

Simprin, March 23, 1707.

BELIEVERS COMMUNING WITH THEIR OWN HEARTS.

SERMON XXVIII.

PSALM iv. 4,

Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.

IN these words, we have David's friendly advice to his enemies, for the good of their souls. In this particular advice, there is, 1. The duty itself, "Commune with your own heart." By the heart is meant the conscience. In this sense it is used by the apostle John: "If our heart condemn us," saith he, "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." It is also said, that David's heart smote him, after that he had numbered the people. There is next a special season of the duty, upon your beds, in the night season. There is also the connection of it with the other duties here recommended. It looks backward and forward, and is here prescribed as an excellent mean to keep us from sin, and to be still from wicked practices.

DOCTRINE. AS it is a necessary duty to commune with our own consciences, so it is an excellent mean to a holy life. In prosecuting this subject, I shall,

I. Shew in what the duty consists.

II. The manner in which it should be performed.

III. The special seasons for engaging in it.

IV. Give the reasons for the duty; and,

V. Shew that it is an excellent mean to a holy life. We are then,

I. To shew what it is to commune with our conscience. This duty consists in two things :

1. We must speak to our consciences. This is easily performed, for they can hear without a voice. Our tongues need not weary in this exercise; for in the deepest silence we speak best, and commune with our hearts to the greatest purpose. Thus David spoke to his heart, "O my soul," said he, "thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my Lord."

2. We must hear our heart and conscience speak to us. "When thou saidst, seek ye my face, my heart," says David, "said unto thee, (namely, to, or within me), thy face, Lord, will I seek." Con-

science can speak to us, so as to make its voice be heard through all parts of the soul. It roused David himself out of his sleep, and put Judas to his wits end. It is God's voice, and therefore must be majestic.

II. To shew the manner in which this duty should be performed.

1. We should commune with our hearts willingly. It is a work of righteousness; "and the Lord meeteth him that rejoiceth, and worketh righteousness." We should be willing to enter on the conference, and even seek this communing. "Isaac went out to meditate at the even-tide." It is sad when conscience speaks only unbidden. We should also continue the communing, and not, like Felix, break it off violently, saying, "when I have a convenient season I will call for thee."

2. Friendly. That which most injures this communing, is people's looking on conscience as their enemy, and therefore they cannot endure it. But conscience may say to you, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" It argues a person to be of little judgment to look on the surgeon as his enemy, though he come with his lance or knife in his hand to open his sores. If conscience speak roughly, it is but to make way for a sound peace. "When I heard," says Habakkuk, "my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice, rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble."

3. We should do it freely. We must have no reserve, no sweet morsel under the tongue. It is grieving to think how averse people are to come upon some points with their conscience, and at what pains they will be to divert or change that discourse. Some sins they love, some they hate; accordingly they are content to commune, so as the conscience will but hold of these points the right eye, the right hand.

4. Honestly and uprightly, not refusing conviction, but admitting what conscience offers according to the word of God. Conscience, indeed, is but a subordinate judge, and therefore the appeal is to be made to the Scriptures. "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." But alas! many refuse the very light which conscience offers from the Scriptures, and are at much pains to cheat conscience into a belief of their mistaken apprehension, as the foolish virgins deceived themselves.

5. Frequently. There is no acquaintance more difficult to be obtained, and more easily lost, than that with ourselves. The soul of man is an unfathomable deep. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?" There is still

occasion for new discoveries, therefore this exercise should be habitual to us. It is one to a thousand, if we find our hearts as we left them. We are now,

III. To attend to the special seasons for communing with our hearts. It is a duty at all times, but for the more solemn performance of it, the Scripture points out the following seasons:—

1. The morning. “Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning.” The first fruits belong to God. The devil and the world will strive to rob him of them, as a pledge for the whole day; and alas! they often succeed. David was careful to give his first thoughts to God. “When I awake,” says he, “I am still with thee.” The pious women who followed our Lord, “came very early in the morning to his sepulchre.” The want of this early devotion is the source of great disorders. Possession is much. It is easier to hold out, than to put out.

2. The evening. “Isaac went out to meditate at the even-tide.” This is to close the day with God. There is great reason to begin and end with God. In the morning, we are to go out amidst many snares; in the evening, we have a whole day’s course to examine and judge.

3. The night season, upon our beds; so says the text. And says David for himself, “when I remember thee on my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.” Men should not go to sleep with their hearts bound to the world, as the horse to the manger. The night is especially proper for this duty, for then a man is at the end of the day’s progress, and it is most meet he should then look back upon it, and observe how matters have gone that day. Again, a man is now out of the noise of the world, his converse with others is at an end, and he may, therefore, the better take a word with himself, and recollect himself freely. Besides, the bed and sleep bear a resemblance to death and the grave, and so calls upon a man to remember his latter end. The night has a kind of awful majesty with it; and seeing we know not of an awakening, we should compose ourselves to sleep, as we would do to death.

4. A time of affliction. Says Asaph, “I call to remembrance my song in the night; I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search.” God sends afflictions to bring sinners back again to himself, Hosea ii. 6, 7. But when we run away from God, we run away from ourselves; and the first turning is, to turn to ourselves, to come to serious consideration, Luke xv. 17; then is it time to pose our conscience with that question, What have I done?

5. Before we go to religious duties. That this was David's practice, we may learn from his calling his prayer his meditation, Psalm v. 1. This duty of self-communing before prayer and other duties, is as the plough before the sower, to prepare the heart. That soul that takes a view of its sins, before it pray for the pardon of them, is likely to make profit, Exod. xxxii. 26, compare xxx. 31.

Lastly, After we are come from duties. It is as the harrow after the sower, to cover the seed. The beasts that did not chew the cud were unclean; and the persons who do not meditate on what they hear, and on what they do, are not likely to reap much benefit, or to reform their lives. How natural is it to a man, when he has been about a worldly business of importance, to reflect on it. Much more need is there here. We are,

IV. To give reasons why we should thus commune with ourselves.

1. Because our conscience is witness to all our actions, and keeps a record of our conversation. Our conscience also bears witness, and our thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another. Would we flee from our consciences, we must flee from ourselves. Yet alas! many will do that in secret, which they would not do before a little child. Conscience is a thousand witnesses. Good reason, then, that we commune with it.

2. It is God's deputy in the soul. If God should send one out of heaven to lodge in your family as his deputy, would you not be often communing with him. Conscience is so. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly." It is our schoolmaster and household preacher, God's spy and man's overseer; as Moses was to Aaron instead of God.

3. Because its approbation is necessary for our actions. Its antecedent approbation is necessary to make our actions lawful, "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" so that it is even sin to go against the conscience, though in an error; its consequent approbation is necessary to our peace. "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." This is the oracle, then, within our breasts, which we must always consult.

4. Excepting only God himself, our consciences are our best friends or worst enemies. A good conscience will clear and support a man under the greatest hardships, 2 Cor. i. 12; and even in the hour of death, Isa. xxxviii. 3. Observe of king Josiah, he was slain in war, yet died in peace with God and his conscience, 2 Kings xxii. 20, compare xxiii. 29. An ill conscience will deprive us of the comfort of all other enjoyments, and fill the mind with horrible dismay, as in the case of Belshazzar. It remains,

V. To shew that this duty is an excellent mean to a holy life.

1. This appears, if we consider that the want of it is that which makes people go on securely in their sins. "I hearkened and heard, saith the Lord; but they spake not aright, no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." Sin is a work of darkness, and therefore goes on best in the dark; for to him that is in love with his sin, the morning is as the shadow of death. Therefore Satan keeps all fast, as long as he gets conscience and the man kept asunder.

2. As soon as people give ear to their consciences, they are obliged to begin a new course; "therefore, thus saith the Lord God, consider your ways." This was exemplified in the prodigal. David also says, "I thought upon my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." Conscience is ever a friend to holiness, even in the worst of men.

3. Conscience discovers our defects, errors, and wanderings out of God's way. To know the disease is a considerable step to the cure. When a man books his accounts, and compares his expenses with his income, it will make him spend less.

4. Conscience will point out duty, and spur a man on to it. When men are pricked in their hearts, they will cry, what shall we do. A little thinking sometimes would set resolutions in practice, and make good purposes bring forth abundantly.

USE 1. For information. We need not weary for want of company. We have a companion within us, able to hold up in profitable discourse.

2. It is great wickedness to refuse to commune with our consciences, when they offer to speak. Sometimes it speaks undesired; but men often entertain it, as did Cain, Felix, and others. Some do like these idolatrous heathens, who beat drums and raise shouts, when their children are consuming on Moloch's altar, to drown their cries.

3. They are careless souls indeed, whose religion never reacheth to their beds, farther than to desire God to have a care of them, when they wrap the clothes about them; as if their beds were sleeping places for their souls as well as bodies; hence Satan has their hearts, sleeping and waking.

4. See here why the devil is such an enemy to this duty. Why, if this conference takes place between a man and his heart, Satan's kingdom is in danger. But men sin and stand not in awe, for they commune not with their heart.

USE 2. Of exhortation. Make this your daily work. Commune with your hearts respecting what concerns your souls. The subject

is very large. You need not want matter, as commune with your heart respecting your state. "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves." Ask your souls whether or not you are born again? It is certain you were once children of wrath and of the devil. The voice may be Jacob's and the hands Esau's. Perhaps no inward change has yet taken place. Commune respecting the frame and case of your soul, whether you be sleeping or waking, growing or declining, grace in exercise or not. Commune respecting your sins. It is very unsafe to be still running on in the score, contracting debts, but never casting up your accounts. Commune where you are like to take up your eternal lodging, in heaven or hell. It is a serious question. Sit not down with an uncertainty, a mere maybe upon it, but ponder what evidences you have for heaven.

In the morning commune with your hearts on what hath passed in the night; on the goodness of God in preserving and refreshing you; what good or sinful motions have been stirred up in your sleep; on the danger on which you are when you are going out to the world, and the need you have of grace to keep you.

At night commune on what has passed through the day, looking through your hearts, lips, and lives. Ask yourselves whether you be a day's journey nearer heaven, or hell; what providences you have met with, what temptations, and the like.

Before you engage in duty, commune with your hearts respecting the majesty and greatness of God, before whom you are to appear; respecting your sins, that you may know what you have to confess; respecting your wants, that you may know what to ask; and respecting your mercies, in order to give thanks.

When you come from duties, commune respecting your behaviour in them; what success you have had; whether you have had access to God or not, whether you have received any blessings of grace or not. And rush not rashly on any project or business; but commune with your own hearts, and consult your conscience what is sin, and what is duty in particular cases. Consider,

1. That the habitual neglect of this exercise is a chief engine of Satan, to make men sleep the sleep of death. In hell, the inconsiderate rich man lift up his eyes. It is next to a desperate case which the prophet Isaiah describes: "He feedeth on ashes; a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand."

2. The neglecting of this duty so much, is the reason why Christians are like Pharaoh's lean kine, so ill favoured. He that would keep a clean face, should often look into the glass.

Lastly, Sooner or later we must reckon with conscience, and the longer in doing it, the worse. Death and judgment are posting on. It is very dismal, indeed, to be hurried out of the world, ere we have got a serious discourse with our hearts, respecting our state and frame. Be not afraid at the difficulty of the work. If Satan be such an enemy to it, that says that it is most advantageous for the soul. Want of frequency in it makes us so averse to it, and the love to sin which must be put away. Study tenderness in your conduct and it will be sweet to you, and often wash your consciences in the blood of Christ. "This will purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God." Amen.

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*Simprin, August 11, 1706.*

BELIEVERS LABOURING FOR THEIR REWARD.

SERMON XXIX.

HEBREWS iv. 11,

*Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.*

HERE have we no continuing city, this is not the place of our fixed abode; all men are in motion heavenward or hellward. These that are going downward, may sit still; they go with the stream, and ere long shall reach the ocean of God's wrath; these that are going upward, must row against the stream, and must be at work till they arrive at Immanuel's land. Rest here is too dear bought, at the rate of everlasting trouble. Let us, then, labour here, that we may enter into that rest which is to come. In these words, there is, *First*, An exhortation: *Second*, A motive pressing it.

In the exhortation we may consider: 1. The dependence of it upon what goes before, intimated in the particle *therefore*; shewing that it is an inference from some preceding doctrine. In the latter part of the third chapter, he shews that unbelief kept the disobedient Israelites out of God's rest; both out of Canaan, and heaven typified thereby, chap. iv.

1. He lets them see, that they had an offer of that eternal rest, as well as the Israelites in the wilderness had; because both had the