

S E R M O N V I I I .

LUKE XIV. 23.

The Lord said to the servant, compel them to come in, that my house may be full.

I PROCEED to the second hinderance of men's rejecting the call of the gospel. The flesh, that in the language of the scripture signifies the corrupt nature, and inbred inclinations of men to forbidden things, obstruct their coming to Christ. The corrupt nature is called flesh, not only as that is a term of vilifying, for the original and resolution of flesh is into the dust, but partly with respect to its propagation, and chiefly in that the usual attractive and defiling objects of men's thoughts and desires are carnal, and are enjoyed by the carnal faculties. Our minds and affections are coloured and qualified, distinguished and denominated from the objects about which they are conversant. This corruption is spread through all the faculties of the soul: the mind is carnal in its principles and acts, "in opposition to the spirit of the mind renewed by grace:" the will and affections are depraved. "Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh." The apostle fully expresses this corruption: he saith, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God;" 1 Cor. 2. 14.

that implies the stubborn averseness in the will and affections from spiritual things: "for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The natural mind is indisposed and incapable of knowing supernatural things in their reality and goodness, so as to ravish the will into compliance, till it is purified and spiritualized by the Holy Spirit. The same apostle tells us, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can be." Rom. 8. As the lusts of the flesh are opposite to the law of God, so the wisdom of the flesh is to the gospel.

This corrupt nature makes the world such a dangerous snare to men: for it binds their minds so as not to see the dross of earthly things, and the glory of heavenly. St. John expresses the tempting objects of the world by the vicious affections that are drawn out and fastened upon them. "All that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life;" for the lusts of men put a gloss upon them, and make them pernicious. The poison is not in the flowers but in the spider, that turns the extraction from them into its own nourishment. Accordingly St. Peter speaks of the "corruption in the world through lust." 2 Pet. 1. The vain heart is more deceitful than the vain world: for not only reason that instructs the wise, but experience that instructs fools, affords sufficient conviction, that all things here below "are vanity and vexation:" there is none so low, none so exalted in the world, but find it so. By tasting a sprig of wormwood, the bitterness is perceived as truly as by drinking a strong infusion of it. The world with all its varieties is a multiplied and perpetuated vanity; it affords no solid satisfaction; the setting down a thousand cyphers makes no sum. But the carnal heart is so enchanted with the false lustre and seeming pleasures of the world, that by changing one vanity for another, it seeks and expects satisfaction. This verifies the observation of the wise preacher, "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go down to the dead." Eccles. 9. 3. What a prodigy of madness is it for men to catch at a shadow of happiness, to seek for that which they are uncertain to find; and if they do find, they are certain to lose; and to neglect substantial felicity, which if they sincerely seek, they shall obtain, and if they obtain, they shall enjoy for ever!

But that it may be more evident "that the flesh with its affections and lusts," does powerfully interpose to hinder men from embracing the gospel, I will particularly consider its opposition to the supernatural doctrines revealed in the gospel, the objects of faith; to the holy precepts of it, the rule of obedience; to the spiritual rewards commended to our choice.

1. The great mystery of godliness, is the incarnate Son of God, who by an ignominious and accursed death purchased a glorious blessed life for his people: 1 Cor. 1. this doctrine is accounted foolishness, and rejected by the proud unrenewed mind. The gospel is "styled the word of faith:" Rom. 10. 8. it is conveyed to the soul with authority and efficacy by faith. As faith in Christ was required of the sick, and blind, and lame, that his healing virtue might rest on them; Mat. 9. 28. so the belief of the divinity of his person and doctrine, is the first vital qualification, that makes us capable of spiritual healing. Infidelity stops the fountain of grace.

The apostle saith, the "word preached did not profit them that heard it, not being mixed with faith." Now although the light of the gospel be so clear and convincing that the sincere considering mind cannot suspend its assent to it, yet the carnal mind stained with prejudices and vicious affections, will not admit it. "An evil heart is the principal cause of unbelief."

The Jews from pride, vain glory, and the love of the world, rejected the Son of God, though all the characters of the Messiah were conspicuous in him: he did not come with visible glory and observation, according to their expectations and desires; they "saw no form nor comeliness in him, and did not believe the report concerning him;" they were scandalized at his parentage and mean condition: he discovered their beloved sins, and sharply reprov'd the reigning vices among them, which made his person and his preaching so odious to them.

Our Saviour tells us, "that light was come into the world; and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." The prejudice of their passions was so strong, that they rejected the saving truths of the gospel, and believed damnable delusions.

Now the same roots of offence are in the hearts of men against the gospel. Such a cloud arises from the stream of carnal lusts darkening the understanding, that it cannot discover truths so

high as the mysterious doctrines of Christ. Love in the heart is requisite as well as light in the mind, to know spiritual things: obedience to the will of God is the best preparative to believe his word. Our Saviour justly taxed the pharisees, "they did not repent, that they might believe." Men are averse from receiving those doctrines that condemn their lusts; and are infidels that they may be freely wicked, that the shadow of repentance may not disturb them. It is said of atheistical scorers, "they are willingly ignorant:" 2 Pet. 3. 5. the corrupt will rules imperiously, and turns the thoughts from those arguments, which if duly considered, reason with a strong hand would constrain them to acknowledge there is a righteous God who has authority to command, and power to punish those who rebel against his laws.

It is true, they pretend to offer something for a more colourable denial of supernatural revelation: but the perverseness of infidelity appears through all their pretences. Some object against the sublimity of the doctrines of the gospel. It was the scornful expression of one, this is like the "peace of God that passes all understanding." As if the reality of things depended upon the conception and capacity of the human mind, and divine truths were impossible because incomprehensible. Such foolish pride obstructs the reception of divine truths; and from hence humble christians are despised as led by a blind belief. Others are offended at the simplicity of the revealing them. The doctrines are so high they cannot reach unto, the manner of conveying them is so low they will not stoop to. But it is evident these arguings are not from the reason but the lusts of men. For the rare accord of the matter and manner of the gospel-revelation is a sensible character of its descent from God: the doctrine is high and bright, of an extraordinary elevation; the delivery of it is easy and familiar, since it is for the instruction and salvation of men; and accordingly the divine wisdom has made an exact temperament of these things. Briefly, the corrupt affections pervert the will to reject the gospel, and the perverted will influences the understanding to disapprove it. Nay, carnal lusts force men against their light, (as the Jews did Pilate to condemn the person of Christ) to condemn his doctrine.

There are many in this degenerate age, who although they dare not publicly own the defiled and abhorred name of infidels,

yet among their companions employ their wit to dispute and decide the most sublime and sacred truths out of the world. Their faces are full of death, the tokens of reprobation are visible upon them. The issue will discover them to be the wretched examples of that fearful rule. Those who are destined to final ruin are infatuated.

Others are believers in profession and their own conceit, but infidels in practice. Their faith is but a vain opinion, a loose assent to the christian doctrine, because it is the religion of the country, but with our radication and establishment. This is evident, considering that the doctrines of the gospel are not merely intellectual, the objects of theory and speculation, but moral and practical, the objects of our choice and seeking: "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ is come into the world to save sinners." Accordingly the unfeigned belief of them is seated not only in the mind, but in the heart, and is correspondent to the infallible truth and transcendent goodness of the thing revealed: they make such an impression on the soul, that the value of them is above life, and whatever comes in competition is with despising disdain rejected. But when men seldom remember and little regard eternal things, how specious soever the profession is, can there be a reasonable belief of their words against their works? Therefore in the language of the scripture, "all that do not first seek the kingdom of heaven, and the righteousness thereof, are unbelievers; it being morally impossible that men should sincerely believe, and have a due apprehension of it, but it must be the great design of their souls, and the main business of their lives to obtain it.

2. Security is the constant effect of infidelity, and hardens men in their sins, and the neglect of salvation so dearly purchased, and graciously offered to them in the gospel. Direct infidels set "their mouth against heaven," and defy the furnace of hell. They are blindly bold, and fearless of that judgment that makes the devils tremble. Others, though not open and palpable infidels, are in a dead calm, not sensible of their sins, and have slight apprehensions of their great danger: infidelity lies at the bottom of their security. As the Egyptians in the thick darkness that covered the land, "moved not from their places;" so many in ignorant darkness, sit down and are at rest, careless of the Saviour that "can deliver from the wrath to come." Only

those who have strong apprehensions of evils imminent and destructive, will fly to Christ as a sanctuary and shelter, and submit to his terms of saving them.

Secondly. The corrupt nature will not submit to the sanctity and purity of the gospel. The forecited scripture tells us, the "carnal mind is enmity against God:" and that enmity is armed with many strong lusts opposing his law. The principal cause of rejecting the gospel is common to all, "we will not have this man to reign over us." Luke 19. 14. It is observable, that as holiness is that attribute wherein God doth most excel, and men are most defective; so the corrupt will is most opposite to it. The justice and power of God in some cases men do approve and apply themselves to: if injuriously accused or oppressed, they desire his justice to vindicate their innocence, and revenge their wrongs: if in distress and exigencies they pray that his powerful providence may regard and relieve them: but they are extremely averse from his holiness shining in his laws, which excites his justice and power to punish those who rebel against it. They are ready to say to Christ, what the rebellious Israelites said to Rehoboam, "thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee." 1 Kings 12. 4. They will measure out the scantling of their obedience, how far he shall rule, and farther they will not yield. But our Saviour declares, "I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it." Mat. 5. It is true, the gospel is a covenant of grace, a sovereign composition of precious promises of recovering grace, and pardoning mercy; but it is also a law, and "enjoins repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As without compensation to the justice, so without conformity to the holiness of God, we can never be restored to his favour, and enjoy him as our felicity.

Our Saviour prescribes this indispensable rule to his disciples, "if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." This is a comprehensive fundamental duty, and the natural man has a strong reluctancy to every part of it.

1. Self-dependance upon our own virtues and duties for the obtaining the favour of God, and the eternal reward, is very natural to men: it was the condition of the first covenant, to which

they cleave. Men of a fair conversation, and unblemished in the eyes of the world, have some sparks of the pharisee in them, who justified himself, that he was no extortioner, nor unjust, nor an adulterer, nor as the profane publican; and that he fasted and paid tithes. Upon such reasons many presume of the goodness and safety of their spiritual state: they take pride and content in themselves, in their moral goodness, and do not feel the want of a Saviour, nor apply themselves with humble mournful affections to him for reconciliation to God. Others think by the worthiness of their works to compensate for the unworthiness of their sins, to commute one duty for another, and balance their accounts with heaven, not considering that if their works were perfectly good, they are but the performance of their duty, if they had never sinned. It was one great obstruction that hindered the Jews from receiving the gospel: "they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God." Rom. 10. 3. One of a high spirit will rather wear a mean garment of his own, than a rich livery, the mark of servile dependance. Pride resists grace, and grace resists pride. The law of faith requires us to renounce not only our unrighteousness, but our righteousness, even the most excellent graces and the fruits of them, in comparison of Christ, and as a foundation of obtaining the pardon of sin, and salvation for ever. Our righteousness is defective and defiled, and cannot endure the trial of God's enlightening tribunal. All our doings and sufferings cannot expiate the least sin; we must only rely upon the Lord our righteousness, to reconcile us to God, and that we may stand in judgment. "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2 Cor. 5. 21. not in ourselves.

How hard it is to awaken men out of the pharisaical dream of their own righteousness, Luke 16. is evident both in the doctrine and practice of those of the Roman communion. They assert the formal cause of our justification in the sight of God is our inherent holiness: they blaspheme the imputed righteousness of Christ as a fantastic apprehension: they declare that good works have the merit of congruity and condignity to eternal life: and that by penance, satisfaction is paid to God for their sins, as if there were a proportion between the one and

the other. They succeed the pharisees in their proud and stubborn resistance of the gospel. And among other carnal motives that fasten men in that corrupt religion, these have a special force, as quieting conscience, and gratifying their lusts, that they can make compensation for their offences against God, and that the absolution of a priest seals their pardon: thus being clear, they may begin a new score, and return to their old lusts with new affections.

2. As self implies the flesh with its affections and lusts, so self-denial, and sin-denial are of the same extent. The whole body of corruption with all the parts of it, even the dearest, the most tender and most cherished by carnal men must be mortified. Severe restraints are laid upon the desiring and the angry appetites, the springs of all the sins and miseries in the world. We are strictly commanded to pluck "out the right eye, and to cut off the right hand," Mat. 5. Mark 9. upon the most fearful penalties, the suffering torments insupportable and everlasting. The gospel has the perfections of a rule, it is clear and complete in the direction of our duty. "It teaches us to deny all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this world." Tit. 2. Now carnal men are apt to say with the Capernaïtes, "This is an hard saying." John 6. 64. Every one has a peculiar favourite lust, the sin of his complexion, or of the country wherein he lives, which if you pluck out of their bosoms, they will fly in your face. Men willingly enough hear reproofs against sins to which they are disinclined; but if directed against their own sins, whether of pleasure or profit, they will scorn the reproof, and storm at the reprover. They will perform some duties that are consistent with their carnal ease and interest, but obstinately stick at others. Herod is a notorious instance of this: it is related "he heard John Baptist gladly, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things;" Mark 6. 20. but his incestuous affection made him prefer a filthy harlot before the pure law of God.

One indulged lust captivates the soul, and keeps it under the power of satan. If one leg of a bird be caught in a net, it is as surely held as if its whole body were entangled. One lust separates from Christ, and is a bar against our entrance into heaven, for Christ is the only way to it. The word of God is "sharper than a two-edged sword;" but carnal men will interpose their

souls between their tender lusts and the word, and receive its deadly strokes to spare them. The Lord Christ tells the Jews, "Ye will not come to me that ye may have life:" John 5. they would readily embrace a Saviour that would allow the pleasures of sin, and free them from the punishment; but their wills were so strongly engaged, they would suffer no divorce from their beloved lusts: they chose hell with sin, rather than heaven with holiness.

3. The denial of self includes all that in the order of nature belongs to us: life, and all the supports, the comforts, the ornaments and endearments of it; the sweetest relations, father and mother, brother and sister, wife and children, the richest possessions, houses and land, must be always parted with, in the preparations of our heart, and resolutions of our wills, and actually, rather than desert our duty. Such a supremacy of affection is required by our Saviour, that suspends the operation of our love upon all inferior things, when they are in competition with his interest and glory. This command binds all without exemption: therefore he directs his followers to be armed with expectation of hard entertainment in the world. Now this precept seems so severe to carnal men, that no motives can reconcile their affections to it. If they are spoiled of the advantages, and deprived of the pleasures of this world, they are ready to complain as Micah to them who robbed him of his image and teraphim, "You take away my gods." As if the Son of God were such a poor or illiberal rewarder, either defective in power or love, that they should be losers for his sake.

Thirdly; The promised rewards of the gospel have no effective force upon the carnal mind, and affections. It is true, the gospel has opened heaven, and "brought life and immortality to light;" a state of entire endless joy in the presence of God. Is it possible that men should be indifferent and careless of their final happiness? It is almost equally difficult to induce men to believe and choose the favour and fruition of God, as their only felicity, as to convince them they do not believe and choose it. But their actions declare their choice, and their choice declares their esteem: for if his favour were esteemed an invaluable treasure, it would be the chief object of their desires; they would not forfeit it for all the world: it is therefore evident that the choosing the pleasures of sin, and the profits of the world, is the

direct despising the favour of God. And the account of it is clear : for though heaven be a state of eternal and inexpressible blessedness, yet it is future and spiritual : it makes but a weak impression upon their minds, and is unsuitable to their affections. Carnal men have but an imaginary representation of the world to come, and their assent to it is overshadowed and eclipsed by the present world with its advantages and pleasures ; they cannot relish a happiness purely spiritual. It is not the goodness of the object, but the inclination of the heart that makes it desirable. The wise philosopher observes, ‘ That such as the radicated disposition and habit of a man is, such will the end appear to him.’ Therefore a supernatural spiritual good cannot appear to a sensual man so attractive, as to be chosen as his felicity. Only “the pure in heart can see God,” and love him, and enjoy him in his amiable excellencies : the unrenewed have no uncertain nor satisfying notions of the happiness that his presence diffuses among the blessed above. This will be discoursed of more particularly under another head.

Fourthly ; Satan has a great agency in men’s opposition to the gospel, and their neglect of salvation. His title, the tempter, implies his constant practice. It is true, he cannot hurt us against our wills ; the enemy without could not surprise us, if the traitor within, the corrupt nature, did not give him admittance ; he cannot immediately work upon the will, nor discern the mind ; without our consent he cannot obtain a conquest over us ; therefore his prevailing temptations do not disculpate sinners that yield to them : he rules only in the children of disobedience, they are his voluntary slaves ; but he has a strange power in the minds and hearts of men by his managing tempting objects. The world makes an impression upon our lower faculties, and he improves the impression, and excites corrupt desires. As the operations of the Holy Spirit in believers are secret, but stronger than the influence of the stars : so the workings of satan are in the wicked secret but powerful. I will first consider the motives that urge him to be so active and ardent in hindering the success of the gospel for the salvation of our souls. 2. His methods and wiles for that end. The motives are,

1. His eternal enmity to God : for being under a doom never to be reversed, his malice is always raging and working to dishonour and displease the Righteous Judge. He “sinned from

the beginning," it is his unwearied and uninterrupted work. Men in complying with his temptations, are swayed and carried by the bias of their lusts; some are bribed by profit, others allured by pleasure: but his great end is, that the law of God may be violated, his majesty despised, and his glory obscured. As in a rebellious insurrection, the multitude are engaged, some for spoil, others for private respects, but the design of the leader is to dethrone the king, and usurp his sceptre. Satan's opposition against God is more fierce and steadfast than of the most resolved rebels that trample upon the divine law every day: they do more accomplish his will than their own, which will be the occasion and matter of his insulting scorn, and furious upbraiding them hereafter. Briefly, he loves sin for sin's sake, as it is an affront and provocation of the divine majesty, and is more pleased in the sins of men than in their everlasting damnation, because the holy and righteous Lawgiver is dishonoured by their sins, and glorified in their punishment.

2. His old enmity and hatred against the souls of men. It is another hell to him, to see them restored to the favour of God, and his glorious image re-engraven on them. He is a jealous jailor, and if possible will not loose any of his captives. Being condemned to everlasting burnings, he will make them feel his fire.

The scripture represents him as a strong and subtile adversary: "a roaring lion that goes about seeking whom he may devour, and the old serpent." His enmity is universal, his diligence is equal to his malice, and his malice whets his invention to lay such trains as may be destructive to them. His strength does chiefly lie in his subtilty. If men could see him in his native shape of darkness, an infernal fiend, the most cursed creature, or what he is relatively to them, "a liar and a murderer from the beginning," how would they flee with horror from his temptations? but he does not awake sinners, and then wound them; he is not seen till felt, nor discovered till he has fastened his stings in their souls. He spreads his snares in the dark; and when their spiritual senses are locked in a midnight sleep, he destroys them.

Secondly; His methods and wiles for this end are various.

1. He blinds the minds of men, and hardens them in unbelief. This was his first and successful temptation, and is the pattern

that he still follows. He told the woman "she should not die;" and the restraint of fear being taken away, the pleasure of taste and curiosity soon prevailed with her to eat the forbidden fruit. The apostle gives this account of men's rejecting the truths of the gospel: "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 who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." His principal design is to increase the natural infidelity in the minds of men, who are so governed by sense, that in matters of faith they require the evidence of sense: for he knows the powerful efficacy of the divine doctrine where it is believed. Faith enters into the conscience, opens the heart, commands and captivates the will and affections, and brings the most stubborn sinners from the kingdom of satan into the kingdom of Christ. "He is in them," possesses all their faculties, and by that advantage works effectually. He has the monarchy of their minds, and diverts their thoughts from pondering the arguments that would turn their judgments, and induce the belief of the gospel: he excites those carnal affections that blind the mind: he enchants men with enticing sensual objects, that they neither can nor will believe what is contrary to their lusts. Reason, conscience, faith, whereby men are primarily and chiefly distinguished from the brutes, are sacrificed to the prince of darkness. Then they are securely his own: for the most precious promises have no attractive influence upon those in whom there is reigning infidelity: the sharpest threatenings cannot pierce through the armour of obstinacy.

2. The most that refuse the offer of grace in the gospel, are not absolute infidels; therefore the tempter tries other ways to ruin them. He observes the dispositions and circumstances of men, and presents such temptations whereby they are most likely to be taken and held in his snares. Although human nature be wholly depraved, yet all men are not cast in the same mould: they are distinguished by their various aspects, constitutions, desires, and conditions of life, and are not wrought on by the same motives. The tempter by his natural sagacity and experience (he is styled the old serpent) has exact knowledge in the art of discerning men. Sometimes sudden passions are painted in the countenance, and he takes particular advantage to strike

in with them. But his universal method is to present the fittest baits to the natural inclinations, and habitual dispositions of men: he knows the faction within will readily open to his call. The sanguine are soft and dissolute, and are easily drawn to exorbitant pleasures: the melancholy are inclined to discontent, sorrow, impatience, despair: those who have active restless spirits, are taken with the advantages of the world. The muddy mind is easily stirred by the offer of gain: the voluptuous mind is strongly allured by sensual delights: the aspiring mind is incensed by the prospect of honour. Now though the tempter be a spirit, and not capable of those sins which are acted by the sensible faculties, yet not only spiritual sins, pride, envy, malignity, and the like, but fleshly lusts, even the foulest actions are from his incitations. He was not only a proud spirit, but an unclean spirit in David. 2 Chron. He was a covetous spirit in Judas: an hypocritical spirit in Ananias: satan put it into his heart to detain part of the price, and lie to the Holy Ghost. He presents the temptation, and suggests motives to embrace it. He brings the fuel, enticing objects, and inspires the flame, ardent desires to them. If burning lusts begin to cool, and raging corruptions are controlled by the threatening of the word, and the terrors of conscience, he will blow them up again. Now any reigning lust is a viceroy of satan's, and keeps possession for him, and consequently excludes the Son of God from admission into the heart.

3. He persuades men that religion in its power and strictness is not necessary: the abstaining from enormous crimes, and the performance of some outward service will be available for salvation. Hell is the portion of the devil and his children, and none are of his race but incarnate devils, unclean spirits in brutish bodies. He makes use of carnal men, under the pretence of friendship to persuade those who feel the restraints of conscience, to be less tender and vigilant, by telling them, this strictness is superfluous, it will spoil you, make you unsociable and odious: the wise and learned that think to go to heaven with the first, take a greater liberty: they will say moderation is a virtue, and by the pretence of temper cherish the loathsome distemper of lukewarmness, that is as fatal as a deadly coldness. The tempter will permit men to make use of religion as a medicine, a little in fainting fits, to relieve and recover them, but not as

their daily food: not to be their diligent and constant practice. The crafty serpent will abuse the words of the Holy Spirit, "be not righteous over much." As Judas said of the precious ointment poured upon our Saviour, "why was this waste?" so carnal men are apt to say, why these severe restraints from satisfying the natural appetites? Why such circumspection in our walking? Why keep the Lord's day so religiously? Is it not enough to hear the sermons? May we not afterwards unbend, and enjoy free society, and recreate ourselves with carnal contentments? They do not believe that God is so strict in his commands, nor will be so exact in requiring an account for them: fond creatures to entertain such carnal conceits of God, to think him like themselves. They are apt to say, the ministers will fetter them all by imaginative rules of holiness unprescribed in the scriptures. For men would fain have the light, and the law that regulates them, to be suitable to their appetites and actions. But are we not commanded to imitate and honour our pattern, "to be holy as our heavenly Father is holy, in all manner of conversation?" Are we not enjoined to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; to cleanse ourselves from all pollutions of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God: to follow holiness with the most zealous and unsatisfied desires," that, if it were possible, we might anticipate heaven on earth? Can there be any excuse for neglecting these holy duties?

There are none more dangerously deceived than those that think they are holy enough, and make no question of the favour of God and their final happiness. They condemn profane outrageous sinners; those who visibly come short of them, they think will fall short of salvation; but to excel them, they think is a needless preciseness, a pride of singularity, a mask of hypocrisy. It is one of satan's arts to conceal the good that is in the saints, that they may condemn themselves, and to conceal the evil that is in the unregenerate, that they may flatter themselves. How many fall as deep as hell from such high hopes? for he that does not seriously desire and endeavour to be renewed into the unspotted image of God, was never truly renewed.