

Farrow, March 18, 1711.

A HEART EXERCISED UNTO GODLINESS NECESSARY TO MAKE
A GOOD CHRISTIAN.

SERMON X.

1 TIMOTHY iv. 7,

Exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

EXERCISE unto godliness is now almost worn out of the world. Many casting off the very bodily exercise in religion; few, very few, keeping up the heart exercise of it; and it is our work to strive against the stream. This is all the apology I shall make to you, for preaching upon a text that several of you heard me upon, elsewhere, not long ago. There it was my business, to stir up myself, and my brethren in the ministry, to the exercise of godliness, in order to make us good ministers; and now I am to stir you up to it, in order to make you good Christians.

The apostle gives us here a short, but substantial description of the Christian life. It is an exercise, it is not a name. People must not think to take on a profession of religion, as men set their foot in a boat, and sit there at their own ease, till they be set ashore. Persons may reach hell in this way, but they will not arrive at heaven. For time runs with a rapid course, and sleep we, or wake we, carries us swiftly down the stream to eternity.

Again, Christianity is not an easy exercise, but such as wrestlers or runners used, exerting all their might and skill to gain the victory. We are not to expect two summers in one year, or rest here, and in heaven also. We are also reminded, that Christianity is heart-soul-exercise, for it is opposed to bodily exercise. It is not the saying of a prayer, reading a chapter, hearing a sermon, giving every one their due, and the like. Though the tongue cry to God, as if it would rend the clouds, and the eyes should help it forward with a flood of tears, the hands should deal among the poor all that a man hath, and his mouth should keep shut to macerate his body with fasting, the knees should become hard as horns with praying, and after all this, the feet should carry away the skeleton to be burned for religion: yet if there be no more, and that of another kind, it is all but vile bodily exercise, that will leave the soul ruined and undone at the latter end. "For," says Paul, "though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body

to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." As if he had said, if my soul within me, burn not as clear in sincere love to God, as my body in the flame, I will but go out of one fire here, into another in hell. So then true religion is an inward thing.

Once more, the Christian life is a heart exercise to the most noble end, even to godliness. It is not to get a name; nay, it is not to get just as much grace as may keep people out of hell, which is the utmost bounds of the ambition of some; and by this they declare that godliness hath never yet touched them at the heart. But it is godliness, a conformity to God in the whole man. This is the scope of their exercise; this only will satisfy the holy ambition, with which the Spirit of the Lord hath fired their hearts.

DOCTRINE. The true Christian life is heart exercise to godliness. For illustrating this, I shall,

I. Shew some weighty truths imported in this.

II. Some things in which the exercise to godliness consists. I am then,

I. To shew some weighty truths imported in this.

1. Habitual godliness is absolutely necessary to salvation. For as a man cannot wrestle, that wants the power of his arms; so neither can a man lead the Christian life, who is not a Christian indeed. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." There must be a new nature, ere there be a new life pleasing to God; for a new life with an old heart, is but superficial, and mere bodily exercise. One dead in sin will never exercise himself to godliness.

2. No person goes to heaven sleeping. The Christian life is an exercise. They have much to do, the Christian race is to run, there are many enemies to wrestle with, and the kingdom of heaven to be taken by violence. Most men look as if they expected heaven would drop into their mouth, while lying on the bed of sloth. It is not our exercise, indeed, that procures heaven, but it is a rest procured not for loiterers but labourers.

3. They must have true courage that shall come to heaven. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." True Christians must be like Caleb and Joshua among the spies, having their foreheads steeled to encounter difficulties. It is only overcomers that carry away the crown. The Christian may have sharp exercise in wrestling. Like Jacob, he may have to wrestle with God himself, Genesis xxxii. 24—30. The soul hath hard exercise in the field of divine trials, as in the case of a

call to some more than ordinary work, as when Abraham was called to offer up his son Isaac. In such cases, armies of discouragements and carnal reasonings will attack the man. These overcame Jonah for a time, but Abraham went actively through. In the case of desertions from the Lord; here the Christian is often wrapped up in a cloud of darkness, and left without light: armies of doubts and fears attack him, dragging him sometimes to the very borders of blasphemy, Psal, lxxvii. 7—10. He is carried captive from Zion to Sinai. "For thou writest bitter things against me" says Job, "and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." Job had hard work, when he said, "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." They have also to wrestle with the devil, even "against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Some people find no difficulty here; they are Satan's sleeping children, whom he will be very unwilling to awaken or disturb; but if any have a mind for heaven, they will get a black band of hellish temptations to wrestle through.

They have to wrestle also with the world. No man can go through it to heaven, but he will find it a place filled with snares, and that will require courage to face the difficulties in it. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." They must also wrestle with their own lusts. They will have a war within, as well as without. "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." But of these more afterwards.

4. People must either give up the name of Christians, or else abandon their old exercise to sin and ungodliness. There is no consistency betwixt the two. "For whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God." Every one has some exercise. The soul is never idle. A watch frequently goes faster when wrong, than when right; so that we call you not to more but to other exercise. If there be a principle of godliness within, however low it be, it will break forth into action at length, and act like itself. Grace in the heart, like a spring, though stopped with mud, will seek a vent one way or another.

Lastly, The Christian life, is a spiritual life. "That which is born of the spirit is spirit." What avails a carcase of duties, without the life and power of godliness. In the sacrifices of the heathens, the priest used to look to the heart, to see if it was sound. God looks to that chiefly. The Christian is the spiritual man, 1 Cor. ii. 15. and his worship is spiritual. "He worships God in spirit and in truth." We now proceed,

II. To shew some things, in which the exercise to godliness consists.

1. In carrying on a constant trade with heaven, through our Lord Jesus Christ. They say our "conversation is in heaven, from whence also, we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." They keep up communion with God, through the Mediator. "Their fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." This trade consists in import and export. I may well put them in that order; for all the traders with heaven, go there empty-handed at first, and have never anything to export that is worthy, but what is the product of Immanuel's land. The soul exercised is taken up, 1. In exporting all its guilt, and importing pardons daily. The exercised soul finds guilt a heavy load to the conscience, yet its weakness is such, that it is still contracting new guilt, therefore takes it, lays it before the Lord, and sues out for pardon, and this only through Christ. The soul dares not, like the vile hypocrite in his bodily exercise, lay down a confession, a resolution to mend, drop a tear, and then snatch up a pardon; but he goes by faith to Christ, dips in that blood that is the blood of God, and comes away clean. He dares not for his very soul touch a pardon, but what is written in blood. "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

Again, the exercised soul is employed in exporting his weakness, poverty and wants, and importing strength and fulness from God. "They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength." They receive also light and life. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. The soul comes before the Lord shaken out of itself, holding out its empty vessel, that the oil of grace may run into it; but in the meantime applies immediately to Christ as the golden pipe, through which alone the golden oil is conveyed. "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." The exercised soul knows that there are no saving influences but through him, no streams of light but what shines through the vail of the flesh of Christ, and no life but what comes through him "that was dead and is alive," and no strength but comes from him "that hath the seven Spirits of God."

The soul is also employed in exporting particular petitions, and importing answers of prayer, and returning praises. "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion: and unto thee shall the vow be paid. O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." What are the prayers of many but just bodily exercise. They neither come from the heart, nor does the heart go with them, nor after them, to see what success they have at the throne. The exercised soul will have particular suits before the Lord, and will be waiting

on while the suit is in dependence, that a gracious return may at length come. "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." And this will be returned again, in the voice of praise. And all through Christ, "in whom we have boldness, and access with confidence, by the faith of him." It was the custom of the Molossrans, when they were to seek a favour of their prince, to take up his son in their arms.

2. In a spiritual performance of duties. Christians "exercise themselves to have a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man." Leaving the corpse of duties, which of itself is but bodily exercise, I shall touch at the life and soul of duties, in which the exercise to godliness consists. The exercise to godliness in this point, consists in these six things:

1. In getting the soul fixed in that point, what is sin and what is duty in particular cases, before we put hand to it. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." It is surely gross religion, when people find a thing in itself lawful, they make no more questions about it, and ask not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. Remarkable is that word, "ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established." That is, though a thing seem very easy to us at first, as to sin or duty, yet examine it accurately as in a pair of balances. Here is matter of exercise, in which the soul will find much need of careful noticing of the word of the Lord, that is a lamp to the feet, looking to the law and to the testimony. There is need also, of a wise observation of Providence, which in subserviency to the word, is the Lord's eye set on his people to guide them. This is an eminent part of the exercise of godliness. "For whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord. This must be attended with an humble dependence on the Lord for light. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way." This dependence is the union of faith and self-denial, by which the soul is laid before the Lord in any matter, as a sheet of clean paper, that he may write on it what his own mind is, keeping the soul in suspense, till the Lord himself cast the balance; not like those who dissembled in their hearts, when they sent Jeremiah to pray for them to the Lord, "saying declare unto us, and we will do it;" but when he declared the answer, "they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God." Jer. xlii. 20, 21.

2. In doing the duty because it is the will of God, which must be not only the rule, but also the reason of your duties, otherwise they

are but bodily exercise. "I seek not mine own will," said Jesus, "but the will of him that sent me." As the belief of a truth is not faith, unless a man believe because God hath said it; so a duty is not a part of godliness, unless it be done because God hath commanded it. "I will keep," says David, "the commandments of my God." Now if a person does a thing because God commands it, he will not stick at any thing, where he sees the will of God plain, Gen. xxii. The Christian course is a walk unto all well-pleasing, not of men's selves, but of God.

3. In doing our duty to the glory of God. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The end in all things is a principal thing, and a perverting of this, perverts the whole work. Seeing God is the first principle of all goodness, natural or moral, he must be the chief end of it also, to whom all must be referred, as the waters being lifted up from the sea to the clouds, return to it again. And men may even as lawfully make themselves their God, as their chief end in their actions, Zech. vii. 5, 6. God will never be the rewarder of that duty, of which he is not the end. What though a servant work very busily, if he be working for himself will the master own it? Let a man pray, mourn, watch, and do every duty, all that is not enough! if God be not your chief end in all these, they are but a costly sacrifice to the idol self: for we know "that skin for skin, yea all that a man hath will he give for his life." Alas! is not all turned upside down with the most part. God is made the mean, ourselves the end; so that the good works of many, are but a serving themselves of God, not a serving of God. The Jewish doctors called God *Place*, intimating that the godly soul dwells not in the barren region of self, but in God; even as the needle in the compass, touched with a good loadstone, turns still to the north, whatever winds blow.

4. In doing our duties in the strength of Christ. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." "Even the devils," said the disciples to their Lord, "are subject to us through thy name." You have no more warrant to act in duty from your own strength, than to depend upon your own righteousness. You can only say, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." Men must act as they live, now the godly soul lives by Christ. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood," saith Jesus, "dwelleth in me, and I in him. He that eateth me, even he shall live by me." The Christian then must act by him. Do you think that any fruit will relish in

heaven, but that which grows upon the true vine. The hypocrite is a tree that hath its own root in the ground, hence he turns into himself, summoning together all his natural powers for duty. "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord; for he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh." But the godly person is a branch, whose fruit depends upon influence from the stock to which it is united; hence he dares not trust to his natural powers, gifts, nor inherent graces, seeing these depend on Christ, as light on the sun, and are but rays, not the fountain of light. But he goes out of himself, in the way of believing, for duties, saying, "I can do all things, through Christ which strengtheneth me." Let men in their bodily exercise, like common boatmen, serve themselves with their oars; the soul exercised to godliness, will depend on Christ, for the influences of his Spirit, saying, "Awake, O north wind; and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." Isaac was born of a barren woman.

5. In doing it out of love to God in Christ. I say in Christ; for whatever deluded enthusiasts say; whatever Christless hypocrites and moralists, who know not God, think; it is impossible for a guilty creature to love God but in Christ, seeing God out of Christ is a consuming fire. "We love him, because he first loved us." Our love to God is but the reflex of God's love to us. God's love darts its beams to us no way but through the veil of the flesh of Christ; and it is through the same veil our love returns to him. Now the Christian labour is a work and labour of love. What comes not to God out of love he regards not; for in that case he gets the hand, but not the heart.

Lastly, In directing all our duties to God, through Christ. As grace for duties comes from the Lord, so duty rightly managed, is the returning of that grace to God, in duty; as the men that got the talents, improved them for their master. Now as there is no saving receipts from heaven, but through Christ; so no acceptable returns but through him. God will not hear praise but through him, and the exercised soul will not dare offer it to him; but through Christ. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Nor a prayer but what comes through his mouth, 1 Kings viii. 39; nor a good work will he receive, but what is dipped in his blood, though it were a sacrifice of our own blood for his cause. The martyrs "have all washed their robes, and

made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The Holy One of Israel will not touch an offering, but what comes through the hands of the holy Jesus. Alas! many if they get some victory over a lust, some steps walked cleanly, they will go even forward to God with them, because they know not God. Bulls offered on the altar at Bethel were abominable, when turtles were accepted on the altar at Jerusalem.

3. The exercise of godliness consists in an habitual and actual mortification of lusts. They that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.

4. In resisting temptations from the devil. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

5. In keeping ourselves unspotted from the world, the things of the world, and the men of the world.

6. In rightly managing the cross, and extracting the sweet of it.

Lastly, In the proper management of divine trials. The length of the preceding part of the discourse, prevents me from illustrating these particulars. I can only add for the use of what hath been said,

1. It may strike terror on the profane world, who are exercised to nothing but wickedness. "An heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children." Many will not so much as meddle with the bodily exercise of religion, but soul and body, both are devoted to the service of the devil. Your exercise is coming when you will neither rest day nor night. "For if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly, and the sinner appear?"

2. It may strike terror on formal hypocrites, who know nothing of religion but bodily exercise, as if they were serving an idol that had eyes, but saw not; ears, but heard not: or they were mere lumps of spiritless clay, and the soul were for no use in the body, but to keep it a while from rotting. Ah sirs! if this be religion that we have been speaking of, then there is little religion in the world. Some that have been of long standing in a profession, may even begin again. Consider where you are and in what this will end.

3. It may fill the faces of sleeping Christians with shame. These things have been their exercise, but they are not much engaged that way now. Arise, and go to your work again. God will awaken you at length, it may be in a very terrible manner; that though you may be saved, yet it may be so as by fire.

Lastly, Let me exhort all to godliness, and to the exercise of godliness. It is the most pleasant life, even a heaven on earth.

“For wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” It is the most profitable exercise: “for godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” Go to Christ for it, for the residue of the Spirit is with him. He hath the seven Spirits of God for dead souls. Amen.

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*Ettrick, August 29, 1714.*

[Sabbath after the Sacrament.]

S E R M O N X I.

P S A L M xlv. 10,

*Hearken O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house.*

THIS Psalm is a marriage song. It celebrates the marriage of king Jesus, with the daughter of Zion, the church of believers; and has no respect to Solomon’s marriage with Pharaoh’s daughter, as many have thought. For the royal Bridegroom is here represented as a mighty warrior, vers. 3, 4, 5; whereas Solomon was no ways such, but eminently a man of peace. Besides, how can what is said, ver. 6, any way agree to Solomon. The apostle expressly determines that it is said to Christ, Heb. i. 8. The first part of the psalm is directed to Christ. The second part, which begins with the text, is directed to his spouse. The scope of these words is not to solicit the bride’s consent. She is supposed to be gained already, and espoused to king Jesus, vers. 9, 13. But the design of the text is to shew Christ’s espoused bride, how she may be most acceptable, and best please her husband, ver. 11. If it be asked, Who is the speaker? Not to insist upon the various conjectures about it, I think the same person who saith to the Son, ver. 6, “Thy throne O God, is for ever and ever,” in the text speaks to the spouse; that is, God the Father, Heb. i. 8, compared with ver. 5.

These words then, are the Father’s advice to the newly espoused bride, how she may please her husband, his Son. And in them is to be considered,

1. The appellation given to the soul espoused to Christ: *Daughter*. Here is the name which believers receive. The person that natu-