

to him and trusts on him for salvation from sin and from wrath, Matth. i. 21, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins."

(2.) As a portion, that will eternally make up impoverished and ruined creatures, Psalm cxlii. 5, and in which the poor petitioner may find what he has so long sought for in vain, in the world and the way of sin.

(3.) As his resort for ever in all his needs, whatever they shall be, Psalm lxxi. 3. The soul coming unto God, comes to him as one that will never go back to another, but will hang on about his door, though he should die at it.

I conclude with an inference or two.

1. Whoso come not unto God in Christ, as a Saviour, &c., are certainly ignorant of him, and see him not in his glory; "For they that know thy name," says the psalmist, "will put their trust in thee," Psalm ix. 10.

2. Great and powerful must that glory be, which draws sinners from all other doors unto God. By nature we are backward to come unto God; it must be a very ravishing glory that has such an effect on perverse sinners.

3. *Lastly*, Be concerned to discern that glory; to discern it by faith, and by experience, in order to your coming to him as your Saviour, portion, and continual resort.

ON ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD:—THE DOCTRINE OF THE ACCEPTANCE OF MEN'S WORKS EXPLAINED, AND A PRACTICAL REGARD THERETO IN ALL THE DUTIES OF LIFE INCULCATED.*

2 Cor. viii. 12,

For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

THE Christians in Judea being in much distress and poverty, there was a contribution through the churches of the Gentiles for them. The communion of saints extends not only to spiritual, but temporal things too; that they be ready to help one another out of their sub-stance. And this communication of worldly things to the supply of the saints, is not confined to those of our own church; but is to be extended to strangers on occasion, at the greatest distance. The

* The substance of several sermons preached at Etterick in the year 1726.

gospel came from Judea to the Gentiles; and now money must go from the Gentiles for the relief of those of Judea. Hereby God took a trial of the Gentile churches, their love to, and esteem of, the gospel. Many will pretend to great esteem of the gospel, but they must have it for nothing. Any of their money that is desired for any public use, for the furtherance of the gospel, it is all accounted lost.

This contribution is here recommended to the Corinthians. They readily fell in with the proposal, ver. 11. Now they are desired to perform, each according to his ability.

In the text, an objection of the poorer sort is answered, who might fear that any thing they had to give was so little, that it would not be accepted. In answer thereto, they are told that God regards men's works rather by the quality than the quantity; by the mind it is given with, rather than by the thing given.

1. The case of acceptance is put, "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted." The acceptance here is of a man's work, not of his person; though the former always presupposeth the latter, in the gospel way. And it refers to God, for he only can judge with what mind a thing is done. Now God accepts a man's service, if there be first a willing mind; that is, a readiness and good will to the work of his service. If the heart go before and lead the hand, it is accepted; otherwise it is not.

2. What regard is had in this acceptance of one's work to the quantity of it. (1.) That it be according to one's ability, that it be done to his power. Some are able to do more, and be more useful than others; but if men have a willingness to the work, and do what they are able accordingly, it is accepted through Christ; his that can do but little, as well as his that can do much. But this cuts off the pretences of those who content themselves with lazy wishes, and lay not out themselves to do what they may do. (2.) That want of power to do more, shall not mar the acceptance of what is done according to power with a willing mind, Mark xii. 43. The Lord will take the little piece of service off his people's hand, when the heart is right; as well as the great service of those of his that have great abilities. Not but that where the inability is brought on by people's own fault, it is their sin that they do not do more; but that sin shall be forgiven them, and what they do be accepted, "if there be first a willing mind."

The scope and substance of the text may be taken up in the following doctrines.

DOCTRINE I. Works may be done in service to God, that are not accepted of him.

DOCTRINE II. It should be our main concern in our works, that they may be accepted of God.

DOCTRINE III. Where there is a willing mind carrying out a man to do and serve the Lord to his ability, what is so done is accepted of God.

DOCTRINE IV. Want of power to do more, shall not mar the acceptance of what is done from a willing mind according to one's power. In that case, God will accept of his people's will for the deed.

I shall speak to each of these doctrines in order.

DOCTRINE I. Works may be done in service to God, that are not accepted of him.

In treating this point, I shall,

I. Confirm the doctrine.

II. Assign the reasons thereof.

III. Make some improvement.

1. In order to confirm the doctrine, consider,

1. Oft-times God hides his face from the man and his work too, and people have no communion with God in their services to him; Hos. v. 6, "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord; but they shall not find him, he hath withdrawn himself from them." When a master will not look on his servant's work, it is an evidence he is not pleased with him, nor it, Isa. i. 15. This may be the case of the godly sometimes, and it is the case of the wicked always. O how many lost services are there this way.

2. Such services may be so far from being accepted, that they are really loathsome to a holy God; Prov. xv. 8, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." He reckons them to be to no purpose, he is full of them, they are vain in his esteem, he cannot endure them, they are a trouble, a burden, and a weariness to him, Isa. i. 11—14. So it is often fulfilled in this case, "That which is highly esteemed amongst men, is abomination in the sight of God," Luke xvi. 15. The man thinks highly of his own work, and others do so too; but in the mean time God abhors it.

3. God may put such services out of the roll of services to him, and set them down in the roll of sins against him. That is a terrible word, Jer. vii. 21, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, put your burnt-offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh;" i.e., Put your sacrifices that should be all burnt on the altar, to your other sacrifices, and eat all together as common flesh to fill your bellies; *q.d.*, Let your prayers, and your common discourse, your hearing of sermons and your idle tales go together; I esteem the

one no more than the other. And that is another dreadful word ; Amos iv. 4, "Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression ; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years ;" *q.d.*, Go to your knees now, and take the name of God in vain ; go to the church, and put off a little time of a Sabbath day.

4. They may bring a curse and a stroke on men, instead of a blessing and token of God's favour ; Hos. viii. 13, "They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it ; but the Lord accepteth them not ; now will he remember their iniquity and visit their sins." Nadab and Abihu were consumed by a fire that came out from the altar they were serving at ; Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead on occasion of selling their land for the service of the church ; and men may be smothered with the dung of their sacrifices spread on their faces, Mal. ii. 3.

5. *Lastly*, This may take place while the service stands the man both cost and pains. The Israelites were at cost for spices for the altar, but all was rejected, Jer. vi. 20 ; they were at pains in attending ordinances, and endured a stress in fasting, but all to no purpose, Isa. lviii. 2, 3. Bodily exercise profiteth little before God, who is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

II. I am next to render the reasons of the point, That works may be done in service to God, that are not accepted of him. God is no austere master, but very indulgent to his servants, and will take a very small service kindly off their hands ; but men often serve him in a way that is provoking to him, and to his dishonour ; and thence are the reasons why their services are not accepted.

1. Sometimes that is offered for service to God, that is forbidden by him, John xvi. 2, "They shall put you out of the synagogues : yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service." A blinded conscience gets the leading of a man, and leads him out of the way of God ; it dictates what is sin to be duty, and what is duty to be sin ; so that the man thinks he is serving God, while he is really serving his own corruptions ; and so instead of a "Well done, good and faithful servant," he meets with a "Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness," Isa. v. 20 ; and "lies down" at length "in sorrow," Isa. l. ult.

2. Sometimes that is offered that is not commanded or required ; Matth. xv. 9, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Nothing can be acceptable to God, but what is required by some one or other command of his ; "for whatsoever is not of faith, is sin," Rom. xiv. ult. See Isa. i. 12.

Horrid idolatry is condemned on that very ground, that it was uncommanded service, Jer. vii. 31. It is an affront to the sovereignty of God, and his mastership, for men to order his service according to the devices of their own hearts, and not to keep precisely to his orders. Hence are the superstitions of Popery, and the uninstituted ceremonies of the Church of England, which are the product of human device, without any countenance from the word of God.

3. Ofttimes, though the work be commanded of God, yet it is marred in the making. There is something about the person, or the work, that ruins all.

1st, About the person, that mars the acceptance. As,

(1.) He may be in a state of separation from Christ, not united to him by faith, and so not accepted of God, John xv. 5. No acceptable work can be done by any man while he is out of Christ; Eph. ii. 10. For a man's person must be accepted, before his work can be accepted, since his work being imperfect, cannot procure the acceptance of his person. Now no sinner's person is accepted but in Christ, Eph. i. 6, and we come to be in Christ by faith; therefore faith in Christ must go before acceptable obedience, Heb. xi. 6. Faith makes the tree good, ere it can bring forth good fruit, Matth. vii. 17. And no fruit of obedience is accepted of God, but what grows on a branch of Christ the true vine. The blasting curse lies on all other. See Gen. vi. 9.

(2.) He may be in a state of enmity with God; and as no man will like the services of his enemies, so God will not accept the services of one not reconciled to him; Amos iii. 3, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Every unbeliever is an enemy to God, Rom. viii. 7, for his sin remains unpardoned, and his nature unchanged; and therefore his best works are but splendid sins, himself but a whited sepulchre; and when he speaks and acts fairest, there are seven abominations in his heart. How then can an all-seeing God accept such services?

(3.) He may be an unregenerate man, and so like Simon "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity," Acts viii. 23. Whosoever are out of Christ, are unregenerate; for it is by being in him, and so partaking of his Spirit and fulness, that we become new creatures, 2 Cor. v. 17; Eph. i. 13. Now how can the corrupt tree bring forth good fruit? or the old nature acceptable obedience? If the fountain be poisoned, can the streams be wholesome? Could one like the best liquor in a vessel wherein there is no pleasure?

(4.) He may be habitually unholy or profane in his life, or as to the body of his conversation; Prov. xxviii. 9, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."

So the Lord rejects the sacrifices of the Israelites, Isa. i. 15, 16. The Psalmist tells us, that "the man who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and stand in his holy place," must "have clean hands, and a pure heart," Psalm xxiv. 3, 4. The apostle wills to "lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;" 1 Tim. ii. 8, if we would be accepted. Their conversation must be of a piece, whose works will be accepted; for God will never accept the services of men, that for the most part serve the devil, the world, and their lusts. Many are like the harlot; Prov. vii. 13, 14, as if they thought their duties would purge away their sins. Nay but their sinful courses otherwise will pollute and render abominable their duties, Hag. ii. 11—14.

2dly, About the work, that may mar its acceptance.

(1.) It may be none of the work of the Spirit of Christ in the man, but proceeding from a man's self alienably. All good works accepted of God are the product of the Holy Spirit in believers, as the sap which the vine-stock communicates to the branches. Therefore to "the works of the flesh;" Gal. v. 19, are opposed "the fruits of the Spirit;" ver. 22. And "all goodness is the fruit of the Spirit;" Eph. v. 9, and a Christian's life is "a walking after the Spirit;" Rom. viii. 1, as a borrowed life. And as no common hearth-fire could be accepted at the altar, but only the holy fire that came from heaven; so no work will be offered to the Father for acceptance by the Son, but what is the work of his own Spirit; and no work will be accepted by the Father, but what is offered by the Son as intercessor. See Eph. ii. 18. See what prayer is accepted, Jam. v. 16. Not the prayer of every one, but of a "righteous man;" not every prayer of a righteous man neither, but "the inwrought" (*Gr.*) "prayer" of his, viz. that which is inwrought by the Spirit.

(2.) It may be no work of love to God, or of a willing mind; but done awkwardly and against the grain; 1 Tim. i. 5; some bye-considerations moving the man to serve the Lord; and no liking of him or his service. Forced service can never be accepted, that which people are constrained to. It is the obedience of slaves, not of sons, that natural men do perform; and flows from a spirit of fear, more than a spirit of love; 2 Tim. i. 7. See Isa. lxiv. 5.

(3.) It may be not done in faith, and so cannot be accepted; Heb. xi. 6. Acceptable service is done in the faith of the command, having authority on the man's conscience; and in the faith of the promise, the promise of strength to perform, and the faith of the reward of grace, believing the labour shall not be in vain in the Lord, 1 Cor. xv. ult. But instead of that, most of our good works are done without any regard to God's authority, without any dependence on him for strength, and without the true hope of the gratuitous reward of grace won by Christ to be communicated to us.

(4.) It may be done selfishly; men seeking their own profit in them, more than God's honour; seeking to please their own conscience that otherwise will not let them rest, rather than to please God; seeking a name to themselves, rather than to glorify his name; and to save their own souls from hell by them, rather than to testify their thankfulness to the Saviour, who has purchased salvation by his blood. This is to pervert the end of duties, to use them for unhallowed ends; in a word, to serve ourselves, and not God; and therefore no more to be accepted than a servant's working his own instead of his master's work, Hos. ix. 4; Zech. vii. 6. Yea good things may be done downright to serve a lust, or to satisfy a passion, Matth. xxiii. 14; 2 Sam. iii. 9.

(5.) It may be done by chance rather than design; Lev. xxvi. 21; (*Heb.*) There are who are chance-customers to religion, who fall in with a good work, rather because it falls in their way, than because God lays it in their way; as the Danites, Judg. xviii. 5. God looks to the heart, and undesigned service to him will be reckoned no serving of him, but serving one's own fancy. This is another thing than one's embracing an opportunity which the Lord puts in his hand; Gal. vi. 10, wherein one is glad of an occasion of serving God.

(6.) It may be done by the power of custom, rather than of conscience. Custom, fallen into by education, or otherwise, is the spring of many duties done by men; wherein men move, by that, as a clock by the weights; rather than from an inward principle; which can never be acceptable to the heart-searching God, who requires reasonable service.

(7.) It may be done in a slighting manner, dealing scrimpily and grudgingly with God. As when there is no proportion between the work and one's ability, as in the rich men casting in their little piece of brass-money, Mark xii. 41; when men offer to God, not the best, but the most worthless they have; so did Cain, Gen. iv. 3, 4. Thus men by thinking any thing may serve in the service of God, pour contempt on the holy One, and bring on themselves a curse instead of a blessing; Mal. i. 14.

(8) *Lastly*, When it is not offered to God for acceptance through Christ. It is God's appointment; Col. iii. 17, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." A young pigeon would have been accepted on the altar of Jerusalem, when a bullock would not have been accepted on the altar of Bethel. If the service of men be never so great and costly, if it is offered to God otherwise, and the acceptance of it looked for because of its own worth, it will be rejected, Rev. vii. 14. No works savour with God, but as they savour of Christ, 2 Cor. ii. 15.

I now proceed to make some short improvement of what has been said,

1. People may do much in the service of God, and yet do nothing to purpose, Eccl. x. 15. A man may go many a weary foot, and yet never come to the place he designed, while he wanders from the right way, 2 John 8. Such wanderers in religion are all unregenerate men, who set about duties; they are busy doing nothing. They do many good things like Herod, and yet they never do one thing acceptably. For their persons are not accepted; and so their works cannot be so.

2. Even among the duties of a godly man, there may be much refuse; many unaccepted duties. A believer's person is always accepted of God, Eph. i. 6, for the state of justification is perpetual. But such may be the prevalence of faithlessness, selfishness, &c., in some particular works of his, that they may never come to be accepted of God; for sanctification has its ups and downs, being liable to many changes.

3. How little reason is there to boast of our works! There is nothing we can do, can be accepted for its own worth. If it be accepted, the meanness of it is seen, the soul is humbled, and no acceptance of it is looked for, but for the sake of Christ. If we be so conceited of our work, as to boast of it; it is an evidence that God accepts it not; hence said our Lord unto the Pharisees, Luke xvi. 15, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed amongst men, is abomination in the sight of God."

4. What will come of them that do nothing in the service of God at all; but live in the habitual neglect of known duties, are prayerless, slights of the means of grace, &c.? 1 Pet. iv. 18. If they that set off to the heavenly city may miss the way, and never reach it; sure those that sit still, and never move that way, will never see it. Many soothe themselves in the neglect of duties, because some that do them walk so unlike them; but the case of such is very dangerous; for no habitual neglecters of duties can be saved; and it is in vain for men to make the practice of others an excuse for evil doing.

5. *Lastly*, Take heed how ye perform duties, and satisfy not yourselves with the bare performance, without being solicitous as to the manner, Luke viii. 18. Better is one duty so managed as to be accepted than a hundred otherwise; as one piece of gold is more worth than a hundred counters. But this brings me to

DOCTRINE II. It should be our main concern in our works that

they may be accepted of God.

In handling this point, I shall

I. Shew what is the acceptance of our works with God.

II. Give the reasons of the doctrine.

III. Make improvement.

I. I shall shew what is the acceptance of our works with God. It lies in these two things.

1. His being pleased with them; Col. i. 10, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." The accepted work God approves of, and is well pleased with. Though the saints do no works that they are every way pleased with themselves; yet there are some works of theirs that are very pleasing to God. He delights in them, Prov. xv. 8. They are sweet to him, as honey to the mouth, Cant. v. 1. They are sweet as music to the ear, and as beauty to the eye, Cant. ii. 14.

This pre-supposeth them to be good, and agreeable to his will. For evil cannot be pleasing to him, Psalm v. 4. He who is goodness itself, can never be pleased but with what is good, Heb. xiii. 16. The unregenerate do nothing good, Psalm xiv. 2, 3, and so nothing they do is accepted, Heb. xi. 6. The saints do some things good, some things evil; the good is accepted, and the refuse is cast away.

2. His taking them off their hand, as service done to him. God testified his acceptance of the sacrifice by fire, Lev. ix. ult. for the fire made them go up in flames towards heaven, Judg. xiii. 20. See Psalm xx. 3, Gen. iv. 4, 5. So he received them off their hand. He reckons such a work a piece of service done to him, sets it down as it were in his book, in due time to give it a reward of grace, Lev. vii. 18, Mal. iii. 16.

Hence is the after-notice God takes of the good works of his people;—in time, as it fared with Moses, who, refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, was afterwards advanced to be king in Jeshurun;—in eternity, as Matth. xxv. He will not forget any of them, Heb. vi. 10, but a plentiful sowing of them will have a plentiful reaping. So they are the surest riches, 1 Tim. vi. 18. Not that the reward is given for their sake, but for Christ's sake; and such is the covenant connection.

QUESTION. How can any of our works be accepted of a holy God, or he be well pleased with them, &c, since there is so much sinfulness attending the best of them?

ANSWER 1. In point of justification they are not, nor cannot be accepted; i. e. our persons cannot be accepted as righteous for our works, since they are not legally perfect, perfect in every point. In the way of the covenant of works, the work was first to be ac-

cepted for its own sake, as absolutely perfect; and then the person for the works' sake. So that whosoever seek by their works to be accepted of God, they go back to the covenant of works; and must either bring works every way perfect, or be rejected; and because they cannot do such works, "therefore by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified," Gal. ii. 16.

2. In point of sanctification the good works of the justified may be accepted; i. e. one's person being accepted, his works may be accepted, being evangelically perfect, though not legally; being perfect in parts, though not in degrees. For in the way of the covenant of grace, the person is first accepted in Christ, and then his work though imperfect. Hence it appears,

(1.) That to a person's being accepted of God in Christ, there is no working, but believing required; Mark v. 36. For till the person be accepted of God in Christ, he can do no acceptable work. He can yield no savoury fruit till he be ingrafted by faith in Christ.

(2.) That the way to bring sinners to good works, is to bring them to Christ in the first place by faith, that they may be justified and accepted in him. Men may be made proud legalists otherwise, but not evangelical Christians; whited sepulchres, but still full of rottenness.

(3.) That there is very good reason why the good works of unbelievers are rejected, because they are imperfect; and yet the good works of believers are accepted, though they be imperfect. For besides that the principle, motives, and ends of their works are vastly different, there is a great odds between,

[1.] Their states. The one is the King's friend, the other an enemy; the one the King's son, the other but his hired servant. If a man is pleased with a little piece of service that his own child does him, can the hired servant expect that as little will be taken off his hand? Can our enemy expect the same acceptance of his service, as our friend?

[2.] The desired acceptance. The unbeliever desires his work may be accepted for his salvation; but the believer desires his work may be accepted as only a token of his gratitude to his Saviour, who has saved him already. Can any man rationally think, that as little can be accepted at his hand, for the price of salvation, as may be accepted for an acknowledgment of salvation received?

But further to clear this question, consider,

1. Even the acceptance in point of sanctification, is not for the sake of the work itself, nor for the worker's sake neither; but for Christ's sake, and by the means of his intercession. This is clear from the necessity of Christ's intercession to the acceptance of our

works ; and that intercession being a pleading of the merit of his own obedience and death ; Col. iii. 17 ; Rev. vii. 14, and viii. 3. It is for the same merit of Christ, that first the believer himself, and then his imperfect works are accepted of God.

2. The sinfulness and imperfections that attend the works of the believer, are not, nor cannot be ever accepted. God is displeased and angry with the dross of sin that cleaves to the believer's best performances ; and he never is so well pleased with the good in them, as to accept the ill too. Yea, he may write his indignation against these, when he is pleased with the substance of the work.

3. The main of the accepted work is good, however sinfulness attends it. For the matter of it, it is commanded ; for the form of it, it proceeds from a right principle, the love of God ; it is done in faith, and to the glory of God. And this is the work of God's own Spirit in the believer ; the weaknesses that attend it, proceed from the believer himself. And such works as are good in the main, God will not reject, for the infirmities that attend them. As for those works even of believers that are not thus good in the main, they are not at all accepted.

4. Christ separates the precious from the vile part, and offers the former perfumed with his merit, unto the Father for acceptance, Heb. x. 21, 22 ; Rev. viii. 3. In every sacrifice there were two very different things, the flesh and the skin and dung. The former came to the altar, the latter never. So Christ separates in a believer's duties that which is from his own Spirit, and that which is from the believer himself puts away this, and presents that to his Father. This was lively represented in the burning of the incense, where the fire being set to it, the finer part went up in flame and smoke, towards heaven ; and the gross part, the ashes, remained, and a priest came and carried them away in a golden dish. So is the case here,—the finer part in the saints' services, that which is done by the assistance of the Spirit and in faith, ascends to heaven for acceptance ; and the ashes that remain are carried away, in virtue of the free promise, Ezek. xxxvi. 25.

5. *Lastly*, The Father then accepts the precious part for the Son's sake, and for the same sake pardons the guilt of the vile part, the infirmities attending it, Rev. viii. 4 ; Psalm cxli. 2. The accepted duties go through two hands, first the believer's, then Christ's ; their prayers are first said on earth by themselves, then they are repeated in heaven by the Mediator. It is from the second hand only, and on the repetition only, that they are accepted, 1 Kings viii. 32 ; and in the second hand, and on the repetition, they are not so bulky, but better.

II. I shall next give the reasons of the point, That it should be

our main concern in our works that they may be accepted of God. Because,

1. As God is the first cause, so he is the chief end of all things; Rom. xi. ult., "For of him, and through him, and to him are all things." So as we are his creatures, our chief end in all our duties should be to please him; as all the waters coming from the sea do return to it again. This was the duty of Adam in the covenant of works, as sure as he was not to have another God, as in the first command; though he was to gain life by his works, which we are not, and therefore it is surely ours much more.

2. Our duties are a matter of gratitude; we owe them to God, not only in point of justice, but thankfulness, for benefits received, creation, preservation, and redemption; Exod. xx. 2, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house bondage." We are in debt to him, and we cannot pay, but only acknowledge by small tokens, Hos. xiv. 2. If we are to offer to a fellow creature a token of our obligation to him, the first question is, What is it that I can give that will be most acceptable to him? How much more should the first question be, What is it that I can give that will be most acceptable to God?

3. God looks mainly to the heart with which a duty is done, and knows whether he gets it or not, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. Though a servant do well, yet if he hath no regard to his master's pleasure in what he does, it is disobliging; and whatever men do, if it is not their main aim to please God, it is provoking. Our aims may be hid from men; but they are as open to God as our overt actions.

4. *Lastly*, It is a necessary ingredient in a good work, so that a work cannot be good without it, 1 Cor. x. 31. For such a work is pointed wrong as to the end of it, Zech. vii. 5. It is a sacrifice wanting the heart, the thing that God mainly requires and delights in, Prov. xxiii. 26. So whatever we may account it, God will not account it a good work.

I come now to the practical improvement of this doctrine, which I shall discuss in a twofold use, viz., of conviction, and of exhortation.

USE I. This doctrine may serve for conviction, humiliation, and reproof to men, who generally are strangers to it, and at best very defective in it. It may convict men,

1. In point of ill works. These are fruitful in the world, things that are altogether evil, and cannot be good, Gal. v. 19. In the midst of gospel-light they overflow, and there is no true repentance for them, because there is no reformation. To such workers I would say,

(1.) How far are ye from regarding at all God's acceptance of

your works, who take the liberty to do against the letter of his law, what ye know his soul abhors ? The drunkard, swearer, sabbath-breaker, or unclean person, is not so abandoned as to think that these his actions can please God. But the truth is, the pleasing of God is what he is not anxious about, but he is resolved to please himself in his lust, let his Maker take it as he will. What must be the end of these things ? Rom. i. 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

(2.) Ye thereby evidence, that it is not the pleasing of God, but yourselves, that ye seek in your good works ; and that therefore your ill works and your good works will all go one way, being rejected of God ; your swearing and your praying, &c. will be reckoned all one. If it were your main design in one thing to please God, it would be so in all, Jam. ii. 10, 11 ; and therefore since ye do not endeavour to please him in all, know that ye can please him in nothing ; Psalm cxxv. ult., "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity."

2. In point of good works, namely, those that for the matter of them are good, wherein men may be accepted of God, if they rightly manage them. These are of three sorts :—

1st, Natural good works, such as eating and drinking, sleeping, &c. I call them good works, because they are commanded of God, are necessary to be done, and it would be sin to omit them. They are duties of the sixth command, the neglect whereof is sinful, Col. ii. ult., and one may be accepted of God in them, Rom. xiv. 3, or rejected of him, Zech. vii. 6. Bring these works of ours to this rule, That it should be our main concern in our works, that they may be accepted of God ; and how may we stand convicted of,

(1.) Regardlessness of God's approbation and acceptance in these things ; having no eye to God in them, but going about them as men without God in the world, or as beasts, Matth. xxiv. 38, without any regard to God's command requiring our use of them, dependence on God for the benefit of them, or design to be strengthened by them for serving God in the duties of religion and our particular calling.

(2.) Dishonouring of God in them. In the way of purchasing them, many an ill shift is made for the belly ; and if men can get it, to satisfy the appetite, they are not anxious about their right to it before God, whether it be with a good conscience their own bread, got with honest labour and industry, 2 Thess. iii. 12 ; or whether doing their utmost with their industry, they have a right to it as charitable supply. In the way of using them, without conscientious modera-

tion, by gluttony or drunkenness; a sinful eagerness to satisfy a lust for them; and unfitting themselves for the service of God by them.

It is but a little the time of eating and drinking will last; there is an eternity to be spent without them. If we endeavour to be accepted of God in them while they last, it will be our comfort when we shall for ever lay them aside; if not, the regardlessness and dishonouring of God in them, will be an eternal sting in the conscience.

2dly, Civil good works, which are the duties of men's station, in the common affairs of this life; such as the management of family affairs, the duties of service, of a man's lawful trade or employment. These are good works on the matter, being commanded of God, and in which one is to walk with God, 1 Cor. vii. 24; and therein one may be accepted, Eccl. ix. 7, or rejected, Prov. xxi. 4. Here again men may be convicted of,

(1.) Regardlessness of God's acceptance, Luke xvii. 28. These things mostly are managed without any eye to God, or to be accepted of him in them. His command and call by his providence unto them is not waited for; or if men have it, yet they do not regard it, to go about their business under a sense of God's command, Eph. vi. 7. The Lord is not looked to for direction, but men trust themselves for conduct in these matters, Prov. iii. 5, 6. He is not depended on for success, but men are either flushed with presumptuous confidence, or tormenting anxiety as to events, Psalm cxxvii. 1. And not God's word is the rule they act by in them, but their own worldly interest or ease.

(2.) Dishonouring God in them. As by pride, passion, and selfishness, which are to be found in people's managing of their family affairs; if they get their business done, there is no concern how their families should serve the Lord. He is dishonoured by the unfaithfulness, dishonesty, eye-service, and perverseness of servants; and dishonoured by the lying, cheating, and injustice used by men in their dealings in their several employments.

These things are but time things either; and all the hurry of worldly business will be hushed ere long; and death will draw the busiest man out of the throng, as clean as if he had never been in it, Eccl. ix. 6. It will be your interest to seek to be accepted of God in them; otherwise ye will lay up bitterness from them, that will be lasting when they are gone for ever.

3dly, Religious good works, the duties whether of the first or second table, which are duties of our Christian calling, such as prayer, giving alms, &c. In them also men may here be convicted of,

(1.) Regardlessness of God's acceptance in them. Men proclaim

this by their rash approaching to them, without considering what they are to be about, Eccl. v. 1 ; by their formality in them, satisfying themselves with the doing of the thing, without any anxiety to get their hearts up to the duty, to do it in a right manner, which is mere bodily exercise, 1 Tim. iv. 8 ; and their carelessness after them, unconcernedness as to their success, when once the task is off their hand, Psalm v. 3.

(2.) Making other things our main concern in them : As, [1.] A name for religion, Matth. vi. 2. An unholy heart, that is an enemy to religion at bottom, may be very fond of a name for it. And to advance this empty name, many times good gifts are prostituted, and enlargements in duty, and great performances for God ; all of them running in that channel of ambition, to be highly esteemed of men as religious. [2.] Some worldly interest, John vi. 26, 27. So it was with Jehu. They will please men for their carnal interest, and do religious duties to please men. Often doth the fear of men go deeper here than the fear of God ; and the loss of some worldly interest deeper than the loss of the soul. [3.] Peace in their own minds. There is a conscience within men that will drive to duty, when there is no love to God drawing ; so men by such duties rather seek to please themselves than to please God. And, (1.) To keep conscience quiet, while it is quiet ; so duties are made a bribe to cause conscience hold its tongue. And certain it is, that many could not live so quietly in their sins as they do, were it not for their duties, as appears from the case of the adulterous whore, Prov. vii. 14, 15. This is the reason that publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of heaven before Pharisees ; and Laodicea's case was the most hopeless of all the seven churches. (2.) To still it again when it is roused, Psalm lxxviii. 34. Men may be very anxious for comfort by duty, that have no concern for sanctification thereby. [4.] Salvation from hell and wrath, Matth. xix. 16—20. One may follow duties on this account, without any love to God, as appears ver. 22, " But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful : for he had great possessions." Self is a strong motive, and heaven and hell are strong arguments for duty ; but the misery is, they seek not God for himself, but for themselves, and so are rejected, 2 Tim. i. 7.

In these duties we are now on our trials for heaven ; in a little the sentence will be passed, according to our works. And those who are not now accepted of God in their duties, will then be rejected of God for ever.

USE II. Let it be your main concern in your works, that they

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may be accepted of God ; whether they be natural, civil, or religious. For motives, consider,

1. This is a distinguishing character of one's state, whereby ye will prove yourselves either gracious or graceless. It is a native result of justification and acceptance of one's person with God, to be mainly concerned for God's acceptance of them in their work, 2 Cor. v. 9. So Noah's integrity and uprightness is traced to his justification as the source, Gen. vi. 9. For so the love of Christ constrains. Whereas the soul being in a state of enmity with God, natively issues in no concern to please him.

2. God is a great God and King, infinitely above the greatest on earth ; he cannot be profited by our services, but requires us to labour to please him in them, Mal. i. 14. He gave us our being, and hath put each of us in our station, and carved out our work for us ; whence it necessarily follows, that it should be our main concern to please him, 2 Tim. ii. 4. And would men more narrowly consider this, that it is God that has set them their business and station, and consequently, that he will call for the account of our work, it would stir them up to make it their main care in their works, that they may be accepted of him.

3. There is a costly provision of an altar on which our sacrifices of praise may be accepted, Heb. xiii. 10, 15. There was nothing a sinner could have done, that could have been accepted, had there not been an altar to sanctify the gift. Now it is provided, a crucified Christ is that altar ; he by his death has become a proper intercessor for acceptance, both of our persons and our works. How heinous will our sin be, if we seek not to bring our gift to this altar, for acceptance with God ?

4. Whatever good work, natural, civil, or religious, we do, may be accepted of God, as pleasing service to him through Christ, Heb. xiii. 15, 16. Men are hugely mistaken to think that it is only works strictly called religious, that God accepts as service to him ; nay, whatever God calls for at thy hand, as to tend the sheep, as well as to attend his worship, if thou act in it to please him, and offer it to him for acceptance through Christ, it will be accepted, Col. iii. 23, 24. It is observable, that the apostle having given that general direction, ver. 17, " Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," &c. falls immediately on relative duties, ver. 18, " Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands," &c.

5. The example of Christ may be very moving here, Rom. xv. 3, " For even Christ pleased not himself." His work was heavy work, but to please his Father he undertook it, set about it, and went through

with it, John viii. 29, Psalm xl. and John iv. 34. And shall not we be concerned to please him in our imperfect works, to please whom Christ laid down his life?

6. If ye be mainly concerned for acceptance with God in your work, ye may expect help from the Lord in it. The waters and rivers run all to the sea, and so they are fed again by the sea, that they never run dry. That work that has God's pleasure for its end will get God's hand to it for its help, Phil. ii. 12, 13, Prov. iii. 6. The man that slights God in his natural and civil actions, provokes God to leave him in them, Josh. ix. 14, and then his own understanding that he leaned to, proves folly. And he that slights God in his religious duties does the same, and his gifts prove a broken reed.

7. Whatever be the success of your work, ye will have solid peace, satisfaction, and comfort, in your having been mainly concerned in your works for God's acceptance, Isa. xlix. 4. Men are great fools, to promise themselves success on their own wise management of their natural and civil actions. It has been a truth from the beginning, and will be to the end of the world, that "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, Eccl. ix. 11. And it is equally foolish to expect the world's thanks for doing them a good turn; for ye will be fair to be disappointed, 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2, and look blunt on the disappointment. Nay, such an ill-natured world it is, that it is one to a thousand if they be not heavy on you for it. For, says Solomon, Eccl. iv. 4, "I considered all travel, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour." But when this is one's main concern, he has what he looked for; 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, and more abundantly to you-wards."

8. If ye do not thus, your works will be lost; lost with God, and lost for eternity; and if that be, all that ye will find of them in the world, will be little worth, Matth. vi. 2. This is our sowing time, good works are the seed; will it not be sad to lose all, so as in the harvest ye have nothing to reap? So it will be, if in this your sowing time ye do not throw in the seeds of good works, and make it your principal concern to look for acceptance with God in them; all ye do will be lost for ever, ye will have nothing to reap in the harvest at the last day.

9. *Lastly*, If ye do not, your best works will be turned to sin, Prov. xv. 8, and ye will be surprised to find so many actions of

yours that ye set down in the roll of good works, appear in God's book in the roll of sins; as cockle instead of barley. There is such a thing, Psalm cix. 7, "Let his prayer become sin."

For direction in this point, we proceed to

DOCTRINE III. Where there is a willing mind carrying out a man to do and serve the Lord, to his ability, what is so done is accepted of God.

Here I shall shew,

I. What sort of works they are that are accepted of God.

II. How or in what respect they are accepted.

III. Why they are so.

IV. *Lastly*, Apply.

I. I am to shew what sort of works they are that are accepted of God.

FIRST, They are works done with a willing mind. Wherein we are to consider,

1. What this willingness relates to.

2. What it is.

First, Let us consider what this willingness relates to. This willingness of the soul respects the will of God, as that which the soul is willing to comply with. The will of God is contained in his commands, summed up in a word, 1 Thess. iv. 3, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification;" and it is the duty of all of us to be willing to that will of God, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, and to say as Psalm xl. 8, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." Hence,

1. A work accepted of God is a commanded work, required of us by God himself, and not an unrequired work, Rev. xxii. 14, "Blessed are they that do his commandments." Matth. xv. 9, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Therefore,

(1.) Nothing in itself sinful can ever be accepted of God; though people may pretend they have no ill in their mind against God in doing it; yea though they may have a good intention in it to serve God by it, John xvi. 2. Yet how many do, on these pretences, lie without any check, and do other ill things? Prov. xxvi. 18, 19, "As a madman who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death; so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?"

(2.) Nothing, that is not required of God, though it be not in itself sinful, can be accepted of him, Matth. xv. 9. For there can be no obedience, where there is not a command; these are relatives. If God command us not, we cannot be said to obey him, nor be accepted of him. Hence, [1.] Will-worship is false worship, and service to God just of men's own devising is not, nor can be accepted; Col. ii. 21—23, "Devised of one's own heart," is a brand of rejec-

tion fixed on a work, that is not in itself evil, 1 Kings xii. ult. And Saul lost the kingdom on such a work, 1 Sam. xv. 21. [2.] Doing a duty not the duty of one's station cannot be accepted, 1 Cor. vii. 24. It was a duty to sacrifice, and to burn incense; yet Saul provoked the Lord by his doing the one, and Uzziah was smitten with leprosy for doing the other; because though they were duties, yet they belonged not to their stations. In a well-ordered family, one servant must not take his neighbour's work and post.

2. The command of God requiring the work must be known to the doer; for otherwise men serve the Lord but at a venture, not knowing whether it be his will or no, which can never be accepted, Lev. xxvi. 21. The acceptable work must be done in faith, faith of the command of God, implying knowledge of it, Rom. xiv. ult.

The sum of the whole lies here. If ye would have your work accepted of God, ye must (1.) Know it to be a commanded duty. (2.) Commanded to you. The want of either will mar the acceptance, as a duty not proceeding from a willing mind.

Secondly, Let us consider what this willingness of mind is. It is twofold, habitual and actual.

1. Habitual; which is a disposition of the soul to comply with the will of God's commands, arising from the new nature given in regeneration or the saving change; Heb. viii. 10, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." Psalm cx. 3, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning." The carnal unrenewed mind is enmity against God and his law, Rom. viii. 7. And while that corrupt set abides on the heart predominant, as in all natural men, there can be no true willingness to comply with the will of God. Hence, that any work of ours may be accepted of God, we must be,

(1.) United to Christ by faith, John xv. 5. While we continue in our natural state, growing on the old stock of the first Adam, we can bring forth no fruit acceptable to God; for the whole nature is corrupt according to the stock, and so must the fruit be, Rom. vii. 5. Particularly there is a reigning refractoriness in the will, whereby the soul is as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke of God's will. Whereas the soul being in Christ is changed, according to the nature of the new stock, and made willing, 2 Cor. v. 17, and gets his image, opposed to Adam's, 1 Cor. xv. 49.

(2.) We must be regenerated, and have our nature changed. The tree must be made good, before the fruit can be so, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. How can there be a willing mind for duty, while the will is unrenewed? How can there be new obedience, while one is not

partaker of the new nature? The dark mind, the perverse will, and disorderly affections, not rectified by regenerating grace, being all of them opposite to good, shew the want of a willing mind.

(3.) We must have a predominant love to God, 1 Tim. i. 5. This disposeth the soul, by a constraining force, to fall in with whatsoever the Lord requires; and constitutes one's obedience labour of love. And where it is wanting, good things may indeed be done, for some by-ends, and from some by-principles; but there is not first a willing mind.

This is the habitual willing mind, whereby the soul being in Christ, regenerated, and having the love of God dwelling in it, is in such a disposition to fall in with the will of God, that getting a touch of a particular command, it readily complies therewith in obedience.

2. Actual; which is an actual compliance of the heart, with such and such a particular duty, laid before one at such a time and in such a place; and ariseth from the habitual disposition. The one looks to the whole law; the other to particular commands requiring such and such a particular duty, as of the Corinthians to help the poor saints of Judea. And it implies,

(1.) An approbation of the command of God for the duty. What the Lord by his word and providence requires of the man as duty, he has a love and liking of it from the heart, Rom. vii. 12. The carnal heart rises against this and the other command laying such a duty on the man; and he takes it on as a slave does his burden, because he cannot help it. But the willing mind has a liking of it, 1 John v. 3, as the little child has a liking of being bid do any little piece of service for his father.

(2.) A sincere resolution to set to the work in the season thereof, Josh. xxiv. 15; Psalm cxix. 106. The willing mind goes not about to seek how to shift obedience to the divine call; nor does it seek offputs and delays, till the season of the duty is away; nor does it muster up difficulties, saying, "There is a lion in the way," to palliate disobedience; but resolves to put to hand timely; Psalm cxix. 60, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."

(3.) A compliance of the heart with the command to the duty, because it is God's command, Psalm cxix. 4. The authority of God has weight with the man's conscience; and the love of God inclines his heart to obey. So the will of God is the reason, as well as the rule, of his obedience. As he believes the promise, because God has said it; so he obeys the command, because God has bid it. So the man's great aim is to answer the call of God, and please him.

(4.) A delight and cheerfulness in the duty, Isa. lxiv. 5; 2 Cor.

ix. 7. Love to the Lord oils the wheels of the soul, and the work goes on, not as of necessity, but as of choice, 1 John v. 3. The awfulness of the command is veiled with prevailing love; take off the threatening of wrath from the command, and the willing soul would not stop for all that; for the love of God in the heart is a law, and a powerful one too, Cant. viii. 6. Terror drives to duty, but weakens; love draws to duty, and strengthens, 2 Tim. i. 7. Terror will make men find their hands, but they lose heart; but love gives heart and hand too.

(5.) A design to honour God by the duty. The general direction is plain; 1 Cor. x. 31, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;" and thereto the willing mind echoes back, "To me to live is Christ, Phil. i. 21. The willing mind is not obtained but by faith, whereby the conscience is made good, and the soul put in a state of salvation; hence natively follows the design of glorifying God by good works, and by them adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, 1 Pet. ii. 9. The faith of Christ's salvation makes a powerful impression of gratitude on the soul, that it is glad of an occasion to glorify him, and express its love; Psalm cxvi. 12, "What shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits towards me?"

(6.) *Lastly*, A looking-out for promised help to the duty, by faith, Heb. xii. 1, 2. The willing mind is not blind to its own weakness, but sees that better than others. But what one is really willing and hearty for the doing of, he will use all means for reaching his end. Carnal men say they are willing but they cannot; in that they deceive themselves, for if they were really willing they would go to the fountain of strength for help. So do they with whom is first a willing mind, they set about the duty in the faith of the promise. Hence they will go forward on God's call, however difficult the work be, and get through too; as the women came to the sepulchre, though not knowing how the stone would be rolled away.

Secondly, They are works that from a willing mind are done to their ability. We may take up this in these four things.

1. They are works which people having ability for, are done; they are not merely wished and woulded to be done, as the sluggard uses to wish well with folded hands, Prov. xxi. 25. For where the heart is to a work, the hand will be put to it, so far as in them lies. Men do but deceive themselves, who please themselves with good desires and wishes, without endeavours backing them; Matth. vii. 21, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Jam. i. 22, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

2. They are done according to the ability they could get in. That is, not only according to the ability in hand, but the man labours to get more ability for the work, whereby he may be fitted for it. We are naturally impotent for any good work; but there is a storehouse of strength opened to us in Christ, to be brought in by faith, Isa. xlv. 24. Wherefore they that are not concerned to fetch in strength for duty, but are unable for duty, and hold themselves so, will not be accepted; for there is no willing mind there.

3. They are not done quite below what they might have done, and was in the power of their hand, Isa. xxxii. 5. Where there is an utter disproportion betwixt one's ability and service, it cannot be accepted but that service brings a curse instead of a blessing, Prov. xi. 24. Hence a certain quantity of service may be accepted off one's hand that will not be accepted off another's, Luke xii. 48. Where God gives much, he requires the greater returns.

4. *Lastly*, They are works wherein the willingness of the mind carries out the hand to do, as far as it can reach, 2 Cor. viii. 3. The willing mind loves to serve the Lord, and to serve him liberally; and so carries a man to do to his power.

II. The next general head is to shew how or in what respect such a work is accepted. God accepts such works,

1. As obedience to him and a doing of his will, Matth. xxv. 21. As the willing mind is peculiar to those within the covenant of grace, so it is the privilege of those in that covenant to have their works so done, accepted, though imperfect. There is not one piece of obedience they can do that is perfect, or could be sustained as obedience according to the covenant of works; but God in Christ, in virtue of the covenant of grace, accepts such imperfect works as obedience pleasing to him, Acts xiii. 22.

2. As a token of their love to God, Heb. vi. 10. A love-token is accepted, though not great, if according to the ability of the giver; especially with God, who looks more to the heart it is given with, than the gift. Some offered gold and precious stones for the service of the tabernacle; some but goats' hair and rams' skins; the latter as well as the former was accepted, where they gave according to their ability with willingness.

3. So as to be rewarded, 1 Cor. xv. ult. As believers' good works are tokens of their love to God, so God gives them tokens of his good pleasure with their works, not of debt, but of grace. To those that improve the abilities they have, he oft-times gives more ability, "To him that hath shall be given." However, accepted good works are a seed that will never miss a rich harvest sooner or later.

III. I proceed to shew why such works are accepted. It is not

for their own worth; for the best works of the saints are attended with such sinfulness, that they could not be accepted in the eye of the law; but have in them more than sufficient matter of condemnation, Isa. lxiv. 6. But they are accepted through special privilege.

1. Being sanctified through the Spirit, Rom. xv. 16. Every work of ours is defiled by us, being in ourselves unclean creatures; but the Spirit works in believers, sanctifying them and their works. And he sanctifies their works, by influencing them to work, and in their work exciting them, giving gracious abilities; particularly working in them that approbation and liking of the command, that resolution to set about the work, that compliance of the heart with it, that delight and cheerfulness in the duty, that design to honour God by it, and that looking out for promised help, which I have spoken of before, and causing them to offer their works to God through Christ.

2. They are presented for acceptance, by the Mediator to the Father. Christ is the believers' resident in the court of heaven, managing all their matters there by his intercession, Heb. vii. 25. He takes their imperfect works, perfumes them with the merit of his obedience and death, and gains their acceptance with the Father, according to the covenant of grace, Rev. viii. 3, 4. The sum of the matter lies here; they are the work of his own Spirit in his children, presented for acceptance by the Son, and so they are accepted of the Father, Eph. ii. 18.

USE. From what is said, we may draw the two following inferences:—

1. See here of what concern it is to get the heart up to every duty, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. The doing of the bare work is of small account with God; and where there is not a heart to it, God regards it not. A good work done grudgingly, whatever use it may be for among men, is an ill work in God's sight.

QUESTION. How may one get up his heart to every duty?

ANSWER (1.) Accept of Christ's free salvation by faith, that ye may be brought into a state of salvation. We have a spirit of slaves, a backwardness to good, derived from Adam. It is from Christ we must get the spirit of sons, and the willing mind, uniting with him by faith, John i. 16. Faith trusting on Christ for salvation to be received freely, works that willingness of mind.

(2.) Exercise faith for every duty anew. Believe the promise, [1.] Of assistance by the Spirit, Ezek xxxvi. 26, 27. In the covenant of grace commands are turned to promises, as Deut. x. 16, "Circumcise the foreskin of your heart." Compare Deut. xxx. 6, "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart." Every call to

duty implies a promise of assistance. The belief of this makes willing, Phil. ii. 12, 13. [2.] Of acceptance through Christ. The apostles' work was heavy, but that made them willing, 2 Cor. ii. 15, "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish." It is hard to be willing to a work, which one does not believe will be accepted.

2. See of what concern it is to put hand to every duty commanded us, and to do in it according to one's power; and not to content ourselves with lazy wishes as some do, and slack and scrimp performances as others, Eccl. ix. 10. Neither will to wish and do nothing be accepted; nor to do, but do niggardly. It is not in every case that God will accept the will for the deed.

1st, God will not accept the natural or unregenerate man's will for the deed, in any case. For such a one is under the covenant of works, and no less than works every way perfect can be accepted off his hand, Gal. iii. 10. But this is a privilege of the covenant of grace, which they are not under, not being in Christ. It is the privilege of sons, but they are but at best hired servants, working for hire, nay slaves, as under the curse. Their persons are not accepted; therefore nothing they are, have, or can do, can be accepted. Therefore deceive not yourselves, looking for this benefit, while ye are out of Christ.

2dly, God will accept no man's will for the deed,

(1.) When they content themselves with wishing only they could do a duty commanded them, but yet never essay it, nor put hand to it, Prov. xxi. 25. The sluggard unwilling to obey, makes a cover for his sloth, of the difficulty and his inability for duty, Prov. xxii. 13. But God will rend off that cover, and shew them in their own colours, Matth. xxv. 24—30. Men cannot deny but that such a thing is their duty, and they wish they could, but that is all.

(2.) When they do not what is really in their power to do, Rom. i. 20, 21. Men's power is indeed little, but their doing is far less. Men are not as stocks and stones, but there are many things acts of moral discipline, that they may and can do, but they will not. But they grasp at the principle, that they can do nothing, and so fold their hands, sitting down contented. They cannot do all, therefore they will do nothing. But will that be accepted? No, Exod. xiv. 15. The women did not so, Mark xvi. 2, 4.

(3.) *Lastly*, When they do not by faith fetch in grace from the Lord Jesus to strengthen them to duty, 2 Tim. ii. 1, compared with John v. 40. Many a good work is laid by, because of inability, and marred because we can carry it no further; but God will take notice what course is taken for getting in strength for duty. There

are full promises lying between us and the full fountain, as the conduit-pipes at which faith is to suck and draw, Isa. xl. 29—31. Assure yourselves that the will will not be accepted for the deed, while this is neglected. And why should it? Is that man willing to pay his debt, who though he has nothing in hand, yet has a gift lying in a rich friend's hand, but he will not lift it? See the decision; Matth. xxv. 27, "Thou oughtest to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury."

I shall now consider in a few words the last doctrine I offered from the text, viz.

DOCTRINE IV. Want of power to do more, shall not mar the acceptance of what is done from a willing mind according to power. In that case, God will accept of his people's will for the deed.

Here I shall shew,

I. In what particular cases God accepts his people's will for the deed.

II. Why he does so.

III. Apply.

I. I am to shew in what particular cases God accepts his people's will for the deed.

1. Where there is a sincere will to serve him in a piece of work, requiring some external abilities which are wanting. If it be hindered only by such want, the will is accepted. The disciples would fain have watched more, but the weak body could not bear up with their mind; and Christ kindly takes notice of it; Matth. xxvi. 41, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Sometimes Satan makes a rack here to God's children; such a duty they would do, but bodily strength will not answer, and hereupon they are disquieted; but that is from Satan, and their own weakness; for God does not require that external duty from us, that we have no bodily strength for. That is a sweet word, 1 Cor. vi. 13, "The body is—for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." Peter would fain have given to the poor man, but had it not, and it was accepted in the will, Acts iii. 6.

2. When doing the best we can through grace, our work after all is attended with many blemishes; the Lord will not reject it for these blemishes, but accepts the will to do better for the deed, Cant. v. 1. There is a broad cover of Christ's righteousness cast over the believer's spots, that they appear not, Cant. iv. 7; and the Lord accepts of the will to that perfection they would be at.

3. Going as far as we have access in a work, but meeting with a

providential stop, the will to complete it is accepted for the deed, as if it had been fully done, as in the case of Abraham's offering up Isaac, Heb. xi. 17. There is a great difference betwixt the stops men make in these, and those which God makes; the former argues an unwilling mind, but the latter not so.

4. Services that one really desires, and fain would perform for God, but have not opportunity; the will to them is accepted for the deed, as in the case of David's purposing to build a house for the Lord, 2 Chron. vi. 8; and the Philippians care about supplying Paul's wants, Philip. iv. 10. Some have opportunities of usefulness, but slight them; that is their sin; others may have a heart to be so and so useful, but they cannot have the opportunity; this God accepts.

5. *Lastly*, In services performed with a real desire of success for God's honour and men's good; the Lord accepts the good will to the success denied, as if it had succeeded according to their wish, Isa. xlix. 4; 2 Cor. ii. 15. The want of success may mar their present comfort, but neither the acceptance nor reward.

II. Why does God accept such will for the deed?

1. The sincere will to a work is present, which God mainly regards. The person sincerely aims at doing such a piece of service for God, but not attaining what he really desires, his good will thereto being present before the Lord, it is accepted, as if the work had been done.

2. We have a merciful High Priest to present that will for acceptance, notwithstanding all the weaknesses, blemishes, providential hindrances, want of opportunity, and failure of success, that it may be attended with, Heb. iv. 15, 16.

3. We have a merciful Father to deal with, Psalm ciii. 13, 14, who pities the weaknesses and infirmities of his people, and graciously accepts of their upright designs to serve and honour him.

USE 1. If the Lord accepts the will for the deed in his own people, then men must answer for the ill they had a will to have done, as if they had done it, Numb. xiv. 42—46. A will and intention to do an evil action, though it be not actually done, is in God's account the same thing with doing it, and will be resented and punished accordingly.

2. God is a gracious master to his servants, taking kindly off their hands through Christ their sincere will to his service, giving them ample testimonies of his regard in all circumstances, and bestowing upon them the special comforts of his grace here, as pledges of the full reward laid up for them in glory hereafter.