

Sermon VI.

Matth. xi. 28.—“Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are wearied,” &c.

It is the great misery of Christians in this life, that they have such poor, narrow, and limited spirits, that are not fit to receive the truth of the gospel in its full comprehension; from whence manifold misapprehensions in judgment, and stumbling in practice proceed. The beauty and life of things consist in their entire union with one another, and in the conjunction of all their parts. Therefore it would not be a fit way to judge of a picture by a lineament, or of an harmony by a discrepant, nor of the world by some small parcel of it; but take all the parts together, all the notes and draughts, as conjoined by art in such an order, and there appears nothing but beauty and consent. Even so it falls out in our conceptions of the gospel. The straitness and narrowness of our spirits takes in truth by parcels, disjointed from the whole, looks upon one side of it, and sees not the other. As for example, sometimes there appears unto us our duty and strait obligation to holy walking and this being seen and considered alone, ordinarily fills the soul with some fear, jealousies, and confusion. Another time, there rises out from under the cloud, the mercy and peace of Christ in inviting, accepting, and pardoning sinners, by his blood, that cleanses from all sin; and in that view (such is our weakness and shortness of sight) there is nothing else presented but pardoning grace; and hence there is occasion given to the corruption of our hearts, to insinuate secretly and subtly unto us some inclinations to more liberty, and indulgence to the flesh. Thus you see what stumbling in practice, and disorder in walking, this partial way of receiving the truth occasioneth. But it hath no less influence upon the many controversies and differences in doctrine and opinion, about grace and works. For from whence arise these mistakes on both hands, but from the straitness of

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our apprehensions, that we do not take the truth of God in its full latitude, but being eager upon one part and zealous of it, we almost lose the remembrance, and sometimes fall, in wrangling with the other? Many that proclaim the free grace of the gospel, their fault is, not that they make it freer than it is, for truly it is as free of any Antinomian can apprehend it, but rather because they take it not in its entire and full complexion, which best declares the freedom of it, as comprehending both the pardon of sin and purity from sin, grace towards us and grace within us; and so, while they only plead for the one, they seem at least to oppugn the other. And, in like manner, others apprehending the necessity, beauty, and comeliness of holiness and new obedience, are much in pressing and declaring this in opposition to the other way; in which there may be some mistake, not in making it more meritorious than it is, but at leastwise⁴⁴¹ in such a manner it may be holden out, as may somewhat obscure the freedom of God's grace. The occasion of both these misapprehensions may be from the scattering of these diverse parcels of truth, as so many pearls in the field of the scripture; one is found here, and one takes it up, as if there were no more; here is repentance, and away he goes with that, without conjoining these scattered pieces into one body. But yet our Saviour sometimes gives us complete sums and models of the gospel, in which he presents all at one view at once, and especially in these words now read. The sum of all the gospel is contained in two words, "Come unto me," and "take my yoke upon you." All the duty of a Christian, and all his encouragement is here. His duty is to believe in Christ, and to give himself up to his obedience, and become his disciple, and to follow his example; and his encouragement is the rest promised, rest to his soul,—which is the only proper seat, of rest or disquiet. It is most capable and sensible of both,—and this rest includes in its bosom, not only peace and tranquillity of mind here, which

⁴⁴¹ [Perhaps it should be *at least, less.*—*Ed.*]

all the creatures combined cannot give, but all felicity besides; that eternal rest from all the labours of this life, and complacency in the fruition of God for ever. You see, then, what is the full invitation of the gospel. It is nothing else but come, and have rest. "Take on an easy yoke, and ye shall find rest. Come and be happy. Come and receive life. That which you seek elsewhere, both ignorantly and vainly, here it is only to be found. Come (says Christ), and I promise to give it unto you. Wait upon me by obedience, and you shall at length find by experience, that rest which I am willing to give you."

I desire you may consider both the order and the connexion of these integral parts of the gospel. The order of the gospel is a great part of the gospel. In some things method is arbitrary, and it matters not which go before, or which follow after, but here they become essential, and so a great part of the matter itself. There must be first coming to Christ, and then taking on his yoke; first believing, then obeying his commandments. This is as essential an order, as is between the fruit and the root, the stream and the fountain, the sun-beam and the sun. Will any man expect fruit till he plant? There must then first be the implanting of the soul into Christ by faith, and then in due season follow the fruits of obedience by abiding in him. The perverting of this order makes much disorder in the spirits and lives of Christians. But how can it choose but all must wither and decay, if the soul be not planted by this river, whose streams gladden the city of our God, if the roots of it be not watered with the frequent apprehension and consideration of the grace of Christ, or the riches of God's mercy? The way and method of many Christians is just opposite to this. For you labour and weary yourselves, how to attain some measure and satisfaction in the latter, before you adventure the first, to have the heart humbled by godly sorrow, and the soul inflamed by love to God, and the yoke of his obedience submitted unto; while in the mean time you deliberately suspend the exercise of faith, and apprehension of the pardoning grace of

Christ. Now, how this can consist either with sound reason or religion, I do not see. For were it not a point of madness to seek fruits from a tree that is lying above ground, and to refuse to plant it till it give some experience of its fruitfulness in the air? And what can be more absurd, than to imagine to have the Spirit of Christ working in the heart godly sorrow, or Christian love, and so renewing it again to his image, and yet withal Christ not received into the heart by faith? Do you not know that this is his first entrance into the soul? He enters there by the door of faith, and a soul enters into him at the door of the promise by faith. How then do ye imagine he shall work in you, before you will admit him to come in to you? Besides, either you apprehend that you may attain to such gracious qualifications by your own industry without Christ, which is blasphemous to his name and office; for if you may, what need have you of him? Or, if you believe that he is the only treasure of all grace and wisdom, and that all things are delivered to him of the Father, then how do you seek these things without him? It must be wretched folly to seek them elsewhere, and not come to him. And indeed it is observable, that this exhortation to come unto Christ is subjoined unto ver. 27, "All things are delivered unto me by the Father." And therefore, seeing all grace, and life, and happiness is enclosed in me, seeing without me there is nothing but a barren wilderness, in which you may toil and labour, and weary yourselves in fruitless pursuits, come hither where it is originally and plentifully seated, and you cannot miss your end, nor lose your labour. And for the farther illustration of this subject, I shall only add that,

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Secondly, There is another woful mistake possesses your minds who take up this way, for certainly you must think that there is some worth or dignity in it, whereby you intend to recommend yourselves unto Christ. For to what purpose is that anxious and scrupulous exaction of such previous qualifications, if it be not to give some more boldness and confidence to thy mind, to adventure to believe the promises and come to Christ, because

thou thinkest thou canst not come when thou art so unclean and so unworthy? And therefore thou apprehendest that thou canst so purge thyself from sin and adorn thyself with graces, as may procure some liking, and procure some favour at Christ's hand, which is indeed very opposite to the tenor of the proposal of free grace in the gospel in which there is nothing upon the creature's part required as a condition or qualification to make them the more welcome in coming to Christ.

Let this word then abide with you: "Come unto me, and take my yoke upon you, and learn of me," which in substance is this, Come and cast your burdens on me first, and then take my burden upon you. O it is a blessed exchange! Cast your heavy burden upon my back, and take my light burden on yours. For what is it to invite them that labour and are ladened to come, but to come and repose themselves for rest upon him? And that is directly to lay over that which burdens and ladeneth them upon him. There is an unsupportable burden of sin, the guilt of sin, and there is an intolerable weight of wrath. "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head (Ps. xxxviii. 4.) and as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me." And when the wrath of God is joined to this burden, the name of the Lord burning with anger, how may you conceive a soul will be pressed under that burden, which is so heavy, that it will press the mountains into valleys, make the sea flee out of its place, and the earth tremble? Now here is the invitation. Is there any penitent soul that feels the burden of the weight of sin and wrath? Let them come and disburden their souls of care, fear, and anxiety, in this blessed port of rest and refuge for poor sinners. Is there a yoke of transgressions wreathed about thy neck, and bound by the hand of God, (Lam. i. 14) a yoke that neither men nor angels are able to bear? Then, I beseech you, come hither, and put over your yoke upon Jesus Christ. Tie it about him for God hath laid upon him the iniquities of us all, and he bore our sins. He did bear the yoke of divine displeasure, and it was bound about his neck with God's own hand, with his own

consent. Now, here is the actual liberty and the releasement of a soul from under the yoke, here is its actual rest and quiet from under the pain of this burden, when a soul is made to consent unto, and willingly to put over that burden upon Christ. And this freedom and vacancy from the unsupportable yoke of guilt, will certainly dispose the soul, and make it more capable of receiving the easy and portable yoke of his commandments. I or you may easily perceive how easy love maketh all things, even difficulties themselves. Let once a soul be engaged that way to Christ, (and there is no possibility of engaging it in affection without some taste and feeling, or believing apprehension of his love and sufficiency for us,) and you will see that the rough way will be made plain and the crooked way straight, heavy things light, and hard things easy. For what command can be grievous to that soul who apprehends that Christ hath taken the great weight of wrath off it, and carried away the intolerable pain of its guiltiness, which would have pressed and depressed it eternally, without any hope of relaxation or ease? Hath he borne a yoke bound on by the majesty of God, and fastened with the cords of his displeasure? And can it be so heavy to a believing soul to take up that obedience which is fastened with the cords of love? And besides, how much will faith facilitate this, and make this yoke to be cheerfully and willingly submitted to, because it delivers the soul from those unsufferable cares and fears, which did quite enervate its strength, and take away its courage? For, I pray you, what is there in a soul under the fear of wrath, that is not totally disabled by that heavy pressure for any willing or cheerful obedience? The mystery⁴⁴² of the spirit is spent that way, the courage of the soul is defeated, the heart is weakened, and nothing is

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⁴⁴² [The word *mystery* seems to be used here in the sense of *energy*. It is sometimes spelt by Scottish writers *mister* and *myster*, and signifies an art or calling, being derived from the old French word *mestier*, a trade. When employed to denote something above human intelligence, it has a different origin (being formed from $\mu\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$, a secret).—*Ed.*]

suitable to the yoke of Christian love and obedience. But when once a soul apprehends Christ, this is a reposition of all his cares and burdens, and comes to exoner⁴⁴³ his soul in him, and cast his burthen upon him. Then the soul is lightened as it were for this journey, then he may walk in the ways of obedience, without the pressing fear and pushing anguish of the dread of condemnation of the law. To conclude this head, nothing will make you take up this yoke willingly, or bear it constantly, except you be delivered from the other yoke that was so heavy even to Christ, and that made him cry, “My soul is exceeding heavy and troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour.”

Now, these who are here in the text invited to come unto Christ,—you see them described to be labouring and heavy laden persons. “Come unto me, all ye that labour,” &c. At least it seems to hold forth a previous qualification and condition of believing, without which we may not venture to come unto Christ. Indeed it is commonly so taken, and mistaken. Many conceive that the clause is restrictive and exclusive, that is to say, that this description of burdened and wearied sinners is a limitation of the command of believing, and that it circumscribes the warrant of coming to Christ, as if none might lawfully come unto him but these that are thus burdened, and thus it is supposed to be a bar, set upon the door of believing at which sinners must enter in to Christ, to hold out, and shut out all those who are not thus qualified for access, which I truly conceive is contrary to the whole strain and current of the dispensation of the gospel. Therefore I take it to be rather declarative, or ampliative, or both. I say, it is partly for declaration, not of the warrant to come, but of the persons who ordinarily do come to Christ. It declares not simply and universally who should come, but those who actually do come unto Christ. Take it thus then. All persons who hear the gospel are invited to come unto our Saviour without exception,

⁴⁴³ [Exonerate, or unburthen.—*Ed.*]

the blind, the lame, those on the highways, not only the thirsty and the hungry, (Isa. lv. 1.) but those who have no thirst or hunger for righteousness, but only for things that do not profit (ver. 2), not only the broken hearted, that desire to come near to righteousness, but even the stout hearted that are far from righteousness. Such are commanded to hearken, and incline their ear, Isa. xlvi. 12, lv. 2, 3. Now, this command that reaches all, gives an immediate actual warrant and right to all to come, if they will. For what is required previous to give warrant to obedience, but the command of obedience? And therefore the Jews were challenged, because they would not come to Christ that they might have life. Now then there is no bar of seclusion set upon the door of the gospel, to keep out any soul from entering in. There is no qualification or condition prescribed by the gospel, and without which if he come, he is actually welcomed and received by Christ, whatsoever you suppose he wants. It is true, men's own security and unbelief will exclude them from Christ, but that is no retraction on the gospel's part. It is a bar set on a man's own heart, that shuts him up from coming to the patent entry of the gospel.

Therefore I take it thus, that though all ought to come to Christ, and none that are indeed willing are debarred for the want of any supposed condition, yet none will actually and really come, till they be in some measure sensible of the weight of their sins, and the wrath of God, till they are labouring under the feeling of their own misery and desperate condition. And whatsoever be the measure of this, if it give so much uneasiness to a man that he can be content with rest and ease in Christ, he may, and certainly ought, to come unto Jesus, and cast all his burdens upon him. I think then, that way that is in so frequent use among Christians, to sit down, and essay to bring our hearts to some deep humiliation, and so to prescribe and order it, as we will deliberately delay, and suspend the thoughts of believing, till we have attained something of this,—I say, this way crosses the

very intention of Christ in uttering these words, and such like. For certainly he meant to take away impediments, and not to cast delays in our way. And therefore I said the word was rather for ampliation, that is, rather to encourage these who accounted themselves excluded, than to exclude any who desire to come. "Come unto me, every one, but especially you that labour, ye should make the greatest haste. Come unto me even though ye apprehend the wrath of God to be intolerable, and have foolishly wearied yourselves in seeking rest by other ways. Ye that are most apprehensive of your sins, and so are apt to doubt of any acceptation,—you that think yourselves worse than any, and so to have least warrant to come to me,—yet come, and I will by no means cast you out, but give rest to your souls." So that it is not intended to exclude those who are most ready to think themselves excluded, because they see so much sin in themselves.

Therefore, my beloved, without further disputing about it, let me exhort you in the name of Jesus Christ, who here invites and commands you, that you would at once put a period to this, and bring it to some conclusion. Since you are diseased and disquieted in yourselves, and cannot find rest in your own bosoms, I beseech you come here, where it is most likely to be found, and it is most certain, if you come you shall find it. Do not continue wrangling and contesting about the matter; for what is that but to increase your labour, and vexation, and add to your heavy burden? It will be so far from giving you any ease in the result of it, that it will rather make your wounds more incurable, and your burdens more intolerable, which is both opposite to the intention of the gospel and the nature of believing. Here then is your rest, here is your refreshing rest. Here it is in quiet yielding to his gracious offers, and silent submitting to the gospel, not in bawling or contending with it, which is truly a contending against ourselves. Isa. xxviii. 12. This is the rest, wherewith you may cause the weary to rest. It is nowhere else, not in heaven or earth, for there is no back that will take on this burden or can

carry it away from us. There is no disburdening of a sinner of guilt and wrath, in any other port or haven, but in Christ, who is the city of refuge. Wheresoever you think to exoner yourselves besides this, you will find no refreshing, but a multiplication of burdens and cares. Your burden shall be rolled over upon you again with double weight. Therefore, my beloved, if you will not hear this, consider what follows, viz. you shall refuse this rest and refreshing and restlessly seek another rest. You may go and be doing, but you shall fall backward, and be broken and snared. Your burden shall fall back upon you, and you shall fall and be broken under it. That which the Lord said to Israel when they would flee to Egypt, is most true in this case. "In returning, and in rest ye shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be your strength;" but alas! they would not, that is a sad close.

Sermon VII.

Matt. xi. 20.—“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me,”
&c.

Self love is generally esteemed infamous and contemptible among men. It is of a bad report every where, and indeed as it is taken commonly, there is good reason for it, that it should be hissed out of all societies, if reproaching and speaking evil of it would do it. But to speak the truth, the name is not so fit to express the thing, for that which men call self love, may rather be called self hatred. Nothing is more pernicious to a man's self, or pestilent to the societies of men than this, for if it may be called love, certainly it is not self love, but the love of some baser and lower thing than self, to our eternal prejudice. For what is ourselves, but our souls? Matt. xvi. 26, Luke ix. 25. For our Lord there shows that to lose our souls, and to lose ourselves, is one and the same thing. But what is it to love our souls? Certainly it is not to be enamoured with their deformed shape, as if it were perfect beauty? Neither can it be interpreted, any true love to our souls, to seek satisfaction and rest unto them, where it is not at all to be found, for this is to put them in perpetual pain and disquiet. But here it is that true self-love, and soul love centereth, in that which our Saviour propounds, namely, to desire and seek the everlasting welfare of our souls, and that perpetual rest unto them, after which there is no labour nor motion any more. Therefore, to draw unto himself the souls of men the more sweetly, and the more strongly too, he fasteneth about them a cord of their own interest, and that the greatest, real rest; and by this he is likely to prevail with men in a way suited to their reasonable natures. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are wearied, and I will give you rest.” Self interest is ordinarily exploded, at least disowned and disclaimed in men's discourses, as a base, wretched, sordid thing, which, though all men act by it, yet they

are all ashamed to profess. But yet, if the interest be so high as indeed to concern self, and that which is truly our self, then both nations and persons count it the most justifiable ground of many of their actions, self preservation. But yet there is a higher interest than that, that relates to the eternal interest of our souls. And truly to own and profess, and prosecute that interest of soul preservation, of eternal rest to our souls, is neither ignoble, nor unbeseeming a Christian; neither is it any way inconsistent with the pursuance of that more public and catholic interest of God's glory, in respect of which all interests, even the most general and public, are particular and private. For this is the goodness of our God, that he hath bound up his own honour and our happiness in one bundle together; that he hath knit the rest of our precious souls, and the glory of his own name inseparably together, not only to condescend to our weakness, but to deal with us suitably to our natures. He proposes our own interests chiefly, to draw us to himself, and allows this happy self seeking in which a man loses himself, that he may be found again in Christ. Seeing then it is thus, that elsewhere, wheresoever you turn yourselves, within or without, there is no rest, but endless labour, and fruitless toil, (you find this already by experience, you who apprehend the weight of your sins, and the greatness of divine wrath,) that there is an intolerable pressure upon your souls already, and that this is nothing diminished, but rather augmented, by your vain labours and inquiries after some ease and peace,—your endeavours to satisfy your own consciences, and pacify God's wrath some other way, having filled you with more restless anxiety, and seeing there is a certain assurance of true rest and tranquillity here, upon the easiest terms imaginable, that is, “come to Jesus Christ, all ye who are disquieted and restless, and he will give you rest,”—O should not this be an invincible and irresistible attractive to your hearts, to draw them to our Redeemer over all impediments? The rest is perfect happiness; and yet the terms are easy. Only come and embrace it, and seek it nowhere else. There is a kind of

quietness and tranquillity in the seeking and attaining this rest. All other rests are come to by much labour and business. Here Christ would have you,—who have laboured in vain for rest, and lost your toil and your pains,—to come at it, by ceasing from labour, as it were, that which you could not attain by labour, to come by it, *cunctando* (by keeping quiet), which you could not gain *pugnando* (by fighting). There is a quiet and silent way of believing promises, and rolling yourselves upon Christ offered in them, which is the nearest and most compendious way to this blessed rest and quietness, which, if you think to attain by much clamour and contention of debate or dispute, or by the painful labour and vexation of your spirits, which you call exercise of mind,—you take the way about, and put yourselves further off from it. Faith has a kind of present vacancy and quietness in it, in the very acting of it. It is not a tumultuous thing, but composes the soul to quietness and silence, to a cessation from all other things but the looking upon Christ holden out in the gospel, and this in due time will give greater rest and tranquillity. Consider what the Lord speaks to the people that would take a journey [582] upon them to Egypt, (Isa. xxx. 15). “In returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” Their peace was near hand, but they would travel abroad to seek it, and they find trouble. Their strength was to sit still and be quiet, and trust in the Lord. Nay, but they would not sit still, but flee and wander abroad to their old house of bondage, and therefore, says the Lord, you shall flee. Now, may not this represent the folly and madness of souls that are under the fear of wrath and sense of sin, and be as it were a type of it? Our rest is in resting on a Saviour, our peace is in quiet confidence in him, it is not far off, it is in our mouth. “The word is near” (says Paul), it is neither in heaven above, nor in the depth below. We need not go abroad and search for that happiness we want. It is nigh at hand in the gospel, but while we refuse this, and give ourselves to restless agitation and perplexity about it, sometimes

we apprehend that we are eased in our travels and endeavours, but it shall prove to us no better than Egypt a house of bondage. Wheresoever we seek shelter out of Christ, we will find it a broken reed, that not only will fail under us, but in the rent will split our hand, and pierce us through with many sorrows. To conclude then this head, coming to Christ with our burdens is a motion towards rest. For he adds, "I will give you rest." But moreover, there is a kind of rest in this motion. It is an easier, plainer, and pleasanter motion, than these troubled and laborious windings and wanderings of our hearts after vanity. He persuades you to walk in this path of pleasantness and peace, and you shall find a great rest at the end of it, "receiving (says Peter) the end of your faith the eternal salvation of your souls."

Now the next thing in the text is, having come to Jesus, and found rest and happiness in him, we must take his yoke upon us. And this is the other integral part of the gospel, of which I desire you to consider these few particulars, that occur in the words,—The order in which it is to be taken on,—The nature of this yoke,—And the most ready and expeditious way of bearing it.

The method and order in which Christ's yoke is to be taken upon us, is first, To come unto our Saviour, and give over the yoke of our transgressions to him, and then to take up the yoke of his commandments from him, to believe in his promises, and rest our souls on them, and to take up the yoke of his precepts, and proceed to motion, and walking in that rest. Now this method hath a double advantage in it, for the real receiving and carrying of Christ's yoke. It gives vacancy and room for it, and it gives strength and furniture⁴⁴⁴ for it. It expels that which would totally disable you to bear it, and brings in that comfortable supply, which will strengthen and enable you to bear it. Consider what posture a soul is put into, that lives under the terror of God, and is

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filled with the apprehension of the guilt of sin and the greatness of God's wrath. I say, such a soul, till he have some rest from that grievous labour, is fit for no other more pleasant labour, until he be something disburthened of that which is like to press him down to hell. He is not very capable of any new burden, until the yoke of his transgressions that is wreathed about his neck be taken off. Do ye think he can find any vacant room for the yoke of Christ's obedience? When a soul is under the dominion of fear and terror, under the power of grief and anguish, do ye think he is fit for any thing, or can do any thing, but groan in that prison of darkness, under these chains? Such a soul is in bondage, under servitude, and can neither take up this yoke of liberty nor walk in it. The strength and moisture of the spirit is drunk up by the poison of these arrows, and there remains neither attention, affection, nor spirit for any thing else. Therefore here is the incomparable advantage that redounds from this way of coming first to Christ, and exonerating our cares and fears in his bosom, and in disburthening our sins upon him, who hath taken them on, and carried them away, as that scape goat sent unto the wilderness on which they laid the sins of the people. By this means, I say, you shall have a vacancy for the yoke of Christ and liberty to all your faculties, your understanding, will, and affections, (which are no better than slaves and captives, *non sui juris*, while they are under these tyrannous passions of fear and horror,) to attend the obedience of Christ and the drawing of his yoke. This will relieve your souls out of prison, and then you will be fit for employment. Besides this, there is furniture and help brought into the soul, which enables it to this; and without which, though it were not pressed under a burden of sin and wrath, yet it would neither be able nor willing. There is that supply and strength that faith brings from Christ, which arises from our mystical implantation in him, from hence flows that communication of his grace to a believer. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ, John i. 16, 17. Now

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this efficacy and virtue that is in Christ the head, is transmitted unto the members of his body by believing in him. Indeed the very apprehension of such a Saviour may have some quickening virtue in it, but certainly the great influence of life is annexed to it by his gracious promises, "Because I live, ye shall live also," John xiv. 19. "As the living Father who sent me, lives in himself, and I have life by the Father, so he that believes on me, shall live by me," John vi. 57. "Abide in me, and I in you, and ye shall bring forth much fruit." He hath graciously appointed the derivation of that life to us, to be conjoined with our right apprehensions, and believing meditations of him, making, as it were, faith the opening of his house, to let in his fulness to us. Now, besides this more mysterious and supernatural furniture and supply, there is even something that is naturally consequent to it, some enabling of the soul for holy obedience, flows naturally from the love of Christ. And when ever a believer apprehends what he has done for him, finds some rest and relaxation in him, it cannot but beget some inward warmth of love to him who so loved us. "Faith worketh by love," says Paul. The way it goes to action is by affection. It at once inflames that, and then there is nothing more active and irresistible. It hath a kind of indefatigable firmness in it, it hath an unwearied strength to move in the yoke all the day long. In a word, nothing almost is impossible or too hard for it, for it is of the nature of fire to break through all, and over all impediments. Nothing is so easy but it becomes uneasy to a soul under fear, and nothing so difficult but it becomes easy to a soul wherein perfect love has cast out fear. For love makes a soul to move supernaturally in divine things, as a natural or co-natural agent, freely, willingly, and constantly. If they be not suitable to our natures as corrupted, and so, grievous to love, then, as much as it possesses the heart, it makes the heart co-natural to them, and supplies the place of that natural instinct that carries other creatures to their own works and ends, strongly and sweetly. 1 John v. 3, Psal. cxix. 165, Neh. vii. 10, Col. iii. 15. Now

you may judge whether or not you can possibly expect so much advantage in any other method or way you take. This I leave to your own consideration and experience.

And so I come to the next thing proposed, *secondly*, To consider what this yoke is, and what is the nature of it. And may I not upon this head justly enough distinguish a twofold yoke, of doctrine and discipline, that is, the yoke of Christ's commandments and laws, which both, in his love and wisdom, he hath imposed upon us, for the regulation of our lives? And this we are to take on by an obedience cheerful, willing, and constant. But there is another yoke mentioned in scripture, namely, the yoke of his chastisements and correcting, such a one as Ephraim (Jer. xxxi. 18) was tried with, and was long or he could learn to bear it. It is good for a man to bear this yoke in his youth, Lam. iii. 27. Now whether or not this be meant here, I do not contend. The first is the chief intent, and it is not needful to exclude this altogether, since it is not the smallest point of Christianity to take up the one yoke by submission, as well as to take up the other by obedience. How ever it be, obedience must be taken so largely, as it cannot but comprehend the sweet compliance, and submission of the will to God's will in all cross-dispensations, which is no little probation of the loyal and obedient temper of the heart. Both yokes must be taken up, for so Christ speaks of his cross, "If any man will be my disciple, he must take up his cross and follow me," Matt. xvi. 24, 25. It must be lifted up upon our shoulders, as it were, willingly, and cheerfully, we actually concurring, as it were, to the bearing of it, and the receiving it. But there is this difference between the one yoke and the other, the one cannot be imposed upon us, neither can we bear it, except we actively and with our own consent and delight take it up. Though God may impose laws upon us, and give us righteous and faithful commandments, which indeed lay a strait obligation and tie upon us under pain of disloyalty, and rebellion, to walk in them, yet it never becomes our yoke, and is never carried

by us, until there be a subsequent consent of the soul, and a full condescension of the heart, to embrace that yoke with delight. Till we yoke ourselves unto his commandments, by loving and willing obedience, we have not his yoke upon us. "Thy people shall be made willing in the day of thy power." It is not terrors and constraints, but the bands of love will bind us to this yoke. It must be bound upon us by the cords of love, not of fear. He is a true king, not a tyrant, he loves *imperare volentibus*, "to rule every man with his own consent," but a tyrant "rules every man against his will," *nolentibus imperat*. But as to the other yoke of his discipline, his cross, whether it be for his sake, or whether it be the general cross of our pilgrimage here, and the vicissitudes and changes of this life, it is not in our arbitrament to bear a cross, or have a cross or not. Have it we must, bear it we must, whether we choose or refuse it. There is no man can be exempted from some yoke of this kind. No man can promise himself immunity from some cross or other, if not in poverty, yet in abundance, if not in contempt and reproach yet in honour and greatness. There is nothing of that kind that will not become weighty with itself alone, though nothing be superadded to it. So then, since every man must have a yoke, he hath only the advantage who takes it up, and bears it patiently. For if he thus sweetly comply and yield to God's will, he will not so much bear his cross, as his cross will bear him. If thou take it up, it will take thee up and carry thee. If thou submit and stoop willingly to God's good pleasure, thou wilt make it a more easy yoke, and light burden. *Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt.*⁴⁴⁵ If thou be patient, his dispensation will gently and sweetly lead thee to rest, but an impatient soul is dragged and drawn after it against the hair, and yet he must follow it. There is this mighty disadvantage in our impatient unsubjectedness to God's will, that it makes that a yoke which is no yoke, no cross a cross, an easy yoke hard,

⁴⁴⁵ [Senec. Ep. 107. See note, page 76.—Ed.]

and a light burden heavy, and yet notwithstanding we must bear it. A yoke, a cross, we cannot escape, whithersoever we go, whithersoever we turn ourselves, because we carry ourselves about with us, and our own crooked perverse apprehensions of things which trouble us more than the things themselves. Now consider the reasonableness of taking on the yoke of Christ's obedience. Should we not with David, offer ourselves willingly, and present ourselves even before we are called? "Lo I come, to do thy will, O God. I delight in thy law, it is in my inward part," Psal. xl. 8. There is no yoke so reasonable, if you consider it as imposed by Christ our King and Lawgiver. Hath he not redeemed us from the house of bondage, from the vilest and basest slavery, under the most cruel tyrants, Satan, and death, and hell? Heb. ii. 15. Hath he not asserted and restored us into the true liberty of men, and of the sons of God? The Son hath made us free, (John viii. 32) when we were under the most grievous yoke of sin and wrath, and the eternal curse of God. He hath put his own neck under it and become a curse for us, that he might redeem us from the curse of the law, and so he hath carried away these iron chariots, these yokes of brass and iron, whereby Satan kept us in subjection, and now been established our careful King, not only by the title of the justest and most beneficial conquest that ever was made, but by God's solemn appointment upon the hill of Zion, Psal. ii. 6. And being exalted a Prince to give us salvation, were it not most strange if his kingdom should want laws, which are the life and soul of republics and monarchies? Ought not we to submit to them gladly, and obey them cheerfully? Should not we absolutely resign ourselves to his will, and esteem his commandments concerning all things to be right? What command should be grievous to that soul, which is delivered from the curse of all the commandments, and is assured never to enter into condemnation? If there were no more to say, were it not monstrous ingratitude to withdraw ourselves from subjection to him, or yield obedience to any other strange lords, as our lusts

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are? Would it not be an unexemplified unthankfulness to requite rebellion to him, for so much unparalleled affection? Since we are not our own, but bought with a price, we are not *sui juris*,⁴⁴⁶ to dispose of ourselves. All reason should say, that he who payed so dear for us should have the use of us. And that is nothing but glory he seeks from us, that we offer and consecrate soul and body to him, to come under his yoke. As for the gain, it redounds all to ourselves, and that as the greater gain too.

Now a word to the last thing proposed, for I can only hint at it. The most excellent and ready way of bearing this yoke, is to learn of him, to present him as our pattern, and to yield ourselves to him, as his disciples and scholars, not only to learn his doctrine, but to imitate his example and practice, “to walk even as he walked.” And herein is great moment⁴⁴⁷ of persuasion, Christ puts nothing upon you, but what he did take upon himself. There is so much more reason for you to take it up, that it is his own personal yoke, which he himself carried, for he delighted to do the Father's will. It was his meat and drink to work in that yoke. Now there are two things especially wherein he propones himself the exemplar or pattern of our imitation, viz., his humility and meekness of spirit. He was “meek and lowly in heart.” And these graces have the greatest suitableness to capacitate and dispose every man for taking, and keeping the yoke of Christ. Humility and lowliness bows his back to take on the least of his commands. This makes him stoop low, and makes his shoulders fit for it, and then meekness arms him against all difficulties and impediments that may occur in it.

⁴⁴⁶ [We are not, “of our own authority.”—*Ed.*]

⁴⁴⁷ [That is, weight or force.—*Ed.*]

Sermon VIII.

Matt. xi. 29.—“Take my yoke upon you,” &c.

Christianity consists in a blessed exchange of yokes between Christ and a pious soul. He takes our uneasy yoke, and gives his easy yoke. The soul puts upon him that unsupportable yoke of transgressions, and takes from him the portable yoke of his commandments. Our burden was heavy, too heavy for angels, and much more for men. It would crush under it all the strength of the creatures, for who could endure the wrath of the Almighty? Or, “what could a man give in exchange for his soul”? Nay, that debt would drown the whole creation, if they were surety for it. Notwithstanding, Christ hath taken that burden upon him, being able to bear it, having almighty shoulders, and everlasting arms for it. And yet you find how heavy it was for him, when it pressed out that groan from him, “Now is my soul sore amazed, very heavy, and exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and what shall I say?” That which carried it away from us, hath buried it in his grave, whither it pressed him down. It gets him very low under it, but he hath got above it and is risen again, and whereas in vain there was a stone put above him, and sealed, he hath rolled a stone above that yoke and burden, that it cannot be able to weigh down any believing soul to hell; for that weight which depressed his spotless soul, would have depressed the sons of men to eternal darkness. Now for his burden, we observe that it is of another nature, to speak properly, than other burdens. It is not a heavy yoke or burden, but a state of liberty, an ornament, a privilege. It is a chain of gold about a saint's neck, to bind Christ's laws about them, every link of that chain is more precious than rubies or diamonds. If there be any burden in it, it is the burden of honour, the burden of privilege, and incomparable dignity, *honus not onus* or *onus honoris*.⁴⁴⁸ This is that which he puts

⁴⁴⁸ [That is, *the honour* not a *load* or a *load of honour*.—Ed.]

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upon us, or rather that which a believer receives from him. Now I will not have you so to take it, as if Christ did not propose the terms thus, "If you will be willing to take on the yoke of my laws, I will take on the yoke of your sins and curses." Nay, it is not such an exchange as is thus mutually dependent; for it hath pleased the Father without consulting us, and the Son without our knowledge or consent, to conclude what to do with the heavy and unsupportable burden of sinners. The Father "laid upon him the iniquities of us all, and he" of his own accord "hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows," (Isa. lii. 4-6) and that burden did bruise him; yea, "it pleased the Lord to bruise him," and it pleased himself to be bruised. O strange and unparalleled love, that could digest so hard things, and make so grievous things pleasant! Now I say, he having thus taken on our burden already, calls upon us afterward, and sends forth proclamations, and affectionate invitations, "Come unto me, all ye poor sinners, that are burdened with sin, and wearied with that burden; you who have tired yourselves in these byways, and laboured elsewhere in vain, to seek rest and peace: you have toiled all night and caught nothing, come hither, cast your net upon this side of the ship, and you shall find what you seek. I have undertaken your yoke and burden, why then do you laden yourselves any more with the apprehension of it? The real and true burden of wrath I have already carried away, why then do ye weary yourselves with the imagination of it? Only come to me, and see what I have done, and you shall find rest and peace."

Now this being proponed absolutely unto sinners, and they being invited to consent to that which Christ has done in their name, in the next place he comes to impose his easy yoke upon us, not at all for any recompence of what he hath done, but rather for some testimony of gratitude and thankfulness on our part, and for the manifestation of grace and love on his part. I do indeed conceive, that the imposition of the yoke of Christ's laws upon believers, is as much for the declaration of his own love

and goodness, as the testification of our thankfulness. If you consider the liberty, the beauty, and the equity of this yoke, it will rather be construed to proceed from the greatest love and favour, than to tend any way to recompence his love. Herein is perfect liberty, Psal. cxix. 32, 45. It is an enlargement of heart, from the base restraint and abominable servitude of the vilest lusts, that tyrannize over us, and keep our affections in bondage. O how narrow bounds is the liberty of the spirits of men confined unto, that they serve their own lusts! Sin itself and the lusts of the flesh, are a grievous yoke, which the putting on of this yoke looses them from: and when the heart is thus enlarged with love and delight in Christ, then the feet unfettered, may walk at liberty, and run in the way of God's commandments. "I will walk at liberty," when I have a respect to thy ways, Psal. cxix. 45. O how spacious and broad is that way in reality, which to our first apprehension and the common construction is strait and narrow! The truth is, there is no straitness, no bondage, no scantiness, but in sin. That is the most abominable vassalage, and the greatest thralldom of the immortal spirit; to be so basely dragged by the flesh downward, to the vilest drudgery, and to be so pinched and hampered⁴⁴⁹ within the narrowness of created and perishing things. To speak properly, there is no slavery but this of the spirit; for it is not so contrary to the nature and state of the body, (which by its first institution was made a servant,) to be under the dominion of men, and further we cannot reach. Yea, it is possible for a man, while his body is imprisoned, to be yet at greater freedom than those who imprisoned him. As his mind is, so he is. But to be a servant of sin and unrighteousness, must totally degrade the soul of man. It quite defaces that primitive glory, and destroys that native liberty, in which he was created. Therefore to have this sin taken off us, and the yoke of Christ's obedience put on us, to be made free from sin, and become the servants of

⁴⁴⁹ [Confined.—*Ed.*]

righteousness, that is the soul's true liberty, which sets it forth at large to expatiate in the exceeding broad commandments, and in the infinite goodness of God, where there is infinite room for the soul.

When, then, I consider how beautiful this is for a reasonable spirit, to be under the law of him that hath made it and redeemed it, I cannot but think that Christ doth rather beautify and bless, than burden. The beauty of the world consists in that sweet order, and harmonious subordination of all things, to that law God hath imposed upon them, or engraves upon their natures. If we should suppose but one of the parts of the world to swerve from the primitive institution, what a miserable distraction would ensue? How deformed would this beautiful and adorned fabric become? How much more is it the beauty, grace, and comeliness of an intelligent being, to be under the law of him that gave him a being, and to have that written in his heart,—to be in a manner transformed by the shining glory of these laws, to be a living law? What is it, I pray you, deforms these fallen angels, and makes them devils? Why do we paint a good angel in a beautiful and comely image, while the devils are commonly represented in the most horrid, ugly, and monstrous shape and visage? Is it not this that makes the difference, that the one is fallen from a blessed subordination to the will of God, and the other keeps that station? But both are equal in nature, and were alike in the beginning.

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Add unto this, the equity of Christ's yoke. There is nothing either so reasonable in itself, or yet so suitable to ourselves. For what is it that he puts upon us? Truly no new commandment; it is but the old command renewed. It is no new law, though he hath conquered us, and hath the right of absolute dominion over us; yet he hath not changed our fundamental laws. He changes only the present tyrannical yoke of sin: but he restores us, as it were, to our fundamental liberty we formerly enjoyed, and that sin forced us from, when it conquered us. Christ's yoke is not

a new imposition. It is but the ancient yoke that was bound upon man's nature by God the Creator. The Redeemer doth not invent or contrive one of his own; he only looses off the yoke of iniquity, and binds on that sweet yoke of obedience and love to God. He publishes the same laws, many of which are already written in some obscure characters upon our own minds; and he again writes them down all over in our hearts. There is nothing superadded by Jesus Christ, but a chain of love to bind this yoke about our necks, and a chain of grace and truth to keep his laws. And truly these make the yoke easy, and take away the nature of a burden from it. O what mighty and strong persuasions! O what constraining motives of love and grace doth the gospel furnish, and the rarest cords to bind on Christ's yoke upon a reasonable soul,—cords of the most unparalleled love!

I shall only add unto all this, that as herein Christ hath expressed or completes the expression of his love upon his part; so upon our part it becomes us to take on his yoke, in testimony of our thankfulness. We owe our very selves unto him. What can be more said? We owe ourselves once and again; for we are twice his workmanship, first created by him, and then renewed or created again unto good works. We are bought with a price, we are not our own. Can there be any obligation imagined beyond this? Let us therefore consecrate ourselves to his glory. Let all who believe the gospel dedicate themselves to its obedience, not so much for salvation to themselves, as their obligation to their Saviour. We are not called so much to holiness and virtue that we may be saved, as, because we are saved, to be blameless before God in love. O how gracious and honourable a disposition of this kind would it be, to serve him more out of gratitude for what he hath done, than merely for the reward that he will give!