

this law in all its parts, has brought in everlasting righteousness, and furnishes all that believe in him with an answer to all its demands.

5. The rule of righteousness, by which ye are to examine yourselves, to see your sins and shortcomings, the mark ye are to aim at if ye would be holy in all manner of conversation, which is nothing the easier to be hit that it is so broad, and the evidence of your sincerity in a perfection of those parts, though ye cannot attain to the degrees.

Lastly, Your absolute need of Christ, of his blood to sprinkle you from guilt, and of his Spirit to sanctify you, that ye may be complete in him. And therefore let this holy law be your schoolmaster to bring you to Christ for all.

OF MAN'S INABILITY TO KEEP THE LAW PERFECTLY.

ECCLES. vii. 20.—*For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*

HAVING at considerable length endeavoured to open up and explain the law of God, as abridged in the ten commandments, in some measure in its spirituality and extent, by describing the several duties required, and sins forbidden therein; and shewn the absolute impossibility of yielding a perfect obedience thereto, in order to give a title to eternal life; and directed you to come to Christ by faith, as the end of the law for righteousness, that your guilt may be removed by the application of his blood to your consciences, and that ye may be sanctified by his Spirit: I now proceed to the exposition of the remaining questions in the Catechism, which I shall mostly discuss in a very short discourse on each, as I have been so long on the former part of this excellent composition.*

Here is the undoubted character of all the human race, fixing im-

* As some readers may be apt to think, in regard several of the following discourses are very short, that they are not so full as they were delivered, it is necessary to inform them, that, besides what the author has here said of his intended brevity, he was generally a short preacher, seldom, on ordinary occasions, exceeding half an hour, and that his delivery was somewhat slow. Besides, we have the testimony of his dear friends Messrs. Wilson, Davidson, and Colden, that he generally wrote his sermons as full as he delivered them. See the preface to his sermons on afflictions. And it is believed, that the attentive reader, upon a careful perusal of this last part of the work, will find the several subjects sufficiently, though briefly, illustrated, for promoting his best and most essential interests.

perfection and sinfulness on the best of the kind in this world, and so concluding all to be liable to sin, and under it. In the words there are two things.

1. A position, *There is not a just man upon earth.* By the *just man* in this text is not meant an evangelically just man, or one just in respect of parts, though not of degrees; but one who is legally so, just in the eye of the law, as having yielded perfect obedience to all its commands; this is plain from the original pointing. Compare Psal. cxliii. 2. 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.' By this time the man Christ had not appeared on the earth: so it is meant of mere men. *On the earth*; to denote that in heaven they are just in that sense, arrived to legal perfection.

2. The explication of it; There is none *who doeth good, and sinneth not.* There are some who do good, as all the godly; but they sin withal, and that daily, for so the word is to be understood of their using to sin.

The doctrine arising from the words is,

Doct. 'Legal perfection is not attainable in this life, but the best sin daily.' Or, 'No mere man, since the fall, is able, in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but doth daily break them, in thought, word, and deed.'

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall,

I. Shew what is legal perfection, or perfect keeping of the commands.

II. Consider the attainableness of this perfection.

III. Shew how the saints sin daily, and break the commands.

IV. Confirm the point, That perfection is not attainable in this life.

V. Give the reason of this dispensation.

VI. Apply.

I. I shall shew what is legal perfection, or perfect keeping of the commands. It is a perfect conformity of heart and life to the commands of God; and implies,

1. A perfection of the principle of action, Matth. xxii. 37. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' For if the heart and soul be not sinless and pure, as in innocent Adam and Christ, but be polluted as our nature is, there can be no perfect keeping of the commands of God. That pollution will stain all.

2. A perfection of the parts of obedience. No part must be lacking, every command of whatsoever nature must be kept: 'For 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,' Gal. iii. 10. If one

be wanting, all is wanting, all is marred. Hence says James, chap. ii. 10, 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point he is guilty of all.'

3. A perfection of degrees in every part, Matth. xxii. 37. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' Sincerity is not enough in the eye of the law. In every thing one must come to the highest pitch, or there is no perfection.

4. A perfection of duration or continuance, Gal. iii. 10. foreited; without apostasy or defection, continuing to the end; for one bad trip after a course of obedience will mar all.

II. Let us consider the attainableness of this perfection.

1. Adam before the fall was able to have kept the commands perfectly; he might have attained it; for 'God made him upright,' Eccl. vii. 29. That law was the rule of Adam's covenant-obedience; and perfect obedience to it was the condition of the covenant, which God could not have proposed to him, if he had not given him strength sufficient to perform it.

2. The man Christ, who was not a mere man, but God-man, who was not only able to keep the law perfectly, but actually did so. He made out what the first Adam failed in, to the salvation of the elect, and in their stead; and this in the whole extent of legal perfection. His obedience was perfect in the principle, Heb. vii. 26. being holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; in the parts, Matth. iii. 15. 'It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness;' in the degrees, John xv. 13. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends;' and in continuance, Phil. ii. 8. 'He became obedient unto death.'

3. The saints in heaven are able, and do actually perfectly obey whatever God's will to them is: so that though in this life they do not attain it, yet in the life to come all the children of God shall attain perfection, Heb. xii. 23. where mention is made of 'the spirits of just men made perfect;' and there they shall be fully freed from sin, and all possibility of sinning.

4. But since Adam fell, no mere man is able, while in this life, either of himself, or by virtue of any grace now given, to keep the commands perfectly. Of himself he cannot do it; neither is there any measure of grace given to any in this life, whereby they may be enabled to do it: for 'in many things we offend all,' Jam. iii. 2. This inability is owing to the remains of corruption that cleaves to every one of them in this mortal state, Rom. vii. 23; and from which they ardently long to be delivered, ver. 24. And there is no promise of grace given in the word, whereby believers may be enabled to keep the commands of God perfectly; nor would it be consistent

with the nature of spiritual growth, which is manifestly, like the natural, gradual; and it is certain that the saints do not arrive at their full stature till they come to the mansions of bliss, 1 Thess. iii. 13.

III. I shall shew how the saints sin daily, and break the commands. And here I shall consider,

1. How many ways the commands may be broken.
2. In what respect the saints sin daily.
3. How these failures of theirs break the commands.

First, I am to shew how many ways the commands may be broken. They may be broken three ways, in deeds, words, and thoughts.

1. In deeds, done contrary to the command of God, or not done, though required. God's commands are the rule of men's outward life and conversation; and whatever we do or commit contrary to the law, is our sin, whether it be public, private, or secret, Psal. xiv. 2, 3.

2. In words, either speaking what we ought not, or not speaking what we ought, or speaking what we ought, but not in the manner commanded. (The same is to be said of actions or deeds.) God's commands are a rule to our tongues, and tell us what to speak, how to speak, and what not to speak; and by regardlessness of the rule, the tongue is 'a fire, a world of iniquity,' Jam. iii. 6.

3. In thoughts. Here God's law goes beyond men's laws as to the whole kind; for our thoughts are open to God, who is omniscient, as words or actions are equally open to him, Heb. iv. 13. and liable to his law. For says Christ, 'Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart, Matth. v. 28. And so one may sin by thinking what he ought not, by omitting of good thoughts, and by not managing good thoughts, in the manner required by the law.

Secondly, I shall shew in what respect the saints sin daily, in thought, word, and deed.

1. Negatively: not that the saints fall into gross sins daily, against the letter of the law, either in thought, word, or deed. God will disown those for saints who entertain vile thoughts daily, swear daily, lie daily, do unjust things, or neglect his worship daily, Gal. v. 19,—21; 'Now, the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I also have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.' Such spots are not the spots of God's people. Christ's

dwelling by his spirit in them, the breaking of the reign of sin in them by the power of divine grace, and their habitual tenderness and watchfulness, hold them off that way of life. But,

2. Positively. Besides that saints may be surprised into gross sins in thought, word, and deed, sometimes by inadvertency, weakness, and violence of temptation, which is the burden of their souls, they sin every day in thought, word, and deed, when they keep the strictest watch, and have most of the divine assistance. What day passes, if without vile thoughts, yet without vain ones; without idle words, if without mischievous words; when there is not something done or undone, which God's law condemns, though perhaps the world cannot quarrel them? Besides, what good thought is thought, good word spoken, or good deed done by them, which the holy law will not spy a flaw in, as to the manner of its performance?

Thirdly, I am to shew how these failures of theirs break the commands, while they sincerely endeavour to obey them. Why, the moral law is the eternal rule of righteousness, and in whatever state the creature be, he is bound to obey his Creator, whether in a state of nature or grace, glory or damnation. And though perfection be not attainable in this life, yet it is the saints' duty, as well as that of others, Matth. v. ult. 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' So every coming short of that perfection is their sin, needing to be taken away by Christ's blood.

And thus men daily break the commands of God in thought, word, and deed; which is the only possible way of transgressing the divine law; and our doing so in these respects shews the equity of that charge which the Lord has against every man, 'Behold thou hast done evil, as thou couldst,' Jer. iii. 5.

IV. I shall now confirm the point, That perfection is not attainable in this life.

1. The scripture attests, that there is no man without sin, 1 Kings viii. 46; 'For there is no man that sinneth not:' and that 'in many things we offend all,' Jam. iii. 2. If any man set up for it in himself, the Spirit of God says he deceives himself, 1 John i. 8. See an unanswerable question, Prov. xx. 9; 'Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?'

2. The best have a corrupt as well as a gracious principle, making the spiritual combat, never ending till death give the separating stroke, Gal. v. 17. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.'

3. We are taught always to pray for pardon, 'Forgive us our debts:' but sinless creatures need no pardons. This clearly shews, that all sin, and so come short of perfect obedience.

4. *Lastly*, Consider the spirituality of the law, and its extent, with human weakness, and you will see this clearly. And hence it is that perfectionists are strangers to the spirituality of the law: for if they rightly viewed it, they would be far from dreaming of having attained to perfection, which never a mere man did in this life.

Object. Noah was perfect, Gen. vi. 9; * Job perfect, Job i. 8.

* In order to illustrate the character of Noah as a righteous and perfect man, and to shew the signification of these epithets, it will not be improper to subjoin the following note, taken from a manuscript work of the author's, which he left prepared for the press, and has been esteemed by proper judges, both at home and abroad, a work of very great learning and merit, but has not yet been printed, entitled "A new translation of the first twenty-three chapters of Genesis, with notes explanatory and critical," according to the principles of the Hebrew accentuation as delivered in his treatise entitled, *Tractatus stigmologicus Hebræo-Biblicus*, printed at Amsterdam in 1738.

Gen. vi. 9. "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations." "As for Noah; [being] a righteous man, he was sound in his generations:" q. d. sound; [sound] in his generations. A sound man is a man of integrity and Godly simplicity, wholly for God, entire in his obedience, keeping himself uncorrupted and unspotted from the world, in which he lives. Such a man was Noah; and such he was, in both the generations wherein he lived, before and after the flood. Thus his character consists of two parts: he was a sound man, and preserved to the end in his soundness. And both these are traced to their common spring-head, namely, his righteous state. Being righteous by faith, a justified man; he was a sound man, in true holiness of heart and life; and a preserving man: Agreeable to which is that of the prophet, Hab. ii. 4. "The righteous (i. e. by) his faith, shall live." *Tzaddik*, an adjective righteous, a substantive a righteous one, is derived from the root *Tzadak*, in the form *Pihel*, (*Tziddek*), as appears by the *Dagesch forte* in it. *Tzadak* (*Kal*) is not to be reputed righteous; that agrees not to it, chap. xxxviii. 26; nor to do righteously; that agrees not to it, Job ix. 20. Psal. xix. 10: but to be righteous; which agrees to it every where. Only it is to be observed, that being righteous is sometimes understood simply of existing righteous, as Gen. xxxviii. 26. Psal. xix. 10. sometimes of appearing righteous, as Job ix. 20. xiii. 18. and xl. 3. Psal. li. 6-4; and this agreeable to the scripture-style in other cases, as Matth. v. 45. "That ye may be (i. e. appear to be) the children of your Father." To state the formal notion of righteousness signified by this root, it is to be observed, that it is used of men, as Gen. xxxviii. 26. Job ix. 20. of God himself, Psal. li. 6-4th; of his laws, Psal. xix. 10; and once it occurs in *Niphal*, *Nitzdak*, which, as a neuter verb of being (as Gen. i. 15.) is to become righteous, and is used of God's sanctuary, viz. Dan. viii. 14. "And it shall become righteous, the sanctuary," i. e. in such a state or condition as, by God's appointment, it ought to be in. From all which it appears, that the notion of righteousness is conformity to the law given concerning the subject, as concerning men, or the sanctuary or to the eternal idea of righteousness, in the mind of God, as in the case of God himself and his laws. *Tziddek* (*Pih.*) *Hitzdik* (*Hiph*) are both active, and sound to justify or make righteous, the action in *Kal* being the complement of both, as chap. viii. 14. But the difference lies here. In no form whatsoever doth this verb import a moral or real change: but in *Pihel* it signifies manifestatively, *Hiphil*, declaratively. In *Pihel* it occurs five times, and accordingly signifies to shew one

Ans. They, and all saints, have a gospel-perfection, which is a perfection of parts. They had a comparative perfection; that is, they were more holy and circumspect than many others. But that they were not legally and absolutely perfect, is clear from Noah's drunkenness and Job's impatience. And where is the saint whose history we have at any length in scripture, but we see their imperfections recorded, to stain the pride of all glory?

righteous, or to make appear righteous, Job xxxiii. 32. "I have desired to shew thee righteous," viz. as one shews a thing that is hid, by taking away the cover. Thus Jerusalem shewed Sodom and Samaria righteous, Ezek. xvi. 51, 52; namely, comparatively righteous, the holiness of Jerusalem being gone, which, while it lasted, quite darkened them. And so the backsliding Israel, Jer. iii. 11. "shewed her soul righteous: from the treacherous Judah," namely, as a servant running away from a master whom he hath served but a short while, shews his deserting of him just, by an old servant's running away from the same master at length. Thus understand the ground of Elihu's anger against Job, chap. xxxii. 2. His shewing his soul righteous; from God, i. e. his justifying himself in his grievous complaints, from the way and manner of the Lord's dealing with him. Hereto agrees *Hitzaddek* (Hithp. the relative of Pih.), which is to shew one's self righteous, occurring only, Gen. xlv. 16. What (i. e. how) how shall we shew ourselves righteous? Comp. Luke xvi. 15. and xx. 20. Thus expound, Rev. xxii. 11. And the righteous, let him shew himself righteous still, viz. by continuing in the practice of good works. And this is the justification the apostle James writes of, to his own countrymen, (Jam. i. 1.) who, knowing the manner of their own language, were in no hazard of mistaking his meaning. Now *Tzaddik*, being immediately derived from *Tziddek*, formally denotes one appearing righteous; the holy language hereby teaching, that whether righteousness be imputed or inherent, it must needs shine forth, not only from the divine appointment, but from the nature of the thing, as a light must needs give light. And to carry along this notion of the word, I write it righteous. Mean while, since there is a false as well as a true appearance of righteousness, one may see how Solomon might forbid a man to be righteous over much, Eccl. vii. 16. meaning it of the mere appearance or shew of righteousness, from the notation of the word. Accordingly he adds, *ibid.* And do not (Tithh-hac-cam) make thyself wise; for which compare Luke xx. 20. Should feign themselves just men, which in Hebrew would be expressed *Hitzaddek*, to shew or make one's self to appear righteous; But since no false appearance can take place before the Lord, in all cases wherein God testifies of one righteous, the appearance must be understood to be true, as the thing really is: and so it is in the case of Noah. *Hitzdik* (Hiph.) is once used intransitively, viz. Dan. xii. 3. every where else transitively. The object of it, in its intransitive use, is the conjugate noun *Tz'dakah* understood as Gen. iii. 6. and it is q. d. to righteous righteousness, i. e. to do righteously. So the formal signification of it, agreeing thereto in its twofold use, is, to make righteous. The sense whereof in the intransitive use, is, according to what is already remarked to do righteously, Dan. xii. 3. They that make righteous, of the many, i. e. Those who do righteously, of the many, ver. 2. comprehending all, and divided into two sorts, those that do righteously, and those that do not so. But in the transitive use, the sense of it is not, to make righteous, by infusing righteousness into a person, making a moral real change on him, as is manifest from Exod. xxiii. 7. I will not make righteous, an unrighteous one, Prov. xvii. 15. Isa. v. 23. This word is never

But is it not said, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin?' 1 John iii. 9. *Ans.* The meaning is not, that the saints do not sin at all; but that they do not commit sin with the full consent of the will; do not take pleasure and delight in it; do not make a trade of it, as unregenerate persons do; and do not commit the sin unto death, 1 John v. 17, 18.

Object. But seeing it is impossible to yield perfect obedience to the law, how is it consistent with the justice and wisdom of God to require of us that which we are not able to perform.

Ans. The laws of God are both possible and just; and there is no so used. On the contrary, the only proper personal object of it is *Tzaddik*, a righteous one, righteous, and appearing righteous, antecedently to the action thereby signified, Deut. xxv. 1. They shall make righteous even the righteous one. So 1 Kings viii. 32. 2 Chron. vi. 23. "And for to make righteous a righteous one. So the true sense of it is legally to make righteous, to declare or pronounce righteous;" which natively follows on the back of the action signified by *Pihel*, viz. shewing righteous, and occupies the first and primary signification of *Kal*. And this is the justification Paul treats of. This phrase of making righteous the righteous, is used in the matter of the justification of a sinner before the Lord, Isa. liii. 11. In his knowing; make righteous a righteous one, shall my servant; to the many. The construction and sense of which words is, q. d. "In his being known to the many; my servant shall justify any righteous one to them." In which few words, there is, (1.) The author or efficient cause of justification, viz. Jesus Christ the Father's servant, sitting Judge. Comp. John v. 22. Matth. ix. 6. Acts v. 31. (2.) The object, the elect, all the elect, the many for whom Christ died, ver. 12. (3.) The character in which they stand before him, one by one, to be justified, viz. righteous and appearing righteous. This is no wise inconsistent with the justifying of the ungodly, Rom. iv. 5. if one considers, (4.) How they come to be righteous before him, viz. in his knowing, i. e. by the faith of him, whereby the soul is united to Christ and thereby hath communion with him in his righteousness, and so appears righteous in the borrowed garments before the throne. And for this faith they are debtors to free grace, as well as for the righteousness: for the word knowing, though active in its form; is passive in its sense; as is clear from the construction of the words, *In his knowing to the many*, shewing the faith to be the faith of God's elect, Tit. i. 1. The infinitive active or gerund, is used for the passive frequently, which phraseology our own language bears; as Gen. iv. 13. Psal. xlii. 4. iii. and cxix. 4. (5.) The time of their justification? not from eternity, but in the very instant of their believing in his knowing. (6.) The nature of justification, viz. "a declaring or pronouncing righteous, according to what is really found, and judicially imputed or reckoned, (*Jatzdik tzaddik*,) He shall make righteous a righteous one. (7.) The free access which all have to this privilege: For the words are not in vain ranged in this order; In his knowing; my servant shall make righteous a righteous one, &c. This is a general truth, whosoever will know Christ shall be righteous, and legally made righteous, before the Lord: though in the mean time, it is the many only who will know him eventually, *Tamim*, sound. The import of this word is whole and entire, all of a piece, unblemished: So by it is expressed a whole day, Josh. x. 13. and the quality of a sacrifice as without blemish, in the ordinary style of the law, as Lev. i. 3. and so is applied to God's work, Deut. xxxii. 4. and his way, 2 Sam. xxii. 31.

duty now required of us which he did not endow us with strength in our creation to perform. Yet in our fallen and corrupted estate, perfect obedience is become impracticable through our weakness and aversion to duty. And there can be no injustice in God to require what is impossible for us to perform, when the impossibility solely arises from our own fault. It is not God, but we ourselves, that have made the perfect observation of his laws impossible; and though we have wasted our stock, and are become bankrupts, yet he may in righteousness exact from us that debt of obedience which we justly owe him.

Object. But are not believers delivered both from the commanding and condemning power of the law, and how are they then bound to yield any obedience to it?

Ans. Believers are certainly delivered as well from the commanding as condemning power of the law, considered only as it is the covenant of works, which requires obedience to it in order to justification; but they are by no means delivered from it as it is the law of Christ, or a rule of duty. For the moral law is the eternal rule of righteousness, a transcript of the divine perfections, which every believer is bound to copy after, and to apply to the blood of Jesus for pardon so far as he falls short of obeying it: for without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Personal holiness is as necessary to the possession of glory, or to a state of perfect holiness and happiness, as is the morning-light to the noon-day warmth and brightness; as is a reasonable soul to a wise, healthy, strong, and full-grown man; as an antecedent is to a consequent; as a part is to the whole; and as motion is necessary to evidence life. And the ten commandments, being the substance of the law of nature, a representation of God's image, and a beam of his holiness, behoved, for ever, unalterably to be a rule of life to mankind, in all possible states, conditions, and circumstances. Nothing but the utter destruction of human nature, and its ceasing to be, could divest them of that office; since God is unchangeable in his image and holiness. Hence there being a rule of life to Adam and his posterity, had no dependence on their becoming the covenant of work: but they would have been that rule, though there never had been any such covenant: yea, whatever covenant was introduced, whether of works or of grace, and whatever form might be put upon them, they behoved still to remain the rule of life. No covenant, no form whatsoever, could ever prejudice this their royal dignity.

V. I shall give the reason of this dispensation. God could make the saints perfect in the moment of conversion. He does it not. So it seems good in his sight. Many things are said to account for

this ; but what is most satisfying is, that it doth exalt the freedom of grace and the power of it most, Eph. ii. 4, 7 ; ‘ But God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us—that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.’ The more sins are pardoned to a sinner, he is the deeper in Christ’s debt. The faster the root of sin appears in one’s nature, the more appears the power of grace in rooting it up. It is surely the glory of our great Pilot, that he brings the broken ship to land, through so many hazards.

Caution. Abuse not this doctrine, to think light of sin because of it. It is the worst of diseases which most men die in, and no man is perfectly cured of until death. Make not your way to hell the easier, because of the difficulties in the way to heaven : for they that strive towards perfection here will get it at death, when ye sitting still at your ease will be carried down the stream to destruction.

Keep not ye some particular lust, because none are perfect : for all the saints are perfect in parts, though not in degrees ; so far perfect, as to ‘ hate every known sin,’ Psal. cxix. 128.

Inf. 1. There is no justification, favour, and peace with God, by our own works, Psal. cxliii. 2. ‘ In thy sight shall no man living be justified.’ Far less can there be works of supererogation. We must be justified by the righteousness of Christ received by faith, or not at all.

2. Whatever your attainments be, be not proud of them ; your wants and defects may always keep you humble. The barren branches are towering ones, while the fruitful boughs hang down their heads.

3. Inexpressibly miserable is the case of unbelievers. They are without Christ ; they must stand or fall by the law, and it is quite beyond their power to keep it.

4. Bear one another’s burdens ; for every man offends. We are in an hospital where most are dying of their disease, and the best but in the way of recovery.

Lastly, Let the struggling saints long for heaven, for there the perfection they would fain be at shall be attained, and not till then. And this may comfort them under all their failures, which they mourn over, that in the other world they shall arrive at full perfection in holiness.