

peril of the times cause you to join yourself to God in Christ, and keep near him; beware of worldly-mindedness, instability and wavering; pride and self-conceit, Rev. vii. 3. Strive against the stream, if ye would not be carried away with it.

THE END OF TIME, AND THE MYSTERY OF GOD FINISHED WITH IT.*

REV. x. 6, 7,

And swear that there shall be time no longer; but the mystery of God should be finished.

THE going out of an old year, and the coming in of a new, doth so natively lead to consider the passing nature of time, that they must be very carnal, light, and inconsiderate, to whom such an event occasions not serious thoughts. For while one sees time on such a run, how can one miss the thought of its running out, or that there "shall be time no longer," as saith the text?

In which we have a deposition, or a matter declared upon oath, made by a mighty angel, Christ, the angel of the covenant, whose glory and majesty is inconceivable, as clothed with a cloud; darkening all created glory, as the sun doth the stars; and whose dispensations of providence are steady and pure, as pillars of fire, verse 1. The gesture used by him in swearing, is not laying his hand upon the book, though he had one in his hand; that is Antichrist's way of swearing; but it is lifting up the hand to heaven, verse 5, the natural and approved gesture of an oath, as being a solemn invocating of God, who dwelleth there. The scope of the deposition is, to comfort the church against the heaviness of the reign of Antichrist brought in by the fifth trumpet, as the Turks were by the sixth. The parts of the deposition are two.

1. The negative part, "that time should be no longer;" (Gr.) "that time shall not be any more." Most interpreters understand this restrictedly, of the time of the Roman empire, or the Antichristian tyranny; others, absolutely, of the world's ending, time's removal for good and all, and eternity succeeding in its room; no more days, months, or years. This I take to be the true sense; for (1.) It is agreeable to the scope, being a general including the particular

* Several Sermons preached at Ettrick in the year 1732. The first sermon was preached January 2.

of the time of the reign of Antichrist, who is not totally destroyed till under the seventh vial, that brings in the end of the world, chap. xvi. 17—21. (2.) Most agreeable to the world, which is precisely "time," not "the time." (3.) To the circumstances of the action noted in the context; the little book, pointing at the small number of events remaining to be fulfilled; the right foot on the sea, the left on the earth, noting his universal dominion, how he could make the sea move no more, and tread away this earth, verse 2; then the seven thunders, noting seven other things to take place under the seventh trumpet, viz., the seven vials, which bring the world to an end. And in relation to these, it is said "time should be no more," or longer than these are running, vers. 3, 4. Finally, the description of the party sworn by, viz., God, that is, Christ himself, who swears by himself; described here as living for ever, most appositely to the mentioning of the ending of time; as creator of the world and all therein, and therefore able to bring it to an end.

OBJECT. But to what purpose should that be confirmed by an oath, which John knew well enough, and nobody is ignorant of? **ANS.** John knew before, and so did others, that time and the world would have an end sometime or other; but he knew not that it would end under the seventh trumpet; that it would not last a moment longer than that trumpet, which is the thing here asserted. The thing which leads to,

2. The positive part of the oath, that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel the mystery of God should be finished. Some understand this mystery in a restrained sense; some of the end of the world, the resurrection and general judgment; some of the calling of the Jews, and overthrow of Antichrist. And these indeed are called mysteries; 1 Cor. xv. 51, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." Rom. xi. 25, "I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, —that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." 2 Thess. ii. 7, "The mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth, will let, until he be taken out of the way." But nowhere, that I have observed, is any of them called the mystery of God. Besides, the finishing of the mystery here mentioned plainly supposeth that mystery, whatever it was, to be begun, and well far on before the seventh trumpet, or days of the seventh angel; which agrees to none of these. Wherefore I understand it with others more generally, and take it to be meant of the whole of the divine management in the world, in pursuance of and according to the gospel scheme and contrivance, called

the mystery of God, Col. ii. 2. This is a mystery of many parts; therefore called the mysteries of the kingdom of God, Luke viii. 10, all which parts being mysterious, the kingdom itself is a mystery, known only to believers, truly, though yet imperfectly; as saith our Lord, Mark iv. 11, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables. The mystery of the kingdom of God. There have been many kingdoms in the world, especially the four monarchies, all which are now gone; the kingdom of Antichrist, a mystery of iniquity, has long made a great figure, and is not yet come wholly to an end; but in the time of all these God had, and yet has a kingdom, which is the mystery of God, which has long been, and yet is going on. But it will be finished in bringing the work to perfection, in completing the happiness of his people, and ruin of his enemies, at the end of time. Then Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom finished, 1 Cor. xv. 24. The time of the finishing it is in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, which days take in all the seven vials. When it shall begin to sound, then the finishing of the mystery of God begins, the last period of that mysterious kingdom of God comes in; the which finishing is carried on by degrees, in the seven vials, till it is perfectly finished by the last of them. And then time, and the mystery of God in his kingdom in this world, end both together. Now we are within the finishing period.

Two doctrines may be deduced from the words.

DOCTRINE I. It is a matter of greatest weight and concern to mankind, that there is a certain period set, and in the general revealed, at which time comes to an end, and never shall be any more. This is a sworn point, and a good man will not swear but what is of weight; it is sworn by the Lord himself, therefore it is of the greatest weight.

In discoursing this doctrine, I shall consider,

I. This truth itself, That there is a period set at which time shall be no more.

II. The weight of it, and its concern to mankind.

III. *Lastly*, Apply.

I. We shall consider this truth itself, That there is a period set at which time shall be no more. This implies,

1. That time had a beginning. Time is the measure of the creature's duration by its several parts; so it could be of no ancients date than the creation. It began with the world, Gen. i. 1. There was a day, a year, that was the first, before which there was not

another. But eternity was before, and will be after time; which therefore appears at present like a small island lifting up its head in the midst of the ocean.

2. Time has run from the beginning, and is running on in an uninterrupted course of addition of moments, hours, days, months, and years. About four thousand years of it passed before the birth of Christ; and now is begun the one thousand seven hundred and thirty-second year from that happy period. So there want not three hundred years now to complete the world's week of six thousand years; after which many have thought the eternal Sabbath would come. But as yet time is, and the mystery of God is not yet finished, nor the treaty with sinners broken off.

3. Time will come to an end. It has run long, but it will run out at length. The last sand in the glass of this world will pass, and then its glass is run out, and not to be turned again. The period is set in the divine decree, the last day and hour, though no man knows them.

Now, time coming to an end, the things of time go too, being swept away with it. So, "that time shall be no longer," nor "be any more," speaks these following weighty things; viz.—That there is a set period at which,

1. This present world shall be no more; these heavens and earth shall pass away by the general conflagration; 2 Pet. iii. 10, "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; and the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up." Time and they began together, and they will end together. Men are busy now, who to get most of this earth; and a mighty pother is made about it, like ants in a hillock; and could they get the heavens marched too, they would no doubt inclose so much of them for themselves also. But then the hillock will be scattered, the stage taken down, not a bit of earth left for their foot.

2. New years shall be no more. The year will come, the month, the day, hour and minute, after which there shall never be another.

All these are parts of time; so time being at an end, there will be no more of them. The annual motion of the sun, and its diurnal motion about the earth, make years and days; but where are they when the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the earth is burnt up? So the Scripture frequently mentions the last day, as John vi. 40. Let us improve our years then for eternity, and count our days so as to apply our hearts to wisdom.

3. The different seasons will be no more. There will be no more summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. They were once intermitted for a while, during the deluge; then it was secured there

should not be another intermitting of them, but withal that they should end for good and all, with time; Gen. viii. 22, "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." There will be an eternal spring in heaven; but an eternal winter, as it were, in hell, where is gnashing of teeth. Now these seasons roll about; but time ending, that revolution of seasons is no more.

4. The business of this life shall be no more. There shall be no more tilling of the ground, tending of flocks, merchandising, nor trades. All these belong to the fashion of this world which passeth away. There are none of them without toil; but then the righteous rest from their labours, and the wicked will have their toil of another sort, under the burden of divine wrath. How unhappy must they be, who have no pleasure nor satisfaction in anything else, since these are not to last!

5. The means of sustaining this life shall be no more. There shall be no more eating, drinking, nor sleeping. These take up a great part of our time now, in the doing of them: and in providing for back and belly the whole time of many goes. But time being gone, the saints shall be supported and satisfied, without meat or drink, and refreshed without sleep; and the wicked will not get a drop of water to cool their tongue, nor rest night nor day.

6. Relations shall be no more. Time going dissolves them all, as fellow-travellers, part when come to their journey's end. There shall be no more magistrates and subjects, ministers and people, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants; Job iii. 19, "The small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master." Only the relation betwixt Christ and his people as head and members, which is not of this world, shall remain; and so the relation to God as his children, Luke xx. 35, 36; who are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. Among Adam's children, the children are subject to their parents, and inferiors to superiors; but at the resurrection, all the saints will be immediately subject to God, one as well as another; all the wicked subjected under him as his enemies.

7. Space for repentance shall be no more. Now sinners have time to repent and turn to God, assured of welcome on their returning. But time once gone, as the tree is fallen it must lie for ever. There shall be no more means of grace, offers of Christ, nor place for repentance, Matth. xxv. 10. The time of trial is over; and they who have misimproved it, cannot be taken on a second trial.

8. Tribulation and adversity of the godly shall be no more. They must have it, cannot miss it; but then it is in the world only as

saith our Lord, John xvi. 33, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." When time is at an end, their trials are at an end, and they shall have an eternal recompence, the days of their mourning are ended. They shall look back on their sorrows as waters that fail; their griefs ran long, but the brook dries up, being but a winter brook.

9. *Lastly*, The prosperity and comfort of the wicked, Luke xvi. 25, shall be no more. Now the sun of prosperity often shines on them, and the godly are sometimes stumbled at it, as you will find in Psalm lxxiii.; and they themselves hardened by it, as appears from Eccles. viii. 11, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." But stay till the end of time, that the web of providence be cut out, it will appear there was no cause for either of these. Whatever comforts they enjoy in time, there will be a total eclipse of their comfort at the end of time.

II. The second thing is, The weight of this truth, and its concern to mankind. That it is of weight and concern to them, appears in its being sworn to them; which implies these three things.

1. That men are very heedless about it, and slow to believe it, and be impressed with it. The virgins would fain slumber and sleep, and therefore care not for looking for the coming of the bridegroom. Most men are so in love with the things of time, that they desire no other state of affairs. And because they have no will time should end, they work up themselves to a belief, that there is little hazard of its ending; and confirm themselves therein, from that there is no appearance of its ending; like those scoffers who said, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," 2 Pet. iii. 4.

2. A legal intimation made to them of its ending. Whether it is believed or not, it is duly intimated, in the most solemn manner unto all to whom the Bible comes. So they are fairly warned, and cannot pretend ignorance; and this intimation will have its weight certainly, when the thing is seen fulfilled.

3. That the period of time is unalterably fixed, the bounds of it set, beyond which it cannot go; for it is set by an oath. Often did the Israelites provoke the Lord, yet he bore with them; but at length he sware, that they should not enter into his rest. And there was no reversing of that. Now he has set the bounds of time, and confirmed it by oath, no prayers nor intreaties can prevail to carry it an hour beyond the set period.

The weight of the thing lies in these three.

1. That then that which concerns mankind's happiness or misery is completed; the state of probation is over, and the state of recompence takes place in perfection, both as to their bodies and souls. Here at this turning point, the end of time, every one is brought to his utmost pitch, the godly of happiness, the wicked of misery. And what can be of greater weight?

2. That then eternity succeeds, the state of all for ever unalterable, no end to be expected more. Whatever case we are now in, we know it will have an end, there will be an alteration, and we may measure the time of its continuance; but eternity fixes unalterably, and there is no more to measure by. Therefore this matter is of greatest weight.

3. *Lastly*, That now or never must be done what is to be done for eternity. Hence our Lord said, John ix. 4, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." Time ending, no more can be done of that nature. It is not to be expected it will begin again, that men may do what they did not while it lasted.

USE. Then be exhorted suitably to improve this intimation of time's ending. And,

1. Look beyond time, this world, and the state of things in it; carry your views into the other world, to eternity; 2 Cor. iv. 18, "Look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." O why should we confine our view to time, which must end and be no more; and neglect the succeeding eternity, which affords a boundless prospect? It would be profitably spent time, that were spent in meditating on eternity, what we shall be there, what shall be our eternal lot.

2. Lift your hearts from off the things of time, and set them on those that are eternal; Col. iii. 2, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." It is impossible the former should be a suitable portion for a rational creature, that must be for ever; since they must end with time. It is but a small portion of the things of time we can get, however eagerly we pursue. But suppose we could have them all, there is yet a period set, at which even in that case we would have nothing. How much more wisely would we act, to set our hearts on things that are eternal?

3. Use this world passingly, as pilgrims and strangers in it; "for the fashion of it passeth away," 1 Cor. vii. 29—31, "The time is short. It remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as

though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away." There is no wisdom in dipping deep therein, loading ourselves with its thick clay. That will but retard us in our way to the better world, and occasion such a throng, as to keep us from our main work till the time for it is over and gone.

4. Let not the frowns of this world, the troubles and trials of the present life, make deep impression on us: let us guard ourselves against that, by considering they will not last. They are but clouds, that be they never so thick and black, will vanish away ere long. And if we are Christ's, we will soon have an eternal sunshine; if not, the thickest clouds that are here, are nothing comparable to the blackness of darkness for ever.

5. Be not lifted up with the world's smiles, nor value yourselves on worldly prosperity; for time will put an end to this also. Time-honours, wealth, and ease, are but like bubbles of water, that in a moment will come to nothing. Whatever differences be now among men, occasioned by these outward things, they are confined within the boundaries of a few years; which being run out, the servant is as good as the master, and the poor as the rich.

6. *Lastly*, Improve time while it lasts, for the ends it is given you for. And that is for,

1. Laying a good foundation for eternity, getting out of your natural state into the state of grace, believing on Christ, and repenting of sin.

2. Living to the honour of God, endeavouring to act in your sphere for propagating the name and kingdom of Christ. Hence said the good king Hezekiah, Isa. xxxviii. 19, "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth."

3. *Lastly*, Serving your generation in usefulness to mankind, seeking to forward the spiritual and temporal good of others; as David did, Acts xiii. 36, who served his own generation by the will of God.

·Doct. II. As time is continued for carrying on the mystery of God in his kingdom among men, so there is a period set, at which that mystery will be finished, and time end with it.

In discoursing this doctrine, we shall consider,

I. The mystery of God in his kingdom among men, generally and particularly.

II. The relation betwixt the mystery of God and time.

III. *Lastly*, Apply.

I. We shall consider the mystery of God in his kingdom among men. And in the general we shall shew,

1st, What that mystery of God is.

2dly, In what respects the kingdom of God is a mystery.

First, We shall consider what that mystery of God is. A mystery is a secret or hidden thing, hid under some vail or other from the eyes of beholders; which vail must be drawn by ere one can see it. The scripture mentions two mysteries.

1. The mystery of iniquity; 2 Thess. ii. 7, "The mystery of iniquity doth already work." And that is the kingdom of Antichrist; Rev. xvii. 5, "And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth." That is a mystery, hiding the greatest iniquity under a vail of sanctity, carrying on the designs of hell under pretences of Heaven's countenance; 2 Thess. ii. 9, 10, "Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." Hence, for many hundreds of years, the world wondered after the beast, taking Antichrist, the great enemy of Christ, for his vicar and chief servant; though some now and then saw through this mystery, and at the reformation the vail was taken off to several nations.

2. The mystery of God, as in the text. And as the former is a mystery of iniquity, this is a mystery of godliness; 1 Tim. iii. 16, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness." Godly in its nature and tendency. As the former is the kingdom of Antichrist this is the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom God carries on among men by Christ, as the devil carries on the other among them by Antichrist. So the scripture manifestly refers this mystery to Christ; 1 Tim. iii. 16, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh;" &c. Col. ii. 2,— "to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." There are mysteries of God in nature; but the great mystery of God is in Christ; in whom there lies hid more of God than in a thousand worlds, and by whom God carries on a mysterious kingdom among men, the kingdom of Christ, called "the mystery of the kingdom of God;" Mark iv. 11. For the better understanding whereof,

1. Consider, God from eternity chose to himself, out of fallen mankind, a church, in the salvation of whom he should be glorified for ever. These are the general assembly, and church of the first-born, which are in heaven; Heb. xii. 23. They were to come into

the world in different ages, one generation of them after another, and to tarry an appointed time in the world, ere they should be transported into heaven. And many of them are not yet born, nor will be in a haste.

2. There behoved to be a divine conduct about them, for fulfilling of this purpose of God anent them. There were many things stood in the way of it. They are naturally enemies to God, and would not come to him; without strength, and unable to come; there is a bar of justice in their way, as sinners, that mars their access, though they were both willing and able; there are enemies to keep them back altogether, and when they do come to him, to draw them away from him again. Therefore it is God himself must take the conduct for that purpose, otherwise it will never be fulfilled; John vi. 44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him." Phil. ii. 13, "For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

3. The Father has devolved this conduct of them on his Son Jesus Christ, given him the kingdom among men for fulfilling this eternal purpose of love; Isa. lv. 4, "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people." God had a people in Egypt whom he minded for Canaan; he gave Moses and Aaron the charge to bring them out, to lead them through the wilderness forty years, and then Joshua to bring them in to, and seat them in the promised land. These all were types of Christ, on whom is devolved the charge of bringing the church of the elect out of the state of their spiritual bondage, through this world, into heaven. Thus the whole power is lodged in the hand of Christ the Son of God; John v. 22, "For the Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son;" and he being vested with it by the Father, is thereby his King; i. e. set up by him, administering the kingdom in his name; Psalm ii. 6, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion."

4. Christ having received this trust from his Father, has been under the Old Testament, all along, and now is, executing it, and will continue so to the end of time, that he has fulfilled the divine purpose, and finished the conduct, and so delivered up the elect perfected. This is the kingdom of Christ, which also is the kingdom of God, because given him of God, and administered for the fulfilling of the purpose of God. And this administration being perfected, the kingdom is delivered up finished, the eternal purpose being fulfilled; 1 Cor. xv. 24, "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power."

5. *Lastly*, Our Lord's management of this trust, and his conduct in the matter, is very mysterious, but exactly according to the plan laid in the eternal decree, and given him of his Father; Eph. i. 11, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." There is a mystery of the Father's will; ver. 9, "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself." This is the rule of this kingdom and conduct, which therefore must be mysterious. Therefore it is called "the mystery of God," as being a mysterious management, wherein the purpose of God is carried on.

Thus ye see, that the mystery of God is the kingdom of Christ, or the conduct and managing of matters by Jesus Christ, to the fulfilling of the purposes of God, for the complete salvation of the church.

Secondly, I will show in what respects it is a mystery, the mystery of God; or that the kingdom of Christ, and his management, is a mystery, the mystery of God.

1. In itself, it is a hidden and abstruse thing; Rom. xi. 33, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Job xi. 7—9, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? it is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." It consists of "the deep things of God;" 1 Cor. ii. 10, which the creature may stand and admire, but cannot dive into the bottom of. It appears among men indeed, but still as an unfathomable deep, requiring our humble attention to it, and an entire resignation, but not to be sounded. God shewed his infinite wisdom in the works of creation; but the work of redemption and salvation of a lost world, was the master-piece of that wisdom. If the former is a mystery, how much more the latter?

2. To natural men it is an absolute mystery; 1 Cor. ii. 14. For "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." They do not at all see into it, their eyes cannot pierce it, nor can they break the shell of it. They see its outward appearance in the world, which is very mean; and they judge of it accordingly, so fall into fatal mistakes about it; preferring the vanities of the world unto the riches of that kingdom, the slavery of their own lusts to the service of Christ; so that Christ is a stumbling-stone and rock of offence to them. It is true, they may think

they know this mystery of God ; for they may be able to talk of it, yea to preach it. But,

(1.) Though they know the words in which the mystery of God is revealed, they know not the thing itself. As one hearing a parable in his mother-tongue, understands the grammatical sense of the words, yet perceives not the hidden meaning wrapt up in them; so they know the words, but perceive not the heavenly things proposed in them; Mark iv. 11.

(2.) They know not the mystery by the Spirit's teaching; all they have of it, is by human teaching; so their knowledge of it cannot reach into the heart of it; Jude ver. 19. They are destitute of saving illumination; and the highest spring of their knowledge of it is flesh and blood, improved by external objective revelation; which is not sufficient. Internal revelation alone is so; Matth. xvi. 17.

(3.) They know it not by experience, which is necessary to give the true knowledge of it. Hence is that exhortation; 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3, "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." They know the mystery by hearsay, but never felt the power of it on their spirits; so they know no more of it, than one may know of honey or vinegar, who never tasted how sweet the one is, and how sour the other.

3. It is a mystery to the godly themselves, the real members of the kingdom of Christ. None in the world have such knowledge of it as they, and none have such a sense of the mysteriousness of it. Whatever they reach of it, it is still a mystery in their eyes. See how Paul speaks of it; 1 Tim. iii. 16, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness," &c. Col. iv. 3, 4, "Withal, praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ; that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak." Hence, after all their progress made in it, they are still to learn; they see many difficulties in it which they are not able to comprehend. Consider here,

(1.) They are but initiated into this mystery while they are here, and cannot expect a full insight into it, till they come to glory; 1 Cor. xiii. 12, "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." They get as much insight into the mystery of Christ's kingdom and management as keeps them from stumbling at him; and all the wisdom of the world and learning cannot give so much; 1 Cor. i. 23, 24, "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks, foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

(2.) What insight into it they have, is not owing to their own penetration, but is the gift of God to them.' Hence, says our Lord, Mark iv. 11, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God," &c. It is the Spirit's teaching, who draws by the veil, and opens the mystery, Hence saith the apostle; 1 Cor. ii. 10, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." And when the Spirit withdraws, they are apt to be offended at some pieces of his management, being so puzzled with them that they know not what to make of them; Psalm lxxiii.

4. It is a mystery even to the angels. None was able but Christ himself to open the sealed book, or look thereon; Rev. v. 3. The angels in heaven are perfect in knowledge; but their knowledge was, and is capable of increase, and did receive increase by the more open setting up of the kingdom of Christ in the world by the gospel, whereby many folds of the wisdom of God in this mystery were opened to them which they saw not before. Hence saith the apostle, Eph. iii. 9, 10, "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." And still they regard it as a mystery to be dived into; 1 Pet. i. 12,—"which things the angels desire to look into." And yet they know not the time of its finishing; Mark xiii. 22, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven,"

5. *Lastly*, It will continue a mystery to the end, as is implied in the text. There have been things in the world dark mysteries for a time, which yet have at length been fully discovered and understood. But as the divine conduct by Christ has been a mystery in all generations past, it will be so in all generations to come. It will never be fully understood till it is completed, the web fully wrought out out, and laid before our eyes altogether. Then will there be a surprising beauty and harmony seen through the whole.

More particularly, for opening of this mystery of God, we shall consider it under a threefold view,

1st, As it was laid before time.

2dly, As begun and carried on in time.

3dly, As finished with time.

FIRST, We shall consider this mystery as it was laid before time. It is not a device of yesterday, a late or new contrivance; but older than men or angels, even from eternity; Eph. i. 9, "Having made

known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself." Compare chap. iii. 11, "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." If we would see the foundation and plan of this mystery, we must look back before all ages unto the depths of the eternal counsels in the breast of God, before the world was, now revealed to us by the Gospel. And here we may consider,

1st, The ground upon which it was raised.

2dly, The mystery itself.

First, We shall consider the ground upon which it was raised. And that was the eternal foresight of man's fall from a state of holiness and happiness, into a state of sin and misery, Rom ix. 21. This pre-supposes a twofold purpose.

1. A purpose of creating man; Rev. iv. 11, "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created." God, from eternity, happy in himself, while yet there was nothing in being but himself, purposed, for his own glory, to make a world, with a variety of creatures therein, and among them man, the chief of the inferior creation, capable to love, serve, and obey him, and to enjoy him as the reward of his obedience, liable to punishment in case of disobedience.

2. A purpose of permitting man to fall, to leave him to the freedom of his own will, and not to hinder his falling away. God was not the cause of man's fall; for saith the apostle, James i. 13, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." But had he not permitted, or willed not to hinder his fall, it could not have happened; Rev. iii. 7, "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth." This permission taking place in time, was then decreed from eternity; Eph. i. 11, "Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Hereupon God foresaw the fall of man, how all mankind would be ruined in Adam by the breach of the covenant of works. And nothing being future, but all present to him, he saw and considered the whole race of mankind as lost, sunk as sinners into a gulph of misery, irremediable by any created hand whatsoever. This was the ground on which the mystery of God was raised; this gave occasion to the mystery and plan thereof in the eternal counsel.

Secondly, The mystery itself laid, in the eternal purpose, upon this ground. Wherein is to be observed,

1. The subject of the mystery, the restoration or recovery of

fallen man. This was the great business aimed to be carried on and finished in the completing of it; this was the grand affair that the thoughts of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, were from eternity set upon; Psalm lxxxix. 19, "Thou spakest in vision to thy holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people." Prov. viii. 31, "Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." 1 Pet. i. 2, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." A mysterious point:

(1.) Considering there was no such design set on foot in favour of the fallen angels, though creatures of a superior dignity to man. Hence says the apostle, Heb. ii. 16, "Verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." These vessels of gold in the great house of God, fell down from their high station, and were so crushed that they became useless, unless they were cast anew. But God left them, and looked after them no more for ever. However, the vessel of earth, man, falling and breaking to pieces, God purposed to gather up the broken shreds, put them together again, and restore the earthen vessel. Who can fathom this mystery of his will? It is called, Tit. iii. 4, "The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man," It will be the eternal admiration of elect men and angels.

2. The impediments that lay in the way of this restoration, from the holy and just nature of God, and the corrupt nature of man, unsurmountable by all created power, Had the project been communicated to men and angels, how to remove these impediments, all would have stood mute, as in a matter beyond their comprehension. Hence says our Lord, Isa. lxiii. 5, "I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me, and my fury it upheld me."

(3.) The restoration of man was designed into a more excellent and honourable state than he fell from. Man fell in the first Adam, is restored in the second Adam; but the latter is infinitely preferable to the former; 1 Cor. xv. 47, "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second is the Lord from heaven," which necessarily infers the excellency and preference of men as his members, to what they were in the first Adam.

(4.) That there was nothing in the creature to move him to all this. No beauty remained in the fallen creature, nothing to be seen there but perverseness and enmity against God, which put him out of temper for seeking help of God. God had no need of man,

neither could he profit him. But he loved man, Tit. iii. 4, fore-cited. He so "loved him, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John iii. 16. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son," Rom. v. 10. A mysterious point, to be resolved only into sovereign will and pleasure; Matth. xi. 26, "Even so, Father, for it seemed good in thy sight."

2. The particular objects of the mystery, namely, the election, a select company of mankind; in which are,

(1.) The head-elect, the man Christ. He was the Father's elect one. Hence says Jehovah, Isa. xlii. 1, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth;" his first choice, in whom the rest were chosen. Hence saith the apostle, Eph. i. 4, "According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world;" he to be the head, they to be the body; vers. 22, 23, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." That election fell on Christ both as the Son of God, Matth. xvii. 5, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him;" and as the Son of man; Psalm lxxxix. 19, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people;" as a member of Adam's family, as well as of the heavenly family, Luke iii. And here was a mysterious point, a clean thing to be brought out of an unclean, a holy thing made of a woman, a daughter of fallen Adam. Hence saith the apostle, Gal. iv. 4, "God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law;" which the angel accounts for thus, Luke i. 35, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God."

(2.) The body elect, that is, a select number of mankind chosen out from among the rest, and given to Christ for the body to which he was to be head; Eph. i. 4, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." These were of the same corrupt mass with the rest of mankind, and might have been passed by as well as others; but God chose them to everlasting life, and gave them to Christ in the eternal decree for his; John xvii. 6, "I have manifested thy name to the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me;" while he reprobated, rejected, or passed by the rest. Here is a mystery, an awful mystery, which the apostle resolves into the sovereign dominion of God; Rom. ix. 21, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"

Who the persons are, is kept secret, and will be all along till the end of the world, at which time that matter will be laid wide open. Now, it is our business to obey the gospel; and none can know their election, till they have believed; then it may be concluded from the fruits of it. But no man's reprobation can be known, whether by himself or others, in this world, except in the case of sinning the sin against the Holy Ghost, which many doubt can now be fallen into; so whoever pretend to give marks of it, do but discover their dangerous rashness and inconsideration, and serve the interest of hell. Sure in this case the "secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed, belong unto us, and to our children for ever," Deut. xxix. 29.

3. The hand into which the management of the mystery was committed. That was Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the glorious Trinity; John v. 22, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." Him the Father appointed King in Zion, leader and commander to the people, the captain of salvation, to bring the designed sons unto glory. He was chosen for that end, and his commission designed him from eternity; in view of which he rejoiced before the world was, Prov. viii. 31, forecited.

A wonderful mystery, that the King's own Son was appointed repairer of the breach betwixt God and man, the Shepherd of Israel to gather together the stray sheep, and feed them. But less would not do; John iii. 16, For "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." The slighting of Christ then is the slighting of the mystery of God as it was laid.

4. The method of carrying on the mystery. It was appointed to be carried on in a way surprising to men and angels, viz., That the Son of God was to be incarnate, come down into our world in our nature; was to be invested with the office of Priest, and die a sacrifice for sin, and then enter heaven again as the Intercessor, bringing his blood within the vail; with the office of a Prophet, to reveal the eternal counsels of peace, and by force of light to rescue the elect from the power of their spiritual darkness; and with the office of a King, to rescue them by strength of hand from the power of their enemies, and complete the happiness of the whole body elect.

A mysterious method, which makes the apostle cry out, 1 Tim. iii. 16, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory:" and which no man nor angel could have proposed. It

is only to be resolved into the infinite wisdom and free love of God. Which aggravates the guilt of the world's contempt of Christ.

5. The foundation of the mystery, on and according to which it was to proceed. That was the covenant of grace from eternity concluded betwixt the Father and the Son as second Adam; Psalm lxxxix. 3, "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant;" "the counsel of peace that was between them both," Zech. vi. 13. A mysterious contract, wherein the Son bound himself to fulfil all righteousness the broken law could demand of the body elect, Matth. iii. 15. And the Father, on the other hand, promised thereupon a glorious reward to Christ himself, and eternal life to them, Phil. ii. 9; Tit. i. 2. It is the fulfilling of this covenant, in the performing of the condition, and in administering of it, that makes the mystery. And it is our personal entering into it in Christ, that brings us into the fellowship of the mystery; while those without the covenant are far from it.

6. *Lastly*, The great design and end of the mystery. It is the most glorious contrivance that ever was; and the design of it must be of proportionate worth and excellency. It is twofold.

1. The subordinate and nearest end. That is the salvation of the church of the elect; Luke xix. 10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost;" to save them from sin and wrath, and make them completely happy for ever. This is the point that the whole of the mystery terminates in; the design unto which every step of the divine conduct and management in the world is levelled. Vain and foolish men on whom the world smiles, are apt to think that the world is, and is managed for them; and they despise the godly, if they are mean and low, as for the most part they are; the church is the object of their contempt. But it is the business of the despised church that is the chief design of providence in the world. Other things are managed with relation to it, so as best to carry on their salvation. It is for their cause that crowns and sceptres are taken away and bestowed; Isa. xliii. 14, "Thus saith the Lord your Redeemer, the holy One of Israel, For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships;" and for their sakes the world is kept up, the corn grows, grass springs, sun and moon are kept circling about, and time spun out; 2 Cor. iv. 15, "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God." And when there is no more use for them on their behalf, they shall be no more. That is a mysterious design, which the world cannot comprehend, and will not believe.

2. The chief and highest end. That is the glory of God ; Rom. xi. 36, " For of him, and through him, and to him are all things ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen ;" the display of his glorious perfections in the eyes of his creatures. God made the world for this end ; and therein he displayed his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power. But in this mystery there is a far more ample display of manifold wisdom, rich goodness, and greater power, with exact justice, and riches of mercy and grace. More particularly,

It is the glory of God in his Son. He made the world through his Son, by his Spirit ; but that glass represented only his glory of God in his first works. He designed to display his glory in the Son ; and for that cause to prepare him a body, a human nature ; his latter work a more stupendous work than the first ; that the constellation of the divine perfections might together shine forth in him ; Isa. xlix. 3, " Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." 2 Cor. iv. 6, " God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." This is the end of the mystery of the divine conduct by Christ ; John xiv. 13, " That the Father may be glorified in the Son," even in his deepest sufferings ; chap. xiii. 31, " Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." And it is so far the design of God in the mystery, that God reckons not himself honoured at all but in his Son ; chap. v. 22, 23, " For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son ; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." Whence appears the fatal mistake of blinded men dishonouring Christ, under pretence of honouring his Father ; whereby they run quite counter to the chief design of the mystery of God, and fight against it, namely, the glory of God in his Son, the centre in which all the parts of the mystery were to meet.

SECONDLY, We shall consider the mystery of God as begun and carried on in time. Here we may view in the general,

1st, The opening of the mystery.

2dly, The gradual opening of it.

3dly, The progress of it.

First, We shall consider the first opening of the mystery. It lay hid from eternity in God, till Adam fell, and all the world was become guilty before God. Then upon that occasion the sealed book was opened, the mystery revealed, and begun to be executed in paradise. It was opened,

1. In the promulgation of the promise of the Gospel ; Gen. iii. 15,

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." A surprising mystery to our guilty first parents, which they neither had nor could have had any hopes of; that the Son of God becoming man, the seed of the woman, should be bruised in the heel by the serpent; and bruise his head on the other hand, and so destroy the works of the devil.

2. In the offering of the first sacrifices, with the skins whereof our naked first parents were clothed, Gen. iii. 21. Thus was Christ held forth as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Thus the sinner's acceptance with God through an imputed righteousness, Rom. iii. 22.

Now Christ first entered on the execution of his office in the management of the mystery of God committed to him, Gen. iii. 8. He began the work, he has been all along since carrying it on, and has not yet finished it. He acted as a prophet, revealing the counsel of God touching man's salvation; as a king, in emitting his royal proclamations, offering his indemnity to rebel-man, and declaring war against the devil; and as a priest in the sacrifices offered.

Secondly, We shall consider the gradual opening of the mystery. Of this we have an account, Heb. i. 1, "God at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." It was opened by degrees, now a piece and then a piece, till it was fully opened in the apostolic times. The patriarchal church had the morning of the opening of the mystery; Adam and Eve got the dawning of it in the revelation of Christ to them as the seed of the woman; and it still grew clearer by degrees. He was revealed afterwards as the seed of Abraham; thereafter as the seed of Isaac; and then the tribe was revealed that he was to come of, Judah; Gen. xlix. 10, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

The Jewish church had the forenoon of it. To it the family he was to come of was determined, namely, the house of David, the place of his birth, Bethlehem. He was lively pointed out in the Levitical ordinances, and to him all the prophets bare witness. Moses witnessed his prophetic office; David speaks of his kingdom and priesthood. David, Isaiah, and others, spoke of his sufferings, resurrection, victory, and triumph. At length the Baptist pointed him out to their eyes, he being bodily present with them; but there was a mist before their eyes, that they knew him not, but fulfilled the scriptures in crucifying him.

The Christian church got the noon-day light of it, after Christ was ascended into heaven. Then the Spirit was poured out, the Gentiles were called, and made partakers of the mystery. Then was the mystery opened at the rate it had never been before, that the angels themselves saw more of it than ever they had seen. Hence saith the apostle, Eph. iii. 8—10, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." But yet it continued a mystery still.

Thirdly, We shall consider the progress of the mystery; concerning which in general we may notice three things.

1. It has never been interrupted since it began in paradise; the salvation of the church has all along been carried on, and matters managed for that end. Still the church has been continued in the world, sometimes more, sometimes less visible; Psalm xxix. 10, (Heb.,) "The Lord sat at the flood, and he hath sat king for ever."

2. It has made such progress, that by this time it is drawing towards the period of finishing it. The several generations of the patriarchal church of the elect, of the Jewish church, and seventeen generations of the Christian, are now wafted over to the promised land; the great manager having made the several dispensations they lived under, though some clearer, others darker, effectual for their salvation. The knowledge of the mystery is now spread far and wide, in comparison of what sometime it was. The prophecies are mostly fulfilled already; the prophecies of the flood, of the Egyptian bondage, the conquest of Canaan, the captivity of the ten tribes, the Babylonish captivity, the four monarchies, are all punctually fulfilled long ago. The prophecy of the coming of Christ, his death, resurrection, and ascension, put off about four thousand years, is near seventeen hundred years since accomplished. So is that of the rejection of the Jews, and the coming of Antichrist, fulfilled in our sight. And there are but a few that remain.

3. *Lastly*, It is going on in our day, in the same powerful hand that has managed it all along. Our Lord, who has picked out his own out of all former generations, and brought them to their happiness, is still drawing forth his own of this generation, out of the world lying in wickedness, taking them under his conduct, and guiding them towards Immanuel's land. And they are surely a vast

company that are got there already, through the progress made in the mystery.

But for a more full view of the mystery as executed in time, we shall consider the eight following particulars of this mysterious kingdom, in every part of which there is a mystery.

1st, The head of this kingdom.

2dly, The subjects of it.

3dly, The erection and conservation of it.

4thly, The seat of it.

5thly, The extent of it.

6thly, The privileges of it.

7thly, The life and practice of it.

8thly, The manner of the conduct and management of it.

1st, The head of it, Jesus Christ, is a mystery. And he is a mystery, a mysterious head,

1. In the constitution of his person, being God and man in one person. He was the eternal son of God, and in the fulness of time he became man, John i. 14, Gal. iv. 4. This is a mystery which dazzles the eyes of human reason, that cannot comprehend it; and because men have neither reach of reason enough to comprehend it, nor humility enough to take it on God's testimony, therefore there are so many infidels this day. But indeed it is a mystery that may attract and fix on it the wondering eyes of angels; the same person, the eternal God, and a man of seventeen hundred and thirty-two years; filling heaven and earth, and yet shut up nine months in a woman's dark womb; nourishing and feeding the whole creation, yet hanging at and sucking the breasts of Mary; upholding all by the word of his power, yet an infant that could not go, but behoved to be carried in her arms; infinite in perfections, not capable of addition, yet increasing in wisdom and stature; Lord of all, yet having nothing but what was given him for house or hold; the express image of the Father's person, yet accounted the reproach of men, and despised of the people; Lord of life, yet dying ignominiously on a cross.

2. In his offices. His prophetic office is a mystery. On earth he appeared a mean man, but revealing the secrets of the eternal counsels, as he that was in the Father's bosom; taught with the greatest simplicity of words and phrases, but with the greatest power, reaching the innermost parts of the soul; now in heaven, yet teaching on earth by his word and Spirit, to the rescuing of sinners from the power of their spiritual darkness. His priesthood is a mystery; dying on a cross as a malefactor, yet meanwhile offering himself a sacrifice for sin; now entered into heaven, presenting the blood of

his sacrifice, and interceding for his people. His kingdom is a mystery, in the setting it up, and whole management thereof in carrying it on.

3. In all circumstances about him. His birth was mysterious, as born of a virgin; his life was mysterious, the greatest power and dignity hid in it under the veil of a mean outward appearance; his death was mysterious; Acts iii. 15, "They killed the Prince of life." His resurrection, his ascension, and sitting at the Father's right hand, were mysterious.

2dly, The subjects of it, believers, are a mystery too. They are in the world, indeed, but unknown to the world; 1 John iii. 1. They are mixed with them in society yet are a "people that dwell alone; Numb. xxiii. 9. There are several mysterious things to be observed about them.

1. Though it is the most honourable of all kingdoms, yet those dignified to be the subjects of it, are for the most part persons of a mean figure, having the least outward advantages to recommend them. O what a mystery is that, 1 Cor. i. 26—28, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are!" If the Son of God was to have a kingdom on earth, one would have thought he would have pitched for the subjects of it upon those descended of noble and ancient families, the wise and learned, the potent, rich, and wealthy. But he hath done just the contrary; for he receives not honour from men.

2. There is a glory in them, hid under a thick veil of human infirmities, bodily and spiritual; Psalm xlv. 13, "The king's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is of wrought gold." There is this difference betwixt them and others, that they wear their worst side utmost, others theirs inmost. They appear outwardly to the world for the most part very despicable; but in the inner man, each one resembles the children of a king. They are all fair in the eyes of God, even whom those worldly men that swell in pride, would scorn to set with the dogs in their flock.

3. They are a mystery in their constitution as Christians in this world. There is in them an old man, derived from the first Adam; and a new man, derived from the second Adam. Hence there is a mystery, two contrary parties, grace and corruption, struggling within them. The man has a will for, and a will against the same thing, at

one and the same time. Hence saith the apostle; Rom. vii. 20, "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." The Christian has a being in himself, and a being out of himself. Hence he is so weak, that he can do nothing; yet so strong, that he can do all; Phil. iv. 13, "I can do all things (says the apostle) through Christ which strengthened me." He has nothing, yet possesses all things; 2 Cor. vi. 10; and loaded with wants and imperfections, yet complete. Hence saith the apostle, Col. ii. 10, "Ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power."

3dly, The erection and conservation of it is a mystery; Luke xvii. 20, "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come; he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation," *i. e.*, with outward shew. Earthly kingdoms are set up, and kept up with a great deal of noise, bustle, and parade. But it is not so here. Consider,

1. The beginnings of it were very small, how vastly soever it has spread. The first beginning of it was in paradise after the fall, where the King gained two subjects to begin his kingdom with under the Old Testament dispensation. The beginning of it under the New Testament dispensation was very small, Acts i. 15, being about an hundred and twenty persons, compared to "a handful of corn upon the top of mountains;" Psalm lxxii. 16, yet has it spread far and wide over the earth.

2. The means of erecting and setting it up, were very unlikely and unusual, *viz.* the despised preaching of the gospel; Psalm cx. 2, "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies." Isa. ii. 3, "Many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." First of all Christ preached it himself, to our first parents under the Old Testament, and then under the New, to the Jews; and then he sent out his apostles. What a mystery was this, being to erect a kingdom, he sends not out an army to fight, to get him subjects by the power of the sword; but a few men to preach the gospel of the kingdom! For them he goes not to the schools, thence to fetch men of learning and breeding whom he might so employ; but to the sea-coasts where he takes fishermen from their boats and nets, to send them out on this errand!

3. The opposition to it from the beginning has been very great; yet it has made its way, and continued all along without interrup-

tion, over the belly of all the opposition. The powers of earth and hell have still been engaged against it, yet could never prevail to raze it. All the four monarchies were one after another heavy on it, yet has it outlived them all; the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, has broken in pieces the iron, brass, clay, silver, and gold.

4. The means of keeping it up, even such as it was set up by. Not the power of the sword; they make the kingdom of Christ no mystery that breathe nothing but fire and sword, war and blood, to maintain and propagate it; but the preaching and teaching of the word of the gospel, and setting that home on men's consciences; prayers, and tears, patient suffering even unto death; Rev. xii. 11, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." These and the like are the appointed, proper means for maintaining the kingdom of Christ, which make it a mysterious kingdom; though I do not think that Christianity obliges men to throw up their civil privileges, or takes away their natural right of necessary self-defence.

4thly, The seat of it is a mystery too. The seats of kingdoms and empires of this world are most conspicuous, being the capital cities of them; there they keep their courts, thence they issue out their royal commands. But the seat of this mysterious kingdom is hid from the eyes of all men on earth; for it is in the highest heavens, at the Father's right hand; Psalm cx. 1. There he keeps his court, there he grants petitions, thence he issues out his royal commands. This is a mystery; but what makes it more so,

1. The meanest of his subjects, in whatever part of his dominion on earth, has immediate access to the throne, with their complaints, petitions, &c., and that though they be not able to stir a foot, but are fixed to a bed or seat. It is hard for the most part to travel with their suits to their earthly princes; and when they are got to the court, they must be introduced by some courtier. But to this King the subjects may have access without moving their bodies at all, and go straight forward without noticing saint or angel; though the Papists think that presumption, making Christ's kingdom like a worldly one, so destroying the mystery. The proto-martyr Stephen, when he died, addressed Christ directly, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." But faith does it.

2. He sees all that is in his kingdom with his own eyes, good or bad, person or thing; Prov. v. 21, "For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings." Kings of the earth must needs see with other men's eyes, and hear with other men's ears; but Zion's King is himself witness to all, needs

no information, and is liable to no mistakes. There is never a good thing any of his subjects do how secretly soever, but he sees it; never a groan they give, but he hears it; he knows all the circumstances of their case. And there is never an ill thing his enemies do, but he is witness to it.

3. As far off as his throne is where he sits, he is ever present with his people for all that, and will be; Matth. xxviii. 20, "Lo, I am with you always (says he) even unto the end of the world." He is not only a help, but "a present help in time of trouble;" Psalm xlvi. 1. A great mystery; but faith can unriddle it, believing him to be God as well as man, and therefore every where present; though the heavens must contain him till the day of the restitution of all things.

5thly, The extent of it is a mystery, whether it is considered,

1. In respect of the kinds of jurisdiction he has in it.

(1.) The kingdom of grace is in his hand. He is a despised Christ in the world, he was crucified as a blasphemer and seditious person in it; yet all the grace and favours of heaven, to the salvation of mortals, relative or real, are in his hand to dispense; and they can come by them no way, but only through him; Eph. i. 22. For God "hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church."

(2.) The kingdom of glory is in his hand too. Hence he said to his disciples; Luke xxii. 29, 30, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

(3.) The kingdom of providence is in his hand likewise. Zion's King is King of the world; the government of the world is lodged by the Father in the same hand the government of the church is; John v. 22, "For the Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." Compare Isa. xliii. 14, 15, "Thus saith the Lord your Redeemer, the holy one of Israel, For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships. I am the Lord, your holy One, the Creator of Israel your King." This is a great mystery; his kingdom is a despised one, yet a nonsuch kingdom; he is higher than the kings of the earth, who are all his vassels, though they pay him little regard.

2. In respect of the bounds of it. It extends itself over both worlds. Hence says Christ, Matth. xxviii. 18, "All power is given unto me in heaven and earth." Rev. i. 18, "I have the keys of hell and of death." The mystery is a-carrying on through this

world ; there he is gathering his elect out of the kingdom of the devil, by the gospel, ruling and defending them all against their enemies. In the other world, he has the eternal rest for his kindly subjects, and the prison for his enemies. And in the passage betwixt the two worlds, viz. death, it is carried on in perfecting the happiness of the saints, and the misery of the wicked. So it is a great mystery, whereof we see little as it is in this world, and nothing as it is in the other, but by faith.

6thly, The privileges of it are a mystery. What a mystery was the man Christ going up and down in a mean outward condition in the world, yet the only begotten of the Father ! John i. 14. Such a mystery are believers in their measure, privileged above the greatest on earth who wear the crowns ; though going in rags, privileged above those going in shining apparel. They have mysterious privileges.

1. Their union with Christ is a mystery ; Eph. v. 32. Every the meanest believer is truly united to Christ ; John. xv. 5, " I am the vine, ye are the branches." A wonderful mystery ; the head in heaven in the fulness of glory, yet the members on earth in a low, afflicted condition ; beset with wants, yet complete in him ; crucified with him, and so dead, yet living ; groaning under the remains of corrupt nature, yet in him partakers of the divine nature, as being one spirit, or of one spiritual nature with him ; 1 Cor. vi. 17, " He that is joined to the Lord, is one spirit."

2. Their justification is a mystery. They are pardoned, and accepted as righteous in the sight of God, yet all " their righteousness as filthy rags ;" Isa. lxiv. 6. How can that be ? Why, the mystery lies here, in that there is an imputation of God's righteousness to them, what he was, did, and suffered. Hence we read, Rom. iii. 22, of " the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ," being unto all, and upon all them that believe." The disputers of this world laugh at this as a putative way of justification, as if one should pretend to be warm by the clothes on another's back, or full with the meat in another's belly. They think justification by our obedience to the new gospel law is a rational way ; thus they make it no mystery.

2. Their sanctification is a mystery. Vain men conceive the sanctification of a sinner to be by vigorous exercise of their rational faculties, to correct their vicious habits, and practise virtue. But sanctification by union with Christ through faith, the only way of the sanctification of a sinner, 1 Cor. i. 2, Acts xxvi. 18, is such a mystery as was unknown to the Jewish Rabbies and Greek philosophers, and an imaginary sanctification in the eyes of all legalists ;

but the truth is, the sanctification of a sinner is no less a mystery than his justification.

4. Their perseverance in grace is a mystery; grace keeping still its ground in the heart, amidst all the strength of corruption within and temptation without, till at length overcoming all, it issueth certainly in glory. That is no less a mystery, than would be a candle burning still in the wind, and laying the wind at length; a spark of fire keeping alive in the ocean, yea drying up the ocean at length; a worm thrashing the mountains, yea at length beating them small as dust, Isa. xli. 14, 15. But the mystery of it lies, in that the covenant is everlasting, they have the perpetual intercession of Christ, and indwelling of his Spirit.

7thly, The life and practice of it is a mystery. The life of every believer or subject of this kingdom is a mystery. They are God's hidden ones, and their life is a hidden life. Col. iii. 3, "Your life," says the apostle, "is hid with Christ in God;" which the world neither sees nor can understand. Hence says Solomon, Prov. xiv. 10, "The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy." They may see the outward appearance of it; but it is "the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price," 1 Pet. iii. 4.

This mysterious life is the life of faith, opposite to the life of sense and self, whereby the man lives out of himself, on things not seen; as the apostle describes it; Gal. ii. 20, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." The man living this life, stands on borrowed legs; sees with borrowed eyes; does every duty, and bears every burden, in and with borrowed strength; and when he has done all, counts all his doings and sufferings dross and dung; Christ being all to him, and himself nothing. Hence saith Paul, Phil. iii. 8, 9, "Yea doubtless and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things; and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Hence there is no duty so easy, nor burden so light, but he owns he is not man enough for it; yet none so difficult, nor heavy, but he will venture on it at the Lord's call. A mysterious life and practice. "But our sufficiency is of God," 2 Cor. iii. 5.

8thly, The manner of the conduct and management of it is a mystery. Kings of the earth have their secrets of government; but they are but trifles in comparison of the mysteries of God's government by Christ in the world. The maxims of government in the kingdom of Christ, and the manner of his management and conduct are vastly different from those of the powers on earth; Isa. lv. 8, 9, "For my thoughts," says the Lord, "are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Some of these mysterious pieces of management follow. It is the manner of this kingdom,

1. To prefer the most unlikely, baulking them that stand fairest for the preference in all human appearance; Matth. xx. 16, "The last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen." There is a thread of this method going through the whole economy of grace. Abel the youngest is preferred to Cain, Shem to Japheth his elder brother, Jacob to Esau, Ephraim to Manasseh, Moses to Aaron, three years older than he, Exod. vii. 7. David to seven brethren elder than he. He calls the foolish and the base things of the world, passing by the wise, mighty, and noble, 1 Cor. i. 26—28, forecited. The mysteries of the kingdom are hid from the wise and prudent, but revealed to babes, Matth. xi. 25. When the gospel is to be preached, the Jews must have the the first offer; they must begin at Jerusalem, where Christ was crucified: for the design is to exalt the riches of grace.

2. To let things go to an extremity, to the utmost point of hopelessness, before a hand to be put to help them, and set them right again. Hence said Moses, Deut. xxxii. 36, "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants; when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left." Pharaoh shall not only enslave the Israelites, but proceed to drown their males, before Moses their deliverer is born; their bondage shall be harder than ever, ere they are out of Egypt. When they are out, they are beset on all hands, and he seems to have them in a horse-net, ere he and they are freely parted. Haman carried his plot so far against the Jews, that the decree was passed, the letters of execution writ, and the posts dispatched with them, before there was a turn. It is a maxim with men, to crush things in their beginnings, because they may prove too strong for them afterwards; but our Lord takes the contrary method, to glorify the power of his hand.

3. To give the sharpest treatment to the greatest favourites. This is not the manner of men, but it is the manner of God. Hence

said the psalmist, Psalm lxxiii. 5, 14, "They (the wicked) are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. For all the day long have I (Asaph, a saint) been plagued, and chastened every morning." Never was one treated so hardly as the Son of the Father's bosom. And it is the ordinary method, that the favourites of Heaven are cast down to the dust, while his enemies are lifted up on high; the former sigh while the latter sing. John Baptist is in the prison, while the incestuous Herodias is at a ball; her daughter danceth, and John Baptist's head is cut off, and brought in a charger to the incestuous woman to triumph over it. They have little skill of the mystery of God, that from their outward ease and prosperity gather the special love of God to them. On the contrary, "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth," Heb. xii. 6. As little skill have they that conclude the greatest sufferers are certainly the greatest sinners. If it be so, the apostles were the worst of men; "For I think (says Paul) that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death. For we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men," 1 Cor. iv. 9.

4. To meet men with astonishing strokes going in the way that God bade them, while they have a fair sunshine that are going in the way of their own hearts. Hence said Solomon, Eccl. viii. 14, "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the word of the wicked; again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous." Jacob was bidden return to his own country; but what storms rose on him by the way, one after another! Moses was bid go to Egypt on God's errand, yet he was in hazard of his life; but Jonah flying to Tarshish got a ship as ready to take him in as he could have wished. People are ready to judge of other men's actions, according to the outward aspect of providence on them: a most uncertain and dangerous rule, which cannot miss of making them condemn the generation of the righteous, and bless them whom the Lord abhorreth.

5. To lay by accepted petitions, and let them long lie by, time after time, while yet unacceptable requests are quickly granted. The people lusted after flesh, and they soon got their desire; they were bent for a king, and they soon got their desire in that too. But how many cries to heaven were among the Old Testament saints for the coming of the Messias, a promised mercy, which yet were not answered till some thousands of years were run. God, while he flings a mercy to a carnal man uneasy for it, will let his elect cry to him night and day for their mercies ere they get them;

Luke xviii. 7. And many a long process they may have before the throne depending many a year, ere they get their answer; as is evident in the case of Abraham for a seed; yea, they may be carried off the stage ere they be answered, as in the case of the cloud of witnesses, Heb. xi. 13, who all died in faith, not having received the promises. And yet after all they are accepted, and the gracious answer is determined for them.

6. To answer accepted prayers quickly with some one terrible thing or other, which yet are to be graciously and bountifully answered in due time. Hence said the psalmist, Psalm lxxv. 5, "By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation." The woman of Canaan got repeated trials of this, Matth. xv. 22—28. Moses and Aaron go in at God's command to Pharaoh, to demand his letting Israel go; and no doubt they prayed for success ere they went; but instead of that, immediately Israel's case is made far worse than ever, Exod. v. Immediately providence takes a run directly contrary to what they had been praying for; this made Moses himself stagger, as ye see, vers. 22, 23, "And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered the people at all." If at any time ye have been praying for a mercy with particular concern and seriousness, and quickly after providence seems to fly in the face of your prayers, be not so weak and so ill seen in the mystery of God, as to think, Now, that is Heaven's final answer; no, it is but a trial, very usual in the mystery of God; which, if ye learn not by hearing, you will be fair to get taught you by experience.

7. To muster up various impediments, make many embarrassments, and set up iron gates, in the way of some great good thing that is to be done for a person, a favourite of heaven. This was taught by the apostles, Acts xiv. 22, who were employed in confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Some get their mercies with a great deal of ease, they drop into their lap like ripe fruit off the tree of common providence. But the children of the covenant come not so easily by theirs; and the greater the mercy is, readily the more and greater are the difficulties in the way thereof. Esau and his posterity were soon and easily settled in Edom, the land appointed for them; but it was many a year after ere Jacob's posterity was settled in Canaan, the land appointed for them; and they fought many bloody battles

before it. Abraham had the promise of a son; but behold the barrenness of his wife is rolled in the way of the promise; and as if that had not been enough, he and she both grew so old, that it ceased to be with her after the manner of women. Much a like was it with Zecharias and Elizabeth, Luke i. 18. But this is for the honour of God, in making the iron gates open of their own accord, and bringing the promised mercy over the belly of the impediments.

8. To set things on a run to bring in a mercy promised; and then when it comes to the point, that one is just expecting to receiving it, suddenly to cause a stop, and make a turn that makes it quite hopeless-like. When the Messias appeared, there were great hopes among the believing Jews of a glorious time for Israel; and these were not vain, but they suddenly met with a shock; the Messias was crucified, dead, and buried; that made some of them like to loose all their hopes. Hence said the two disciples that were going to Emmaus; Luke xxiv. 21, "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." This is a very ordinary piece of the divine conduct, the mystery of God, first, as it were, to pass the sentence of death on a promised mercy, to bury and lay the grave-stone on it, and then to raise it up, and bring it in. David had the promise of the kingdom; he is sent for to court, has Saul's favour, is made general by him, gains the hearts of the people, 1 Sam. xviii. Now things were on a run towards the accomplishing of the promise. But behold, this run is suddenly stopped; Saul seeks his life, he is for many years hunted like a partridge on the mountains, thinks one day he will fall by the hands of Saul, and says in his haste, Psalm cxvi. 11, "All men are liars." So Moses being bred up in the court of Pharaoh, had a secret intimation that he would be the man who would deliver Israel. Accordingly, when he was forty years old, he sets himself to the work, Exod. ii. 11, &c.; but it misgives in his hand, and he is in hazard of his life, and is forced to flee the country, and for forty years after he lives retired in Midian, Acts vii. 23, &c., by which time it would seem he had lost all hope of the matter. Yet was the work done in its due time. Such seems to have been the case with Zecharias, as ye will see, Luke i. 13, compared with ver. 18.

9. When a promised mercy is to be brought about, to lay by the most likely and promising instruments, from whence one has his expectation. It is a piece of the mystery of God, in that case, to loose their gripes one after another, till in end they have nothing left to gripe to but God himself in his word. Hence said the apostle, 2 Cor. i. 9, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the

dead." Before Israel should conquer Canaan, all the men of war, among them behaved to be consumed and dead, Deut. ii. 16. Joseph had a fair prospect of deliverance, when he so signally obliged a courtier, Pharaoh's chief butler; but the ungrateful man never minded him, Gen. xl. 43. But the Lord doth this, that his own hand in the mercy may appear the more eminent; and he loves to employ unlooked-for means, and unexpected instruments. So our Lord Jesus let the boats go away, but came walking on the sea, to the relief of his distressed disciples. He says sometimes to instruments of a good work, Hitherto shall you go, but no further. The great and good Moses, that singular instrument for good to Israel, must be laid by, before they enter Canaan.

10. To make use of hindrances of good things for furtherances thereof. Hence said Paul to the Philippians, chap. i. 12, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me, have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." It was meet that Paul the apostle of the Gentiles should be at Rome, then the chief city of the world, to preach the gospel there. He often purposed it, but was disappointed. Hence he said, Rom. i. 13, "Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto), that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles." How got he thither? Why, there was a mob raised on him by the Jews, he was taken prisoner by the Romans, tossed from hand to hand, till he was obliged to appeal to Cæsar, and then the Romans carried him to Rome. Jacob was brought into heavy case, by what befel his son Joseph; but behold, that was the means of the support of him and his family. Hence said he on his death-bed, Gen. xlix. 24, "His bow [Joseph's] abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel." In the mystery of God there is frequent working by contraries; providence driving straight forward to the designed point, while it seems to us to be going quite against it. Christ cures the blind man putting clay on his eyes; Haman goes unto the King to get Mordecai hanged, and by that very means is brought to lead him through the city on horseback, in the greatest pomp and splendour. Had not Joseph been put in the prison, he had not come to the court.

11, *Lastly*, To give weak backs heavy burdens to bear. Hence saith the apostle; 1 Cor. i. 27, "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty." Thus he chose his apostles fishermen, to set up his kingdom in the

world, combat the learning of the schools, and the force of them who had the power of the sword. The apostle unriddles this mystery; 2 Cor. iv. 7, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." While he makes a worm thrash the mountains, to beat them small, the greater is the glory of the mighty hand that does it with such a flail; Isa. xli. 14, 15. When Peter was a young man, able to bear hardships, he was at ease; but when old and less able, he got sore ones. Hence said our Lord to him, John xxi. 18, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not." If as the back grows weaker, the burdens to bear are increased, it is but an ordinary piece of management in the mystery of God; which accounts for that order; Isa. xl. 31, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

Many such things are in the mystery of God; but these condescended on shall serve for a swatch.

Thirdly, We are to consider the mystery of God as finished with time. And here I shall shew,

1st, When it shall be finished.

2dly, Wherein the finishing of it lies.

3dly, The import and consequence of this finishing.

First, Let us consider when this mystery of God shall be finished.

1. It will be in the days of the voice of the seventh angel. Now it is plain, the days of the seventh angel are come already; but then under it are comprehended the seven vials; and we are come the length of the third or fourth vial. So that the finishing period of the mystery of God is now running, and is well far on. The morning and mid-day of the mystery is past, the afternoon of it well far spent, and we are in the time drawing near to the evening of it.

2. It will get the finishing stroke with the end of time; and time and it will end together. It will not be carried on beyond time, and time will not end till it be done. Hence saith the apostle; 1 Cor. xv. 24, "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power." At one and the same period, the world will end, and time with it, and the mystery of God finished withal.

3. But the precise time of this event is kept a secret from all men; which none of them are able to discover, nor should they in-

quire into. Hence said our Lord; Matth. xxiv. 36, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." And saith Paul, 1 Thess. v. 2, "For yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." It is so ordered on design to guard men against security, and to oblige them to watch. Hence saith the exalted Redeemer; Rev. xvi. 15, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

Secondly, Wherein does the finishing of this mystery lie? It lies in these three things following:—

1. The accomplishment of the remaining prophecies. These are but few; the principal whereof are, the calling of the Jews, and the total destruction of Antichrist. That the Jews are to be called, is evident from Rom. xi. 25, 26, "I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." And who can consider, that though this people have been rooted out of their own land, and scattered among the nations more than sixteen hundred years, and yet remain a distinct people still, not incorporated with nor sunk in other nations, but they are reserved by special providence for this notable event? And so much of the prophecies of the downfall of the Antichristian kingdom is already accomplished, as insures the total destruction thereof, according to the remaining part ament it.

2. The gathering in of all the elect. There is a certain number chosen to life; those that remain of them yet unborn, must be born into this world, till the last person of that blessed roll is come forth. And they must also be born again, and brought by faith into the kingdom of Christ. And then when the last elect man or woman is born, and withal brought to Christ, the mystery is on the very point of finishing.

3. The completing of the salvation of the church of the elect. That was the end for which the mystery was laid before time in the eternal counsel; and that being obtained, it is finished; 1 Cor. xv. 24, forecited. Hereto belongs the resurrection of their bodies, the destroying of death the last enemy, and the presenting of the whole company of the elect, from the first to the last man, spotless before the throne. Hence saith Paul; Eph. v. 25, 27, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any

such thing ; but that it should be holy, and without blemish." And, saith Jude, ver. 24, " Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy," &c. This is the delivering up of the kingdom to the Father, mentioned, 1 Cor. xv. 24.

Thirdly, It remains to shew the import and consequence of this finishing the mystery of God. It is of greatest importance to the honour of God, and to the children of men. For then,

1. The eternal purpose of God concerning mankind is fulfilled ; the contrivance laid from eternity in the depth of wisdom about them, is executed. From eternity the scheme was formed, the draught was made, and then the building is reared up actually in conformity thereto, the head-stone is laid upon it.

2. The covenant betwixt the Father and Christ the second Adam is then fulfilled on both hands. In it there was a condition to be fulfilled by Christ. This he did complete near seventeen hundred years ago, paying the debt of the whole elect world. And there were promises on the Father's part to be fulfilled on the performing of that condition. A great part of these yet remain to be fulfilled ; but then it will be done completely ; and the promises be made good in every point to the head and to the members.

3. Then the whole frame of the ordinances, now or since Adam's fall, in use in the world, for bringing in of sinners, and edifying of saints, is laid by. No more church-assemblies, word and sacraments, church-government and discipline, nor church-officers ; these are as the scaffolding all to be taken down, now that the house is built ; Eph. iv. 11—13, " And he gave some, apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists ; and some, pastors and teachers ; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ : till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. In these it was that the mystery of God was carried on ; but the mystery being finished, there is no more need of them ; but they will not be missed by them, who have through them been brought into the fellowship of the mystery. Hence saith John of the New Jerusalem, Rev. xxi. 22, " I saw no temple therein : for the Lord God almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple of it."

4. Then the manner of the divine conduct towards mankind is altered so, that it is quite new ; Rev. xxi. 5, " He that sat upon the throne, said, " Behold, I make all things new." There will be no trials and afflictions of the godly, and no more prosperity of the wicked, as now. Now is the mixed dispensation ; then comes the

unmixed one, that where it is well, it is perfectly well ; where ill, it is absolutely ill. An eternal sunshine then cheers the godly, without the least intercepting cloud ; and an eternal gloom sits down on the wicked, without the lest gleam of light.

5. Then Christ's conquest is complete, his enemies made his footstool, which he is this day in expectation of. Hence saith the apostle ; Heb. x. 12. 13. "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God ; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." Then shame covers the faces of all that opposed and slighted him ; their profane tongues that they used in contempt of him, and his holy religion, are silent in darkness ; the serpent's head is quite bruised away, and his works utterly destroyed ; and he, and sinners that believed him to their ruin, are together shut up in the pit. Then Christ and his followers have a total victory over sin, Satan, death, and the present evil world.

6. Then begins the eternal marriage-feast to be held in the kingdom of God, when Jesus Christ, the glorious bridegroom, has brought home his bride, believers now espoused to him, Matth. xxv. 10. The plenty, the glory, and the pleasure of that feast mortals cannot comprehend ; for "in his presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore," Psalm xvi. 11. Some sips and drops his people get now and then, more relishing than any of the dreggy pleasures of this world ; but still there is a veil betwixt us and it so that we cannot know it.

7. Then the door is shut, Matth. xxv. 10. No access more, knock who will. No refuser of Christ will then, though he may now, have liberty to take his word again ; the mystery is finished, of which God's bearing so long with sinners makes a great part ; but as God's shutting in Noah was the barring out of those that were out ; so the espoused to Christ being set down, there is no access for new guests.

8. Then the world ends, 1 Cor. xv. 24, forecited. The world is kept up for the sake of the carrying on of the mystery of God in it ; and had it not been for that cause, it had been overthrown at Adam's fall ; but then the mystery being finished, there is no more use for it ; so fire is set to it as the stage of wickedness, a cursed world, wherein God has been so long dishonoured.

9. Then the mystery is opened, and appears in a full light ; though before veiled, the veil is then taken off. The saints were often puzzled with the difficulties of it ; but then they shall all be unfolded and laid open to them, to the clearing of them, in a suitability to the divine perfections, and becomingness to the divine wisdom,

justice, and goodness, to their eternal joy and consolation. Hence saith the apostle, 1 Cor. xiii. 12, "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I also am known." The wicked despised the mystery, drew conclusions from it as it appeared to them, to their own ruin; but then it will be so far opened to them, as they will see it worthy of God to their eternal shame and confusion. Hence saith the prophet, Mic. vii. 16, "The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might; they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf."

10. *Lastly*, There will be no more mystery of God; then it is finished. It is for the exercise and trial of faith, that matters are carried on in that mysterious manner now; but then faith gives place to sight and sense. Not that ever men will be able fully to comprehend the mystery; but as far as the saints' capacity reacheth, it is cleared unto them; and the wicked will be no more liable to mistake as to the way of the Lord's dealing with them.

II. We shall consider the relation betwixt the mystery of God and time. We take it up in these two particulars.

1. Time is the space appointed for the mystery of God its being executed. It was in all the parts of it laid indeed in the eternal counsels before time; the effects of it, or the state it will bring mankind into, and keep them in, will be to everlasting, when time is no more; but the execution of it, the beginning, carrying on, and finishing it, is in time; time bounds that before and behind. The mystery is a building of God, wherein many hands are employed; the pattern of it was drawn from eternity; it will be inhabited through eternity; but the building of it belongs entirely to time; in it the foundation was laid, and in it the copestone will be laid on.

2. The subsistence or continuation of time depends on the mystery. Hence are the words of the text, the angel "sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, that there should be time no longer, but the mystery of God should be finished." The mystery must be carried on and finished, take what time it will; therefore time must wait on it, till it be done. Being done there is no more use for time, and so it ends. So it is for the sake of the mystery of God, not for the trifling concerns of men, that time is lengthened out. Had there been no mystery of God to have been carried on, time once polluted with sin, had ended soon after it began.

USE 1. Of information. Hence we may learn,

1. Whence it comes to pass, that there is so much stumbling of wicked men at the divine conduct by Christ in the world. They can see no beauty in it, they cannot receive it, they are offended at

it, they improve it to ruining purposes against themselves. This obtains so universally, that our Saviour pronounces, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me," Matth. xi. 6. The matter is; it is a mystery, and their natural blindness hinders them to see it, so that they know it not; 1 Cor. ii. 14, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." They stumble at the doctrinal part of the mystery; for there is in it what their reason cannot comprehend; and because it is so, many of them professedly reject it, 1 Tim. iii. 16. They stumble at the providential part of it; Mal. iii. 15, "And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness, are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered." That is a mystery too, which one needs the light of the sanctuary to let him into. Hence saith the Psalmist, Psalm lxxiii. 16, 17, "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me. Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end."

2. How the godly come to have other thoughts of it; and true Christians admire the beauty and glory of it, which carnal men despise. It is the mystery of God, which he reveals to his friends and fearers of his name; Psalm xxv. 14, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant." John xv. 15, "Henceforth," saith Christ, "I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you." They are let into the secret which others are not, and they get eyes to see what the sharpest eye of unsanctified reason cannot perceive; Mark iv. 11, "Unto you (saith our Lord to his disciples) it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables." Therefore they ought to be thankful and humble, posing themselves with that question, Who maketh thee to differ? The babes see what the wise and prudent cannot discern, because the Father has revealed the same to the one, and hid them from the other, Matth. xi. 25.

3. No reason to despise religion, because the world generally do so. Religion is a mystery; the world is a blind world, and the blind cannot judge of colours. No body despises it, but those who know it not; and it is rashness with a witness to condemn what one knows not, Psalm ix. 10, John iv. 10. It is true, carnal men have an understanding as well as others, and in many instances of deeper reach than others; but still it is but a natural understanding, that is not competent for the mystery of God, which cannot be taken up

but with a new understanding. Hence saith the apostle, 1 John v. 20, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true." It is the king's favourites that are let in to the secrets of the government, not every body.

4. Time is not continued as a sleep without a design. The secure sleeping world look on time as a thing that runs on by a necessity of nature; and because they see now a new day still succeeding the foregoing one, they think in effect it will always be so. They consider not the design of God in continuing it, wherefore the sun and the moon make so many rounds, why one day as yet still comes after another; but are apt to say, as 2 Pet. iii. 4, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." O that men would consider that it is lengthened out on a particular design, which being compassed, it shall end for good and all!

5. It is not this world's business, but heaven's business, that is the great design of the continuing of time. Ye are mistaken, if ye think that the sun rises again, the new seed-time comes, &c., just that ye may go to your work, and till and sow, &c. Nay, it is that the mystery of God may be carried on; and these things have no place but as appendages of the mystery of God; and true Christians will manage them so. Hence is that exhortation, Col. iii. 17, "And whatsoever ye do in word and deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Much less is it that men may carry on their mysteries of iniquity, which is almost the only thing that some profligate sinners use their time for. But dreadful will their reckoning be, that spend in carrying on their mysteries of iniquity, that time that is designed for carrying on the mystery of God.

6. The mystery of God must be a matter of singular excellency, and of the last importance, that for it time is continued. It is so indeed, for the honour of God. Hereby there is a revenue of glory raised to him in this world, wherever that mystery is declared: and as to those places wherein it is not heard of, true believers honour him in entertaining awful thoughts of his sovereignty, and the unsearchableness of his judgments, in keeping it wholly up from those places, reverently waiting the opening of that part of the mystery. But all these are but gleanings; the full harvest of glory to God from the mystery comes at the finishing of it. It is so likewise to mankind; for upon that mystery depends their eternal state of weal or wo, according as they receive or slight it.

7. The mystery of God has, in the execution of it, been of long

continuance; but it is drawing to a close. It was begun in paradise, in the promulgation of the first gospel that was ever heard in the world, Gen. iii. 15. Several thousands of years have past since in carrying it on. Many a time the world has been heartily weary of it, wishing to have it at an end; not considering that time must end with it; so that could they have effectuate it, they would have but drawn down the house on their own heads. And perhaps the Christian world was never more weary of it than at this day. But it is drawing to a close now; and at the period God has fixed for its end, it will be finished.

8. *Lastly*, When there is no more time requisite for the mystery of God, there will be no more time for other things neither; time will end with it; for it is for the sake of it that time is continued.

USE 2. Of reproof; and that to those,

1. Who will have no mysteries in religion, but all within the reach of human reason. However, according to the scripture, it is a bundle of mysteries, Matth. xiii. 11; hid from the wise, chap. xi. 25. The foundation of practical religion is a mystery, Eph. v. 32. The practice of it is a mystery, Col. iii. 3, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Gal. ii. 20, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless yet I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." See 1 Tim. iii. 16, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." What reason can be assigned, why our God may not take trial of man, in believing him on his bare word, as well as obeying him on the mere intimation of his will?

2. Those who despise the gospel, as a weak and mean thing, looking on it with disdain as foolishness, as it was to the Jews and Greeks, 1 Cor. i. 23. A dangerous adventure; a despising of the mystery of God, the mystery of his wisdom, ver. 24. They will be confounded at the finishing of the mystery.

3. Those who improve it not, to the proper end of revealing it to them; *i. e.* the salvation of the soul; like those invited to the marriage of the king's son, who "made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise," Matth. xxii. 5. This is a neglect insuring ruin; Heb. ii. 3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

USE 3, *Last*, Of exhortation. And,

1. Be not rash in passing judgment on the state of affairs in the world, while you see the seeming confusions in your own case, of

others, or of the church. Wait the finishing of the mystery. Then you will see surprising sights ; particularly,

(1.) An admirable harmony betwixt jarring providences and promises. They will meet in close agreement ; and it will appear that there never was any real discord between them ; but that providence took the best way towards the accomplishing of the promises ; Deut. xxxii. 4, " God is the rock, his work is perfect ; for all his ways are judgment ; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he."

(2.) A beautiful agreeableness of smiling providences in the case of the wicked, to the divine perfections. By these will appear the goodness, patience, &c., of God without any the least marring of the divine faithfulness in the threatening. Hence said Abraham to the rich man ; Luke xvi. 25, " Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things ; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." And saith the prophet ; Isa. iii. 11, " Wo unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him ; for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

(3.) The base believers who took the mystery on trust fully satisfied ; the wise and prudent who would believe no farther than they saw, confounded ; 1 Cor. xiii. 12, " For now we see through a glass darkly ; but then face to face ; now I know in part ; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Matth. xxii. 12, " And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment ? And he was speechless."

2. Improve the mystery while you have it, before it be finished ; for if once it be finished, there will be no more method of grace and salvation for sinners. The gospel is the last ship for Immanuel's land. It will be finished in itself with time ; but to you with the end of your time.

(1.) Earnestly seek of God by his Spirit the revelation of the mystery to you, the saving knowledge of it ; Matth. xiii. 11, forecited. For no man can have it without the Spirit ; 1 Cor. ii. 14, forecited,

(2.) Rest not till ye be brought into the fellowship of the mystery ; Eph. iii. 9. By the gospel ye are called unto it ; 1 Cor. i. 9, and by faith brought into it ; 1 John i. 3.

(3.) *Lastly*, Carry always with you in remembrance the finishing of the mystery, and time with it ; that you may be inured to look on the present state of affairs as passing, and to look for all things new.