

S E R M O N I I I .

GEN. XXXIX. 9.

How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

ii. **I** Shall proceed to consider the evil of sin relatively to us, and prove it to be most pernicious and destructive. If we compare it with temporal evils, it preponderates all that men are liable to in the present world. Diseases in our bodies, disasters in our estates, disgrace in our reputation, are in just esteem far less evil than the evil of sin: for that corrupts and destroys our more excellent and immortal part. The vile body is of no account in comparison of the precious soul. Therefore the apostle enforces his exhortation, "dearly beloved brethren, abstain from fleshly lusts, that war against the soul." The issue of this war is infinitely more woful, than of the most cruel against our bodies and goods, our liberties and lives: for our estates and freedom, if lost, may be recovered; if the present life be lost for the cause of God, it shall be restored in greater lustre and perfection; but if the soul be lost, it is lost for ever.

All temporal evils are consistent with the love of God: Job on the dunghill, roughcast with ulcers, was most precious in God's sight: Lazarus in the lowest poverty, and wasted with loathsome sores, was dear to his affections; a guard of angels was sent to convoy his departing soul to the divine presence.

“ But sin separates between God and us,” who is the fountain of felicity, and the centre of rest to the soul.

Other evils God, who is our wise and compassionate father and physician, makes use of, as medicinal preparations for the cure of sin : and certainly the disease which would be the death of the soul, is worse than the remedy, though never so bitter and afflicting to sense.

Sin is an evil of that malignity, that the least degree of it is fatal. If it be conceived in the soul, though not actually finished, it is deadly. One sin corrupted in an instant angelical excellencies, and turned the glorious spirits of heaven into devils. It is poison so strong, that the first taste of it shed a deadly taint and malignity into the veins of all mankind.

Sin is such an exceeding evil, that it is the severest punishment divine justice inflicts on sinners on this side hell. The giving “ men over to the power of their lusts,” is the most fearful judgment, not only with respect to the cause, God’s unrelenting and unquenchable anger, and the issue, everlasting destruction, but in the quality of the judgment. Nay, did sin appear as odious in our eyes as it does in God’s, we should account it the worst part of hell itself, the pollutions of the damned to be an evil exceeding the torments superadded to them.

Sin is pregnant with all kinds of evils, the seeds of it are big with judgments. The evils that are obvious to sense, or that are spiritual and inward, temporal and eternal evils, all proceed from sin, often as the natural cause, and always as the meritorious. And many times the same punishment is produced by the efficiency of sin, as well as inflicted for its guilt. Thus uncleanness, without the miraculous waters of jealousy, rots the body, and the pleasure of sin is revenged by a loathsome consuming disease, the natural consequence of it. Thus intemperance and luxury shorten the lives of men, and accelerate damnation. Fierce desires, and wild rage are fuel for the everlasting fire in hell. The same evils considered physically, are from the efficiency of sin ; considered legally, are from the guilt of sin, and the justice of God.

This being a point of great usefulness, that I may be more instructive, I will consider the evils that are consequential to sin, under these two heads.

First. Such as proceed immediately from it by emanation.

Secondly. Those evils, and all other as the effects of God's justice and sentence.

First. The evils that proceed immediately by emanation from it: and though some of them are not resented with feeling apprehensions by sinners, yet they are of a fearful nature. Sin has deprived man of the purity, nobility, and peace of his innocent state.

1. It has stained and tainted him with an universal, intimate and permanent pollution. Man in his first creation was holy and righteous: a beam of beauty derived from heaven was shed upon his soul, in comparison of which, sensitive beauty is but as the clearness of glass, to the lustre of a diamond. His understanding "was light in the Lord," his will and affections were regular and pure, the divine image was impressed upon all his faculties, that attracted the love and complacency of God himself. Sin has blotted out all his amiable excellencies, and superinduced the most foul deformity, the original of which was fetched from hell. Sinners are the natural children of satan, of a near resemblance to him. The scripture borrows comparisons to represent the defiling quality of sin, from pollutions that are most loathsome to our senses: from "pestilential ulcers, putrefying sores, filthy vomit, and defiling mire." This pollution is universal through the whole man, spirit, soul and body. It darkens the mind, our supreme faculty, with a cloud of corruption; it depraves the will, and vitiates the affections. It is a pollution so deep and permanent, that the deluge that swept away a world of sinners, did not wash away their sins: and the fire at the last day, that shall devour the dross of the visible world, and renew the heavens and the earth, shall not purge away the sins of the guilty inhabitants. This pollution hath so defiled and disfigured man, who was a fair and lovely type, wherein the skill and perfections of the Creator were conspicuous, "that it repented God that he made man." As an artificer having formed a surprising piece, either a statue or picture, wherein art almost equalled the life and lustre of nature; if it be torn or broken, throws it from his sight with sorrow, impatient to see it so rudely defaced: thus God is said "to hide his face from sinners," to express his displeasure, as unwilling to behold the dis-

paragement of his master-piece, the excellent product of his wisdom and power.

2. Sin has degraded man from his native state and dignity. Man by his extraction and descent was "the son of God, a little lower than the angels," consecrated and crowned, as a priest for the service and communion with his glorious Maker, and as king over the world. "But being in honour, he understood not his dignity, his duty and felicity, and became like the beasts that perish." By his rebellion against his Creator, he made a forfeiture of his dominion, and lost the obedience of sensible creatures, and the service of insensible; which I only mention, and shall restrain my consideration, to show how he is become like the beasts, as an effect resulting from his sin. He is divested of his white robe of innocence, and his noblest perfections, reason and religion. Sense and imagination, the leading faculties in brutes, are his rulers: the rational governing powers of man, have lost their superior sway, and the carnal passions rove without reins to forbidden objects. The lower appetites are predominant, which is the most ignominious and cruel servitude wherein human liberty can be entangled and fettered. His understanding and will, that were capable of taking a flight for the discovery and fruition of celestial and eternal things, are debased, and limited to sensual perishing things, and derive vilifying qualities from them. "He is earthly minded;" his aims, contrivances, desires are fastened to the earth: the divine spark within him is covered under ashes. "He is carnally minded," always studying and making "provisions for the flesh." This is a viler debasement, than if the counsellors of state were employed in the sordid offices of the kitchen or stable. Nay, it is a diminution below the rank of beasts, for by nature they are incapable of directing their eyes and desires towards heaven; but man is brutish by his voluntary sin. To see the head of a rapacious wolf, or fierce tiger, or lustful horse joined to the body of a man, how monstrous would it appear? But it is more unnatural and ignominious, for men, in whom reason and religion should govern, to resemble them in the brutish appetites of lust and rage; for there is a nearer affinity between the body of a man and of a beast, that agree in the common sensible nature, than between the immortal spirit of a

man, and the beasts that perish. In short, sin has enslaved men to satan an infernal fiend: "they are taken captives by him at his pleasure:" and, which is the lowest degradation, "they are the servants of corruption."

3. Sin has broke the sweet peace and blessed concord in the soul, the felicity of our innocent state. Peace is the tranquillity that results from order and unity. In man there was a regular harmony of all his faculties; the affections were consonant with his will, his will with his understanding, and his understanding with the law of God. This was the inward state of his soul in his creation; for having a derived being, it was natural and necessary, that he should be appointed to his end, and receive his rule for the obtaining it, from the understanding and will of his Maker. Now whilst there was a correspondence in his faculties, and their operations with his rule and end, the will of God, and the glory of God, the result of it, as well as the reward of it, was spiritual peace with God, internal peace with himself, external peace with others. Now sin has dissolved this unity, violated this sacred order: and from hence,

(1.) Peace with God, that consisted in his favour and friendship to us, and our filial dependance upon him, which is the spring of full and satisfying joy, is broke. God appears a fearful enemy against the sinners; the penal effects of his wrath, I shall speak of distinctly under the second general: and that divine calm in the conscience, that peace joined with the purest pleasure, that was the reflex of God's favour on the soul, is changed into anxious apprehensions of his just power to punish us. Guilt generates fear, and fear hatred, and both cause a woful flight from God.

(2.) Internal peace is broke by sin. Whilst the passions were subordinate to the empire of reason, and in accord among themselves, there was a perfect peace; but sin has raised an intestine war in man's breast. "The law of the members rebels against the law of the mind:" for there is no man so prodigiously wicked, and spoiled of his primitive endowments, * but still there remain some principles of morality in the mind, so that his conscience discovers and condemns the vices he allows and practises, which makes the sinner uneasy to himself, and

* Prima hæc est ultio, quod se jūdice nemo nocens absolvit.

mixes vinegar with his wine. Besides, since the passions are disbanded, into what confusion is man fallen? How various, how violent are they, and often repugnant to one another? How often do we change their habits and scenes in a day? Sometimes we are vainly merry, and then as vainly sad; sometimes desirous, and then averse; and with respect to ourselves, sometimes pleased, sometimes vexed, sometimes amiable, and sometimes odious; we are more mutable than the planet that is the emblem of inconstancy. How often do clouds of melancholy darken the bright serenity of the spirit, and cast a dreadful gloom over it? How often do storms of passion disturb its tranquillity? The breast of man, that was the temple of peace, is become a den of dragons; every exorbitant affection tears and torments him. It is true, this is also a penal effect from divine justice: "there is no peace saith my God to the wicked:" with which that saying of St. Austin is consonant, *jussit Domine, & sic est, omnis inordinatus affectus est sibi pœna.*

(3.) Sin has broke our agreement with one another. When there was a regular consent between the superior and lower faculties in all men, they were in unity among themselves, for they were perfectly alike. But the tumultuous and tyrannical passions have engaged them in mortal enmity. It is the account St. James gives, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members?" Sin kindles and blows the fire of discord, in families, cities, kingdoms: sin is the fury that brings a smoking firebrand from hell, and sets the world into combustion. Ambition, avarice, the greedy desires of rule and revenge, have made the world a stage of not feigned, but the most bloody tragedies. In this men are not like, but worse than the beasts: for the fiercest beasts of Africa or Hyrcania, have a respect for their own likeness: though they devour others, yet they spare those of their own kind: but men are so degenerate as to be most cruel against their brethren. These are some of the evils that proceed from sin as their natural cause. And from hence it is evident, that sin makes men miserable, were there no hell of torment to receive them in the next state.

Secondly. I will consider the evils consequent to sin, as the penal effects of the sentence against sin; of divine justice that

decrees it, and divine power that inflicts it: and in these the sinner is often an active instrument of his own misery.

1. The fall of the angels is the first and most terrible punishment of sin. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, reserved in chains of darkness to judgment." How are they fallen? from what height of glory and felicity into bottomless perdition? How are they continually racked and tormented with the remembrance of their lost happiness? If a thousand of the prime nobility of a nation were executed in a day, by the sentence of a righteous king, we should conclude their crimes to be atrocious: innumerable angels, dignified with the titles of "dominions and principalities," were expelled from heaven, their native seat, and the sanctuary of life, and are dead to all joyful operations of the intellectual nature, and only alive to everlasting pain.

One sin of pride or envy, brought this terrible vengeance; from whence we may infer, how provoking sin is to the holy God. We read of king Uzziah, that upon his presumption to offer incense, he was struck with a leprosy, and the priests thrust him out, and himself hastened to go out of the temple: a representation of the punishment of the angels: by presumption they were struck with a leprosy, and justly expelled from the celestial temple; and not being able to sustain the terrors of the divine majesty, they fled from his presence. It is said, "God cast them down, and they left their own habitation."

2. Consider the penal effects of sin with respect to man. They are comprehended in the sentence of death, the first and second death threatened to deter Adam from transgressing the law.

In the first creation man while innocent was immortal: for although his body was compounded of jarring elements, that had a natural tendency to dissolution, yet the soul was endowed with such virtue, as to embalm the body alive, and to preserve it from the least degree of putrefaction. But when man by his voluntary sin was separated from the Fountain of Life, the soul lost its derivative life from God, and the active life infused by its union into the body. It cannot preserve the natural life beyond its limited term. A righteous retaliation. Thus the apostle tells us, "sin came into the world, and death by sin." Even infants who never committed sin, die, having been conceived in sin.

And death brought in its retinue evils so numerous and various, that their kinds are more than words to name and distinguish them. "Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble:" at his birth he enters into a labyrinth of thorns, this miserable world, and his life is a continual turning in it; he cannot escape being sometimes pricked and torn; and at going out of it, his soul is rent from the embraces of the body. It is as possible to tell the number of the waves in a tempestuous sea, as to recount all the tormenting passions of the soul, all the diseases of the body, which far exceed in number all the unhappy parts wherein they are seated. What an afflicting object would it be, to hear all the mournful lamentations, all the piercing complaints, all the deep groans from the miserable in this present state? What a prospect of terror, to see death in its various shapes, by famine, by fire, by sword, and by wasting or painful diseases, triumphant over all mankind? What a sight of woe, to have all the graves and charnel-houses opened, and so many loathsome carcasses, or heaps of dry naked bones, the trophies of death, exposed to view? Such are the afflicting and the destructive effects of sin. "For wickedness burns as a fire: it devours the briars and thorns."

Besides other miseries in this life, sometimes the terrors of an accusing conscience seize upon men, which of all evils are most heavy and overwhelming. Solomon who understood the frame of human nature, tells us, "The spirit of a man can bear his infirmity:" that is, the mind fortified by principles of moral counsel and constancy, can endure the assault of external evils: "but a wounded spirit who can bear?" This is most insupportable when the sting and remorse of the mind is from the sense of guilt: for then God appears an enemy righteous and severe; and who can encounter with offended omnipotence? Such is the sharpness of his sword, and the weight of his hand, that every stroke is deadly inward. Satan the cruel enemy of souls, exasperates the wound. He discovers and charges sin upon the conscience, with all its killing aggravations, and conceals the divine mercy, the only lenitive and healing balm to the wounded spirit. What visions of horror, what spectacles of fear, what scenes of sorrow are presented to the distracted mind by the prince of darkness? And which heightens the misery, man is a worse enemy to himself than satan: he falls upon his own sword,

and destroys himself. Whatever he sees or hears, afflicts him; whatever he thinks, torments him. The guilty conscience "turns the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood:" the precious promises of the gospel, that assure favour and pardon to returning and relenting sinners, are turned into arguments of despair, by reflecting upon the abuse and provocation of mercy, and that the advocate in God's bosom is become the accuser. Doleful state! beyond the conception of all, but those who are plunged into it. How often do they run to the grave for sanctuary, and seek for death as a deliverance?

Yet all these anxieties and terrors are but the beginning of sorrows: for the full and terrible recompences of sin shall follow the eternal judgment pronounced against the wicked at the last day. It is true, the sentence of the law is passed against the sinner in this present state, and temporal evils are the effects of it; but that sentence is revocable: at death the sentence is ratified by the Judge upon every impenitent sinner; it is decisive of his state, and involves him under punishment for ever: but the full execution of judgment shall not be till the public general sentence pronounced by the everlasting Judge, before the whole world. It exceeds the compass of created thoughts to understand fully the direful effects of sin in the eternal state? "For who knows the power of God's wrath?" The scripture represents the punishment in expressions, that may instruct the mind, and terrify the imagination: that may work upon the principles of reason and sense, by which men are naturally and strongly moved.

(1.) Sinners shall be excluded from communion with the blessed God in heaven, "in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore. In the clear and transforming vision of his glory, and the intimate and indissoluble union with him by love, consist the perfection and satisfaction of the immortal soul. The felicity resulting from it, is so entire and eternal, as God is great and true, who has so often promised it to his saints. Now sin separates lost souls for ever from the reviving presence of God. Who can declare the extent and degrees of that evil? for an evil rises in proportion to the good of which it deprives us: it must therefore follow, that celestial blessedness being transcendent, the exclusion from it is proportionably evil: and as the felicity of the saints results both

from the direct possession of heaven, and from comparison with the contrary state : so the misery of the damned arises, both from the thoughts of lost happiness, and from the lasting pain that torments them.

But it may be replied, if this be the utmost evil that is consequent to sin, the threatening of it is not likely to deter but few from pleasing their corrupt appetites : for carnal men have such gross apprehensions, and vitiated affections, that they are careless of spiritual glory and joy. " They cannot taste and see how good the Lord is : " nay, the divine presence would be a torment to them : for as light is the most pleasant quality in the world to the sound eye, so it is very afflicting and painful to the eye when corrupted by a suffusion of humours.

To this a clear answer may be given : in the next state where the wicked shall for ever be without those sensual objects which here deceive and delight them, their apprehensions will be changed ; they shall understand what a happiness the fruition of the blessed God is, and what a misery to be incapable of enjoying him, and expelled from the celestial paradise. Our Saviour tells the infidel jews, " there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves shut out." Luke 15. 28. How will they pine with envy at the sight of that triumphant felicity of which they shall never be partakers ? " Depart from me," will be as terrible a part of the judgment, " as eternal fire."

(2.) God's justice is not satisfied in depriving them of heaven, but inflicts the most heavy punishment upon sense and conscience in the damned : for as the soul and body in their state of union in this life, were both guilty, the one as the guide, the other as the instrument of sin ; so it is equal, when re-united, they should feel the penal effects of it. The scripture represents both to our capacity, " by the worm that never dies, and the fire that shall never be quenched : and by the destroying of body and soul in hell-fire." Sinners shall then be tormented, wherein they were most delighted : they shall be invested with those objects, that will cause the most dolorous perceptions in their sensitive faculties. " The lake of fire and brimstone, the blackness of darkness, are words of a terrible signification, and intended to awaken sinners to fly " from the wrath to come." But no

words can fully reveal the terrible ingredients of their misery : the punishment will be in proportion to the glory of God's majesty that is dishonoured and provoked by sin, and extent of his power. And as the soul was the principle, and the body but an accessory in the works of sin ; so its capacious faculties will be far more tormented, than the more limited faculties of the outward senses. The fiery attributes of God shall be transmitted through the glass of conscience, and concentrated upon damned spirits : the fire without them is not so tormenting as this fire within them. How will the tormenting passions be inflamed ? What rancour, reluctance and rage against the power above that sentenced them to hell ? What impatience and indignation against themselves for their wilful sins, the just cause of it ? How will they curse their creation, and wish their utter extinction, as the final remedy of their misery ? But all their ardent wishes are in vain : for the guilt of sin will never be expiated, nor God so far reconciled as to annihilate them. As long as there are justice in heaven, and fire in hell, as long as God and eternity shall continue, they must suffer these torments, which the strength and patience of an angel cannot bear one hour. From hence we may infer, what an inconceivable evil there is in sin, and how hateful it is to the Most High, when God " who is love, who is styled the Father of mercies," has prepared and does inflict such plagues for ever for the transgression of his holy laws : and such is the equity of his judgment, that he never punishes offenders above their desert.

I shall now apply this doctrine, by reflecting the light of it upon our minds and hearts.

1. This discovers how perverse and depraved the minds and wills of men are, " to choose sin rather than affliction," and break the divine law for the obtaining temporal things. If one with an attentive eye regards the generality of mankind, what dominion present and sensible things have over them, how securely and habitually they sin in prosecution of their carnal aims, as if the soul should not survive the body, as if there were no tribunal above to examine, no judge to sentence and punish sinners ; if he has not marble bowels, it will excite his compassion or indignation. What comparison is there between the good things of this world, and of the next in degrees or duration ? Airy honour, sensual pleasures, and worldly riches, are but the

thin appearances of happiness, shadows in masquerade, that cannot afford solid content to an immortal spirit : the blessedness of heaven replenishes with everlasting satisfaction. What proportion is there between the "light and momentary afflictions here," and a vast eternity "filled with indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, and desperate sorrow?" What stupid beast, what monster of a man, would prefer a superficial transient delight, the pleasure of a short dream, before ever satisfying joys? Or to avoid a slight evil, venture upon destruction? Yet this is the true case of sinners : if they can obtain the world with the loss of heaven, they count it a valuable purchase ; if they can compound so, as to escape temporal troubles, though involved under guilt that brings extreme and eternal misery, they think it a saving bargain. Amazing folly! Either they believe or do not, the recompences in the future state : if they do not, how unaccountable is their impiety? If they do, it is more prodigious they do not "feel the powers of the world to come," so as to regulate their lives, and control the strongest temptations to sin against God. A wicked believer is more guilty than a wicked infidel. How could we conceive it possible, were it not visible in their actions, that men who have judicative faculties to compare and distinguish things, and accordingly be moved with desires or fears, should with ardent affections pursue despicable vanities, and neglect substantial happiness, and be fearful of the shadows of dangers, and intrepid in the midst of the truest dangers! He is a desperate gamester that will venture a crown at a throw, against some petty advantage : yet this is really done by sinners who hazard the loss of heaven for this world : they hang by slender strings, a little breath that expires every moment, over bottomless perdition, and are insensible, without any palpitation of heart, any sign of fear.

How strong is the delusion and concupiscence of the carnally-minded? The lusts of the flesh bribe and corrupt their understandings, or divert them from serious consideration of their ways, and the issues of them. From hence it is they are presently entangled and vanquished by sensual temptations ; they are cozened by the colours of good and evil, and satan easily accomplishes his most pernicious and envious design, to make men miserable as himself. How just is the reproach of wisdom, "how long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, and fools hate

knowledge?" The light of reason and revelation shines upon them, they have not the excuse of ignorance, but the righteous and heavy "condemnation of those who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." It is no mean degree of guilt to extenuate sin, and make an apology for sinners. The wisest of men tells us, "fools make a mock of sin:" they count it a fond niceness, a silly preciseness to be fearful of offending God. They boast of their deceitful arts and insinuations, whereby they represent sin as a light matter, to corrupt others. But it is infinitely better to be defective in the subtilty of the serpent, than in the innocence of the dove. A mere natural, who is only capable of sensitive actions, and is distinguished from a brute by his shape, is not such a forlorn sot, as the sinful fool. What the prophet Jeremy speaks of one who gets riches unjustly, that he shall leave them, and "in the end die a fool" will be verified of the wilful obstinate sinner: in the end he shall by the terrible conviction of his own mind, be found guilty of the most woful folly: and how many have acknowledged in their last hours, when usually men speak with the most feeling and least affectation, how have they in words of the psalmist arraigned themselves, "so foolish have we been, and like beasts before thee?"

2. From hence we may be instructed of the wonderful patience of God, who bears with a world of sinners, that are obnoxious to his justice, and under his power every day. If we consider the number and aggravations of men's sins, how many have out-told the hairs of their heads in actual transgressions; how mighty and manifest their sins are, that the Deity and providence are questioned for the suspending of vengeance? And yet that God notwithstanding all their enormous injuries, and violent provocations, is patient towards sinners, it cannot but fill us with admiration. His mercy, like the cheerful light of the sun, visits us every morning with its benign influences; his justice, like thunder, rarely strikes the wicked. He affords not only the supports of life, but many comforts and refreshments to the unthankful and rebellious.

It is not from any defect in his power that they are not consumed, but from the abundance of his mercy. He made the world without any strain of his power, and can as easily destroy it: he has an innumerable company of angels attending his commands; and every angel is an army in strength: one of them

destroyed an hundred and fourscore and five thousand in a night. He can use the most despicable and weakest creatures, frogs, and lice, and flies, as instruments of vengeance to subdue the proudest Pharaoh, the most obstinate rebels.—He sees sin wherever it is, and hates it wherever he sees it; yet his patience endures their crying sins, and his long-suffering expects their repentance. “The Lord is not slack, as some men count slackness, but he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” He spares sinners with such indulgence, in order to their salvation. It is deservedly one of his royal titles, “the God of patience.” Our fierce spirits are apt to take fire and revenge for every injury real, or supposed; but the great God, who is infinitely sensible of all the indignities offered to his majesty, “defers his anger, and loads them with his benefits every day.” What is more astonishing than “the riches of his goodness,” unless it be the perverse abuse of it by sinners, to harden themselves in their impieties? But although his clemency delays the punishment, the sacredness and constancy of his justice will not forget it: “when patience has had its perfect work,” justice shall have a solemn triumph in the final destruction of impenitent unreformed sinners.

3. The consideration of the evil of sin, so great in itself, and pernicious to us, heightens our obligations to the divine mercy, in saving us from our sins, and an everlasting hell, the just punishment of them. Our loss was invaluable, our misery extreme, and without infinite mercy, we had been under an irremediable necessity of sinning and suffering for ever. God saw us in this wretched and desperate state, “and his eye affected his heart, in his pity he redeemed” and restored us. This is the clearest testimony of pure goodness: for God did not want external glory, who is infinitely happy in his own perfections: he could, when man revolted from his duty, have created a new world of innocent creatures: for infinite power is not spent nor lessened by finite productions, but his undeserved and undesired mercy appeared in our salvation. The way of accomplishing it, renders mercy more illustrious: for to glorify his justice, and preserve the honour of his holiness unblemished, he laid upon his Son “the iniquity of us all.” This was love that passeth all understanding: our Saviour speaks of it with admiration; “God so loved

the world," and hated sin, "that he gave his only begotten Son to die for it; that whosoever believes in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And how dear are our engagements to Jesus Christ? The judge would not release the guilty without a ransom, nor the surety without satisfaction; and the Son of God most compassionately and willingly gave his precious blood to obtain our deliverance. If his perfections were not most amiable and ravishing, yet that he died for us, should infinitely endear him to us. "To those who believe, he is precious:" to those who have felt their undone condition, and that by his merits and mediation, are restored to the favour of God, he is eminently precious. Who can break 'the constraints of such love?' If there be a spark of reason, or a grain of unfeigned faith in us, "We must judge, that if one died for all, then all were dead; and those that live, should live to his glory, who died for their salvation."

Add to this, that in the sufferings of Christ there is the clearest demonstration of the evil of sin, and how hateful it is to God, if we consider the dignity of his person, the greatness of his sufferings, and the innocent recoilings of his human nature from such fearful sufferings. He was the eternal Son of God, the heir of his Father's love and glory, the Lord of angels; he suffered in his body the most ignominious and painful death, being nailed to the cross in the sight of the world: the sufferings of his soul were incomparably more afflicting: for though heavenly meek, he endured the derision and cruel violence of his enemies with a silent patience; yet in the dark eclipse of his Father's countenance, in the desolate state of his soul, the Lamb of God opened his mouth in that mournful complaint, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" His innocent nature did so recoil from those fearful sufferings, that with repeated ardency of affection, he deprecated that bitter cup; "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; let this cup pass me:" he addressed to the divine power and love, the attributes that relieve the miserable, yet he drank off the dregs of the cup of God's wrath. Now we may from hence conclude, how great an evil sin is, that could not be expiated by a meaner sacrifice, "than the offering up the soul of Christ" to atone incensed justice; and no lower a price, than the blood of the Son of God, the most invaluable treasure, could ransom men who were devoted to destruction.

4. The consideration of the evil of sin in itself and to us, should excite us with a holy circumspection to keep ourselves from being defiled with it. It is our indispensable duty, our transcendent interest to obey the divine law entirely and constantly. The tempter cannot present any motives, that to a rectified mind are sufficient to induce a consent to sin, and offend God. Let the scales be even, and put into one all the delights of the senses, all the pleasures and honours of the world, which are the elements of carnal felicity, how light are they against the enjoyment of the blessed God in glory? Will the gain of this perishing world, compensate the loss of the soul and salvation for ever? If there were any possible comparison between empty deluding vanities, and celestial happiness, the choice would be more difficult, and the mistake less culpable; but they vanish into nothing in the comparison: so that to commit the least sin that makes us liable to the forfeiture of heaven, for "the pleasures of sin that are but for a season," is madness in that degree, that no words can express. Suppose the tempter inspires his rage into his slaves, and tries to constrain us to sin by persecution; how unreasonable is it to be dismayed at the threatenings of men, "who must die," and who can only touch the body; and to despise the terrors of the Lord," who lives for ever, and can punish for ever? Methinks we should look upon the perverted raging world, as a swarm of angry flies, that may disquiet, but cannot hurt us. Socrates, when unrighteously prosecuted to death, said of his enemies, with a courage becoming the breast of a christian, 'They may kill me, but cannot hurt me.' How should these considerations raise in us an invincible resolution and reluctancy against the tempter, in all his approaches and addresses to us? 'And that we may so resist him, as to cause his flight from us,' let us imitate the excellent saint, whose example is set before us.

(1.) By possessing the soul with a lively and solemn sense of God's presence, who is the inspector and judge of all our actions. Joseph repelled the temptation with this powerful thought, "How shall I sin against God?" 'The fear of the Lord is clean;' it is a watchful sentinel, that resists temptations without, and suppresses corruptions within: it is like the cherubim placed with a flaming sword in paradise, to prevent the re-entry of Adam when guilty and polluted. For this end we must, by fre-

quent and serious considerations, represent the divine being and glory in our minds, that there may be a gracious constitution of soul; this will be our preservative from sin: for although the habitual thoughts of God are not always in act, yet upon a temptation they are presently excited, and appear in the view of conscience, and are effectual to make us reject the tempter with defiance and indignation.

This holy fear is not a mere judicial impression, that restrains from sin, for the dreadful punishment that follows; for that servile affection, though it may stop a temptation, and hinder the eruption of a lust into the gross act, yet it does not renew the nature, and make us holy and heavenly. There may be a respective dislike of sin with a direct affection to it. Besides, a mere servile fear is repugnant to nature, and will be expelled if possible. Therefore, that we "may be in the fear of the Lord all the day long," we must regard him in his endearing attributes, his love, his goodness and compassion, his rewarding mercy; and this will produce a filial fear of reverence and caution, lest we should offend so gracious a God. As the natural life is preserved by grateful food, not by aloes and wormwood, which are useful medicines; so the spiritual life is maintained by the comfortable apprehensions of God, as the rewarder of our fidelity in all our trials.

(2.) Strip sin of its disguises, wash off its flattering colours, that you may see its native ugliness. Joseph's reply to the tempter, "How shall I do this great wickedness?" Illusion and concupiscence are the inducements to sin: when a lust represents the temptation as very alluring, and hinders the reflection of the mind, upon the intrinsic and consequential evil of sin, it is like the putting poison into the glass: but when it has so far corrupted the mind, that sin is esteemed a small evil, poison is thrown into the fountain. If we consider the majesty of the Lawgiver, there is no law small, nor sin small, that is the transgression of it. Yet the most are secure in an evil course, by conceits that their sins are small. It is true, there is a vast difference between sins in their nature and circumstances: there are insensible omissions and accusing acts, but the least is damnable. Besides, the allowance and number of sins reputed small, will involve under intolerable guilt. What is lighter than a grain of sand? you may blow away a hundred with a breath; and what

is heavier than a heap of sand condensed together? It is our wisdom and duty to consider the evil of sin in its essential malignity, which implies no less, than that God was neither wise nor good in making his law, and that he is not just and powerful to vindicate it: and when tempted to any pleasant sin, to consider the due aggravations of it, as Joseph did, which will control the efficacy of the temptation. I shall only add, that when a man has mortified the lusts of the flesh, he has overcome the main part of the infernal army "that wars against the soul." Sensual objects do powerfully and pleasantly insinuate into carnal men, and the affections are very unwillingly restrained from them. To undertake the cure of those, whose disease is their pleasure, is almost a vain attempt: for they do not judge it an evil to be regarded, and will not accept distasteful remedies.

(3.) Fly all tempting occasions of sin. Joseph would not be alone with his mistress. There is no virtue so confirmed, and in that degree of eminence, but if one be frequently engaged in vicious society, it is in danger of being eclipsed and controlled by the opposite vice. If the ermines will associate with the swine, they must lie in the mire: if the sheep with wolves, they must learn to bite and devour: if doves with vultures, they must learn to live on the prey. Our surest guard is to keep at a distance from all engaging snares. He that from carelessness and confidence ventures into temptations, makes himself an easy prey to the tempter.

And let us daily pray for the divine assistance to keep us from the evil of the world; without which all our resolutions will be as ineffectual as ropes of sand, to bind us to our duty.

5. The consideration of the evil of sin is a powerful motive to our solemn and speedy repentance. The remembrance of our original and actual sins, will convince us, that we are born for repentance. There are innumerable silent sins, that are unobserved, and do not alarm the conscience: and although a true saint will neither hide any sin, nor suffer sin to hide itself in his breast, yet the most holy men in the world, have great reason with the psalmist, to say with melting affections, "Who can understand his errors? O cleanse me from my secret sins;" discover them to me by the light of the word, and cover them in the blood of the Redeemer. There are sins of infirmity, and daily incursion, from which none can be perfectly freed in this

mortal state : these should excite our watchfulness, and be lamented with true tears. There are crying sins of a crimson guilt, which are to be confessed with heart-breaking sorrow, confounding shame, and implacable antipathy against them, and to be forsaken for ever. Of these, some are of a deep dye in their nature, and some from the circumstances in committing them ; some are of an heinous nature, and more directly and expressly renounce our duty, and more immediately obstruct our communion with God : as a mud-wall intercepts the light of the sun from shining upon us. 2. Some derive a greater guilt from the circumstances in the commission. Such are,

(1.) Sins against knowledge : for according to the ingrency of the will in sin, the guilt arises. Now when conscience interposes between the carnal heart and the temptation, and represents the evil of sin, and deters from compliance, and yet men will venture to break the divine law, this exceedingly aggravates the offence ; for such sins are committed with a fuller consent, and are justly called rebellion against the light. And the clearer the light is, the more it will increase the disconsolate fearful darkness in hell.

(2.) Sins committed against the love as well as the law of God, are exceedingly aggravated. To prevent the benefits we receive from God to his dishonour, to turn them into occasions of sin, which were designed to endear obedience to us ; to sin licentiously and securely in hopes of an easy pardon at last, is intensive of our guilt in a high degree. This is to poison the antidote, and make it deadly. There is a sacrifice to reconcile offended justice ; but if men obstinately continue in sin, and abuse the grace of the gospel, there is no sacrifice to appease exasperated mercy.

(3.) Sins committed against solemn promises and engagements to forsake them, have a deeper dye : for perfidiousness is joined with this disobedience. This divine law strictly binds us to our duty, antecedently to our consent ; but when we promise to obey it, we increase our obligations, and by sinning, break double chains. In short, any habitual allowed sin, induces a heavy guilt ; for it argues a deeper root and foundation of sin in the heart, a stronger inclination to it, from whence the repeated acts proceed, which are new provocations to the pure eyes of God. Accordingly in repenting reflections, our sorrow should be

most afflicting, our humiliation deeper, our self-condemnation most severe for those sins which have been most dishonourable to God, and defiling to us. Not that we can make any satisfaction for our sins, though we should fill the air with our sighs, and heaven with our tears; but it becomes us to have our sorrows enlarged in some proportion to our unworthiness. And this mournful disposition prepares us for the grace of God. The law does not allow repentance, but exacts entire obedience: it is the privilege of the gospel, that repenting sinners are assured of forgiveness: without this qualification it is inconsistent with the majesty, purity and justice of God, to extend pardoning mercy to sinners: for they will never value, nor humbly and ardently seek for mercy, till they feel the woful effects of sin in their conscience: only the stung Israelite would look to the brazen serpent. And this is requisite to prevent our relapsing into sin: for the dominion of sin being founded in the love of pleasure, the proper means to extinguish it, is by a bitter repentance: the heart is first broken for sin, and then from it.

To conclude; let us renew our repentance every day: let not the wounds of our spirits putrefy: "let not the sun go down upon God's wrath:" let us always renew the application of Christ's blood that alone can cleanse us from sin.