who are not unmindful of their duty, God will not be unmindful of their safety: Mal. iii. 16, 'The Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for those that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name.' You see there that God will not forget those that forget not his word. Those that keep their feet in the worst times, when others reel and stagger, God hath a great care of them. Every word you speak for God, every inconvenience you suffer for him, every duty you perform to him, it is all upon record.

Fourthly, We may with the more confidence recommend our case to God: Ps. cxix. 153, 'Consider mine affliction, and deliver me, for I do not forget thy law.' They that do not make haste to deliver themselves, God will deliver them. The same God that requireth duty doth assure them of comfort

SERMON XCII.

The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.—VER. 85.

THIS verse containeth a complaint against his enemies, whereas most of the other verses express his affection to the law of God. Yea, this verse strongly implieth it; for he censureth and condemneth his enemies mainly upon this ground, because they did what they pleased, without any regard to that law which he himself took to be the rule of his duty, and the charter of his hopes and happiness. Observe three things:—

1. The character of David's enemies, *the proud*.

2. Their practice, or subtle and treacherous dealing with him, *they have digged pits for me*.

3. David's censure of that practice, or their manifest iniquity, *which are not after thy law*.

Let us explain the words.

The proud.—In the scripture it signifieth—(1.) Either the wicked in general: Ps. cxix. 21, 'Thou hast rebuked the proud which are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.' It is a horrible arrogancy to oppose God's laws and interests in the world. (2.) More particularly such as are puffed up with worldly happiness and success, and so either Saul's or Absalom's counsellors may be intended.

Have digged pits for me.—A metaphorical phrase, usual in scripture, to represent the secret plots and treacherous dealings of wicked enemies; an allusion to them who dig pits to take wild beasts. In the Greek it is, 'They have told me tales.' Though this rendering was occasioned by a mistake of the word, yet it agreeth well enough with the sense, for this digging of pits by false pretences and ensnaring counsels: Prov. xvi. 27, 'An ungodly man diggeth up evil, and in his lips there is as a burning fire.' But let us keep to the translation we have. The manner of toils among the Jews was digging pits, and covering them over, and hiding snares in them, that as the beast pressed the clod, and fell therein, he might be caught, and kept from getting out again. Therefore David saith, Ps. xxxv. 7, 'Without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.'

Which are not offer thy law.—Heb., 'Not after thy law.' It may refer to the men or the practice; who walk not according to thy law, or which fraudulent practices of theirs are not agreeable to thy law. The law of God condemned pits for tame beasts: Exod. xxi. 33, 34, 'If a man open a pit, or dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or ass fall therein, the owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money to the owners of them.' Though it was lawful for hunters to take wild beasts, yet they were to take heed that a tame beast fell not therein, at their peril. Yet not for men innocent, and holy men. But there is a *litotes* in the words. That is said not to be good or well done which is extremely evil, very contrary to thy law. Thus we are wont to speak of a tiling horrid in terms of extenuation; as when we speak of a fact, It is not very commendable, when we mean it is extremely abominable. So crafty and subtle dealing consenteth not with the truth of God's word; that is, it is extremely opposite to it. This is produced by David as a ground of his confidence, why he hoped he should not be taken in these pits. These practices were not only injurious to himself, but contemptuous of the law of God. He layeth forth his enemies' carriage before God. Note—

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1. That secret plottings against the interests of God and his people in the world are an ancient practice.

2. That these plots usually begin in pride.

3. That God can, when he will, and usually doth, protect his people against the plots of the proud, or the fraud as well as the violence of enemies.

4. That God's law forbiddeth all mischievous, ungodly, treacherous designs, attempts, and actions.

5. That the innocent should not be much troubled to be maligned and hated by them who contemn God's laws, as well as oppose his people.

I shall gloss on these points, and then close all with application.

First point. That secret plottings against the interest of God and his people are an ancient practice.

David here complaineth that the proud had digged pits for him; and Ps. xxxvii. 12, 'The wicked plotteth against the just;' yea, ver. 7, it is a description of a wicked man, 'The man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.' It is so known a practice that it is gotten into their name and style. A wicked man's brain is a forge that is always hot. So Ps. vii. 14, 'Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood.' Wicked men conceive, and then travail, but usually the birth proveth abortive. To represent the truth to you, I shall give you a draught of some of the designs of wicked men:—(1.) For the suppressing of God's interest and people in the world. (2.) Private persons.

For the *first*, you cannot imagine that I should unravel all the secrets of the kingdom of darkness, and break open the devil's cabinet. I shall only point at some few plots and contrivances for the ruin of God's interest in the world.

First, Plots to foment and promote divisions, either between them and themselves, them and their rulers, or them and God himself.

1. Them and themselves. Ever since God had a people in the world, the devil and his instruments have sought to divide them, that they may first ruin one another, and then become a prey to their common adversaries. Nothing hath hindered the growth of Christianity so much as the spirit of division. Πολλοὺς χριστιανίζειν ἀπέτραπεν (Sozomen). And Chrysostom's ἦλθεν ἔθνικος τὶς, in his homilies upon the Acts: there came a certain ethnic to him, and told him, I would fain be a Christian, but there are so many parties among you that I know not to whom I should join myself. And Christ's prayer intimates, John xvii. 21, 'That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me,' &c. The world are apt to look upon Christ as an imposter, and his religion as a fond superstition, when they see his people so divided and scattered one from another. Divisions in the church breed atheism in the world. Now Satan and wicked men have endeavoured all they can to keep up these divisions and hatred among Christians. This was Julian the apostate's design. When he had a mind to suppress Christianity, he did not openly persecute it, but took the worst sort of Christians and upheld them, that they might still maintain a quarrel between them and others. In Germany the Jesuits go over to the Lutherans to keep up the difference; they blow the coals, and then warm themselves by the flame. And among us the envious man hath sown tares: 'Is not the hand of Joab in all this?' By what spirit are the Quakers and others acted, and why are these things kept up, but

to render Christianity odious? Sanballat and Tobias set up a party among the Jews to hinder the work of their restoration, Ezra iv. 4, that they might foment division among them, and so hinder the growth of the people's prosperity, for they had now the countenance of the king of Babylon, and by this means they thought to do so.

2. To divide between them and their rulers. The devil knoweth what an advantage it is to religion to have the countenance of princes, and, on the other side, how jealous they are of their authority and prerogative; and therefore by his instruments seeketh to prejudice and prepossess them against it, and those that profess it in strictness and power. Thus 'Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words,' Amos vii. 10. He chargeth him with treason and open rebellion, that he withdrew subjects from their duty, and excited the people against his authority, and this by clancular insinuation, when Amos was not called or heard. Thus they pretend great friendship to authority, to sharpen the rage of princes against God's servants. So Ezra iv. 12, 'Be it known unto the king that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city,' &c. So Saul against David, as appears by his expostulation with him about it: 1 Sam. xxiv. 9, 'Wherefore nearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?' So Haman against the Jews: Esther iii. 8, 'Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.' So in primitive times; thus did they take the Christians, who were most innocent, though they were more numerous; yet still they were faithful to their prince: *Bibamus pro salute imperatoris*; they would rather endure to die than venture upon it, for they did apprehend it as a heathen sacrifice. Thus whisperers make princes conceive an ill opinion of religious men.

3. To divide between them and God. The devil turneth every stone. Would you ever think malice should rise so high as to disengage God from the protection of his people, and to disaffect him against them? How can it be? Have Satan and his instruments a plot upon God himself? What else should be the meaning of all his temptations? But see Balaam's plot, Micah. vi. 5, 'O my people, remember what Balak the king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered from Shittim unto Gilgal,' &c. Balak and Balaam are framing a project how to overcome the Israelites, and that can never be as long as God is with them; and how shall they do to get away God from them? Jehovah was not as a heathen god, to be called out by sacrifices and enchantments, as they had their charms and rites among the heathens to call out their tutelar gods from among the nations against whom they came to fight. Macrobius hath a chapter, *De Ritu evocandi Deos*. They were now to deal with the God of Israel, who would not be moved with such deceits and blandishments; therefore they will have a plot to disengage him from his people. It is insinuated, Num. xxiv. 14, 'Come now, and I will advertise thee what thou shalt do.' Moses doth not express the counsel given, because it was whispered secretly into Balak's ear; therefore you see the sense

is imperfect in that place, and indeed there is a pause in the Hebrew, to show that something must be supplied. But what the plot was may be known by the effect, in the 25th of Numbers, and is in brief set forth, Rev. ii. 14, where it is said of Balaam, that 'he caused Balak to lay a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.' This was the plot, to send some beautiful women of Midian to wander about the camp of Israel, to tempt their lusty youth and martial men first to uncleanness and then to idolatry, that so God might be provoked against them—a plot so full of refined malice, that it can hardly be paralleled. Thus the devil and his instruments play their part sufficiently, to divide God's people, to prejudice their rulers, yea, to disaffect God himself.

Secondly, Plots to discourage and suppress religion. So there are many ways which wicked men take. Who can name them all? I shall only instance in two policies of Julian the apostate, the most refined instrument the devil used either for wit or malice; two ways especially did he seek to undermine religion.

1. One was to forbid the use of schools to the Christians, and sup press human learning. To make a people irreligious, the way is to make them ignorant; discourage learning, and piety will not be long in fashion, not able long to maintain itself: in the dark men will adore any fancy. This was like Nahash his condition to Jabesh Gilead, 'Put out their right eye.' God's two famous instruments who wrote most both of the Old and New Testament, Paul and Moses, were both excellently skilled in secular learning.

2. Another was to put none to death for religion, but to oppress them with all manner of vexations and discouragements. To put them to death he apprehended to be glorious; but sometimes banished them towns. As Athanasius[9] deprived them of all offices civil and military, wasted them with burdensome levies and exactions: Let us make them poor, saith he scoffingly, for it is a hard matter for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The devil doth his work more cleverly and handsomely when Christians are not called out to the fire and gibbet, but are wasted by lingering inconveniences and loss of privileges.

Thirdly, Plots to introduce persecution.

1. Defamation. Infamy is the forerunner of more trouble, and the showers of slander are but presages of grievous storms of persecution. The devil is first a liar and then a murderer, John viii. 44. When the children of God are represented as criminal, they are more easily destroyed. It was a fashion in the primitive persecutions to invest Christians with a bear's skin, and then to bait them as bears. And it is a usual practice of Satan and his instruments to blast the repute of religious

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9 Qu. 'Antoninus'?—ED.

persons, to clothe them with the livery of reproach, and then prosecute them as offenders: Ps. v. 9, 'Their throat is an open sepulchre.' The slanders of the wicked are preparatives to death, as the sepulchre when opened is prepared to receive the dead carcase. Men first slander and then molest The devil is afraid to meddle with unstained innocency. A good report is a great security against open violence.

2. To destroy the church, under the pretence of the church; as the beast in the Revelations pushed with the horns of the lamb, Rev. xiii. 11. It was a proverb, All evil began in the name of the Lord—*In nomine Domini incipit omne malum.* And it hath been a false pretended zeal for the church that hath of later years raised and fomented all or most of the persecutions of Christians.

3. To destroy Christians upon the pretence of civil quarrels and laws, and to disguise hatred against religion under a pretence of public peace; kill you, as well as cast you out of the synagogue. Dan. vi. 4, the Persian noblemen 'sought to find occasion against Daniel because of the kingdom, though they found none.'

4. To make way for errors and falsehoods; so many pits do the wicked dig to beguile unwary and unstable souls, sometimes by more than ordinary pretences of love, meekness, and sweetness. 'They come to you in sheep's clothing,' saith our Lord, 'but inwardly are ravening wolves,' Mat. vii. 15. Sheep's clothing, that is, all for love and kindness, and so steal away the hearts of the people, as Absalom by his submission and servile flattery. And then by debasing, opposing, and crying down a faithful ministry. Demosthenes' fable of the wolves agreeing with the sheep *in lusu*[10] would send away their dogs. Now thus they do by questioning their calling, as the false teachers did Paul's; and we have been so long unministering one another, that all ministry is hated in the hearts of many an anti-ministerial spirit. Sometimes by decrying maintenance. The lamp is starved when not supplied with oil. Some, to gain credit and entrance, and to disgrace Paul and the true evangelic ministers, whose poverty needed a supply, will take no maintenance; therefore Paul saith, 2 Cor. xi. 12, 'That wherein they glory we might be as they;' but there is no end of raking in this puddle.

Secondly, Private persons. Cain against Abel, drew him into the field, disputed with him about God and providence and the world to come, Gen. iv. The princes of Darius against Daniel, Dan. vi. The kingdom was but newly subdued by the Medes: this would try the affection of his subjects; no request to be made to God or man for thirty days. The Medes and Persians were wont to ascribe divine honours to their kings, as Brissonius proveth. The report of this reverence would be glorious. Religion was at stake; therefore Daniel would venture the lions' den. Judas's treason against Christ: Luke xxii. 3, 'The devil entered into Judas.' The Jews' laying in wait for Paul: Acts xxiii. 12-14, 'Certam Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, or oath of execration, that they would not eat or drink till they had killed Paul: and they were more than forty that had made

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[10] Qu. 'in case they'?—ED.

this conspiracy.' And this they would do with the consent of the chief priests, as he was coming to the Sanhedrim. A parallel in the fifth of November. So Jezebel's plot against Naboth for his vineyard; makes use of God's name and worship to bring it about, 1 Kings xxi. 8-10. But I must stop, being carried beyond my first intention: plotted mischiefs are an ancient practice.

Use of all. How much are we obliged to God's providence, who doth not only defend us against open violence, but secret machinations f It is the Lord taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and disappointeth the counsels of wicked men against his people, Job v. 12. Many things are contrived against us in the dark that we know not and see not, but the eye of the Lord watcheth for us: Isa. viii. 10, 'Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought: speak the word, and it shall not stand, for God is with us.'

Second point. That these plots usually begin in pride; for David saith here, 'The proud have digged pits for me.' Therefore it is pride that puts men upon designs of mischief and ruin to others. Pride showeth itself in the envy of superiors, contention with equals, or the disdain of inferiors.

1. Take pride as it venteth itself by envy at any excellency, or sup posed excellency, in others. Search the scriptures, and you will say this puts men upon plotting the mischief of their neighbours' religious eminency. Man cannot endure to be outstripped in religion; therefore men malign and hate what they will not imitate, and then seek to destroy and undermine God's people. It was Abel's goodness that made Cain plot against him, to draw him into the field that he might kill him, 1 John iii. 12. The power of godliness is an eyesore to those that would look no further than the form of it. Or it may be the men of the world do envy the godly should thrive by them. This made the presidents lay a snare and gin for Daniel. When the gospel is likely to get credit, 'the Jews, moved with envy,' seek to suppress it, Acts xvii. 5. Pride is loath to stoop, or to see opposites in any honour and request. The Pharisees conspired to take Christ: John xii. 19, 'Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? the whole world is gone after him.' They were galled to the heart to see such flocking and resorting to Christ after he had raised Lazarus from the dead. Some men will neither serve Christ themselves, nor endure that others should do it, therefore Christ must be taken out of the way. The plots of Sanballat and Tobias were their envy at the Jews.

2. As pride venteth itself by contention with equals; for only 'by pride cometh contention.' Thus the Jews conspired to kill Paul; they looked upon him as one that had cried down the customs of their nation. This made Absalom plot the death of Amnon, because of the quarrel he had with him, and the dishonour he had done his sister: he bids him to dinner, and plieth him with cups till he is merry, and then killeth him, 2 Sam. xiii. 22.

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3. As it venteth itself by the disdain of underlings. Haman could not endure to see Mordecai in the king's gate, Esther v. 13, and therefore contriveth how to root him out and all his nation. Pride disdaineth the meanness of God's people, and that they should have any subsistence, and think they may oppress them freely, and root them out: Ps. cxxiii. 4, 'We are filled with the scorning of those

that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.' They scorn the people of God, and think they may do what they please with them without control.

Well, then, this informeth us how much we should look to things betimes. The wickedness of David's enemies began in pride, went on in malicious plotting, and then they stick at no iniquity. When once we are engaged in a course of sin, there is usually no stop. Pride in some sense is the original of all wickedness, but more especially of malicious dealing with the people of God: Ps. x. 2, 'The wicked, in the pride of his heart, doth persecute the poor.' The godly many times are in a mean condition when their adversaries are in power, and can easily oppress them as underlings; but men forget the great God, who is their defender, and whose work and business it is to cast down the proud: James iv. 6, ἀντιτάσσεται, he standeth in battle array. And proud they are certainly who use their power to oppression, and care not what terms they put upon them.

Third point. That God can, when he will, and usually doth, protect his people against the plots of the proud; for therefore David bringeth the cause before God.

First, That God can, when he will, protect his people against the fraud and violence of their enemies. There are two grounds of trust—his wisdom, and the vigilancy of his providence.

1. His wisdom. As we have God's power to trust in against their violence, so God's wisdom against their frauds and deceits: Job xii. 13, 'With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding.' Wisdom implieth his accurate knowledge of things; counsel, his advised government of them; wisdom, his disposing and ordering things aright with respect to their ends. He hath understanding to find out all secrets, counsel to know fit means to bring his purposes to pass, and wisdom to order the means for attaining these ends.

Observe there, first, how wisdom and strength are there coupled; as in that text, so elsewhere: Job ix. 4, 'He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength.' As he hath wisdom to judge, so power to execute or effect all his counsels. So Job xxxvi. 5, 'Behold God is mighty in strength and wisdom.' There is no standing out against supreme wisdom and invincible power; both together make God the most dreadful enemy and the most desirable friend.

Observe, again, how God's wisdom is set forth by these three words, *understanding, counsel, wisdom*, to assure the hearts of the faithful that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against' the church of God, Mat. xvi. 18. In the gates anciently was their strength, and there their magistrates and council sat. Now, they that believe that God is wise, of whom should they be afraid? Prov. xxi. 30, 'There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.' There may be wisdom, counsel, and understanding in the enemies of the gospel; and in the Lord there is wisdom and strength, counsel and understanding. Only against him there is the wisdom, counsel, and understanding of the creature; in him, of the creator. Surely the wisdom, counsel, and understanding of the creature can do nothing without him, nothing against him. Not without him, for it is dependent;

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whatever the creature hath it cometh from him; otherwise our understanding is but ignorance, our counsel rashness, our wisdom folly. Pharaoh thought to go wisely to work, Exod. i. 10; but that wisdom costs dear when it tends to suppress God's interest. Ahab, when God threatened to cut off his posterity, begets seventy sons, bestowed them in fenced cities, 2 Kings x. 1; but those seventy sons were slain. Herod thought to go wisely to work, to destroy him that was born king of the Jews in the cradle; but Christ was preserved for all that. The synagogue of Satan is hatching crafty counsels to destroy the spouse of Christ, but with what effect? The man of sin is consumed more and more. We are afraid of our subtle enemies, but are we in such straits as God knoweth not how to bring us out? They cannot outwit the Lord. Whatever is plotted in Rome or hell against us, God knoweth it, for he hath understanding; God counter-worketh it, for he hath counsel; therefore they will but play the fool, for he hath wisdom. He heareth every word they say, knoweth their secret juggling, is at work for those that depend upon him; therefore let us rest in God's wisdom, and not be disquieted with every rumour.

2. The care and vigilancy of his providence. It is emphatically expressed in two places: Heb. xiii. 5, 6, '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;' and Ps. cxxi. 4, 'Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.' In both there is a negative gradation. His eyelids try the children of men; the Lord waketh for us all.

Secondly, That usually he doth protect his people against the plots of the proud, and bringeth the mischief they intend to others upon their own heads: Job xv. 35, 'They conceive mischief and bring forth vanity, and their belly prepareth deceit.' But to keep the notion of the text: Ps. vii. 15, 'He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made;' Ps. ix. 15, 16, 'The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared by the work of his own hand: they are sunk down into the pit they digged; in the net which they hid is their own feet taken.' So Ps. xxxv. 7, 8, 'For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul. Let destruction come upon him at unawares, and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall;' and Ps. x. 2, 'Let them be taken in the device they have imagined;' and Ps. lvii. 6, 'They have prepared a net for my step; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, in the midst whereof they are fallen themselves.' All these places show how usual it is that their devices do not succeed; yea, that the wicked cannot take a nearer course to ruin themselves than to seek the overthrow of God's church and people. All their machinations turn to their own loss, and the mischief they design to others falls constantly on themselves. As a stone thrown up or an arrow shot up against heaven returneth upon the head of him that throweth it, their acts and attempts of hurting others are converted to their own ruin, and destruction seizeth upon them by that very means by which they thought to bring it upon other men. This God doth, partly as they are proud, as they despise God and his people: Ps. x. 4, 'The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.' They are so confident of all they design, that they will not so much as call upon God for a blessing:

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this is so firmly laid, that all things shall succeed. They will not seek after God through the pride of their countenance; or suppose they should pray, it is but as Balaam offering sacrifice to entice God to curse his own people. The Lord telleth us, Prov. xxi:27, 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?' Partly because of God's care and respect to his people: 'The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless,' Ps. x. 14. He trusts his all with God, who is the patron of the innocent and oppressed.

Use 1. To direct us to carry the cause to God, as David in the text: Ps. lxxxiii. 2-4, 'For lo, thine enemies make a tumult, and they that hate thee have lift up the head: they have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones: they have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.' You must make the Lord the party still against the wicked. So Ps. xxxvii. 12, 'The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.' The wicked plotteth; but do the just countermine him? No; the Lord interposeth; he laugheth at him. It is a mighty support to the soul to oppose his justice to their wickedness, his omnipotency to their power, his wisdom to their craft, his love to their enmity. They are in God's hands, and cannot stir without him: as if one designed to poison me, but cannot do it without my father's consent. Wicked men are full of their boasts, but their brags and threats are but as the brags of a man on the scaffold, who is ready to be executed. Their day is coming.

2. When God doth so it must be acknowledged with thankfulness and praise; yea, though an old mercy, Micah vi. 5. The godly are preserved though there be pits digged for them. Surely such experiences ought much to engage his people's hearts to him, for it showeth how mindful he is of their safety and welfare. Blessed be God that yet we subsist, that their devices are disappointed, and their designs brought on them, what they had projected against others.

Fourth point. That God's law forbiddeth all ungodly, treacherous designs, attempts, and actions.

As contrary to justice. To design mischief and treachery against the life of any is the guise of wicked men.

As contrary to sincerity and godly simplicity: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-wards.' Crafty and subtle dealings consenteth not with those that profess to direct their ways by the word of God.

As contrary to charity and mercy, which we owe to all men. How God hath guarded the life of the innocent by his precepts, and what a base perverse spirit it is to dig pits for them.

Use. Here is some plea for religion. It is not *feralis superstitio. Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum?* It is not a false, unnatural, unkind superstition, when men, under pretence of it, commit such evils, digging pits, laying mines and barrels of gunpowder, that religion should persuade all

this. The world thinks that religion is a sour superstition, that it makes men ill-natured. No; it is the peaceablest and meekest thing that can be. A false religion indeed efferates the mind, begets a bloody spirit: Jude 11, ‘Gone in the way of Cain;’ in the way of blood and murder. They that have either a false religion, or are false in the true religion, indeed they are ill-natured and possessed with a rough spirit, unfit for human society. The true religion, which God hath established in his law, is the meekest thing in all the world.

Fifth point. That the innocent should not be much troubled to be maligned and hated by them who contemn God’s laws. Why?

For their wickedness, fraudulency, and cruelty is a certain prognostic of their ruin. The more their sins are aggravated, their judgment cometh the sooner. God’s law is wronged, as well as our interest endangered.

It is a great ease to the conscience of the godly that they dig pits for us without a cause, Ps. xxxv. 7. The most godly and innocent may have pits digged for them. It encourageth us in our addresses to God, that we have no enemies but those who are enemies to God also and his ways; and the most wicked men are most violent against God’s people. Who was it first raged against the Christians but Nero? And what a beast was Nero! That must needs be some great good that was condemned by Nero, but it was an honour and credit to religion to have such an enemy as Nero: Ps. v. 10, ‘Let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against thee.’ It is some argument of confidence that their ruin is coming.

Use. What use shall God’s people make of the whole for themselves?

1. Never to engage in any design but what will suit with God’s word, and you may commend to God in prayer. Do not dig pits which are not after God’s law. Examine it according to rule. Never break a law for safety, nor for the best ends in the world dispense with your duty to God or man. It is horrible distrust of God’s promises to venture upon the breach of his precepts for our pretended safety. Take heed of doing anything or carrying any plot against God’s law, unless you would be like the enemies of the gospel.

2. Walk with greater simplicity, without that guile and double-dealing and serpentine wisdom that is so proper to wicked men. He that walketh uprightly walketh safely. Protection holds good for the road and not for byways, 2 Cor. i. 12. The proud are those that dig pits; the character of those that shall have pardon for their sins is this, ‘In whose spirit there is no guile.’ A guileful spirit ill suits with the gospel and the grace of God.

3. Take heed of carnal affections. Pride, envy, contempt of others, we know not how far these lusts may transport us, to what horrid, unnatural designs. When once the devil hath a man upon the hip, when engaged in an evil design, it is hard to stop; pride then digging pits, and then casting off

God's law; and then he never cares whether to please or displease, honour or dishonour God, is not troubled with such kind of thoughts.

4. Take heed how you engage against God's people, or dig pits for them that fear the Lord. God's interest usually goeth along with them: Isa. viii. 9, 10, 'Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken to pieces: take counsel together, and it shall come to nought.' As the captain's servant said, 'Take heed what ye do, for this man is a Roman.' So these men are children of God, he is their patron and protector; God is interested in their protection; they are little ones, but they have a great God, Mat. xviii. 10. Therefore take heed of having any interest opposite to the strict people of God, for this is but to ruin yourselves.

SERMON XCIII.

For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.—VER. 89.

THESE words are usually rendered as making but one proposition; but the accent *athnah* showeth there are two branches, the one asserting the eternity of God, the other the constancy and permanency of his word. Thus—(1.) 'For ever art thou, O Lord;' (2.) 'Thy word is settled in the heavens.' So the Syriac version readeth it; and Geierus, and after him others, prove and approve this reading. And so this verse and the following do the better correspond one with another, if we observe beginning and ending, as 'Thou art for ever, O Lord,' and 'Thy faithfulness unto all generations,' which are exactly parallel. And then the last clauses, 'Thy word is settled in the heavens,' 'Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.' And implieth, as God is eternal, so is his word, and hath an emblem and fit representation both in heaven and in earth: in heaven, in the constant motion of the heavenly bodies; in earth, in the consistency and permanency thereof; that as his word doth stand fast in heaven, so doth his faithfulness on earth, where the afflictions of the godly seem to contradict it

First, Of the first clause, 'Thou art for ever, O Jehovah.'

1. That Jehovah is the one, only, eternal, and everlasting God. What eternity is passeth our skill exactly to define. As we understand it, it is the duration of a being that is without beginning or end. Duration is a continual tract of being; and eternal duration implieth an immutable and unterminable abode in being. So it is here.

[1.] It is an infinite, unterminable duration, without beginning or ending: Ps. xc. 2, 'From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.' God never was nothing, never shall be nothing. All the generations past were, but now are not. We heretofore were not, but now are. God is the beginning and end of all things, yet himself without beginning or end. He had an infinite, incomprehensible

being before any part of the world was framed, and will remain the same still when the world shall be no more. The soul, in viewing God, is enclosed between infiniteness before and infiniteness behind, and which way soever it looketh it seeth infiniteness round about it.

[2.] Immutable; as without beginning and end, so without any change: Ps. cii. 25-27, 'Of old thou hast kid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they shall perish, but thou shalt endure, yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.' God from the mount of eternity beholdeth all the successions and changes of the creature; but he is not changed, his nature is one and the same from everlasting to everlasting. We change every day; we are not that to-day which we were yesterday; we have left some part of our life behind us, which is gone, and cannot be recovered; and our duration lesseneth every day; but God abideth for ever one and the same, though all things be in continual flux and motion about him.

2. Now, that God is eternal I shall prove by scripture and reason.

[1.] By scripture: Gen. xxi. 33, 'Abraham called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.' The gods of the nations were upstart gods, but lately found out and soon destroyed; but he is the eternal God, who ever was, and is, and ever will be: Job xxxvi. 26, 'Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out.' He speaketh of God's eternity in such terms as man is capable of; for God's being is not to be measured by days and years, but so we express it for our understanding, for his duration is far above our reach and capacity. So Isa. lvii. 15, God is said to 'inhabit eternity.' Thus the scripture propounds God's eternity as matter of our faith, reverence, and admiration.

[2.] By reason, because the perfection of the first cause requireth that his duration should be without beginning or ending, or, which is all one, eternal. He is *Jehovah*, that hath his being from himself, and all other things have their being after him and from him. Some thing must be eternal, or else there would be nothing made. It is certain that if there had been a time when nothing was, there never would be anything, for something cannot come out of nothing; therefore we must stop in some first Cause and eternal being.

3. That eternity belongeth to God is to be seen in all his attributes; for if God be eternal, his wisdom, power, and goodness are eternal also.

[1.] His wisdom is eternal, for all things are present to the knowledge of God. Things come to our knowledge successively, some before, and some after. We see and know things according to their duration and existence. We compute by days and years, yesterday, to-morrow, last year, and next year. One generation passeth and another cometh, but in God's understanding there is no succession of before and after: 'Known to God are all his works from the beginning,' Acts xv. 18. God, that doth all things in time, knew them all before time, otherwise his knowledge was not

infinite and eternal; they are all present to his understanding. Hence is that expression: 2 Peter iii. 8, 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' All those differences of duration, which to the creatures are longer or shorter, are all alike to God; for all things are constantly present to God, and under his view and prospect. Indeed the Lord is pleased to condescend to our shallow capacities, and to give us leave to express his duration in our own terms, whilst he calleth himself 'Yesterday, to-day, and for ever,' Heb. xiii. 8; and Rev. i. 4, 'From him which is, which was, and which is to come.' Yet in proper speaking, God always is. I AM is his name; and all things to him are present, either past, present, or to come. Time hath no succession to him: he beholdeth at once what is not at once, but at several times; there is nothing past to him, to come to him, but all present. He knoweth the end of all things before he giveth them a beginning.

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[2.] His power is eternal; therefore it is said, Rom. i. 20, that his eternal power and godhead is clearly understood from the creation of the world, and seen in the things that are made. How else could so many things be educed out of nothing, and still kept from returning into their original nothing, if there were not an infinite and eternal power then and still at work? So Isa. xxvi. 4, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.' We may depend upon him, for his arm is never dried up, nor doth his strength fail; there is no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity. God is where he was at first; he continueth for ever a God of infinite power, able to save those that trust in him.

[3.] His goodness and mercy are eternal: Ps. cxxxvi., it is often repeated, 'For the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever.' It is true a parte ante his mercy did not begin of late, but was towards us before we or the world were; from all eternity we were thought upon, that he might do us good himself. It is said, 'With an everlasting love have I loved thee, and therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn thee,' Jer. xxxi. 3. Whomsoever God draweth to himself in time, he loved them before all time. And *a parte post* it holdeth good; his love and affection continueth the same, and shall do for ever; he is not weary of doing good, nor is his mercy spent. You have both, Ps. ciii. 17, 'The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him.' The mercy was decreed and prepared before the beginning of the world, and we shall have the fruits and effects of it when the world shall be no more. It was from everlasting; for God, foreseeing the fall of Adam, provided us a remedy in Christ; and having all lapsed in his prospect and view, did out of his free love choose some, whilst others are passed by, to life and salvation by Christ. That God did from eternity decree and purpose this is manifest, because he doth in time effect it, otherwise he should not 'work all things according to the counsel of his will,' Eph. i. 11, or else his will would be mutable, willing that in time which he willed not from eternity; whereas in him there is no variableness or shadow of turning. And that his mercy is to everlasting appeareth because he doth in time convert and sanctify them, and so bring them to glory and blessedness; for the eternal God will make his people eternally happy with himself.

4. That God showeth himself as an eternal being, both as a governor and benefactor.

[1.] As a governor. His eternity is seen in his government, in threatening eternal misery to the wicked, and appointing eternal happiness to the godly: Mat. xxv. 46, ‘These shall go away into ever lasting punishment, and the righteous into life everlasting.’ The joys of the blessed are everlasting; there shall never be a change of nor interruption in their happiness, but after millions of years they are to continue in this life as if it were the first moment. Thy crown will be thy crown for ever; thy kingdom thy kingdom for ever; this glory will be thy glory for ever; thy God will be thy God, and thy Christ, for ever. We affect the continuance of this life, though it be a life of pain and misery: ‘Skin for skin, and all a man hath, he will give for his life.’ Oh, how much more valuable should this eternal life be, which is a life of uninterrupted joy and felicity! On the other side, the punishment is everlasting, the loss is eternal, the wicked are everlastingly deprived of the favour of God. The disciples wept when Paul said, ‘Ye shall see my face no more.’ Oh, how much more terrible will it be to be banished everlastingly out of God’s presence! Mat. xxv. 41. Besides, the pain will be eternal, as well as the loss. This worm never dieth, this fire shall never be quenched, Mark ix. 44. Neither heaven nor hell hath any period or end, either of them are eternal. Now this way God ruleth and governeth the creature, as becoming his infinite and eternal majesty. The laws of kings and parliaments can reach no further than some temporal punishment; their highest pain is the killing of the body; their highest reward is some vanishing and fading honour, or perishing riches; but God’s law concerneth our everlasting estate, our eternal well or ill-being; eternal life or eternal death is wrapped up in these commandments. These are rewards suitable to the eternal majesty of the lawgiver; and if thou do evil there is an eternal loss of heaven, and an eternal sense of the wrath of God. If you believe and obey the gospel there is eternal salvation provided for you; for Christ is ‘the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him,’ Heb. v. 9.

[2.] As a benefactor he showeth himself also an eternal being. There is a double beneficial goodness of God—common and special. His common goodness runneth in the channel of creation and common providence; his special goodness in the channel of redemption and renovation by Christ.

(1.) He is a benefactor to all men; he hath given them an immortal spirit that shall abide for evermore: Eccles. xii. 7, ‘The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God that gave it.’ There is an immortal soul that dwelleth in a mortal body. The body was made of corruptible principles, was dust in its composition. It is true, God can annihilate it; but the soul, as it is a spirit, hath no corruptible principles in it; it is a thing that cannot be killed or destroyed by any created power. Now this divine spark, which cannot be quenched, is a pledge and effect of God’s eternity; for he that giveth immortality certainly is immortal himself: nothing can give what it hath not. And besides, because our souls are immersed and sunk into matter, and forget their divine original, therefore God by the blessings of his providence seeks to raise them up to look after this supreme and spiritual being, and giveth us all kind of comforts and mercies, whose creatures we are, ‘that

we may seek the Lord, if haply we may feel after him, and find him,' Acts xvii. 27; that we may own him as the first cause or father of lights, by whom this spark was kindled in us; or seek him as the chief good, in whom alone this rest less soul of ours can find contentment and satisfaction.

(2.) He is a benefactor in a way of grace and recovery by Christ. This also sets forth his eternity. The first rise and bottom cause of all this grace and favour that stirred and set all the causes on work which concurred to it, was God's everlasting love, John iii. 16. And Christ saith, Prov. viii. 31, 'I was set up from everlasting;' and this 'grace was given us in Christ before the world began,' 2 Tim. i. 9. Before the foundation of the world was laid this business was transacted with Christ for our benefit. And then the way how it was brought about, it was by an everlasting redemption, Heb. ix. 12, of an eternal force, value, and efficacy. And the grace wrought in us; it is called 'incorruptible seed,' 1 Peter i. 23. There is an eternal principle in our hearts, and that is the reason why a believer is so often said to have eternal life abiding in him, because of the beginning, seed, and principle of it that is sown in his heart; and the comfort and fruit of it that we have here is called 'everlasting consolation,' 2 Thes. ii. 16, 'He hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope, through grace.' It is not bottomed on any poor fading thing, but on matters of an eternal duration; the happiness itself is the eternal fruition of the ever-blessed God: 1 Thes. iv. 17, 'We shall be ever with the Lord.' So that we are made eternal also both in body and soul; whence you see how abundantly God discovereth his eternal being, in all his gifts and graces by Christ.

5. When the creatures are spoken of as eternal, it must be understood; it is a communicated, dependent, half eternity, and so no derogation to this perfection which is proper to God.

[1.] It is communicated to us, for originally God only hath immortality, 1 Tim. vi. 16. We have it by derivation, God hath it originally in himself and from himself. God dispenseth and measureth out the duration and continuance of all other things, their races and stages, when they shall begin and when they shall end. And that immortality which the angels and the souls of men have is ascribed to us by participation; we have it from God, because he was pleased to give it to us.

[2.] It is a dependent eternity, for every moment we depend upon God; if he take away his Spirit we are gone, man or angel. We assert the immortality of the soul because it hath not the principles of corruption in it as the body hath; but yet we cannot, must not cut off the dependence upon the first cause and fountain of being. In his hand is the breath of all living, and he is often called 'the God of your life,' and 'the God of the spirits of all flesh.'

[3.] It is but a half eternity: we sometimes were not, God is from everlasting to everlasting; but we are appointed to eternal life, and time was when we lay in the womb of nothing. We are but of yesterday, poor upstarts, that had but an existence and a new being given us of God; if he will lengthen it out, and continue it to all eternity, it is not such an eternity as he hath, but a half eternity; not an eternity without beginning, but only without ending.

6. This eternity of God is not seriously and sufficiently enough thought of and improved, till it lessen all other things in our opinion and estimation of them and affection to them. Two things should especially be lessened—the time we spend in the world, and the things that we enjoy in the world.

[1.] The time we spend in the world. Alas! what is this to God's eternity! Ps. xxxix. 5, 'Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth, and mine age is nothing before thee.' Whether our days be spent in prosperity or adversity they are but short, a hand-breadth, a mere nothing, compared with God's eternity: Ps. ex. 4, 'A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.' A thousand years, compared to eternity, are but as a drop spilt and left in the ocean, or as time insensibly past over in sleep. Forty, fifty, or seventy years seemeth a great time with us; yet with God, who is infinite, ten thousand years is no considerable space, but a very short and small duration.

[2.] As time, so the things of the world: 2 Cor. iv. 18, 'The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' They are short as to continuance and use. As to continuance, he calleth the honours and delight of Pharaoh's court, Heb. xi. 25, 'The pleasures of sin for a season.' Whatsoever is temporal a man may see the end of it. Be it evil: a man in the deep waters is not discouraged as long as he can see banks; but in eternity there are neither banks nor bottom. If good: Ps. cxix. 96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection.' The most shining glory will shortly be burnt out to a snuff; it wastes every day. Eternity maketh good things infinitely good, and evil things infinitely evil. If it be temporal, whatever paineth us is but a flea-bite to eternal torments. Whatever pleaseth or delights, it is but a may-game to eternal joys. So for use too, it is but for a season, Deut. xxiii. 24; the law gave an indulgence to eat of his neighbours' grapes for refreshment; 'But thou shalt not put any in thy vessel:' 1 Tim. vi. 7, 'For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.' The manna was useful and refreshing when used in the day, but if kept all night it perished and was useless; it was useful in the wilderness, but ceased when they came to Canaan.

The uses are many.

Use 1. First, Comfort to the godly, for their own particular. He is an eternal God that ordereth and guideth all things, that he may bring them to their eternal felicity, and will in time admit them into it: Ps. xlviii. 14, 'For this God is our God for ever and ever, and he will be our guide even unto death.' After death he will be their God still; death doth not put an end to this relation; for God is Abraham's God when he is dead, Mat. xxii. 32. God is the same still, both in himself and to those that believe in him: he will constantly guide them all the days of their life, and after death receive us to the ever lasting enjoyment of himself, and revive our dust. Oh, what a blessedness is this, to have an interest in such an eternal God! Secondly, As to the community and society to which they do belong. God's eternity is the church's stability; and so it is urged in scripture: Mal. iii. 6, 'For

I am the Lord; I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed;' Ps. cii. 27, 28, 'Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end; the children of thy servants shall continue.' So when the flourishing of the wicked is spoken of, when they spring as grass: Ps. xcii. 8, 'But thou, O Lord, art most high for evermore.' If they be high, God is higher, and they are but upstarts to him; their power is of a late rise and short continuance. So Ps. xciii. 2, 'Thy throne is established of old; thou art from everlasting.' God's throne is as eternal as his being. So Lam. iii. 17, 'Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever, and thy throne from generation to generation.' Is the life of thy enemies long? God endureth for ever. Is their power great? It is but dependent. God had power before them, and will have power when they shall be no more.

Use 2. Terror to the wicked: Heb. x. 31, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' They may outlive other enemies, but they cannot outlive God, who abideth for ever, to avenge his quarrel against them. And judge you if his controversy against them be not just, since they are such impious fools and brutes as that they prefer the creature before the creator, and choose temporal things rather than everlasting, and prefer earth before heaven, and the satisfaction of their bodily lusts before the saving of their souls. Can you blame God of any injustice in dooming them to everlasting misery? What part of the punishment would you have relaxed? the loss, or the pain? The loss is double—of God's favour or their natural comforts. Would you have God admit those to the sight and everlasting fruition of him self who never cared for him? Or return again to their natural comforts, that they may eternally run riot with them, or abuse them to an occasion of the flesh? Or is it the pain? Would you have God take off that when the sin and impenitent obstinacy doth still continue, since they preferred a temporal good before that which is eternal, and would 'sell their birthright for one morsel of meat'? Heb. xii. 16. How just is it for God to make them everlastingly to lie under the fruits and effects of their own evil choice!

Use 3. To press us to seek after the everlasting fruition of this blessed and ever-glorious God, because many live as if they had never heard of things eternal; most live as if they did not believe any such thing; the best do not improve those things as they ought: therefore I shall a little insist upon a quickening exhortation, to stir you up to seek an eternal happiness in God.

1. As we are reasonable creatures, we were made for eternity; for God hath given us an immortal spirit, and there is no proportion between an immortal soul and temporal things. It cannot be content with anything that shall have an end, for then we may survive our happiness. If we had souls that would perish, it would be more excusable to look after things that perish. What will you do when your souls shall be turned out of doors, when ye fail? Luke xvi. 9. To what region will the poor, shiftless, harbourless soul betake itself when you die? All your thoughts that concern the present world perish; and if you did perish too, it were no such great matter. But you shall live; and what will you have to comfort yourselves if you have not an interest in the eternal God? In whose hands

will you be if you have slighted him while you were upon earth, and the eternal happiness he offereth to us, and could not find enough in God and his eternal salvation to take off your hearts from the pleasures and vanities of the world? Can you expect that he will favour you and be kind to you?

2. Eternity is made known to us Christians, and clearly set before us in the doctrine of the gospel: 2 Tim. i. 10, 'He hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' Nature hath but guesses at it, the law but shadows; but here it is clearly, certainly, and fully revealed. You know that you have an eternal God to please, and an infinite and eternal reward to expect. The whole drift of our religion is to call us off from time to eternity, from this world to a better. Christ came not to settle us here in a state of prosperity, nor to make this world our rest and portion, but to draw us up to God and heaven.

3. The same religion showeth that we are already involved in an eternal misery, and stand under a sentence binding us over to the curse and everlasting wrath of God: John iii. 18, 'He that believeth not is condemned already: and this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness more than light, because their deeds are evil.' God hath offered life and immortality to them who have so miserably lost it, and involved their souls in eternal death. Therefore, if we know what it is to be liable to the wrath of an eternal God, and to be interested in the hopes of eternal glory, we should awaken and be more serious in a business of such concernment.

4. You will shortly be summoned to give an account, Luke xvi. 2. You have received so much from me, such riches, honours, parts, sufficiencies, such invitations to draw you home to me, what will you answer? Nay; there is not only a little time between you and judgment, but a little time between you and execution; nothing but the slender thread of a frail life, which is soon fretted asunder. And will you, can you sleep in sin so near eternity, and laugh and dance over the brink of hell? You cannot soon enough flee from wrath to come.

5. Consider what poor deluded wretches, who are in that everlasting estate, would give, if they might be trusted with a little time again, that they might provide for eternity. How happy would they think themselves if God would but try them once more! If careless creatures would but anticipate the thoughts of another world, how soon would they discern their mistake! How miserably will you bewail yourselves when you have lost eternity for poor temporal trifles! What comfort will it be to you that you have been merry here, lived in pomp and ease, when you must endure the wrath of God for evermore, and wish for any allay of your torments? Luke xvi. 24, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on 'me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.' It is better to believe than try; provide against it, than try.

6. If you be Christians indeed, you have not the spirit of this world. Christianity, as it is acted by us, is but the exercise of faith, hope, and love. Now, the eternal fruition of God is the matter that all these graces are conversant about. Faith believeth that there is an eternal being, and that our

happiness lieth in the fruition of him, Heb. xi. 6. Love is that which levelleth and directeth all our actions to this blessed end, that we may see God and enjoy him as our portion and felicity: Ps. lxxiii. 25, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee.’ Our desires are after him, our delights in him; it is our work to please him, our happiness to enjoy him. The truth of his eternal being is the object of our faith; so the apprehension of him as our chief good and felicity is the object of our love, so as he is capable of being enjoyed; and our participated eternity is the object of our faith: this is the end of all our desires and labours, and the expectation of this fortifieth us against all the difficulties of our pilgrimage, and so directeth us what to mind, be, and do: 2 Cor. v. 9, ‘Therefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of the Lord.’

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Directions what we shall do.

Direct. 1. Meditate often and seriously of eternity. There is a great deal of profit gotten by this meditation; nothing doth more promote the great ends of the gospel than this meditation.

1. For Christ. Nothing makes Christ precious but serious thoughts of eternity, he being the only means to deliver us from wrath to come, which is the great evil of the other state, and procure for us the eternal enjoyment of God, which is the good of that estate: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, ‘He is a sun and a shield, and no good thing will he withhold from them that live uprightly.’ You can make a shift without Christ in this world, you are by ordinary means well provided against the evils of this life, and well fortified with the good things thereof; but in death, Christ will be to thee gain and advantage.

2. It would promote the great change. What will make a proud man humble, a vain man serious, a covetous worldling heavenly, a wicked man a good man? Let him think of eternity, where only the humble, the heavenly, are favoured and accepted, 2 Cor. iii. 11.

3. What would check temptations, either from the pleasures, riches, or honours of the world? These are not eternal riches, nor eternal pleasures, nor eternal honours; transitory things are not our business, nor our scope, Heb. xi. 25.

4. What would quicken diligence, and put life into our endeavours but the meditation of eternity? Everything should be laboured for that hath an everlastingness in it; the travail of your souls should be laid out upon those things: Isa. lv. 2, ‘Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfies not?’ So John vi. 27, ‘Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but that which endureth to life everlasting.’ Surely serious diligence is necessary. Shall I trifle away that time which I am to improve for eternity?

Direct. 2. Let the enjoyment of an eternal God be your end and scope: 2 Cor. iv. 18, ‘While we look not to things which are seen, but to things that are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.’ When you have set eternal things before you, then make your choice. On the one side there are eternal joys, on the other eternal torments.

Now vain pleasures lead to the one, solid godliness to the other. By the neglect of God you run the hazard of a miserable eternity. By the choice of God for your Lord and portion, you get an interest in a blessed eternity: only let me warn you—

1. To choose end and means together: Mat. vii. 13, 14, ‘Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it.’ They must be coupled; both quicken each other, the intention of the end quickens to a diligent pursuit and an earnest use of means; and the use of means will sooner give you to understand what your condition will be than a bare reflection upon the end.

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2. Do not confound principal and subordinate means, so as one should jostle out the other. The primary means of going to the Father is Christ: John xiv. 6, ‘Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me.’ The secondary means is holiness: Heb. xii. 14, ‘Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.’

Direct. 3. Be resolvedly true to your end, which is the enjoyment of God, and that will quicken you the more, and direct you; for the end is both our measure and our motive. In short, do all things from eternal principles to eternal ends. The eternal principle is the grace of the Spirit; the eternal end is the pleasing, glorifying, and enjoying of God: Phil. i. 11, ‘Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God.’ Actions carried on from eternal principles, according to an eternal rule, for an eternal end, cannot miscarry.

SERMON XCIV.

Thy word is settled in heaven.—VER. 89.

THIS will bear two senses—(1.) Relating to God’s decree, made in heaven; (2.) An emblem of its constancy, is in heaven.

1. It may be referred to God’s decree, ‘Thy word is settled in heaven,’ in thy mind and will. The words of temporal kings are on earth, and therefore their laws and edicts are subject to many changes, and are often revoked and altered, either by themselves or by their successors; but the word of God is above all changes and alterations, as being decreed in heaven. It is preached on earth, believed on earth, fulfilled on earth; but decreed in heaven, fixed and settled there by God’s unalterable purpose and will.

2. That in heaven there is an emblem of it. It is usual in scripture to set forth the stability and constancy of God’s word by this similitude; as Ps. lxxxix. 2, ‘Mercy shall be built up for ever, thy

faithfulness hast thou established in the very heavens.' So when it is compared with the covenant of day and night: Jer. xxxiii. 20, 21, 'Thus saith the Lord, If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, that there should not be day and night in their seasons; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant.' So Jer. xxxi. 35-37. This sense I incline to, because in the next verse it is compared with the stability of the earth. Well, then, his word is settled in heaven, partly because the heavens stand fast by the same word by which they were first made: Gen. i. 3, 6, 'And God said, Let there be light, and there was light; Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and divide the waters from the waters; and it was so.' So *Midrash Tillim*. And partly because the being and order of heaven showeth the settledness of God's word, as the heavens were created and settled in a course, which they constantly observe in their motions; and this duration and equability in the motion is so exact, that men can foresee eclipses long before they happen; therefore the Psalmist saith, Ps. cxiv. 19, 'The sun knoweth his going down;' that is, 'keepeth so to the just points of his compass as if he were an intelligent agent, and knew the exact time when to set and rise. Now when we lift up our eyes to heaven, and see how punctually and exactly the order is observed which was once settled by God's will; even from the beginning of the world to this day no remarkable change hath been observed; the heavenly bodies keep their tenor and course, and by their constant motions distribute their light and influence to the world, and this from their first creation, and all because he hath said, It shall be so; in the strength of his word they abide. This continuance of the heavens showeth the permanency of his word.

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Doct. That God's word is of an eternal truth and immutable constancy.

By his word is principally meant the gospel covenant. It is said by the prophet Isaiah, chap xl. 8, 'The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever.' And the apostle Peter, quoting and improving the same place, saith, 'The word of God is the gospel preached unto you,' 1 Peter i. 24, 25. And more especially the promise of eternal life; for that is opposite to the fading glory of the present life, and is the eternal effect of the word of God abiding in our hearts. When all other things fade and decay, this blessed estate, offered in and conveyed by the gospel, will not fail us.

1. I shall give you the reasons.

2. The emblem and representation.

3. The profit and usefulness of this meditation.

First, The reasons. In every promise, that it be certain and firm, three things are required:—

1. That it may be made seriously and heartily, with a purpose to perform it.

2. That he that hath promised continue in his purpose without change of mind.

3. That it be in the power of him that promiseth to perform what he hath so promised. Now of all these things there can be no doubt

[1.] Certainly God meaneth as he speaketh, when he promiseth to give eternal life to those that believe and obey the gospel. There is no question but he is so minded, when he hath written a book to assure the world of it; for what need God to court the creature with an imaginary happiness, or to tell them of a glorious estate which he never meant to bestow upon them? Yea, why should *Amen*, the faithful witness, come from heaven further to assure us of it by his doctrine, die the death to purchase it for us, and afterward rise again, and enter into that happiness which he spake of, 'That our faith and hope may be in God?' 1 Peter i. 21. Why should he, as soon as he was ascended, give gifts unto men, send forth messengers into the world to preach this doctrine, and give notice, of this blessed estate to he had on these terms, and attest it by divers signs and wonders, partly to alarm the drowsy world to regard it, and assure the incredulous world of the truth of this salvation? Heb. ii. 3, 4. Not to believe that God is serious in all this, is to make him a liar indeed, yea, to establish a lie and falsehood with great solemnity.

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[2.] That God doth continue his purpose is beyond doubt, if we consider his eternal and unchangeable nature: Mal. iii. 6, 'For I am the Lord; I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed:' and James i. 17, 'With him is neither variableness nor show of turning.' And what should alter his purpose? Doth he meet with anything that he foresaw not, and knew not before? God doth never repent, and call back his grant, that he hath by this act of grace insured eternal happiness to the saints on such terms: 1 Sam. xv. 29, 'For the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent;' Ps. ex. 4, 'I have sworn, and will not repent: thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedeck.' Christ is instated in full power of entertaining and blessing his faithful servants, which shall never be retracted. To take off all doubt, he hath given us double assurance—his word and his oath: Heb. vi. 17, 18, 'God being willing more abundantly to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, wherein ii was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge,' &c. God hath ever been tender of his word; above all that is famed or believed of God, this is most conspicuous: Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' Now this needed not, for an oath is interposed in a doubtful matter; but it showeth God's extra ordinary care for our satisfaction; his good-will is seen in the promise, his solicitude in the oath. In short, God would never be so fast bound, but that he doth continue his purpose.

[3.] That he is able to perform it: Mat. xix. 26, 'With God all things are possible;' Rom. iv. 21, 'Being fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform:' Phil. iii. 21, 'According to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.' He is able to find out a way whereby sinners may be reconciled, sanctified, subdued by his Spirit; whereby his interests may be preserved in them against the assaults of the devil, the world, and the flesh; finally, able to

raise our bodies after eaten out by worms and turned into dust. Matters of faith being chiefly or mainly future and to come, and difficult to be performed, therefore an express belief of God's power is necessary. To convert such an obstinate, and to sanctify such a sinful creature, and to raise the dead, are no slight things.

Secondly, The emblem of this immutable constancy is settled in the heavens; it is not measured by the floating estate of things here upon earth, but by the perfection of the heavens, which are free from all changes and chances.

1. They are fit emblems of the stability of the word, for they continue to be what his word once made them to be. There is no jostling among the stars, but all obey God's word and law: Ps. cxlviii. 4-6, 'Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and waters that be above the heavens: let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded, and they were created: he hath also established them for ever and ever; he hath made a decree which shall not pass.' So that when a believer looketh up to heaven, there he seeth the book of the creatures opened, wherein he beholdeth God's constancy and certainty written in indelible characters. God's powerful voice did first separate the waters from the waters, and those celestial bodies move in that order wherein God hath set them. Now is not this a help to us, when we open the book of scriptures, and compare the one with the other, how the stated course of nature, and the stated course of grace, agree with his power? For as long as you trust God's word you can never fail, for both heaven and earth are sustained by it: Heb. i. 3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power.' All is easy to God, for he preserveth the heavens in that estate wherein they are governed, and can preserve his people in the most difficult cases.

2. God's constancy and truth doth appear in the heavens also; there is a witness there of his eternal truth; for when he had once said, 'Let there be heavens,' &c., they presently were, and ever since have kept one constant tenor and course. Yea, heaven shall sooner fail than God's word fail; he will not retract what he hath once said; and therefore his word is more firm and stable than the frame of heaven and earth: Mat. v. 18, 'Till heaven and earth pass, not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law till all be fulfilled;' Mat. xxiv. 35, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.' So that God's word is more stable than heaven and earth.

Thirdly, The profit of this meditation.

1. That we may set the sureness of this word against the diffidence and distrustfulness of our own hearts: Luke xxiv. 25, 'Slow of heart to believe.' Though God hath so firmly bound himself to the creature by his own word, yet the promise to us seemeth doubtful and uncertain, especially when men are clouded with troubles and temptations; for we look only to present sense, and would not be put on any trial. Now it is comfortable to remember that the order and course of nature is not so settled as the grace of the covenant is: let it have its course, resolved and patient obedience will at length end in eternal happiness; and therefore we should build surely upon a firm foundation, that we may not 'stagger through unbelief, but give glory to God,' Rom. iv. 20.

2. To comfort us when our hopes are delayed. In due time the promise cannot want the effect, Heb. vi. 12. There will be day and night, summer and winter, in their season; therefore as in the night we wait for day, and in the winter for summer, so must we wait for our eternal consolation.

3. To support us against the various changes in the state of worldly things. Many things fall out in this world that breed trouble in us, therefore if we should only look to the present state of things, our hearts would float up and down; but we must look to the immutable constancy of God's word, that is a sure rock for the anchor of hope to take hold on. There is a sure rule to walk by, sure promises to build upon, if we would be everlastingly happy. There are 'the sure mercies of David,' Isa. lv. 3. The changes of this world perplex our faith; therefore we should not look to the instability of things below, wherein there are continual vicissitudes, but to the sure covenant.

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4. Not only when our hopes are delayed and obscured by the changes and chances of this world, but contradicted by contrary appearances; God seemeth to cast us off, to have no pleasure in us. Now to bear up our faith in the hardest condition, that we may say, Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' and believe in hope against hope, we should remember the settledness and constancy of his word. The promises stand firm in heaven, when they seem to fail on earth. God may cover himself with frowns, and his dispensations may seem contrary to his intention; as Joseph spake roughly to his brethren, when he meant to discover himself to them, or as Christ dealt with the woman of Canaan, Mat. xv. But when there seemeth to be such a contradiction between the word and works of God, when his voice is sweet like Jacob's, and his hand rough like Esau's, we must remember that the smart rod is consistent with covenant love, Ps. lxxxix. 32. And we must not interpret the promise of God by his providential dealing with us, but rather his dealing by his promises; his promise being as the light part of the cloud, and his dealing as the dark part of it. God is fulfilling promises by hard dispensations, and sharp afflictions belong to his faithfulness, Ps. cxix. 75. Many times that is best for us, not what we think best, but what God thinks best. The buffetings of Satan and oppositions of the world may be most wholesome to us, though not most pleasing to the flesh.

5. To wean us from the fading vanities of the world, Isa. xl. 8, and 1 Peter i. 24. There is nothing firm and lasting in this world till we lift up our eyes to heaven, and seek an happiness in the promises, 1 John ii. 17. Our happiness lieth not in the present life, but in the everlasting enjoyment of God: in the covenant all is settled and sure, but in the world all is unstable and uncertain. God's covenant provideth for us eternal joy and bliss.

Use 1. To show what contrary and different conclusions the carnal and spiritual will draw from the same principles. The scoffers said, 2 Peter iii. 4, 'Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.' Because the whole frame of nature had kept one constant tenour and course, they plead for the eternity of the world and the falsehood of the promises. Now David reasoneth quite the contrary way. They see the mercy of God, that the things of nature keep ordinarily one constant course, and are not

terrified with the frequent change thereof; yea, they are thereby confirmed in the belief of the Lord's constancy and faithfulness. But men in love with their lusts make a woful use of this consideration, hardening themselves in their conceit, that there shall never be a change, and so sin more securely. See the like in other things: 1 Cor. vii. 29; 1 Cor. xv. 32; Jude 24; Rom. vi. 2; 2 Sam. vii. 2; with Hag. i. 2; 1 Sam. iii. 18; 2 Kings vi. 33.

Use 2. Whenever you look to heaven, remember that within you have a God who hath fixed his residence and shown his glory there, and made it the seat both of his mercy and justice. You have also there a Saviour, who, after he had died for our sins, sat down at the right hand of majesty, to see his promises accomplished, and by his word to subdue the whole world. There are 'angels that fulfil his commandment, hearkening to the voice of his word,' Ps. ciii. 21. There are glorified saints, who see God face to face, and dwell with him for evermore, and came thither by the same covenant which is propounded to us as the charter of our peace and hope. Without, we see the sun and moon and all the heavenly bodies move in that fixed course and order wherein God hath set them; and will God show his constancy in the course of nature, and be fickle and changeable in the covenant of grace, wherein he hath disposed the order and method of his mercies?

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Use 3. To cure our unbelief, by considering how God's grace is settled in the covenant, so as to leave no cause or occasion of doubting or suspecting the truth and certainty of those blessings which he hath promised us; and shall we live in jealousy, as if we were not upon such sure terms with God? If we transact with another about certain benefits, the transaction may prove to no purpose, if the matter about which we contract with them hath no being, or the terms be impossible, or the conveyance be not firm and strong, so as to hold good in law. Now, none of these can be imagined in our entering into covenant with God. For—

1. Eternal life is not a chimera, or a thing that hath no being. You might run uncertainly, 1 Cor. ix. 24, if it were a dream or a well-devised fable. No; it is the greatest reality in the world, Heb. iv. 9, we cannot be mistaken; we see it before us in the promises so confirmed.

2. It is not upon impossible terms, but such as are performable by the grace of God: Eph. ii. 8, 'By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.' And the apostle telleth us, Rom. iv. 16, 'It is of grace, that it may be sure to all the seed.' It is grace maketh it sure. God giveth what he requireth. There are conditions that concern making covenant and keeping covenant. First, conditions for making covenant: Jer. xxiv. 7, 'I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord;' Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 'A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I bestow upon you.' After this, for keeping covenant: This is a covenant that keepeth us as well as we keep it: Jer. xxxii. 40, 41, 'I will put my fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me;' so Ezek. xxxvi. 27, there is a promise of influence, 'I will put my spirit into you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.' This to prevent the danger of discovenanting.

3. Or that the conveyance be not strong and firm, so as to make n plea in law; for it is as strongly confirmed as anything can be by God's word and oath, as before it is upon record in heaven among the ancient decrees of God. It is written in the word for our comfort; yea, upon our hearts. It is sealed by the blood of Christ, Heb. ix. 16, 17; sealed by the Spirit, Eph. i. 13. And therefore the conveyance will bear a plea, both now in prayer, and hereafter before the tribunal of God. We may show him his promises, plead the satisfaction of Christ, as he pleadeth it in heaven, Heb. ix. 24. But where is there room for any doubt? If any, it must be of your qualification; for on God's part all is ordered and sure; and there two things: First, That all the qualifications of the gospel must be evangelically interpreted, not legally; not in absolute perfection, but prevalent degree, Mark ix. 29, and Can. v. 2. Secondly, Your only way to obtain comfort is to make the qualification more explicit: 1 John ii. 5, 'Whosoever keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby we know that we are in him;' and 1 John iii. 19, 'Hereby we know that we are of the truth.'

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4. Let nothing that is uncertain keep you from this blessed and sure covenant. All things without it are uncertain. Riches are uncertain, 1 Tim. vi. 17. The like may be said of honours, they are slippery places; of friends, health, life itself. Now, do not forsake your own mercies for lying vanities. Some vain thing or other taketh us off from God and seeking his favour, which will certainly prove a lie to you; therefore employ your time, care, and thoughts about these things.

5. If the covenant be settled, never expect to alter it, or model it, and bring it down to your fancies and humours. It is God only that can prescribe conditions and laws of commerce between us and him; man is not allowed to prescribe the conditions, or treat about the making of them, but is only bound to submit to what God was pleased to prescribe, and to fulfil the conditions without disputing. They are not left free and indifferent for us to debate them, and modify, and mitigate, and bring them down to our own liking and humour. We are to take hold, not to appoint, Isa. lvi. 4, and Rom. x. 3; so that it bindeth our duty as well as assureth our comfort. Our vote cometh too late to retract and alter God's eternal decrees. What would you have to be done for your freedom from hell and the wrath of God? Oh, that God would alter those severe constitutions which he hath made, and not insist so strictly on the self-denying duties required in the gospel covenant for the salvation of sinners! You may as well ask that God should repeal the ordinances of nature, turn night into day, and day into night for your sakes. But if the gospel covenant were repealed, that you may be more secure, what then? In what a case are you then? What will you hold by then? You have no hope if the gospel stand in force; but what hope would you have if the gospel were abolished? Must the whole world be ruined to establish your security and indulgence to sin? Oh! surely this gospel thus stated hath more stability than the foundations of heaven and earth. Therefore, expect nothing to be altered for thy sake. The gospel constitution was settled long before thou wert born, and it is an unalterable decree, which cannot be reversed. All this is spoken to confute them that look upon the gospel as true and to be believed, till they meet with something which crosses them, and then they hope it is not so. In short, God is true when he promises, true when he threatens,

true when he commandeth. Or thus, if the gospel covenant be false, thou has no ground of hope; if true, it doometh licentious sinners to eternal destruction.

SERMON XCV.

Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.—VER. 90.

THESE words contain a truth which is—(1.) Asserted; (2.) Represented by a fit and lively emblem, *thou hast established the earth, and it abideth*. He had before said, 'Thy word is settled in the heavens:' now he speaketh of it as manifested in the earth. There the constancy of God's promises was set forth by the duration and equal motion of the heavenly bodies, now by the firmness and immovableness of the earth. God's powerful word and providence reacheth to the whole world, this lower part here upon earth, as well as the upper part in heaven.

Doct. That in all ages God ever showed himself a true God, and faithful in all his promises. It is here confirmed by experience, and represented by an emblem.

1. God's faithfulness relateth to some promise wherein he hath engaged himself to his people: Heb. xi. 11, 'She judged him faithful who had promised.' It is his mercy to make promises, but it is his faithfulness and truth to fulfil them. His truth is pawned with the creature till he discharge it, Micah vii. 20.

2. His truth dependeth upon his unchangeable nature, but it is confirmed to us by experience. His unchangeable nature, Heb. vi. 18. If a promise can be made out to be of God, we have no more reason to doubt of it than of the nature and being of God. Yet, *quoad nos*, it is confirmed by experience: Ps. xviii. 30, 'The word of the Lord is a tried word.' We are led by sensible things, and what hath been done doth assure us of what shall be done, or may be expected from God.

3. That therefore God hath been ever tender of his truth, that the event may answer the promise, and we might know that God that hath been faithful, and kept touch with the world hitherto, will not fail at last. The heathens ascribed a double perfection to their gods— ἀληθεύειν καὶ εὐργετεῖν. So the true God is known by his mercy and his fidelity; he never failed to perform his part of the covenant with any: Ps. cxxxviii. 2, '1 will praise thy name, for thy lovingkindness and thy truth; for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' As he hath made us admirable and great promises of giving his Son, and with him all things, so he will certainly perform all to the utmost importance of them. The matter of his word is mercy and loving-kindness, and in the performance thereof there is great truth and fidelity; as he hath made great and excellent promises, so he performeth them most punctually. So that in fulfilling his word, God will be known above all that

is named, or famed, or believed, or apprehended, and spoken of them. Here is his great glory and excellency.

4. That the experience of all generations doth confirm God's faithfulness in his promises; for it is said in the text, 'His faithfulness is unto all generations.' In the Hebrew it is, 'From generation to generation.'

The point may be amplified by two considerations:—

First, That some promises have been received by one generation, and fulfilled in another.

Secondly, That the same common promises have been fulfilled to the faithful in all ages.

First, That some promises have been received by one generation, and fulfilled in another, when the matter so required; as, for instance, Israel's going out of Egypt: Gen. xv. 13, 14, 'And he said unto Abraham, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years: and also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge; and afterwards they shall come out with great substance.' Compare now Exod. xii. 41, 'and it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.' Thirty years were added, because of their fathers dwelling in Canaan; but God kept touch to a day. So for the promise of the Messiah and calling the Gentiles; that God fulfilled in due time, and sent a Saviour into the world: Gal. iv. 4, 'In the fulness of time God sent his son.' When the sceptre was gone from Judah, Gen. xlix. 10, when the crown was possessed by Herod, a tributary and foreigner, during the Roman monarchy, which at length Christ should utterly destroy. Dan. ii. 35, Nebuchadnezzar had a vision of an image of four different metals, the head of gold, arms and breasts silver, belly and thighs brass, and the feet part iron and clay. While he beheld the image, and surveyed it from head to foot, he saw a stone hewn out of the mountain without hands, which stone smote the image, not upon the head, breast, or belly, but upon the feet of iron and clay, upon which it vanished away, and the stone became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. This vision Daniel expounded of four Gentile kingdoms, which should succeed one another with great extent of dominion. The first of the Babylonians, which then was; the second of the Medes and Persians; the third of the Grecians; the fourth of the Romans, which subdued all the others, and because possessed of the riches and glory of the former; during this last kingdom was the stone hewn out of the mountain, and smote the iron feet. This stone was the kingdom of the God of heaven, which Christ set up. But not to trouble you with mysteries and nice debates, the apostle telleth us, Rom. xv. 8-10, 'That Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again, it is said, Rejoice, ye Gentiles.' The event in all these cases afterwards did speak for itself; so in all that is yet to come, we should depend upon the veracity of God; as the calling of the

Jews, the destruction of antichrist, a more ample effusion of gifts on the church, together with a dilation of its borders; as the patriarchs ‘all died in faith:’ Heb. xi. 13, ‘Having not received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them.’

Secondly, That the same common promises have been fulfilled to the faithful in all ages; there is but one and the same way to eternal life in necessary things, and the dispensations of God to every age are still the same; and so in every generation the promises of God are still fulfilled as if they were directed to that time only. God’s faithfulness hath been tried many ways and at many times, but every age furnisheth examples of the truth of his promises. From the beginning of the world to the end, God is ever fulfilling the scripture in his providential government, which is double—external or internal.

[1.] External, in the deliverance of his people, the answers of prayer, and manifold blessings vouchsafed to believers and their seed See Ps. xxii. 4, 5, ‘Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them: they cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.’ The godly in former times trusted God, and trusted constantly in their troubles, and in their trusting they cried, and did never seek God in vain; which should support us in waiting upon God, and to depend on his mercy and fidelity; for they that place their full affiance in God, and seek his help by constant and importunate addresses, shall never be put to shame.

[2.] Internal, in conversion to God, the comforts of his Spirit, establishment of the soul in the hopes of the gospel, as to the pardon of sins and eternal life. Certainly God, that hath blessed the word throughout many successions of ages, to the converting and comforting of many souls, showeth that we may depend upon the covenant for pardon and eternal life. How many have found comfort by the promises! Now, as the apostle speaketh of Abraham, ‘It was not written for himself alone, but us also,’ Rom. iv. 23, 24; so these comforts were not dispensed for their sake alone, but for our benefit, that we might be comforted of God; having the same God, the same Redeemer, the same covenant and promises, and the same Spirit to apply all unto us. If they looked to God and were comforted, why should not we? His faithfulness is to all generations; he is alike to believers, as they be alike to him: Rom. iii. 22, ‘There is no difference.’

5. That the experience of God’s faithfulness in former ages is of use to those that follow and succeed, to assure them of God’s faithfulness; for God’s wonderful and gracious works were never intended merely for the benefit of that age in which they were done, but for the benefit also of those that should hear of them by any creditable means whatsoever. It is a scorn and vile contempt put upon those wonderful works, which God made to be had in remembrance, if they should be buried in oblivion, or not observed and improved by those who live in after ages; yea, it is contrary to the scriptures: Ps. cxlv. 4, ‘One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts;’ Joel i. 3, ‘Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation;’ Josh. iv. 6-8, ‘That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, What mean you by these stones? then shall you answer

them, that the waters of Jordan were cut off from before the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God.' So Ps. lxxviii. 3-7, 'That which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. we will not hide them from their children, showing to the generations to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.' From all which I observe:—

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[1.] That we should tell generations to come what we have found of God in our time, and more especially parents should tell their children; they are bound to transmit this knowledge to their children, and they to improve it, either by word or deed. By word, by remembering the passages of providences, and publishing his mercies to posterity: Ps. lxxxix. 1, 'I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth I will make known thy faithfulness to all generations.' Or by deed, putting them in possession of a pure religion, confirmed to us by so many providences and instances of God's goodness and truth.

[2.] That this report of God's gracious works, and owning his covenant, is a special means of edification. Why else should God enjoin it, but that the ages following should receive benefit thereby? Surely it is an advantage to them to hear how God hath owned us in ordinances and providences.

[3.] And more particularly I observe, that this tradition is a great means and help to faith; for it is said, ver. 7, 'That they may set their hope in God.'

6. That to be satisfied in point of God's faithfulness is of great importance to believers. Partly because their fidelity to God is much encouraged by his fidelity to us. They that do not trust God cannot be long true to him: Heb. iii. 12, 'Take heed lest there be found in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God;' and James i. 8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways,' δίψυχος ἀνὴρ, one that doth not stick fast to God, and is ever unresolved, being divided between hopes and fears concerning his acceptance with God. A wavering Christian is divided between God and some unlawful course for his safety, divided between God's ways and his own, and cannot quietly depend upon his promises, but is tossed to and fro, doth not entirely trust himself in God's hands, but doth wholly lean upon his own carnal confidence. And partly because God is invisible, and dealeth with us by proxy, by messengers, who bring the word to us. We see not God in person: Heb. xiii. 7, 'Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversations;' their manner of living, their perseverance till death in this faith and hope. And partly because the promises are future, and the main of them is to be accomplished in another world. Now, nothing will support us but the faithfulness of God: Prov. xi. 18, 'The wicked worketh a deceitful work,

but to him that soweth righteousness there shall be a sure reward.' Men think to be happy by their sin, but find themselves deceived at last; but none can be deceived that trust in the living and true God. Partly because many of the promises contradict sense; as when the soul is filled with anguish because of the guilt of sin: 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess our sins, be is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' And the power of sin: 1 Thes. v. 24, 'Faithful is he who calleth you, who also will do it.' Supported in great distress: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'He will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able.' That we may be able to stand in the judgment: 1 Cor. i. 9, 'God is faithful, by whom ye are called into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ.' Here is a Christian's great security and support, God's faithfulness, testified by Christians now and in all ages, confessing they have found by their experience the word of God to be true; for they have transmitted religion to us by their constant consent, and left it to us under a seal of God's faithfulness; and therefore we should persevere in our duty to God.

Secondly, As represented by an emblem. We should consider it, for it is a help to frequent meditation, as being always before our eyes; and they are without excuse who see not God in this thing; every time we set foot on the ground we may remember the stability of God's promises. And it is also a confirmation of faith, thus:—

1. The stability of the earth is the effect of God's word, this is the true pillar upon which the earth standeth; for 'he upholdeth all things by the word of his power:' Ps. xxxiii. 9, Tor he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.' Now his word of power helpeth us to depend upon his word of promise. God, that doth what he pleaseth, never faileth in what he promiseth. We see plainly that whatever standeth by God's will and word, cannot be brought to nought. Whence is it? how came this world to have a being? It is the work and product of that God whose word and promise we have in scripture. Certainly the power of this God cannot fail, it is as easy for him to do as to say.

2. Nothing appeareth whereon the globe of the earth and water should lean and rest: Job xxvi. 7, 'He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.' Now, that this vast and ponderous body should lean upon the fluid air as upon a firm foundation is matter of wonder. The question is put. in the book of Job, chap, xxxviii. 6, 'Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who hath laid the corner-stone thereof?' Yet firm it is, though it hang as a ball in the air. The globe of the earth is encompassed with the regions of the air and the celestial spheres, and hath no visible support to sustain so heavy a body hanging in the midst of so vast an expansion; yet God hath settled and established it so firm as if it rested on the most solid basis and foundation; fitted so strange a place for it that, being a heavy body, one should think it would fall every moment; yet which, whensoever we would imagine it, it must, contrary to the nature of such a body, fall upwards, and so can have no possible ruin but by falling into heaven. Now since his word beareth up such a weight, all the church's weight, and our own burden leaneth on the promise of God; he can, by the power of his word, do the greatest things without visible means: Luke vii. 7, 'But say

in a word, and my servant shall be healed.' Therefore his people may trust his providence; he is able to support them in any distresses, when no way of help and relief appeareth.

3. The firmness and stability offereth itself to our thoughts. The earth abideth in the same seat and condition wherein God left it, as long as the present course and order of nature is to continue: Ps. civ. 5, 'He hath laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be moved for ever.' God's truth is as immovable as the earth: Ps. cxvii. 2, 'The truth of the Lord endureth for ever.' Surely, if the foundation of the earth abideth sure, the foundation of our salvation laid by Jesus Christ is much more sure: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one tittle of the word and law of God, till all be fulfilled,' Mat. v. 18. If the law given by Moses be so sure, much more the promises of salvation by Christ: 2 Cor. i. 20, 'For all the promises of God in him are yea and amen.'

4. The stability in the midst of changes: Eccles. i. 4, 'One generation passeth away and another cometh, but the earth abideth for ever.' When man passeth away, the earth stayeth behind him, as a habitation for other comers, and abideth where it was, when the inhabitants go to and fro, and can enjoy it no more. All things in the world are subject to many revolutions, but God's truth is one and the same. The vicissitudes in the world do not derogate from his fidelity in the promises; he changeth all things, and is not changed. Though there be a new face of things in the world, yet we have a sure rule to walk by, and sure promises to build upon. And therefore, in all conditions, we should be the same to God, and there is no doubt but he will be the same to us.

5. In upholding the frame of the world, all those attributes are seen which are a firm stay to a believer's heart, such as wisdom, power, and goodness. Wisdom: Prov. iii. 19, 'The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth, by understanding hath lie established the heavens,' Look on it, it is the work of a wise agent. So for power: This great fabric is supported by his almighty power. His goodness is seen in that he hath made the earth to be firm and dry land, that it may be a fit habitation for men; this is a standing miracle of goodness. Luther saith we are always *in medio rubri maris*—kept, as the Israelites were, in the midst of the Red Sea. The Psalmist telleth us, Ps. xxiv. 2, 'He hath founded the earth upon the seas, and established the world upon the floods.' That part of the world whereon we dwell would suddenly be overwhelmed and covered with waters were it not for the goodness of God, for this the order of nature showeth in the beginning of the creation, Gen. i. 7, that next under the air were the waters covering the whole surface of the earth. But God made such cavities in the earth as should receive the waters into them, and such banks as should bound and bridle the vast ocean, that it might not break forth, Gen. i. 9; and so now by his providence the water is beneath the earth, and the earth standeth firm upon that fluid body as upon the most solid foundation; which, as it is a work of wise disposal and contrivance, so an effect of the goodness of God for the preservation of mankind. And though once, for the sins of the world, these waters were appointed to break out and overwhelm the earth, yet God hath firmly promised that they shall never be so again; wherein his truth is also verified, and applied to the covenant of grace: Isa. liv. 9, 'For this

is as the waters of Noah to me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wrath with thee, nor rebuke thee.' The covenant of grace is as sure as the covenant made after the deluge; so that we cannot look upon this earth but as an emblem of those attributes which confirm our faith in waiting upon God till his promises be fulfilled to us.

Use. Let us be then more firmly persuaded of God's faithfulness, that we may depend upon it both for his preserving the church and ourselves in the way of our duty, till we enjoy our final reward.

1. For the preservation of Christ's kingdom, God's faithfulness chiefly appeareth in the government of his church or spiritual kingdom, and this is a kingdom that cannot be moved when all things else are shaken: Heb. xii. 28, 'Having received a kingdom that cannot be shaken.' Christ cannot be a head without members, a king without subjects. And we are told. Mat xvi. 18, 'That the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.' Many disorders happen, but let us depend upon the faithful God. The world was well guided before we came into it, and other generations have had experience of God's faithfulness, though we complain that we see not our signs, nor any tokens for good.

2. For the preservation of our bodies to the heavenly kingdom. We have many discouragements within and without, but while we persevere in our duty, God will not fail us; his word is as sure as the earth: 2 Thes. iii. 3, 'The Lord is faithful, who shall establish and keep you from evil.' God hath promised not only to give us our final reward, but to secure and defend his people by the way, that they be not overcome by the evils they meet with in their passage.

SERMON XCVI.

They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.—VER. 91.

THE prophet is proving the immutability of God's promises from the conservation and continuance of the whole course of nature. He had spoken of it by parts, now conjunctly; apart, first of the heavens, ver. 89; of the earth, ver. 90; now both together, *they continue*, &c.

In the words we have two things:—

1. An observation concerning the continuance of the courses of nature; *they*, that is, the heaven and the earth. Heaven doth continue in its motion, and earth in its station, according to the ordinance of God, that is, by virtue of that order wherein he placed things at first: Ps. cxlviii. 6, 'He hath established them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass.' As he ordained at

first by his powerful decree, so heaven and earth is still continued. God's laws are fixed for the government of all creatures, and in the manner and to the end for which God appointeth them they stand and continue.

2. The reason, *for all are thy servants*. The reason saith more than the assertion, and therefore doth over and above prove it; not only the heavens and the earth, but all things which are contained therein, from the angel to the worm, they all serve God; they attend upon him as their supreme Lord and master every moment.

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Doct. That it is a great help to faith to consider God as the omni potent creator, preserver, and absolute governor of the world, disposing of all things as he pleaseth.

This is the meditation which the Psalmist produceth and exposeth to our view in this verse.

His creation is implied in that, *thine ordinances*; when God first settled the course of nature by a wise and powerful decree.

His preservation, in those words, *they continue this day*. The course of nature is so settled that it doth not fail to go on according to God's decree; everything standeth or falleth according to God's command, and the order first settled by God still obtaineth; his decree is not yet out of date.

His being the absolute governor of the world, in these words, *for all are thy servants*, which implieth his sovereign dominion and empire over all the creatures as his servants, who are at the beck of his will. To evidence this to you more fully, consider there are in God two things—power and authority, might and right.

First, By power we mean a liberty and sufficiency in God to do whatever he will: 'With God all things are possible,' Mat. xix. 26. Or take the negative, which bindeth it the stronger: Luke i. 37, 'With God nothing shall be impossible.'

Secondly, Authority or dominion, or a right over all things to dispose of them at his own pleasure. In this right there are three branches:—

1. A right of making or framing anything as he willeth, in any manner as it pleaseth him, as the potter hath power over his own clay to form what vessel he pleaseth of it. This right God exercised in his creation: Rev. iv. 11 , 'Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.' This was his absolute freedom and sovereignty, to create all things according to his own pleasure.

2. A right of having or possessing all things so made and framed by him, for God is owner and possessor of whatever he made, since he made it out of nothing. Heaven is his, earth is his; so angels, man, beasts, gold, silver; all things he challengeth as his right: Ps. cxv. 16, 'The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's.' It is the Lord's to dispose of, not only the lower, but the highest

heavens, which he hath provided for his own palace and court of residence. So ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness therefore,’ Ps. xxiv. 1. This whole lower world is his by right of creation and providential preservation, and so are all the sorts of creatures with which he hath replenished it: it was by him produced at first, and every moment continued and preserved. And so the angels are his; they are called his ministers or servants: Ps. civ. 4, ‘He maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flame of fire.’ Though he is able to do all things by himself, or administer the whole world as he at first created by a word, by saying, and it was done; yet he pleaseth to make use of the ministry of angels, who some of them in subtle bodies of air, others of fire, come down to execute his commands upon earth. Men are his creatures and his possession; we are not lords of anything we have, neither life, nor limb, nor anything; our bodies and our souls are his, 1 Cor. vi. 20. Christ had power to lay down his life and take it up again, but no mere man hath; he is accountable to a higher Lord, who hath an absolute, uncontrollable right to dispose of us according to his own pleasure: ‘He killeth and maketh alive, bringeth low and lifteth up; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s,’ 1 Sam. ii. 6-8; meaning that God is the Lord of the dwellers upon earth, from the one pole to the other: Dan. iv. 35, ‘None can stay his hand, and say unto him, What doest thou?’ None can call him to an account, for his will is absolute. So for the beasts: Ps. l. 10, ‘Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.’ He hath a plenary dominion over all the cattle on earth, wild and tame, and the fowls of the air, and a certain knowledge where every one of them resideth, that he can readily command any or all of them whensoever he pleaseth; all is the Lord’s by primitive right. So for gold and silver, and those precious things which are most valued by men: Hag. ii. 8, ‘The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.’ The absolute dominion of the riches or the splendour of the world belongeth to the Lord of hosts, to dispose of them as he pleaseth; and therefore is to be owned, acknowledged, and submitted unto by every man in his lot and portion. All that we want he hath at his command, and would not withhold it, if it were not for our good.

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3. He hath a right of using and disposing, and governing all things thus in his possession, according to his own pleasure. Certainly the use and benefit and utility of anything belongeth to him whose it is. Now God, who is the disposer of all things, made them for himself; he governeth them ultimately and terminatively for himself, immediately for man: Prov. xvi. 4, ‘God hath made all things for himself.’ But he considereth man’s good subordinately in all sublunary things; for ‘the earth he hath given to the children of men,’ Ps. cxv. 16, chiefly to his people, Rom. viii. 28. But this government of God is twofold—either natural or moral.

[1.] I begin with the last. His moral government is by laws; so he governeth angels and men, who are rational and free agents, but in the relation of subjects to God, and therefore are under his command; which if they decline, they are rebels, yet cease not to be under God, H3 the devils and wicked men, who have disturbed the order of the creation, and withdrawn themselves from God’s government, yet they cease not to be under his power. Of the devils, we read they sinned, 2 Peter ii. 4, and therefore ‘were thrown down into chains of darkness:’ meaning thereby, their unappeasable horrors, and the ‘restraints of God’s invisible providence’. Of men, that they withdrew their

allegiance, and would not be subject to his laws: Ps. xii. 4, ‘Our tongues are our own: who is lord over us?’ Rom. viii. 7, ‘The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God.’ But yet they are under the restraints of his providence, and he governeth all their actions to his glory: Ps. lxxvi. 10, ‘Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee;’ and serveth himself and the designs of his providence of their sins.

[2.] His natural government is that order into which by his positive decree God hath necessitated and disposed all creatures for the benefit of the world. Rational creatures he ruleth by moral means, as subjects, requiring duty from them, under the sanction of penalties and rewards, where the law is the rule of our duty, the sanction of his process; but other creatures he ruleth by natural motions and inclinations or tendency, according to the decree and order which he hath settled in their creation. Surely such a kind of empire he hath over all his creatures, for if he had made creatures which he cannot rule, he could not carry on his providence, for there would be something beneath him which might resist his will, and that will not suit with the perfection of God. Now this natural government is twofold—ordinary or extra ordinary.

(1.) Ordinary is that which is according to the course of second causes, or that order of nature which God hath established in the world, which is nothing else but his preserving the creatures, and working by them according to their natural motions. So it is said in the text. ‘’ They continue this day according to thine ordinance;’ and is confirmed by the apostle, Heb. i. 3, ‘He upholdeth all things by the word of his power;’ that is, in that course wherein he hath set them. The being and motion of every creature is ordered by the will of God; they move as he hath set them, and can move no further nor longer than he supplieth them with power.

(2.) Extraordinary is when God doth things above or beside nature; as when he made the sun stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley Ajalon, Josh. x. 12, 13; or made the sun to go back ten degrees in Ahaz’s dial, Isa. xxxviii. 8; his interdicting the Red Sea that it should not flow, Exod. xiv. 22; causing iron, which is a heavy body, that it should swim upon the top of the water at the prayer of Elisha, 2 Kings vi. 5; the fiery furnace not to burn, Dan. iii. 22; shutting the mouths of hungry lions, Dan. vi. 22; making ravens, which are by nature birds of prey, to be caterers for Elijah, 1 Kings xvii. 6; the cleaving of the earth and swallowing up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Num. xvi. 32, 33. Often in the New Testament we find the creatures acting contrary to their common nature, as the star that directed the wise men to Christ, Mat. ii. 2; the opening of the heavens at Christ’s baptism, Mat. iii. 16; the eclipse of the sun at his death, Mat. xxvii. 45; the fishes that came to net, Luke v. 5; and furnishing money, Mat. xvii. 26; the sea to be as firm ground to Peter, Mat. xiv. 24-29; Christ stilling the tempest of a sudden, Mat. viii. 26; the earth quake at Christ’s death, Mat. xxvii. 51; the tree suddenly withered, Mat. xxi. 14. When the will of God is so that the creatures shall depart from their own private nature for a common good, we see how readily they obey him.

Now I shall prove to you that no creature can decline or avoid this dominion. The text saith, ‘They are all his servants;’ that is, all at the beck and will of God.

1. The celestial bodies are his servants: Isa. xlviii. 13, ‘Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together;’ where they are compared to. servants that stand attending on great persons, ready at a word or beck to obey their Lord and master, and go instantly about whatever he doth enjoin them.

2. The angels, the inhabitants of heaven, are said to be his ministers and hosts; and therefore he is called ‘the Lord of hosts;’ and it is said, ‘They fulfil his pleasure, hearkening to the voice of his word,’ Ps. ciii. 21.

3. The winds and seas, and storms: Ps. cxxxv. 6, ‘Whatsoever the Lord pleased that did he in heaven, and in earth, and in the seas, and all deep places;’ again, Ps. cxlviii. 8, ‘Fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy wind fulfilling his word.’ So Job xxxvii. 12, ‘The clouds are turned about by his counsels.’ The changes in the air by storms and tempests are not by chance, but are all directed by God for some intent of his; and in what work he doth employ them they fail not to execute his will, and by these things many times God hath executed great matters in the world: Judges v. 20, ‘The stars in their course fought against Sisera.’ By their influence, Josephus saith, caused a great storm of hail and rain, that they could not hold up their targets.

4. Sickness and disease: Mat viii. 9, ‘Speak but the word, and my servant shall be healed.’ Christ wondered at his faith. So that all things contained in heaven and earth are at God’s beck, and do whatsoever he hath ordained.

Use 1. To teach us to increase our faith by this meditation. There are two things by which we glorify God—by subjection and dependence; or, the two bonds by which we adhere to him are faith and obedience: faith, by which we trust ourselves in his hands; obedience, by which we submit to his will; to his commanding will by holiness, to his disposing will by patience. Now the one increaseth the other. Faith doth mightily befriend obedience; if we can depend upon God, we will subject ourselves, and be faithful to him. The first cause of man’s warping was that he would be at his own finding. God taunted him with it: Gen. iii. 22, ‘And the Lord said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.’ While man contented his mind in the wisdom, goodness, and all-sufficiency of God, he kept innocent; but when he grew distrustful of God, and desired, as the prodigal, to have the stock and portion in his own hands, he presently fell from God, and would preserve himself by his own shifts and skill. The reason why we are not faithful to God is want of faith and trust in his fatherly care, and will be at our own finding Heb. iii. 12. Trust him, and you will adhere to him; distrust him, and you will depart from him. Man would have his safety and comfort in his own hand rather than God’s; and this is a deadly blow to our obedience.

2. There is one consideration feedeth and encourageth both our dependence upon God and our subjection to him, and that is a sound and thorough persuasion of God’s all-sufficiency: Gen xvii. 1, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect.’ We will trust God in the way of our

duty, and not fly to our own carnal shifts. Now that which doth assure us of God's power and all-sufficiency to effect his promises and do us good is that which is here represented.

p.] His power is implied, which made the world out of nothing. Other artificers must have matter to work upon, or else their art will fail. The mason must have timber and stones prepared to his hand, or he cannot build a house. The goldsmith must have gold and silver, or he cannot make so much as a cup or a ring. But God made the world out of things that did not appear, Heb. xi. 4, yet it standeth fast. Now this power is engaged to us in the promises.

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[2.] Here is a power which placeth and maintaineth all things in their order, both in heaven and earth, and causeth every part of nature to do its office; and therefore, why should not we live in a total dependence upon God for life and being every moment? What God hath once settled, it doth and shall continue in the order that he hath appointed; the same power that created them upholdeth them; the same wisdom directeth and ordereth them still. Therefore, when he hath settled grace in the established order of a covenant with his people, the word of God is a foundation that cannot fail; for God needeth no other means to effect anything but his own word and will. The word of God is as powerful in the work of grace as in the works of nature, to renew, convince, subdue, and comfort the heart: Heb. iv. 12, 'For 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:' 2 Cor. x. 4, 5, 'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and everything that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.' Depend upon that word, Ps. cxxx. 5, 'I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.' It is as unchangeable as powerful: Isa. xlv. 23, 'The word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return;' Ps. lxxxix. 34, 'I will not alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.'

[3.] Here is a power to which they are subject, 'For they are his servants;' and be they never so averse and opposite to God, they cannot hinder his work, for he performeth what he will, and who can let? Certainly what God hath engaged himself to do he will not fail to bring it to pass, to give grace at present and glory hereafter, Ps. lxxxiv. 11. Look neither upon the weakness of the means, nor the greatness of the work, but the truth and power of him that promised.

3. Here is something offered to each apart, both to feed trust and dependence, and to engage to subjection and obedience.

First, For trust and dependence.

[1.] We see here that God is a great God, who taketh the care and charge upon him of the sustentation and government of all things to their proper ends and uses. How soon would the world fall into confusion and nothing without his power and care! Now this should recommend him to

our esteem and love. Oh, what a blessed thing is it to have an interest in this powerful and almighty God! All his strength and power is engaged for the meanest and weakest of his children: 1 Peter i. 5, 'We are kept by the power of God to salvation:' and therefore we are bidden to be 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.' Surely they are blessed that have such a mighty God on their side, and engaged with them against their enemies: 1 John iv. 4, 'Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.' He can enable them to do their work, satisfy their desires, maintain them in the midst of opposition: John x. 29, 'My father, which gave them me, is greater than all.' Such is the efficacy of his providence, that he can subject ail things to himself, make them servants, to do what he would have them. Oh, how safe is a Christian in the love and covenant and arms of an almighty God, whom he hath made his refuge! Our trials are many, and grace received is small in the best; but our God is great; he that made all things, and sustaineth things and governeth all things, and possesseth all things, is our trod; surely his grace is sufficient for us,' 2 Cor. xii. 9, and his ever lasting arms can bear us up: Deut. xxxiii. 27, 'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.' He can recover us from our falls, and lift us over all our difficulties. If we could but rest upon his word and lean upon his power, why should we be discouraged? Oh, let us rejoice, then, not only in the goodness but greatness of that God whom we have chosen for our portion!

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[2.] We see here that God is an unchangeable God in goodness 'They continue this day according to thine ordinance.' The stability of his works showeth how stable the workman is. Heaven and earth continue by virtue of his word, that man may have the use and benefit of it from generation to generation, that the continual vicissitudes of day and night may be continued, that man may have light to his labour and darkness drawn about him as a covering for his rest, and also that there might be a constant succession of summer and winter to prepare and ripen the fruits of the earth. Now, if God forsake not the world will he forsake his people? For the benefit of mankind he preserveth the courses of nature, and keepeth all things in their proper place for their roper end and use; and will he not keep one way with his children? there be a failure in the covenant, when there is not a failure in common providence? as if he would satisfy the expectation of heathens that look for a constant succession of day and night and summer and winter, and would not satisfy the expectation of his children, when they look for a blessed morning after a dark night of trouble and conflict, and the light of his countenance after the storms of temptation

Secondly, For subjection, which I made to be double.

[1.] Submission to his disposing will. God's appointment giveth laws to all; there is not the least thing done among us without his prescience, providence, and wise disposal, to which all things in the world are subjected. The Lord's will and pleasure is the only rule of his extending his omnipotency, and is the sovereign and absolute cause of all his working, for all is done in heaven or in earth according to his ordinance and no creature can resist his will; therefore let us submit to this will of God. If God take anything from us, let us bless the name of the Lord; he doth but make

use of his own: ‘It is the Lord let him do what seemeth him good,’ 1 Sam. iii. 18; it is none of ours, but God’s, and let him do with his own as it pleaseth him. God is the disposer of man as well as other creatures, and must choose their condition, and determine of all events wherein they are concerned. We usually dislike God’s disposal of us, though it be so wise and gracious lit consider his sovereignty; you cannot deliver yourselves from the will of God, and get the reins into your own hands. And alas! we are unfit to be disposers either of the world or ourselves, as an idiot is to be the pilot of a ship: therefore let God govern all according to his own pleasure. Say, ‘Lord, not my will, but thine be done.’ We are safer by far in God’s hands than our own.

[2.] Obedience to his commanding will. All creatures do serve God as his word hath ordained; so should we do. We have law and ordinances too. Shall man only be eccentric and exorbitant and transgress his bounds? Winds and sea serve him, only man, made after his image, disobeyeth him: they serve God for our benefit; the heavens continue their motion to convey light, heat, and influence to us, and the air to give us breath and motion, and the earth to be a sure fixed dwelling-place. When all things are created and continued for our use, shall not we serve our bountiful creator? We are sensible of the disturbance of the course of nature when these confederances are dissolved, when the floods increase, or rains fall in abundance. Oh, be moan rather thy own irregular actions, which are a greater deformation of the beauty of the universe!

In short, no creatures are *sui juris*; they are subject to God, by whose word and commandment they must rule their actions. Surely none of us are too great or too good to submit to God. Angels enjoy immunities, yet are not exempted from service. The creatures have acted contrary to their common nature for God’s honour; let us obey God, though contrary to our own wills and inclinations.

SERMON XCVII.

Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.—VER. 92.

IN the verses before the text, David meditateth upon the constancy of the course of nature, whereby is represented God’s constant fidelity in performing all his promises to his people. Now he produceth his own experience, and showeth that all this had been matter of most pleasant meditation to support him under his afflictions; when all other comforts failed, he found sufficient consolation in the word of God, *unless thy law had been*, &c.

In which words observe—

1. David’s condition; he was afflicted.

2. His bitter sense of that condition; he was ready to perish in his affliction.

3. His remedy; the word of God.

4. The way of application; it was his delights.

1. For his condition. Though he was a man after God's own heart, yet he had his troubles: Ps. cxxxii. 1, 'Remember David, Lord, and all his afflictions.'

2. For his sense and apprehension, 'I should then have perished.' *Then*; that is, long since. If you suppose him now under trouble, probably he should have sunk under the weight of it; or if out of trouble, he remembereth from experience what did comfort him when he was ready to perish. But how perished? It may be understood—

[1.] Either as given over to the will of his enemies, if he had not confided in God; for all human help and comfort was cut off, and then did divine help appear.

[2.] Died for sorrow; for 'worldly sorrow worketh death,' 2 Cor. vii. 10. We are apt to despond and despair in great and sore troubles. Affliction worketh heaviness, 1 Peter i. 6, and heaviness drieth the hones and wasteth our strength. What kept him?

3. His remedy was the word of God; for he saith, 'Unless thy law had been my delights,' Some take the word *law* strictly, for the precepts of the law, which keepeth us from sin, which doth involve us in danger. But rather it is taken for the whole word of God, and chiefly for the promises of support and deliverance. I had despaired if I had not consulted with thy word. He doth not here speak of direction, but of support; elsewhere he found nothing but sorrow, but in the word of God joy and comfort.

4. The way of application, *my delights*. The word is plural, and increaseth the sense, in what way soever it may be interpreted. Now it may be interpreted passively or actively.

[1.] Passively, that the word of God refreshed him, and afforded him matter of delight, and so renewed his strength. David had many sorrows, but here he found delights, as many comforts as troubles. The word of God yieldeth comfort for every state of life; if there be many sorrows, there are many delights; but with advantage, heavenly comforts for earthly afflictions, eternal comforts for temporal sorrows.

[2.] Actively. He delighted in the word of God, yea, counted it his delights. It increaseth the sense.

(1.) It was his chief delight. Other things might be thankfully accepted and acknowledged, but this was the solace and delight of his soul.

(2.) His continual delight and comfort, to which he retreated upon all occasions.

(3.) His whole, or only delight; when deprived of all other things, this was instead of all delights to him: all which show his high esteem of the word.

Doct. That the afflicted man's true consolation is in the word of God.

I will pursue the point in the method that I have laid forth in the parts of the text.

First, A man after God's own heart, such as David was, may be afflicted. Why?

1. Because God hath chosen another way of expressing his love to his people than by outward things; for he will govern the spiritual part of the world by faith, and not by sense: therefore 'None shall know love and hatred by things that are before him,' Eccles. ix. 1; that is, by mere outward events, or things obvious to outward sense; the significations of his love are more hidden. Prov. iii. 31, 32, Solomon supposeth that the oppressor may be in a flourishing condition, yet all this while the Lord hates him; his secret is with the righteous. We know his fatherly love to us, not by things without us, but things within us, Rom. viii. 16; 1 John iii. 2, 4, 'Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us:' Gal. iv. 6, 'He hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.' Outward things would soon be overvalued, and we should take them as our whole felicity and portion, if, besides their suitableness to our present needs and appetites, they should come to us as special evidences of God's love.

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2. Afflictions are necessary to the best. Certain it is God will conduct his people to glory, not only by his internal, but external providence. Now to humble us, to wean us from the world, there is need of afflictions: 1 Peter i. 6, 'Ye are in heaviness for a season, if need be.' We are wanton, vain, neglectful of God, unmindful of heavenly things; if God did not put us under the discipline of the cross, our minds and hearts would be more alienated from God and heavenly things: Ps. cxix. 67, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray.' Now, since the best need it, God will not be wanting in any part or point of necessary government to them.

3. That they may know the worth and benefit of God's word, and the comfort of it may be seen and felt by experience, how able it is to support us, and to uphold a sinking heart under any trouble whatsoever, Rom. xv. 4. In full prosperity, when we seem to live upon the creature, we know not the benefit of God's promise, nor how to live by faith; as the use of bladders in swimming is not known while we are upon firm land. The word of God provideth comforts for the obedient, not only at the end of the journey, but for their support at present, while they are in the way. These comforts would be useless if never put upon the trial; therefore none of God's children must look to be exempted: 1 Peter v. 9, 'All these afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.' Our condition is no harder than the rest of the saints of God that have passed through the world.

Secondly, David was ready to sink under his burden; and so are other the people of God ready to perish, when they look to the bare afflictions. This may come:—

1. From the grievousness of the affliction, which staggereth and amazeth them: Ps. lx. 3, ‘Thou hast showed thy people hard things; thou hast made us to drink of the wine of astonishment.’ Their thoughts are confounded, as a man that has taken a poisonous potion. They know not to what hand to turn, are wholly dispirited, and put out of all comfort.

2. It comes from the weakness of the saints. There is some weakness and imbecility in the best, more than they are aware of; as when David was ready to faint under the cross before troubles came. We are like unto Peter, we think we can walk upon the sea; but some boisterous wind or other assaults our confidence, and then we cry out, ‘Help, Master, we perish,’ Mat. xiv. 30. We reckon only upon the sea, but do not think of the wind, and so our weakness is made evident by proof. Whence cometh this weakness?

[1.] Partly because we look more to the creature than to God, and to our dangers than to the power that is to carry us through them: Isa. li. 12, 13, ‘I, even I, am he that comforteth thee: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?’ We that have the immortal and almighty God to be our protector and saviour, why should we be afraid of a frail, mortal man?

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[2.] If they look to God, yet God doth not seem to look to them. If a thin curtain be drawn between God and us, we are presently dismayed, as if he were wholly gone; and because of our hardships, question the love of God: Ps. lxxvii. 9, ‘Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?’ Isa. xlix. 14, ‘Zion hath said, The Lord hath forsaken me, my God hath for gotten me;’ though our condition be everyway consistent with the fatherly love of God: Heb. xii. 5, ‘Have you forgotten the exhortation which speaketh to you as children?’ We are children, though under discipline; and God is a father, though he frowneth as well as smileth.

[3.] Impatiency of delay; if we question not his love, yet cannot tarry his leisure. Certainly it is very good to wait God’s leisure; though he seemeth asleep, he will awake for our help. Faith makes us like people that dig the pit, and wait for the rain to come down and fill it; to lay the cloth, though we know not whence the provision will be sent. But the people of God have not always the strength of faith, and therefore faint, and are ready to perish: ‘I said in my haste, I am cut off,’ Ps. xxxi. 22.

[4.] Religion itself entendereth the heart; a father’s anger is no slight thing to a gracious soul. When we are afflicted, and God is angry, the trouble is the more grievous, and it is hard to steer right between the two rocks of slighting and fainting. Well, then, pity poor creatures under their burden, and help them, but censure them not.

Thirdly, His remedy, God's word; there is the paradise of delights, and the only *requies* to allay the bitter sense of all our troubles. Why?

1. As to the main blessings, there is represented to us the true fountain of all comfort, who is God, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, 2 Cor. i. 13; who distributeth comfort when and where and to whom he pleaseth.

2. There is discovered to us the meritorious and procuring cause, who is Jesus Christ: 'Who hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,' 2 Thes. ii. 16.

3. The Spirit, who is the applier of all comfort, therefore called the Comforter; and he giveth us peace and joy in believing, Rom. xv. 3.

4. The true instrument, means, or condition whereby we receive comfort, and that is faith, John xiv. 1.

5. The true matter of comfort, and that is pardon and life.

[1.] Pardon and reconciliation with God, Rom. v. 10. No solid cause of rejoicing till then, when reconciled to God; then true peace, and peace that passeth all understanding, which will guard both heart and mind, Phil. iv. 7; then all miseries are unstinged. Solid peace of conscience is your best support and comfort under afflictions, the intrinsic evil of afflictions is then taken away: Lam. iii. 39, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?' While sin remaineth unpardoned. the thorn still remaineth in the sore.

[2.] The promise of eternal life, Rom. v. 2. There is the crown set against the cross, heavenly comforts against earthly afflictions; the afflictions of God's children comparatively are light and short: 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'This light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Nothing should be grievous to them that know a world to come, where all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and we shall enjoy fulness of joy and pleasure for evermore.

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6. It showeth us who are the parties capable—the renewed or sanctified: Ps. xxxii. 11, 'Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous, and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.' To all Christ's sincere, faithful, and obedient servants, these promises are matter of abundant joy.

As to particular comforts concerning afflictions, it is endless to in stance in all, but take a few instances.

1. The word of God teaches us not only how to bear them, but how to improve them. As it teaches us how to bear them, it breedeth quietness and submission; but as it teaches us how to improve them, it breedeth peace and joy. To bear: Micah vii. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me:

he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.' To improve them: Heb. xii. 11, righteousness brings peace along with it. The fruit is better than the deliverance, as we get spiritual advantage by them, as they promote repentance, purge out sin, bring us home to God. They rid us of the matter -of our trouble, and bring us to the centre of our rest.

2. The word teaches to depend upon God for the moderating of them, and deliverance from them, 1 Cor. x. 13. Before he giveth a passage out of our pressures, he vouchsafeth present support to us, and will not permit his servants to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear.

3. His people have most experience of God under the cross; they have a more peculiar allowance from God for sufferings than for ordinary services. Paul was strongest when weak, 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. The greater pressures, the more sensible the divine assistance. And when ordinary means fail, and they are pressed above their own strength, the more visible the proof of God's help. When they are most apt to have jealousies of God's love, they have had the highest manifestations of it; never more liberty than in the house of bondage; most of God's smiles when all things seem to frown upon them. In short, have had more understanding, not only of God's word, but his love.

4. God's governing all things for the benefit of his people: Rom. viii. 28, 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God;' sure, then, afflictions. Now they submitting, and being exercised under sharp dispensations, may find it verified to them; many things seem for our hurt intendedly, many thought so by ourselves, but God knoweth how to bring good out of them, Cant. iv. 16.

Fourthly, David saith, 'My delights.' They that seek their solace and delight in the word shall find it there. It is an excellent frame of heart to be satisfied with the comforts which the word offereth; every one cannot be thus affected. To raise this delight:—

1. Faith is necessary; for the comforts of the word are received and improved by faith. Unless we expect the sure accomplishment of God's promises, how can we be supported by them? Ps. xxvii. 13, 'I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living:' that is, without a full assent to the promises which God had made him of his restoration, for he had particular assurance of the kingdom, as we have of the kingdom of heaven. So for the consent, as well as assent, to take the happiness contained in the promises as our whole felicity: Ps. cxix. 111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; they are the rejoicing of my heart.' There is heritage and portion rich enough in God's promises, and this breedeth joy in all afflictions.

2. Meditation is necessary; for thereby the sweetness of the word is perceived and tasted, and the promises laid before us. It is the fruit of delight: Ps. i. 2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' And it is the cause of it: Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord.' They who delight in a thing will often

view it and consider it, and thereby their delight is increased. The most lively truths work not on us for want of serious consideration.

3. There must be mortification and self-denial, or prizing spiritual favours before temporal benefits. The cross will not be grievous to a mortified spirit, when, they compare their gain with their loss, 2 Cor. iv. 16. To others we speak in vain, whose hearts are set upon worldly advantages; but they who value all things in order to the chief good, and have weaned their hearts from the false happiness, they have their end if they be brought nearer to God, though by a bitter and sharp means.

Use 1. Reproof to four sorts.

1. To those that know no comfort but what ariseth from the enjoyments of sense. Alas! these comforts are dreggy and base, and leave a taint upon the soul, Jude 19. Again, they leave us destitute when we most need comfort, Job xxvii. 8. When other comforts forsake us, and have spent their allowance, the comforts of the word abide with us. Again, these comforts increase our grief, though for a time they seem to mitigate and allay it. They are like strong waters, that warm the stomach for the present, but destroy the true temper and natural heat of it, and leave it the colder afterwards; they cheer us a little, but the end of that mirth is heaviness. Oh! how much better are the comforts of God's word, which giveth us matter of joy in the saddest condition; and do not only save us from desperation in troubles, but make us rejoice in tribulation, and can bring pleasure to us in our bitterest afflictions! There are breasts of consolation for every distressed creature to suck at and be saved.

2. It reproves them that think philosophy as good, or a better institution than Christianity. Certainly we should own the wisdom of God, by what hand soever it is conveyed to us; as Elijah refused not his meat though brought by ravens. But when this is done by men of a profane wit, in a contempt of God, we must convince them of their dangerous error and mistake, and show how complete we are in Christ, that we be not spoiled by the rudiments of vain wisdom or philosophy, Col. ii. 8. Surely God's comforts have greatest authority over the conscience to silence all our murmurings, Ps. xciv. 19. Man speaks to us by the evidence of reason, but in scripture God himself speaks to us, and impawneth his truth with us to do us good. They knew not the true cause of trouble, sin; nor the true remedy, Jesus Christ. And surely those great mysteries of Christ as procurer of comfort, the Spirit as the applier, heaven as the matter, the word as the warrant, faith as the means to receive, all these are a more accommodate means to settle the conscience than those little glimmerings of light which refined nature discovered. They speak of submitting out of necessity, little of reducing the heart to God; and their very doctrines for comfort were rather a libel against providence than a sure ground of peace and tranquillity of mind; and they taught men to eradicate the affections rather than to govern and quiet them; and therefore keep up your reverence to the scriptures. A Seneca may speak things more neatly, and to the gust of carnal fancy, but not with greater power and efficacy; this is reserved for the word.

3. It reproves them that undervalue the consolations laid down in the word, as if they were but slender, empty, and unsatisfactory, and would have some singular and extraordinary way of getting comfort: Job xv. 11, ‘Are the consolations of God small with thee? is there any secret thing with thee?’ God’s ordinary way is the sure way, the other layeth us open to a snare; therefore they who undervalue the ordinary comforts of the word, obtained in a way of faith and repentance, and close walking with God (as Naaman undervalued the waters of Jordan), and would have signs and wonders to comfort them, they may long sit in darkness, because if God comfort them not in their way, they will not be comforted at all. Now, though God hath sometimes, in condescension to his people, granted them their desires—as to Thomas—yet it is with an upbraiding of their weakness and unbelief, John xx. 28. We should acquiesce in the common allowance of God’s people, lest we seem to reflect on the wisdom and goodness of God, and lay open ourselves to some false consolation and dream of comfort, while we affect new means without the compass of the word; especially when we find not our expectations there speedily answered, like hasty patients, readier to tamper with every new medicine they hear of, than submit to a regular course of physic. Gregory tells us of a lady of the emperor’s court that never ceased importuning him to seek from God a revelation from heaven that she should be saved. He answers, *Rem difficilem et inutilem postulas*—it was a thing difficult and unprofitable; difficult for him to obtain, unprofitable for her to ask, having a surer way by the scriptures, 2 Peter i. 19, than oracles. The adhering of the soul to the promises is the unquestionable way to obtain a sound peace. Luther, as he confesseth, was often tempted to ask a sign of the pardon of his sins, or some special revelation. He tells also how strongly he withstood these temptations—*Pactum feci cum Domino meo ne mihi mittat visiones, vel somnia, vel etiam angelos: contentus enim sum hoc dono, quod liabeo scripturam sanctam; quae abunde docet et suppeditat omnia, quae necessaria sunt tam ad hanc vitam, quam ad futuram*,—I indented with the Lord my God, that he would never send me dreams and visions; I am well contented with the gift of the scriptures.

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4. It shows how much they are to blame that are under a scripture institution and do so little honour it by their patience or comfort under troubles. Wherefore were the great mysteries of godliness made known to us, and the promises of the world to come, and all the directions concerning the subjection of the soul to God, and those blessed privileges we enjoy by Christ, if they all be not able to satisfy and stay your heart, and compose it to a quiet submission to God, when it is his pleasure to take away his comforts from you? Is there o balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Will not the whole word of God yield you a cordial or a cure? It is a disparagement to the provision Christ hath made for our comfort.

[1.] Surely this comes either from ignorance or forgetfulness; you do not meditate in the word, or study the grounds of comfort, and remember them: Heb. xii. 5, ‘Have you forgotten the exhortation which. speaks unto you as unto children?’ Hagar had a well of comfort nigh at hand, yet ready to die for thirst.

[2.] You indulge a distemper, and the obstinacy and peevishness of grief: Jer. xxxi. 15, 'A voice was heard in Rama, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, and refused to be comforted.' Certainly you do not expostulate with yourselves, and cite your passions before the tribunal of reason, Ps. xlii. 5; or else look altogether to the grievance, not to the comfort; aggravate the grievances, extenuate the comforts; you pitch too much upon temporal happiness, would have God maintain you at your own rate: Heb. xiii. 5, 6, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' A man must be purged from inordinate affection when he would trust in God. Do not pitch too doatingly upon temporal happiness.

Use 2. Let us get these comforts settled upon our hearts. Was this peculiar to David alone? No; every godly man, as Theodoret observeth, may say in his trouble, Unless thy word had been my delights, 1 had perished in mine affliction. So Daniel when forbidden to pray; so the three children in the furnace; all the martyrs; yea, all the afflicted servants of God. Therefore let us—

1. Prize the scripture, and be more diligent in hearing, reading, meditating on the blessed truths contained therein. The earth is the fruitful mother of all herbs and plants; yet it must be tilled, ploughed, harrowed, and dressed, else it bringeth forth little fruit. The scripture containeth all the grounds of comfort and happiness, but we have little benefit unless daily versed in reading, hearing, meditation. Surely if we prize it as we should we would do so: Ps. cxix. 97, 'Oh, how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day.' There is the only remedy of sin and misery, the offer of true blessedness, the sure rule to walk by.

2. If you would have these comforts, you must get such a spirit of application under afflictions: Job v. 27, 'Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.' All efficacy is conveyed by the touch; the nearer the touch, the greater the power and efficacy; bring it down to your hearts: Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?'

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3. The law of God must be your delight in prosperity, if you would have it your support in adversity: Ps. cxix. 105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.' That which is our antidote against our lusts is our best cordial against our passions: 2 Peter i. 4, 'Whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.' When afflictions come upon you, consider what is your greatest burden and what is your greatest comfort, for then you are best at leisure to consider both; your greatest burden, that you may avoid it, your greatest comfort, that you may apply yourselves to it.

SERMON XCVIII.

I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.—VER. 93.

IN these words observe two things:—

1. David's thankful resolution, *I will never forget thy precepts*.

2. The reason of it, *for with them thou hast quickened me*.

First, In his thankful resolution, take notice:—

1. Of the object, *thy precepts*.

2. The duty promised, and negatively expressed, *I will never forget*.

1. For the object, 'Thy precepts:' thereby may be meant the word in general; he had found benefit by it, and the word of God should ever be dear and precious to him, especially the gospel part of it. Surely that is the great means of quickening; that may be comprised in the term, *thy precepts*, if not principally intended; or else most especially some particular truth which God had blessed to the use and comfort of his soul: I shall never forget that truth, those precepts of thine.

2. The duty promised, 'I will never forget.' Forgetting or remembering is sometimes taken in scripture for a notional remembrance or notional forgetting, when we retain the notions of such a truth, or the notions of it vanish out of our minds. And sometimes it is taken practically, when we are suitably affected, as the thing or truth remembered deserves. Both may be intended; I remember, retain, feel the fruit of thy word. That which hath done us good, the very notions of it will stick in our minds. Or else it may be for the practical remembrance; so it signifies, I will prize, I will cleave fast to it as long as I live. To remember is to esteem, and to forget is to neglect; as Heb. xiii. 16, 'To do good, and to communicate, forget not;' that is, neglect not. I may remember to communicate, yet not perform; but forget not, that is, neglect not. In this sense we usually say, You forget me, that is, you neglect to do that which I desired of you. So David saith, '1 will never forget thy precepts.' The remembrance of his promises is effectual and perpetual. It is effectual; for I will remember it, prize it, and lay it up in my heart with thankfulness. And it is perpetual; 'I will never;' the Hebrew is, 'not to all eternity;' 'I will not forget thy precepts for ever,' as we render it fitly.

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Secondly, The reason, 'For with them thou hast quickened me.' The reason is taken from his experience of the benefit of this word; and there we have the benefit received, *quickening*; the author, thou hast quickened; the means, *with them*. God by this means had quickened his soul.

1. The benefit, quickened. There is a double quickening, when from dead we are made living, or when from cold and sad and heavy we are made lively. One sort of quickening the word speaks of is when from dead we are made living, Eph. ii. 1. Another when from cold, sad, heavy, we are

made lively, and so not only have life, but enjoy it more abundantly, according to Christ's gracious promise, John x. 10, that they may be living, lively, kept still in vigour. Now this second quickening may be taken either more largely for the vitality of grace, or strictly for actual comfort. Largely taken; so God quickens by increasing the life of grace, either internally by promising the life of grace, or morally and externally by promising the life of glory. More strictly; his quickening may be taken for comfort and support in his affliction; so it is likely to be taken here: he had said before, ver. 92, immediately before the text, 'Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction:' and now, 'I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.' It was great comfort and support to him, and therefore he should prize the word as long as he lived. This is the benefit received, thou hast quickened me.

2. Here is the author, *thou*. God put him, by the inspiration of grace, upon the meditation of his word, and then he blessed that meditation; his assistance and grace doth all. We receive all degrees of life from the fountain of life. The word was the means, but *thou hast quickened me*.

3. The means, *by them*; that is, by his precepts; the word was spirit and life to him. By the Spirit God makes his word lively in operation, and conduceth very much to quickening, comforting, and supporting of the saints.

Doct. Those that have received comfort, life, and quickening by the word of God, find themselves obliged to remember it for ever.

I shall illustrate this proposition by these considerations:—

1. That God's children are sometimes under deadness.

2. That in such deadness the word of God is the only means to quicken them.

3. Though the word be quick and lively and powerful, yet it is God that must bless it, that must make it a support to the soul.

4. That whenever we have received these comforts, quickenings, and supports from him, they should ever be recorded and treasured up in the registers of a thankful memory, for the great uses of Christianity.

First, God's children are under deadness sometimes, which happeneth to them for many causes.

1. By reason of some sin committed, and not repented of, or not fully repented of. God smites them with deadness and hardness of heart, and the spiritual life for awhile is greatly obstructed and impaired, that it cannot discover itself, and they have not those lively influences of grace as formerly. Thus it was with David when he had strayed so greatly from God, and begs God not to cast him off: Ps. li. 11, 'Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.' As a wound in the body lets out the life, blood, and spirits, so these grievous sins are as a wound in the

soul. Sin against the conscience of a renewed man defaceth the work of the Holy Spirit, so that for a while he seems to be shut out from God's favour, and his gracious abilities are lessened and impaired; he is like a wounded man, till he be cured and made whole again. The Spirit being grieved and resisted, withdraws, and the strength of the soul is wasted; and therefore be very tender, stand in awe not only of greater, but smaller sins.

2. By reason of some good omitted, especially neglect of the means whereby we may be kept alive, fresh and lively in God's service. Lazy fits of indisposition and omissions of duty do more frequently steal in upon believers than positive outbreakings and commissions of sin, and they are more ready to please themselves in them, and lie still under them, and so by this means contract much deadness of heart. As a lute that is not played upon, but hangs by the wall, and not used, it soon grows out of keller for want of use; so if we do not diligently and constantly exercise ourselves in godliness, our hearts grow dead and vain. It is the complaint of the church, Isa. lxiv. 7, 'There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.' If we do not stir up ourselves to keep on a constant commerce with God and respect to God, alas! deadness creeps upon the heart unawares; and we are commanded, ἀναζωπυρεῖν, 2 Tim. i. 6, 'To stir up the gift of God which is in us.' Surely a slothful servant will soon become an evil servant: Mat. xxv. 26, 'Thou evil and slothful servant.' Therefore our sinful sluggishness is one cause of our deadness; for he that doth not trade with his talents will necessarily become poor: and if we do not continue this holy attendance upon God, the heart suffers loss: 1 Thes. v. 19, 20, 'Despise not prophecy; quench not the Spirit.' The coupling of these two things together shows, that if we despise prophecy, we quench the Spirit; as fire goes out not only by pouring on water, but by not stirring and blowing it up. To expect help from God when we are sluggish is to tempt Christ, and put him still upon a miraculous way to heal and cure our distempers. Who will bring bread and meat to a sluggard's bed, who will not arise to labour for it, or will not rise at least to fetch it? Therefore, if we will not attend upon God in the means of grace, he will not bring us that help, comfort, and supply that otherwise we might have. God worketh, but so that we work also: Phil. ii. 12, 13, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh,' &c. God's working is not a ground of laziness, but for more strict observance. Since all depends upon God, therefore take heed you do not offend God, and provoke him to suspend his grace. We must not lie upon a bed of ease, and cry, Christ must do all; for this is to abuse the power of grace to laziness. It is notable that God bids his people do that which he promiseth to give them, Ps. xxxi. 24; Ps. xxvii. 14, 'Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart.' As if he had said, Strengthen thine heart, and he will strengthen thy heart. The courage of faith is both commanded and promised. Why? God by this would show how we should shake ourselves out of our laziness and idleness; that though God gives us grace and power, yet he will have us to work; as a father that lifts up his child's arm to a burden, and bids him lift it up. Usually we complain of deadness with a reflection upon God; he quickens the dead, and therefore I am dead. Ay! but what hast thou done to quicken thyself? for grace was never intended that we might be idle. You must complain of yourselves as the moral faulty cause; God is the efficient cause. You

do not meditate, pray, draw life out of the precious promises. When the spouse sleeps and keeps her bed, then Christ withdraws, Cant. v. 6.

3. Another cause is unthankfulness for benefits received, especially spiritual benefits; for God loves to have his grace acknowledged. He stops his hand, and suspends the influences of his grace, when the creature doth not acknowledge his bounty: Col. ii. 7, 'Be established and rooted in the faith, abounding therein with thanksgiving.' The way to grow in faith, and get by faith, is to be thankful for what we have received; that is an effectual means both to keep it and to get more. Therefore if we be always querulous, and do not give thanks for the goodness of God to us for what he hath already vouchsafed to us in Christ, no wonder that deadness and discouragement creep upon our hearts.

4. Pride in gifts; for we are told, James iv. 6, 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.' The garland we put on our own heads soon withers, and those gifts which we are puffed up with are presently blasted, and have deadness upon them; for he will teach us to ascribe all to himself.

5. Some great and heavy troubles. We read, ver. 107 of this psalm, 'I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word.' Oh! when we are afflicted sore, there is a deadness upon the heart, the spiritual life clogged. With what alacrity did they go about good things before! But then there is a damp; worldly sorrow deadens the spirit, as godly sorrow quickens it, and is a means to keep us alive to God.

6. Another cause is carnal liberty, or intermeddling with worldly vanities. So much we may learn from that prayer, Ps. cxix. 37, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.' Oh! when the children of God let loose their minds to vanity, and take immoderate liberty in the delights of the flesh, there is a deadness comes upon them, for therefore he goes to the cause: 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.' Immoderate liberty in earthly things, or in gratifying the flesh, brings on a deadness upon the heart. The Spirit withdraws when the soul is taken off from other comforts, and is more addicted to vain pleasures: Jude 19, 'Sensual, not having the Spirit.' As we are enlarged to the flesh, we are straitened to the spirit. As sensuality increaseth, so the life and vitality of grace decays.

Secondly, In such cases, the word of God is the only means to quicken us. Why the word? For two reasons:—

1. Because the word contains the most quickening considerations, and the affections are wrought upon by serious and ponderous thoughts; for there God interposeth in the way of the highest authority, straitly charging and commanding us, under pain of his displeasure: and there he reasons with us again in the most potent and strong way of argumentation, from the excellency of his commands, their suitableness to us as we are reasonable creatures; from his great love to us in

Christ, whom he hath given to die for us; from the danger if we refuse him, which is no less than everlasting torment; from the benefit and happiness in complying with his motions, which is no less than eternal and complete blessedness both for our bodies and souls; and all this is bound upon us by a strict day of impartial accounts. Oh, what a company of quickening considerations are there, to set us awork with life, vigor, and seriousness, when we are to answer for our neglects, or else to receive the reward of our diligence! Now what will quicken us if this will not? If the high and glorious authority of the supreme lawgiver awe us not, if the reasonableness of God's commands invite us not, if the wonderful love of God in Christ constrain us not, if the joys of heaven do not allure us, and the horrors of ever lasting darkness do not preserve upon us a lively sense of our duty, what will work upon us if this do not, and gain us to a constant diligent care and serious preparation for our own happiness and salvation? Out of what rock was the heart of man hewn, that all this shall be brought to him in the most persuasive way, as it is in the word of God, and will not work upon him? Again, if the deadness should arise from our negligence in our duty, the word of God how powerfully doth it quicken us! But if the deadness should arise from sorrow and discomfort, is not the word as powerful to raise and quicken the soul to a delight in God as to inforce our duty? What puts a damp upon us? Is it fury of men? We have a living God to trust to, who will remain when they are gone, who will pardon our sins, help us in all our straits, who will lay upon us no more than we are able to bear, who will never leave us utterly destitute, but will sanctify all, and make all work together for the best, for our everlasting salvation, and finally bring us into his glorious presence, that we may live for ever with him. Here is comfort enough, whatever our heaviness be; such a powerful God to stand by us in all our troubles, and make all work for good, that at length we may be brought home to God. If this word did but dwell richly in our souls, it would keep us fresh and lively, and we need not fear man or devil, Col. iii. 16. Again, 1 John ii. 14, 'The word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.' We need fear nothing, for whoever trouble us, they are something under God. Whatever is our misery, and whatever befalls us, it is something less than hell, which we have escaped by Christ, and will all be made up in heaven. The first sight of God and the first glimpse of everlasting glory will recompense all the sorrows of the present life, and as soon as we step into heaven, all shall be forgotten. In short, God's particular providence, fatherly love and care, the example of Christ, the promise of the comforting Spirit, the hopes of glory, should revive us in all our languishings. So that if deadness comes from backwardness and slowness in our duty, in the word there are most quickening considerations; or if from troubles, we have enough in God, Christ, the covenant, the promise of eternal life to support us. This is the first reason; the word of God is the only means to comfort us, because it contains proper quickening considerations, that may keep life and vigour in us, if either carnal distemper invade the heart, or worldly sorrow and fear, which is apt to perplex us.

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2. The quickening Spirit delights to work by this means. The ordinary chariot, that carrieth the influences of grace, is the word of grace. The Spirit that speaks in the word speaks his own lively comforts to us. Alas! they are but cold comforts we can find else where. The Spirit of God rides

most triumphantly in his own chariot. The word and the Spirit are often associated, to show they go together. The word goes with the Spirit: Isa. lix. 21, ‘My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart,’ &c. Isa. xxx. 20, when God promiseth, ‘Their eyes shall see their teachers;’ it is promised also, ‘They should hear a voice behind them, saying, This is the way;’ God would afford the word and Spirit in times of their affliction. The Spirit works still in concomitancy with the word, that it may the better be known to be a revelation from God. If God will set up a word and revelation of his mind distinct from the light of nature, it is fit it should be owned; and that is done by a concomitancy of his grace, and powerful operations of his Spirit, that goes along with his word: John xvii. 17, ‘Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.’ We find the word to be truth, because it is associated and accompanied with the operations of the Spirit: 1 Peter i. 22, ‘Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.’ The Spirit still goes along with the truth of the gospel, and with God’s word. His word is the sword of the Spirit. God will not bless any other doctrine so much as the word to quicken, revive, and comfort the soul; and therefore here we should busy ourselves, for it contains the surest grounds of comfort, and the Spirit is associated with it, and goes along with it, to bless it to our souls.

Thirdly, Though the word be the means, yet the benefit comes from God, ‘for with them thou hast quickened me.’ Life comes from the fountain of life. The gospel is a sovereign plaster, but it is God’s hand that must apply it and make it stick, make it to be peace, comfort, and quickening to our souls. It is said, 1 Tim. vi. 13, ‘That he that quickeneth all things is God.’ The quickening of life natural or life spiritual is to be ascribed to God alone. Let me evidence this by three considerations:—

1. The life of grace is begun and carried on in a constant way of dependence upon God; he will not trust us with a stock of grace in our own hands, but our life is in Christ’s hands: 1 John v. 12, ‘He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son, hath not life.’ He hath it in his own hands, and he gives and conveys it to us. And Gal. ii. 20, ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.’ Christ made the purchase, and therefore it pleased the Father that the purchased treasure should be put into his hands, and not immediately into ours. We have so foully miscarried already, that God will trust his honour in our hands no more, as at first he did. We have nothing but what we have daily from Christ and in Christ: he must influence us, and without him we can do nothing: John xv. 5, χωρὶς ἐμοῦ. Apart from him we can do nothing, therefore we cannot quicken our selves; for God hath reserved this life of grace, and kept it in his own hands, that we may have our daily supplies from Christ.

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2. The vitality or liveliness of grace is not dispensed by a certain law, but according to the sovereign will and good pleasure of God. God gives life to his people, but the activity of it is only from his good pleasure: Phil. ii. 13, ‘For it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of (or according to) his good pleasure.’ He gives out comfort, and he gives degrees of quickening as he pleaseth, to some more, to some less, and not always in the same degree to the same persons;

therefore we must look up unto God if we would have this life and quickening; it is very necessary to our well-being, but it is a favour, 'he worketh in us according to his good pleasure.'

3. The means cannot work without the principal agent. As the word could not convert us at first but by the power of God, or as his grace works by it, quickening a dead soul, purifying a defiled heart, humbling a proud mind; so when the conscience grows sleepy, you need quickening excitations to duty. The same grace which caused a spiritual life doth give us spiritual strength, and maintain that life, by inclining the mind and will, by stirring up the affections by longing desires after Christ and glory; so the soul is still kept alive in the same way as it was begotten by God at first: 1 Cor. iii. 7, 'Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but it is God that giveth the increase.' All is of God, who only hath the supreme power over men's hearts, to enlighten the mind, incline the will, and enlarge the affections. Though we use the means (and we sin if we do not), yet it is God that quickeneth us; he hath the supreme power over the heart of man.

Fourthly, These powerful experiences in this kind will be and should be recorded and remembered by us; for, saith David, 'I will never forget thy precepts.'

1. They will be remembered if we have met with any powerful experiences of the Lord's quickening and awakening the heart. (1.) We will remember what most concerns us. (2.) We will remember all those things which make notable impressions upon our souls.

[1.] Things that concern us will be remembered by us. Every one's memory is as his affections are. Let a child read the scripture, that chapter wherein mention is made of Joseph's parti-coloured coat, that will stick in his mind more than better things, because it suits with his childish fancy, and his desires that his parents should make such a garment for himself. And it is usually observed that youth is most taken with the histories of the Bible, because of their desire to know things past. And if once they come to manly age, they are more taken with the doctrines of the Bible, because when they grow men they begin to form their opinions of religion. And elder persons are taken with psalms, and holy devotional strains in scripture, because then, as they grow in age, it is time to address themselves to God. Persons in doubts and fears by reason of sin will be most affected with tenders of grace, as suiting best with their condition; persons in affliction, with the consolations appointed for the afflicted; persons in conflict with any sin, with those passages which afford most direct help against them. Still that which more especially concerns us should and will be most observed and remembered by us, for there it speaks to our very hearts. Now, saith the soul, in such a point, in such extremity, the word of God did my heart good; I shall remember it as long as I live; when a seasonable word is spoken to their case; their judgment was not passed over by the Lord: I was dead, and it revived me; disconsolate, and it comforted me; ready to stray, and it reduced me; under such a temptation, and it relieved me. I should transcribe the whole scripture, especially the psalms, if I should tell you how often David takes notice what the word of God did to him in such and such a condition; for still things that nearly concern us, they will affect us, and be remembered by us.

[2.] Those things will be remembered that make any notable impression, that leave a lively sense upon the heart; they impress a notice of themselves, and will not be forgotten: Luke xxiv. 32, 'Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?' If opening of the scriptures causeth any burning of heart, or any strange workings of soul, when the heat is gone and past yet the burning cannot be forgotten; they remembered Christ still, and can speak of the actings of the Spirit, not only when they are on, but when they are over and past Christ was vanished out of sight and gone, yet they cannot forget the warmness of heart they felt while he opened the scriptures to them: Cant. v. 4, 'He put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him;' and ver. 6, 'My soul failed when he spake.' Oh! if we be soundly humbled or soundly comforted, or be effectually moved and stirred to the remembrance of God, then heavenly things that occasion this will not be forgotten.

2. These things should be remembered to confirm our faith, to increase our love.

[1.] To confirm our faith. Faith is taken either for a general assent to the word, or for a dependence upon God for some blessing that we want or stand in need of.

(1.) If we take it for a general assent to the word, why, these notable quickenings and experiences of the convincing or comforting or converting power of the word, they are a *secondary* confirmation of the truth of the word to us. I tell you why I put in that word, a secondary confirmation; they are not a primary, for we must believe the word before we can feel its efficacy and find it to be effectual to us; and therefore the primary grounds of faith are the impressions of God upon the word, the secondary are the impressions of God upon the heart. Now I have felt the virtue and power of the truth upon my soul, and all the world shall not draw me from it. I must have a primary confirmation of the truth of the word before I can believe, and before it can work in me. The apostle saith, 1 Thes. ii. 13, 'Ye received the word, not as the word of man, but as the word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe.' First I receive it as the word of God by some marks, and notes, and characters, some impress of God upon his word; some what God hath left of himself in the word, and that awes my heart to reverence it, there I receive it upon my heart; but when it works in me mightily, I have a secondary confirmation. When I have eyes to see the impress of God upon the word, then I feel the power of it; and when I have felt the power of it, it is confirmed in my soul, 1 Cor. i. 6. When we feel the blessed effects, the quickenings and comforts of the word, it is a mighty help to faith. So 1 John v. 10, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.' What is that witness in himself? Why, the witness of the Spirit, applying the blood of Christ to the conscience, sanctifying and quickening the heart; then he hath the witness in himself, and is more confirmed that Jesus is the Christ, and the word of God is true, and cannot easily be divorced from it; he hath felt the effects of it in his own heart: Col. i. 5, 6, 'For the hope that is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, and knew the grace of God in truth.' We guess at things before, and have but a wavering faith, such as may let in some work upon the soul; then we know it in truth, then it is more fully made good to us, by the

convincing, comforting, and sanctifying Spirit, that evidenceth it to our souls, and this can be no other but the truth of God; this makes our faith more strong and rooted, and we may be confirmed in the hope and belief of the gospel, and may not easily be removed therefrom.

(2.) Take faith in the other notion, for a dependence upon God, for something that we stand in need of. Every manifestation of his grace should be kept as an experience by us for afterwards, when that frame may be away, when God may hide his face, and all dead in the soul; as David in his infirmity 'remembered the years of the right hand of the most high,' and former experiences of God, Ps. lxxvii. 10. As he, in an outward case, for outward deliverances, remembered the former help and succours he had from God, so we may remember former grace and former quickening. There are many ups and downs in the spiritual life, for even the new creature is changeable, both in point of duty and in point of comfort. Now it is a mighty confirmation when we remember what God hath done:—

(1st.) In point of duty. Sometimes you shall find you are dull and heartless under the ordinances of God; in reading and hearing you find little life, lazy, and almost indifferent, whether you call upon God in secret, or hear the word, or join in the communion of saints; no relish in any duty, do it almost for custom's sake, or at best but to please your consciences: you must do it, and you drive on heavily, not for any great need you feel of them, or good you find by them, or hope you expect from them. Now it is of great use to remember how I have waited upon God formerly, and he hath quickened, refreshed, and comforted me; and therefore it is good to try again, to keep up our dependence upon his ordinances, when this dulness seizeth upon the soul, and this listlessness; when conscience is sleepy, and the heart hangs off from God, remember I have been quickened.

(2d.) If it be in point of comfort, fears and sorrows, why! is there no balm in Gilead? no physician there? Hath not God relieved in like straits before, and given in fresh consolations, when you have bemoaned yourselves and opened your case before him? There are none acquainted with the spiritual life but have many experiences both of deadness and comfort. Now one is a great help against the other, that our hands may not wax faint and feeble. God, that hath comforted, may comfort again, and why should I neglect his appointed means? No; I will continue there, and lie at the pool where the waters have been stirred.

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[2.] They are of use, again, to stir up our affections to God and his word.

(1.) To increase our love to God. Oh! we should keep the impression of his kind manifestation still upon the heart, that the mercy may be continually acknowledged. Surely it is a favour that God will manifest himself to us, and own us in our attendance upon his word and other duties. The Lord Jesus promiseth it as a great blessing: John xiv. 21, 'He that loveth me, and keepeth my commandment, shall be loved of my father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.' Now, then, when any such sensible favour is vouchsafed to us, we should not forget it, but lay it up as a continual ground of thankfulness and love to God: Cant. i. 4, 'We will be glad, and rejoice

in thee; we will remember thy love more than wine.' When God hath treated us most magnificently in his ordinances, either at his table or word, and hath refreshed and revived our souls, oh I we will remember this, and lay it up for the honour of God, and knit our hearts in a greater love to God.

(2.) It is of great use to increase our love to the word, for the excellency and worth of the word is found experimentally by believers, HO that their love and estimation of it is more fixed and settled upon their hearts, so that they purpose to make use of it always for their comfort and direction; it is a great encouragement when formerly they have found comfort and life thereby. The apostle, to settle the Galatians that began to waver, that were apt to be overcome by their Judaizing brethren, to settle them in love to the gospel, he puts them to the question, Gal. iii. 2, 'This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' The Spirit of regeneration, with all his comforts and graces, is not conveyed to you by the doctrine of the law, but the doctrine of the gospel. As if he had said, Stick to that doctrine where you have been quickened, comforted, revived, and your hearts settled, for God hath owned that doctrine. He appeals to their own conscience, and to their own known experience, that they should not quit the doctrine of faith, but prize and keep close to it; for surely that which hath been a means of be getting grace in our souls should be highly prized by us. If God hath wrought grace, and any comfort and peace, stick there, and own God there, and be not easily moved from thence. Another apostle reasons, James i. 18, 19, 'God hath begotten us by the word of truth, where fore be swift to hear;' that is, Oh! do not neglect hearing; take heed of forsaking or neglecting the word, for then you go against your own known experience. You know here you had your life, quickening, comfort, strength, and will you be turned off from this?—for many times a seducer may turn off a believer from the word which hath given him his first knowledge of Christ.

There are three causes which carry saints to the word and other ordinances—viz., necessity, natural appetite and inward inclination, and experience. Necessity; they cannot live without the word. Natural appetite and inward inclination; they have hearts suited to this work; the Spirit, which wrought in the heart, hath put a nature in them suitable to the work. And experience; they have found benefit by it. These are the three grand causes of respect to the word, and they are all implied or expressed in that, 1 Peter ii. 2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word,' there is natural appetite for the word; we have them come as new-born babes. And there is necessity; you cannot live, nor keep, nor increase what you have, unless you keep to the word. And there is experience; if so be you have tasted, you have had powerful impressions and quickenings by this word. We should engage our hearts upon experience, the comfort, life and light that we have had by the word of God.

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Our own spiritual estate will sooner be discerned by these experiences, the comfort and quickening received from the word, in the way of duty; for 'experience worketh hope,' Rom. v. 4. If your experiences be observed and regarded, this works a hopeful dependence upon God for everlasting glory; your evidences will be more ready, and sooner come to hand. The motions of

our souls are various, and, through corruption, very confused and dark; and this is that which makes it so difficult upon actual search to discern how it stands between us and God; it is for want of observation. But now, if there be constant observation of what passeth between us and God, how he hath quickened, comforted, and owned us in our attendance upon him, and what he hath done to bring on our souls in the way of life, these will make up an evidence, and will abundantly conduce to the quickening and comforting of our hearts.

Use 1. For information. It shows us—

1. The reason why so many neglect and contemn God's word; because they never got benefit by it, they find no life in it, therefore no delight in it. Those that are quickened acknowledge the mercy and improve it; they esteem the word, and have a greater conscience of their duty. It is not enough to find truth in truth, not to be able to contradict it, but you must find life; then we will prize and esteem it, when it hath been lively in its operations to our souls.

2. It shows the reason why so many forget the word, because they are not quickened. You would remember it by a good token if there were a powerful impression left upon your souls; and the reason is, because you do not meditate upon it, that you may receive this lively influence of the Spirit: for a sermon would not be forgotten, if it had left any lively impression upon your souls.

3. If we want quickening we must go to God for it; and God works powerfully by the influence of his grace, and so he quickens us by his Spirit; and he works morally by the word, both by the promises and threatenings thereof: and so, if you would be quickened, you must use the means, attend upon reading and preaching, and meditating upon the word. As he works powerfully with respect to himself, so morally by reasonings.

Use 2. By way of reflection upon ourselves.

Have we had any of these experiences? David found life in God's word, therefore resolves never to forego it or forget it. Therefore, what experience have you had of the word of God? s Surely at least at first conversion there was the work of faith and repentance, at first you will have this experience. How were you brought home to God? What I have you had no quickening from the word of God?

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Case. But here is a case of conscience: Doth every one know their conversion, or way of their own conversion? Christians are usually sensible of this first work. There is so much bitter sorrow, and afterwards so much rejoicing of hope which doth accompany, that surely this should not be strange. But though you have not been so wary to mark God's dealings with you, and the particular quickenings of your souls, yet at least when the Lord raised you out of your security, and brought you home to himself, you should have remembered it: 1 Thes. i. 9, 'They themselves show of us what manner of entering we had unto you.' The entrance usually is known, though afterward the work be carried on with less observation. Growth is not so sensible as the first change. God's first

work is most powerful, meets with greater opposition, and so leaves a greater feeling upon us; and therefore it were strange if we were brought home to Christ, and no way privy and conscious to the way of it, as if all were done in our sleep. I say, to think so were to give security a soft pillow to rest on. And therefore, what quickenings had you then? Can you say, Well, I shall never forget this happy season and occasion, when God first awakened me to look after himself? Many of God's children cannot trace the particular footsteps of their conversion, and mark out all the stages of Christ's journey and approach to their souls, for all are not alike thus troubled. But yet, that men may not please themselves with the supposition of imaginary grace wrought in them without their privity and knowledge, let me speak to this grand case, this manner of entrance of Christ into our souls, how we are quickened from the dead and made living.

1. None are converted but are first convinced of their danger and evil estate; God's first -work is upon their understandings: Jer. xxxi. 19, 'After I was instructed I smote upon the thigh,' &c. There is some light breaks in upon the soul which sets them seriously a considering, What am I? whither am I going? what will become of me? And Rom. vii. 9, 'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' The commandment, the law of God, breaks in with all its terrors and curse upon the soul by strong conviction, and the man is given for gone, lost and dead. You know the way to the bowels is by the mouth and the stomach, and so by other passages. There is no way to the affections but by the ear, then to the understanding, and then passeth to the apprehension, the judgment, and conscience, and heart; from the apprehension to the grammatical knowledge, then they come to the judgment, then to the conscience; and when conscience is set awork, usually there is some feeling.

2. Conviction, where it is strong and serious, where it is not *levis et niollis*, it cannot be without some compunction. The eye affects the heart. Can a man be sensible of a lost condition, and of the necessity of a change, without being troubled at it, without making a serious weighty business of it? Are heaven and hell such slight matters that a man can think of the one or the other without any commotion of heart?—(pray do but bethink yourselves; I shall solve the particular cases, but I must establish the general one) especially if he be convinced of his being obnoxious to one, and doth not know whether he shall have the other, yea or nay? Certainly whoever is instructed or convinced will smite upon his thigh and bemoan himself as Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. There is none ever came to Christ, the spiritual physician, but they were in some degree heart-sick; none ever came for ease but they felt a load upon their back. If there be conviction and compunction, this will be felt.

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3. But then the degrees are various, some are more, some less, some earnestly solicitous, or deeply in horror. Some are brought to God by the horrors of despair, and are convinced with a higher and more smart degree of sorrow, before ever they come to settle; but all are serious and anxious. There is certainly a difference; some men's conversion is more gentle, others more violent. To some, Christ comes like an armed man, and doth powerfully vanquish Satan in their hearts; to others, there is a great deal of difficulty and conflict, which must needs impress a notice of itself.

Some are sweetly drawn, others are snatched out of the fire. To some the Spirit comes with a mighty rushing wind, to others by a gentle blast, sweetly and softly blows open the door. God opened the heart of Lydia; we read of no more, Acts xvi. 14. But when he comes to the jailer, he had more horror of conscience, and more sorrow and desperation, and was ready to kill himself, saying, 'What shall I do to be saved?' ver. 31. The Lord bids us to put a difference, to have compassion of some, and to pluck others more violently out of the fire, Jude 23. So here, the Lord's work is various, it is to some more gentle, but to others it is with a greater horror.

4. I answer—That no certain rule can be given as to this different dispensation, why some are so gently used, and others so violently brought home to God. Sometimes they which have had good education, and less errors of life, have less terrors of heart, as being restrained from gross sins; at other times they have had most terrors, because they have withstood so many means, and because they do not know when God works upon them. Sometimes those which are called to greatest services have had most terrors, that they may speak more of the evil of sin, having felt the bitterness of it: 2 Cor. v. 11, 'Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.' Sometimes it is quite otherwise; they which have been called to some eminent public service for God may not drink so deeply of this cup, but are spared, that they may be kept more entire for their public work, which serves instead of sorrow and trouble of conscience. Again, sometimes men and women of most excellent and acute understandings are most humble, as having clearest apprehensions of the heinousness of sin and terror of wrath. At other times, on the contrary, these horrors and fears come from ignorance, as fears arise in the dark, and weak spirits are apt to be terrified, and have a knowledge of the remedy as soon as they know their disease; the work may be more gentle. Sometimes these terrors fall on a strong body, as being best able to bear them; sometimes on a weak, the devil taking advantage of their weaknesses and manifold infirmities. Many times in hot and fiery natures their changes are sudden, carried on with extremities; but sometimes soft natures, whose motions are slow and gentle, by degrees are surprised, and impressions of grace are made insensibly. Thus God acts as he will, but in the general all are serious and solicitous.

5. Because no certain rule can be given, the measure must not be looked after, but the effects; we are not so much to look to the deepness of the wound, as the soundness of the cure. The means only respect the end, therefore the end must be considered; and many times the effects are visible and more evident in fruit and feeling. Now, if we give sound proof that we are converted, I am contented. If the work be done, that sufficeth, which way soever it be done, though usually it is done by some notable and powerful impression upon the heart. Look, as the blind man said, John ix. 25, 'Which way my eyes were opened I know not; but this I know, that whereas I was blind, I now see.' So if the renewed soul can say, How the work was done, I cannot tell; I have been waiting upon God, and have felt the fruits of his grace upon my heart.

6. The effects of this first work are these:—

[1.] A hearty welcoming of Christ Jesus into the soul; they do not take up with comfort on this side Christ. Men's troubles are known by their satisfaction. If honour satisfied men, then disesteem and disrespect were their trouble, however they did palliate it with religious pretences. If riches satisfied men, then poverty pinched them. If the prosperity of the world satisfied men, it was worldly adversity was their trouble, though it crept under religious pretences. But if we see the necessity of a saviour, receive him into our hearts, and believe in him with all our heart's desire, and delight, and all is carried after Christ and after the refreshings of his grace, and are satisfied with none but Christ, and our hearts pant for him 'as the hart panteth after the water-brooks,' you ought to bless God that he hath left the impression of the effect, though he hath not left the impression of the way, Ps. xlii. 1. But now, when desires after Christ are either none at all, or cold and faint, and easily put out of the humour, and only provoke you now and then to put up a cold prayer, or express a few faint wishes or heartless sighs; that though you have a desire after Christ, yet it is easily diverted, and controlled by other and higher desires, and you can be satisfied, and take up with something beneath Christ, and Christ is not the precious and only one of your souls, you have not that impression which amounts to a hearty work.

[2.] Another impression is a thorough hatred of sin, and serious watchfulness and striving against it; when you seek to cast it out of your soul with indignation, Hosea xiv. 8; to 'hate every false way,' Ps. cxix. 104; when you are continually groaning under it, Rom. vii. 24, and seek to weaken it more and more; for 'they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof,' Gal. v. 24. This is a sensible impression left upon the soul.

[3.] A lively diligence in the spiritual life. Though you cannot tell how God brought you in, yet if you keep up a lively diligence in serving God, and with 'the twelve tribes instantly serving God day and night,' Acts xxvi. 7, and you are always 'working out your own salvation with fear and trembling,' Phil. ii. 12, and you are hard at work for God; if this holy care be the constant business and drift of your lives, you have the effect of this conversion, though the first impression of it not so sensible.

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SERMON XCIX.

I am thine, save me: for I have sought thy precepts.—VER. 94.

IN these words you have—(1.) David's plea, *I am thine*. (2.) His request, *save me*. (3.) His argument to make good his plea, *I have sought thy precepts*. His plea is taken from God's interest in him, 'I am thine.' His request is for safety, to be saved either from wrath to come or from temporal danger, rather the latter; for he seeth trouble lie in wait for him, therefore 'save me.' And then the

evidence of that interest, which may serve as an argument to set on the request, ‘I have sought thy precepts.’

Let me speak of these in their order, and first of David’s plea, ‘I am thine.’

Doct. 1. That God hath a special people in the world, whom he will own for his.

David, as one of this number, saith to God, ‘I am thine.’ By a common right of creation all things are God’s: 1 Chron. xxix. 11, ‘Heaven and earth is thine, and all that is therein.’ He made all, and therefore by a just right he is lord of all: Ps. xxiv. 1, ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof.’ Now, as to this general right, God is no more bound to one than to another; there is no great privilege in this to be God’s in this sense, for so are the cattle upon a thousand hills, as we are his by creation. We cannot say with David, ‘I am thine; save me;’ for he that made them will not save them, if they have no other title and interest in him, Isa. xxiii. 11. Thus by creation all things are God’s, but more especially men: Ezek. xviii. 4, ‘All souls are mine.’ God hath a peculiar interest in the reasonable creatures, as their maker, governor, and judge. And yet further, his church is his by general profession; all the members of the visible church may say, Lord, we are thine; and that is some kind of plea for their safety and protection: Isa. lxiii. 19, ‘We are thine; thou never barest rule over them, they were not called by thy name.’ So may all the members of the visible church speak to God. Yet more particularly there is a remnant in the world that are his by a nearer interest, and they are the saints or new creatures, who are his peculiar people, Titus ii. 14, λαός περιούσιος. All the world else are but as the lumber of the house, but these are his treasure. A man is more chary of his treasure than of his lumber; yea, they are ‘his jewels,’ Mal. iii. 17, precious and dear to him, and of special interest in his heart and affection; they are ‘the first-fruits of his creatures,’ James i. 18. The first-fruits were the Lord’s portion. Now these God doth peculiarly take to be his portion, and valueth them more than all the world besides.

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Let us see the grounds of his special interest in them; wherefore are they his?

He hath elected them before all the world: John xvii. 6, ‘Thine they were, and them thou gavest me.’ They were his by eternal election and choice, and they are purchased and bought by Christ, therefore called a purchased people, bought with a price, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20, and upon this ground they are said to be Christ’s, 1 Cor. iii. 23. Now, as they are Christ’s and God’s by purchase, they are also his by conquest and rescue from Satan. Prisoners in war belong to the conqueror, Luke xi. 21. The strong man that holdeth captive the carnal part of the world, they are his goods; but the stronger than he shall come and bind him and take away his goods. They were Satan’s, but by rescue and conquest the prey falls to Christ: Col. i. 13, ‘Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.’ Once more, they are his by effectual calling and work of his grace: Eph. ii. 10, ‘We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works,’ &c. So the title is changed by the right of the new creation. Again, they are his by covenant; we choose him to be our God, and the Lord chooseth us to be his peculiar people, Hosea

ii. 23. They acquiesce in him as their all-sufficient portion, and surrender and give up themselves to his use and service. This is that which is chiefly intended here, namely, that we are his by contract and resignation; for so David saith, 'Lord, I am thine.' All this doth abundantly make good God hath a special people in the world whom he will own for his. The grace by which we are inclined to resign up ourselves to God, that flows from election, through the redemption of Christ, by sanctification of the Spirit; but the grounds, reasons, and motives for which we dedicate ourselves to God, they are his right in us by creation and redemption. It is but fit God should have what he hath made and bought; we are his creatures, his purchase, therefore we are his.

Use 1. For trial. Are we of the number of God's peculiar people? As David paid to the Egyptian, 'To whom belongest thou? whence art thou?' 1 Sam. xxx. 13. So, if the question should be put to you, Whence are you? to whom do you belong? Can you answer, 'Lord, I am thine.' I belong to thee? If it be so, then:—

1. When did you solemnly dedicate yourselves to him? If you be God's, can you remember when you first took your oath of allegiance to him? There is a solemn time of avouching one another, when God avouched you to be his people, and you avouched God to be your God: Deut. xxvi. 17, 18, 'Thou hast avouched this day the Lord to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and keep his statutes, and his commandments, and judgments, and to hearken to his voice: and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people.' When did you give up the key of your hearts to God, and lie at God's feet, and say, 'Lord, here I am, what wilt thou have me to do?' Acts ix. 6. They that are God's come in this way, by resignation or spiritual contract, by entering into covenant with him.

2. What have you that is peculiar? Have you the favour of his people? Have you the conversation of his people? God's peculiar people have peculiar mercies; at least their hearts and spirits are carried out after them: Ps. cvi. 4, 'Lord, remember me with the favour of thy people.' Common
444 'mercies will not serve their turn, but they must have renewing and sanctifying mercies, and special pledges of his love; not increase of estate, honour, or esteem in the world; these are not things their hearts run upon; but, Lord, the favour of thy people; or, Ps. cxix. 132, 'Do good unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.' There is a goodness which God vouchsafeth to all his creatures; to the men of the world he gives a plentiful portion; their bellies are filled with thy hid treasure; but, Lord, let me have the comforts of thy Spirit, the manifestations of thy love and good-will to my soul in Christ Jesus. As Luther said and protested, God should not put him off with gold nor with honours; I must have his grace, his Christ, his Spirit; *Valde protestatus sum me nolle his satiari.* If you have such peculiar spirits, your hearts would be carried out after these distinguishing mercies. A man may have common mercies and go to hell and be cast away; but God's peculiar people have peculiar mercies; then they will not be contented with a common conversation: Mat. v. 47, 'If you love them that love you, what do you more than others?' There is τί περισσὸν, something over and above, that should be seen in a Christian's life. It is a fault, 1

Cor. iii. 3, ‘Ye walk as men.’ In the new creature there should be something more excellent. God’s peculiar people, as there is a difference between them and others in point of privileges, so also in point of conversation; they should live at a higher rate, more heavenly, meek, mortified, more charitable than others. Christians should walk so as to convince the world, and make them wonder at the beauty, majesty, and strictness of their lives. You harden carnal men when you profess yourselves to be God’s peculiar people, and there is no difference between you and others.

3. Doth your resignation appear in your living and acting for God? Is holiness to be written in visible characters upon all you do? Zech. xiv. 19, 20. The impress of God is upon his people, it is upon the horse bells, upon all the pots of Jerusalem; it is upon all they have, all they enjoy, ‘Holiness to the Lord:’ they spend their time as being dedicated to God, they spend their estates as being dedicated to God. Do you use yourselves as those that are Christ’s, improving your time, relations, talents, interests for his glory? This may be discovered partly by checking temptations upon this account: 1 Cor. vi. 15, ‘Shall I take the members of Christ, and make them to be the members of an harlot?’ This body is Christ’s, and therefore must be kept in sanctification and in honour; this time I misspend, this estate is Christ’s; and so you dare not give way to the folly and sin with which others are transported, for you look upon all that you have as Christ’s. And so also are your contrivances and projects for God’s glory; you will be casting about how you may honour Christ by your estate and relations, and everything you have: Neh. i. 11, ‘Grant me mercy in the sight of this man: for I was the king’s cup-bearer:’ that is, he was considering what use he might make of this authority and esteem which he had with the king of Babylon, and what use he might make of it for God. God hath advanced me to such honour and place; what honour hath God had? Look, as David, 2 Sam. xvii. 2, ‘I dwell in a house of cedar, and the ark of God dwells within curtains.’ Here the Lord hath abundantly provided for me, but what have I done for God? When you are in all things seeking the things of God, and laying out yourselves for the glory of God, and if God needs anything that is yours, you freely and willingly part with it.

Use 2. To persuade us to resign up ourselves to God, and to live as those that are God’s.

First, To resign up ourselves to God: Isa, xliv. 5, ‘One shall come and say, I am the Lord’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.’ Come and subscribe to the God of Jacob, give it under hand and seal, enter your names in his muster-roll, that you are one of his subjects and servants. Motives are these:—

1. You owe yourselves to God, and therefore should give up yourselves to him: Philem. 19, ‘Thou owest unto me even thine own self.’ It is true with respect to God; thou owest all that thou hast to him, thou hast nothing but what he gave thee first. God calls it a gift, ‘My son, give me thy heart:’ but it is indeed a debt, for God gave it, not to dispossess himself and divest himself, but gave it for his use and service. He gave you yourselves to yourselves, as a man gives an estate to a factor to trade with, or as a husbandman scatters his seed upon the ground, not to bury it there,

but expecting a crop from thence. So God scatters his gifts abroad in the world, gives life and all things; not to establish a dominion in thy person, but only a stewardship and a course of service. Hast thou life? Man is not *dominus vitae*, but *custos*—not lord of his life, but only the guardian and keeper for God. Now what is said of life is true of estates and all things else; there is no proper dominion we have.

2. God offers himself to thee, and therefore it is but reasonable thou give up thyself to God. In the covenant there is a mutual engaging between God and the creature to be each other's, according to their several capacities; 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' The great God, *Quantus quantus est, totus noster est*, as great as he is, lie becomes ours; all in him ours, his wisdom, power, strength; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are our everlasting portion. God the Father will be our portion for ever, he will give his Son to be our redeemer, and his Spirit to be our guide; all the persons, with all their power and strength, are engaged for our use. Look, as when Jehoshaphat made a league with the king of Israel, this was the manner of it: 1 Kings xxii. 4, 'I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses.' They mutually made over their strength one to another. So when God offereth to make over himself to us, this is the tenor, 'I will be for thee, and thou shalt be for me,' as Hosea iii. He makes over himself with all that is his. Now, when God offers to make over himself to us, and all that belongs to him to our use, his strength, power, and love, shall we stand demurring upon so blessed a contract, and not give up ourselves to the Lord? God, that needs us not, will engage himself to us to be for us, if we will be for him. Oh, then, let us resign up ourselves, and put ourselves under the power and sovereignty of God!

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3. You never enjoy yourselves so much as when you give up yourselves to God; it is not your loss, but your gain; it is a kind of receiving: for you give up yourselves to become his people, to be sanctified, to be preserved by his grace, and governed by his Spirit; and all these are privileges, they are rather a gift for us. For a beggar to give up herself to match with a prince, she gets by giving; you give up your hearts to God to be better. Other things that are dedicated to God are only altered in their use, as gold and silver dedicated to the sanctuary; but when a man is given to God, he is altered in his nature, he is governed and fitted for God's use. If there be any pretence of loss, it is this, a right or power to live according to your own will. Ay! but that you never had by virtue of your creation. You are bound to live according to the will of God; God's precepts bind as a law where they are not received as a covenant; and therefore you have no power to dispose yourselves; you are God's, whether you give up yourselves to him or no. When you consider how much you gain, you are interested in all the privileges of the Lord's grace; it not only establisheth your duty, but your comfort and encouragement. If there were nothing but this free leave to go to God in all our straits and dangers, 'I am thine, save me,' this were a benefit not to be valued. If God be yours, you may expect salvation, temporal, eternal; therefore the benefit of this gift is not God's, but ours; you give up yourselves, not to bring aught to God, but receive from God.

4. You cannot give other things to him unless you give up yourselves to him. 2 Cor. viii. 4, it is rendered as a reason of their forwardness in a good work, ‘They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.’ When a man hath given himself to God, all things else will succeed more easily in the spiritual life; as a woman and man in the conjugal relation, they are easily kind one to another when they have bestowed themselves one upon another. As Quintus Fabius Maximus, answering to the ambassador that offered him gold, that it was not the fashion of the Romans to have gold under their power, but they were under a power that were owners and possessors of their gold. Apply it; the first thing God looks after is the person.

5. It is your honour to be in relation to God, therefore give up yourselves: Ps. cxvi. 16, ‘O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid.’ He repeats it thrice, as if he were wonderfully pleased with the relation. Mean offices about a prince are accounted honourable in the world; so to be in the meanest degree of service about God is a great honour; therefore give up yourselves to God.

Secondly, Live as those that are God’s. The first thing we should do is to determine whose we are, then to make good that relation. You are not your own, that is clear, 1 Cor. vi. 19; therefore not to live to your own will, your own ends, your own interest. All the disorder that is in the world comes from a man’s looking upon himself as his own: Ps. xii. 4, ‘Our tongues are our own:’ and therefore they take liberty to speak what they please. And saith Nabal, ‘My bread and my wine.’ When we are so eager to establish our own dominion and propriety, then we miscarry. As Bernard saith, *Horreo quicunque de meo ut sim meus*—we should be in utter detestation of living to ourselves, and rather be God’s bondmen than our own freemen. And as they are not their own, so not the world’s: John xv. 19, ‘Because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hates you.’ The world hates the godly because they have other principles and other ends. You should not conform to the world in judgment or practices, for you are not of the world; you are not of the flesh: Rom. viii. 12, ‘We are not debtors to the flesh:’ therefore this should not be your care and study to pamper and please the flesh. You are not Satan’s, for you are taken out of his power, Col. i. 13. Whose are you? You are the Lord’s; therefore your business should be to please God and honour God. It is easy to say, I am thine; do we make it good in our practice? This may be known two ways:—

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1. When we make his glory to be the scope of our lives: Phil. i. 21, ‘To me to live is Christ:’ that is my business and employment, not to seek my own things, but the things of Christ Jesus. Do you give up yourselves to be governed and ordered by his Spirit, acting and living for his glory?

2. When we walk so as God may own us with honour; take his law for our rule, as well as to fix his glory for our scope. Exod. xxxii. 7, saith God to Moses, ‘Thy people whom thou hast brought up out of Egypt:’ *thy* people; God would not own them when they had corrupted their ways. We would say to God, Lord, I am thine; but alas! we act not as the Lord’s, but as if we were of the flesh, as if we belonged to Satan, to lust, and passion, and anger; by those cursed influences are we acted and swayed in our conversations. It is as sweet an argument and as forcible a reason as you

can use to God in prayer to say, Lord, I am thine, if we could use it in good conscience, saith Chrysostom. All men are so, but how few can thus speak to God; for, saith he, his servants you are whom you obey; and the servant of sin lieth when he saith, I am thine. Alas! most every kind of sin may say, Thou art mine; lust and covetousness and ambition may challenge us. It is not words, but affections and actions that must prove us to be the Lord's; then we are his when we seek to please him in all things. Judas was Christ's in profession, but the devil's in affection. David saith, 'I am thine,' but presently adds, 'I seek thy precepts,' I endeavour to do thy will. Oh! then, live not as your own, as of Satan and the flesh, but as the Lord's.

Let us come to the ground of his plea, 'Save me.' David doth not say, 'Thou art mine, save me,' but, 'I am thine.' These two are correlates; he that speaks the one speaks both; if we be God's, God is ours: 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine:' and yet David saith, 'I am thine,' but doth not say, Thou art mine, for four reasons:—

1. Because this is first in our apprehension. We know God to be ours by giving up ourselves to be his. His choice and election of us is a secret till it be evidenced by our choice of him, till we choose him for our portion. Well, then, a believer cannot always say God is his, but a believer is always resolved to be the Lord's by his own choice and dedication; they resolve to be his, and not their own. Though you cannot discern your election, that God hath chosen you, yet it is comfortable to renew your resignation of yourselves to God. Resignation, that is our act, and is more sensible to conscience than God's election: 'Lord, I have none in heaven but thee, and whom do I desire in comparison of thee?' God will not refuse such a soul that is thus willing to tack himself upon God, will not be put off: 'I am thine.' As the Campani, when they begged the Romans to help them, and they refused, they came and gave themselves and their whole estates to be vassals to the Romans, with this plea, If you will not defend us as your allies, defend us as your subjects. Thus a gracious soul will tack himself upon God, and will not be put off: I will not be my own, but thine.

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2. 'I am thine:' he saith so, because this was the best check to the present temptation. David was then in fear of his life when he spoke this, when the wicked lay in wait to destroy him, ver. 95; they wanted neither malice nor power to do it; then saith David, 'I am thine.' In afflictions God seems to break down the hedge, and lay his people open, in common with others, to the fury of the judgment that is then upon them. In regard of God's outward dealings, little appearance different between us and them; but then we must say, Lord, I am thine; though involved in the same judgment, yet, Lord, thou canst put a difference, 'I am thine.' 2 Peter ii. 9: 'The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation,' how to put a distinction and difference between his own and others; so that our distinct interest, 'I am thine,' is a relief to the soul.

3. Saints observe a difference when they speak to God and when they plead with their own hearts; when they speak to God, then they mention their own resignation, Lord, I am thine; but when they would revive their own drooping souls, then they say, God is mine. Compare the text with Ps. xlii. 11, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' &c. He is my God; God is mine, and wilt

thou be troubled? But when they speak to God, 'I am thine:' so they raise their hearts in a holy confidence. The interest is mutual. In dealing with our own unbelief, it is best to urge our interest in God: He is mine; but when in prayer, God's interest in us: Lord, I am thine.

4. This is the more humbling way, to urge our own resignation. See Ps. cxvi. 15, 16, 'Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints;' then presently, 'Ah, Lord, truly I am thy servant,' &c. God's children may be exposed to hazards alike, but their blood is precious to God. Now though the world thinketh lightly of their death, yet God doth not think so. How doth David apply this comfort, 'Precious in the sight,' &c. He doth not say, as the force of the words would seem to carry it, Lord, I am one of thy saints; but, Lord, I am thy servant; he takes a more humble title. There is many a man fears and doubts to apply the privileges of God's children under some higher title, yet they should apply them in a title suitable to their condition and measure. So did David; he presumeth not to say, Thou art mine; that were a higher challenge, but yet such as God's condescension will warrant him; but he doth aver and assert his own resignation, which is a more dutiful and humble way of confidence. Again, he doth not. say, I am thus and thus, but, I am thine. He doth not plead property or good qualification, but he pleads God's property in him; Lord, I cannot say I am perfect and upright as I should be, yet I am thine. It is good to own God in the humbling way, and take hold of promises on the dark side; so doth Paul, 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a faithful saying,' &c.; as if he had said, Nay, if that be a faithful saying, then I can put in a plea, I am sinner enough for Christ to save. Thus by these lower ways of application we may derive and take out to ourselves the comfort of the promises.

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Doct. 2. God's interest in his people is the ground of his care for their safety.

It may be pleaded as a ground of his care for their safety, Lord, I am thine, and therefore save me; this is David's plea in a time of danger. And so Christ, when he was to leave his disciples to the troubles of a furious opposite world, how doth he plead for them! John xvii. 6, 'Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; therefore keep them through thine own name.' We may pray to God with more confidence for our safety in a time of danger when we can plead his interest in us.

How doth his interest prove a ground of confidence and plea for prayer in a time of danger?

1. God's knowledge of them: 2 Tim. ii. 19, 'The Lord knows those that are his.' He hath a particular exact knowledge of all the elect, and who they are that shall be saved; they are engraven as it were upon the palms of his hands; he takes notice of them, and of the condition in which they are: John x. 3, 'He calleth his own sheep by name.' Christ knows them by head and poll.

2. His care over them and his affection to them. Interest in general is a very endearing thing. That which is mine doth more affect me than that which is another man's: 1 Tim. v. 8, 'He that careth not, and provideth not for his own, is worse than an infidel.' It is an unnatural thing for a man not to affect his own; and will God suffer that which is his own to be snatched out of his hands,

and used by evil men according to their pleasure? A man is careful of his own children, to dispose of them in a safe place, and careful of his own jewels: the saints are not as God's lumber, but as his jewels; they are dearer to God than all things else: Isa. xliii. 3, 4, 'I am the Lord thy God, thy saviour; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee; since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life;' that is, if the sword must drink blood, let it go to Seba and Ethiopia, to Arabia, and to Egypt; he strikes the king of Assyria in his wrath, and the sword shall be diverted that way, rather than they should be given up to be destroyed. But this is not all. The way how we come to be his own doth exceedingly endear us to him; as, for instance, we come to be God's by eternal election; now this must needs endear us to God. A woman that carries her child in her womb but nine months, what a tender affection hath she to it! Isa. xlix. 14, 15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child?' &c.; Eph. i. 4, 'He chose us from the foundation of the world.' We lay in the womb of his decree from all eternity, and therefore we are very dear to God, namely, as we are his by election. Again, as we are his by redemption; they were bought with a dear price, therefore they are a precious people; God hath a high esteem and value for them. That which cost dear, we will not lose it lightly. The saints are valuable, not so much in themselves, as in Christ, by whose precious blood they are purchased with God, 1 Peter i. 18. Adam sold us for a trifle, but Christ did not redeem us at a cheap rate. Then the work of the Spirit, who hath drawn the image of God upon us; God will not suffer his own work to be destroyed, Ps. lxxiv. 6. They came to God, and complained of the defacing of the material temple, that the carved work, the curious work which was wrought by the special direction of God's own Spirit, was destroyed (for the Spirit of God directed Bezaleel to work in brass and all manner of curious works); certainly the temples of the Holy Ghost, which are formed for God's praise, God will not suffer them to be destroyed and never look after them. Again, as they are God's by dedication, so they are dear to him. Common gold and silver was not so valued as consecrated gold and silver. Goat's-hair that was consecrated to the uses of the temple was more excellent than all other things that was for common use. We are dedicated, consecrated to God, set apart for himself: Ps. iv. 3, 'The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself.'

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3. He hath a peculiar eye to his own. Why? Because he expects more work from them than from others, therefore they have more protection; God is known, glorified and owned among them. His revenues to the crown of heaven from the world come to little in regard of what he hath from his people and his church: Ps. cxlv. 10, 'All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord, and thy saints shall bless thee.' God hath most of his praise from his saints. His creatures show forth his glory, but his saints bless him. The common sort of people smother the glory of God in their atheism, security, and unbelief; but those only are the people that keep up his praise in the world, therefore he preserves them.

4. Because by covenant all that is God's is theirs, for their use. His strength is theirs: Eph. vi. 10, 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.' And his salvation is theirs: Ps. lxviii.

20, ‘He that is our God is the God of salvation.’ If God be a God of salvation, he is our God. If he hath salvation to bestow, it is ours. A believer hath full right to make use of all that God hath.

Use 1. To press you to get this interest in times of danger. We should now be more careful than at other times to get and clear up our interest in God. Oh, it will be no advantage to say, This and that is mine, but a great advantage to say, God is mine. When desolations are on the earth, there is great havoc made of great estates, and outward supplies will come to nothing; but this will be an ever lasting comfort to say, God is mine. See 1 Sam. xxx. 6, ‘But David comforted himself in the Lord his God;’ Hab. iii. 18, ‘I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation.’

2. It presseth you to make your interest more evident by fruits of obedience; as David, ‘I am thine.’ How makes he it good? ‘I sought thy precepts.’ We would have mercy, but neglect duty. Therefore saith David, ‘I sought thy precepts.’ It is an emphatical expression. To seek God’s precepts is more than barely to do them; to seek them, that is, with all diligence. We labour after the knowledge of them, and grace to practise them; it is to give up our minds and hearts; it notes earnest study and affection to them, will, and care, and all to the practice of God’s will. Where there is an honest and earnest endeavour to obey God’s command in all things, this proves a believer’s interest. In times of trouble you must expect your confidence will be assaulted. Now when Satan or conscience represent God as putting thee off thus. What! come you to me? thou art a grievous sinner; but, Lord, I am thine. How prove you that? I seek to know thy will. ‘How to perform that which is good, I find not,’ Rom. vii. We cannot always find it; that is, serve God with exactness of care; but if this be the bent of our hearts, if we seek it, we may come with confidence, and look God in the face, and say. Lord, I am thine.

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3. We may improve it with confidence in prayer, I am thine, save me. God saves man and beast, Ps. xxxvi. 6, therefore will save his own, he that is our father and our God: ‘I know that my God will save me,’ saith David, Ps. xx. 6-8. There are some God will not save: ‘They are not mine, therefore I will break down their bulwarks.’ In the Book of Chronicles it is said, ‘Why transgress you the commandment of God, that you cannot prosper?’ There is an utter incapacity when men will be sinning away their protection. Here is your great plea in time of danger, in adversity, go to God and say, I am thine; Lord, save me.

SERMON C.

I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.—VER. 96.

IN this verse the scripture, as the charter of our hopes, and the seed and principle of our spiritual being, is recommended above all things in the world as that which doth chiefly deserve our respect

and care. Consider the word by itself, and you will find it excellent; but consider it by way of comparison with the vanity and insufficiency of other things, and the excellency thereof will much more appear. As in a pair of balances, when things come to be weighed together, you will soon see the difference, and which is heaviest; so here in the text both scales are filled; on the one side there is the world and the perfections thereof, and on the other side the word of God and the benefit that we have thereby, and sensibly the beam breaketh on the word's side; in the one scale there is limited perfection, which will soon have an end; in the other, a happiness that hath length and breadth, 'I have seen an end,' &c.

In the words there is a thesis or proposition, and then an antithesis, or something said by way of opposition to that position. The thesis, 'I have seen an end of all perfection:' and the antithesis, 'But thy commandment is exceeding broad.' Both together will yield us this point:—

Doct. That the serious consideration of the frailty and fadingness of all natural and earthly perfections should excite and quicken us to look after that better and eternal estate which is offered to us in the word of God.

I shall make good this proposition by going over the circumstances of the text as they are offered to us.

First, I begin with the thesis or proposition, *I have seen an end of all perfection*; and there you may take notice—

1. Of the subject or matter here spoken of, it is *perfection*; understand it in a natural and worldly sense, the most excellent of all the creatures, and the greatest glory of all natural accomplishments.

2. The extent, *all perfection*, whatever it be.

3. The predicate, *hath an end*.

4. The confirmation from sense, *I have seen*. It is either *dictum experientiae*, I have often seen it fall out before my eyes; or *dictum fidei*, I could by faith easily see to the bottom of the creature, see vanity in it whilst in its greatest glory. Let us open these things.

Mark, it is not said in the concrete, I have seen an end of perfect things; but in the abstract, I have seen an end of all perfection itself. The most perfect of worldly things are but imperfect; man, in his best estate, is altogether vanity, Ps. xxxix. 11.

And then mark the extent of it, it is 'all perfection;' not only some but all perfection; wisdom and learning, as well as beauty and strength, wit and wealth, honour and greatness; I have seen an end of all of it. Many will readily grant that some kind of perfections are slight; but all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Here is a meditation fit for per sons of all sort and conditions. For great ones that they presume not; for mean ones, that they repine not; for the old, whose vigour and strength

is gone, in whom it is verified; and for the young, or those that are in the vigour and freshness of youth, in whom within a little while it will be verified; for the rich, that they trust not in uncertain riches; for the poor, that they be not over-dejected; for the honoured, that they please not themselves overmuch with the blasts of popular breath and vain applause; the disgraced, that they may make a sanctified use of their afflictions. All perfection, first or last, will wither and decay.

And then here is the predicate, hath *an end*; the word also signifieth limit or bound; there is an end in regard of length, duration, and continuance, and an end in regard of breadth and use; that also must be taken in; for the narrowness of worldly comforts and the breadth of the commandments are often opposed one to the other. I will show you—

First, That all earthly perfections have their bounds and limits as to their use and service; they are good for this and that, but not for all things; but 'godliness is profitable for all things,' 1 Tim. iv. 8. They are not able to bear full contentment to the mind, or give full satisfaction to the heart, at least in all conditions and sorts of afflictions; riches will help against poverty, and health against sickness, but 'godliness is profitable to all things.' There are many difficulties and dangers in which the limited power of the creatures cannot help us; but the word of God, applied and obeyed, and followed with his mighty Spirit, will yield us relief and comfort in all cases and conditions. All the pleasures and profits, and honours of the world are nothing to this. As, for instance, all these perfections cannot—

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1. Give us any solid peace of conscience and rest to our souls; in the midst of all our fulness there is something wanting; carnal affections must be mortified before they can be satisfied. Grace must do that for you; it is godliness that brings contentment to the heart of man: 1 Tim. vi. 6, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.' Alas! wealth can never do it; our desires are increased the more we have; and the way to contentment is not to increase our substance, but to limit our desires; as in a dropsy, the way to cure the man is not to satisfy him with drink, but to open a vein to take away his thirst. We expect too much from the creature, and then the disappointment breedeth trouble; and therefore, Eccles. i. 14, why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Outward things do not bear a thorough proportion with all the wants and desires and capacities of the soul, and therefore cannot give solid peace to our souls.

2. It cannot make you acceptable to God, neither wealth nor beauty, nor honour, nor strength; it is grace that is of great price in the sight of God: 1 Peter iii. 4, 'The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price.' This is a beauty that doth never fade nor wax old: 'Since thou wert precious in my sight, thou wast honourable, and I have loved thee,' Isa. xliii. 4. God loveth his people for the grace he putteth into them, not for the outward gifts he bestoweth upon them. It is grace that makes us amiable to God, and fit objects of the divine complacency; you are not a jot the more pleasing to God when rich than when poor. No; but the more hateful to him, if you are not rich towards God, Luke xii. 21.

3. It cannot stead you in your greatest and deepest necessities, and therefore they are but limited. There are two great necessities wherein all creature comforts will fail:—

[1.] In troubles of conscience. Men do pretty well with their worldly portion and happiness till God sets their consciences awork, and begins to rebuke man for sin, and reviveth the sense of their own guilt and liableness to the curse. In such a case, all the glory and profit and pleasure of the creature will do no good; it cannot allay the sense of God's wrath scorching the soul for sin: Ps. xxxix. 11, 'When thou with rebukes doth chasten man for sin, thou makest his beauty to consume like a moth.' Tell him of honours, friends, estates, pleasures, all is nothing; the virtue of that opium wherewith he laid his soul asleep is now quite spent. Trouble of conscience arrests the stoutest and most jovial sinners, and layeth them under sadness and horror. Judas threw away his thirty pieces of silver when his guilt stared him in the face: 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood,' Mat. xxvii. 4. When God is angry the creatures cannot pacify him and make you friends. As when a man is going to execution with a drooping and heavy heart, bring him a posy of flowers, bid him smell them, and comfort himself with them, he will think you upbraid his misery; so in troubles of conscience, what good will it be to tell a man of riches and honours. The remedy must be according to the grief; so that if outward things could satisfy the heart, they cannot satisfy the conscience; our sore will run, among all the creatures, and there is no salve for it.

[2.] They will not stead us at the hour of death, when a man must launch out into eternity, and set sail for an unknown world. Can a man comfort himself then with outward things, that a man is great, rich, and honourable, beautiful or strong, or that he hath wallowed in all manner of sensualities? If men would look to the end of things, they would sooner discern their mistake: Deut. xxxii. 29, 'Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!' So Jer. xvii. 9, 'At his latter end he shall be a fool.' He was a fool before, all his life-long, but now he is so in the account of his own heart. So Job xxvii. 8, 'What hope hath the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God cometh to take away his soul?' The poor man would fain keep his soul a little longer; no, but God will take it now; and he doth not resign it, but God takes it by force. And 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin.' The dolours and horrors of a guilty conscience are revived by death, and then the weakness of worldly things doth best appear; our wealth and honour and pleasure will leave us in the dirt. When the soul is to be turned out of doors, our vain conceits are blown away, and we begin to be sensible of our ill choice. If conscience did not do its office before, death will undeceive them: Ps. xlix. 17, 'When a man dieth he shall carry nothing away with him, his glory shall not descend after him.' He shall be eaten out by worms as others are, when he cometh to go the way of all the earth; then for one evidence for heaven, one drachm of the favour of God, as Severus the emperor cried out, I have been all things, but now it profits me nothing.

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4. It is of no use to you in the world to come. Gold and silver, the great instruments of commerce in this world, are of no value there. All civil distinctions last but to the grave. Some are high and others low, some are rich and others poor; these distinctions will last but a while, but the distinction

of good and bad lasts for ever. Their works follow them, but not their wealth; outward things cannot save your souls, or bring you to heaven.

5. In this world it will not prevent a sickness or remove it. The honourable and the rich have their diseases as well as the poor; yea, more, they are bred upon them by their intemperance. All your houses and lands and honours and estates cannot ease you of a fit of the gout, or stone, nor ah aching tooth, nor keep off judgments when they are epidemical. There were frogs in Pharaoh's bed-chamber as well as among the meaner Egyptians, and all the king's guard could not keep them out.

Well, then, all these things show it is of a limited use; indeed they serve to make our pilgrimage comfortable, and to support us during our service—that is the best use we can put them to; but the use the most put them to is to satisfy a sensual appetite or please a fleshly mind, Ps. xvii. 14. The utmost that these things can procure is a back well clothed, and a belly well filled. This is but a sorry happiness, to feed a little better than others, to provide a richer feast for the worms, yea, a prey for hell. Take all created perfections, not as subordinate to grace, but separate from it, it serveth but to please the appetite or the fancy, make the most or best of it.

Secondly, by their time and period as to continuance. All these things perish in the using; like flowers, they wither in our hands while we smell at them: 'The fashion of this world passeth away,' 1 Cor. vii. 31; and whosoever liveth here for a while must look for changes, and reckon to act several parts in the world. Whatsoever was wonderful in former ages is lost and past with age; things that now are are not what they once were: Ps. cii. 26, 27, 'They shall perish, but thou shalt endure for ever,' saith the Psalmist, speaking to God; 'yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shalt be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years have no end.' Christ, he hath no end, but men will soon see the end of all perfection. The world and all things were made *ea lege ut aliquando pereant*—that they might at length fail and come to an end. That which you now have you cannot say it shall be yours this time twelvemonth, or it may be a month hence; we hold all things by an uncertain tenure. God may take away these things from us; for man is compared to grass, and the glory of man to the flower of grass, 1 Peter i. 24. What is the glory of man? Riches, wisdom, strength, beauty, credit, all these things are called the flower. Now the flower fadeth before the grass, and withers; the neglected stalk remaineth. When the leaves of the flower are shed, you may be gone and they gone. If they continue with you till death, then you must take your final farewell of all your comforts. Thus you see all perfection will have an end.

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And then, here is the confirmation from sense, *I have seen*. Consider it—(1.) As it is matter of sense or experience; (2.) As it is an observation upon experience.

1. The vanity of the creature is matter of sense and plain experience. We have seen, and others have seen, all outward things come to their final period; goodly cities levelled with the earth, mighty

empires destroyed, worldly glory blasted, honours vanished, credit and esteem shrunk into nothing, beauty shrivelled with age, or defaced by sickness; yea, all manner of greatness laid in the dust. We trample upon the graves of others, and within a little while others will do the same over ours. All things have their times and turns, their rise and ruin; there is no man that converseth with the world, but he will soon see the vanity of it David found it not only by clear reason, but by his own experience, 'I have seen,' saith he; and so will you say too within a while; these things will fail when you have most need of them. Credit and honour before the world; what is more uncertain than the people's affections? They that cry, 'Hosannah,' to-day, will cry 'Crucify him,' to-morrow. Pleasures are gone as soon as they come; and when they are gone, they are as a thing of nought, but that they leave a sting in the conscience, and a sadness in the heart: 'Riches take wings and flee away,' Prov. xxiii. 5. You can be no more confident of them than of a flock of wild fowl that pitcheth in your field. Honour is soon gone. Haman is one day high in favour, the next day high upon the gallows. Strength and beauty are soon assaulted by diseases. It will be matter of sense; better believe it than try it; then it will prevent a great deal of vexation, and the shame of disappointment Seldom doth a man act the same part in the world for a year together; now joyful, anon sad; now children, then none; now married, anon in a widowhood condition. It is much in the desire and thoughts of natural men to have a perpetual enjoyment of this life and the comforts of it; but it will never be. They perish, and we must die; and when we are gone, our glory will not be remembered. Solomon, recordeth his experience of the vanity of all earthly things. Oh, that we would believe it r without trying conclusions! You that are so eager after the world, what will you think of it when it is parting from you, or you from it? Will they then be found to be such excellent things as you once deemed them to be? Oh, no! At last you must come to this, 'I have seen an end of all perfection;' and then you will say, Oh, how hath the world deceived me! I have laboured for nought!

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2. 'I have seen:' that is, with a spiritual eye; this should be observed and improved by faith. Many are sensible of the vanity of the creature, but are not a jot the wiser: Ps. xlix. 13, 'This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings.' They are sensible of the folly of their ancestors, but yet do not mend by it. We should not only see with our eyes, but understand with our hearts. When the wise man went by the field of the sluggard, he saw it over grown with thorns and nettles, and the stone wall thereof broken down: Prov. xxiv. 32, 'I saw it, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction.' We should profit by everything. In this sense we may gather figs off thistles and grapes off thorns. Especially should we observe the vanity of all sublunary things: Eccles. vii. 2, 'It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting; for this is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart.' We should make a good use of these occasions; a man seeth his own end in the end of others, and by their death is admonished of his own frailty and mortality. It is a sad sign when this is not considered: Isa. xlii. 25, 'Yet he laid it not to heart;' Isa. xxvi. 11, 'Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see, but they shall see.' They shall be forced to take notice of what now they will not, when God's hand is upon them to their utter confusion.

3. ‘I have seen.’ Happy they that have such eyes! But alas! there is a great deal of difference between the sight of the senses and the sight of the understanding. When we see things with our eyes, there is a natural blindness or brutishness, or a veil upon our hearts, that we mind them not. Men have eyes to see, but they have not a heart to see. So God complains, Jer. v.’21, ‘They have eyes and see not, ears and hear not.’ So Deut. xxix. 3, 4, ‘The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, and the signs and those great miracles: yet the Lord hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day.’ So Isa. vi. 9, 10, ‘And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not: make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears.’ Though things be never so plainly delivered, so power fully pressed, so apparently verified; and so they see and hear, and receive no more benefit than if they had never heard nor seen it, God withholding and withdrawing the efficacy of his Spirit, whereby it might be beneficial to them for good. So Isa. xlii. 20, ‘Seeing things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but thou nearest not.’ They see the wonderful works of God, but do not consider them as wise people ought to do: Isa. i. 3, ‘The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider;’ Ezek. xii. 2, ‘Thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not, they have ears to hear, and hear not:’ that is, they make no use of them, but strive and endeavour to put it out of their minds. So John ix. 39-41, ‘And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and they that see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say we see, your sin remaineth.’ There is a great deal of difference between the sight of believers and unbelievers; the one sees with an understanding heart, the other without it. In the one there is a free, ready, and sincere use of their disciplinable senses, that they may learn his word and walk in his ways, that they may profit in the knowledge of God, and so get understanding and spiritual prudence. The other are brutish, ignorant, or idle, negligent, and forgetful; they shut their eyes, and their ears are uncircumcised, and so they know not what they know. The causes of this are, first, non-attendancy or inadvertency, prejudicate opinions and rooted lusts, hinder their profiting. Look, as the sun, moon, and stirs, though they move with a most swift and rapid motion, seem to a vulgar eye to stand still, or at least to move very slowly, so these sublunary things, though they are always passing, yet the inward thought of worldlings is that they shall endure for ever. Oh, labour then for this spiritual and heart-affecting sight! If a man could behold this world in the light of a divine knowledge, he would find it to be but a vanishing shadow. Though the vanity of the creature be a plain truth, and taught by daily experience, and is easily and commonly acknowledged, yet it is not easy to make this truth have a deep impression upon the hearts of men. They are naturally unwilling to admit thoughts of a change, Amos vi. 2, because they are unable to sanctify themselves and look after a better and spiritual estate. But let us not grieve the Spirit of God by our unteachableness in so plain a point. When we are told of the frailty and slipperiness of worldly comforts, we shake our heads and confess it to be true, but improve it not, at best conceive some

weak and faint resolutions, but they soon vanish, and we are as worldly and carnal as ever we were; and therefore pray as David, Ps. xc. 12, 'So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.' You have seen the first part of the text—here is perfection, all perfection; then all perfection hath an end; and this is to be seen, it is liable to sense; and it should be improved by grace. If all creature perfection hath an end:—

Use 1. Let it moderate our desires; for who would court a flying shadow, especially when these pursuits hinder us from looking after better and eternal things? Jonah ii. 8, 'They that seek lying vanities forsake their own mercies:' that is, they might have been their own, if they had chosen them. Within a while the world will be but a stale jest, and the laughing fit is over, and then our sorrow cometh; the feast will be at an end, and then we begin to feel the gripes of a surfeit.

Use 2. Let it moderate our sorrows and fears. Our sorrows; when these things befall us, it is no strange thing. 1 Peter iv. 12; it is no more strange than to see the night succeed the day, or to see a shower come after sunshine; it is no wonder to see a light thing move up ward, nor a heavy thing to move downward. So our fears; when the power and strength of the world is turned upon us, there will be an end of all our evils, but not of the word of God. We shall everlastingly find the effects of his truth and promise, though our enemies excel in worldly pomp, and seem to be grounded upon an immutable foundation; but as powerful as they seem to be, they shall at length come to an end: Job v. 3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation:' when the foolish, that is, the wicked, seemed to get rooting, then I cursed, not by way of imprecation, but by way of prediction.

Use 3. It serves to moderate our delights. No day so pleasant but the night puts an end to it, no summer so fruitful but a barren winter overtaketh it. The Philistines were sporting on their holiday, but their banqueting-house became their grave and place of burial; and Jonah's gourd was soon withered and dried up. Worldly riches serve men as long as they live, and after death do some service in conveying their bodies to the grave by a pompous funeral; but there it leaves them. But the word of God supports us against all temptations while we live, and conveys us to death with comfort, and the fruit of it abideth with us; after we are dissolved the soul immediately hath benefit by it, and afterwards, at the resurrection, the body. We do not hold worldly things *durante vita*—during our life, nor *quamdiu bene se gesserint*—as long as we shall behave ourselves well in our places; but only *durante beneplacito*—as long as God pleaseth. How often is the most shining glory burned into a snuff, turned into ignominy, and honour into contempt, and our fulness into the want of all things! A cobweb that has been long a-spinning is soon swept down. Yea, the time will come when the lust of these things shall be gone, 1 John ii. 17, and the time will come when we shall take no pleasure in them. As soon as we have the creatures, many times we are weary of them, 2 Sam. xiii. 8; as Amnon hated Tamar when he had satisfied his lusts; and David longed for the waters of Bethlehem, and when he had it, he would not drink it. When we come to consider these things, the imperfections that before lay hid are discovered by fruition.

Secondly, Let us now come to the antithesis, *but thy commandments are exceeding broad*.

Before I come to discuss the words in particular, I observe—

First, that the stability of the word of God is often opposed to the vanity of the creature: Isa. xlvi. 8, 'The flower fadeth and the grass withereth, but the word of God abideth for ever.' So 1 Peter i. 25, 'All flesh is grass, and the glory of man is as the flower of grass; but the word of God liveth and abideth for ever:' and 1 John ii. 17, 'The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever.' So Luke x. 41, 42, 'Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall never be taken away from her.' Now, what doth this teach us, but that when we see the vanity of earthly things, we should be informed what better things to set our hearts upon? The hearts of men cannot be idle, their oblectation must be upon something; when pleasures, and riches, and honours are found vain and perishing, there is a more enduring substance to be looked after.

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Secondly, That these better things are discovered by the word of God, now 'life and immortality is brought to light through the gospel,' 2 Tim. i. 10, and he that doth the will of God shall increase his knowledge, he that doth the will of God shall know what doctrine is of God. This doth direct us in making our choice; the independent heart of man will choose something to adhere to. Now, in the word of God we have direction what to choose. The use of all things present is temporal, but the use and benefit of the word is ever lasting; this will do us good another day. All things visible have their own perfection in their kind, and do extend, some of them to one temporal use and some to another; but the word of God extendeth in its kind to all uses; as godliness is profitable to all things; it bringeth blessedness in this life and in the world to come, 1 Tim. iv. 8. A man may satisfy himself in the contemplation of any truth and virtue that is visible; but here are unsearchable riches, such deep wisdom, such rich comforts, perfect directions, that we cannot see to the bottom of them. Every perfect thing in the world hath an end, but the word endureth for ever.

More particularly in this antithesis I observe—

1. The subject, or thing spoken of, *thy commandment*; that is, the whole word of God.

2. The predicate or attribute, what is said of it; *it is broad*.

3. The amplification of this attribute, *it is exceeding broad*; you cannot easily understand the use and benefit of it.

1. The subject, or thing spoken of, 'Thy commandment is exceeding broad.' This breadth must be spoken of with respect to the former clause; it is broad for its use, and then it is broad for its duration and continuance.

[1.] It is broad for use. A man may soon see to the bottom of the creatures, but the wisdom and purity and utility of the word of God, and the mysteries therein contained, and the spiritual estate

that we have thereby, you cannot see to the end of that; it extendeth to all times, places, persons, actions, and circumstances of actions; it hath an inconceivable vastness of purity and spirituality. But you will say, There is a set number of precepts, how say you then 'it is exceeding broad'? Their use is large; and it is here put for the whole word of God. *Adoro plenitudinem scripturarum tuarum*, saith Tertullian. Here are remedies for every malady, and a plentiful storehouse of all comforts, satisfaction to every doubt; nothing pertaining to the holiness and happiness of man is wanting; nothing more requisite to direct, comfort, and support men in all conditions, prosperity, adversity, health, sickness, life, death. What shall I say? It is the word that sanctifies all our comforts, 1 Tim. iv. 5; it is the word that maintaineth our lives, Mat. iv. 4; it is the word that fitteth us to an immortal being, 1 Peter i. 23. We cannot easily express the comprehensiveness of it, and the benefit we have by it. When all earthly things fail, the word will be a sure comforter and counsellor to us; it doth not only tell us what we should do, but what we shall be. In short, the word of God describeth the whole state of the church and the world, and what shall become of it in the world to come. There is a foolish curiosity that possesseth many in the world, who desire to know their destiny, and what is in the womb of futurity; as the king of Babylon stood upon the headways to make divination. Now, let this curiosity be turned to some profitable use; nothing deserves to be known so much as this, What shall become of us to all eternity? If the question were, Shall I be rich or poor, happy or miserable in this world? it were not of such great moment, for these distinctions do not outlive time; but the question is of great moment, whether I shall be eternally miserable or eternally happy? It is a foolish curiosity to know our earthly state, the misery of which cannot be prevented by our prudence or foresight; but it concerneth us much to know whether we are in a damnable or saveable condition, while we have time to remedy our case; and this the word of God will inform you of assuredly. Well, 'the commandment is exceeding broad.' This is the word that discovereth to you the nature of God and the holy angels, the souls of men, the state of the world to come. Who is the author of scripture? God: 'thy commandments.' The matter of scripture? God; it was not fit that any should write of God but God himself. What is the end of this word? God. Why was this word written but that we might ever lastingly enjoy the blessed God? As Caesar wrote his own commentaries, so God, when there was none above him of whom he could write, he wrote of himself; by histories, laws, prophecies and promises, and many other doctrines, hath he set himself forth to be the creator, preserver, deliverer, and glorifier of mankind; and all this is done in a perfect manner. Men mingle their imperfections with their writings; though holy and laudable for their names, yet they discover themselves in all they do; their words and speeches are never so perfect but there is something wanting, and here you can find nothing but God; here God hath written a book whose words are perfect, nothing can be added, nothing taken away. To say there is an idle word in scripture, is great blasphemy, saith Basil. We have no reason to run to human inventions, for the word prescribeth every duty, everything that is to be believed and done in order to salvation. Open the gap once, and there is no end; one brings in one thing, and then another, and from hence comes all the ceremonies that do abound in the church. It is not only most perfect, but most profitable, and containeth all kinds of learning. Common crafts will teach us how to get our bread, but this

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how to get the kingdom of heaven. Law preserveth estates, the testament of men; this the testament of God, the charter of our in heritance. Physic cureth diseases of the body; this afflicted minds and distempered hearts. Natural philosophy raiseth men to the contemplation of the stars, but this to the contemplation of God their maker. By history we come to know of the rise and ruin of kingdoms, states, and cities; by this, the creation and consummation of the world. Rhetoric serves to move affection; this to kindle divine love. Poetry causeth natural delight; this delight in God: no writing like this.

[2.] As it hath a breadth for use, so for duration and continuance; it is the eternal truth of God, that shall live for ever: Mat. v. 18, ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of the law shall fail.’ So Mat. xxiv. 35, ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but thy word shall not pass away.’ But how doth the word continue for ever? Not the word itself, but—

(1.) The obligation and authority of the word continueth for ever. It is an eternal rule of faith and righteousness to the church, that is more stable than heaven and earth. Let me show you how the doctrine is perpetual. The original draught is in God himself. The substance and matter of the moral law is perpetual, namely, the perfect love of God and of our neighbour; but the form is not; we shall have no need of precepts, and prohibitions, and promises, and threatenings in the light of glory, which we have need of in the light of grace. Fierce horses need a bridle, and there is other kind of discipline for children when grown up than when young. When they are young, we correct their bodies; but when they are grown up, we correct and punish them by disinheritance. The prop is removed when the thing standeth fast upon its own basis. When we come to heaven, we have intuitive apprehensive knowledge; we shall have no other bible but the Lamb’s face. Many things that are necessary by the way are not necessary when faith is changed into vision and hope into fruition. Scripture is necessary, as letters to the spouse from her beloved while absent, when present there is no such need. We need not a bond when payment is made; so scripture is the indenture between us and God here; but when that is past, we shall not need scripture.

(2.) It is eternal in the fruit; it bringeth forth the blessing of eternal life to them that keep it and obey it: 2 John 2, ‘For the truth’s sake that dwelleth in us, and shall be in us for ever.’ So John viii. 51, ‘He that believeth in me shall never see death.’ Why I holy men die as well as others; but they have a being in the world to come; and therefore the word of God is called ‘the word of eternal life,’ John vi. 68; that is the end and use of it, it maketh them capable of eternal life that obey it. So 1 Peter i. 25, ‘The word of God abideth and continueth for ever.’ It is the seed and principle of eternal life; it is the charter of their everlasting privileges they shall enjoy in the world to come. But how doth the word endure for ever? It is not meant subjectively, but effectively, because it assures us of eternal life upon obeying it, and threatens eternal death to all that reject it.

Use 1. Oh! then, let us be much in hearing, reading, studying, and obeying this word, that makes us everlastingly happy. If the commandment be so exceeding broad, why do we make no more use of it?

1. Let our hearts be more taken up about it; that should be our main care wherein to busy ourselves day and night, Ps. i. 1. Our delight should not be in vain books and empty histories, but in the law of God: we should often look into the charter of our great hopes.

2. Be directed by the word of God, it will direct you in every business: Ps. cxix. 105, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' Here is direction for you in prosperity and adversity.

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3. Study it that you may be sanctified by it: John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' This is the great benefit that we have by the word, it is the instrument of sanctification.

4. Be much in the study of the word, that you may be assured by it, that you may make out your own qualification to the kingdom of heaven: Acts xiii. 46, 'Since you put away the word of God from you, you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.' When you let God's book lie by neglected, and never hear it, nor read it, nor meditate on it, the thing is past all question, you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.

Use 2. Let this commend the word of God to us, that eternal life is in it. Other writings and discourses may tickle the ears with some pleasing eloquence, but that is vanishing, like a musician's voice. Other writings may represent some petty and momentary advantage, but how soon shall an end be put to all that? so that within a little time the advantage of all these books shall be gone. The statutes and laws of kings and parliaments can reach no further than some temporal reward or punishment; their highest pain is killing of the body, their highest reward is some vanishing and fading honour, or perishing riches. But God's word concerning our everlasting estate, our eternal well or ill being, eternal life and death, is wrapt up in these laws and commandments; these are rewards and punishments suitable to the eternal majesty of the lawgiver. Here is life and immortality brought to light, and offered to them who have so miserably lost it, and involved their souls in an eternal death; therefore let us have a precious esteem of the scripture, which shows us the way of escaping that misery into which we have plunged ourselves, and a way of obtaining eternal blessedness. Do not, then, go to a wrong guide and rule; nothing more necessary to be known than what our end is, and the way that leadeth to that end. The most part of men walk at random, and run an uncertain race; they have neither a certain scope nor a sure way. Men's particular inclinations and humours are an ill guide, for they incline us to please the flesh, and so we shall miss of everlasting blessedness, and wander in a by-path that leadeth to destruction. Naturally man is more addicted to temporal things than spiritual, and to worldly vanities than to spiritual enjoyments; and it is in vain to persuade men to look after better things till the carnal affections be mortified; and one way and great means to mortify carnal affections and inclinations is to consider the vanity of the creature; and when our affections are weaned from the world, we must look after some better things to set our hearts upon. That good which satisfieth all the desires and capacities of man had need to be an infinite and an eternal good. Now, these better things are only discovered in the word of God. The word of God discovers that there is such an estate as ever lasting glory and blessedness. The word telleth us plainly and peremptorily who shall go to heaven and who to hell. Well, then,

if you would have this comfort, you must see whether you have embraced it with that reverence, faith, and obedience which the importance of it doth require.

SERMON CI.

Oh, how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.—VER. 97.

IN this psalm you have a perfect character of a regenerate man, what he is, and what he ought to be, in his meditations, his exercises, his affections; and all this recommended to us from the frame of David's heart and example, and course of his way. Men of spiritual experience can best judge of these affections; for 'as face answereth face in a glass,' so doth the heart of one believer to another.

In these words you have—(1.) His love asserted; (2.) Demonstrated from the effect.

1. His love asserted, *oh, how love I thy law!*

2. Demonstrated from the effect of it, *it is my meditation all the day*.

This is an effect, for we are wont to muse upon what we love; therefore David, loving the law of God, is always thinking of it.

First, For the assertion. Observe the matter asserted, and the vehemency of the assertion. The matter asserted is love to the law; the vehemency of the assertion, 'Oh, *how* I love thy law!' It is an admiration with an exclamation. David is not contented with a naked affirmation, 'I love thy law;' but useth a pathetical protestation of it, 'How love I thy law!' The interrogation expresseth wonder, 'How I love thy law!' And the exclamation, 'oh, how!' that gives vent to strong affection, as if he had said, It is more than I am able to express. The *law* is taken for the whole scripture, as often in this psalm.

Secondly, For the demonstration of this affection, 'It is my meditation all the day;' that is, I do often meditate thereof, and can spend whole days therein. The words may signify frequency of such thoughts; they were not such as did come now and then, but all the day his heart was working on holy things, as the blessed man is described, Ps. i. 2; that is, every day he is working something out of the word of God. Or, 'it is my meditation all the day,' may note the depth and ponderousness of these thoughts; his mind did not run out upon the law with flighty sallies, but he had such thoughts as were solid and serious, and did abide with him.

The points from hence are two:—

1. That God's people have a great love to his word; yea, such a hearty affection as cannot easily be expressed.

2. They that love the word will be meditating therein continually, 'It is my meditation all the day.'

Doct. 1. That God's people have a great love to his word; yea, such a hearty affection as cannot easily be expressed.

I will evidence that by two considerations—(1.) The word deserves this love; (2.) The saints are ready to yield it.

First, The word deserves it in respect of the author, the matter, and the use; in all these respects is the word of God lovely.

First, For the author; it is God's word, and they love it for the author's sake, the signification of his mind, as a letter from a beloved friend is very welcome to us. Aristotle, in his Rhetorics, mentioning the cause of delight, saith thus, They that love much, when they are speaking of what they love, or when they hear anything of the party beloved, or receive anything from them, it is a mighty delight and pleasure to them. So it is in this spiritual love. The word is God's epistle and love-letter to our souls, therefore for his sake it is the more welcome to us. And upon this ground God complains of it that when he had 'written the great things of his law 'to a people, they were neglected and slighted and 'counted a strange thing.' Hosea viii. 12. *I have written*; God is the author, whosoever is the penman. The scriptures are a writing from him to us. Now for us to be strangers to it, and little conversant about it, argues some contempt of God; as to slight a letter of a friend shows little esteem of the writer. The saints they put it into their bosoms, and it gains upon their hearts. Why? It is God's epistle, it is my best friend's letter. This is certain, love God and you love his law; for the author's sake it will be dear and precious to you.

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Secondly, The saints have such a strong love to the word of God, because of the matter in it revealed, for it hath all the properties of a thing to be beloved; it is true, good, profound, and full of depth and mysteries. What would you desire in a doctrine to draw your hearts to it? Truth, goodness, and profoundness of knowledge.

1. If certainty of truth will draw love, it is be found in the holy scriptures, for they are vouched by God himself to be true: Ps. xix. 9, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' And the gospel is called 'the word of truth,' Eph. i. 13, 'After ye had received the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation:' and John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' To improve these places thus. Truth is the good of the understanding, and without the knowledge of which we can have no tranquillity of mind. Now of all truths this is the chiefest; it is not human, natural, or inferior truth, but a supreme divine truth, ratified by God's authority, such as nature could never have found out; yea, such a truth as carries its own evidence with it, and shows how

it comes from God, and discovers itself to be of God. As the sun is seen by its own beams, so the word of God needs no other testimony than itself to commend it to the consciences of men. Certainly it is such a truth as doth sufficiently evidence itself to be of God; all God's works discover their author, and carry about with them their own demonstration; not only his greater works, upon which he hath impressed most of his wisdom and power, but even his lesser works: every worm and pile of grass shows who made it. To an attentive and discerning eye, a man cannot look upon a worm, or consider a gnat or any contemptible creature, but he shall see this was made by a wise God. God hath left his stamp upon every one of his works, and certainly upon his word much more; for 'he hath magnified his word above all his name,' Ps. cxxxviii. 2. There is a more clear discovery of the goodness, wisdom, and power of God than can be in any of his works; for upon this he hath laid forth all the riches of his wisdom and goodness. Therefore, if there be in all creatures and works of God a self-evidencing light to discover their author, and that invisible Godhead and power by which they were made, certainly there is somewhat in the word of God to discover its author; because of this objective evidence which it hath in itself it is more sure than an oracle or voice from heaven: 2 Peter i. 19, 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy.' More sure than what? Than that voice which he heard from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' This was a continuation indeed, you will think; and yet Peter, that heard that voice, telleth us that comparatively we have greater security from and by the word of God; not more sure in itself, but as it is given in evidence to us; so we have a more sure word of prophecy. A transient voice is more easily mistaken and forgotten than a standing authentic record; therefore we have a more sure ground to rest upon than ever hath been or can be given to sinners, subject to forgetfulness, jealousies, and mistakes. A voice from heaven speaking to us by name might more easily be suspected to be another's than the Lord's voice; as when God called Samuel, he suspected that it was the voice of Eli. Therefore an oracle cannot be so sure, safe, and self-evidencing as this word of God that he hath commended to us. For if God should speak to us still from heaven, how should we be able to distinguish it from delusion, or to know it was a voice from God? Might not Satan cause a voice to be heard in the air, and deceive us? Indeed the holy men of God that immediately received those voices and oracles were certified that it was of God, because there was some divine evidence which did accompany the revelation; and if there be the same impressions of God upon the written word, we have as much certainty as they; yea, more, as we view the whole revelation of God together, and more deliberately consider the character and signature of God that is stomped upon it. In short, the word when preached by Christ himself in person came in upon the hearts of men chiefly by this self-evidencing light; therefore it is said of Christ, Mat. vii. 29, that 'he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' His hearers were convinced of a sovereign majesty in his speech, proper to the divinity of his person; and when the officers were sent to apprehend him, there was such an evidence in his doctrine, that they cried out, 'Never man spake like this man,' John vii. 46. And still there is the same evidence in his doctrine written, for the voice could add nothing to it, and the writing can take nothing from it. The voice is but a circumstance, the word written not a dead letter, but can sufficiently evidence itself to be of God *de jure*; it hath the same power still,

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though *de facto* not always so received and so owned by the sons of men, but only by those that are enlightened by the Spirit to see this evidence. You find by daily experience every ingenious author leaves an image and impress of his own spirit, the mark of his genius upon every work that he doth. We can say of an exquisite painting, by some secret art in it, this is the hand of such a great master. Now, can it be imagined that God should put his hand to any work, and leave no signature or impress of it upon that work? It cannot be imagined, for it must be either because he could not, or he would not That God could not, cannot be said without blasphemy. Can men show the wisdom and learning they have attained to in every work, and cannot God, who is the father of lights and the fountain of wisdom, insinuate such secret marks and notes of his wisdom and divine authority into that writing he took care should be penned for the use and comfort of the world, that it might be known to be his? And that he would not, that cannot be believed neither. He that is so willing to 'show man what is good,' so willing to reveal himself to the reasonable creature, can we imagine he would so wholly conceal himself that there should be no stamp of himself upon that doctrine, to move our reverence and obedience, but receive it from the testimony of such a church? Therefore surely there is enough in the word to discover God to be the author. The apostles, when they went abroad to work faith, all the fruit that they expected from their preaching was from this self-evidencing light which was discovered in their doctrine; therefore doth the apostle say, 2 Cor. iv. 2, 'Not handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.' They did not commend themselves to the consciences of men merely by the miracles which they wrought, though that also was some seal of their commission, and that they were authorised and sent by God to preach those things to the world, but 'by the manifestation of the truth commending themselves to every man's conscience.' So the apostle reckons up many things, 'approving ourselves as the ministers of God by the word of truth,' 2 Cor. vi. 4. Therefore certainly there is somewhat in the truth delivered that will sufficiently make out itself to be of God. And when they render the reason why this word was not received, it was not for want of evidence, as if this truth could not sufficiently be known to be of God, but because men were blinded with their lusts and carnal affections; for so he saith, 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4, 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not,' &c. Which shows there is a light in the gospel by which it can discover itself, and if this light be hidden from the eyes of men, it is because their minds are blinded by their own lusts and carnal affections. Now, if the certainty of truth will draw affection, certainly those truths which are conveyed in the word of God should gain upon our hearts and draw affection. Why? Because these are sublime, supreme, and weighty truths, and come in with a great deal of evidence upon the hearts of men.

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2. If goodness can gain the hearts and affections of men, the word of God is good as well as true. There is a double desire in man—a desire of truth and a desire of immortality; to know the truth, and to enjoy the chiefest good; the happiness of the intellect, of the understanding, that lies in the contemplation of truth; and the happiness of the will, in the enjoyment of good. In the state

of innocency, this was represented by the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, to suit these two capacities and desires that were in the heart of man: the tree of life, to suit his desires of happiness; and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, to suit his desires of truth. Under the law, this is set forth by the candlestick and the table of shewbread; and in the gospel by the sacrament of baptism, which is called an enlightening—Heb. x. 32, 'After you were enlightened:' that is, after you were baptized—and the Lord's supper. Light and life are the two great things man looks after as a reasonable creature; to get more light, and then life, that he may enjoy God. Now, we are still at a loss for satisfaction of these desires until we meet with the word of God, where there is *primum verum*, the supreme truth, and *summum bonum*, the chiefest good; and therefore the directions of the word are called 'true laws' and 'good statutes,' Neh. ix. 13: true laws, all words of truth, so to perfect the understandings of men; and good laws, very suitable to their will and inclination, and so bear a full proportion with the desires of a reasonable creature. So 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.' The gospel is a faithful saying; there is truth to perfect the understanding, and then worthy of the chiefest embraces of our wills and affections. As there is plain, certain, clear truth in the word of God, a satisfaction to the understanding in the view of truth, so there is also a full compliance with the motions of the will which the scripture offereth. Now two things there are the scriptures do reveal which are good for men, and cannot be found elsewhere, and all the world have been puzzled about them how to find them out:—(1.) Reconciliation with God; (2) Salvation, or eternal happiness.

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[1.] Reconciliation with God: this is the grand inquiry of the guilty creature, Wherewith shall God be appeased, satisfied, and we reconciled to him, he being offended by our sin? Micah vi. 8. How justice shall be satisfied, and men, that are obnoxious to the wrath of God, may come to have delightful communion with him, this is the great scruple that troubleth the creature, and all the false religions in the world were invented for the removing and assailing this doubt and scruple, and appeasing the hearts of men as to these fears of divine justice. Now, we can nowhere be satisfied but in the way of reconciliation and peace which is tendered by God himself to repenting sinners, through the mediation of Christ Jesus. Natural conscience will make us sensible of sin and wrath, and we have no ransom to pay it; and all other creatures cannot help us, for they are debtors to God for all they have and can do. How then shall God be satisfied? How shall we escape this vengeance? This fear would have remained upon us to all eternity, but that we have relief from the word of God: 2 Cor. v. 19, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses.' There is more glory in these few words, and more of God discovered in them, than there is in all the world. Oh, what a deal of comfort, and what a foundation for the rejoicing of our faith, is there laid in this reconciliation in and by Christ Jesus our Lord! That short sentence discovers more of God's intentions and good-will to man than all the bounty of his providence in and by all the creatures put together. Here was a secret which could never enter into man's heart, nor do we find a syllable of it written in any heathen book as to the way of it, how it shall be brought about; a truth so incredible to flesh and blood, that the prophet, when he speaketh of this wonder, asketh,

‘Who hath believed our report?’ Isa. liii. 1; who hath believed that he should bear our sorrows, and be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, and that the chastisements of our peace should be upon him, and by his stripes we should be healed? Here is the great secret God hath revealed to you in his word. This must needs be a secret in nature, for this was a work which merely proceeded from the free motion of God’s will; and therefore, being not *opus naturae divinae*, but *opus liberi consilii*, that work which God did not do by any necessity of nature, but by the free motion of his own will, will never be found out unless God will discover it himself; for how could any man divine what God purposed in his heart before he brought it to purpose, until he himself had revealed it? Therefore it is a good word, because it reveals reconciliation by Christ.

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[2.] There is something more to draw our hearts to the word—that is, eternal salvation. We grope and feel about for an immortal good. Nature will give us some presages of a state after this world, some kind of guesses; and we are groping and feeling about for an eternal good, Acts xvii. 27. Man, who hath a soul that will not perish, must have some happiness that will last as long as his soul shall last; he would fain be eternally happy. Now, it is the word of God only reveals both the thing and the way to God; the thing itself, that there is such a state, and what it is: 2 Tim. i. 10, ‘Christ hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.’ It lay in darkness before, hidden under some guesses and representations to the old people of God, but now it is brought to light in the gospel. Heathens in their dark notions did stumble upon the immortality of the soul, which they did rather dream of than understand distinctly; but now all is open and clear, and God hath manifested to you that ‘there is a rest for the children of God,’ and a happiness after this life. And also God hath revealed the way how to seek it, and how to attain and get this eternal happiness; therefore the holy scriptures are said to be ‘able to make wise to salvation,’ 2 Tim. iii. 15: it doth direct you in this way; that is wisdom indeed, to be wise to salvation. To be able to turn and wind in the world, to be wise only in the present generation, as the children of this world are, it is folly rather than wisdom; as when children can set forth their toys, we do not look upon it as any piece of wisdom, but folly. Wisdom lies in fixing a right end, in a choice of fit means, and in a dexterous prosecution of those means for the attainment of this end. Now the holy scriptures make you wise to salvation—that is, to fix upon a right end, for they discover that there is a happiness that we may fix upon, and they direct us in the way; and then by mighty and potent methods of reasoning they quicken and awaken us to look after this business, that we may dexterously pursue it as the great care that lies upon us; therefore the children of God delight in the word, because this makes them wise to salvation. Here they have a perfect blessedness, and a powerful way of argumentation, and the soul is quickened to look after these great and everlasting hopes.

3. The doctrines of the word are profound truths: ‘Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore doth my soul keep them,’ Ps. cxix. 129. They are remote from vulgar and ordinary knowledge. The word of God is not only called ‘a doctrine according to godliness,’ 1 Tim. vi. 3, but a ‘mystery of godliness.’ I Tim. iii. 16. Since the fall there is a curiosity of knowledge, a desire whereby man not only seeks what is true and good, but what is rare and profound; we have no need to run to other

books. True depth and true profoundness are to be found in the word of God. There are wonders in God's law, if we had eyes to see them: Ps. cxix. 18, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law:' things indeed so profound and so mysterious that the angels desire to pry into them, 1 Peter i. 12. Those spirits that live in the blessed vision and constant fruition of God, yet they did find a depth of wisdom in salvation by Christ, such a ravishing mystery, that they curiously are taken up in the study of it, and they delight in the view of those things which are commended to us for our study: Eph. iii. 10, 'To the intent that now, unto the principalities in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.' God's word is a glass wherein those glorious creatures do, as in a mirror, behold his wisdom, and are in some sort bettered by it. The state of angels is a happy state, but it is finite, capable of being improved and bettered, and that by the doctrine of the holy scriptures. Well, then, such are the depths and various excellences of the word of God, that the saints know not how more pleasantly and contentedly to spend their thoughts and time than in the search and view of those truths, where such notable mysteries are revealed about the nature of God, creation, providence, the story of man's fall, redemption by Christ, the way to true happiness, and the like. Both the grounds of faith and rules of practice are all such as are above the pitch of human understanding; natural reason cannot find them out, and now they are revealed by God, the mind doth not fully apprehend them.

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Thirdly, The use of scripture, the ends for which God hath appointed it, and the uses for which it was given.

1. To increase the knowledge of God. Now, the saints would know more of God, and better their notions of him; as Moses, his great request to God is, 'Tell me thy name:' when he learned that, 'Show me thy glory;' he would fain know more of God. So the saints would fain know more of God; therefore the word is dear and precious to them, because it discovers so much of God, Hosea vi. 3. This is their property, they 'follow on to know the Lord.' They do not content themselves with their first and infant notions, but aspire to know him more and more; for their love, fear, and trust, and all, doth depend upon the knowledge of God. If we had more knowledge of God, we should love him more and trust him more: Ps. ix. 10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.' We know God but as men born blind know the fire; they know there is such a thing as fire, for they feel it warm them, but what it is they know not; so that there is a God we know, but what he is we know little, and indeed we can never search him out to perfection; a finite creature can never fully comprehend that which is infinite. The saints are following on to know the Lord; they desire to know more and more, and there is no such means to discover God to them as this way.

2. The use of the word is to convert the soul and to bring it home to God: Ps. xix. 7, 'The law of God is perfect, converting the soul.' There is the perfection of God's word, it is God's instrument for converting of souls, or turning of them back to him again. For conversion, take it in its whole

latitude, compriseth this, to humble us, to cleanse us, to bind up our broken hearts. Because of all these uses, the children of God love his word. It serves—

[1.] To humble us for sin: Jer. xxiii. 29, 'Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' He appeals to it as things that we may find by experience, that the word of God is not only a hammer to break, but afire to melt. As a battered vessel, when it is to be new formed, must be melted, that it may be capable of this new form, so no such way to melt the heart, and make it capable of God's purpose, as the word of God; no such thing to break the heart, no such terrors and agonies like those the word works; and to melt the heart, to make it pliable to God's use, no such thing as the word of God to affect us for sin, for sin as it is a breach of God's law, or an offence to God.

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[2.] It hath this use, to cleanse the heart, and subdue it to the obedience of Christ: Ps. cxix. 9, 'Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereunto according to thy word.' Young men, who more stubborn and boisterous than they, that are carried on with great strength and fervour in the very heat of their rebellion against God? Well, the word of God can cleanse the heart of a young man. As Plato saith of youth, that it is such a beast as will not easily come to hand. Now for cicurating and taming this beast, for the captivating those rebellious affections in youth, and cleansing and working out the filthiness that is in us, nothing like the word. And it is by these spiritual weapons that every thought is brought into captivity to Christ, 2 Cor. x.; and then, as it is obstinate, the power of the word breaks the force of our lusts.

[3.] For comforting and binding up the broken-hearted. Human wisdom and eloquence can do nothing to purpose this way; but when God by the word reveals to a man his righteousness, then 'his flesh shall come again as a child's, he shall return to the days of his youth,' Job xxxiii. 25. Though a man before did walk up and down as a ghost, was, as it were, a walking skeleton, and his marrow was sucked out of his bones by the terrors of the Lord that were upon him, yet when he hath God's word to show, under God's hand, for his pardon, this brings his comfort; his flesh shall revive, he shall return fresher than a child, and shall return to the days of his youth; his strength, joy, and comfort shall come again. Therefore, oh, how they love the law! because they have felt in their heart it must be God's word; for that which wounds must also heal.

3. To make us perfect as well as to begin the work: 2 Tim. iii. 17, it is said, 'The word of God is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works:' so that in this perfection there are three uses for which the word serves:

[1.] For building up in faith, or increasing in internal grace. The word of God is not only for novices, but for grown persons, that there may be a continual dropping into the lamps, as it was in the vision of Zechariah: Acts xx. 32, 'I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.' It is not enough to lay a foundation, but there must be a building up. Now, what is that which builds us

up? ‘The word of his grace;’ that is, God’s blessing upon the reading and hearing the word; for the apostle speaks it when he was taking leave of the Ephesians: ‘I commend you to God, and the word of his grace:’ that is, the word of grace sent among them, by their ordinary officers continued to them, blessing the reading and hearing the word by their ordinary officers; there would be no need of Paul, the room should be supplied. Habits of grace must still be maintained by fresh influences, and they always come into us by the word of God; therefore, after we are converted and born again, the word is useful, ‘that we may grow thereby,’ 2 Peter ii. 2.

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[2.] To direct our practice; that is one use the word serves for; so it is said, 2 Peter i. 19, ‘We have also a more sure word of prophecy, thereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place:’ in this state of ignorance wherein we are, for that is figured by those words, ‘in a dark place.’ Sure it is a great blessing to have a light shining to us that we may not wander, and fall into the snares wherewith we are encompassed. We are apt to forget and mistake our way; we are very forgetful, and our way is narrow, hardly found and hardly kept; and Satan is full of wiles and deceits, like an *ignis fatuus*, ready to lead us out of the way; therefore we had need have a sure guide and a sure light: Ps. cxix. 105, ‘Thy word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths.’ It is a light not only to our paths, for the choice of our general way, but for all our steps, to direct us in all our ways.

[3.] To comfort us in all conditions, under our crosses, confusions, and difficulties; we have all from the word of God: Ps. cxix. 50, ‘This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me.’ Oh! when a child of God is even dead, and hath many damps and discouragements upon his heart, when he goes to the word, there he hath quickening, reviving, and is encouraged to wait upon God again. All our discomfort comes from forgetting what God hath spoken in his word: Heb. xii. 5, ‘Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children.’ There is abundant consolation in the word, but we forget it, and do not carry it always in our mind, and then we lie under much dejection of heart; if we do not study it, discomfort will come upon us. In the word there is a remedy for every malady and an ease for every smart; and therefore this is that which makes it precious to the children of God.

Secondly, The saints readily yield this love to the word. Why?

1. Because their hearts are suited to the word. The word is every way suited to the sanctified nature, and the sanctified nature is suited to it; for that which is written in God’s book is written over again upon their hearts by the finger of the Spirit. While we are in our natural state there is an enmity to the law of God: ‘For we are not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be,’ Rom. viii. 7. Ay! but when they come to be written upon the heart and mind, then our affections are suited to the word. Carnal men do not love the word. Why? Because it is contrary to them; as Micaiah to Ahab, ‘He prophesieth nothing but evil to me.’ It only rubs their sores and discovers their spots to them, and that is grievous; and proud spirits think it to be a simple, plain doctrine. Worldly spirits

love it not, for it draweth them off wholly to think of things to come; but they whose hearts, are suited to it, they have a mighty love to it.

2. They have tasted the goodness of the word, therefore they love it: 2 Peter ii. 3, ‘As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word.’ Why? ‘If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious:’ if you have felt any benefit: Jer. xv. 16, ‘Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.’ When they come to taste, digest, and have experience of the benefit in comforting, changing, supporting their own hearts, then they love the word of God that hath been the instrument of it: James i. 18. ‘He hath begotten us by the word of truth.’ Then what follows? ‘Be swift to hear.’ If a man be begotten, if he hath felt the benefit of the word, then he will be taking all occasions to delight himself, and refresh his soul in the word of God, in reading, hearing, meditating, because he hath found sensible benefit.

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Use 1. To shame and humble us that we are so cold in our love. It is an admirable and an incredible affection David here speaks. Consider who it was that speaks thus. David, he that was encumbered with the employments of a kingdom, he that had so many courtly pleasures, so many great businesses to divert and draw him aside; yet all his employment could not withhold him from delighting him self in the word of God. It was David, that was a king, and mark how he doth express himself; he doth not say, I endeavour to keep thy word, but ‘I love thy word.’ Nay, he saith more, he speaks of it as a thing he could not express, ‘How I love thy law!’ No great wonder that we cannot express the excellency of the word; but that our affections, which are so finite, that these should not be expressed, this is wonderful. Then he speaks of it with exclamation too, ‘Oh, how I love thy law!’ and he speaks this to God. The Septuagint reads it, ‘Lord, how have I loved thy law!’ He makes God himself to be, judge not only of the truth of his love (as Peter makes Christ the judge of the truth of his love: I have many failings, I have fallen foully of late; but, ‘Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest I love thee’) but he makes God the judge of the strength of his love, ‘Lord, how do I love thy law!’ Have we anything answerable? Heart should answer heart. Are there such affections wrought in us as David expresseth to be in himself? This should shame us, for we have more reason, there is more of the word of God revealed to us, more of the counsel of God discovered, the canon of scripture being enlarged, more discovered than ever was to David, yet our affections so cold.

SERMON CII.

Oh, how love I thy law! &c.—VER. 97.

I COME now to a second use, to press us to get this love. Take three arguments:—

1. This will wean us from sinful delights, that are apt to insinuate with us and take our hearts; it will draw us off from carnal pastimes, curious studies, vain pamphlets: if you had this love, here would be your recreation in the word of God. *Castae deliciae meae sunt scripturae tuae*, saith Austin—here are my chaste delights, thy holy scripture, to be ruminating and meditating there. Here you will be employing your time and strength of your thoughts. There are two things mightily concern us—to make religion our business and recreation; our business in regard of the seriousness, and our recreation and delight in regard of the sweetness. Now, if you have a word from God, here will be your delight; you will be exercising yourselves contemplating the height, depth, and breadth of God's love in Christ Jesus, and turning over this blessed book: Job xxiii. 12, 'I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food.' Your very food for sustentation of your bodies will not l>e so sweet to you as the word of God for the comfort and refreshing of the soul. When the promises are as dry breasts and withered flowers, when men have little or no feeling of the power of it upon their hearts, no wonder they are besotted with the pleasures of sin. Men's minds must have some pleasure and oblectation, but their hearts are chained to carnal delights, so that they cannot mind the business of their souls.

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2. Your hearts will be more stable and upright with God, more constant in the profession of godliness, when you come to love the word and love the truth for the truth's sake: 2 Thes. ii. 12, 'Because they received not the truth in the love of it, therefore God gave them up to strong delusions, that they might believe lies.' The Lord hath seen it fit ever to continue this dispensation in the course of his providence, to suffer seducing spirits to go forth to try how we have received the truth, whether only in the bare profession of it, or received it in the love of it. Many have received the truth in the light of it; that is, compelled by conscience, human tradition, current opinions, and custom of the country to profess it; but they do not love it, therefore they are easily carried away. There may be knowledge where there is not assent; there may be assent where there is not love; there may be some slight persuasion of the truth of evangelical doctrine, but if the heart be biassed with lust and sin, a man doth but lie open to temptations to apostasy. Therefore, until the heart be drawn out unto love to the truth it can never be stable with God.

3. This is that which will give you a clearer understanding in the mysteries of godliness. The more we love the word the more we study it, and the deeper insight and more spiritual discerning we have in the mysteries thereof. It is not acute parts, but strong affections to divine things, that maketh us to understand them in a spiritual manner. If a man hath acute parts, but yet hath vile affections and carnal passions, these will becloud the mind and fill us with prejudicate opinions, so that we cannot discern the mind of God in many cases, nor spiritually discern it in any. Men are darkened with their own lusts, their minds are darkened with carnal lusts; then 'in seeing they see not, in hearing they hear not:' they do not hear what they hear. Let me set it forth by this similitude. A blunt iron, if it be thoroughly heated in the fire, will sooner pierce through a thick board than a sharper tool that is cold; so in the order of the affections; when a man's heart is heated and warmed with love to divine things, then it pierceth through; he hath such a sight of divine things as they

shall affect and change his heart more than he that hath great parts. It is not acuteness of parts, so much as entireness of affection, which gives us a spiritual discerning of the mysteries of godliness; for when the heart is wedded to carnal lusts, the judgment is corrupted and partial, but when we have an affection to holiness we shall sooner discern the mind of God. Knowledge breeds love, and love increaseth knowledge, for it fortifieth and strengthened the other faculties of the soul, that they may be more ready in operation. Let this persuade you to get this love to the word of God.

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Ay! but how shall we do to get this love?

Direct. 1. I told you before it is the fruit of regeneration; yet a little to quicken you hereunto, consider all the arguments which are brought. As whose word it is; it is God's word, and if you love God, will you not love the word of God? Surely your best affections are due to him, and if you bear any affections to him you will bear an affection to his word: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'Our desires are to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name.' First to thee, and then to the remembrance of thy name; or, as it is in the original, to thy memorial. If you have desires to God, then you will love that blessed book wherein you shall read and hear of God, where God hath displayed his name to you. And then consider what benefits you have by the word. It serves—

1. To enlighten us and to direct us. This is our light in a dark place, and to guide us on all occasions. Solomon saith, Eccles. xi. 7, 'Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.' If light natural be so pleasant, what is light spiritual? And therefore the Psalmist compares the word of God to the sun, Ps. xix. First he speaks of the sun when he displayeth his beams upon the earth, then presently he comes to speak of the word of God. The world can no more be without the one than the other, without the word of God no more than without the sun; for as one doth revive the drooping plants, and cheer and refresh nature by his comfortable beams, so the word of God doth rejoice, refresh, and revive the hearts of God's people by its light and influence, Ps. xix. 7, 8. Oh! it is a comfort to have light to see our way. When men begin to have a conscience about heavenly things they will judge so. Paul and his companions in the great storm at sea, when they saw no sun for many days, and when they were afraid to fall upon rocks and shelves, with what longing did they expect to see the sun! So a poor bewildered soul doth experiment such another case, when his way is dark, and hath no direction from the word of God what course to take; but when he can get a little light from the testimonies of the Lord to guide him in his way, how sweet, refreshing, and reviving is this to his heart!

2. It serves to comfort us in all straits. The word of God is, as Basil saith, a common shop of medicaments, where there is a salve for every sore, and a remedy for every malady, a promise for every condition. God hath plentifully opened his good-will and heart to sinners; whatever the burden and distress be, still there is some remedy from the word of God. Look, as David, Ps. xlviii. 2, 3, bids them to view Zion on all sides, to see if there were anything wanting necessary for ornament and defence, so we may say of the word of God, Go round about, see if there be anything wanting for the comfort of a Christian. There are promises of wisdom to manage our business, James i. 5;

promises of defence in the midst of all calamities, Heb. iii. 5; promises of sustentation and support in God's storehouse, blessings enough for every poor soul. Then the word of God serves to support and strengthen us in our conflicts, either with sins or with afflictions, to strengthen us against corruptions, and quicken us to duties; the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, the choicest weapon in the spiritual warfare, Eph. vi. 18. Here a Christian fetcheth his all from hence. Therefore, if you would have these affections to the word, think what a great deal of benefit is to be had by it, light, comfort, and strength.

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Direct. 2. Be in a capacity to love the word. If you would have this strong affection David speaks of, you must be renewed and reconciled.

1. Renewed, for this love is an affection proper to the new nature: Rom. viii. 5, 'They that are after the spirit do mind the things of the spirit.' It is in vain to think of any such love to God's word until we be renewed by God's grace. A man, as a man, may delight in the knowledge of the word; but to receive the word of God as the word of God, there must be somewhat of the divine nature, or you will not have such a relish and savour to spiritual things.

2. Be reconciled to God. A guilty creature, what comfort can he take in the word of God, where he can see nothing but his accusation and his doom? When he looks into it, it shows him his natural face. A natural man cannot delight in the word of God, for it only revives his fears, and offers to his mind a sense of his misery. Therefore God's witnesses are said to 'torment them that dwell on the earth,' Rev. xi. 10. God's word is a torment to them; to come to the word, and study the word of God, and consider his mind revealed therein, this nothing but increaseth fears. It is a vexation to them, when they would sleep securely, to have their consciences rubbing up and reviving their fears. Therefore they are not in a capacity to delight in the word of God.

Direct. 3. If you would delight in the word of God, you must get an esteem of spiritual enjoyments. Why are wicked men so greedily carried out after worldly comforts? These are the only things which they value. But until a man learns to value knowledge, and spiritual comforts, and subjection to God, and conversion of his heart to God, he will not love the word, which is the instrument of all these benefits. When he counts these as the greatest blessings, then his heart will be carried on to them, for the word only hath a subserviency to these things. Poor low creatures value themselves by plentifulness of worldly accommodations; they will not be so much longing after them. But when they value instruction above silver, and knowledge more than their gold, as Prov. viii. 10, when the heart is set upon spiritual things, then they love the word by which they might be made partakers of it.

Direct. 4. Let a man live in awe of the word, and make it his business to maintain communion with God; for this will show him the necessity of his word to comfort and to strengthen him upon all occasions. A lively Christian, that in good earnest minds his work, must have the word by him for his strength and support, as he that labours must have his meals, otherwise he will faint. Painted

fire needs no fuel, and when we content ourselves with a loose and careless profession, then we will not so delight ourselves in God's book and in his statutes, and run to those things for the support of our souls. But when we make it our business, then naturally we will be carried out in love to the word.

Use 3. For trial. Have we this love to God's word? God's people love his word exceedingly. There are many do not hate it, do not oppose it, or have some cold affections this way; but have you that order of affection which the children of God do express?

1. If you have a true love to the word of God, you will much exercise yourselves therein in reading, hearing, praying, conferring, and meditating; these will be constant exercises of your souls. You will be much in reading the word, as the eunuch returning from public worship was reading a portion of scripture, Acts viii. 28. It is good to see with our own eyes, and drink out of the fountain; not barely to attend upon deductions from the word, and discourses built thereupon, but to read the book itself; and if it seem dark, God will s*end you an interpreter. Then you will be delighted in hearing the word. Certainly the saints will take all meet occasions for this. If he hath begotten you by the word of truth, you will be swift to hear, James i. 19. They which have experimented the power of it, there needs not much ado to press them to come and wait upon the dispensation of the word: Ps. cxxii. 1, 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go up unto the house of the Lord.' You should be glad of these occasions of hearing God's word. Look, as in heaven all our comforts and all grace comes in there by vision, by sight, so now it comes in here in the church by hearing. Hearing is the sense exercised in the church, and therefore God's children will be much in hearing the word. Then much in conferring of it; what a man delights in he will be talking of, and so should you at home and abroad: Deut. vi. 7, 'Thou shalt be talking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest in the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.' When you are at home you should be conferring of these holy things, and abroad seasoning your journey and business with gracious conference.

2. If you have this love to the word of God, you will delight to get it into your hearts. There is the great business of a Christian, that it may not only be in the Bible, but may be impressed on the heart, and expressed by a sincere, uniform, impartial obedience, when we study conformity thereto in heart and life. Hypocrites may delight in speculation, but a child of God is delighted in the obedience and in conformity to his word: Ps. cxix. 14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches.' Not only in the testimonies themselves, in the naked contemplation of these blessed truths, reconciliation with God, and the way to true happiness, but in the way and practice of these things. He that loves his rule will study an exact conformity thereunto. The love a child of God hath to the word differs from the love of a hypocrite or a temporary believer thus, by this similitude: in a rare piece of painting, an ordinary beholder takes a great deal of comfort when he seeth it or looks upon it, but this is nothing to that contentment which an artist takes in imitating and copying it out, in expressing it, when he can by his own pencil copy it out to the life;

so that which a child of God delights in is when he can copy out tins word of God, get it into his heart, and hold it forth in his conversation, for the scripture speaks of both. Of the word got into the heart: James i. 21, 'Receive with meekness the ingrafted word:' when it is not only an external rule, but an ingrafted word. So Ps. xxxvii. 31, 'The law of God is in his heart,' and Ps. xl. 8, 'Thy law is in my heart.' Here is the great testimony of our love to God's law, when we strive to have it impressed on the heart and expressed in the conversation: Phil. iii. 16, 'Let us walk by the same rule.' This is a double contentment when it comes to that, not only to the view of truth, but when the heart is a ready transcript of the word of God, when these things are not only revealed to him, but revealed in him: Gal. i. 16, 'It pleased God to reveal his Son in me.' There is a revealing things to us and a revealing things in us. Now, when this is our business, that all this may be revealed in us, and we may be cast into the mould of this doctrine, then indeed do we love the law of God: Rom. vi. 17, 'Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you,' or 'whereto ye were delivered.'

3. They which love the word of God, love the whole word, even that which thwarts their natural desires, and discovers their sin to them. Paul saith, Rom. vii. 12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.' What is the meaning of this disjunctive, the *law* and the *commandment*? By the commandment he means that particular law which had so strangely affected him, that had wrought such tragical effects upon his heart, made sin revive, disturbed him, discovered himself to himself; he loves that law which broke in upon his heart with so much power and evidence, and stirred up his affections. Carnal men love the comfortable part of the word, to be feasted with privileges; but that part which urgeth them to unpleasing duties, or discovers their sins, they love not: 1 Kings xxii. 8, 'He doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil:' therefore I will not hear him. Though he was a prophet of the Lord, and came with the word of the Lord, yet, He never prophesied good to me; that is, such things as did please him. Do you think that was the temper of that wicked king alone? No; it is the temper of every wicked man's heart: Amos v. 10, 'They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.' All wicked men have such a disposition; they hate that part of the word which doth stir up their fears, revive their doubts, and is contrary to their lusts. It is their general disposition: John iii. 20, 'Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.' They shun that part of the word whereby they might come to know themselves; either they could wish such things were not sins, or that they did not know them to be sins: 2 Peter iii. 5, 'For this they willingly are ignorant of.' A guilty soul hath a secret enmity to the word of God, being loath to read his own doom there, and be much occupied and employed in that which condemns and accuseth him; as a man that hath light ware is loath to come to the balance, or a man that hath counterfeit coin is loath to come to the touchstone; so they are loath to come too close and near the word of God, that their whole course may be discovered to themselves. None but a pure sincere heart can have such a universal love to God's law.

4. If you love the word, you will ever love the word; for the same reasons that drew your heart at first continue still: Ps. cxix. 20, 'My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.' By *judgments* is meant the word of God, which is the rule of God's proceeding with sinners. It was not for a pang only that he had that strong and vehement affection, but it was a constant thing at all times, it was the ordinary frame of his heart. Many men have good affections for a while, but they i abide not with them; for some have an adulterous affection only:' they may love the word of God while it is new, for novelty sake: John v. 35, 'Ye rejoiced for a season in his light:' and Acts xvii. 20, they flocked about Paul, because he seemed to be a 'setter forth of new doctrine.' This is but carnal love, that is soon altered. Or else it may be they have some love to the word during some qualm of conscience, and they may find some savour in it when they have a little trouble upon them, as we desire strong water in a pang, not as a constant diet. When they are under some working of conscience, then they run to the word; but as soon as they can lick themselves whole again, they slight it, and their love to the word is gone. As their trouble wears off, so their affection is worn off. These are driven by fearing the word, and not by the love of it. For a great while men are carried on pleasingly in their love to the word, but when it grates hard, bears hard upon conscience, and meets with their lusts, then they go away in discontent; as Herod 'heard John gladly' for a while, Mark vi. 20, until his Herodias was touched, and then follows his darling sin again. Their love is to the word if carnal credit accompany it, as John was welcome to the Jews until he fell under Herod's displeasure. The stony ground received the word with much joy, 'until the sun arose with a burning heat,' Mat. xiii. There are certain times when it is a credit to be religious, and when the gospel is befriended in the world; then men will have some seeming affection, but it dies away. God's children love the word for its own sake, therefore they ever love it. They which love the truth for foreign reasons, because of novelty, merely out of present necessity, public countenance, because it is in fashion and repute, or because they thought the word would flatter them more in their sins than it doth, these do not love the word. Thus David's affection is asserted.

Secondly, We have David's assertion demonstrated, 'It is my meditation all the day.'

Doct. 2. They that love the word will be meditating therein continually.

There are two grounds for this—love causeth it, and love is in creased by it.

1. Love causeth it. We are continually thinking of whatsoever we love. Rich men, that affect worldly things, are always thinking of gathering substance and increasing their worldly portion; as that man, Luke xii. 17, 18, was dialogising and discoursing with himself. Carnal lovers are thinking of that they love, and ambitious men are feasting their souls with imaginations and suppositions of worldly greatness, pleasing themselves by framing images in their minds; and warriors are thinking of battles and wars, and voluptuaries are thinking of sports and pastimes, and a child of God is thinking of holy things. Love causes the soul to be more where it loves than where it lives; it is the best entertainment they can find for themselves to frame images of things loved in their minds.

2. As love begets meditation, so meditation cherishes love. Meditation is the life of all the means of grace, and that which makes them fruitful to our souls. What is the reason there is so much preaching and so little practice? For want of meditation. Constant thoughts are operative. If a hen straggleth out from her nest, she brings forth nothing, her eggs chill; so when we do not sit abrood upon holy thoughts, if we content ourselves with some few transient thoughts and glances about divine things, and do not dwell upon them, the truth is suddenly put off, and doth no good. All actions require time and space for their operation; if hastily slubbered over, they cool; if we give them time and space we shall feel their effects. So if we hold truths in our mind, and dwell upon them, there will be an answerable impression; but when they come like a flash of lightning, then they are gone, and we run them over cursorily. That truth may work there is required three things—sound belief, serious consideration, and close application: Job v. 27, 'Lo, this we have searched it; so it is, hear it, and know thou it for thy good.'

[1.] A sound belief, for it is reality that will work upon us. Affection is always according to the strength of the persuasion.

[2.] There must be application. Every kind of operation is by the touch. The nearer the touch the greater the virtue; so the more close they are upon the heart, and touch, and concern us, the more they work upon us.

[3.] There must be consideration: we must seriously revolve these things in our mind, and debate with ourselves; as, for instance, what a strict and precise account we are to give at the day of judgment, the inexpressible pains of hell and ineffable joys of heaven. Generally we do not believe these things. If we were persuaded there is a heaven and hell, if we did think of them with application, and say, Soul, thou must one day go either to heaven or hell, thou must one day appear before God, and be put under a sentence of everlasting death, or receive a sentence of everlasting life; if we did consider them with serious and with inculcative thoughts: Is it indeed so? then let me consider what I must do; this reasoning and debating, and whetting these truths upon the heart, would work upon us, and we should sooner see the fruit. As Elisha stretched himself often upon the Shunamite's son, and kept stretching himself till the child began to wax warm and sneezed, and then he opened his eyes, so we should spread truth upon the heart till affection begin to quicken it.

Use 1. Reproof, and that of three sorts of persons:—

1. Those that go musing of vanity all the day, and never can find a thought for God, for Christ, for the covenant, or for the great truths of the word. They have thoughts and to spare for other things. Do those love the word of God, and never spend a thought about it? Prov. vi. 21. If the word were bound upon us as a jewel and chain, then when thou goest it would lead thee, when thou sleepest it would keep thee, and when thou awakest it would talk with thee. The word would ever be running upon our minds if we had any hearty affections to it. Christians, think with yourselves; have you thoughts for other things, and none for God, Christ, heaven, and everlasting glory? Would

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you count him to be a charitable man that should throw away his meat and drink into the kennel, rather than give to him that needs and asks it? So, would you count him to be a godly man, one that hath a sincere love to God, that hath thoughts he knows not what to do with, but casts them away upon every idle toy and base inconsiderable thing, and not a thought for God? to suffer his thoughts to run waste; yea, run riot in envious ripenings, or unclean glances, or revengeful or proud imaginations; that can have thoughts for such trifles, and never a thought for God, and forget him days without number? Jer. ii. 32. Have these affections to the word of God?

2. It reproves those persons to whom good thoughts are looked upon as a burden and melancholy interruption, and when they rush into their minds, are thrown out again like unwelcome guests. These seem to be described by those words, Rom. i. 28, 'They did not like to retain God in their knowledge;' when men like not to entertain thoughts of God. If they fasten upon our hearts we soon grow weary of them. Christians, to a gracious heart, one that loves God and his word, thoughts of God and holy things are very comfortable and sweet: Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet.' But when they are so unwelcome, and seem so troublesome to your souls, have you a love to them? To be weary of the thoughts of God is to degenerate into devils; for it is part of the devils' torment to think of God: they believe and tremble; the more explicit thoughts they have of God, the more is their horror increased. If it be so with you, judge whether you have this affection.

3. Those that read and hear, but do not meditate in order to affection and practice. This duty must have its turn too. If you will ever manifest affection, and increase affection, you must take some time to meditate and season your thoughts: James i. 24, 'For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' They lay aside thoughts of what they hear and read, and so go into their old course again. When you hear or read anything of the word of God, the greatest part of the task is yet behind; you are to meditate, to exercise your thoughts therein. When men hear and do not meditate, it is like the seed which fell upon the pathway: Mat. xiii., 'The fowls of the air came and picked it up.' When you do not labour to cover it, to get it into your heart by deep and ponderous thoughts, the devil comes and takes it away again, when you work it not into your souls. Bare hearing leaves but little impression, unless we debate and revolve it in our minds. 'God spake once, and I heard it twice,' saith Job. He had it not only at the first delivery, but at the rebound; he went it over again in his thoughts.

Use 2. Information. It informs us why we are so backward to meditate; it is for want of love: 'Oh, how love I thy law!' and then, 'It is my meditation all the day.' You think it is want of time, and want of parts and abilities. I tell you, it is want of love. It is but a vain boasting, and the greatest hypocrisy, to say we love the law of God, and never exercise our minds therein; for where there is love it will command our thoughts; and if once you have found a heart, you will find time, abilities, and thoughts to bestow upon holy things. Love sets all the wheels of the soul awork; and therefore the great reason why meditation is so difficult is we have not such strength and such ardour of

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affections to the things of God. The difficulty doth not lie in the duty itself, but in the awkwardness of our hearts to the duty. You can muse upon other things, why not muse upon that which is holy?

Use 3. To press you to show love to the word of God this way by often meditating upon it; meditate upon the doctrines, promises, threatenings, man's misery, deliverance by Christ, necessity of regeneration, then of a holy life, the day of judgment. Fill the mind with such kind of thoughts, and continually dwell upon them. A good man should do so, and will do so. He should do so, Josh. i. 8; and he will do so, Ps. i. 2. Oh, do not begrudge a little time spent this way! for hereby we both evidence our love to the word and increase it.

But to quicken you hereunto:—

1. The more the heart is replenished with holy meditation, the less will it be pestered with worldly and carnal thoughts. The mind of man is restless, and cannot lie idle, therefore it is good to set it awork upon holy things. It will be working upon somewhat, and if you do not feed it with holy thoughts, what then? 'All the imaginations of the heart will be evil, only evil, and that continually,' Gen. vi. 5. These are the natural products and births of our spirits. And Mat. xv. 19, 'Out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts,' &c. When the heart is left to run loose, then we shall go musing of vanity and sin; therefore by frequent meditation this evil is prevented, because the mind is pre-occupied, and possessed already by better things; nay, the mind is seasoned, and vain and carnal thoughts grow distasteful to us when the heart is stored with good matter.

2. The more these thoughts abide with us, the more the heart is seasoned and fitted for all worldly comforts and affairs. It is hard to touch pitch and not be defiled, to go up and down with a serious heart in the midst of such temptations. Nothing makes you aweful and serious so much as inuring your minds with holy thoughts, so that you may go about worldly businesses in a heavenly manner. God's children are sensible of this, therefore they make it their practice to begin the day with God: Ps. cxxxix. 18, 'When I awake, I am still with thee.' As soon as they are awake they are seasoning their minds with somewhat of God. And they not only begin with God, but take God along with them in all their comfort and business: Prov. xxiii. 17, 'They are in the fear of the Lord all the day long.' Why do vain thoughts haunt us in duty? Because it is our use to be vainly occupied. A carnal man goes about heavenly business with an earthly mind, and a godly man goes about earthly business with a heavenly mind. A carnal man's thoughts are so used to these things that he cannot take them off; but a godly man hath inured his mind to better thoughts.

3. Thoughts will inflame and enkindle your affections after heavenly things. It is beating the steel upon the flint makes the sparks fly out. So by serious inculcative thoughts we beat out affections; these are the bellows to blow up the coals. It is a very deadening thing to be always musing on vanity: Cant. i. 3, 'Thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.' When a box i& broken, and the ointment poured out, when the name of God is taken in by serious thoughts, that stirs up affection.

4. By holy thoughts we do most resemble the purity and simplicity of God. We do not resemble God so much by speech and course of our actions as we do by our serious and holy thoughts, for his spiritual nature and being is best expressed by these operations of our own spirits. You can conceive of God as a spirit, always beholding him self, and loving himself; and so you come nearer as to the being of God, the more your thoughts are exercised and drawn out after holy things.

5. By these holy meditations the soul is present with God, and can solace itself with him. The apostle saith, We are absent from him in the body, but present with him by the spirit; present with him by the workings of our thoughts. This is the way to get into the company of the Spirit, to be with him, Ps. cxxxix. 18. How with him? By our thoughts, and by serious calling him to mind. God is not far from us, but we are far from him. God is not far from us in the effects of his power and goodness, but we are far from God, because our thoughts are so seldom set awork upon him. This is the way to solace ourselves with God, to be much in these holy things.

SERMON CIII.

Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me.—VER. 98.

IN the former verse you shall find the man of God had expressed his affections to the word, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' Now he renders the reason of his great affection, because he got wisdom thereby; a benefit of great value, as being the perfection of the reasonable nature, and a benefit highly esteemed in the world. Those which care not for the reality of wisdom yet affect a reputation of it: Job xi. 12, 'Vain man would be accounted wise, though he be born like the wild ass's colt;' though he be rude and brutish, yet he would fain be accounted wise. Knowledge was the great bait laid for our first parents; and so much of that desire is still left with us, that we had rather be accounted wicked than weak, and will sooner entitle ourselves to the guilt of a vice in morals than own any weakness in intellectuals. No man would be accounted a fool. Well, then, David's affection is justified; he might well say, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' because he got wisdom thereby, and such wisdom as carried him through all his trouble, though he had to do with crafty adversaries, as Doeg, Achitophel, and others, that excelled for worldly policy; yet, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' For, 'through thy commandments,' &c. In which words you have

1. The benefit gotten by the word, *wisdom*.

2. The original author of this benefit, *thou*.

3. The means, *through thy commandments*.

4. The benefit amplified, by comparing it with the wisdom and craft of his enemies, the politicians of Saul's court, men advanced for their great wisdom and subtlety, Thou hast made me *wiser than mine enemies*.

5. The manner how he came to obtain this benefit, *for they are ever with me*.

Doct. That God, through his commands, doth make his people wiser than their enemies.

It is but David's experience resolved into a proposition. I shall—

1. Illustrate the point by explaining the circumstances of it.

2. Then prosecute it.

First, The benefit obtained is wisdom. Mark—

1. It is not craft, or wisdom to do evil—that is to be learned in the devil's school—but divine wisdom, such as is gotten by study and obedience of God's laws: Gen. iii. 1, 'The serpent was the subtlest of all the beasts in the field.' Satan's instruments are very acute in mischief, 'wise to do evil, but to do good have no knowledge,' Jer. iv. 22; cunning enough in a way of sin, but to seek in every point of duty; your souls must not enter into their secrets. This wisdom should rather be unlearned; better be fools and bunglers in a way of sin, than wise to do evil: 1 Cor. xiv. 22, 'Brethren, in malice by ye children, but in understanding be ye men;' and Rom. xvi. 19, 'I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.' Simplicity here is the best wisdom.

2. It is not worldly policy, or a dexterous sagacity in and about the concernments of this life. There are some which have 'the spirit of the world,' 1 Cor. ii. 12, and a genius or disposition of soul which wholly carrieth them out to riches, honours, and pleasures, and are notable in this kind of skill, in promoting their secular ends in these things. A child of God may be a fool to them for this kind of wisdom; for it is our Saviour's observation, Luke xvi. 8, 'The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' Though David was wiser than his enemies, yet the children of this world are wiser in their generation, that is, as to carnal fetches and devices to accomplish their worldly purposes; in their generation, that is, about the course of their affairs. *Thus* David is not wiser than his enemies.

3. It is not great skill in arts and civil discipline. This is indeed a gift of God, but given promiscuously, sometimes to the good and some times to the bad; sometimes to the good, for Solomon could unravel all the secrets of nature, and dispute of everything from the cedar to the hyssop, 1 Kings iv. 23, 29-31; and sometimes to the bad, as the heathen philosophers, many of whom knew all things almost within the circuit of the world. Yet how little this wisdom is to be valued in regard of that wisdom which we get by God's commandments, God hath in some short

shown, in that he hath suffered those books which Solomon wrote concerning trees, plants, beasts, to be lost; whereas to this day the writings of the heathens are preserved, as Aristotle's book *De Animalibus*, &c. But now those books in which Solomon taught the fear of God and true wisdom, which is godliness, are, by the singular care of God's providence, conserved for our use and benefit. God hath herein shown that we might want those other books without the loss of true wisdom, but those books that indeed make us wise to salvation, these are kept. Learning is a glorious endowment indeed, but God would give us that gift by the writings of heathens; but grace, which is true wisdom, he would give us that by the holy scripture. A man may excel in learning, yet, after all the profound researches and inquiries of his high-flown reason into the mysteries of nature, he may be a very fool, and be damned for ever; for Paul saith of the philosophers: Rom. i. 22, 'Professing to be wise, they became fools;' since they had not the true knowledge of God and the way of salvation.

4. It is not a bare knowledge of God's will, but wisdom. Knowledge is one thing, and wisdom another: 'I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,' Prov. viii. 12. Many are knowing men, well skilled with notions, but they want prudence or practical direction for the governing of their hearts and ordering of their ways. In the scripture you shall find faith is not only opposed to ignorance, but to folly: Luke xxiv. 25, 'O ye fools, and slow of heart to believe.' Every natural man is a fool, Titus iii. 3, though never so notionally wise and skilled in the theory of divine knowledge: Prov. xiv. 8, 'The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way;' not to soar aloft in speculation, abstract from practice, and remote from spiritual influence, but to direct his course so as he may attain to the chiefest good; not only to know what is to be done, but to do what is to be known. Carnal men have great knowledge, and yet are spiritual fools for all that; they may lick the glass, and never taste the honey; or, like negroes, dig in mines of knowledge while others enjoy the gold; they may search out the mysteries of that religion which the godly man lives upon, dispute of heaven while others surprise it and take it by force; or, like the lark, soar high, but fall into the net of the fowler. A careful strict walking, that is the true wisdom; and thus we have stated the benefit.

Secondly, Here is the author of this benefit, which is God, '*Thou*, through thy commandments:' which I note, not only to show to whom we must go for this wisdom: 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God,' James i. 5; nor to show to whom we must ascribe the glory of it; if we get any benefit by the word, praise belongeth to God, who is 'the father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift,' James i. 17. All candles are lighted at his torch, and all the stars owe their brightness to this sun; to the father of lights we owe all the light, wisdom, and direction that we have. I say, not only for these ends do I note it, but to show the main and principal reason why a child of God is far more safe by his godly wisdom than his enemies by all their worldly policy. Why? God is of his side, counselling, directing, and instructing him what to do; whereas they are acted and influenced by Satan: Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13, 'The wicked plotteth against the just; the Lord

shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming.' The wicked plotteth against him, but there is a wise God that acts for him. He doth not say the just countermineth the wicked, and strains himself to match his enemy with policy and craft, but God watcheth for him. If it were only this policy against piety, it were not so much, but it is men's craft against God's wisdom: Prov. xxi. 30, 'There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.' These three words express the sum and height of all natural abilities: *wisdom* notes a quick apprehension; *understanding*, a wise foresight grounded upon experience; *counsel*, a designation of some rare artifice and device. Now neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel, none of these can stand against the Lord. God's children are sometimes dismayed when they consider the advantages of their enemies, their wisdom, learning, malice, experience. But here is their comfort, that they may set God against all these—God, who is the fountain of wisdom; for he is interested in their cause, his wisdom against their craft; and so, having the direction of the mighty counsellor, they are safe.

Thirdly, Here is the means, 'Through thy commandments,' or through the directions of the word. You will say, What can we learn from the word to match our enemies in policy? what wisdom will that teach us for our safety and preservation against the malice of our wicked enemies? There is our rule, and the more close and punctual we are in the observance of it, the more safe we are. A double wisdom we learn from the word of God, which is our security against the malice and craft of our enemies.

1. This wisdom we get by the commandment; it directs us how to keep in with God, which is our great wisdom; this is to stop danger at the fountain-head: Prov. xvi. 7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' The way to get peace and safety in evil times is not to comply with enemies, but to comply with God. All our danger lies in his anger, not in their wrath and rage; for God can bridle them or let them loose upon us as he sees good. He hath the hearts of all men in his hands as the rivers of water; the creature is but God's instrument, and wholly at his dispose. We have no need to fear the sword, if we do not fear him that wears the sword; nor need we fear the creature if we do not break with God. Many are troubled with the ill-will of men, or about the rage of men, and are full of fears when they meet with any opposition in their profession of godliness, and how soon men may be let loose upon them in time of danger, but look not to the cause of it, which is their offending God; therefore our chief wisdom is to serve him and study to please him. When a war is begun between two nations, the way to end it is not by a treaty with this or that private soldier, or to seek their favour, but to treat with those that employ them; so it is not to fawn and crouch and court the favour of men, but to be reconciled to God, and get him made a friend, then we need not fear man's enmity. Now this wisdom the word of God teacheth us, how to walk with all-pleasing before God, and then the creature cannot meddle with us without his leave. Another place is, Prov. x. 9, 'He that walketh up rightly walketh safely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.' There is no one seems to be more exposed to danger

than he that is sincere, that is, strictly severe to a godly purpose, that walks uprightly, that stands strictly and precisely upon his duty to God; and yet there is no man usually more safe. But he that turneth and windeth to avoid dangers, and runs to his shifts and studied arts to provide for his own security, usually is left in the mire, and comes off with some notable blemish; he is cast from God's protection. There are but two sorts of men in the world that usually do carry their purpose; they are either those that are perfectly honest through out, without daubing and warping, or those that are perfectly dishonest, that wholly give up themselves to a course of fraud and sin, that are resolved to boggle at nothing, neither checks of conscience nor rules of honesty or equity will stop them; these, in judgment, are permitted to carry their purpose in worldly things. So the plain, downright, upright man, that will not for fear or favour step a jot out of God's way, but keeps close to God's direction, is the truest and most perfect politician in the world. They that are thus severe to their purpose will be found the wisest men at length, not only in the world to come, but in this world; for it is our warping and going out of God's way that causeth our trouble and confusion of thoughts.

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2. The word teacheth us how to give the enemy no advantage and needless provocation. It is not enough to do good, but we must do it well, well timed and well ordered for every circumstance. Now God by his word teacheth his people so to do: Eccles. viii. 5, 6, 'Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing; and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment; therefore the misery of man is great upon him.' To open this: The case there spoken of is provoking rulers and men that have power in their hand. Now a man that desires to keep the commandments of God shall be taught to walk so circumspectly that he shall not needlessly provoke the wrath of men to his own ruin, nor draw down the displeasure of God upon his head. God will show him the season when to act and when to forbear, a right time and a right manner, when to oppose by way of reproof and admonition, and when to hold his peace; he will find the fit time for doing of every business which God hath stated, and the ignorance of this time costs a man a great deal of misery; for he goes on, 'To every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him.' When men are self-confident, or distempered with passion and prejudice, and consult not with God, they are carried on by headlong counsels, or moved with the impulsion of their own interest and corrupt affection into the mouth of danger. But he that makes conscience of his duty, and comes to the word of God without any private affection, he shall find time and judgment, those important circumstances, stated and determined, when to act and when not; they shall find a fair opportunity of providence either checking or leading them on to complete their resolutions. Many a good action miscarrieth for want of observing time and judgment, or consulting with God and his word about it; when to speak, when to hold our peace, to do or not do. Another scripture that speaks to this purpose, Eccles. vii. 16-18, Be not over-wise, over-foolish, over-just, over-wicked, that is the sum of what is spoken there; 'But he that feareth the Lord shrill come forth of them all.' A man may many times do a thing conscientiously and upon an opinion of duty, and thereby involve himself in trouble and danger when indeed there is no necessity so to do (that is it which Solomon means); therefore, to

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moderate zeal with prudence, that he may neither be remiss in his own interest nor passionately violent in the concernments of God; to preserve his heart from faulty and imprudent extremes, that we may sincerely keep unto duty, yet wisely decline danger. The word of God will teach us, if, in the fear of God, without being biassed and prepossessed with any corrupt aims, we come to take the direction of it, how to walk without offence. Well, then, you see this is the wisdom God teacheth those that give up themselves to the direction of the word; they are wiser than their enemies, and this is policy enough for a Christian. It teacheth us how to please God, and how to govern and order all our affairs, that we need not needlessly exasperate and provoke men to our own ruin. So that the word of God hath more wisdom to guide him than his enemies have subtle craft to ruin and ensnare him.

Fourthly, The manner how we come to receive this benefit by the word, in that clause, 'They are ever with me.' These words may be interpreted as implying frequency of meditation, or presentness of counsel and direction, the one as the fruit of the other.

1. Frequency of meditation, 'They are ever with me:' that is, often thought of by me, for my comfort and direction. A man that exerciseth himself in the commandments of God, there is his study and business. The king of Israel, for his comfort and direction, was to have the book of the law ever before him, Deut. xvii.; and Josh. i. 8, 'Thou shalt meditate therein day and night.' 'They are ever with me,' the law is always in my eye and heart. It is not a slight looking into them that will give us this wisdom, but an intimate constant acquaintance, when we are much in studying out God's mind.

2. 'They are ever with me.' This may imply also that they should be a ready help. Such as derive their wisdom from without, they cannot have their counsellors always with them to give advice. But when a man hath gotten the word in his heart, he finds a ready help; lie hath a seasonable word to direct him in all difficulties, in all straits, and in all temptations, to teach him what to do against the burden of the present exigence, to teach him what to do and what to hope for.

Having illustrated the words of the text, I now address myself to make good the proposition, that a child of God is wiser than his enemies. I shall do it in a twofold consideration:—

1. They are wiser in their general choice.

2. Wiser as to the particular controversy or enmity that is carried on against them by their enemies, as to those contests they have with their carnal enemies about the things of God; for I suppose these enemies here are not only such as had a private grudge, or carnal quarrels, but upon a public account; they have more wisdom by God to guide them than their enemies have craft to ruin them.

First, Supposing these enemies to be carnal men (for such are the enemies of God's people), they are wiser than their enemies in their general choice and course of life. To determine this, let

us see what is wisdom and what is folly. Saith Solomon, Eccles. vii. 25, ‘I gave my heart to seek out wisdom, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.’ Wisdom lies in three things—(1.) In fixing a right end; (2.) In the choice of apt and proper means; (3.) In the accurateness and diligence of our prosecution. And as to degrees of comparison, he is wiser than another that hath a better end, a better way, and is more dexterous and vigorous in pursuing the means that he may accomplish his ends. For instance, if we speak of worldly wisdom, the wisdom of the world is to fix the world for our scope: ‘He that will be rich,’ saith the apostle, and accordingly he that busieth himself with such means as will conduce to that purpose, that wholly gives up himself to worldly pursuits, and that with all his heart and vigour makes haste to be rich; this is the wisdom of the world: ‘He shall not be innocent,’ saith Solomon. Then there is heavenly wisdom when we make the enjoyment of God to be our scope, take the law of God for our rule, and make religion to be our business, avoiding evils, improving all occasions, sparing no cost nor trouble to compass such a holy end, that we may come to the enjoyment of the blessed God; this is spiritual wisdom. Then, among the children of God one is wiser than another as his intention is more fixed, as his means are more regular, or as his prosecution is more exact, uniform, and industrious. He that keeps close to his purpose of glorifying God and enjoying God, and he that understands more of his rule, he is the wiser man; and he that is more accurate and industrious, and with greater self-denial doth give himself up to God; as there are some that are more heavenly, more watchful, more diligent in the spiritual life than others. Well, then, if wisdom be to be determined by these things, the children of God, that are taught by the word of God, will be found to be wiser than their enemies and all carnal men.

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1. They are wiser as they have a nobler end, even the great end for which they were created, which is the enjoyment of God. Surely the higher ends any man hath, the wiser he is. Now there is none higher than God, for that which is the chiefest good that should be our utmost end. There is nothing good in itself and for itself, but only God. When we have God, we need not consider what further good to get by him, for to get him is enough. To look at anything as good in itself, without looking further what it is good for, is to put it in the place of God. Of all other things besides God we may say, What doth it serve for? what use may I put it to? what am I the better for it? But now, beyond God there is nothing to be sought; food and raiment, that is for health; and health, that is for service; and service for the glory of God. Everything riseth higher and higher, till it terminate in God. Certainly he is a wise man that lives up to the highest end, and makes this his scope to enjoy God. Well, now, he is a wise man that doth not mind trifles, but doth promote his proper, necessary, and great interest. This is our proper, great, and necessary interest, to make God our friend and heaven our portion; beyond these there is nothing more, for God is the chiefest good. Let me pursue it by another medium. Certainly a higher end is to be preferred before a subordinate, a general good before a particular, that which will yield all things, before that which will only yield us a limited or particular comfort. So he is the wiser man that chooseth God for his portion, for he that hath God ‘shall inherit all things,’ Rev. xxi. 7; and Mat. vi. 33, ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of

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God and his righteousness, and all things shall be added:' that is a more universal good. Again, a profitable good is to be preferred before a pleasing. He that prefers a little pleasure before a solid good, you count him a fool; as Esau, that sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. And to part with all for a little temporal satisfaction, certainly that is a main folly. In short, a spiritual good is to be preferred before a corporal. Why? Because a man is more concerned as a soul than a body; therefore that wisdom that is only 'earthly, sensual, devilish,' as the wisdom is that is not from above, James iii. 15, this is all for the body or outward man; and he is called a fool that only provideth for his body, Luke xii. Why a fool? He had provided but for half his self, for the worser and more brutish part, and for that half but for a little while; therefore, 'Thou fool, this night,' &c. Then an eternal good should be preferred before a temporal. Man, that lives for ever, must have a happiness that lasts for ever. We live longer in the other world by far than here, therefore our care should be Tor that. Indeed, if a man did not live after death, and there were an end of him when he dies, it were the greatest wisdom to make the best use of his time here, to look no further than temporal things. Ay! but now to look after the world and neglect things to come is to be wise for the present, and be fools to all eternity. We cannot count that wisdom. Again, a necessary good is to be preferred before an arbitrary. Now 'one thing is necessary,' Luke x. 42. It is not necessary to be rich, to live in pleasure, to wallow in delights; within a while we shall not be a penny the better for these things. It is not necessary to have so great a plenty of worldly accommodations; it is not necessary to our happiness hereafter, nor to the comfort of our lives for the present to have so much here. Now, see who is the wiser man, he that looks no higher than to some subordinate end, or he that fixeth upon the last end? He that pitcheth upon some limited good, or he that pitcheth upon the most universal good that will yield him all things? He that pleaseth his fancy with toys, or he that looketh after a solid benefit? He that taketh care for his body, or he that minds his soul? He that mindeth that which is accessary or indifferent to his happiness, or he that mindeth that which is mainly necessary? He that looketh after a perishing vanity, or he that mindeth eternal happiness? Certainly if there be a God, and this God can do all things, and our happiness lies in the enjoyment of him, he is the wisest man that takes God for his portion, and makes it his business to keep in with him; and so doth a child of God. Thus wisdom is seen in fixing our aim.

2. Wisdom lies in the choice of apt and proper means, and that is, to take the word for his rule; first God for his portion, then the word for his rule. To presume of the end, without using the means, is folly; therefore, next to a good end and scope, there must be a good path. Now, that we might not grope blindfold, and wander up and down in fond superstitions, God hath given us his word to instruct us in all things which concern our duty and our danger, and to make us every way wise to salvation, 2 Tim. iii. 15. If our happiness lies in the enjoyment of God, it is meet God should appoint the way how we should come to him. We should have been at a great loss if the Lord had given us grace to fix upon him as our end, if he had not given us a rule; we would not find out our way. But now God hath so exactly chalked it out, that 'a fool shall not err therein,' Isa. xxxv. 5; such plain directions as 'make wise the simple,' Ps. xix. 7; a plain rule, found out by the wisdom of God, and

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so stated for all, and peremptorily commanded to all, that the most simple that will give up themselves to God's direction they shall find it. Now who are wise? they that walk in the way of their own hearts, or they that will take God's direction in his word? those that will live according to the counsel of God's word, or those that will fashion their lives according to the course of this world, or according to the customs and examples of carnal men like themselves? Who is wiser? they that will inquire after the mind of God, who is wisdom itself, and can best judge of wisdom and folly? or they which shape their course according to the secular wisdom that prevails in the world, and which hath often failed in its end? Who the wiser man? he that hath taken God's counsel, and can never be deceived, or those that walk according to the course of this world, and find themselves wholly to be deceived? Ps. xlix. 13, 'This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings.' They will imitate that folly which hath been so fatal and so mischievous to others, and think themselves happy. Many carnal men when they died, they all-to-be-fooled themselves, and lamented it that they had taken no more care to please God, and walked no more closely with him; that they had been more busy about worldly things than they had been for their precious and immortal souls. Therefore surely the children of God are wiser than their opposites, that give up themselves to the vanity of carnal pursuits.

3. Wisdom lies in a vigorous prosecution of fit means to the best end, without which all is nothing. It is in vain to be sensible of our end and to be convinced of our way unless we mind to walk in it. Many carnal men will say that their happiness lies in the enjoyment of God, that the scriptures are the word of God, and his directions to attain that happiness; but their folly lies in this, that they have not a hearty consent to take this word for their rule, and give up themselves to the directions thereof: Prov. xvii. 16, 'Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?' that is, such means and such opportunities given them to be happy, but that is a price in the hands of a fool, his heart hangs off from the way; and therefore here is the great effect of wisdom, when we do with all our hearts give up ourselves to God, that he may take his own way with us to make us happy for ever. Wisdom lies in obedience: Deut. iv. 6, 7, 'Keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom,' &c. The world will say it is a simple course to be so nice, scrupulous, and precise; but God tells you it is your wisdom; and they that keep his statutes are a wise and understanding people. The devil fills us with all kind of prejudices against religion. To such as love ease, he represents difficulty, and the yoke of Christ to be a tedious yoke. If they love honour, he tells them of reproaches and disgrace. If they affect wisdom, he telleth them it is a low doctrine, beneath the sublimity of their parts and abilities. Now God assureth you this is your wisdom and understanding. So Job xxviii. 28, 'And unto man he said, Be hold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.' There is an inquiry there in that chapter where wisdom is to be found; and it is resolved that it is nowhere to be found but in a strict obedience; not in the knowledge of the secrets of nature, not in the crafts and policies of the world, not in the plots and contrivances of the wicked, not in dexterity to get wealth, but in keeping God's commandments with all preciseness and care. Briefly, this dexterous and effectual prosecution of

the means which lead to our end lies in three things, and so accordingly we may know wisdom: all these are called wisdom in scripture.

[1.] In diligence and constant labour in the spiritual life. When a man makes religion his work, then he is a wise man, true to his end. There are a company of notional fools in the world that make religion their talk but do not make it their work, that can talk at as high a rate as others; they have a naked approbation of the things of God, but do not lie under the power and dominion of them: Eccles. x. 2, 'A wise man's heart is at his right hand.' A speech which seems to be contrary to the natural posture of the heart in the body, for the heart both of the one and the other is towards his left, but a wise man's heart is at his right hand. The right hand is that which is ready for action, so a wise man is ready and prepared to obey every good work. When men are diligent, serious, and hard at work for God, 'working out their salvation with fear and trembling,' then are they thoroughly wise.

[2.] It lies in circumspection and watchfulness, when we are very heedful lest we be turned out of the way, and that we do not anything that is contrary to the will of God; therefore it is said, Eph. v. 15, 'See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.' When is a man a fool and when a wise man? When we are careful in all things to practise according to our light, to walk exactly according to the rules of God's word; these are the only true wise, whatever the world thinks of them. The more circumspect men are the more the world counts them fools, crazy brains, and judge it to be a fond scrupulosity to expose themselves to scorning and trouble, for that which they call a nicety; but the less circumspect, the more foolish; and the more wary and more desirous to see God's word, this is wisdom. That is the reason why it is said, 'The fear of the Lord prolongeth days,' Prov. x. 27. When men once come to stand in awe of God, when they are afraid to do anything that may displease God, and look for a warrant and rule, and desire to know the mind of God in every action, these are wise men.

[3.] This wisdom lies in self-denial, or being at some cost or charge to compass our end. A godly man knows his end will recompense him sufficiently at last, the enjoyment of God will pay for all. It is a part of folly, not wisdom, to have great aims and designs, and loath to be at charges. He that will not be at the cost will never bring any weighty matter to pass. So he is called a wise merchant that sold all for the pearl of price, Mat. xiii. 46. Surely heaven is worth something; therefore, if you are called to despise the delights of the flesh, the honours of the world, to part with them, to be dead to temporal interests, it seems the greatest folly in the world, but indeed it is the truest wisdom. Saith Lactantius, Usually wisdom dwells at the sign of folly. Why? Because all wisdom puts men upon some self-denial. Carnal men count it folly for a man to be dead to his conveniences and worldly concernments, and that upon the pursuit of invisible things that lie in another world: but this indeed is the greatest wisdom. There is no wisdom without some self-denial. Carnal men have a self-denial, a cursed one; none deny themselves so much as they; they part with heaven, Christ, peace, and serenity of conscience, all the hopes, all the comforts of the Spirit, merely

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to please the flesh and gratify their interest in the world; all is to compass the pleasure, profits, and honours of the world, and so to dig for iron with mattocks of gold, waste precious things to compass them that are vile and contemptible.

Well, then, let us see who are wise, they that are working out their salvation, or those that are pleasing the flesh? they that are wary and circumspect, and loath to break with God, or those that run blindfold upon the greatest dangers, and go ‘like an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks’? Prov. vii. 22. Who are wise? those that sell all for the pearl of price, or those that part with their birthright, all their hopes in God, and present sense of his love, for a little temporal convenience?

Thus I have proved the first thing, namely, that the children of God are wiser than their enemies as to their general choice.

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Index of Greek Words and Phrases

•ἐνθυμεῖ τις: 1
•ἀγαθοποιῶν: 1
•ἀλλὰ εὐχαριστία: 1
•ἀσπασάμενοι: 1
•Ἀγαθοποιῶν: 1
•ἐν τούτῳ ἀσκῶ: 1
•Ἐποίησεν ὡς ἀγαθὸς τὸ χρήσιμον, ὡς σοφὸς τὸ κάλλιστον, ὡς δυνατὸς τὸ μέγιστον: 1
•ἦλθεν ἐθνικος τὶς: 1
•ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν: 1
•Ὁ ὀντως ὢ τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν: 1
•Ὄφθαλμοί τι ἄγαν λαμπρὸν οὐχ ὁρῶσι: 1
•ὑπερπερισσεύομαι τῇ χαρᾷ: 1
•Θέσθε τὰς καρδίας ἐπὶ τὰς ὁδοὺς ὑμῶν: 1
•Μενοῦνγε: 1
•Νέκρον ἑαυτὸν ἡγεῖται τῆς θείας ἐστερημένον εὐμενείας: 1
•Πολλοὺς χριστιανίζειν ἀπέτραπεν: 1

- Τὸ ἕτοιμον εἰς ἐξουσίαν ἀργὸν εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν: 1
- ἄσκῳ ἐν αἰγείῳ: 1
- ἀγάπη: 1
- ἀγαθέρις: 1
- ἀγαθοποιῶν: 1
- ἀδάπανον εὐαγγέλιον: 1
- ἀδίκως: 1
- ἀθυμία κατέσχε με: 1
- ἀκαίρως: 1
- ἀλεκτροφωνίας: 1
- ἀληθεύειν καὶ εὐργετεῖν: 1
- ἀλλὰ μόνον ἐν κυρίῳ: 1
- ἀναζωπυρεῖν: 1
- ἀνδρὶ παρακύψαντι: 1
- ἀνέχου καὶ ἀπέχου: 1
- ἀνόητοι: 1
- ἀνομία: 1
- ἀντιτάσσεται: 1
- ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ: 1
- ἀποδίδωσις: 1
- ἀποκαραδοκία τῆς κτίσεως: 1
- ἀφιλάγαθοι: 1
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- δίψυχος ἀνὴρ: 1
- διὰ τὴν ἕξιν τὰ αἰσθητήρια γεγυμνασμένα ἐχόντες: 1
- διὰ τὴν ἀναίδειαν: 1
- διὰ τὴν φήμην: 1
- διὰ τὸ ὄνομα: 1
- διώκετε εἰρήνην: 1
- δοκεῖ: 1
- ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων: 1
- ἔτι γὰρ μίκρον ὅσον ὅσον: 1
- ἐκλέκτων ἐκλεκτότεροι: 1
- ἐν πάχνῃ: 1
- ἐν τόπῳ παροικίας μοῦ: 1
- ἐπιβάλλει τοὺς νεόττους ἡ κόραξ: 1
- εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἦλθὼν: 1
- εἰς νοῦν ἀδόκιμον: 1
- εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν: 1
- εὐκαίρως ἀκαίρως: 1
- ζῷον πολίτικον: 1

- ζῶοω πολίτικον: 1
- ζέοντες πνεύματι: 1
- ἠλεήθην: 1
- ἠῤῥώστησα, ἐτμήθην, ἐῤῥώσθην: 1
- ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρᾳ: 1
- ἴδιον στήριγμον: 1
- κατὰ Θεὸν: 1
- κθκλογένησις: 1
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- λαός περιούσιος: 1
- λόγος βέβαιος: 1
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- λόγος βέβαιος: 1
- μὴ συνιέντος: 1
- μεγίστη παρὰ ἀνθρώποις πίστις: 1
- μόρφωσις της γνώσεως: 1
- ὁ Χαλδαῖος ἀφήλατο: 1
- ὅτι δικαιοσύνη τὰ κρίματα σου: 1
- ὁμικλίαι κακαὶ: 1
- οὐκ ἐτόλμησε: 1
- ου χαρᾶς εἶναι ἀλλὰ λύπης, καρπὸν εἰρηνικὸν: 1
- παθήματα μαθήματα: 1
- παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα: 1
- πέρας ἀντιλογίας: 1
- περικαθάρματα: 1
- πιστὸς κτίστης: 1
- πνεῦμα δουλείας: 1
- πολίτευμα: 1
- πολλῷ μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον: 1
- πρὸς ἄλλο: 1
- πρὸς τὸ παρὸν: 1
- πρόθεσιν: 1
- πρόθεσις καρδίας: 1
- σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος: 1
- σφόδρα: 1
- τὰς ὁδους σοῦ διελογισάμην: 1
- τελευταῖον χιτῶνα: 1
- τί περισσὸν: 1
- τοὺς νεόττους ἐπιβάλλει: 1
- τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς ἐλευθέρους μανθάνειν τοὺς νόμους μετά τινος μελωδίας.: 1
- ὕστερον: 1

•φιλάγγελος: 1
•φιλάνθρωπος: 1
•φιλαδελφία: 1
•φιλανθρωπία: 1
•χρηστότητα: 1
•χρηστότητα, παιδεῖαν, καὶ γνῶσιν: 1
•χρηστοτητα ἐποίησας μετὰ τοῦ δούλου σοῦ: 1
•χωρὶς ἐμοῦ: 1
•ὥσπερ ὀφθαλμοι τὸ ἅγαν λαμπρὸν οὐκ ὁρῶσι: 1

Index of Hebrew Words and Phrases

•חֶבְלֵי: 1
•חֶבֶל: 1
•טוב טעם: 1
•יבשו: 1
•ישובו: 1

Index of Latin Words and Phrases

•A quatenus ad omne valet consequentia: 1
•Adoro plenitudinem scripturarum tuarum: 1
•Amor benevolentiae et complacentiae: 1
•Amor meus est pondus meum: 1
•Aspectus boni viri delectat: 1
•Aspice ut se mutuo diligunt Christiani: 1
•Bene orasse est bene studuisse: 1
•Bibamus pro salute imperatoris: 1
•Bonum: 1
•Bonus es non petenti, et benefacis petenti: 1
•Castae deliciae meae sunt scripturae tuae: 1
•Chirographa tua injiciebat tibi Domine: 1
•De Ritu evocandi Deos: 1
•Deum cognoscere et colere: 1
•Deus donando debet: 1 2

- Deus meus et omnia: 1
- Dominus dedit, diabolus abstulit: 1
- Et passim alibi.: 1
- Felix domus: 1
- Firmia: 1
- Horreo quicunque : 1
- Id agit iota scriptura, ut credamus in Deum: 1 2
- In nomine Domini incipit omne malum.: 1
- Intra hunc: 1
- Lingua Petiliani non est ventilabrum Christi: 1
- Ministris eorum nihil vilius: 1
- Misericordia: 1
- Non est vivere sed valere vita.: 1
- Non quod habet numerat, &c.: 1
- Non sic vixi ut pudeat me inter vos vivere; nec mori timeo, quia bonum habeo Dominum.: 1
- Non sunt ista litigandi, sed orandi tempora.: 1
- Non vacat: 1
- Notitia voluntatis: 1
- Nunquid ego talis?: 1
- Optima demonstratio est a sensibus.: 1 2
- Opus diei in die suo.: 1
- Pactum feci cum Domino meo ne mihi mittat visiones, vel somnia, vel etiam angelos: contentus enim sum hoc dono, quod liabeo scripturam sanctam; quae abunde docet et suppeditat omnia, quae necessaria sunt tam ad hanc vitam, quam ad futuram: 1
- Pax est tranquillitas ordinis: 1
- Pax est tranquillitas ordinis.: 1
- Pedum pastorale: 1
- Perit omne judicium cum res transit in affectum: 1
- Plus valet unus oculatus testis: 1
- Possidet possidentem omnia: 1
- Quantus quantus est, totus noster est: 1
- Qui tribulantur: 1
- Quid hodie malum sanasti? cui vitio obstitisti?: 1
- Quid prodest regium alimentum si ad Gehennam pascal?: 1
- Rem difficilem et inutilem postulas: 1
- Scias hominem Christo deditum mori posse, vinci non posse: 1
- Si Deo a consiliis adfuisset in creatione mundi, multa se consultius ordinaturum: 1
- Sic agamus cum hominibus tanquam Deus videat; sic loquamur cum Deo tanquam homines audiant.: 1
- Sic scriptum est: 1
- Ubi pater ibi patria: 1
- Unum moneo, cavete antichristum, male enim vos parietum amor cepit, male ecclesiam Dei in tectis artificiisque veneramini, male sub iis pacis nomen ingeritis: anne ambiguum est in iis

antichristum cessurum? Monies mihi et sylvae et lacus et carceres, et voragines sunt tutiores; in its enim : 1
•Unumquodque operatur secundum suam formam: 1
•Valde protestatus sum me nolle his satiari.: 1
•Verba notitiae connotant affectus: 1
•Vexatio dat intellectum; qui tribidantur: 1
•Video meliora proboque: 1
•Vidisti aliquando canem: 1
•Vitia etiam sine magistro discuntur: 1
•a bono in bonum: 1
•a pari: 1
•a parte post: 1
•ab assuetis nulla fit passio: 1
•acupictus: 1
•affectus et effectus: 1
•amicitia per se: 1
•anima mundi: 1
•bonitatem fecisti: 1
•bonitatem gustus et scientiae doce me: 1
•bonitatem sensus: 1
•bonum: 1
•bonum congruum: 1
•bonum fecisti: 1
•cibo extemporali: 1
•consortium factionis: 1
•cultus naturalis: 1
•custos: 1
•de facto: 1
•de jure: 1
•dictum experientiae: 1
•dictum factum: 1
•dictum fidei: 1
•dominus vitae: 1
•donum perseverantiae: 1
•durante beneplacito: 1
•durante vita: 1
•ea lege ut aliquando pereant: 1
•exacta ratio justi: 1
•feralis superstitio. Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum?: 1
•fervidus: 1
•flens dico: 1
•hic ure, hic seca: 1
•humidum radicale: 1
•hymnos antelucanos: 1

- idem velle et nolle, est amicitia: 1
- ignis fatuus: 1
- in bivio: 1
- in bonum: 1
- in hypothesi: 1
- in medio rubri maris: 1
- in patria: 1
- in thesi: 1
- in via: 1
- intuitu voluntatis: 1
- levis et niollis: 1
- lucidus: 1
- malum morale: 1
- malum naturale: 1
- minus malum: 1
- misericordiarum: 1
- missa a domino frusta panis aut carnis aperto ore captantem, et quicquid excipit. protinus integrum devorat, et semper ad spem futuri hiat.: 1
- modo non ponatur obex: 1
- nodosa eternitas: 1
- nolentes auditis: 1
- non advertit animum: 1
- non placet: 1
- objectum intellectus: 1
- odium inimicitiae to amor benevolentiae: 1
- omne bonum in summo bono: 1
- oportet discentem credere: 1
- opus liberi consilii: 1
- opus naturae divinae: 1
- oratio mentalis, vocalis, vitalis: 1
- pater ultionum: 1
- per accidens: 1
- poena: 1
- politico et forensi: 1
- potestatem vitae et necis: 1
- practicum dictamen: 1
- praelatio unius rei prae altera: 1
- primum verum: 1
- quae firmat regulam in non exceptis: 1
- quamdiu bene se gesserint: 1
- quoad nos: 1
- remedium delinquentium: 1
- semper victuri: 1
- sensu mathematico: 1

•sibi rapacissimum: 1
•sicut se habet simpliciter ad simpliciter, ita magis ad magis. : 1
•sui juris: 1
•summum bonum: 1 2 3
•unitas contra unitatem: 1
•unum necessarium: 1
•usque longe: 1
•usque valde: 1
•ut anima sit subjecta Deo et pacata in se.: 1
•ut bonis bene sit, et malis male: 1
•veritas mystica: 1
•veritas naturalis: 1
•voto et praeparatione animi: 1

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