

Sermon VIII.

Isaiah i. 10, 11, &c.—“Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom, give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah,” &c.

It is strange to think what mercy is mixed with the most wrath like strokes and threatenings. There is no prophet whose office and commission is only for judgment, nay, to speak the truth, it is mercy that premises threatenings. The entering of the law, both in the commands and curses, is to make sin abound, that grace may superabound, so that both rods and threatenings are the messengers of Jesus Christ, to bring sinners to him for salvation. Every thing should be measured and named by its end, so, call threatenings promises, call rods and judgments mercies, name all good, and good to you, if so be you understand the purpose of God in these. The shortest preaching in the Bible useth to express itself what it means, though it be never so terrible. This is a sad and lamentable beginning of a prophet's ministry, the first word is, to the heavens and to the earth²⁸² a weighty and horrible regrave²⁸³ of this people, as if none of them were to hear, as if the earth could be more easily affected than they. The creatures are taken witnesses by God of their ingratitude, and then who shall speak for them? If heaven and earth be against them, who shall speak good of them? Will their own conscience? No certainly, it will, in the day of witnessing and judging, precipitate its sentence, and spare the judge the labour of probation, “a man's enemy shall be within his own house,” though now your consciences agree with you. Nay, why doth the Lord speak to them? Because the people consider not, because consciences have given over speaking to them, therefore the Lord

²⁸² [Hear, O heavens and give ear, O earth. ver. 2.—*Ed.*]

²⁸³ [Regret, or accusation.—*Ed.*]

directs his word to the dumb earth. Yet how gracious is he, as to direct a second word even to the people, though a sad word? It is a complaint of iniquity and backsliding, and such as cannot be uttered, yet it is mercy to challenge them, yea, to chasten them. If the Lord would threaten a man with pure and unmixed judgments, if he would frame a threatening of a rod of pure justice, I think it should be this, "I will no more reprove thee, nor chasten thee," and he is not far from it, when he says, "Why shall ye be stricken any more?" &c. ver. 5. As if he would say, It is in vain now to send a rod, ye receive no correction. I sent the rod, that it might open your hearts and ears to the word, and seal your instruction,—but to what purpose is it?—Ye grow worse and worse. Well, the prophet compares here sin and judgment, and the one far surmounts the other. Ye would think a desolate country, burnt cities, desolation made by strangers, a sufficient recompense of their corruption and misorders, of their forsaking and backsliding. Ye would think now, if your present condition and the land's pressed you to utter Jeremiah's lamentation, a sadder than which is not almost imaginable, ye would think, I say, that you had received double for all your sins. And yet, alas! how are your iniquities of infinite more desert? All that were mercy, which is behind infinite and eternal punishment. That there is room left for complaint, is mercy, that there is a remnant left, is mercy.

Now, to proclaim unto this people, and convince them that their judgment was not severe, he gives them one word from God. And, indeed, it is strange, that when the rod is sent, because of the despising of the word, that after the despising of both word and rod, another word should come. Always this word is a convincing word, a directing word, and a comforting word. These use to be conjoined, and if they be not always expressed, we may lawfully understand them. We may join a consolation to a conviction, and close a threatening with a promise, if we take with a threatening. Jonah's preaching expressed no more

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but a threatening and denunciation of judgment, but the people understood it according to God's meaning and made it a rule of direction, and so a ground of consolation. How inexcusable are we, who have all these expressed unto us, and often inculcated, "line upon line, and precept upon precept," and yet so often divide the word of truth, or neglect it altogether. Most part fancy a belief of the promises and neither consider threatenings nor commands. Some believing the threatenings, are not so wise for their own salvation as to consider what God says more, but take it for his last word. Shall not Nineveh rise up in judgment against this generation? They repented at one preaching, and that a short one, and in appearance very defective, and yet we have many preachings of the Son of God and his apostles in this Bible,—both law and gospel holden forth distinctly, and these spoken daily in our audience, and yet we repent not.

This is a strange preface going before this preaching, and more strange in that it is before the first preaching of a young prophet. He speaks both to rulers and people, but he gives them a name such as certainly they would not take to themselves, but seeing he is to speak the word of the Lord, he must not flatter them, as they did themselves. Is not this the Lord's people, his portion and inheritance which he chose out of the nations? Are not these rulers the princes of Judah, and the Lord's anointed? Were they not both in covenant with God, and separated from the nations both in privileges and profession? How then are they "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah" likened to the worst of the nations, and not likened to them but spoken of as if they were indeed all one. When ye hear the preface ye would think that the prophet was about to direct his speech to Sodom and Gomorrah, but when you look upon the preaching ye find he means Judah and Jerusalem, and these are the rulers and people he speaks of. Certainly, according as men walk, so shall they be named and ranked. External privileges and profession may give a name before men, and separate men from men before the world, but

they give no name, make no difference, before God, if all other things be not suitable to these. "He is not a Jew, saith Paul, who is one outwardly," but he who hath that circumcision in the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter. Outward profession and signs may have praise of men, but it is this that hath praise of God, Rom. ii. 28, 29. Circumcision and uncircumcision, baptism or unbaptism, availeth nothing, but a new creature. A baptized Christian and an unbaptized Turk are alike before God, if their hearts and ways be one, Gal. vi. 15. All Christians profess faith, and glory in baptism, but it avails nothing except it work by love, Gal. v. 6.

Now, what name shall we give you? How shall our rulers be called? How shall ye, the people, be called? If we shall speak the truth, we fear it will instruct you not, but irritate you, yet the truth we must speak, whether ye choose or whether ye refuse. You would all be called Christians, the people of God, but we may not call you so, except we would flatter you, and deceive you by flattering, and murder you by deceiving. We would gladly name you Christians in the spirit, saints chosen and precious. O that we might speak so to rulers and people! but, alas, we may not call you so except ye were so indeed, we may not call you Christians lest ye believe yourselves to be so. And yet, alas, ye will think yourselves such, speak what we can. Would you know your name then? I perceive you listen to hear what it is. But understand, that it is your name before God, which bears his account of you. What matter of a name among men? It is often a shadow without substance, a name without the thing. If God name you otherwise, you shall have little either honour or comfort in it, when men bless you and praise you, if the Lord reckon you among the beasts that perish, are ye honoured indeed? Well, then, hear your name before God. What account hath he of you? Ye rulers are rulers of Sodom, and ye people are people of Gomorrah. And if ye think this a hard saying, I desire you will notice the way that the prophet Isaiah takes to prove

his challenge against them, and the same may be alleged against rulers and people now. We need no proof but one of both, see ver. 23,—“Thy princes are rebellious, because, though they hear much against their sins, yet they never amend them, they pull away their shoulder, if they hear, yet they harden their heart.” Is there any of them hath set to pray in their families, though earnestly pressed? Well, what follows? “Every one loves gifts.” Covetousness, then, and oppression proves rulers to be rulers of Sodom. Shall then houses stand, “shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar?” Jer. xxii. 15. No certainly, men shall one day take up a proverb against them. “Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his, and ladeth himself with thick clay, they shall be for booties to the Lord's spoilers,” Hab. ii. 6. Woe to them, for they have consulted shame to their houses, and sinned against their own soul. Their design is to establish their house, and make it eminent, but they take a compendious way to shame and ruin it. Alas, it is too public, that rulers seek their own things, for themselves and their friends, and for Jesus and his interests they are not concerned. But are ye, the people, any whit better? O that it were so! But alas, when ye are involved in the same guiltiness, I fear ye partake of their plagues! What are ye then? “People of Gomorrah.” Is not the name of God blasphemed daily because of you? Are not the abominations of the Gentiles the common disease of the multitude, and the very reproach of Christianity? Set apart your public services and professions, and is there any thing behind in your conversation, but drunkenness, lying, swearing, contention, envy, deceit, wrath, covetousness, and such like? Have not the multitude of them been as civil, and carried themselves as blamelessly, and without offence, as the throng of our visible church? What have ye more than they? It is true, ye are called Christians, and ye boast in it. Ye know his will, and can speak of points of religion, can teach and instruct others, and so have, as it were, in your minds a form and method of knowledge,—the best of you are but such. But I ask, as Paul

did the Jews in such a case, “Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that makest a boast of the law, through breaking of it, dishonourest thou God?” Rom. ii. 17-23. Why then, certainly all thy profession and baptism avail nothing, and will never extract thee from the pagans, with whom thou art one in conversation. Thy profession is so far from helping thee in such a case, that it shall be the most bitter ingredient in thy cup of judgment, for it is the greatest aggravation of thy sin, for through it God's name is blasphemed. If they had not known, they had not had sin. Pagan's sin is no sin in respect of Christians. If ye consider Christ's sermon, Matt. xi., ye will say Isaiah is a meek and moderate man in regard of him. Isaiah calls them people of Gomorrah, but Christ will have them worse, and their judgment more intolerable than theirs. And that not only the profane of them, but the civil and religious like who believe not in him. Well, then, here is the advantage ye get of your name of Christianity, of your privilege of hearing his word daily, ye who never ponder it, to tremble at it, or to rejoice in it, who cannot be moved either to joy or grief for spiritual things, neither law nor gospel moves the most part of you. I say, here is all your gain,—ye shall receive a reward with Gentiles and pagans, yea, ye shall be in a worse case than they in the day of the Lord. The civil Christian shall be worse than the profane Turk, and ye shall not then boast that ye were Christians, but shall desire that ye had dwelt in the place where the gospel had never been preached. It is a character of the nations, that they call not on God, and of heathen families, that they pray not to him, (Jer. x. 25,) and wrath must be poured on them. What, then, are the most part of you? Ye neither bow a knee in secret nor in your families, to God. Your time is otherwise employed, ye have no leisure to pray twice or thrice a day alone, except when ye put on your clothes ye utter some ordinary babblings. Ye cannot be driven to family worship. Shall not God rank you in judgment with those heathen families? Or shall it not be more tolerable

for them than for you? And are not the most part of you every one given to covetousness, your heart and eye after it, seeking gain and advantage more than the kingdom of heaven? Doth not every one of you, as you have power in your hand, oppress one another, and wrong one another? Now, our end in speaking thus to you, is not to drive you to desperation. No, indeed, but as there was a word of the Lord sent to such by Isaiah, so we bring a word unto you. That which ruins you, is your carnal confidence. Ye are presumptuous as this people, and cry, “The temple of the Lord, the work of the Lord,” &c. as if these would save you. Know, therefore, that all these will never cover you in the day of wrath. Know there is a necessity to make peace with God, and your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of a profession, and external privileges and duties, or else ye shall be as far from the kingdom of heaven as Sodom and Gomorrah. We speak of rulers' sins, that ye may mourn for them, lest ye be judged with them. If ye do not mourn for them in secret, know that they are your sins, ye are companions with them. Many fret, grudge, and cry out against oppression, but who weeps in secret? Who prays and deprecates God's wrath, lest it come upon them? And while it is so, the oppression of rulers becomes the sin of the oppressed themselves.

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“Hear the word of the Lord.” It were a suitable preparation for any word that is spoken, to make it take impression, if it were looked on “as the word of the Lord,” and “law of our God.” And truly no man can hear aright unless he hear it so. Why doth not this word of the Lord return with more fruit? Why do not men tremble or rejoice at it? Certainly, because it is not received as God's word. There is a practical heresy in our hearts, which rather may be called atheism—we do not believe the Scriptures. I do not say men call it in question, but I say, ye believe them not. It is one thing to believe with the heart, another thing not to doubt of it. Ye doubt not of it, not because ye do indeed believe it, but because ye do not at all consider it. It is one thing to

confess with the mouth, and another thing to believe with the heart, for ye confess the Scriptures to be God's word, not because ye believe them, but because ye have received such a tradition from your fathers, have heard it from the womb unquestioned. O that this were engraven on your heart—that these commands, these curses, these promises are divine truths, the words and the oath of the Holy One! If every word of truth came stamped with his authority, and were received in the name of God himself, what influence would it have on the spirits and the practices of men? This would be a great reformer, would reform more in a month, than church and state hath done these many years. Why are rulers and people not converted and healed for all that is spoken? Here it is, “Who believes our report?” Who believes that our report is thy own testimony, O Lord? When ministers threaten you in God's name,—if his authority were stamped on the threatening, if men did seriously apprehend it were God's own voice, would they not tremble? When the gospel and the joyful sound comes forth, if he apprehended that same authority upon it, which ye who are convinced believe to be in the law, would ye not be comforted? Finally, I may say, it is this point of atheism, of inconsideration and brutishness, that destroys the multitude, makes all means ineffectual to them, and retards the progress of Christians. Men do not consider, that this word is the word of the eternal, and true, and faithful God, and that not one jot of it will fail. Here is a point of reformation I would put you to, if ye mind indeed to reform, let this enter into your hearts and sink down, that the law and gospel is the word of God, and resolve to come and hear preachings so, as the voice “of Jesus Christ, the true and faithful witness.” If ye do not take it so now, yet God will judge you so at the end. “He that despiseth you, despiseth me, and he that hears not you, hears not me.” If ye thought ye had to do with God every Sabbath, would ye come so carelessly, and be so stupid and inconsiderate before the Judge of all the earth? But ye will find in the end, that it was God whom

ye knew not.

Sermon IX.

Isaiah i. 11.—“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord,” &c.

This is the word he calls them to hear and a strange word. Isaiah asks, What mean your sacrifices? God will not have them. I think the people would say in their own hearts, What means the prophet? What would the Lord be at? Do we anything but what he commanded us? Is he angry at us for obeying him? What means this word? Is he not repealing the statute and ordinance he had made in Israel? If he had reprov'd us for breach of commands, for omission and neglect of sacrifices, we would have taken with it, but what means this reproof for well doing? The Lord is a hard master. If we neglect sacrifices, and offer up the worst of the flock, he is angry, if we have a care of them, and offer them punctually, and keep appointed days precisely, he is angry. What shall we do to please him? I think many of you are put to as great a non plus, when your prayers and repentance and fasting are quarrell'd, do ye not say in your hearts, we know not what to do? Ministers are angry at us if we pray not, and our praying they cry out against, they command us to repent and fast, and yet say that God will abhor both these. This is a mystery, and we shall endeavour to unfold it to you from the word. It concerns us to know how God is pleas'd with our public services and fastings for the most part of people have no more religion. Ye all, I know, desire to know what true religion is. Consult the Scriptures, and search them, for there ye shall find eternal life. We frame to ourselves a wrong pattern and copy of it, and so we judge ourselves wrong. Our narrow spirits do not take in the latitude of the Scripture's religion, but taking in one part we exclude another, and think God rigid if it be not taken off our hand so. But, I pray, consider these three things, which seem

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to make up the good old way, the religion of the Old and New Testaments—

First, Religion takes in all the commands,—it is universal, hath respect to all the commandments, Psal. cxix. 6. It carries the two tables in both hands, the first table in the right hand, and the second in the left. These are so entirely conjoined, that if you receive not both, you cannot receive any truly.

Secondly, It takes in all the man, his soul and spirit as well as his body, nay, it principally includes that which is principal in the man, his soul and spirit, his mind and affections. If ye divide these, ye have not a man present but a body, and what fellowship can bodies have with him who is a Spirit? If ye divide these among themselves, ye have not a spirit indeed present if the mind be not present, surely the heart cannot, but if the mind be, and the heart away, religion is not religion, but some empty speculation. The mind cannot serve but by the heart, where the heart is, there a man is reckoned to be.

Thirdly, It takes in Jesus Christ as all, and excludes altogether a man's self. He worships God in the spirit, but he rejoices not in himself, and in his spirit, but in Jesus Christ, and hath no confidence in himself, or the flesh, Phil. iii. 3, 8. It includes the soul and spirit, and all the commands, but it denies them all, and embraces Jesus Christ by faith, as the only object of glorying in and trusting in. All a man's self becomes dross in this consideration. Now, the first of these is drawn from the last, therefore it appears first—I say, an endeavour in walking in every thing commanded, of conforming our way to the present rule and pattern, is a stream flowing from the pure heart within. A man's soul and affections must once be purified, before it sends out such streams in conversation. And from whence doth that pure heart come? Is it the fountain and original? No certainly. The heart is desperately wicked above all things, and how will it cleanse itself? But this purity proceeds from another fountain,—from faith in Jesus Christ, and it is this that lies nearest

the uncreated fountain Christ himself, it is the most immediate conduit the mouth of the fountain or the bucket to draw out of the deep wells of salvation. All these are conjoined in this order, 1 Tim. i. 5—"The end of the commandment is love." Ye know love is said elsewhere to be the fulfilling of the law, and when we say love, we mean all duties to God and man, which love ought immediately to principle. Now this love proceeds from a pure heart, cleansed and sanctified, which pure heart proceeds from faith unfeigned. So then, we must go up in our searching from external obedience all alongst, till we arrive at the inward fountain of Christ dwelling in us by faith, and then have ye found true religion indeed. Now, ye may think possibly, we have used too much circumlocution: what is all this to the present purpose? Yes, very much. Ye shall find the Lord rejecting this people's public worship and solemn ordinances upon these three grounds,—either they did not join with them the observation of weightier commands, or they did not worship him in them with their spirits, had not souls present, or they knew not the end and use for which God had appointed these sacrifices and ceremonies, they did not see to the end of all, which was Jesus Christ.

First, then, I say the people were much in external sacrifices and ceremonies, commanded of God, but they were ignorant of the end of his commands, and of the use of them. Ye know in themselves they had no goodness, but only in relation to such an end as he pleased they should lead to, but they stayed upon the ceremony and shadow, and were not led to use it as a means for such an end; and so, though they fancied that they obeyed, and pleased God, yet really they wholly perverted his meaning and intention in the command; therefore doth the Lord plead with them in this place for their sacrificing, as if it had been murder. They used to object his commands. What, says the Lord, did I command these things? Who required them? Meaning certainly, who required them for such an end, to take away your sin?

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Who required them but as a shadow of the substance to come? Who required them but as signs of that Lamb and sacrifice to be offered up in the fulness of time? And forasmuch as ye pass over all these, and think to please me with the external ceremony, was that ever my intent or meaning? Certainly ye have fancied a new law of your own, I never gave such a law; therefore it is said, Psal. 1. 13.—God pleads just after this manner, “Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?” &c.; and Micah vi. 7, “Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?” He who hath no pleasure in sinful men, what pleasure can he have in beasts? Therefore, it was to signify to them (who thought God would be pleased with them for their offering) that he could not endure them; it was worse to him to offer him such a recompense, than if they had done none at all. He is only well pleased in his well-beloved Son; and when they separate a lamb or a bullock from the well-beloved, what was it to him more than “a dog's neck” or “swine's flesh?” It was his creature, as these are, and no more, Isa. lxvi. 3. Now that they looked never beyond the ceremonies, is evident, because they boasted in them; they used to find out these as a remedy of their sins, and a mean to pacify God's wrath, Micah vi. 6. Paul bears witness of it, 2 Cor. iii. 13-15. Moses had a vail of ceremonies over his face, and the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that mystery, Christ Jesus, but their minds were blinded, and are so to this day in the reading of the scriptures; and this vail of hardness of heart shall be done away when Christ returns to them again. Now, I say, it is just so with us. There was never a people liker other than we are like the Jews. We have many external ordinances, preaching, hearing, baptism, communion, reading, singing, praying in public, extraordinary solemnities of fasting and thanksgiving, works of discipline and government, public reproof to sinners, confessions and absolutions. What would ye think if we should change the terms of sacrifices and new moons, and speak all this to you? To

what purpose is the multitude of your fasts and feasts, of your preachings and communions, of your praying in secret, and in your families, of conference and prayer with others, of running to and fro to hear preaching, to partake of the Lord's table? I am full of them, I delight not in them. When ye come here on the Sabbath, who required at your hand to tread my courts? Come no more to hear the word, run no more after communions, seek no more baptism to your children, call no more solemn assemblies, it is all iniquity. O, say ye, that is a strange preaching indeed! Must we pray no more, hear no more, sing no more? Did not God command these? Why do ye discharge them? We do not mean so, that these should not be, but they should be in another way: all these want the soul and life of them, which is Jesus Christ in them. Do ye not think yourselves religious, because ye frequent these? The multitude of the people think that these please God, and pacify his wrath: ye have no other thing in your mind but these. If ye can attain any sorrow or grief for sin, or any tears to signify it, presently you absolve yourselves for your repentance. The scandalous who appear in public, think the paying of a penalty to the judge, and bowing the knee before the congregation,²⁸⁴ satisfies God. Ye miss nothing when ye have

²⁸⁴ [Agreeably to the course of discipline in former ages, (Hooker's *Eccl. Pol.* vol. iii. p. 15,) they who had been convicted of any gross crime were required by the First Book of Discipline, (chap. ix.) and by subsequent enactments of the Church of Scotland, to confess their sin in the hearing of the whole congregation. The same thing was required of delinquents by the canons of the Church of England. Dr. Grey, in his *Impartial Examination of Neale's History of the Puritans*, (App. pp. 62-68,) has, from original documents which were in his own possession, furnished us with various forms, according to which, towards the end of the sixteenth century, offenders were appointed to make their confession, in different parts of England, in their respective parish-churches. The dues which, in cases of scandal, were exacted by the ecclesiastical courts of Scotland, were imposed and defined by acts of parliament. Power to levy these was given to justices of the peace, who were frequently members of the kirk session, or parochial consistory of their district. In the year 1648, the General Assembly "recommended to every congregation, to make use of the

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these. I speak to the professors of religion also, who pretend to more knowledge than others, when ye have gone about so many duties, ye are well satisfied if ye get liberty in them. If ye can satisfy yourselves, ye doubt not of God's satisfaction; and if ye do not satisfy yourselves in your duties, ye cannot believe his satisfaction. Ye get the ordinance, and miss nothing. Now, I say, in all this ye do not reach to the end of this ministry, Jesus Christ; ye do not steadfastly behold him, to empty yourselves in his bosom, to turn over all the unrighteousness of your holy things upon him who bears it. That which pleaseth you, is not "he in whom the Father is well-pleased," but the measure of your own duty. O, the establishing of our own righteousness is the ruin of the visible Church! This is the grand idol, and all sacrifice to it. Know, therefore, that the most part of your performances are abomination and iniquity, because ye have so much confidence in them, and put them not upon Christ as filthy rags, or do not cover them with his righteousness, as well as your wickedness. I know ye will say, that ye are not satisfied with them, and that is still the matter of your exercise. Well, I affirm, in the Lord's name, from that ground, that ye have confidence in them, for if your diffidence and inquietness arise from it, your confidence and peace must come from it also. Is there any almost that maintain faith, except when their own conditions please them well? And that faith I may call no faith, at least not pure and

9th act of the parliament 1645, at Perth, for having magistrates and justices in every congregation." (Rec. of Kirk of Scot. p. 511, Edn. 1839.) It was in this way, it would seem, or from elders acting both in a civil and in an ecclesiastical capacity, that the practice of exacting fines by kirk sessions arose and was continued. "You object that our church sessions did exact fines. But if you consider, that these fines, which you mention, are particularly imposed and determined by statute, and thereby appointed to be applied to pious uses, and therefore the demanding and uplifting thereof only, as well for the more summary and effectual restraint of sin, as for the end whereto they are destined, is in use to be exercised by kirk sessions, or rather by their officers and beadles in deficiency of the magistrate, this your scruple must quickly cease." "The True Non-Conformist," p. 55, printed abroad in the year 1671.—*Ed.*]

cleanly entire faith. As for the multitude of you, you must know this, that God is not pleased with your prayers, and fasting, and hearing, &c. because ye have such an esteem of them, because ye can settle yourselves against all threatenings, and never once remember of Jesus Christ, or consider the end of his coming into the world; because ye find no necessity of pardon for your prayers and righteousness, but stretch the garment of these over the uncleanness of your practices. What delight hath the Lord in them, when they are put in his Son's place? Will he not be jealous that his Son's glory be not given to another?

In the *second* place, the Lord rejects their performances, because there was nothing but a mere shadow of service, and no worshipping of God in the Spirit. Ye know what Christ saith, "God is a Spirit, and he that worships him must do it in spirit and in truth," John iv. 24. It is the heart and soul that God delights in, "My son, give me thy heart," for if thou give not thy heart, I care for nothing else. The heart is the whole man. What a man's affection is, that he is. Light is not so,—it brings not the man alongst with it. Christ Jesus hath given himself for us, and he requires that we offer ourselves to him. If we offer a body to frequent his house, our feet to tread in his courts, our ears to hear his word, what cares he for it, as long as the soul doth not offer itself up in prayer or hearing? And this was the sin of this people, Isaiah xxix. 13. "They draw near with the lips, and their heart is far from the Lord." Now are we not their children, and have succeeded to this? Is there any thing almost in our public services, but what is public? Is there any thing but what is seen of men? Ye come to hear, ye sit and hear, and is there any more? The most part have their minds wandering, no thoughts present; for your thoughts are removed about your barns and corns, or some business in your head; and if any have their thoughts present, yet where are affections, which are the soul and spirit of religion, without which it is no true fire but wild fire, if it be not both burning and shining? Are ye serious in these ordinances?

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Or rather, are ye not more serious in any thing beside? And now, especially, when God's providence calls you to earnest thoughts, when it cries to all men to enter into consideration of their own ways, I pray you, is there any soul-affliction in your fasts even for a day? Is there any real grief or token of it? Not a fast in Scripture without weeping! We have kept many, and have never advanced so far. Shall the Lord then be pacified? Will not his soul abhor them? How shall they appease him for your other provocations, when they are as oil to the flame, to increase his indignation? The most part of Christians are guilty here; we come to the ordinances, as it were, to discharge a custom, and perform a ceremony, that we may have it to say to our conscience that it is done, and there is no more intent and purpose. We do not seek to have soul-communion with God. We come to sermon to hear some new thing, or new truth, or new fashion of it; to learn a notional experience of cases. But alas, this is not the great purpose and use of these things. It is to have some new sense of those things we know. We know already, but we should come to get the truth more received in our love, to serve God in our spirits, and to return to him ourselves in a sacrifice acceptable. This is the greater half, if not the whole of religion,—love to Jesus Christ who loved us, and living to him, because he died for us, and living to him because we love him. Now, all our ordinances and duties should be channels to carry our love to him, and occasions of venting our affections.

Thirdly, The Lord rejected this people's services, because they were exact and punctual in them, and neglected other parts of his commandments; and this is clearly expressed here, "I will not hear" your prayers, though there be many of them. Why? "Your hands are full of blood." Ye come to worship me, and pray to me, and yet there are many abominations in your conversation, which you continue in, and do not challenge in yourselves. Ye have unclean hands; and shall your prayers be accepted, which should come up with pure hands? They took his covenant in their

mouth, and offered many sacrifices, but what have ye to do with these things, saith the Lord, since ye hate to be reformed, since ye hate personal reformation of your lives, and in your families? What have ye to do to profess to be my people? Psal. l. 16, 17. The Lord requires an universality, if ye would prove sincerity: if ye have respect to any of his commands, as his commands, then will ye respect all. If ye be partial, and choose one duty that is easy, and refuse another harder,—will come to the church and hear, but will not pray at home,—will fast in public, but not in private,—then, says the Lord, ye do not at all obey me, but your own humour; ye do not at all fast unto me, but unto yourselves. As much as your interest lies in a duty, so much are ye carried to it. And I take this to be the reason why many are so eager in pursuing public ordinances, following communions, and conferences with God's people, ready to pray in public rather than alone. If ye would follow them into their secret chamber, how much indifferency is there! How great infrequency, how little fervency! Well, says the Lord, did ye pray to me when ye prayed among others? No, ye prayed either to yourselves, or the company, or both. Did ye seek me in a communion? No, saith the Lord, ye sought not me, but yourselves: if ye sought me indeed with others, you would be as earnest, if not more, to seek me alone, Zech. vii. 6. And again, the Lord especially requires the weightier matters of the law to be considered. As it was among the Jews, their ceremonies were commanded, and so good; but they were not so much good in themselves as because they were means appointed for another end and use. But the moral law was binding in itself, and good in itself, without relation to another thing; and therefore Christ lays this heavy charge to the Pharisees, “Ye tithe mint and anise,” Matt. xxiii. 23. “Woe unto you, for ye neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ye ought to have done, and not left the other undone.” Are there not many who would think it a great fault to stay away from the church on the Sabbath or week day, and yet will not

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stick to swear,—to drink often? “Woe unto you, for ye strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel;” therefore are the prophets full of these expostulations. The people seemed to make conscience of ceremonies and external ordinances, but they did not order their conversation aright; they did not execute judgment, and relieve the oppressed, did not walk soberly, did not mortify sinful lusts, &c. Alas, we deceive ourselves with the noise of a covenant,²⁸⁵ and a cause of God; we cry it up as an antidote against all evils, use it as a charm, even as the Jews did their temple; and, in the mean time, we do not care how we walk before God, or with our neighbours: well, thus saith the Lord, “Trust ye not in lying words,” &c. Jer. vii. 4, 5, 6. If drunkenness reign among you, if filthiness, swearing, oppression, cruelty reign among you, your covenant is but a lie, all your professions are but lying words, and shall never keep you in your inheritances and dwellings. The Lord tells you what he requires of you. Is it not to do justly, and walk humbly with God? Mic. vi. 7. This is that which the grace of God teaches, to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, towards your God, your neighbour, and yourself,” Tit. ii. 11, 12; and this he prefers to your public ordinances, your fasting, covenanting, preaching, and such like.²⁸⁶ “Is not this to know me?” saith the Lord, Jer. xxii. 15, 16. You think you know God when you can discourse well of religion, and entertain conferences of practical cases. You think it is knowledge to understand preachings and scripture; but thus saith the Lord, to do justly to all men, to walk humbly towards God, to walk soberly in yourselves, is more real knowledge of God, than all the volumes of doctors contain, or the heads of professors. Is this knowledge of God to have a long flourishing discourse containing much religion in it? Alas, no! to do justly, to oppress none, to pray more in secret, to walk humbly and soberly, this is to know the Lord. Practice is real

²⁸⁵ [See Note, page 375.—*Ed.*]

²⁸⁶ [This passage is quoted in the Life of the Author.—*Ed.*]

knowledge indeed: it argues, that what a man knows, he receives in love, that the truth hath a deep impression on the heart, that the light shines into the heart to inflame it. What is knowledge before God? As much as principles, affection, and action, as much as hath influence on your conversations; if you do not, and love not what you know, is that to know the Lord? Shall not your knowledge be a testimony against your practice, and no more?