

3. Walk on resolutely, however narrow and straitening the way be to you; for it leads to life; and the broad way, however easy, to death and destruction.



THE DUTY AND ADVANTAGE OF CLEAVING TO THE LORD AND HIS WAY, IN A DECLINING TIME.\*

GEN. vi. 9,

*Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations.*

IN the two preceding verses we have the destruction of the old world determined, ver. 7, and the preservation of Noah by special favour secured, ver. 8. When that generation for their sins was to be swept away by a deluge, Noah is God's favourite, safety and protection from the common stroke is determined for him. Hereupon a question natively ariseth, O what sort of a man was Noah, who was so highly favoured? It is answered in the words of the text, "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations." Wherein we have,

1. Noah's character; he "was perfect;" not legally, but evangelically. He was a man of integrity, downright for God; not following the wisdom and way of the world, but studying in all things to approve himself to God. This character of his is raised, from the consideration of the time wherein he lived, "He was perfect in his generations;" in the generation before the flood, and the generation after it. The former was a generation of general corruption, ver. 12, wherein the speat of wickedness and apostasy ran so high, that it carried all before it; yet even in such a time Noah kept his feet, and made his way against the stream, though he was very singular. This is the man that finds favour with God in a day of wrath against the generation, that is safe while others are swept away in the anger of God.

2. How Noah came to reach such a character; "He was a just man." It refers not to his life; for the perfection or integrity ascribed to him comprehends all in that point; but to his state; he was a justified man, justified before God by faith in the promise; Gen. iii. 15. For so runs the original, "Noah a just man was perfect," &c. Noah held by the righteousness of faith for himself, and preached

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it to others, as we learn from Heb. xi. 7, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." 2 Pet. ii. 5, "God spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." And not only so, but he taught and practised the righteousness of a holy life; while that generation, slighting the faith of the promise, and going off from the doctrine of free grace therein held forth, to acceptance by works, after the example of Cain, Gen. iv. 5, ran into all immorality, and casting off of good works, in their practice, till they were swept off the earth for their loose lives; which is the native consequent of legality. There were others, I doubt not, besides Noah, justified persons in that generation, and holy too; at least Methuselah, who died in the year of the deluge, and Shem, Noah's son; but this is added concerning Noah, that he "was a just man," to shew that he could not have attained that excellency in his generation, but that he was justified by faith; the promise being the only channel of the conveyance of grace.

Two doctrines are deducible from the words.

DOCTRINE I. In the most declining generation, wherein sin and wickedness come to the greatest height, God has still some, though few, that retain their integrity, and cleave to him and his ways.

In discoursing this doctrine, I shall,

I. Evince the truth of the point.

II. Shew how it is that the declining of a generation comes to be so very general, that so very few are left retaining their integrity.

III. Why some, though few, are still left retaining their integrity in such a generation.

IV. *Lastly*, Apply.

I. I shall evince the truth of this, That in the most declining generation, wherein sin and wickedness come to the greatest height, God has still some, though few, that retain their integrity, and cleave to him and his ways." It has been found so in all ages of the church. In the old world there was a Noah; in Sodom a Lot; among the children of Israel in Egypt a Moses, who all retained their integrity, and cleaved to the Lord and his ways. Of Moses it is said, Heb. xi. 24—26, that "when he was come to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the re-

compense of the reward." There was a Caleb and a Joshua in the generation in the wilderness; in Elijah's days "seven thousand;" in Isaiah's days "a small remnant;" Isa. i. 9, and likewise "a remnant" in Jeremiah's days; Jer. xv. 11. In the Jewish apostasy under Antiochus, there were some that were tortured for the cause of God, and refused to "accept of deliverance" on sinful terms; Heb. xi. 35. When Christ came into the world, there were some "waiting for the consolation of Israel;" and when the Jewish nation was ruined at the destruction of Jerusalem, there was "a remnant according to the election of grace." In the grand apostasy under the New Testament, there were still "two witnesses" left; Rev. ix.

II. How is it that the declining of a generation comes to be so very general, that so very few are left retaining their integrity, that they may be for signs and wonders in the day wherein they live?

1. The corruption of human nature is the spring-head of it; Gen. vi. 5, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." In the most favourable times for religion, in the most advantageous circumstances men can be placed in, man's nature has still a strong bias to the wrong side; therefore no wonder, that whatever set a church or people get at sometimes towards religion, they do through time decline and go all wrong, according to the natural bias.

2. No due care taken for the religious education of those who are springing up, doth notably advance it. When religion falls low among parents, and those in the place of parents having the training up of youth in their hands, it can hardly miss to sink among the children and youth; so that if the one be bad, the other must needs be worse, but where sovereign grace interposes, and hinders the native effect of the neglect and ill example. And here is one of the manifest causes of the declining of religion in our day, in families, in parishes, and in the ministry, alas! too. The signal corrupting of the youth was one of the causes of the apostasy of the generation in Noah's days; Gen. vi. 2, "The sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they choose."

3. Corruption of manners thus prevailing, every one serves to corrupt another, till the leaven has well nigh gone through the whole lump; Gen. vi. 12, "And God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." In a time of declining, sin and wickedness is like a ball of snow rolled among snow, that still grows bigger, one piece of snow licking up another; or like the water, the farther from the head the

greater it grows, by the brooks that join it in its course. And dreadful execution is thus made three ways,

(1.) In all times there are some of no principle, that have no tincture of religion; but in respect of religion are like a sheet of white paper. These readily take on the first bad impressions, and lie a ready prey to evil counsel, and pernicious example. By this means thousands are ruined by their falling into ill hands, and in an evil time; who might have got another cast, if the stream of wickedness had not run so high in their day.

(2.) There are others who have a very slender grip of religion. They have good meanings and inclinations; but, alas! the evil day comes upon them ere they are rooted; and so the wind of an apostatizing time blowing hard, their fruit and leaf is blown off, and at length they are blown up by the root with it, and go quickly away with the stream.

(3.) Many that have the root of the matter in them, fall asleep, and let down their watch, and they are carried off their feet too; and so, though they get their souls for a prey, they lose the honour and advantage of retaining their integrity in their generation. Thus it is said of some of the Lord's people; Psalm xcix. 8, "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." So Moses and Aaron, for their provocation at Meribah, died in the wilderness, with the generation that had been a snare to them; and good Eli, for the little care he had of the young priests, to train them up rightly for his Master's work, never saw the captive ark return into Israel.

4. When a generation is thus posting on in the road of apostasy from God unto ruin, the Lord usually takes home many of his own out from among them; Isa. lvii. 1, 2, "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness." The good Lamech, Noah's father, died five years before the flood; and his good grandfather Methuselah died in the very year it came on. Josiah was taken away a little before the Babylonish captivity; Luther a little before the wars in Germany began; holy Rutherford died the very day before the act rescissory was passed, 1661; and a great man of God\* in this church was taken away from among us in May 1720. Matters being thus, the declining goes on the faster, the pillars being removed.

5. The declining humour by these means at length so prevails,

\* Mr. James Webster, one of the ministers of Edinburgh.



that it makes its way over all opposition, and gets the mastery, so as it carries all before it, like a flood. And at this height of it three things are remarkable,

(1.) Iniquity comes to be established by a law. Thus some are said to "decree unrighteous decrees, and write grievousness which they have prescribed; Isa. x. 1. The sin of the generation which began privately to set up its head, spreads, and is by degrees brought into reputation, till at length it turns truth and holiness out of their seat, and sits down in their place; and "good is called evil, and evil good;" Isa. v. 20. And then all are not only allured, but commanded to entertain it; and in such circumstances the apostasy of the generation cannot miss to make a mighty progress, like Ephraim; Hos. v. 11, "Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment; because he willingly walked after the commandment."

(2.) Shame is cast on the way of God. Thus our Lord says, that some are "ashamed of him and his words in an adulterous and sinful generation;" Mark viii. 38. And that shame drives many into the net. Then men must risk either their conscience or credit and reputation; and must either be false to God, or fools in the eyes of their generation. No doubt Noah, when he was building his ark, and the rest were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, would even be a laughing-stock to them. This is a mighty engine for corrupting man. Many whom blows would not drive from their religion, are ashamed out of it by an apostate generation pouring contempt on it.

3. The stream of the generation's favour runs on the side of the declining. True seriousness and tenderness serves only to make men overlooked, opposed, contemned, and despised; while such as can go with the multitude, are in honour and estimation, Psalm xii. throughout. The prophet Jeremiah takes notice, chap. xii. 1, that "the way of the wicked prospers," and that "they are all happy that deal very treacherously."

6, *Lastly*, What puts the keystone on the course of a generation's defection from God, and readily fills the cup to the brim, is persecution of the way of God, and of any that will dare to retain their integrity. This is the native end of a declining course, and is readily found, also, to be the full sea-mark, which when they come to, God calls them to an account for their apostasy. Lot was long vexed in Sodom: at length they made an attack upon his house, and then their ruin came on. The Jews had a long day of declining; at length they crucified Christ, and instead of embracing the Gospel, they persecuted the apostles; and so wrath came on them to the uttermost.

III. Why are some, though few, still left retaining their integrity in such a generation ?

1. Because of God's faithfulness in his promise ; Matth. xvi. 18, " Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The gates of hell may attack the church, and carry on their victory very far, but cannot prevail over her entirely. The floods may overflow her even to the neck, but shall never go quite over her head, and so utterly carry her away. Christ is ever in the midst of her ; and though his attendants that cleave to him may be very few, there will always be some.

2. Because God will not leave himself without a witness in an apostatising generation. While the antichristian apostasy was going on, God would have his witnesses against them maintained, Rev. xi. 3. Such a witness for God was Noah against the old world, and by his practice as well as his preaching he condemned them, Heb. xi. 7. And this is the character of all those who in a declining day cleave to the Lord and his way ; Isa. xliii. 10, " Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord." Prov. xxviii. 4, " They that forsake the law, praise the wicked ; but such as keep the law contend with them." Therefore he bears them up for their work.

3. Because therein the power of his grace appears most illustriously. That the Lord preserved a Noah in the old world deluged with wickedness, before it was overflowed with water ; and a Lot in Sodom, where all were so very vile, was a sort of miracle of grace, as the keeping of a candle burning in an ocean, where the waters are round about to extinguish it. There is an emphasis in that Rev. iii. 4, " Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments." There are sometimes when in some places people can hardly miss to seem good, if they be not really so ; but some times there are again, wherein it is extremely hard to get the road kept in the practice of religion, the stream runs so against it.

4. *Lastly*, The Lord preserves them for a seed to better days. What should have come of the new world if Noah had not been perfect in his generation ? But he served to carry the principles and practice of religion into the generation after the flood. And as long as God has a church in the world, be the times never so bad, there will still be some to cause the name of Christ to be remembered in all generations, according to that promise ; Isa. vi. 13, " But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return," &c.

USE 1. Whatever encouragement such have, that turn their back on the way of religion and seriousness, and take a sinful latitude to themselves from the multitude going their way, there is a witness against them still left, that will rise up in judgment against them,

and condemn them. This was the case in Noah's days; Heb. xi. 7, "By faith Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Though iniquity is become fashionable, and the stream of it overflows all its banks in our days, there are still some who for ten thousand worlds would not take the sinful liberty to themselves that others take. And their way and practice writes death on theirs.

2. However bad the days are, let none pretend it cannot be better with them, because their lot is cast in such an evil day. The spear of wickedness never ran so high yet, as to carry all before it without exception. But there are some, who, if religion will be easy for them, will follow it; but they have no heart to strive against the stream. Such are not for heaven, especially in a declining day.

3. Be exhorted not to conform yourselves to the ways of the declining generation wherein our lot is cast; but be among the few who cleave to him and keep his way. It is hard, yet it is possible. Noah was perfect in his generation; it will be our sin and ruin if we be not so in ours. Awake, and bestir yourselves to see your state, that ye be righteous by faith; and see to your life and conversation, that ye walk with God, as Noah did. And for direction take this other doctrine.

DOCTRINE II. God takes special notice of them for good, who in a declining generation retain their integrity, and keep right, cleaving to him and his way in the face of a generation departing fast from him.

In discoursing this doctrine I shall shew,

I. What this rare attainment is, this perfection in such a generation; or, How men keep right, like Noah, in such a generation.

II. What are the advantages of this course, in which the Lord takes special notice for good, of those who follow it in a declining day.

III. *Lastly*, Apply.

I. The first thing is to shew what this rare attainment is, this perfection in such a generation; or, How men keep right, like Noah, in such a generation. It is then to be,

1. Sincere, and not a hypocrite. Sincerity is Gospel perfection; and where it is wanting, nothing is accepted, as is clear from the case of Amaziah, who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart, 2 Chron. xxv. 2; and where this sincerity is, the man is accepted, notwithstanding of many imperfec-

tions, as is clear from the case of Asa, who, though the high places were not taken away, yet his heart was perfect before the Lord, chap. xv. 17. Noah was a sincere soul, else he had not got such a noble character. Hypocrisy will never carry out before the Lord; a form of godliness will be no sufficient preservative in such a generation, wherein the mask is taken off many faces, and the thoughts of many hearts made manifest.

2. Downright for God, without going aside to the ways of carnal wisdom. The apostle gives us an excellent notion of it from his own practice; 2 Cor. i. 12, "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." The man considers what is the good and acceptable will of the Lord; and that discovered, he follows it in simplicity, without consulting with flesh and blood; reckoning it his greatest wisdom to cleave to the Lord's way, and that his greatest wisdom lies in discerning the steps of the great Leader before him. Other wisdom will be a false light.

3. Tender in one's private walk and conversation, as under the eye of the all-seeing God. This David could say from his own experience; Psalm xviii. 23, "I was upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity." Men will in vain pretend to be perfect in their generation, by keeping a fair outside in public, while in the meantime they make no conscience of the secret life of a Christian, which the world cannot be witness to. Those that truly keep right in such a day, set themselves above all to keep their own hearts, to mortify their own lusts, and to keep up communion with God in duties; and do not satisfy themselves with a parcel of outward performances.

4. Watchful against snares and temptations, that one be not led away with them. The perfect man has his eyes in his head to discern his hazard; and his soul cries within him, "Lead us not into temptation." And he labours to stand at a distance from sin: And (1.) From the sin with which he is most easily led aside, Psalm xviii. 23; Heb. xii. 1. (2.) From the snares and sins of the time wherein he lives. He sees the snares of that sort many, as they always are in a declining time; and it is his business to keep his garments clean, Rev. iii. 4. Whatever his station is in the world, he will never think himself out of hazard of being led aside into sinful courses, while all flesh have corrupted their way.

5. Proof against ill example, which is the great engine of Satan for carrying on apostacy in such a day and generation. So was Noah in the old world, and Lot in Sodom. They who set God be-



fore them as they ought, while he bids them stand, though all the world should be moving forward, will not dare to follow. Ill example is the ruin of many in such a day. Hence saith our Lord, Matth. xxiv. 12, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."

6. A mourner for the sins of others. Hence we read of some that sighed and cried for all the abominations that were done in the midst of Jerusalem, Ezek. ix. 4. And righteous Lot, while dwelling in Sodom, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day, with the unlawful deeds of that people, 2 Pet. ii. 8. Such a one will not think himself unconcerned in the sins of the generation wherein he lives. He sees God is dishonoured, his wrath is provoked, the souls of the sinners are thereby put in the utmost hazard, and his own soul is in hazard of being held consenting thereto. So love to God, to his neighbour, and to himself, kindles in his soul a real grief and sorrow for the sins of the generation.

7. An opposer of the sinful courses of the day and generation wherein he lives, as he hath access. Hence is that exhortation; Eph. v. 11, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." It is not enough to stand off from them ourselves; but we ought to witness against sin in others to reprove, admonish, and exhort sinners to take heed of the God-provoking courses. The Lord in such a time saith, "Who is on my side?" And we are to take part with God against a sinful, backsliding, wicked generation.

8. *Lastly*, In a word, it is to be rowing against the stream of iniquity, and endeavouring to draw the nearer God that others are going far from him; to be best when others are worst; to be the more earnest, serious, and active in real religion, the more low we see it falling in our day.

This may afford us matter of lamentation, shewing there are few perfect in our generation. (1.) Most part are under visible blemishes in their outward conversation. (2.) They that are otherwise, are asleep; they are not active for God; if they be not carried away with the stream, they do not oppose it.

II. The second thing is, to shew what are the advantages of this course, in which the Lord takes special notice for good, of those who follow it in a declining day.

1. Sweet peace of conscience in keeping the Lord's way, while others are disregarding it. Hence saith the apostle, 2 Cor. i. 12, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world. Though

it is hard to row against the stream of an apostatizing generation, and may expose one to much trouble; yet there is a quietness within, a certain satisfaction that ariseth from reflecting that one is in the way of duty, and through grace gets it kept. And this will be of great value with those who by experience have learned, that inward peace is preferable to peace with all the world, and is to be bought at any rate, but sold at none. Hence saith Job, chap. xxvii. 6, "My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live."

2. Communion with God, and access to him in duties. Hence saith our Lord, John xiv. 21, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." As the endeavour to keep right in such a day, gives the upright soul many errands to God, and obliges him to be looking much to the Lord, whence must come his help; so the Lord even allows the soul access to him in such a case in a special manner, Rev. xi. 4; and though no works of theirs, but the blood of Jesus only is the ground of their confidence before the Lord, yet uprightness for God removes the impediments which hinder the soul's confidence. Hence saith the apostle, 1 John iii. 21, "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." If any have communion with God in such a day, it shall be they. Hence saith the prophet, Micah ii. 7, "O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?"

3. A sweet allowance of furniture, strength, and support, for the duty called for; Prov. x. 29, "The way of the Lord is strength to the upright." Sometimes the Lord calls his people to the field of battle; and unbelief says, it will not do, for they are naked and unarmed; but the call being clear, they that would keep right in an evil day, must venture forward at their Lord's beck, though naked, leaving it upon him by faith to provide them weapons when and where he will, 1 Sam. ii. 4. And then they are provided in the field of battle, if not before. Hence saith our Lord, Matth. x. 19, "When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak." And whoever uprightly venture thus to swim against the stream, they may assure themselves the Lord will be the lifter up of their head.

4. Seasonable providential appearances for them. God has a watchful eye for good over them who keep his way; and he will

protect them in it, while he has use for them that way ; Psalm cxxi. 2, 3, " My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved ; he that keepeth thee will not slumber." They that would carry uprightly in a declining time, must lay their account to run a risk ; but it ever remains a truth ; Prov. x. 9, " He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely." And whoever do uprightly appear for God in an evil day, sooner or later God will appear for them, with a favourable cast of his hand ; Prov. xvi. 7, " When a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Lot was a witness against Sodom's wickedness ; and at length they make a furious attack on him and his house, but God seasonably interposeth for his rescue, Gen. xix. 9, 10, 11. Jeremiah in the road of duty was in hazard of death, but the princes rescue him, especially Ahikam, Jer. xxvi. Samuel witnesses against Israel's bent for a king ; but there was no diverting them ; the speat ran so high, that he could not stem it ; but God joined his testimony from heaven against the people's course by thnnder and rain, which left a conviction in their breasts, so that they greatly feared the Lord and Samuel," 1 Sam. xii. 18.

5. *Lastly*, Special favour in a suffering time, when the Lord ariseth to plead his controversy with the sinful generation. Hence saith the prophet Habakkuk, chap. iii. 16, " When I heard, my belly trembled ; my lips quivered at the voice ; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble." The best security against a time of suffering is uprightness for God in a sinning, declining time.

(1.) Sometimes they are so seen to in a common calamity, that they are freed from trouble, as if they dwelt alone, or had a Goshen to live in, while darkness is over all the land. Hence saith the Lord ; Ezek. ix. 4, " Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof ;" an allusion to the Israelites in Egypt. Noah had an ark when the old world was destroyed ; Lot was saved when Sodom was burnt up. God can hide whom he will, when the world is in greatest confusion.

(2.) A mitigation of trouble when they meet with it in a suffering time. Though they may drink of the cup of common calamity, it shall be of the brim, not of the bottom ; there shall be much sweet mixture in it. Jer. xv. 11, " The Lord said, Verily it shall be well with thy remnant, verily I will cause the enemy to intreat thee well in the time of evil, and in the time of affliction." The rod shall be to them but the rod of a man, a weak man, that lays on but a slender stroke.

(3.) They shall be safe from the sting of trouble; they will have ease within, though trouble without, Hab. iii. 16; forecited. Their standing at a distance from the provocations that brought on the stroke, will afford much sweet peace, while others find themselves taken in the snares their own hands have made.

(4.) They lie fairest to be preserved from the temptations of a suffering time, and to be carried cleanly through. Hence is that promise; Rev. iii. 10, "Because thou hast kept the hour of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth." The Lord in his just judgment, for the sins of a backsliding generation, often brings such a trial, as does not only expose men to suffering, but to sinning, and renouncing the religion that is left them. And it is too likely that they may come to be the trial of this generation; but they that now retain their integrity, are fairest to be preserved in such a day.

(5.) *Lastly*, Let the worst come to the worst in the matter of trouble, it shall be well with them. Josiah had a promise of dying in peace, 2 Kings xxii. 20, yet he died in battle; but the promise stood firm, for die as they will, they die in peace who die within the covenant of peace. The grave is one of God's hiding-places for his people.

USE. I exhort you to be perfect in this generation, to be persons of integrity, downright for God, rowing against the stream of this sinful generation. And in order to that,

1. Purge your conversation from the gross pollutions of the outward man. It is the character of "the man who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord," that "he hath clean hands, and a pure heart; hath not lift up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully," Psalm xxvi. 3, 4. Be blameless in your walk before the world, standing at a distance from the profanity of the generation. It is true that this is not enough; but alas! wickedness is at such a height in the generation, that there are few whose outward conversation is not stained with cursing, swearing, banning, drunkenness, deceitfulness in their dealings, lying, profanation of the Sabbath, &c. Surely, whoever they be that are perfect in this generation, it is not the like of these.

2. Be Christians indeed, in the inner man. Such an one is described Rom. ii. 28, 29, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God." For real religion is under a deep decay; and as profanity is devouring the souls of some, woful formality is preying on



the souls of others. The virgins are generally slumbering and sleeping, and the life of religion is much gone. O strive to be among the "few names which have not defiled their garments," Rev. iii. 4. And here I would recommend three things to you.

(1.) Study to be experimental Christians; Psalm xxxiv. 8, "O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him." Experimental religion is much worn out in our day. Men satisfy themselves with dry and sapless notions of religion in their heads, while they labour not to find the power of truth on their souls; and hence it comes to pass that truth itself is a-going so fast. See the promise; John viii. 32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

(2.) Be exercised Christians, like Paul; Acts xxiv. 16, "Herein do I exercise myself (says he) to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men;" exercised about your soul's case, carefully observing whether ye be going back, or coming forward; looking to the ills of your hearts, your pride, passion, untenderness, &c., and setting yourselves to mortify these; exercised to know what is sin and duty in particular cases; to notice the Lord's comings or goings with respect to your souls.

(3.) Lively and active Christians. The prophet complains, that it was otherwise in his time; Isa. lxvi. 7, "There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself, to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities." In public, and in private and secret duties, stir up yourselves to get near God; to get the favour of religion on your spirits; and strive against deadness, formality, and spiritual numbness, that has seized on most of the generation.

3. Be of a public spirit. That is a spirit sunk sore in this generation; in place of which is come a detestable neutrality, indifference, selfishness, and worldliness; Phil. ii. 21, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Be ye concerned for the public honour of God, for the ark of God, for Zion in all her distresses. Let your hearts say, as Psalm cxxxvii. 5, 6, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." They that are not with Christ in such a case are against him.

4. Be of a Gospel spirit, having high thoughts of the free grace of God, and deep impressions of the nothingness of man, and all that he can do; "Gal. vi. 14, "God forbid (says the apostle) that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Learn and

hold fast Gospel principles in your heads; keep up a Gospel frame in your hearts, and have a Gospel practice in your walk. Learn the art of living by faith, believing the promise, and on the credit of the promise going out in duty. Let love constrain you to obedience, and be strict and tender in the whole of your walk, and so adorn the profession of the Gospel.

5. Be accurate observers of your duty to God, whom the generation we live in has much cast behind their back. Be conscientious in the duties of godliness, frequent and fervent. Keep your hearts for him; worship him reverently, converse much with his word; give yourselves to prayer; let him have the morning as well as evening sacrifice in secret and in your families; name his dreadful and holy name as little as you can in common conversation, and never mention it but with awe on your spirits; sanctify his day, and let alone discoursing of your worldly business before and betwixt sermons, at home or at the kirk.

6. Be nice observers of justice and truth in your dealings with men; for both these are rare to a marvel in this generation, as they were of old. See Isa. lix. 13—15, Mic. vii. 1, &c. O sirs, do not go with the stream of the generation. Know that God is a God of justice and truth, and his soul loathes the unjust and deceitful man. A little gained or kept back by injustice, may bring a blasting curse on all you have, and may make it melt yet like snow before the sun. Make not the way of the multitude the standard of justice in your dealings; but “to the law and the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Especially I recommend to you, and, as the messenger of God, do bind it this day on your consciences, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets,” Matth. vii. 12. Lie not; but be ye tender of speaking truth, as ye would be tender of your souls. That is the character of the Lord’s people; Isa. lxiii. 8, “Children that will not lie.” Be slaves to your word; if it be to your loss, do not break your promises. This is the character of a citizen of Zion: Psalm xv. 4, “He sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.” And in a special manner do not break your promises, and alter your bargains with the poorer sort to their loss; Prov. xxii. 22, “Rob not the poor because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted in the gate.”

7. Oppose and set yourselves against sin and wickedness in others, as ye have access; and so endeavour to stem the tide of the apostasy of the generation; Eph. v. 11, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” Appear on

the Lord's side as witnesses for him, and his ways of truth and holiness; and discountenance and bear testimony against the dishonour you see done to his name. Strengthen the weak in hazard to be led away; admonish and warn those before whom temptations are laid; and shew yourselves adversaries to all sinful courses. Hence are these exhortations, 1 Thess. v. 14, "We exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." Jude, vers. 22, 23, "Of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." If ye be Christ's disciples, ye are the salt of the earth, Matth. v. 13, to resist putrefaction.

8. Do your endeavour to get a right set in the young generation, who are in great hazard at this day. It should be the work of all that fear God, to be concerned for posterity, after the example of David; Psalm xlv. 17, "I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations; therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever:" and therefore to give good example and precept in their families, as did Abraham, Gen. xviii. 19, "For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment:" and to be useful to all others of the younger sort, as they have opportunity, to recommend the way of the Lord to them, and set them at odds with the sinful courses of the day. The hope of future times lies in them; and what will become of the land, and of the work of God, his cause and interest in it, if they be bred up in the ways of the present apostacy of the generation?

When we look to the rising generation at this day, they are visibly declining, generally corrupt in their manners, and worse than their fathers; however, in a few years, church, and state, and country will be in their hands. This is a weighty consideration for all who are concerned for religion. I would therefore drop a few words to those of the younger sort of both sexes.

1. While you are entering on the stage of the world at this time, you must either act the part of witnesses for God against the sinful courses of the day, or enter into the conspiracy of the generation against God. Ye cannot be neutral, however ye may think to be so; Matth. xii. 30, "He that is not with me," saith Christ, "is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad." Therefore consider well which to choose, and resolve to sist yourselves forthwith on Christ's side. Say as Joshua, chap. xxiv. 15, "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that

were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

2. Know that this land is married to the Lord in solemn covenants to reform what is amiss, and to preserve the reformation in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, and to oppose whatsoever is contrary to sound godliness. And since that time there have been speats of defection and apostacy from God. But among our fathers were found witnesses for God, who, at the expense of all that was dear to them in the world, and even of their own lives, transmitted the testimony for truth and holiness unto us. It lies upon your consciences to take it up, and maintain it; for ye must be answerable to God for it in your stations; and woe, woe will be to that generation in whose hand it falls. This was expressly enjoined to, and strongly inculcated upon the Jewish church, as ye may see from Psalm lxxviii. 5—7; "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, when he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children. That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born: who should arise, and declare them to their children. That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God; but keep his commandments."

3. The speat of irreligion, neglect and contempt of seriousness, runs so high among the young generation of this day, that ye are in great hazard of being carried away with it; and can hardly miss to be so, if ye do not look well to yourselves. Therefore take these advices.

(1.) Begin the world as ye would desire to end it; Eccl. xii. 1, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." Though ye be young now, ye must be old, and go the way of all flesh then, if not before. It is pity to stand at a distance from religion and seriousness while ye are young, since ye know the day will come when ye will need it, and ye know not how soon.

(2.) Give an obedient ear to good advice for your souls. Nature is corrupt, youth is headstrong, raw, and inexperienced; there is much need for to be pliable to the counsels of those concerned for your spiritual welfare, Prov. v. 11, 12, "lest thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed; and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof?" A few years may come to let you see the folly of the way of wilfulness.

(3.) Take heed to your company; 1 Cor. xv. 33, "Be not de-



ceived: Evil communications corrupt good manners." Ill company has been the ruin of many, and is so at this day. And many have fallen into such company in their youth, as has given them an ill set, that has stuck to them all their days; or led them into such courses, as have soon ruined them.

(4.) Observe carefully and improve what ye see befalling young people as well as others. You see there are of that sort carried off to eternity in the middle of their days; and is it not reasonable you should timely see to your own state, in case it be your lot too? You see what wretched snares the folly of youth betrays many into; and be ye therefore on your guard. Take heed of sad examples set before you, lest ye become examples to others.

(5.) Study to learn the lesson of the vanity of the world; Eccl. i. 2. What is youth, strength, beauty, wealth, &c. but fair fading flowers, that last not, but are quickly gone? Cease your towering imaginations, your flourishing hopes of worldly contents, your big promises to yourselves of what fine things you may reach; these will but make your disappointments the more cutting.

(6.) Consecrate yourselves to the Lord; and let Christ Jesus, the plant of renown, the chief among ten thousands, have your hearts and affections while ye are young; Prov. xxiii. 26, "My son," says the Lord, "give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." Lay hold on him in the covenant of grace, and knit unto him by faith, and so lay your measures for your welfare in time and eternity.

(7.) Carry yourselves tenderly and religiously, being holy in the whole of your conversation; Heb. xii. 14, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Whatever be your station in the world, be conscientious in the duties of it, looking on the all-seeing God as the party with whom ye have chiefly to do. And particularly be modest in your garb, speech, and behaviour; that Satan may not carry on his triumph at the rate he has often done in this place, to the dishonour of God, reproach of religion, and the ruin of souls.

(8.) *Lastly*, Eye God seriously, and walk by his counsel, in your settlement in the world; Prov. iii. 6, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Lay your matters before the Lord in prayer, and, in dependence on him for light, weigh them in the balance of sanctified reason, according to the general directions of the word; and walk as the Lord is pleased to discover his mind. Especially in your marriages acknowledge God, and walk by his direction. The neglect of this in the old world was one of the springs of that wickedness that brought on the flood; and that

spring is fast running at this day, carrying on the apostacy of the generation.

I shall give you the following MOTIVES to press you to be perfect in this generation, as you have been exhorted. Consider,

1. It will be a great discovery of your sincerity, and unfeigned love to the Lord and the way of holiness. "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations." A declining time is a trying time, and the naughtiness of many is thereby discovered; it is a sifting time, and there is much refuse appears. In times wherein religion and seriousness are in vogue, as sometimes they have been, many put on the mask of religion that have nothing of it in reality; and then the time turns, and wickedness goes with open mouth; so men cast off their mask, and appear in their own colours, and then appears who have it in reality; 1 Cor. xi. 19, "For there must be heresies among you, that they which are approved, may be made manifest among you."

2. It is a noble, heaven-like disposition, to be perfect in such a generation; to cleave to Christ, when the generation is so generally turning their back on him, John vi. 66—68. It speaks a man to have a rooted principle in him for God and his way, and not to be carried by the mean motives of the world's applause, ease, &c. towards religion, but out of conscience towards God.

3. It will glorify God very much; and that is the great business we have to do in the world, agreeable to what is said; 1 Cor. x. 31, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Compare Matth. v. 16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." This will be a testimony for God against a sinful generation, the keeping up of a standard for him, while so many standards are displayed against him; Prov. xxviii. 4, "They that forsake the law, praise the wicked; but such as keep the law, contend with them." Alas! what should come of his declarative glory, if there be none to show a respect to his commands.

4. It is the best service ye can do for the generation, like David, who "served his own generation by the will of God," Acts xiii. 36. No man is born for himself, every man is obliged to seek the good of mankind, and particularly to lay himself out for the good of the generation wherein he lives. Now there is a twofold good to be done the generation this way. (1.) It is a proper mean to keep them back from the way of sin, and to gain them to the way of the Lord. Example has a powerful influence. Hence is that exhortation; 1 Pet. iii. 1, "Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by

the conversation of the wives." And if one soul can be gained that way, from the way of sin, how desirable is it? (2.) It is a proper mean to keep off wrath; it is the bearing up of the pillars of a land, Psalm lxxv. 3. If there had been but ten righteous men in Sodom, the Lord would have spared it for their sakes.

5. Suppose it should not be effectual to stop the career of any in their sin, yet it would leave a conviction of sin in their consciences. Hence the apostle exhorts the Philippians, chap. ii. 15, 16, to "be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation; among whom" says he "ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." A holy tender conversation, though wicked men's corruptions rise against it, yet their consciences approve of it; and while they are running down the godly man for it, yet in their consciences they have a secret honour for him.

6. It is a debt we owe to posterity. Hence says the Psalmist; Psalm xlv. 17, "I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations; therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever." The keeping of the way of God in a declining generation, is a transmitting of the testimony for God to those yet unborn; and the going the way of the multitude is a betraying of them, as it were a conspiring to take the light out of the room they were coming into, that they may have nothing but darkness.

7. It is an honourable thing. It is to be a witness for God; and this is one of the characters of his people; Isa. xliii. 10, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord." Behold, the honourer of God shall be honoured, when those that despise him shall be lightly esteemed, 1 Sam. ii. 30; Prov. x. 7, "The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot." How savoury is the name of Noah, Lot, Caleb, and Joshua at this day, while the name of the old world, Sodom, &c. is in disgrace?

8. It is the best course ye can take to be safe in the evil day, when the Lord calls the generation to an account. A sinning time will be followed with a suffering time; and it is good to prepare for it in time. They quite mistake their measures, who go off the Lord's way for safety; Prov. x. 9, "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but he that perverteth his ways, shall be known."

9. *Lastly*, It will be most comfortable in a dying hour; as it was to the good king Hezekiah, when he said, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight," Isa.

xxxviii. 3. Sinful going with a multitude, coming in remembrance on a death-bed, makes bitter reflections; whereas that is sweet, which is mentioned; 2 Cor. i. 12, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

I shall conclude all with the following directions.

DIRECTION 1. See, in the first place, to be just by faith in Jesus Christ. Where the soul has not the imputed righteousness of Christ there can be no righteousness of a holy life. For the unjustified man is under the curse; he wants the root of good works, viz. faith. But the soul furnished with faith, is furnished for holy walking.

2. Make the word of God your rule, and not men. "All men are liars," Rom. iii. 4. It is dangerous for one to be satisfied with a thing, just because men are so. Most men, good men, will not be a safe standard in a declining time.

3. Labour for holy courage in the Lord's way; men are in hazard of being ashamed of Christ in a sinful time. There is need of a brow to face the daring wickedness of such a generation.

4. Labour to be resolute for God, and a good conscience, Eph. vi. 15. They that would row against the stream, must be resolute, like Joshua, chap. xxiv. 15; who, whatever others should do, was resolved with his house, to serve the Lord.

5. Let not the world's account of singularity have weight with you. They will be apt to think it strange that you "should run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you," 1 Pet. iv. 4.

But do not regard their opinions or censures. Many comply with sinful courses, because they cannot away with being singular. But better be alone in God's way, than out of it with the whole world.

God's people can hardly miss to be a world's wonder sometimes, as was the case with Joshua, and his fellows; Zech. iii. 8, "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee; for they are men wondered at."

6. *Lastly*, Keep eternity much in view; 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." This is an excellent help to get right through an evil world. He that considers, he knows not how soon he may step out of the world into eternity, will take heed to his steps, that he step not wrong in a declining day.

Therefore let the example of Noah, who "was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and walked with God," have a due influence upon you to move you to follow his steps.