

OF THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

EXOD. XX. 15.—*Thou shalt not steal.*

THIS command respects men's goods and outward estate in the world; and the scope of it is to procure and further the same by all good means. And the law of God respecting this plainly says, that religion is highly concerned in our civil actions, working, buying, and selling, and all the ways of advancing of the outward estate. In these we are hedged about by this command, as well as in natural things by the sixth and seventh. God's law follows us wherever we go, to the house or field, bed or board, church or market. This command also plainly establishes distinct properties, and that there is no universal community of goods, but every one has his own portion.

This being a command of the second table, it respects ourselves as well as our neighbour. And so the meaning is, Thou shalt not steal from thyself nor any other; thou shalt not wrong thyself nor others. And as in every negative is applied an affirmative, so while stealth or theft is here forbidden, the contrary is required, namely, the procuring and furthering of our own and others' welfare in these things, but by means only that are lawful.

In discoursing further from this subject, I shall shew,

I. What is required in this command, viz. 'the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.'

II. What is forbidden, viz. 'Whatsoever doth or may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbour's wealth or outward estate.'

III. Make application.

I. I am to shew what is required in this command. And,

First, God requires us in this command, by lawful means, to procure and further our own wealth and outward estate. We may take up this in these seven things.

1. We should look unto God for things necessary and convenient for us. Here we should begin our care about temporal things; 'for he it is that giveth thee power to get wealth,' Deut. viii. 18. and without his appointment our endeavours will not succeed, Psal. cxxvii. All the creatures depend on God's provision, as caged birds on those to whose care they are committed, Prov. xxx. 3. And so our Lord teaches us to pray every day, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' Matth. vi. 11. seeing God has comprehended this in the promise.

2. A provident care and study to get things necessary and suitable

to our condition, 1 Tim. v. 8. To pray, and cast off means, is presumption; to use means, but neglect praying, and looking to the Lord, is atheism. We should keep the middle way betwixt carelessness and anxiety, and hold in the way of moderate care in these things; for we are not to expect to be like the lilies that toil not, neither spin, and yet are clothed.

3. For this cause every body must have a lawful calling and employment, and duly use it, that so he may be useful to himself, and worth his room in the world, and not like mice and rats, good for nothing but to devour what others labour for. Adam in innocence had a calling, that of dressing and keeping the garden of Eden, Gen. ii. 15. and so had his sons afterwards, though born to greater estate than any now can pretend to, the one being a keeper of sheep, and the other a tiller of the ground, Gen. iv. 2. But we must be sure it be a lawful calling, Eph. iv. 28. But what avails it if it be not duly used? Therefore God requires of men that they labour to be skilful in it, and not bunglers at what they take in hand, Prov. xiv. 8. and he allows men to look to himself for that end, Isa. xxviii. 26. and likewise that they be diligent and industrious in it, and not loiterers, Prov. x. 4. for laziness will make a thief, either directly or indirectly. And this is quite opposite to God's appointment, Gen. iii. 19.

4. We are to take the moderate comfortable use of the product of our diligence, using and disposing it for our necessity and conveniency, according to our condition in the world, Eccl. x. 12, 13. For to what end do men get wealth, if they have no power comfortably to use it? As good want it, as not to have the necessary and convenient use of it. Such steal and rob (in the sense of this command) from their nearest neighbour, that is, themselves.

5. Withal God requires men here to be frugal and honestly sparing, i. e. to keep a due medium betwixt lavishness and niggardly pinching, Prov. xxi. 20. This frugality directs to the right managing of what God has given, so as, (1.) People do not cast out their substance on trifles that are for no good purpose, but on such things as there is some solid use of, Isa. lv. 2. and amongst these are to be reckoned extravagant furniture for back and belly, in which people cannot satisfyingly to conscience answer the question, What needs all this waste? (2.) That of those things which may be useful, there be nothing lost. When Christ had provided bread enough, he gives particular orders to gather up the fragments, John vi. 12. (3.) That this care proceed not from carnal affection to the world, but from conscience towards God, that we abuse not his benefits, and take care to do good by what is spared to ourselves or to others,

though it were even to beasts. *Lastly*, True frugality will be effectual to make us ready to lay out for God on pious uses, to the poor and otherwise, as the best way to save, Prov. xi. 24.

6. Careful avoiding of whatsoever may embarrass our affairs, and wrong our own wealth and outward estate.—Thus God requires men to take heed that they do not inveigle themselves in unnecessary pleas and law-suits, 1 Cor. vi. 1,—8. rash cautionry, Prov. xi. 5. whereby sometimes men ruin themselves and families, and so sin against God, themselves, and their house. Of this sort may be reckoned people's rash and foolish engaging in things that they are in no probable case rightly to manage, stretching farther than they can well be supposed able to reach.

7. *Lastly*, Moderation of heart with respect to worldly goods, Phil. iv. 5. (1.) We must moderate our judgment about them, that we put not too high a value and esteem on them, 1 Tim. vi. 17. (2.) We must moderate our wills about them, that we be not among those that will be rich; for that will carry us over this hedge, ver. 9. (3.) We must moderate our affections to them. We must beware of love to them, ver. 10; for the covetous heart will not stick at undue means. We must moderate our care about them, resting in God's promise, and depending on his providence, Matt. vi. 25, 26. and be content with our lot, Heb. xiii. 5. For they that are not content, have what they will, are always poor; and their eye will be evil towards others also.

SECONDLY, God requires in this command, that we, by lawful means, procure and further the wealth and outward estate of others. We are not born for ourselves, nor must we live for ourselves. We are members one of another as men, and much more as Christians; and selfishness is offensive to God, and destructive to society. We may reduce this to two general rules of practice, founded on the light of nature, and confirmed by the word.

First, Give every one their due. The natural conscience dictates this, however little it is regarded; and God's word confirms it, Rom. xiii. 7. If ye do it not, ye rob them, or steal from them. So God will reckon, and so will men's consciences reckon at last. In whatever relation ye stand to them, as masters, servants, neighbours, or under any particular bargain with them, or obligation to them, give them what is due to them.

Secondly, Do as ye would be done to. This also a natural conscience dictates, and the word confirms, Matt. vii. 12. If we must love our neighbour as ourselves, we must not do to him what we would have nobody do to us. If ye do otherwise ye steal from them, ye wrong them, your own consciences being judges. For if

they would do so to you, ye declare they are unjust to you; so if ye do so to them, ye must either find out a law for them, which ye are not under, or else your own consciences will condemn you as breakers of the law of God, which is common to both. To move you to walk by these rules, consider,

1. In vain will ye pretend to Christianity without it.—This is natural religion, which revelation came not to destroy, but to confirm, Tit. ii. 12. And the Heathens, who in their Pagan darkness saw these rules of righteousness, and walked more by them than many Christians, will rise up in judgment against many that profess the name of Christ, and yet make so little conscience that way. People must either walk by them, or quit the name of Christians. If they will do neither of them now, Christ will strip them at length out of their player's coat, and make them appear before the world in their proper colours.

2. Ye will never see heaven without it, 1 Cor. vi. 9. If people get to heaven in another way, they must step over all the law and the prophets, Matth. vii. 12. I grant that these will not bring people to heaven; people may walk by them, as some sober heathens have done, and yet go to hell; but without it people will never see it. For though our good works and honest dealings with men will not save us, yet our ill works and unrighteous dealings will damn us, 1 Thess. iv. 6. But to be more particular, we may take up this in five things.

1st, God requires of us that we be careful to prevent our neighbour's skaith and loss, as we have opportunity, Deut. xxii. 1. For the loss we see him get and can prevent, but do it not, is in effect the same as if we downrightly procured it to him. That which we can hinder, and do not, is our fault before the Lord; and in this sense each man is bound to be his brother's keeper.

2dly, That we deal honestly in all matters between man and man. If we would not come under the guilt of stealing from them, we must in all our dealings with them be strict observers of truth, faithfulness, and justice; dealing in simplicity and plainness, Psal. xv. 2, 4; Zech. vii. 4, 10; whether it be in bargains, buying and selling, in matters of trust concredited to us, or any thing of his we have under our hands. We must deal with God as if the eyes of men were on us; and with men as knowing the eyes of God are on us. A Christian indeed will do so. He will be an upright dealer with men, a slave to his word, a man that never wants a quick-sighted witness to his actions. And therefore it will be all one to him whether his party be absent or present, skilful and that will not be cheated, or simple and easily deceived.

3dly, Restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof. This looks especially to two cases.

(1.) Things lost and found ought to be restored to the owners, and not concealed and kept, Dent. xxii. 2, 3: for the keeping up of what is another's against the owner's will, is a sort of theft and injustice, contrary to the rules aforesaid. And therefore it cannot be kept with a good conscience.

(2.) Whatsoever we have wronged our neighbour of, by taking it away from him, ought to be restored, Lev. vi. 2, 4. There is, [1.] The case of trust, wherein a thing committed to him by another is kept up, on some pretence that it is lost or so. [2.] In case of fellowship in trading together, when one puts a thing in his partner's hand, in which case it is easy for one to deceive another. [3.] In case of violence, when it is taken away by robbery, stealth, yea, and oppression, 1 Sam. xii. 3. [4.] In case of cheatery, when by fraud and circumvention it is taken away.

Now, in all these cases, and the like, restitution is necessary. It is true, actual restitution is sometimes beyond the power of him that should restore; yet in such a case the party is bound to go all the length he can, as appears from Exod. xxii. 3. But a readiness to restore to the utmost of our power is absolutely necessary. For he does not truly repent of his sin, who is not willing to do all he can to repair the wrong; nor is the love of righteousness and his neighbour in that man, who is not ready to give every one their due. And in this sense the rule holds, *Non tollitur peccatum, nisi restituitur*. It is remarkable that it is made one of the signs of true repentance, Ezek. xxxiii. 15. 'If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.' And said Zaccheus, Luke xix. 8. 'If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.'

Now, the party obliged to make restitution, is not only the person that took a thing away, but he in whose hand it is found; though he had it not fraudulently, yet upon the discovery of the thing, he is obliged to return it, because the person who (suppose) sold it to him, had no right to it, and therefore could give him none. But particularly the person himself and his heirs, are bound to restore, Job xx. 10; and that the thing itself, or the value of it, yea, and a reasonable acknowledgement for the loss of it, Lev. vi. 5. Luke xix. 8. The restitution is to be made to the owner, or, if he be dead, to his heirs; and if neither can be found, to the Lord, Numb. v. 6, 7, 8. Luke xix. 8.

In case the reputation of the party be in hazard, the restitution

should be managed with that prudence that it may not be unnecessarily blasted; for which cause they that are in straits that way ought to consult some prudent person, either minister or Christian, that will be tender of them.

4thly, Charity and justice in the matter of loans. Here,

(1.) Lending to our neighbour in his necessity, is a duty we owe him for the welfare of his outward estate, Matth. v. 42; not only lending upon interest, which is lawful, so that it be moderate, Deut. xxiii. 20; but freely, viz. to those that are poor, and require the loan for pressing necessity. In that case we ought to lend them freely such a quantity of money and goods as we can well enough bear the loss of, in case they be rendered incapable to pay it again. And so is that scripture to be understood, Luke vi. 35; 'Lend hoping for nothing again.'

(2.) Returning or paying again thankfully what is borrowed by us, Exod. xxii. 14; And therefore we are not to borrow more than we are in a probable capacity to pay; which while some have not regarded, they have liberally lived on other men's substance, and in the end have ruined other men's families, and quite devoured their money as in another case, Gen. xxxi. 15: for no man has more that he can call his own, than what is over and above his debt, Psal. xxxvii. 21; If the incapacity flow from mere providence, it is their affliction, but not their sin, 2 Kings iv. 1.

Lastly, Giving unto the poor or those that are in need, according to their necessity and our ability, Luke xi. 41. They are our neighbours, to whose outward estate we are obliged to look; they are to have mercy shown to them that way. A disposition of soul to help them is requisite in all, even in those that have not a farthing to give, Prov. xi. 25. What people give must be their own, 1 John iii. 17. it must be *thy* bread, Eccl. xi. 1. And therefore such as have not of their own, they cannot give what is another's, without the tacit consent and approbation or allowance of the owner; neither will God accept their robbery for burnt-offering. But even people that must work hard for their own bread, must work the harder that they may be able to give, Eph. iv. 28. But they to whom God has given a more plentiful measure of the world's goods, must be so much the more liberal to the poor; for to whom much is given of him is much required. In helping the necessitous, the apostle's rules are to be observed, that special regard is to be had to our relations that may be in straits, 1 Tim. v. 8; and that though all that need are to be helped, yet special respect is to be had to the poor members of Christ, Gal. vi. 10; and the greatest need is to be most regarded and most helped.

This duty is to be managed with these qualities.

(1.) People must give to the poor out of conscience towards God, and a design to honour him, Prov. iii. 9; not out of vain-glory, else the work is lost as to acceptance, Matth. vi. 1, 2.

(2.) With an honourable regard to the poor, either as Christians, and members of the same mystical body of Christ, or at least as of the same blood with ourselves, and not with contempt, and shaming of them, 1 Cor. xi. 22.

(3.) Cheerfully and freely, not grudgingly and as by constraint, 2 Cor. ix. 7.

(4.) According to the measure of what the Lord has given unto us, 1 Cor. xvi. 2; So the more we have, the more we ought to give. The particular quantity cannot be defined, but by wisdom and charity it must be defined by every one for themselves, Psal. cxii. 5.

To engage you to this duty, consider,

[1.] We are not absolute masters, but stewards of our goods. The whole world is God's household; and he has made some stewards to feed others, Luke xvi. 10, 11, 12. We must give account of our stewardship to him, who could have put us into their case, and them into ours.

[2.] It is a duty bound on us with ties of nature and revelation. The law of God requires it, 2 Cor. viii. 9. Nature itself binds it on us, teaching us to do to others as we would be done by, if in their case. Not only Christianity, but humanity calls for it.

[3.] In this duty there is a singular excellency. For (1.) It is a blessed thing by the verdict of our blessed Lord, Acts xx. 35; 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' (2.) The image and likeness of God shines forth in it in a peculiar manner, Luke vi. 35, 36; 'Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again: and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful.' Though Christ became poor for us, yet he gave to the poor, to commend it to us by his example. (3.) It is particularly taken notice of in the day of judgment, Matth. xxv. 34, 35.

Lastly, It is the most frugal and advantageous way of managing of the world's goods. For,

(1.) It is the way to secure to ourselves a through-bearing; there is a good security for it, Prov. xxviii. 27; 'He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack.'

(2.) It is the best way to secure what we have, which is liable to so many accidents, Eccl. xi. 1. 'Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.' Laying out for God is bet-

ter security than laying up what God calls for. For so it is put in a sure hand, that will be sure to pay it again. The poor and needy are God's receivers, Prov. xix. 17; 'He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given, will he pay him again.'

(3.) It is the way to be rich, as the Bible points out the way, Prov. iii. 9; 'Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of thine increase. Solomon observes the accomplishment of it, Prov. xi. 24. 'There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.'

(4.) It is the way to secure comfort to us in the time when trouble shall overtake us, Psal. xli. 1, 2, 3; Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.'

Lastly, God has promised that such shall find mercy, Matth. v. 7; always taking along what is said, ver. 3. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' See Luke xvi. 9. 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19.

II. I come now to shew, what is forbidden in the eighth commandment. It 'forbids whatsoever doth or may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbour's wealth or outward estate.'

The sins forbidden in this command may be reduced to these two heads: whatever doth or may hinder our own wealth unjustly; and whatever doth or may unjustly hinder our neighbour's wealth or outward estate.

FIRST, Whatsoever doth or may hinder our own wealth unjustly. This is necessarily understood; for we may neither do a sinful thing to procure our own wealth, nor yet to preserve it. But when there are lawful means which Providence calls us to the use of, and we do not use them, we sin against God and ourselves. Thus this command says to each of us, in the first place, Thou shalt not steal from thyself. Thus we are guilty,

1. By idleness, when people that are able do not employ themselves in some honest calling or work according to their ability, 2 Thess. iii. 11; The idle man wrongs himself, while he exposes himself to poverty, and so to a snare, by his not using means to preserve and improve his substance. And he sins against God, who has appointed, that in the sweat of his face man shall eat bread, Gen. iii. 19; And this is so although he have enough of his own, and needs not be burdensome to others, Ezek. xvi. 49; He makes himself a waif for Satan to pick up.

2. By carelessness, sloth, and mismanagement in our calling, Prov. xviii. 9; Carelessness lets occasions of furthering our own wealth slip; and slothfulness in business is next to doing nothing at all. And they that cannot put down their hands to work diligently, will hardly miss some time or another to put out their hand to steal. Careless and slothful management of business by one hand in a family, may do more mischief than many diligent hands can remedy, Prov. xiv. 1. Religion does not allow either men or women to be drones in their family, good for nothing but to make a noise, take up room, and feed on the product of the diligence of their relatives, Rom. xii. 11.

3. By not owning God in our business, and so slighting his blessing, who gives man power to get wealth, Deut. viii. 18; It is he that gives rains and fruitful seasons, that makes the cattle to thrive or to be diminished, and that prospereth the work of our hands. Do they not stand in their own light that acknowledge him not in these things?

4. By wastefulness and prodigality, whereby people foolishly spend and lavish away what God has brought to their hands, Prov. xxi. 17; And indeed these two ordinarily go together, unthriftiness and wastery; for readily they that have no hands to gather, have two to scatter; and they that can do no good to get, are active at putting away. Thus they not only misapply what God has given them, but take the high way to poverty and stealing.

5. By rash engaging in such things as may ruin our wealth and outward estate, as unnecessary inveigling ourselves in law pleas, whereby the contentions humours of some have made them like the ass in the fable, that seeking his horns, lost his ears, 1 Cor. vi. 6, 7, 8; as also cautionary, which although it be duty in some cases, as giving and lending is, yet if it be not managed with prudence and discretion may prove but a plucking out of the mouths of our own, to put it in the mouths of strangers, Prov. xi. 15. and vi. 1, &c.

6. By distrustful and distracting care in getting and keeping worldly things, Matth. vi. 31. Can that man be wealthy indeed, who, have what he will, never has enough, and whose abundance suffereth him not to sleep? Eccl. iv. 8. This keeps him from the comfort of what he has, that he robs himself of, which is the only valuable thing in worldly enjoyments, Prov. x. 22.

7. *Lastly*, By sordidness, which is when a man has no power to enjoy the gift of God, Eccl. vi. 1, 2. We can scarcely say, have what they will, that they have it, but it has them; for they have not the convenient decent use of it. They are of no use but to be serviceable to people's necessities and conveniencies; so that where that is wanting, it is as good as if they had them not.

To conclude this: Let us walk conscientiously in these things, knowing that we are accountable to God in them. We are not at our own disposal, but must lay out ourselves as God calls us. Neither may we do with our own what we will; for we are but inferior lords of them, and must use them agreeably to the will of the great Proprietor.

SECONDLY, Whatsoever doth or may unjustly hinder our neighbour's wealth or outward estate, is forbidden here as theft in God's account. Whatsoever way we wrong others in their outward estate, comes under this notion of stealing. So this command says, Thou shalt not steal from others. In respect of our neighbour, this command is broken two ways.

First, By direct stealing, which is the taking away of what is our neighbour's against his will, to his hurt and loss. If it be done secretly, without the knowledge of the owner, it is called theft; if it be by violence, it is robbery, whether by sea or land. There are two sorts of it.

1. Stealing of persons, called man-stealing, 1 Tim. i. 9, 10. It was the stealing away of men, women, or children, either to use them or sell them for slaves. Slavery having no place among us, there is no practising it with us, so far as I know. But there want not other sinful practices participating of the nature of this sin, such as running away with persons for marriage, whereby their parents are robbed of what is their own; enticing away other people's servants, to the prejudice of their masters; and seducing people's children to vicious and lewd practices. All which are contrary to the golden rule of justice, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.'

2. Stealing of substance. Whereof there are three kinds. (1.) Stealing from the public or commonwealth, whereby the magistrate and nation are wronged. (2.) Stealing from the church, taking away of what is devoted for pious uses, for maintaining the service of God and the poor. It is called sacrilege, Rom. ii. 22. These are the worst kinds of theft in regard of the relation these things have to God. (3.) Single theft, whereby private persons are wronged in their private substance. Whether the thing stolen be little or great, he that takes it away, is a thief, and is therefore excluded out of the kingdom of heaven, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. A man may lose his soul by the unlawful getting of what is not worth a penny, as well as of what is worth a thousand. Did men and women believe the curse of God which they take up with the thing they take away from others, they would see they had a sad bargain of it, Zech. v. 3, 4.

Secondly, By indirect stealing, which, though not accounted theft among men, yet it is so in the sight of God. And of this there are a great many ways, all here forbidden. People are thus guilty of theft, and break this command.

1. In their hearts, by nourishing those lusts that have a tendency thereto; for as there is heart-adultery, so there is heart theft. And this especially lies in these three things: (1.) Discontent with our condition, Heb. xiii. 5. This lays people open to the worst of snares. (2.) Envy and grudging at the good of others. This is the evil eye, which devours the substance of others. (3.) Covetousness. A covetous heart is that which stretches out the hand to steal.

2. In their conversation, by taking such ways as tend to the wronging of others in their outward estate, and really do wrong them, and take from them unjustly. This command is broken,

1st, By the idleness and sloth of those that are not able otherwise to maintain themselves. Every one is bound by this command to have a calling, and be diligent in it, if they be able. Therefore it is a sin for such to give themselves up to idleness, and live without a calling, or to be lazy in it, Eph. iv. 28. 2 Thess. iii. 10. 11. Hence it is evident,

(1.) That sturdy beggars are not to be tolerated; and no person being able to work for their maintenance can with a good conscience make a trade of begging. They that are able to work, but are not willing, ought to be compelled to it; and it is the sin and shame of the government that it is not so. For they directly set themselves in opposition to God's ordinance, Gen. iii. 19. They carry not themselves either as subjects or church-members, and dispose themselves that way to all manner of wickedness without controul.

(2.) That no person can with a good conscience lay the burden of their maintenance on others, further than what they cannot prevent by their own utmost diligence in labouring for themselves. And therefore those that will rather seek than work, though they be able, are reckoned in God's account to steal it, though they think not so.

Idle and lazy persons are guilty of stealth two ways. They wrong them that have, being without necessity a burden to them. They wrong others that are really poor and unable to help themselves; for they rob them at least in part of what they should get; and whereas they ought to labour to help them, they do it not, Eph. iv. 28.

2dly, By unlawful, base, and unwarrantable ways of getting gain. This the Spirit calls *filthy lucre*. For men must not only work, but

work that which is good, that they may gain a maintenance. And if they take sinful ways to obtain it, it is theft in the sight of God.

(1.) Using unlawful arts in trades, Acts xix. 19, 24, 25. Such are not working the thing that is good, but in itself evil, and tending to the debauching of mankind.

(2.) By raking together gain by our own sin, or the sin of others, as for gain to play the whore, or to do or help others to any sinful thing. Of this sort is the selling drink to those that go to excess in it, where people are instrumental in the ruin of the souls, bodies, and means of others, for their own filthy gain. Of this sort also are your set drinkings to help people to some stock; which is an occasion of much sin and excess. It must needs be base gain that is made that way, as being no way warranted by the word of God of helping them that are in need; and ordinarily it is seen to be blasted, so that it does little good. Must men be obliged to abuse themselves and God's good creatures to help others? Is that a way becoming Christian gravity and sobriety for helping those that need? But they will cast out their money liberally that way, that will not part with a penny to a poor object. Let those that need ply their hands well; and if that will not do to help them, let them take Christian methods for their help otherwise, and not run themselves on the sword-point of the curse denounced against such base gain, Hab. ii. 15. 'Wo unto him that giveth his neighbour drink: that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also.' And let men of gravity and sobriety discourage those ways, and not partake of other men's sins.

(3.) By making merchandise of things that ought not to be sold or bought. If they be spiritual things, as sacraments and church-offices, it is Simony, Acts viii. 20. If it be of justice, it is bribery, Job xv. 34. Or whatsoever it is that people make merchandise of, which ought neither to be bought nor sold.

(4.) It is a base gain that is made by your penny-weddings, as they are commonly managed, being condemned both by the laws of the land and of the church. And for people to begin the world with treading upon the laudable laws of the state, and constitutions of the church, for a little base gain, cannot be but a sinful way, being offensive and disorderly, 1 Cor. x. 32. 2 Thess. iii. 6. Our church, by act of Assembly, has declared them to be fruitful seminaries of all lasciviousness and debauchery, as well by the excessive number of people convened thereto, as by the extortion of them therein, and licentiousness thereat, to the great dishonour of God, the scandal of our Christian profession, and the prejudice of the country's welfare. And I appeal to your own consciences, if it be not a just

character of them. The drinkings, dancings, excesses, and quarrellings that accompany them, are they suitable to the rules of Christianity? They are generally reckoned oppression, and a gentle way of begging; but I fear God will reckon them stealing, as a way of base gain. But we have such fresh experience of your respect to warnings from the Lord's word, that I need not doubt but if ye had occasion, we should have a penny-wedding next Tuesday, Hos. iv. 4.

(5.) It is base gain that is made at playing at cards and dice, or any such game of hazard. For the lot being an appeal to God, it is dangerous to make a play of it. They occasion much sin of blaspheming God's providence under the name of ill luck when people lose, commending their good luck when they win, misspending time through a bewitching in the matter, whereby they cannot give over, the winners hoping to win more, and the losers hoping for better. Surely it is no working of that which is good, Eph. iv. 28. A Popish doctor, in a treatise of his on plays, tells us, that all games of hazard are condemned by Pagans, the fathers, the most able Popish and Protestant doctors, and that even Jesuit casuists find a mortal sin in playing at cards.

(6.) It is base gain when people stand at nothing, whether credit or conscience, if they can but reach it. Thus many reckon gain sweet, whatever way they get it. They will debase themselves to the meanest things to win a little thing, without any necessity. They will toil themselves excessively for what is very inconsiderable; and if charity and gifts be going, they will without necessity put in for their share, to the great prejudice of those that are truly needy, and cannot help themselves. These and all other ways of base gain are forbidden here as stealing.

3dly, This command is broken by family-frauds and robbery. For in this case one's enemies may be those of their own house. These family-frauds are committed,

(1.) By the husbands spending and wasting their money or goods, to the detriment of their wives and children. It is abominable robbery for men to ware that on their lusts, which should serve the necessities and conveniencies of their families, as it falls out in the case of drunkards, adulterers, and mismanagers. But worst of all, while they themselves are kept full and their poor families sadly pinched, 1 Tim. v. 8.

(2.) By wives embezzling and putting away their husbands' goods to his loss, by which means a man may soon be stolen off his feet, as we term it. It is quite contrary to the character of a virtuous woman, Prov. xxxi. 12. 'She will do him (her husband) good, and not evil, all the days of her life.'

(3.) By children embezzling and taking away their parents' money or goods without their consent. There is no doubt a child may steal from his parents seeing he is not proprietor of their goods, Prov. xxviii. 24. Though they think they may take at their own hand, God's word says the contrary.

(4.) By servants wronging their masters in their substance that is among their hands. By their employment and trust, they have occasion to steal from their masters, if conscience engage them not to honesty. And so they may be guilty of taking of their master's either for themselves or to give away to others, Tit. ii. 9, 10.

(5.) *Lastly*, I will add by all such as tempt or encourage either husbands, wives, children, or servants, to wrong their relatives. These are deeply guilty; for, as we say, there would not be a thief if there was not a resetter, Psal. l. 18. Thus hostlers and others that entertain men to the prejudice of their families, steal from these families. Thus covetous neighbours, who have their intrigues with other people's servants and fawning flatterers that draw about people's houses, to make a prey, whether of simple wives, children, or servants, engaging them to rob their husbands, parents, or masters, to give them, are thieves in the sight of God, to be avoided as plagues and pests to a house, Prov. xxix. 24.

4thly, This command is broken by injustice and cheatey in bargains and commerce, 1 Thess. iv. 6. What is gotten in that way is stolen in God's account, Lev. xxv. 14. Thus men are guilty,

(1.) When they take advantage of their neighbour's necessity, either in buying or selling; as when a person is necessitated to sell a thing, the buyer takes the advantage to gain it much below the worth; or when the seller knows the buyer must needs have it, then to rack it above the worth to him, Lev. xxv. 14. Indeed, if the seller would not otherwise part with the thing, but to answer that necessity, or the buyer would not otherwise take it, the case alters; for then parting with his money or goods in that case requires a rational compensation.

(1.) When the seller commendeth, and the buyer dispraiseth the wares, contrary to their own conscience and knowledge, that so they may over-reach one another, Prov. xx. 14. So no doubt the way of priggging so long before people come to the due worth, is an insuaring way of dealing.

(3.) When men take advantage of their neighbour's ignorance in buying or selling. This sometimes falls out in buying, when the seller knows not the value of the thing, but the buyer does, and so gets it from him far below the worth. Oft-times in selling, when the seller imposes on the buyer's ignorance, either by express lying,

saying the thing is what he really knows it is not, or concealing fraudulently the fault of it, as if, in selling a beast or any other thing, a man should conceal a known fault of the commodity, which he knows if the buyer knew, he would either not have it at all, or not at the price. In this case, men think it enough that the neighbour's eye is his merchant. But will ye apply this practice to the golden rule, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, Matth. vii. 12; and let conscience say if it be fair dealing or not, Lev. xix. 11. 'Ye shall neither do falsely, nor lie one to another.'

(4.) By adulteration of wares, mixing them with worse, to the prejudice, and without the knowledge of the buyer; the commodity perhaps good and sightly, where it appears to the buyer's eye, but full of refuse that is good for little or nothing, but to make weight, or fill up the measure, which he finds not till he is to make use of it. Amos viii. 6.

(5.) By using false weights and measures, Micah vi. 10, 11; or any deceit whatsoever about weights or measures, whether in buying or selling; as in the case where the party is absent, and therefore it is made scanty, or when men have one to buy with, and another to sell with, or whatever way men take to 'falsify the balances by deceit,' Amos viii. 5.

(6.) When that which is bought is not precisely delivered, but is vitiated; as by taking away a part of what is good in it, and making it up with what is worse; so that though they have the same weight or measure which they bought, yet it is not of the same goodness. This is direct stealth: for what is once sold is no more ours; and with the same justice ye might take a shilling out of your neighbour's pocket, putting in a sixpence for it.

(7.) Unfaithfulness in not performing condition, Psal. xv. 4; when people make no conscience of keeping their word. This is not to be rigidly interpreted to involve men in guilt, when they use all moral diligence to perform their condition, but Providence puts a stop in their way; for in all promises of that nature, such an exception is to be understood; but when people have a sinful hand in not performing exactly according to promise.

(8.) *Lastly*, When payment is made with uncurrent money, consisting with the knowledge of the payer, Gen. xxiii. 16; or like Ananias and Sapphira, Acts v. keeping back part of the price; a base and unjust custom with some, who still eat up a part of what they are obliged to pay, Prov. iii. 27, 28.

5thly, This command is broken in fellowship, when people trade together, or have a common interest in one room together, and in

the management thereof defraud and go beyond one another; which is the rise and spring of many brawls and grudges that neighbours have against one another, Lev. vi. 2; So in over-stenting of ground beyond what falls to their share, shifting to bear proportionable burdens to their profit, breaking over any of the conditions of their fellowship, and raising their own gain out of their neighbour's loss, and many such things which men do to others that they would not have done to themselves; and therefore are pieces of injustice, and sorts of theft, here condemned.

6thly, It is broken in the matter of neighbourhood, as by removing marches or land-marks, Prov. xxii. 28; carelessness to keep our neighbours from skaith by us, whereas justice requires we should be as loath to do wrong to our neighbours, as to receive it from them. Far more when it is done designedly, as for people to stand and feed their beasts on their neighbour's grass, at times when they know they cannot be catched in the thievish act. And of this sort is the turning out of beasts in the night-time, when there is no probability but they will be in their neighbour's skaith, though they resolve to rise early, and set them right ere they can be noticed.

7thly, It is broken in matters of trust. Treachery under trust is amongst the worst pieces of injustice. Thus men are guilty when they give hurtful counsel to those that trust to them, and so betray them; when partners in trading are unfaithful one to another; when men have other people's business among their hands, their substance or their work, and prove unfaithful, because it is in the power of their hand. But the worst of all this sort is unfaithfulness to poor orphans left to men's care and tutory, whom many hard hearts can treat most unjustly, to their loss or ruin, and to the bringing of a curse on themselves, God being the Judge of the fatherless in a special manner.

8thly, It is broken in the case of hiring many ways. As, (1.) When men wilfully or carelessly abuse a thing which they have hired, it is a piece of injustice. So men may be guilty in abusing the house they dwell in, or the horse they ride on, or the land they possess. (2.) When hirelings make no conscience of working honestly for their wages, as when they take wages for work, they have not skill to manage to the advantage of those that employ them; or when they spend time carelessly, and are not diligent for the advantage of those that employ them; and much more when they designedly work slightly for their own greater gain. (3.) When the hireling is defrauded in the matter of his wages, either by keeping it from him altogether, or not giving it him in due time, when it is in the power of our hand, or paying him with any insufficient thing, Jam. v. 4.

9thly, This command is broken in retaining instead of restoring what is not ours, but our neighbour's. Thus men are guilty in concealing things found, and with-holding them from the right owners when they are known, whom, according to the weight of the matter, they should be at pains to know; much more when, being found, it is dispatched so as our neighbour can never have it again, Deut. xxii. 1, 2; So in all cases where restitution is necessary, the retaining is a continued theft; for what we have taken away from others, we should be ready to restore. Indeed the party's giving of it takes away the necessity of restitution, and that though it be but rationally presumable that they do not desire such restitution.

10thly, It is broken in the matter of borrowing and not paying again. As, (1.) When people make no conscience of restoring what they have borrowed for their use, or preserving it entire, that it be not notably the worse of them. Borrowing and lending is a necessary bond of society among neighbours; and as lenders are obliged to be neighbourly, so borrowers should be so too, Exod. xxii. 14. (2.) Refusing to help our neighbour, by lending where our own affairs will spare it, and he is in straits, Matth. v. 42; and particularly a rigid standing at a distance from all lending to those that are low in the world, and under a particular strait; for in that case, I shewed before that it was a duty to lend to such, such a portion of money or goods as we can well bear the loss of, though never repaid, Luke vi. 35. (3.) Not paying our just debts, if we are able, Psal. xxxvii. 21. And of this sort is borrowing what we are in no probable condition to pay. (4.) The staving off of payment, and shifting it, and obliging people to vexatious law-suits for the recovering of their due; for that is a sort of robbery, Prov. iii. 30; And so is the involving people in law-suits for an unjust debt. (5.) *Lastly*, Extortion in compensation for loans, Ezek. xxii. 12; which we call usury or ocker, Psal. xv. ult. and the requiring of all our debts rigidly, without mercy or compassion, Isa. lviii. 3.

11thly, It is broken by an uncharitable use of what is our own. The sovereign Proprietor of the world may do what he will; but so may not we, that are bound to use what is ours in the way of charity towards our neighbour. This is done many ways, particularly by the two following, taken notice of in the Larger Catechism on this command.

(1.) By unjust inclosures and depopulations, that is, inclosing grounds and dispeopling them, whereby it comes to pass that houses are pulled down, and families cast out, to make room for beasts or so; and so the country is dispeopled, and some one, or a few, are built up on the ruins of many, Isa. v. 8. Micah ii. 2.

(2.) By ingrossing commodities to enhance the price, whereby one gets such a commodity all in his own hand, so that he makes all that need it depend on him, and makes his own price as he will, seeing people cannot mend themselves at another hand. Such is the hoarding up of corn and other necessary things for a dearth, that they will not sell when people stand in need of them, Prov. xi. 26.

12thly, It is broken by oppression, when a man, by his own power, favour, or interest, bears down his neighbours, either thrusting them from their right, or with-holding them from their due, or stretches beyond what his own right and title will warrant him, to the prejudice of a weaker party. Thus magistrates may oppress their subjects, masters their servants, landlords their tenants, and one powerful tenant or neighbour his weaker neighbour. This is a horrid sin in the sight of God, for men to use their power to distress others that are weaker than they. It is a sort of murder, condemned in the sixth command, Micah iii. 2, 3. and of theft or robbery, condemned in the eighth, Ezek. xxii. 7.

13thly, It is broken by partaking with thieves or unjust persons, l. 18. and partakers in sin may lay their account to be partakers in plagues with the sinner. Now, partakers with thieves or unjust persons are,

(1.) All that encourage and tempt them to it: these directly concur to the guilt.

(2.) All that receive or harbour stolen goods, Prov. xxix. 25. Such are all that join with them to hide what is taken away from their neighbours; such as wittingly and willingly take them from them as gifts, or that buy them from them, because they get a round pennyworth; but they are the dearest ever they bought, if they knew the matter as it is; such as wittingly and willingly receive the profit of them; so the husbands, wives, children, and servants, are guilty of the theft of their relatives in that case. Doubly deceitful and cruel are they who receive the pickeries of children.

(3.) Such as do not hinder it when it is in their power; when people see a person at that soul-ruining trade, and let them be doing; certainly know them guilty, and yet will not so much as tell them of it prudently; though perhaps they will spread it to others, and then set their foot on it.

Lastly, This command is broken by unmercifulness to the poor, shutting up our bowels of compassion against them, which locks up the hand from giving them in their need. I shall say two things of it.

(1.) It is a complication of many sins in one. For,

[1.] It is a theft, Eph. iv. 28. It is a taking from them what is

their due by the law of God: for though we have the right of property in our own goods, the truly poor have a right of charity in them, so far as they need and we can spare.

[2.] It is ingratitude to God, who has given us so much, and yet in that case we will not part with a portion of it, when he requires it back by the poor, his receivers. It is the Lord himself that asks of us by the poor, and it is horrid ingratitude to refuse him, Mat. xxv. 40, 41.

[3.] It is perfidiousness in the stewardship which God has committed to us, Luke xvi. 10. as if a steward should use all for himself, and starve his master's family.

[4.] *Lastly*, It is a sort of murder, 1 John iii. 15,—17. For as the fire may be put out by with-holding fuel, as well as pouring water on it; so a man's life may be taken away by denying him the supports of life, as well as by cutting his throat.

(2.) So it brings on a complication of strokes from God. [1.] It is a moth in what a man has, and directly tends to poverty and want, Prov. xi. 24, 23. for what men thus hold together, God in his anger seatters. [2.] It is inconsistent with the love of God, 1 John iii. 17. and the want of bowels to the poor is the want of pure religion before God, Jam. i. ult. [3.] *Lastly*, As men deal with the poor unmercifully, so they may expect God will deal with them, Prov. xxi. 13. Jam. ii. 13.

Thus I have gone through the duties required, and the sins forbidden in this command, as they occurred. But a tender conscience, in applying this command in practice, will find much more than what I have said. And when we come to the light of the Lord at the great day, things will be seen required and forbidden in it (I doubt not,) that neither you nor I have thought of. Who can understand his errors? O what need of the blood of Christ, and grace to repent, and turn from our evil ways!

I shall now shut up my discourse on this command with two dehortations.

FIRST, I would dehort all and every one from stealing. Let every one abhor this sin. Let such as have stole, steal no more, but repent. I wish there were no ground to insist on this; but I am convinced that there is. I shall,

1. Offer some motives to press the forsaking of this sin.
2. Consider some occasions of it, and expose them.
3. Point out the remedies against it.

FIRST, I shall offer some motives to press the forsaking of this sin.

1. Consider how shocking it is to nature's light, that teaches us to do to others as we would be done to. So that if conscience be

but in the deadthraw with the thief, and not quite dead, he is judged and condemned from within in the very act. No wonder the heart quake, and the hands tremble, when they are put out, over the belly of the conscience, to that unlawful gain.

2. Consider the reproach of it. How disgraceful a name is that of a thief! If conscience have no weight with people, may they not regard their credit? Do not people regard to be hissed at by others? Job xxx. 5. It is true, they hope to carry it secretly; but how often is it seen that a bird of the air carrieth the voice, and they are surprised one time or other with shame covering their face?

3. It quite mars our acceptance and communion with God. The thief excommunicates himself from the presence of the Lord. He may pray to God, but God will not hear him; may come to sermons, but there is nothing for him there but words of anger. Judas was a thief, and both preached and prayed; but had no intercourse with God in these exercises. When the thief brings in the stolen goods, God goes out; and is not that a sad exchange, and are not the things stolen dear wares? And while he enjoys the sweet of it, it is mixed with the vinegar of God's wrath; till he repent, and restore to, if he be able, he can have no more access to God than the murderer while he has his sword in his neighbour's body, or the adulterer while his whore is in his arms, Jer. vii. 9, 10.

4. Nay, it brings down a curse instead of a blessing. While he swallows down these goods, the curse goes down with it, which will choke him at length. It brings a curse on him, and that he has otherwise, Zech. v. 2,—4. Sometimes it works on his own substance like a moth, and what he has decays, and do what he will he is always poor. Sometimes it works like a lion, so that though he have a full life of it a while by the gains of unrighteousness, yet at length all is swallowed up from him together, either by the hand of God or of men. However, it makes always a blasted, withered soul.

5. *Lastly*, It will ruin people eternally. The thief is liable to three tribunals. (1.) Of the state, seeing the laws of the land strike against it. Theft is punished with death, how equitably, I shall not say, for there seems to be no proportion betwixt men's goods and lives. Pickery, or small theft, is punished arbitrarily, with disgrace enough. (2.) Of the church: for the discipline of the church ought to strike against it, and they are censurable for it, even to excommunication, 1 Cor. v. 11, 12. But it is for the most part so cleverly carried, that neither church nor state can touch them. But they will not escape. (3.) The tribunal of God, who is a Judge that will not want witnesses to prove the fact which no eye saw, while himself is omniscient, and there is a conscience within men's breast. And

therefore I, as a messenger of that Judge, the eternal God, do in his name and authority summon, arrest, and bind over, every stealer, and partaker with stealers, hearing me, or that should be hearing me this day, to answer it before the tribunal of God; denouncing the eternal vengeance of God and everlasting damnation against them, to be assuredly executed against them if they repent not in time. And let the timber and stones of this house, and every one of you, be witnesses to this execution, to be produced when they and I shall stand before that tribunal, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. And O but it is dear bought that is got at the rate of eternal burnings!

SECONDLY, I shall consider some occasions of this sin, and expose them.

1. Solitude, people dwelling alone, which gives them fair occasion to play their tricks. It is marked of that graceless place Laish, Judg. xviii. 7. that they were far from neighbours. Such a solitary place we live in; and readily solitude produces either great saints or black devils, as in other things, so particularly uncleanness and thievery; and therefore the night is the thief's time, because of the solitude of it. It is no small business to keep a clean conscience on a hill head or in a glen, or in the black and dark night, where there is an occasion of sinning.

But O consider, that God's eye is on you at all times and in all places! and whatever solitude ye may have to sin in, ye will be called to an account before the throng of the whole world, angels and men, and in broad day-light.

2. Poverty becomes an occasion of it, through the corruption of men's hearts, Prov. xxx. 8, 9. Graceless poor bodies can hardly think but they have a dispensation to steal.

But surely God, who will not have the persons of the poor respected in judgment, Lev. xix. 15. never gave a dispensation to them to steal, but commands them to be content, and to seek for his sake what they have not, and cannot want. Poor thieves are thieves as well as others; and I doubt not but it is that which keeps some always poor, Job xxx. 3,—5. It is true, Solomon says, that as his temptation is stronger, his guilt is less than others, Prov. vi. 30; but still he is guilty, ver. 31; and all that can be expected from this is to have a less hot place in hell than others; and that is but cold comfort.

3. Idleness and laziness, Eph. iv. 20. There is a generation that will not ply themselves, work and win, and they cannot want, and they must steal. They idle away their time when they might be provided as others, and then the time comes that they cannot want, and they steal from their neighbours what they provided for themselves with the sweat of their brows.

Ye have two sins to account for here, your idleness and stealth; the one will not excuse, but aggravate the other. Ye make yourselves a prey to the devil; and when the devil finds you idle, it is no wonder he puts work in your hands.

4. A fair and easy opportunity meeting with a covetous heart. When there was a wedge of gold lying for the uptaking before Achan, he could not hold in his hands. People that have a mind to steal in such a place, need not go off their own field, or from their own flock, to steal; their neighbour's goods cannot be kept from mixing with theirs, and their is an opportunity to the wish of a covetous heart.

But if people would think with themselves, Now, God in his holy providence is trying me, now the devil is waiting for my ensnaring: shall I sin because I have an opportunity? May not God send me to hell then, having such an occasion against me?

5. The smallness of the thing. They think it is but a small thing the owner may well enough spare that, it will not do him much harm. It is but this and but that.

But be what it will, it will make thee but a thief for stealing of it. And wilt thou sell thy soul for such a small thing? The way of sin is down the hill; let the devil get in a finger, and he will have in his hand next. He that for a little will sin, will mend his service if the devil will mend his wages. At first perhaps it is but a bit of meat, then a parcel of peats, then a quantity of fodder, and then a sheep, and so on till they come to the gallows here, and to hell hereafter.

5. The difficulty there is in finding it out. It is a work of darkness, which there use not to be witnesses to, and so the man or woman defies the world to make out any such thing against them; and so they go on without controul, boasting like Ephraim, 'He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand; he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance; in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me, that were sin,' Hos. xii. 7, 8.

But O what avails that? Will ye defy the God of heaven, and your own conscience, to make it out before the tribunal? and then ye say something. Till then thou art a criminal before God, and dreadful shall thy doom be. But take heed, they have been discovered that thought themselves secure because no eye saw them. When a man's day comes to fall in such a course, God can infatuate them, that he guides not his matters with common sense.

7. *Lastly*, Bearing with them. I will not meddle with them says one; I will not meddle with them, says another; let them fall in

another's hand, and so on it goes. Justice is neglected, neighbour's are robbed, the souls of the guilty are ruined, and others involved in their sin, that might prevent the progress of it, and will not. It is marked of that Laish, that there was none in it to put it to shame, Judg. xviii. 7. Respect to men's credit more than to their consciences, is like the tender mercies of the wicked, that are cruel.

THIRDLY, I come now to point out some remedies against this sin.

1. Let the guilty flee to the Lord Jesus Christ, for his blood and Spirit to wash away their guilt, and take away their sin. They are no more beyond the reach of mercy than other gross sinners are. In the catalogue of the Corinthian sinners, were thieves; and yet we are told, that they were washed, and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, 1 Cor. vi. 10, 11. Put the covetous heart in his hand, that he may take it away.

2. Labour to awe your hearts with the dread of the all-seeing God whose eye is ever on you; and remember, that for all these things ye do God will bring you into judgment.

3. Labour to be content with your lot, Heb. xiii. 5. Be content with little, if it be your lot. A little will serve nature, grace will be content with less; but lust will never have enough.

4. *Lastly*, Lay more stress on the quality than the quantity of what ye have. A little with God's favour, in a righteous way, is better than much with the wrath and curse of God.

SECONDLY, I would dehort from all injustice and unrighteous dealing whatsoever, in all the ways that I have shewn that the eighth commandment may be broken, besides by direct stealing, and any other way whatsoever. Be precisely upright and just in all you do, and do nothing to others that ye would not have done to you. For motives consider,

1. Whatever you gain by any unjust way, it is indirectly stolen, it is stolen in effect. Therefore God forbids all these, under the name of stealing. And there is good reason for it; for no right can be founded in wrong. Injustice can give no man a title to what is his neighbour's before God; and therefore what you have of him unjustly, is still his, and ye are fraudulent and wrongous possessors of it, as well as if ye had directly stolen it.

2. Just and upright dealing is necessary to prove you to be saints, Psal. xv. 1, 2. It is true, it will not prove it alone; men may be just to their neighbours, and yet be no saints. But he can be no saint that makes not conscience of it, be his profession and practice in religion otherwise what it will. This is clear, if you consider,

(1.) Righteousness towards men is an essential part of the image of God, Eph. iv. 24, 25. And as the half-image is no image, so piety without righteousness is not God's image, nor true piety. Will God ever regard what we give him, when we make no conscience what we take from our neighbour?

(2.) Without it our service to God is but half-service, Luke iv. 74, 75; and that can never be sincere, Psal cxix. 6. In regeneration, God writes his law on the heart, and not shreds here and there of the first table: so that where righteousness, a principal duty of the second table, is not, the law of God is not written there.

3. That injustice in professors of religion gives a deep wound to religion itself, Rom. ii. 22, 24. And indeed that religion which does not make men just neighbours to deal with, can hardly be thought to make them saints. That craft, cunning, and fraud, used by many, how inconsistent is it with Christian simplicity, the fear of an all-seeing God, and contempt of the world, which religion teaches.

4. How opposite is it to the nature of God, who is just and righteous, and whom we must follow as dear children! The unjust stand in direct opposition to him who cannot but do right. God has a special love in righteousness, Psal. xi. ult. and all injustice is an abomination to him. He has set a particular mark of abhorrence on it, Micah vi. 10, 11. 'Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?' And he has also set a particular delight in just dealing, Prov. xi. 1; 'A just weight is his delight.'

5. It brings a blasting curse along with it, Prov. xiii. 11; 'Wealth gotten by vanity, shall be diminished.' And although it may prosper for a while, it will have a foul hinder end, Prov. xx. 21; 'The end thereof shall not be blessed.' It is as a moth in the man's own labours, and sometimes eats away his substance, makes wings to it that it leaves him, and often hurries him away from it. That is a heavy word, Jer. xvii. 11; 'He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.'

6. It leaves a sting in the conscience, which will be felt to smart sooner or later. Conscience is the deputy of a just God in the soul, which will be able sometimes to act its part, and both accuse, convince, condemn, and torment the unjust dealer, so that he will be ready to throw away his unjust gain, as willingly as ever one ready to be burnt did live coals out of his bosom, and as Judas did his thirty pieces of silver, though perhaps it may be out of time. A

Pythagorean bought a pair of shoes upon trust : the shoemaker dies : the philosopher is glad, and thinks them gain : but a while after his conscience twitches him : he repairs to the house of the dead, casts in his money with these words, ‘ There, take thy due ; thou livest to me, though dead to all besides.’

7. *Lastly*, It will exclude you out of heaven. There is a bar drawn on all unrighteous persons, that they cannot come there, 1 Cor. vi. 9. The treasures of eternal glory are lost by unrighteous dealing in the world, Luke xvi. 11. Where then is the profit, though a man gain the whole world ? It is sad gain where a thousand times more is lost by it. Peace with God and conscience is lost by it ; the soul is lost by it, and that for ever. And they who walk not by the rules of justice in the world, shall lie under the strokes of divine justice eternally.

The occasions that ensnare men into stealing might be repeated here, as occasions of other pieces of injustice. But to fence you against this evil, I offer these things.

1. Consider your unrighteous nature, and carry it to Christ to be healed by him. When Adam’s nature, and ours in him, was corrupted, it was wholly so, not only with respect to the first, but the second table. There is need, then, that the plaister be as wide as the wound, Eph. iv. 24. And he that would remove the bitter streams, must apply to get the fountain sweetened.

2. Accustom yourselves to acknowledge the Lord in your civil actions, Prov. iii. 6. The want of this betrays men into much unfair dealing ; for where there is so little of God, there must be much of the devil.

(1.) Eye God in these matters, as he who is your witness, and will be your judge to them. Set the Lord before you in your business, and you will fear to step wrong. May be thou canst wrong thy neighbour, and he shall not know it. But God knows it, and it cannot be hid from him. May be he cannot right himself for want of witnesses ; but pray remember, that God and thy own conscience are witnesses to all that passeth betwixt you and others. And though ye may think it is long to that court-day, yet remember that awful declaration, Mal. iii. 5. ‘ I will come near to you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.’ May be thou canst bear him down from his right, but mind, the wronged party has a strong avenger, 1 Thess. iv. 6. O how well might it go, if men in all their bargains, work, neighbourhood, &c. would set God thus before them !

(2.) Eye God in these matters as the fountain of strength. Alas ! most men have no diffidence in themselves in these affairs, but trust themselves as in no hazard there, and thus are the betrayers of themselves, Prov. xxviii. 26. The least of duties are too much for us alone, and in the plainest way we will go wrong, if we be not led right. Satan has snares laid for us in these things ; and therefore we have need of strength from the Lord to resist them.

3. Remember ye are not only to seek your own, but your neighbour's welfare, Phil. ii. 4. Selfishness is the cause of much unfair dealing. 'Lovers of themselves more than God,' and exclusively of our neighbour, are in bad condition. For a man to build up himself on another's ruins, is contrary to that love which we owe to our neighbour, as fellow-partakers of the human nature, and as members one of another as Christians, Eph. iv. 25. The goodness that is most diffusive and communicative, is most like God.

4. Consider the vanity of the world. It is an overvaluing of earthly advantages that leads people aside into unrighteous ways, Hos. xii. 8. A due impression of the vanity and emptiness thereof, would let you see that they are not worth a man's going off his way for them. It is not long till very little will serve us ; death comes, and we have no more to do with it, a coffin and a winding sheet, and a little room in the heart of the earth, which none will grudge us, will be all we will need. What madness is it, then, to wound the conscience for such a pitiful business ? All the gains of unrighteousness will never quite the cost.

5. Labour to mortify the lust of covetousness, which being indulged, the conscience will get sore stretches to satisfy it, Heb. xiii. 5. It cannot miss to pierce people through with many sorrows. Therefore 'love not the world,' 1 Johu iii. 15 ; for whoso follow it too closely at the heels, it will dash out their brains at last.

6. A little well gotten is more worth than much otherwise, Prov. xvi. 8. There is a blessing in the one, a temporal one at least ; but there is a curse in the other. A man may use the one with a good conscience ; the other is with an ill conscience, and that is a sad sauce to the meal. The one a man has on free cost, having nothing to pay for it ; the sweet of the other is squeezed out by a dear reckoning following.

7. *Lastly*, Remember the day is coming wherein all wrongs are to be righted, secret things brought to light, and open violence reckoned for. If men were to have no after-reckoning for these things, they might do in them as they list ; but thou shalt be countable for the least farthing. The Judge is infinitely wise, and the most cunning and tricky will not get him outwitted nor shifted. He is omnipo-

tent, and they who force their way now through all the bands of justice, shall not be able to make head against him. In all temptation that way, then awe your heart with that meditation, 'What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?' Job xxxi. 14.

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OF THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

EXOD. xx. 16.—*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*

THE scope of this command is the preservation of truth amongst men, which is a necessary bond of human society. And forasmuch as all the commands of the second table relate to ourselves as well as others, the meaning of this is, Thou shalt not bear false witness either against thyself or thy neighbour, and so neither wrong thy own nor thy neighbour's good name.

The positive part of this command is implied in the negative, viz. Thou shalt bear real and soothfast witness (as our law terms it) for thyself and thy neighbour, and so maintain thy own and thy neighbour's good name, so far as truth will allow. This witnessing is to be understood not only of judicial, but extrajudicial witnessing.

*Qucst.* 'What is required in the ninth commandment?' *Ans.* 'The ninth commandment requireth the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbour's good name, especially in witness-bearing.'

I shall consider this commandment, as it relates,

- I. To truth betwixt man and man in general;
- II. To our own good name; and,
- III. To our neighbour's good name.

I. As it relates to truth betwixt man and man in the general. Truth is a sacred thing, which we are to cleave to as we would to God, who is true essentially, and therefore called truth itself. It was a notable saying of a philosopher, that truth is so great a perfection, that if God would render himself visible, he would chuse light for his body, and truth for his soul. He was not far out, for the scripture tells us of Christ, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily, that he is the light, and the truth. And, on the other hand, it holds out Satan as the prince of darkness and father of lies. And there is a mighty affinity betwixt light and truth, darkness and lies. Truth is to the soul as light is to the body; and they that walk in the light, will walk in truth. Now, this command requires the maintaining of truth. We may take up this in these two things.