

Sermon I.

1 John iii. 23.—“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another.”

It is a common doctrine often declared unto you, that the most part of those who hear the gospel do run, in their pretended course to heaven, either upon a rock of dashing discouragement, or the sands of sinking presumption. These are in all men's mouths; and no question they are very dangerous, so hazardous, as many fools make shipwreck either of the faith, or a good conscience,—of the faith, by running upon and dashing upon the rock,—of a good conscience, by sitting down upon the quicksand. But I fear that which is commonly confessed by all is cordially believed by few, and so, little regarded in our course and conversation. All Christians pretend to be making a voyage heaven-ward, and that is only home-ward. Now the gospel is given us to direct our course, and teach us how to steer between these two hazards, both safely and surely. This is the shore that shall guide us, and conduct to our intended haven, that is heaven, if we set our compass by it, and steer our course accordingly. Yet strange it is to behold the infinite wanderings and errors of men, on the one hand or the other:—some presuming upon the news of mercy, and the sound of God's grace, to walk after the imagination of their own hearts, and to live and continue in sin, for which Christ died, that he might redeem us from it, fancying a possibility of living in sin, and escaping wrath, and so abusing the tender of grace to promote licentiousness;—others, again, apprehending the wrath of God, and their just deservings, abusing the notion of God's justice, and the perfection of his holiness, to the prejudice of the glory of his grace and mercy, and their own salvation. This is certainly the cunning sleight of Satan, with the deceitfulness and ignorance of our own hearts,

that leads men, and sometimes one and the same man, at diverse times, to contrary misapprehensions of divine truths. The wind of temptation gets fires to one corner of the house and then to another, and sometimes over-persuades the notion of mercy, and another time overstretches the apprehension of his justice; and yet in effect there is no true persuasion of any of them, but a cloud or shadow is apprehended instead of them.

Now I say, there is one cure for both these,—the right apprehension of the gospel in its entire and whole sum, the right uptaking of the light which shines in a dark place, and is given to lead us to our place of rest—to have a complete model, and a short summary of the gospel, always in our heart and eye. For truly it is the apprehending of parcels of divine truth, which leads men into such opposite mistakes and courses. To remedy this, we have some brief comprehensive models of the gospel set down by the Holy Ghost, and none in better terms than this here: “This is his commandment, that ye believe,” &c. You have it in two words, faith and love. This is the form of sound words which we should hold fast, 2 Tim. i. 13. This is the mould of doctrine delivered by Christ and his Apostles. It is the separation of these two in some men's fancy, that leads too many in such paths of destruction. Truly they can as little be divided as the sun's light and heat, but the motions and shadows of them may, and it is the following the shadows of some of them which shipwrecks souls. Now not only the common multitude of the hearers of the gospel are in hazard of this, but even God's own children, who have believed in him.

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The taking up of these things apart, creates the heart much trouble and perplexity, and occasioneth much sin and stumbling. I do think it is the ignorance and advertency of this conjunction, that makes our case both more sad and sinful than otherwise it would be. And these two indeed have a mutual influence upon one another, loosing reins to sin more freely, for it unquestionably disturbs the soul's peace, and procures it much bitterness.

And again, the quitting hold of the promise of grace in Christ Jesus, and the indulging our own sad and sullen apprehensions, cannot but in the issue disable the soul from the duties of love, and expose it unto the violence of every temptation. As these two do mutually strengthen one another, the faith of Jesus Christ, and the lively apprehension of his grace and goodness, so they are the most noble and effectual persuasives to live unto him, and to walk in love. Besides, faith is the mean and way which God hath appointed to convoy his influence unto the soul; and then again, love carrying itself actively in duties to God and men, bestirring itself for God and those who are beloved of God, it brings in a supply to faith, and returns by a straight compass to the spring from whence it first issued, and increases it still more. Believing on the name of the Son sends forth the stream of holy affection to him, and all begotten of the Father, and this returns again by the circuit of obedience to his commands and submission to his easy yoke, to unbosom itself in the fountain from whence it first issued; and whereas faith was at first one simple soul adherence to a Saviour, and a hearty embracing of him, this accession of the fruits of it exalts it unto that height of assurance, and gives that evidence which it wanted; and faith being thus strengthened, and rooted, and built up to the top of assurance of God's grace, love, and salvation, it becomes more able to bear the yoke of his commands, which are not grievous. The spring of believing, thus swelled by the concurrence of so many streams, it breaks forth the more, and sends out more love and delight in God, and more charity, compassion, and meekness towards men. And this is the circle and round Christianity runs, until that day come that the head-spring of faith shall be obscured and shrivelled up in the great sea of the love of God, which shall overflow all the saints' graces in due time, when we shall see God face to face.

This is a true Christian, which this apostle so beloved of God describes. Here is one under a commandment, and not above it, as some fondly conceive. He is a keeper of his commands, and a

doer of these things which are pleasant in God's sight. This is no legal notion, if it be right taken.

It is not the bondage of the creature to be under the command of God, truly it is the beauty and liberty of a reasonable soul. Some speak of all subjection unto a law as slavery, but is it not an infinitely greater slavery to be at liberty to sin, and serve our own lusts? O wretched and base liberty! the Son indeed makes us truly free, and that from sin; and he is truly a Redeemer who redeems us from all iniquity, John viii. 32; Psal. cxxx. ult.; Tit. ii. 14.

But this commandment here spoken of, would not indeed be gospel, unless there was a prior command, a brighter precept, given by the Father to the Son. I find two commands given by the Father, and received by the Son, which two you may conjoin and make one of, as here faith and love are made one commandment. The first is, John x. 18, "I lay down my life of myself, no man taketh it from me. This commandment have I received from my Father, and no other." John xii. 49, 50, "The Father gave me a commandment, what I should say and speak, and I know that his commandment is life everlasting." This is more expressly and clearly set down, John vi. 39, 40, "This is the Father's will that sent me, that of all that he gave me I should lose none, but raise them up at the last day. This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have everlasting life." Here, then, beloved in the Lord, is the foundation of our hope, and that which makes all commandments given by God to us to come under a gospel notion, that which makes Christ's yoke easy, and his burden light, and his commands not grievous. The great commandment was imposed upon our Saviour. The great weight of that wrath due to our sins was put upon his shoulders. This was the Father's will, that he should lay down his life for his sheep; this command he received willingly, and obeyed faithfully and fully. And by his obedience to this, that great obligation to satisfy God's justice, and pay a

ransom for our souls is taken off us; inasmuch as he died, justice cannot come and demand it at our hand. Now, therefore, there is another commandment given to Christ, which directly concerns us, and it is this in substance: "I will and command that thou who hast come in the place of sinners, and resolvest to die for them, that thou give eternal life to whom thou wilt, even to as many as believe in thy name; I give to thee the absolute disposal of life and death; I command thee to preach life everlasting to all pious souls, that shall flee unto thee upon the apprehension of the danger of death, and that thou bestow that life upon them, and raise them up at the last day to be partakers of it." This is the commission the Father gave to the Son, a sweet commission for poor sinners, and the charter of our salvation. And for this errand he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and sent into the world; nay, the commission extends further than grace, even to eternal glory also. Christ has received commandment of the Father, to give repentance and remission of sin, both to give faith, and love, and all other graces, else it were defective. Thus Christ comes instructed to the world. He lays open his commission in preaching the gospel. He obeys the first commandment in his own person, by offering up himself upon the cross a sacrifice for sins, and he is about the fulfilling the next commandment, that is, the giving life to them that believe: and that he may accomplish it, having ascended himself unto heaven to intercede for us, he also sent his ambassadors into the world, to whom he hath committed the word of reconciliation, and he gives them commission to publish and proclaim this commandment in his own name. This is his command, that ye "believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." And this we do proclaim in his name, since he has gotten a commandment to give life everlasting to believers. This, then, is his charge to you, to come and receive it from him. Come and embrace him, and ye shall have life and all in him. This is the hardest and heaviest burden he imposes upon you, the weight of your life and salvation he hath taken upon himself.

But O! now come and lay hold on him, who is thus offered unto you. Know that you are lost and undone in yourselves, consider the impossibilities you lie under to escape his wrath. Behold the anger of God hanging over your head, ready to be revealed in flaming fire, and a tempestuous cloud of eternal misery. Will ye consider that ye are born heirs of wrath? Your natural inheritance is in the lake of fire; and whatsoever your endowments by nature, or your privileges by birth be, nothing shall exeeem you from this. Shall not then this Saviour be welcome to you? For truly faith is but a cordial salutation and embracement of our blessed Redeemer. The soul brings him into the house, and makes him welcome, and he is standing ready to come in to your heart, and to bring in salvation with him.

Now whatever soul hath obeyed this commandment by belief of the truth, and receiving of Christ into the heart, there is but one commandment behind, and it is not grievous, viz., love me, and love one another; love me, and live unto me. This is an easy yoke; and there is good reason for it, though it had never been required to love him, and live to him, who loved not his life unto the death for us. There is mention made only of brotherly love here, but certainly the other love to God flowing from the sense of his love, is the right wing of the soul, and brotherly love the left; and by these the pious soul mounts up to heaven with the wings of an eagle. The love of our brother is but the fruit and consequent of this love, but it is set down as a probation, and clear evidence of the love of God in our souls.

Love is commanded as the very sum and substance of the whole law, as the fountain of all other duties. Things are compacted in their causes, and lie hid within the virtue of them. Truly this is the way to persuade and constrain you to all the duties of godliness and righteousness, of piety towards God, and charity towards men,—if once we could fasten this chain of affection upon your hearts, and engage your souls by love to God and man. We cannot but beat the air, while we seek to persuade you

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to the serious practice of religious duties, of prayer in secret and in your families, of reading and meditation upon the word, of sanctifying the Sabbath, of dealing justly and moderately with all men, of sobriety and temperance in your conversation, of denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, of walking humbly with God and towards men, of restraining and subduing your inordinate lusts and passions; I say, it is almost in vain to press these things upon you, or expect them from you, till once the Spirit of power and love enter into your hearts; and indeed the spirit of love is a powerful spirit, the love of God possessing the heart within, cannot but conform all within and without to his love and good pleasure. Love only can do these things which are pleasant in his sight, for it doth them pleasantly, heartily, and cheerfully; and God loves a cheerful giver, a cheerful worshipper. Brotherly love is rather expressed, because little or not at all studied by the most part. Other duties to God, if men come not up in practice to them, yet they approve them in their soul and mind. But there is scarce a notion of the obligation of charity and love towards our brethren, yea, not so much as in the minds of Christians, let be in their practice. It is the special command which Christ left to his disciples when he was going away, John xiii. 35. But, alas! we have forgotten it, it is so long since.

Sermon II.

1 John iii. 23.—“This is his commandment, that,” &c.

We commonly make many rules in religion, and turn it into a laborious art, full of intricate questions, precepts, and contentions. As there hath been a great deal of vanity in the conception of speculative divinity, by a multitude of vain and unedifying questions which have no profit in them, or are beneficial to them that are occupied therein, but only have stirred up strife and envy, and raised the flame of contention in the Christian world; so I fear that practical divinity is no less vitiated and spoiled in this age amongst true Christians (by many perplexed cases relating to every condition), than the other among the schoolmen. Hereby it seems to me, that Christ and his apostles did not suppose it to be so perplexed a business as we now do make it; neither did the hearers weary themselves or others with so many various objections against the practice of the fundamental commandment of the gospel, believing in Jesus Christ. The plain nature of the gospel being holden forth and received, I am persuaded, was and is able (like the sun arising in brightness) to dispel and scatter all these mists and clouds which do arise both in the one and other, from ignorance at first, and which are elevated to a greater height by the custom of the times. The matter, my brethren, is not so dark as you make it. Here it is plainly and simply expressed: “This is his commandment, that ye believe in the name of his Son;” and then, “love one another.” Ye all know that we had commandments given us by God, which were by nature impressed on the heart of man; but by his fall into sin, the tables of the law (which I may say were in Adam's mind and heart, understanding and affection), those two tables were broken in the fall, and since there could be no obedience, because of ignorance and perversion, the tables breaking in pieces, their ruptures have produced these two opposite principles. The fall of man hath

broken his mind, and so darkened his understanding, and broken his will, and put it in a wrong set. This appointed it, set it in a posture of enmity against God. However, we are by this fall utterly disabled to stand up before God in acceptable obedience. There is no man breathing, how blameless soever he be before the world, but must fall down as guilty before God in many things, yea, in all things. But the law being thus obliterated out of men's consciences, as he lost ability to obey, so he lost almost all conscience of sin and disobedience. He not knowing his charge and obligation, could not accuse himself for falling in rebellion. Therefore it pleased the Lord to cause the law to be written in tables of stone in mount Sinai. He transcribes the commandments over again, that all the world may see their obligation, and how infinitely short they have come in their subjection, and how just their condemnation may be. For this purpose, the Lord causes proclaim the old bond in the ears of men with great majesty and authority, as it became the Lawgiver, that all may become guilty, and stop their mouth before God, Rom. iii. 19. He would once have all men knowing that they are under infinite breaches of his commandments, that they may see themselves also subject to his judgment. Now, what do you think of a soul that stands at the foot of this mountain, and hears a dreadful accusation read against it, to all which the conscience within must subscribe unto, and both together pronounce the person guilty and liable to eternal punishment? I say, what can such a soul do, who has with trembling heard his voice? Satisfaction there cannot be given for an infinite offence against an infinite nature. The curse and sentence which was the sanction and confirmation of this commandment is just, and there appears no way how, without violation of God's justice, it can be repealed. Obedience to these commandments is now both impossible and unprofitable;—impossible, I say, because of the weakness and wickedness of the flesh, that has no ability nor willingness but to offend and disobey; and unprofitable, because it cannot at all relax the former sentence of condemnation. Now

obedience, being a present duty, cannot pay old debts, or satisfy for our former rebellions, and so it must leave a man to seen condemnation. I fear this is a puzzle that all consciences must come unto here, or elsewhere. Here is a strait indeed.

But yet there is an enlargement, there is a way found out of bringing the soul out of the miry clay, and deep pit of misery; and it is this, God hath found out a ransom for himself, without our procurement, or consent, or knowledge. He hath provided a satisfaction to his justice in his Son Jesus Christ. Having laid upon him our iniquities, he exacts of him our deserved punishment, and makes him a curse who knew no sin. Now this being done, the Lord sends forth to all poor sinners who are trembling at mount Sinai this proclamation,—this is my last and most peremptory command, that ye believe in the name of my Son Jesus Christ. This is my well-beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased, hear ye him. Have ye heard me the lawgiver condemning you? Now go and hear him, the Mediator and Saviour, absolving you, for I have committed all judgment unto him. Though I pronounce the sentence in this world against you, yet I have committed all the execution of it to him, and if you come to him, you may prevent it. You have broken all my former commandments, and I have pronounced a sentence against you for that. But now I give a new commandment instead of all the former, which if you obey, then the sentence of death is relaxed. You who cannot obey the law and give satisfaction in your own persons, I charge you to flee unto my Son Christ, who hath given me full satisfaction both to the curse, by suffering, and to the command, by obedience, and lay hold on his righteousness as your own, and in him ye are justified, and delivered from all these sentences and hard writings against you. I give a new commandment as the cure and remedy of all broken commandments. Believe on this name, in which is salvation. Take his obedience and suffering for your cure, and present me with that, I shall be as well satisfied as with your own personal satisfaction.

This now is very plain business. All commands are broken. There is yet one published in the gospel to help all, and it is in substance to embrace and welcome Jesus Christ for all, to seek our life and salvation in him, to take him as a priest to offer sacrifice for us, and expiate our sins, and to come to him as a prophet to seek wisdom and illumination, and all grace from him; to choose him as our King, henceforth to submit to his easy yoke of government. Now I say there will be no more debates about this. Will ye yet dispute whether ye may believe or not? Will ye inquire after this whether you have a warrant or not? Truly such a question would occasion much jealousy and provocation among men. If a man had signified as much willingness by command, by invitation, by request, by frequent repetition of these, yet to call in question or dispute whether or not I may go to such a person, will he make me welcome, were it not the greatest affront I could put upon him? Would it not alienate his affection more than any thing, to be jealous of his real kindness to me.

I would desire to hold out unto you the sin, the danger, and the vanity of such a way. I say the sin is great, it is no less than the highest and most heinous disobedience to the gospel, which of all others is of the deepest dye. You have disobeyed the law, and broken all the ten commandments. And will ye therefore disobey the gospel, too, and break this fundamental commandment? Is it not enough that ye have broken the rest, and will ye break this also, which was given for the cure of all?

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Consider, I say, this is his commandment. Now commands should be obeyed, and not disputed, coming from an infallible and uncontrollable authority. Would ye not silence all the rebellions of your hearts against the commands of praying, hearing, reading, dealing justly, and walking soberly, with this one word, it is his command, it is his sovereign will? And why do ye not see the stamp of that same authority upon this? Now if you consider it aright, it hath more authority upon it than upon others, because it is his last command, and so would be taken as most

pungent and weighty. When your hearts rise up to question and dispute this matter, I pray you cut all these knotty objections with the sword of his commandment. You use to go about to loose them by particular answers and untie them at leisure with art and skill, but truly it would be a readier and wiser course to cut them in pieces at one stroke, by this piercing and pungent precept. If your reasons and scruples be weighty, and you cannot get answers to overbalance them, I pray you put this weighty seal of divine authority into the balance, and sure I am it will weigh down all. Consider then the danger of it. It is the last and most peremptory command, after which you may expect no other, but the execution of justice. How sad and severe is the certification, "He that believeth not is condemned already," and "the wrath of God abideth on him." There needs no new sentence to be pronounced against you. Why? Because, if you believe not, that prior sentence of the law is yet standing above your heads to condemn you, that wrath abides on you. This is the only way to remove it, to come to him, who hath taken it on himself, after the breach of all commands. Ye have this retreat, this refuge to flee unto, a new command to come unto the Son, and have life; but after this disobedience of the Son, you have none. There is nothing after unbelief, but ye are turned over, or rather left over, in the hand of the law and divine justice. Therefore it is the most dangerous and damnable thing to disobey this. It is to refuse the very remedy of sin. Consider also what vanity and uselessness is in these debates. What an unreasonable and senseless thing is it to dispute against our own soul, and against our own happiness! All is wrapt up here, and we do no less than the highest act of self-murder that can be. He that hateth me, wrongs his own soul. What an unreasonable thing then is it, because ye are miserable, to refuse mercy; because ye are unclean, therefore to maintain that ye are not to come to the blessed fountain of cleansing; because ye have broken the rest of the commands, therefore ye may not obey this? Is there any sense or reason in

such things; because I am a sinner, therefore I will not come to a Saviour? Alas! to what purpose was the Son sent and given, and for what end came he? Was it not to seek and to save such as are lost and undone, and to deliver them from misery? What do you gain by such questions? For at length you must turn and enter in at the door of a naked command and promise, when you have wearied yourselves to find that in your hearts which is not in them, to seek waters in the wilderness, and springs in the desert, qualifications and graces in your own hearts to warrant your boldness in coming to the promise. I say, when you have sought and all in vain, you must at length come to this fountain in which is all grace and happiness. If you had what you seek, yet if ye would indeed believe in Christ, you must deny them and look upon yourselves as ungodly, to be justified by faith. Why then do you grasp after that which can do you no good, (though you had it), I mean, in point of your acceptation? Consider it, my beloved, that the honour of God and your own happiness lies most in this, nay not only that, but your holiness too, which you pretend to seek after, lies in it. Till you come to Christ, it is in vain to seek it elsewhere.

Sermon III.

1 John iii. 23.—“And this is his commandment,” &c.

There are different tempers of mind among men, some more smooth and pliable, others more refractory and froward. Some may be persuaded by love, who cannot be constrained by fear. [559] With some a request will more prevail than a command. Others again are of a harsher disposition. Love and condescension doth rather embolden them, and therefore they must be restrained with the bridle of authority. It would seem that the Lord hath some regard to this in the administration of the gospel. He accommodates himself to the diverse dispositions of men, and (if we may say with respect to him which yet can be no disrespect, seeing he hath humbled himself lower) he doth become all things to all men, that he may gain some. You see the gospel sometimes running in the channel of love and kindness, sometimes in the channel of authority and majesty. God sometimes stoopeth down to invite, and affectionately to beseech sinners to come unto his Son for life. He hath prepared a marriage and banquet for us in Christ. He hath made all things ready for the receiving, for the eating, and he sends forth his servants to entreat and invite all such, who have no bread and clothing, who are poor and lame, to this wedding. He gives an hearty invitation to all that stand at an infinite distance from God, and so are feeding upon empty vanities without him, to come and enjoy the riches of his grace, which runs as a river in Christ between these two golden banks, the pardon of sin, and the purification of our soul from its pollution. You have a hearty invitation, Isa. lv. 1, 2, 3, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come to the waters.” But he comes yet lower to request and obtest poor sinners, as if he could have advantage by it; he will not stand⁴²⁸ to be a supplicant at any

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man's door, to beseech him to be reconciled to God, 2 Cor. v. 14, 19, 20. As if we could do him a favour and benefit, he requests us most earnestly. Truly it is strange that this doth not melt the heart, and make it fall down into the belief and obedience of the truth. Affection is the most insinuating and prevailing thing with an ingenuous spirit, most of all when it is accompanied with majesty in the person that hath it, and humility in the carriage and disposition. For a great personage to descend out of love, to affectionate and humble requests and solicitations, this cannot but have a mighty influence on any spirit that is not wild and savage. But because the heart of man is desperately wicked, and hath lost that true ingenuity and nobleness of spirit, and is now become stubborn and froward, as a wild ass, or as a swift dromedary traversing her ways, therefore the Lord takes another way of dealing with men suitable to their froward natures; he gives out his royal statute backed with majesty and authority; "This is his command," &c.—that when fair means could not prevail, other means more terrible might reduce lost rebellious men. He hedges in our way with threatenings and promises annexed to the commandment, "He that believeth has everlasting life, but he that believeth not is condemned already, and shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." He declares all men traitors if they come not in to his Son, to be reconciled to God, before the decree of wrath pass forth.

Truly it is a wonder that there should be any need either of an invitation, or a request, or a command, or a threatening; that we should need to be invited, or requested, or commanded, or threatened to our own happiness. Might not a bare and simple offer, or proposal of Jesus Christ, his nature, and offices, of the redemption and salvation purchased by him, suffice? What needed more, but to declare unto us that we are lost and utterly undone by nature, and that there is a refuge and remedy provided in Christ? Surely in any other thing of little importance, we needed no entreaty. Were it not a good enough invitation to a

man that is like to starve for hunger, to cast meat freely before him; or to a man that is in hazard of drowning, to cast a cord to him? We would seek no other persuasion to go and dig for a treasure of gold, than to show us where it is hid. But strange is the rebellious and perverse disposition of man's heart. What an enmity is in it to the ways of God! What strange inclination to self-murder, ever since man destroyed himself! We cannot express it unto you; but you may perceive it well enough, both by the Lord's frequent obtesting, and protesting to us in his word, and the experience of the great barrenness of all such means. Whence is it, I pray you, that there should need so many means to persuade you to that which is your own advantage, and to call you to shun the ways of destruction? And whence is it that notwithstanding of all those invitations, entreaties, commandments, promises and threatenings often sounding in your ears, yet the most part are not reduced to obedience, nor reclaimed from the ways of death, and do not take hold of the path of life. Truly it may plainly point out to you the desperate wickedness of the heart, the stubbornness and rebelliousness of our disposition, and if once we could persuade you of this we had gained a great point which few do seriously consider, and so do not abhor themselves. [560]

The commandments mentioned in the text are these two, to believe in Christ, and to love our brother. It is no wonder they are recommended with so much seriousness and earnestness; for they are both the most comprehensive, and the most pleasing commandments. They are most comprehensive; for it appears that all the commands spoken of in the preceding verse, are summed up in this one precept, "And this is his commandment," &c. And that they are most pleasant in God's sight is evident, for the true Christian being described from this, that he does these things that are pleasing in God's sight,—that he is one that studies to conform himself to his good pleasure, this is subjoined, as the two most pleasing exercises of Christianity, "This is his com-

mandment,” that is, his pleasing commandment, that ye should believe in Christ, and love one another.

This command of believing in Jesus is comprehensive, because it takes in all precepts, and that under a threefold consideration. It takes them all in as broken and transgressed by men, as fulfilled by Christ, and also takes them all in as a rule of righteousness, according to which the believer ought henceforth to walk.

The command of believing in Christ doth first of all import this—that a sinner should examine himself according to the law of God,—that he should lay his whole life and course his heart and ways, down before the perfect and holy commandments,—that he may stop his own mouth with shame and silence, and find himself guilty before God. Many use to speak of humiliation preparatory to believing, and the work of the law preparatory to the gospel. But truly I conceive it would be more fitly expressed, if it were holden out thus, that it is one of the essential ingredients in the bosom of believing, and one of the first articles of the gospel law, to charge all sinners to acknowledge their sin and misery, to discern their own abounding iniquity, and danger of perishing by it, how guilty they are before God, and how subject to his judgment, that so finding themselves undone, they may have recourse to a Saviour.

Truly the Spirit's work is to convince of sin, and then of righteousness, and when we are commanded to believe, the first part of our believing is crediting and subscribing to the law, to the justice and righteousness of God against us, and then the believing and acknowledging the gospel is the end and purpose to that. “Ye believe in God, believe also in me.” This takes in completely the two books of saving faith towards God as a Lawgiver and Judge, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour and Redeemer; and it doth but beget misapprehensions in many, when the one is looked upon as a condition without which we shall not be welcome to the other. Truly, I think, both are proposed as essentials of saving faith; none of them in such a

way as to procure right and warrant to the other, but only in such an order as is suitable to any reasonable nature to be wrought upon, and that is all. It is only required of you, upon that account, because fleeing unto a Saviour for refuge is a rational and deliberate action, which necessarily includes the sense of misery without him. But the sense of sin and misery is not urged as one thing which ye should go about to prepare, and fit yourselves for more welcome at Christ's hand as commonly it is taken. Here it is easy to understand how the command of believing belongs unto all who hear it, even to the vilest and grossest sinners, who are yet stout, hard hearted, and far from righteousness, (Isa. xlv. 12.) those who are spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfies not, and those whose hearts are uncircumcised, and their lives profane. And yet the commandment of coming to the Son and believing on him for life, is extended unto them all. All are invited, requested, commanded, and threatened to this duty. There is no bar of exclusion set down in the gospel to hold out one, and let in another; as many suppose these promises, that sound condition wise, to be limitations and restrictions of the right and warrant to persons to believing. Indeed it is true all are not exhorted at the first hand to assurance of God's love, and an interest in Christ. There is no question that none have right to this seal, but them [561] who have believed and set to their own seal to the character or truth of the word. But all are charged to believe in Christ that is, out of a sense of their own lost estate, to embrace a Saviour for righteousness and strength. Neither is there any fear that men can come too soon to Christ. We need not set down exclusions or extractions, for if they be not sensible of sin and misery, they will certainly not come to him at all. And therefore the command that enjoins them to believe on the Son, charges them also to believe that they are lost without him. And if the most presumptuous sinners would once give obedience to this commandment, really there would be no fear of presumption in coming too soon unto

Jesus. A sense of sin is not set as a porter, to keep out any who are willing to come in, but rather to open the door, and constrain them that were unwilling to enter in, so that if the least measure of that can do this, we are not to stand till we have more, but to come to the Prince exalted to get remission of sins, and more true gospel sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation from dead works. You should not therefore understand any promises in the scriptures so, as if there were any conditions set down to seclude any from coming, who are willing to come. For they do but declare the nature and manner of what they are invited to, that no man may mistake believing, and take his own empty presumptions or fancies, which embolden him to sin more, for that true faith which is full of good fruits.

Now, in the text, the pious soul, having once subscribed to the guilt and curse of all the commandments by believing the law, he looks also upon the Son, Jesus Christ, and finds the law fulfilled, the curse removed, all satisfied in him. He finds all the commandments obeyed in his person, all the wrath due for the breach of them pacified and quenched by his sufferings. And he gives a cheerful and cordial approbation of all this. He receives Christ as the end of the law for righteousness, which Christ made up by obedience and suffering to supply our disobedience. We should stay or rest upon this, as that which pacifies the Father's wrath to the full. This is what gives the answer of a good conscience, and pacifies every penitent soul, and secures his title to heaven. Now this presents God with a full atonement and obedience to all the law, which he accepts from a believer as if it were his own. This is the large comprehension of believing, it takes in its arms, as it were, in one bundle,⁴²⁹ all the precepts and curses, and devolves them over on Christ, puts them in an able hand, and then takes them all, as satisfied and fulfilled by him, and holds them up in one bundle to the Father. And hence it

⁴²⁹ [Parcel.—*Ed.*]

proceeds, in the third place, that believing on the Son takes in all again to be the rule of walking and the mark to aim at. Finding such a perfect exoneration of by-gones⁴³⁰ in Christ and standing in such favour with God, the soul is sweetly constrained to love and delight in the divine laws. And truly this is the natural result of faith. I wish you may rightly observe this conjunction, that this is inseparably knit with it, love to God and men, delight to do his will, to love him, and live unto him. Do not deceive yourselves with vain words. If you find not the smartness of the gospel, and the doctrine of grace laying this restraint upon the heart, ye are yet in your sins. This is the reasoning of a believing soul. Shall I, who am dead unto sin, live any longer therein? Shall I not delight in those commandments, when Christ hath delivered me from the curse of the law? Though such a one fall, and come short, yet the pressure of the heart is that way. But then attend unto the order, ye must first believe on the Son, and then love him, and live unto him. Ye must first flee unto his righteousness, and then the righteousness of the law shall be wrought in you. Therefore do not weary yourselves to no purpose. Do not wrong your own souls by seeking to prevent this order, which was established for your joy and salvation. Know that you must first meet with satisfaction in all the commands of Christ, before obedience to any of them be accepted, and having met with that, know that the sincere endeavour of thy soul, and the affectionate bent⁴³¹ of thy heart to thy duty, is accepted. And if ye find yourselves thereafter surcharged with guilt and unanswerable walking, yet ye know the way is to begin at this again, to believe in the Son. This is the round you must walk, as long as ye are in the body. When you are defiled, run into the fountain, and when you are washed, study to keep your garments clean, but if defiled again, get your hearts washed from wickedness. “These things,” says John, “I write to you that ye sin not,” who believe but if any sin,

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⁴³⁰ [Such a disburdening of former offences.—*Ed.*]

⁴³¹ [Inclination.—*Ed.*]

who desire not to transgress, you have a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

Now love is a very comprehensive command. It is the fulfilling of the whole law, Rom xiii. 10, Matth. xxii. 37, 38. It is indeed the true principle and pure fountain of our obedience unto God and men. All fruits of the Spirit are moral virtues that grow out of the believer. Whether pleasant unto God, or refreshing unto men, they are all virtually in this root of love, all the streams are compacted in this fountain. Therefore he names one for all, viz. brotherly love, which is the bond of perfection, Col. iii. 14. It is a bundle of many divine graces, a company or society of many Christian virtues combined together. They are named bowels of mercies, long suffering, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness, all which are tied to the believer's girdle by charity, so that where love is, every good comes. After it a troop of so many sweet endowments and ornaments also come, and where this is wanting, (as truly it is the epidemical disease of the time), there are many sins abounding, for when iniquity abounds "the love of many shall wax cold," Matt. xxiv. 12. Oh! that is our temper or rather our distempered nature,—love cold, and passion hot! When charity goes away, these wild and savage beasts of darkness come forth, viz. bitter envying and strife, rigid censuring and judging, unmercifulness and implacableness of spirit upon others' failings and offences. Self love, that keeps the throne, and all the rest are her attendants. For where self love and pride is, there is contention, strife, envy, and every evil work, and all manner of confusion. Thus they lead one another as in a chain of darkness, Prov. xiii. 10, James iii. 16. Think not that love is a complimentary word, and an idle motion of loving, it is a more real thing, a more vital thing. It hath bowels of mercy, they move themselves when others are moved, and they bring their neighbours misery into the inmost seat of the heart, and make the spirit a solemn companion in misery. And it is also exercised in forbearing and forgiving. Charity is

not easily provoked, therefore it can forbear, is easily appeased, therefore it can forgive, it is not soon displeased, or hard to be pleased, “forbearing and forgiving one another in love.” Study then this grace more. See it to be the fulfilling of the law, for “the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.” The end of the law is not strife and debate, nor such intricate and perplexed matters as minister endless questions and no edification. Though men pretend conscience and scripture, yet the great end of both is violated, that is charity, which mainly studies edification in truth and love. And therefore it is a violent perversion of the commandment, or word, to overstretch every point of conscience, or difference, so far as to the renting of Christian peace and unity. What hath kindled all these names of bloody war, what hath increased all these fiery contentions among us, but the want of this? As James says of the tongue, so I may speak of uncharitableness and self love, they set on fire the course of nature, and they are set on fire of hell. The true zeal and love of God, is like that elementary fire of which they speak, that in its own place hath a temperate heat, and doth not burn or consume what is about it. But our zeal is like the fire that is mixed with some gross matter, a preying, devouring, and consuming thing, zeal down in the lower region of man's heart, it is mixed with many gross corruptions, which are as oil and fuel to it, and gives it an extreme intemperate destroying nature.

But then consider, that this commandment of love is our Lord and Saviour's last testamentary injunction to his disciples, John xiii. 34, 35. “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” It is Christ's latter will, and given us as a token and badge of discipleship. Every profession hath its own signs and rules, every order their own symbol, every rank their own character. Here is the differential or peculiar character and livery of a Christian, brotherly love,—“By this shall all men

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know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another," &c. I remember a story of a dying father who called his sons to him on his death bed, and having sent for a bundle of arrows, he tried them one by one if they could break them, and when they had all tried this in vain, he caused loose the bundle, and take the arrows one by one, and so they were easily broken, by which he gave them to understand, that their stability and strength would consist in unity and concord, but, if love and charity were broken, they were exposed to great hazard.⁴³² I think our Lord and Saviour gives such a precept unto his disciples at his departure out of this world,—“A new command I give unto you,” &c. (John xiii. 34)—to show them that the perfection of the body, into which they were all called as members, consisted in that bond of charity. And indeed love is not only a bond or bundle of perfection in respect of graces, but in regard of the church too. It is that bond or tie which knits all the members into one perfect body, Col. iii. 14, 15, 16. Without this bond, all must needs be rents, rags, and distractions.

Now I shall add but one word of the other, that these commands are pleasing in God's sight. And truly believing in the Son must be grateful to him, not only from the general nature of obedience to his will, but also because this doth most honour both to the Father and to the Son. The Father counts himself much honoured, when we honour the Son, and there is no honour the creature can be in a capacity to give unto him like this, to cast all our hope, and hang all our happiness upon him, (John v. 23, 24), to set to our seal that he is true and faithful, (John iii. 33), which is done by believing. But most of all, this is pleasing in his sight because the Father's good pleasure centres in the same point with the soul's good pleasure, that is, on the well beloved Son, Christ. Therefore faith must needs be well pleasing to the Father, for what is faith else but the soul's complacency

⁴³² [De Agricola filios suos docente. Æsop. Fab. p. 98. Oxon. 1653.—*Ed.*]

and satisfaction in the Son. As the Father is already well pleased with his death and sufferings, so he propones and holds him out in the gospel, that you may be as well pleased with him as he is. This is believing indeed, to be pleased with him as the Father is pleased, and this pleases the Father too. Oh that you could understand this! The gospel is not brought unto you, that you may reconcile God, and procure a change in his affection, but for this end, to beseech you to be reconciled unto God, to take away all hostile affections out of your heart. And this is the business we have to do, to persuade you that the Father holds him abundantly contented with his Son. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And to move you to be as well contented with him as he is, he says, "Hear him. I hear him for you, hear ye him for me. I hear him interceding for you, hear ye him beseeching you." Now this may take down all ground of jealousy concerning our welcome and acceptance, it cannot but be an acceptable and pleasing thing to God, that the affection and desire of the soul fall in and embosom itself with his good pleasure upon Christ his Son.

And then, in the next place, it is well pleasing to God that ye love one another, not only because he shall see his own image and likeness in your love, (for there is nothing in which a Christian more eminently resembles his Father, or more evidently appears to be a child of the Highest, than in free loving all, especially the household of faith, and forbearing and forgiving one another, and so he cannot choose but like it well), but especially, because your love concentrates too, and meets upon the same objects with his love, these whom the Father so loved, that he gave his only begotten Son for them, and the Son so loved them, that he gave himself for them. If these be thy delight, and thou forbear them as the Father and the Son hath done, that conspiracy of affections into one point cannot but be pleasing unto him. Now, if these please him so well, whom should they not please?