

OF SIN IN ITS AGGRAVATIONS.

EZEK. viii. 15.—*Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these.*

IF we look on sin absolutely, and in itself, as it is a transgression of the divine law, no sin is small, but a great evil, greater than any evil of suffering, which men can be exposed to: but if we look on sin comparatively, one sin compared with another, all are not alike, but some greater than others, as we see from these words. Wherein may be observed,

1. Great sins which the prophet had seen, shewn to him in vision by the Lord himself, who knows the sins of all men, with their nature and qualities, ver. 5, 11, 14.

2. Greater sins he was yet to see. He had seen the image of jealousy, namely, the image of Baal, set up at the gate of the altar, ver. 5; the chambers of imagery in some of the courts, and the ancients of Israel, at their idolatrous service, ver. 10, 11; the women weeping for Tammuz in the court of the women, or of the priests, by which the Lord's courts were turned into stews. These were great abominations, and yet greater than any of these was their worshipping of the sun, ver. 16. and that in God's account: for it was done in a more sacred place, at the very door of the temple; it was more public, and had greater contempt of God in it, than the rest.

The text affords this doctrine:

Doct. 'All sins are not alike;' but 'some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.'

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. What is understood by the heinousness of sin.

II. In what respect some sins are more heinous than others.

III. Apply.

I. I am to shew what is understood by the heinousness of sin. Its great offensiveness is hereby understood. Sin may be offensive unto men; but we consider it here as sin, and offensive to God. So for sin to be heinous in the sight of God, implies,

1. That it is offensive to God, displeasing to him, and grieving to to his Spirit, Jer. xlv. 4. 'Oh! do not this abominable thing that I hate.' He cannot away with it, he cannot endure it before his eyes, but shews his indignation against it. It is an abominable thing before the Lord; hence it is called filthiness, uncleanness, vomit, &c. all which provoke loathing; so Rev. iii. 16. it is said, 'I will spue

thee out of my mouth.' It is contrary to his nature and will, and gives him displeasure and offence; and, if it were possible it would disturb his repose, as smoke doth to the eyes, Isa. lxy. 5. 'These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.'

2. It is greatly offensive to God; for that also is implied in the notion of heinousness; every fault is offensive, but some faults are heinous offences. Such an offence is sin to God. It gives him great offence, Psal. v. 4, 5. 'Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all workers of iniquity.' Hab. i. 13. 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. There is no sin that God is indifferent about, none that he can pass without a mark of his indignation on it: He will by no means clear the guilty,' Exod. xxxiv. 7.

Now here mark well two things.

1. That all sin is heinous in the sight of God, viz. greatly offensive. There are no small sins before God, though some are greater than others; but the least of them is great in itself, and great in his sight, Hab. i. 13. forecited. This is plainly implied, while it is said, 'Some sins are more heinous than others.'

2. That there are degrees of heinousness. Though the sin which the blinded soul accounts but a mote, is a mountain in the eyes of God and of an enlightened conscience, yet all are not alike for all that; but as some mountains, so some sins are greater than others.

II. I shall shew in what respects some sins are more heinous than others.

First, Some sins are in themselves, and in their own nature, more heinous than others. There are some capital offences, as it were, which God's wrath does in a special manner burn against, and which are most provoking to the eyes of his glory: such as murder, Gen. iv. 10; oppression, Hab. ii. 11; which are noted to be crying sins; blasphemy and contempt of God, Exod. v. 2; idolatry, Ezek. viii.; unbelief, rejecting of Christ, and disobeying the gospel, Matth. xxii. John iii. 19. 2 Thess. i. 8. But of all sins the most heinous is the sin against the Holy Ghost, Matth. xii. 31.

Secondly, Some sins are more heinous than others by their aggravations; and the greater and more numerous the aggravating circumstances be that attend any sin, it is the more heinous. Now, sins are aggravated, or made greater or more heinous than others,

1. From the persons offending; the more notable they are, the more heinous are their sins; as the greater the fire is, the more mischief will it do, if it go out of its place; the greater the tree is, the more mischief will it do by its fall. Thus one and the same sin is

greater in magistrates, ministers, parents, and the aged, than in subjects, people, children and the younger sort. For men's places and offices, which respect the government of others in the way of holiness and justice, aggravate their sins, Rom. ii. 21. 'Thou which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, doest thou steal?' And so do the greater gifts and profession that one hath, Luke xii. 47, 48. 'That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more.' And so doth the greater experience of God's goodness which they have had, as in the case of Solomon, of whom it is said, 1 Kings xi. 9. 'The Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice.' For such advantages make their sins more pernicious, in respect of the influence of their example on others, as in the effect of Peter's dissimulation at Antioch, Gal. ii. 13. of whom it is said, 'And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. And these advantages carry them over greater obligations they are under to the Lord.

2. From the parties offended. Let men consider whom their sins strike against, if they would see how heinous they are. For as a thrust in a leg or arm is not so much grievous as one at the heart, so is it in this case.

1st, Sins immediately against God, his Son, and his Spirit, are more heinous than such sins against man, any man whatsoever, 1 Sam. ii. 25. 'If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? Thus lying and dissembling to God, is more heinous than lying to men, as appears in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, Acts v. 4. because of the infinite distance of the immediate objects of the sin. Thus, whereas in all sins of the second table, there is a fault against God, and against man too; yet the fault against God, and the injury done to his glory, is the bitterest ingredient in it. Thus David's sin in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah was a great sin in respect of these persons; but see how he confesses it, Psal. li. 4. 'Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.'

2dly, Sins against superiors in the church, state, and family, are more heinous than the same sins are, if done against persons of their own rank and condition. The reason is, because superiority given

of God is such a divine impress on a man, that it makes his character in some sort sacred, as in the case of Moses, Num. xii. 8. Hence it is that disobedience to parents is so heinous a sin, Prov. xxx. 17. 'The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.'

3dly, Sins against those whom we are under special engagements and obligations to, are more heinous than such sins against others we have no such concern in. Religion teaches gratitude, and sets a black mark on ingratitude, Psal. lv. 12. 'For it was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have born it; neither was it he that hated me, that did magnify himself against me, then I would have hid myself from him.'

4thly, Sins against the saints and people of God are more heinous than against others, because of their relation to God, as being those in all the world dearest to him, Matth. xviii. 6. 'Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.' Such are sins against weak saints, as being more liable to get harm by them than those who are strong, Rom. xiv. 15. 'If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.'

Lastly, Sins against the common good of all, or of many; for the wider the effects of one sin go, it is still the worse, Josh. xxii. 20. 'Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity.' 'One sinner,' says Solomon, 'destroyeth much good;' and the more the greater is his sin.

3. From the quality of the offence. A sin may be vested with such qualities as will make it much more heinous than when divested of them. These evil qualities are many; I will reduce them to two Heads.

(1.) *Intrinsic qualities*. Thus sins against the letter of the law are more heinous than others; mother-sins, which are big and bring forth many others, besides simple ones; sins consummated by action, as well as while merely in the heart, Jam. i. 15; sins that are scandalous, as well as others not so; sins the injury in which to men admits of no reparation, more than that of others in which it does. This was the reason why death was the punishment of adultery, not of fornication because in this last case the man was obliged to marry the woman.

(2.) *Extrinsic qualities*; which again are of two sorts.

[1.] Being done against means whereby one might be with-held

from sin, Matth. xi. 21, 22. 'Wo unto thee, Chorazin, wo unto thee, Bethsaida: for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you.' Thus one's sinning against mercies drawing them from their sin, judgments and rebukes from the word or providence, from God or men, sinning against the light of one's own conscience, do all of them aggravate sin.

[2.] Being done against bonds one has taken on him against the sin, when men sin against purposes and resolutions of amendment, against their covenants and engagements to the Lord, whereby they are bound to stand off from such courses, Ezek. xvii. 19.

4. From the manner of committing it. Who can imagine, but sin done deliberately, and wilfully, and presumptuously, is more heinous than sin committed through inadvertency and weakness? If one be impudent in his sin, delight in it, and boast of it; if he go on in it obstinately, fall into it frequently, and relapse into it after convictions and humblings for it; every one of these aggravates the guilt.

5. From the time of it, as in the case of Gehazi, 2 Kings v. 26. where Elisha says to him, 'Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid servants?' Thus sins committed on the Lord's day, immediately before or after divine worship, are more heinous than at other times. And so is sinning just after reproofs, warnings, engagements; or in a time when the anger of the Lord is going out against the land, family, or person, as Ahaz in his distress.

Lastly, From the place of it. Thus in a place where the gospel is preached, sin is more heinous than elsewhere, Isa. xxvi. 10. 'Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.' Sins done in public before others, are more heinous than those in secret; for in the former many may be defiled, as in the case of Absalom, lying with his father's concubine on the house top.

A few inferences shall conclude this subject.

Inf. 1. Never think light of sin, nor slightly of Christ, and your need of him, since all sin is heinous in God's sight, and exposes the sinner to his just vengeance.

2. There will be degrees of torment in hell, though the least degree will be dreadful, Matth. xi. 21. since there are degrees of sinning.

3. No wonder God's anger go out against us, and the land wherein, and the generation amongst whom we live: For heinous are our sins beyond those of many, and a frightful look may we get of them in this glass. Magistrates, ministers, parents, the aged, professors, sons and daughters of the Lord, have corrupted their ways, as well as others. Our sins have struck immediately against God, and against those who are vested with his authority in the state, in the church, and in families, against his people, and the common good. Sins against the letter of the law, scandalous offences abound, over the belly of light, mercies, and judgments, covenants national, sacramental, and personal; and these continued in obstinately, in a time when the Lord's hand has oft been stretched out and drawn in again, in a land of light.

4. Repent, and flee to the blood of Christ for pardon, if so be our heinous sins may not be our ruin.

5. The means of grace which we enjoy will either promote our salvation, or they will aggravate our damnation.

6. When ye examine yourselves, and think on your sins, consider the several aggravations of them; and lie deep in the dust before the Lord on account thereof; and, through the grace of God, abstain from every sin, and all appearance of evil.

OF THE DESERT OF SIN.

GAL. iii. 10.—*It is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*

THOUGH some sins be greater than others, yet there is no sin but deserves damnation, which we can no where better learn than from the voice of the law, which is the verdict of a just God upon the demerit of sin. This verdict in the text is found written, Deut. xxvii. ult. 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.' And herein consider,

1. The party condemned by the law; *every sinner*. The law condemns him for omissions as well as commissions, for breaking off from obedience as well as never entering upon it; for every sin, even the least sin, the least breach of the law; as well as the greatest: *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, &c.*

2. The doom pronounced in all these cases, is God's wrath and curse; *Cursed is he that continueth not in all things, &c.* This curse binds over to wrath in this life and that which is to come. It is