

Sermon I.

At A Public Fast In July, First Sabbath, 1650.²⁵⁷

Deut. xxxii. 4-7.—“He is the Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment,” &c.

There are two things which may comprehend all religion,—the knowledge of God and of ourselves. These are the principles of religion, and are so nearly conjoined together, that the one cannot be truly without the other, much less savingly. It is no wonder that Moses craved attention, and that, to the end he may attain it from an hard hearted deaf people, he turns to the heavens and to the earth,—as it were to make them the more inexcusable. The matter of his song is both divine and necessary. Throughout it all, he insists upon these two,—to discover what they were in themselves, and what God was to them. He parallels their way

²⁵⁷ [The Records of the Presbytery of Glasgow show, that this Fast was appointed by the commission of the General Assembly. “The commissioun of the Generall Assemblie, upone the 25 day of June 1650 did emit ane seasonable warning concerning the present dangeris and dewties unto all the memberis of the kirk. To draw neir to God, to murne for thair ayin iniquiteis, and for all the synnes, prophanitie, and bakslydinges of the land, to studie to mak peace with God in Cryst Jesus, to searche and try our wayis and to return speedilie to the Lord, and to lift up our hartis with our handis to God in the heavines, that he may spair and save his pepill, that thai be not a prey to the enymie,” &c. (Nicol's Diary of Public Transactions in Scotland, p. 17. Printed by Bannatyne Club, Edin. 1836). On the 28th of June, a copy of this warning was presented to the Scottish parliament, who thanked the commission of the General Assembly for it, and requested them to delay the printing of it for a few days, that it might be accompanied with a Declaration from them suited to the existing crisis (Sir James Balfour's Annals of Scotland, vol. iv. p. 63.). When the Presbytery of Glasgow met on the 31st of July, 1650, “the brethrene that wer present declaired that yei had keepit the fast, that yei had read the warning” (Presb. Rec). See also Lamont's Diary, 7th July 1650. The appointment of Fasts to be observed on the Lord's day, was at a subsequent period disapproved of by the Church of Scotland. “Albeit by the treatise of fasting emitted by the Assembly 25 December, 1565, the Sundays were appointed for some fasts as

with his way, that they, finding the infinite distance, might have other thoughts of themselves and of him both. It is a song, it is true, but a sad song. The people of God's mourning should be of this nature,—mixed, not pure sorrow. It is hard to determine whether there be more matter of consolation or lamentation, when such a comparison is made to the life, when God's goodness and our evils are set before our eyes, which may most work the heart to such affections. Nay, I think it possible they may both contribute to both these. Is there any more abasing and humbling principle than love? How shall the sinner loathe himself in his glorious presence? Will not so much kindness and mercy, so often repeated, as oft as it is mentioned, wound the heart in which there is any tenderness? And, again, when a soul beholds its own ingratitude and evil requital of the Lord's kindness, how vile and how perverse it is, how must it loathe itself in dust and ashes! Yet is not all ground of hope removed. Such a sad sight may make mixed affections. If we be so perverse and evil, then he is infinitely good, and his mercy and goodness are above our evils; if we have dealt so with him, yet is he the Rock that changes not, he is a God of truth, and will not fail in his promise. Nay, though it be sad to be so evil, void of all goodness, yet may the soul bless him for evermore, that he hath chosen this way to glorify his name, to build up his praise upon our ruin. May not a soul thus glory in sad infirmities, because his strength is perfected in them, and made manifest? May not a soul choose emptiness in

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being for the greater ease of the people, and since by the last act of Assembly 1646, a fast is appointed on the Sabbath next except one preceding the then following General Assembly, yet seeing the work to be performed on the first day of the week is, by divine institution, already determined, we ought to set about it exactly, which we all acknowledge to be a thanksgiving and not a fast. Extraordinary duties are not to interfere with the ordinary, nor is one duty to shuffle out another. If either should be allowed, it would look somewhat like the reverse of redeeming the time, for thereby diligence is rather diminished than doubled in the service of God.”—Overtures of the General Assembly, 1705.—*Ed.*]

itself, that it may be beholden to his fulness? How refreshing a view might the saddest look on our misery and emptiness be, if we did behold his purpose of manifesting his glory in it! You see here a comparison instituted between two very unequal parties, God and man; there is no likeness, let be equality in it, yet there is almost an equality in unlikeness. The one is infinitely good and perfect; well, what shall we compare to him? Who is like thee, O God, among the gods? Angels' goodness, their perfection and innocency, hath not such a name and appearance in his sight. So then, there can be no comparison made this way. Let no flesh glory in his sight in anything, but, "let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord," for in the sight of the glorious Lord, all things do disappear and evanish. But surely nothing, though most perfect, can once come within terms of reckoning beside him for any worth. Moses sees nothing to set beside God, that will appear in its own greatness and native colours, but the creatures' evil and sin; and if this be not infinite absolutely, or equal to his goodness, yet it comes nearest the borders of infiniteness. So then, is God most perfect? Is he infinite in goodness, in truth, in righteousness, &c.—and so infinite, that before him nothing appears good?—"There is none good save one, that is God." Yet we may find another infinite, and it is in evil sinful man; and these two contraries set beside other, do much illustrate each other. It is true that his grace superabounds, and his goodness is more than the creatures' sinfulness; yet, I say, you shall not find anything that cometh nearer the infiniteness and degrees of his goodness, than the sinfulness of men. How much the more glorious he appears, so much the more vile and base doth it appear.

If ye did indeed ponder and weigh these two verses in the balance of the sanctuary, would not your heart secretly ask this question within you, Do I thus requite the Lord? O foolish and unwise! Yea, would you not account yourselves mad, to forsake the fountain of living waters, and dig broken cisterns

to yourselves? O of how great moment were this to humble yourselves to-day! This day ye are called to mourning and afflicting your souls. Now, I know not a more suitable exercise for a day of humiliation, or a principle that may more humble and abase your souls, than the serious and deep consideration of these two,—what God is, and hath been to us, and what we are, and have proved to him; what hath made so many formal humiliations that have provoked him to anger? Certainly we do not either seriously think on any of these, or if one of them, yet not on both. The most part of you know no more in such a day, but a name and ceremony of a little abstinence. Is this to sanctify a day to the Lord,—when ye do not so much as the people who bowed down their head for a day, and spread sackcloth under them? I wonder how ye think to pacify his wrath, and are not rather afraid of adding fuel and oil to the flame of his indignation. Ye come here and sit as in former times, and what do ye more either here or at home? There is no soul-affliction, no, not for a day. The most part of you are no more affected with your sins and his judgments, than if none of these things were. Now, I pray you, what shall the Lord say to us, when he speaks to the Jews in such terms, Isa. lviii. 5,—“Is it such a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul?” And do ye so much as afflict it for a day, or at all? Is this then the fast that he will choose, to abstain from your breakfast in the morning, and at night to compensate the want of it, and no more?²⁵⁸ Is this an acceptable

²⁵⁸ [“The abstinence is commanded to be from Saturday at eight of the clock at night, till Sunday eftir the exercise at eftir noone, that is, after five of the clock. And then onlie bread and drink to be used, and that with great sobrietie, that the bodie craving necessarie food, the soul may be provoked earnestly to crave of God, that which it most neideth, that is mercie for our former unthankfulnes, and the assistance of his holie spirit in tyme to cum.” (*The Ourdoure and Doctrine of the General Fast, set down by John Knox, and John Craig, at the Appoyntment of the Assemblie in the year 1565, Apud. Dunlop’s Confessions*, vol. ii. p. 686.) This Order was afterwards observed in all the fasts appointed by the General Assembly. (Id. p. 699.)—*Ed.*]

day to the Lord? The Lord upbraids the Jews, “Wilt thou call this a fast?” And what reason have we to ask you, is it possible ye think ye do indeed fast to the Lord? I cannot think that the most part of you dare say, that ever ye fasted or afflicted your souls. [363]

Always here is the way, if we consider it. To spend a day acceptably to the Lord, enter into a serious consideration of his Majesty, and yourselves. Study on these two till ye find your hearts bear the stamp of them, enlarge your hearts in the thoughts of them. Both are infinite,—his goodness and power and mercy, and your sin and misery,—no end of them. Whatever ye find good in God, write up answerably to it, so much evil and sin in yourselves and the land; and what evil ye find in yourselves and the land, write up so much goodness and mercy in his account. All the names of his praise would be so many grounds of your confusion in yourselves, and would imprint so many notes of reproach and disgrace upon the creature found so contrary to him. This is even the exercise God calls us to this day,—to consider his ways to us, and our ways to him; how he hath walked, and how we have walked. Because ye lose the sight of these two, he sends affliction,—because in our prosperity and peace we forget God, and so ourselves; as ye find this people did, “when they waxed fat they kicked against him, and forgot that he was their Rock.” We are so much taken up with our own ease and peace, that we do not observe him in his dealings; therefore doth the Lord trouble our peace, remove those things we are taken up with, make a public proclamation of affliction, and blessed be his name whose end is gracious. He means this,—it is the proclamation of all his judgments,—turn your eyes off your present ease here, consider what I am, and what yourselves are. No nation so soon buries the memory of his mercies, O how soon are they drowned in oblivion! And we forget our own provocations as suddenly. Therefore must he write our iniquities upon a rod, that we may read them in great letters; and he writes

his former goodness in the change of his dispensations, when his way to us changes, that we may know what is past. This is the great design that God hath in the world,—to declare himself and his own name, that it may be wondered and admired at by men, and this cannot be but by our ruin, abasing us in the dust. He therefore uses to stain the pride of all glory, that his alone may appear without spot. This is then the great controversy of God with men and nations in all generations. They will not see him alone exalted, and will not bow before him, and see their own vileness. Why doth he overturn kingdoms and thrones? Why doth he shake nations so often? Here it is; God's controversy will never cease, till all men acknowledge him in his highness and holiness, as the sole fountain of all life, and find themselves vile, less than nothing, nay, worse than nothing, and emptiness. If ye would then have God at peace with the land and yourselves, here is the compendious way,—set him up a throne of eminency in your hearts, and put yourselves in the dust, take with your own guiltiness and naughtiness, and impossibility to help yourselves in yourselves. Hold these two still in your eyes, that he may be alone exalted.

Look how unequal a match, ver. 4, 5, “He is the Rock,” a rock indeed! If we speak of strength, lo! he is strong; if of stability, he is the Lord, and changes not, “the Ancient of days.” Hast not thou heard and considered this, that the Almighty faints not, and wearies not? He holds forth himself in such a name to his people, a ready, all-sufficient, perpetual, and enduring refuge to all that trust in him, and fly unto him as a rock higher than they. And this is the foundation that the church is builded on, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. God's omnipotency is for defence, his eternity, faithfulness, and unchangeableness to make that sure. His mercy and goodness makes a hole in that rock to enter in, a ready access for poor shipwrecked and broken men, who have no other refuge. This is our rock, on which the church is builded, Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. x. 4.; Matt. xvi. 18. Were God

inaccessible in himself, an impregnable rock, how would sinners overcome him, and enter in to him to be saved from wrath? Nay but Jesus Christ hath made a plain way and path, out of the waves of sin and misery, into this rock higher than we; and so the poor soul that is lost in its own eyes, and sees no refuge, is forced to quit the broken ship of created confidence, for fear of perishing. Here doth it find a door in this rock to enter. And there is water to drink of, “a fountain of living waters” comes out of it, and that is Christ. [364]

Now, all these names of his praise rub so many marks of shame on his people. O how sad is the secret reproof and expostulation contained in this commendation of God! He hath been a rock to us, our refuge that we fled unto, and found sure; for as, in our straits, we mounted upon his power and were supported, when “the floods lifted up their waves,” yet have we left our rock, gone out from our strength. He offers himself a rock unto us, his fulness and all-sufficiency for us, and yet we leave the fountain of living waters, and dig broken cisterns, had rather choose our own broken ships in which to toss up and down. He abides for ever the same; though we change, he changes not. How may it reprove our backslidings, that we depart from our rock! And where shall we find a refuge in the day of indignation? Is there any created mountain, but some floods of the time will cover? Therefore it is folly and madness to forsake this rock that is still above the floods; “he is mightier than the noise of many waters.” It may reprove our unbelief,—we change our faith according to his dispensation, our faith ebbs and flows as the tide of his providence, and thus we are as sticks floating in the water, tossed up and down. But would ye be established as mount Sion? Would ye be unmoveable in the midst of great waters, that they shall not come near unto you? Then, by all means get upon this rock, that abides unmoved in the midst of the waves. Though they should beat upon it, and the wind blow, yet it is proof of all tempests. All things might be driven up and down about you

with the Lord's dispensation, but ye should abide the same, and might look round about you on the troubled sea of men's minds, of lands and estates. If you come here, ye may make shipwreck, but ye shall not drown; though ye lose the creature's comfort and defence, yet ye are on your rock, which is established before the rocks and mountains. You may be sure of salvation. He that made the rocks and winds and seas, is your rock.

“His work is perfect.” As he doth not trouble himself when all is troubled about him, so he keeps him also in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on him; so also what he doth among men, though it cannot pass without man's censure, yet it is in itself perfect, complete, without spot or defect. What is the subject of all men's questions, doubts, complaints, censures, expostulations, and such like, of which the world is full? It is some one work of God or other; there is no work of his providence, but some man finds a fault in it, and would be at the mending of it. *Neque Deus cum pluit, omnibus placet:*²⁵⁹ if he give rain, he displeases many; if he withhold it again, we are as little pleased. The reason of all this misconstruction is, we look on his work by parcels,²⁶⁰ and take it not whole and entire. [Viewed] so, it is perfect, and cannot be made better. “His works are perfect,” in relation to the beginning and original of them, his own everlasting purpose. Men often bring forth works by guess, by their purpose, so no wonder it answer not their desire. But “known to him are all his works from the beginning,” and so he doth nothing in time, but what was his everlasting pleasure. Often we purpose well, and resolve perfectly, but our practice is a cripple, execution of it is maimed and imperfect. But all his works are carved out, and done just as he designed them, without the least alteration; and, if it had not been well, would he have thought on it so, and resolved it beforehand? His works are perfect, in relation to the end to which he appointed them. It may be it is not perfect in itself: a

²⁵⁹ [That is, “Nor does God please all, when he sends rain.”—*Ed.*]

²⁶⁰ [That is, parts.—*Ed.*]

blind eye is not so perfect as a seeing eye; nay, but in relation to the glory of his name, who hath a purpose to declare his power by restoring that sight, it is as perfect. And in this sense, all the imperfection of the creatures and creation, all of them are perfect works, for they accomplish the end wherefore they were sent; and so the night declares his name, and utters a speech as well as the day, the winter as the summer, the wilderness as the fruitful field. For what is the perfection of the creature, but in as far as it accomplishes his purpose and end, as the maker of it serves himself with it? And therefore all his work is perfect, for it is all framed in wisdom to his own ends, in number, measure, and weight; it is so exactly agreeing to that, that you could not imagine it better. Again, his work is perfect, if we take it altogether, and do not cut it in parcels, and look on it so. Is there any workmanship beautiful, if ye look upon it in the doing? While the timber lies in one part, and the stones in another, is that a perfect building? When ye see one arm here, another there, and a leg scattered beside them, hath that image any comeliness? Certainly no; but look upon these united, and then they are perfect. Letters and syllables make no sense, till ye conjoin them in words, and words in sentences. Even so is it here; if ye look on the day alone, the light of it being perpetual would weary us, the night alone would be more so; but the interchange of them is pleasant,—day and night together make a distinct language of God's praise. So God hath set prosperity and adversity the one over against the other. One of them, it may be, seems imperfect; nay, but it is a perfect work that is made up of both. Spots in the face commend the beauty of the rest of it. [365]

If ye would then look upon God's work aright, look on it in the sanctuary's light, and ye shall say, "He hath done all well." Join the end with the beginning, and behold they agree very well. Many things among us seem out of order, many things uncomplete, The reformation of England, how great obstruction was in the way of it? Is that now a perfect work? Yes, certainly;

for if we knew his end and purpose, it is very well, and could not be bettered by the art of all men; “his thoughts are far above our thoughts.” The prosperous and uninterrupted success of that party in England, is it a perfect work? Yes, certainly; for if ye could behold their end, ye would say so; “they are set in slippery places, their foot shall slide in due time.”²⁶¹

Entertain this thought in your heart, that he hath done all well. Let not your secret thoughts so much as call them in question. If once ye question, ye will quickly censure them. Hold this persuasion, that nothing can be better than what he doth, nothing can be added, and nothing diminished from them, he doth all in number, weight, and measure. It is so exactly correspondent to his purpose and design, as if it were weighed out, and measured out for that end.

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Let this secretly reprove your hearts. The perfection of his works stains our works. O how imperfect are they! And which is worse, how impudent and bold are we to censure his, and absolve
 be humbled, that the Lord may be appeased, and that he may returne to the thousands of his people, and *comfort us according to the days wee have beene afflicted, and the yeares that wee have seene.* You are going, you sat, upon the deuities, for returne of the afflicted land, (you do well to do soe,) and to try the instrumentall causes and occasions of the disaster and surprisal. Looke not too much upon second causes, the pryme and originall, and only cause, is God's just displeasure: for the causes of defeats in armys, they are harder to be found out than in any other of the actions of men, a word, a sound, the mooving or remooving of any body or squadron, may be, and have beane, the causes of the losse of battles, and how often have pannicke feares seized upon them, that never any ground or resone could be given for? Lay not the fault upon this or that, coming doune, or not staing upon a ground of advantage, or upon this person or the other. That is the worst way of all, for nothing devided nor discord can stand or prosper, but leaste of all ane army; any thing of that kinde is the sodaine ruine of it. Upon any other constitution it will not worke so soone. Therefore wee intreete and charge you, as ye feare God, love his cause in your hands, have affection to your countrie, or respect to us, that you will remember, you are brethren in a covenant, and that you now stand up and joyne together as one man for religion, your countrie, your wives, children, liberties, and us, as your predecessors have done in their difficulties in their generations. Wee shall as willingly as any of them be ready to hazarde our

our own? If he have a hand in our work, these imperfect works are perfect in regard of him. As we have a hand in his perfect works, his perfect works are imperfect in regard of us.

lyfe (nay to lay it down) with you for God, the covenant, and the honor and freedom of this hitherto unconquered kyngdome, with any handful you have together, or when it shall be thought convenient.” (Thurloe’s State Papers, vol. i. p. 163.) The gross hypocrisy of Charles, in putting his name to a letter containing sentiments like these, and thus exciting false expectations in the minds of his credulous subjects, must be apparent to all who are acquainted with his subsequent history.—*Ed.*]

²⁶¹ [The army of the Commonwealth was now on its march towards Scotland, under the command of Cromwell, who had been appointed by the English parliament captain general of their forces. But the hopes of the people of Scotland had been revived by the arrival of Charles II. from Breda, about a fortnight before this, who, at the mouth of the river Spey, before he landed, had signed the national covenant, and also the solemn league and covenant, though the commission appointed to receive his subscription appear, on too good grounds, to have suspected his sincerity (Sir Edward Walker’s Hist. Disc., p. 158. Life of Rev. J. Livingston, written by himself, p. 51. Glasg. 1754.) A letter, addressed by Charles to the Committee of Estates, immediately after the battle of Dunbar, and dated Perth, 12 September, 1650, contains the following passage: “Wee cannot but acknowledge that the stroke and tryall is very harde to be borne, and would be impossible for us and you, in humane strength, but in the Lord’s wee are bold and confident, whoe hath always defended this

ancient kingdome, and transmitted the government of it upon us from so many worthy predecessors, whoe in the lyke difficulties have not fainted, and they had only the honor and civill liberties of the land to defend, but wee have with your religion, the gospel, and the covenant, *against which Hell shall not prevaile*, much lesse a number of sectains stirred up by it. Wee acknowledge, that what hath befallen is just from God for our sinns, and those of our house, and the whole land, and all the families in it, have lykewise helped to pull downe the judgement, and to kindle this fierce wrath. Wee shall strive to