

January 25, 1708.

GOD HIDING HIS FACE FROM BACKSLIDERS.

SERMON XXXVI.

ISAIAH lxiv. 7,

And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.

THIS chapter contains a prayer of the church in great distress, in which they plead with God for his return, confess their sin, and lament their case. In the sixth verse, they lament their sinfulness and misery, and here they bewail the helplessness of it, and the improbability of their recovery.

The time to which this relates is twofold; namely, the Babylonish captivity, and the final rejection of the Jews. This prophecy was before the Babylonish captivity, and that it hath a respect unto it, will scarcely be doubted; but that it looks further, is clear from the Lord's answer to the prayer, Isa. lxv. 1. Whence we observe, that though some are willing to part with Christ, he will always find others ready to entertain him.

In the text we have mentioned the general neglect of the duty, to which their circumstances called them: "There is none that calleth upon thy name." We are not to understand it, as if there were simply none at all; for in the worst of times, the Lord had always a remnant, that would not, for their part, give consent to his departure. The Lord reserved seven thousand in Elijah's days; but comparatively, there were so very few, that they were next to none, and could hardly be discerned amongst the multitude.

We have, also, the woful frame and temper of the spirits of professors in that day. "None stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." There was a general deadness and indifference, nothing like an active vigilant frame. They were not exercised about the holding of Christ still, with themselves and with others. Their best friend is taking his departure from their house, but they are in bed; and though they may coldly cry out of their beds to bid him stay, yet they do not rise up, and resolutely take hold of him, and say they are resolved not to part with him. But for them he may go, if he will, they are indifferent.

DOCTRINE I. Though the Lord be on his way to depart, yet he may be holden still.

DOCTRINE II. When the Lord is on his way to go, it is high time for people to stir up themselves to hold him still.

DOCTRINE III. Sometimes religion is at such a low ebb amongst a professing people, that Christ may even go his way, for any that is to hold him still.

DOCTRINE I. Though the Lord be on his way to depart, yet he may be holden still. To confirm this, consider,

1. It is pure love that brings Christ to a people or person, Deut. vii. 6—8; and such you know, may easily be holden still. What should have brought him out of heaven, but love to the inhabitants of the earth. His delights were with the children of men. Had he not enough in the hallelujahs of angels in the bosom of the Father, or was there any attracting object here below? No, surely. If he would have them home to be his spouse, he behoved to wash his filthy bride in his own blood, before she could set her foot within his Father's house. Now, if he took such a journey to come, will he not stay if he get entertainment.

2. He is unwilling to go away, when he is come, and therefore he may be holden still. This appears, if you consider: 1. That our Lord waits long upon poor sinners, if so be they will be so wise as receive him. "Behold," says he, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me." He waited one hundred and twenty years on the old world, in the days of Noah. He has waited long on Scotland, and yet he is not gone. He has waited at our doors on most of us, and he is still ready to embrace us. 2. Many times he enters on his way, and yet he turns back again, as if he could not obtain it of himself, to leave even a professing sinful generation, Hos. xi. 8, 9. How often did he leave the people of the Jews, before he parted with them altogether? Many good nights, is an evidence of unwillingness to go away. How often has he turned his back on Scotland, and yet come back again, even when he was almost out of sight; when we were ready to say, we shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living. How can it be thus? Truly Christ is not so bound to any land, but he may leave it altogether. Look to the Jews, the seven churches of Asia, and others. The reasons are:—There may be some hidden ones among them, so that he cannot leave a land altogether, till these be put out of harm's way Isa. lvii. 1, 2. Lot must be out of Sodom before it be destroyed. Again, there may be some chosen vessels in the loins of such a generation, as it was in the case of

that generation that came out of Egypt, with whom God bare forty years for their posterity's sake. He does it also for the glory of his patience. God will have it to be seen, that he delights in mercy, and that he does not execute his judgments on sinners, till they extort them out of his hands. Judgment is his strange act. *Finally*, God spares a wicked people, till the measure of their iniquity be filled up, and the cup be brim full, and then the last stroke comes, which compensates for its being so long a-coming, with the severity of it when it is come.

3. He gives frequent warning that he is going away ere he go; and why all that, but to stir up people to hold him still. Thus he warned the old world by Noah. Not a chop was laid on the ark, but it was a warning to them.

4. The breach never begins on his side, nor does he go while people are resolute to hold him still. See how he condescends to Abraham, Gen. xviii. 23—33; and how the Lord, by Paul and Barnabas, takes his leave of the Jews, Acts xiii. 46.

Finally, He has been holden still, when he was on his way to depart; and what has been, may be, Luke xxiv. 28, 29. The spouse, Song iii. 4. Jacob, Gen. xxxii. Moses, Exodus xxxii.

USE 1. If the Lord depart from us, then the blame lies at our door, for then he may be holden still. The case of this land is very dangerous, yet it is not hopeless. Our Lord is yet within a cry, within the reach of prayers. If he go, for want of serious invitation from us to stay still, we are inexcusable. Alas! that there are so few stirring up themselves to take hold of him. I must needs say, that the empty seats in this kirk, on the fast day, are no good sign either for the land or the parish. If sitting at home, or going about their own work that day, was a way to hold Christ still in the land, I am much mistaken. Surely, the people of Judah did not so much despise the fast proclaimed by Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. xx. 3, 4. But if these people did, with Esther, iv. 16, keep private fasts at home, when others were gathered for that work in the congregation, it will say much to clear them of contempt of the ecclesiastical and civil authority, calling them to fast and pray that day, and say that they were indeed concerned to hold Christ among us. And never more need to fast than at this day.

2. This may stir us up to wrestle with God for his stay amongst us, we may come to prevail. Where there is no hope of success there can be no vigorous endeavours; but a possibility of being successful in this very important matter, may engage us to exert ourselves. There is hope in Israel concerning this thing, Zeph. ii. 1—3.

DOCTRINE II. When the Lord is upon his way to go, it is high time for people to stir up themselves to hold him still.

I. I shall shew you when it may be said that the Lord is upon his way.

II. I shall shew what it is to take hold of Christ.

III. What it is to stir up ourselves to take hold of him.

IV. Give the reasons of the point. I am then,

I. To shew you when it may be said that the Lord is upon his way, and so when it is high time for us to stir up ourselves to hold him still. I shall do this, first, more generally, and then more particularly.

I. More generally, with respect to a land in which the Lord has set up his candlestick. The Lord is upon his way,

1. When people have plenty of gospel means, and yet remain unfruitful under them, Isa. v. 4—6; Heb. vi. 7, 8. The ox is near to the slaughter, when he has meat to the full laid before him to fatten him. If the Lord mind to lay the cities of Judah waste, he will send Isaiah to preach to them, and ripen them for that stroke. Alas! there is too great ground of fear, that this takes up a great part of the commission of the ministers of Scotland this day. That is an astonishing word: "And now also, the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire," Matth. iii. 10. "And now." Let us attend to this passage in its connection. O! what a people John had to preach to, and he was a burning and a shining light. The whole people flocked out to hear him preach, ver. 5. They would not loiter at home. They did not stand to undertake a long journey out of the cities, to the wilderness to hear him, ver. 1. They made open profession of repentance, ver. 6. They were admitted by him to the sacrament of baptism. Finally, they had their cases of conscience to propose to him, Luke iii. 10. But notwithstanding, says he, "Now is the axe laid to the root of the trees." It is with the gospel as with the sun, which sometimes gives a very fair blink a little before it set; and usually the greatest severity follows at the heels of the greatest mercy; of which that is a dreadful instance, 1 Thess. ii. 16. This may let us see that it is high time to stir up ourselves.

2. When people have been tried with many lighter rods, and have not been made better. Sodom got a stroke, Gen. xiv. but it did them no good, therefore came on them that fearful overthrow. When all means have been used to do good to all people, and yet have proved unsuccessful, the Lord is near to a departure. He then says of such, as he did of the fig-tree: "If it bear fruit, well; and

if not, then after that, thou shalt cut it down." Scotland hath got a little of various kinds of judgments, and yet what the better are we? He that was filthy, is filthy still.

3. When some of the pillars of a land fall, and others begin to fall. Good Josiah must be taken away in his young days, 2 Kings xxii. 20. Isaiah says, chap. lvii. 1, "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come." Luther, writing on this text saith, that the Lord, after his death, would bring great affliction on Germany. It so fell out, two years after his death. Noah was taken into the ark, and Lot out of Sodom, before the threatened destruction came. We are not without such sad prognostics. But then, when the remaining pillars fail, that finishes the business. It was a sad token, when Jonah was fast asleep in the ship. When the godly that remain are not fit to stand in the gap, but security steals upon them. Thus, while the bridegroom tarried, even the wise virgins slumbered. General security says wrath is at the door, "for when they shall say, peace and safety, then suddenly destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." The security of this generation is too palpable.

4. When the glory is gone the length of the threshold of the temple, Ezek. ix. 3—5. When the shadows of the evening are stretched out, the night is fast hastening on. May we not say, where is the God of Elijah; and the servants may complain, as their Master did before them, "I have laboured," said he, "in vain; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain." Their own, and their people's dead-heartedness, often close up the door of utterance; and when that is opened, yet the door of entrance is mostly kept shut, unless it be to hew them by the prophets, and slay them by the words which come out of his mouth, or to dart in convictions upon people, who nevertheless run away with the arrows sticking in them, and at last get them out, and lick themselves whole again. We find this is sometimes the great part of ministers' work, Rev. xi. 10; and it is a sad sign that Christ and the gospel are upon the wing to depart. For within a while, the tormented hearers rejoice at the death of the tormenting preachers, that ripped up their sores, and would not let them sleep to death. This then should alarm us to rise up, and take hold of the Lord to keep him still, while the glory is yet on the threshold; but should not encourage any to turn their backs on the ordinances, lest they be found not to follow after the Lord, but to run away before him.

II. More particularly.

1. When spiritual darkness is still upon the growing hand. Then may people say, Woe unto us! for the day goeth away, for the

shadows of the evening are stretched out. A child of light may be in darkness, even when the Lord is with him, Isa. 1. 10; but then he is laying hold upon the Lord; but when darkness is growing, and the soul is at ease, God is on his way. Many get a wakening light, but it is not changing, therefore it decays by little and little, as the light after sunset, till it grow perfect darkness. But as in a dead body, when it begins to corrupt, there is a life and motion of another kind that succeeds, so there may be much seeming light swimming in the head, when the true light and sense of religion, in the power of it, is going away with all speed; Rev. iii. 1. 2. True light that affects the heart, is troublesome and a burden, but empty knowledge puffs up and seems to give a name. Oh! is not the sun of many like to go down at noonday? Is there not a strangeness crept in betwixt Christ and them? Is not the Bible a sealed book to many? O stir up yourselves to take hold of the Lord, lest if you delay, it turn dark night upon you. The nearer it is to night, the traveller should mend his pace, lest the darkness overtake him.

2. When people come to the meeting place, time after time, but see not God's face, nor hear his voice, then he is on his way, for his back is turned. "They shall go," says the prophet, "with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them." The Lord does with many professors for their fearful backslidings in heart and life, as David did with Absalom when he allowed him to come to Jerusalem, but not to see the king's face. Withdrawing makes way for departing. It is high time then to stir up yourselves to take hold of Christ, lest if you delay, he be, ere long, out of your reach, so as you shall not be able to overtake him. This was the case with the spouse, Song v. 6—8.

3. When people are spiritually always growing weaker and weaker. God was on his way from Sardis, when the things that remained in them were ready to die. When the Lord draws near to the soul, he comes with strength. He strengthens his people with strength in the soul. This is the case with many in our day, the longer they live, the weaker they grow, and their corruptions grow stronger as nails grow in decaying bodies. They are as Jerusalem, sighing and going backwards. O stir up yourselves to take hold of him, lest you be, ere long, like Samson without his hair, even weak as other men. It is time to take a firm hold of Christ, when our talents are come down to one, and to be trading diligently with heaven, lest we be brought to beggary. Prov. vi. 10, 11. It is time to cherish the fire when it is come to a spark hid among the ashes.

4. When people have forsaken the Lord, and are going on in a course of gading after their idols, Psal. lxxviii. 57—60. Who can live with an adulterous wife, that will not give over her strange lovers? Ezek. vi. 9. This is a horrid indignity with which God will not bear, Jerem. ii. 31—37. Alas, it is the case of many, their idols have stolen away their hearts. They have set up their idols of jealousy in which they delight more than in the Lord himself.

Arise now and lay hold on him quickly, lest after your idols have ruined you, and you go to seek help of the Lord, you meet with that, Go to the gods which you have chosen; and lest you be left at length as Michal, with an image in the bed instead of your husband.

5. When peoples' gifts being blasted, are withering and decaying. When the Lord had a mind to leave Saul, he took the spirit of government from him. It is a dreadful word. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered, and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Alas, it is sad, when people cannot so much as exercise a gift but before others, where they have the wind of praise to fill their sails. A dead body will be warm, while it is laid before a fire, and others may be chafing and rubbing it; but when it is laid by alone, its heat departs, for it has no inward principle of motion. Follow many to their secret devotions, and it will be seen that it is custom and not conscience that draws them thither. How hardly can they get a while of an hour, or a very short space from the world, and then it is huddled over, that they may be eased of the burden. Though the eyes be shut, yet they see a thousand vanities; the heart leaves the tongue, and there is so little vital heat within, that the word dies in their mouths. In a word, there is nothing in them of real value. It is high time then, for such to stir up themselves to take hold of him, if so be there may be hope, for surely he is then on his way.

Lastly, When the Lord, after many strugglings in vain with a soul, makes some strong, though short-lived impressions on the heart, that somewhat rouseth the man out of his lethargy. The Lord does with souls as men that have no will to go away, though they have knocked long, and yet have got no access; at the last they give some loud knocks, that if possible they may get access, and if not they will go their way. O! it is dangerous to be sleeping now, and to disobey Christ's voice. Luke xiii. 8, 9. Hosea xiii. 13.

Now is the nick of time. Strike the iron while it is hot. If you let it cool, it will be out of time. Bestir yourselves then, lest he depart from you, never to return. Miss that, and it may be the wind never blow again for transporting you to Emmanuel's laud.

O! it is hard to tell what may be the Lord's last farewell to your souls, what may be the parting word, the parting conviction. Only we know that his Spirit will not always strive with men. Perhaps it may come to that this day with some. Now or never. Their salvation or damnation may be sealed. If you have not hold of him now, next may come that oath: "They shall not enter into my rest." We proceed,

II. To shew what it is to take hold of Christ. He is now in heaven, with respect to his bodily presence, and so there is no reaching him with the hands of the body; and though there were, it would be to little purpose. "For it is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing." It is then a spiritual hold we ought to take of him. Now there is a three-fold arm which we should clasp about our Lord, to hold him still.

1. The arms of faith. Faith is the hand of the soul, which first and last takes hold of Christ, and it is a very prevailing grace. Hence, Jesus said unto the woman of Canaan, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee, even as thou wilt." An unbeliever cannot hold Christ, more than one that wants hands. Faith embraces Christ; it embraces the person of Christ. Hence it is said, "As many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Christ, in the gospel, is offered to sinners in spiritual marriage. The daughter of Sion, especially when she sees him like to go away, puts off all delays, and says, "Even so I take him," and thus is united to him, and carries him into the secret chamber of her heart, not to sojourn, but to dwell there. "That Christ," says Paul, "may dwell in your hearts by faith." This is a noble way to hold Christ, for it is the keeping at the door that puts him away. Again, faith holds Christ by his word of promise, and it is a sure hold which a soul gets of him this way. Christ will not draw back of his word. Sometimes we have but a loose hold of men, when we have them only by their word, for they can do with it as Joseph with his mantle; but Christ will not do so, for he will not suffer his faithfulness to fail. The covenant is a bundle of promises, broad and wide enough, so as his people may get something to hold. And O! but it is a promising sight when Christ is going away, to see all his people running after him, and hanging by his chariot to hold him still. This, says he, will not drive far.

Faith also holds fast the tokens of Christ's love. Faith does with an angry God and a departing Christ, as Tamar did with Judah, Gen. xxxviii. 25. When lovers are to part for good and all, they will require up their tokens; but the party that is unwilling the

bargain should break up, will hold fast these. Faith can manage former experience in a dark hour, to the holding of Christ still, and can cast in its memorials to the court of heaven for favour. "Remember," say they, "thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this Mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt."

2. The arms of love, Luke xxiv. 29—32. They that will not love Christ, pretend what they will, they would even let him go without a good night. They that love their lusts, hate the Lord, and if they could get it done with their honesty, would entreat him to depart out of our coasts. But love cleaves to Christ. Love hath cords that bind to him. Love doth two things to hold Christ still. Love awakened, flees after the Lord; even as a child who is taken up with pictures, yet when the mother goes away, follows after, weeping, Song v. 4; vi. 2, 3. Love tells Christ, the soul cannot part with him, but if he goes, he must not leave the soul, but take it with him. The house is empty when Christ is not there.

Love holds the heart of Christ, and its hold is very strong. "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." It is as death, that draws all to it, and holds all till a pull of omnipotency draw back its prey. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Love says to Christ, as Ruth to Naomi, "entreat me not to leave thee." It is an overcoming grace.

3. The arms of prayer. A praying people are the horsemen and chariots of Israel. Luther used to call the prayers of the godly his great ordnance. When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and when he let it down, Amalek prevailed. It is a sad sight when the master of a family is turning his back to leave his habitation; but yet there is hope when all the children are hanging about him, and beseeching him to stay. Thus Jacob had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him; he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us. Prayer has done great things, and were there a spirit of prayer poured out on this land this day, what a blessed change would it make in the state of affairs. We find one Abraham getting all his requests for a very wicked people, Gen. xviii. One Lot, saving a whole city, Gen. xix. 20. The prayers of Jacob staying the hands of Esau, Gen. xxxii. 10, 11, 12. The prayers of the church breaking open prison doors, making chains fall off, and an iron gate to fly open, Acts xii. 6—10.

Prayer is pleasant melody in our Lord's ears, Song ii. 14, and arrests a departing God. The prayers of the saints are sweet

odours The words of a lisping child will go very far with a tender-hearted father, but not so far as prayers do with God. Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him.

Prayer entertains Christ with savoury discourse. It is very usual to keep up discourse with them we would fain have to stay, and so to prevail with them; this cannot but prevail here, for our Lord, when he goes, gets always the last word.

Prayer puts employment in Christ's hand, and so holds him still, Song iii. 4. For he will not go while sinners have any employment for him. But it is not every sort of prayer that will do this. It is not the gift but the spirit of prayer. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man, availeth much. Many may pray, who will do no more good with prayers, than the heathen mariners in the ship with Jonah. A sigh, or groan, or broken sentence from the spirit of prayer, will do more good than ten thousand prayers of another sort. Strange fire is not fit for the mercy-seat, but holy fire taken from the altar will ascend with acceptance.

We are now, III. To shew what it is to stir up ourselves to take hold of Christ.

1. It imports a man's discerning of the signs of the Lord's departure and noticing the same. The want of this is reproved by our Lord. "O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times." Every rod has a voice, but it is the man of wisdom only that hears it. Men will never deny themselves to their ease, till they see the hazard of security; Heb. xi. 7. If the fire has fastened on a man's bed, and he neither feel the heat nor see the smoke, he will not rise up. Alas! many are so spiritually senseless, they know neither Christ's goings nor comings. Hence, they never awaken, till, with the rich man in hell, they lift up their eyes.

2. Vigorous endeavours for the truth of grace in the heart, which is the only thing that makes a man capable of holding Christ still. A dead man can do nothing but lie and rot in the grave. He that hath a spark at home, may blow it up; but where there is not a spark, fire must be brought in, if he would entertain his guest. Alas! many overlook this, and so lose all their pains. They endeavour to perform duties, but neither for nor from grace. What serves a prayer that Christ may abide with us, if there be not grace in the heart to entertain and hold him? The want of grace in the heart makes all our attainments vain and fruitless: they still leave the soul in the same state of condemnation and enmity to God as before. For all duties of that sort, as they cannot atone for one sin, so they cannot mortify one lust, only grace can do it. The want of

grace, also, makes our attempts but faint and languishing, so that at last they are ready to give over. Duties never flow freely from that soul, where grace is not as a fountain to supply them. A lamp quickly goes out, when the oil is exhausted. "Will the hypocrite delight himself in the Almighty? Will he call upon God always?"

OBJECTION. But can we work grace in ourselves? ANSWER. Though we cannot sow the seed, we may prepare the ground, Jer. iv. 3. We may examine ourselves, and see the want of it, and that we are undone without it; and we may take no rest to ourselves, nor give the Lord any, till we get grace; and when we are doing this, which we can do, God may do what we cannot do for ourselves. And if we do not do this, we will be damned, not only for the want of grace, but for the contempt of it, that we would not stir up ourselves to get it: and it will be a worm in our conscience, that we did not do what we might have done to have got grace, and so have got Christ. But that you began your work at the wrong end, because that was easiest, though not safest. "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it."

3. A vigorous exercise of grace, received in order to take hold of Christ. A sleeping man is unfit to hold one that is going away, as well as a dead man. Sleeping prayers and faint wishes will not suffice. Yet, alas! these are all that Christ can get at this day from many that have the root of grace in them. They have hands indeed, but alas they are in their bosom, and it giveth them pain to pluck them out. If there be any stirring up of themselves, their love is burning, and cannot part with him, their faith is resolute, and will not quit their hold, so that if he go he must drag them after him; their love cannot bear his frowns, their faith will plead kindness on him, Isa. lxiii. 15, 16.

Lastly, A patient, though resolute wrestling with him for his stay, Gen. xxxii. 26. It must be patient continuance in well doing that God will regard. Many under a rod, will pretend to wrestle with God, but if that be removed, they give over, though the Lord be still as angry as ever. But the saints persevere in patient wrestling. "Mine eye," says the prophet, "trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven." We are now,

IV. To give reasons of the point. When the Lord is on his way, it is surely high time for us to stir up ourselves, to take hold of him.

1. Because then it is evident the Lord is angry, and is it time to be sleeping when the fire of the Lord's anger is kindled? The Lion hath roared, who will not fear. The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophecy. Are we able to run away from it? or to abide it?

No, no. God is saying to us this day, as Moses to Aaron, "Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly into the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the Lord: the plague is begun." Sleep a while, and the house may be on fire about your ears, and no escape left by door or window, therefore "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

2. Because then, the Lord has begun to resent the entertainment that sinners have given him, and surely it is high time for us then to begin to mend. Our Lord, after a long and dark day, has returned to Scotland, and for many years hath kept house in it, furnished with the rich provision of the gospel. If there be some who weep, that the glory of the latter house is not so great as that of the former, suffer them to rejoice, who never saw such a glorious one; and also to weep, for that he has come to his own and his own received him not, and for that he seems now to be resenting the harsh treatment he hath received, Matth. xxiii. 37, 38.

3. Because when the Lord is on his way, judgment is at the door, when the glory is on the threshold, the bloody commission is a giving out, Ezek. ix. 3—5. As Christ goes, wrath comes on a person or people. "Woe also unto them, when I depart from them, saith the Lord." If we part with him, our happy days are done. There are many complaints this day, but I am afraid they will increase and not diminish, if the frame and temper of this generation be not changed. It will be a wonder if, for the slighting of the white horse of the gospel and his glorious rider, we turn not red, black and pale, ere all be done. If the gospel go, it is like that more will go with it, 2 Chron. xv. 3—6.

4. Because, if we do not then stir up ourselves, he may, ere long, be out of our reach. Christ may come to retaliate upon those who slight him, Prov. i. 24—33. His spirit will not always strive with us. Thou hast an offer of Christ to-day, but the world cannot assure thee that thou shalt have another to-morrow. But some may say, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the father's fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Well, the threatened tree stands long in the wood, but it is cut down at last. The pulse beats oft in the body in the time of life, but the last pulse comes at length. Our breath, like a stranger, goes oft to the door, yet comes back again, but at last it goes, and returns no more.

Now, to shew you the necessity of stirring up ourselves in order to take hold of Christ effectually, Consider,

1. That our ordinary frame will not do here. We must rouse up, if we would take hold of him to purpose; for it was never yet known that sleeping prayers had much power to hold Christ, Song iii. 1. Seeking that is not striving, will be seeking in vain. "Strive," says our Saviour, "to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." A soul besotted with spiritual sloth will let Christ, Heaven, and all the benefits of the gospel, slip through his fingers, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags. People may lie in their bed and wish for heaven, and carry their wishes to hell with them; but if we would hold Christ, we must up and offer violence to heaven.

2. It is a difficult work we have to do. The fire that is almost extinguished, is difficult to kindle; and when Christ has turned his back, it is likely to be hard work ere people see his face again, Song v. 6. What a hard morning's work had Jacob of it, when he wrestled with him till the breaking of the day. It seems, also, that it was not easy for the disciples to hold him: for it is said, they constrained him, saying, abide with us. It must be hard work, for it is hard work. Religion exists inwardly, and the heart must be brought to it, or it will not do; and if you do not think heart work hard work, you have never tried it. O it is easy to say a prayer but to get the heart to cling to Christ by faith, love, and the spirit of prayer, is not so easy.

It is work in which you will have all to undo again, that you have done, which has provoked him to go away. Sinner! what hast thou been doing, but as it were thrusting Christ to the door? Thou hast been weaving thy life into a net to entangle thy feet; and building up a wall of partition, broad and high, betwixt him and thee, setting up idols of jealousy in every corner, to make the Son of God fain to remove and leave thee to thy lusts. Would you hold him then, you must open out the net to disentangle thy feet, pull down every stone you have laid, and take every one of these idols and sacrifice them to his jealousy. And if this be work for a sluggard, judge ye?

He who has got Christ and you asunder, will strive to keep you so, even the devil. Sad experience confirms this. How oft are some convinced and resolved to stir up themselves. But then hell is alarmed, and the devil endeavours to get all quiet again. "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, and a little folding of the hands to sleep." Hence it is, that the goodness of many is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew, it goeth away. Satan is Christ's rival, and will strive to keep his ground.

USE. It is then high time now to awake out of sleep, and take

hold on Christ, to keep him still. All the signs of departure before named, agree to us. O then up now, take hold of him, keep him fast, and protest against his departure. There are three things, in respect of which, you should be concerned to hold Christ still.

1. Be concerned for Christ's abode in the land, that the gospel be not removed, the pure ordinances be not taken away, 1 Sam. iv. 13. That Christ do not remove his tent from Scotland as from Shilo. If the gospel go, what will become of us? a land of darkness is uncomfortable. We have no security for enjoying the gospel. Pity your own souls, the souls of others and posterity. Let not Christ go, as you would not imbrue your hands in the blood of the souls of them yet unborn.

2. Be concerned for Christ's presence in the ordinances. Oh! it is monstrous for the children to be unconcerned for Christ's presence in their mother's house, where they were born, and where ordinarily they are fed. Be concerned for his convincing presence. When the sun shines into a house, the motes appear. When the sword of the word is in Christ's own hand, it is then quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. When Christ comes to ordinances by his word in the mouth of his servants, he opens the volume of a man's conversation, and reads to him the secret history of his heart and life. The man is convinced of all, he is judged of all. And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. O what a valuable thing is this! but if Satan can, he will keep people out of the way of it.

Be concerned for his converting presence. Acts ii. 37. Christ in the gospel, hath a drawing, overcoming power. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." When Christ comes in this way, mountains are levelled and hills become a plain. When he mounts his triumphal chariot, he will make rebels lacquey at his feet. "For his arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, whereby the people fall under him." Alas, that there is so little of this with us.

Be concerned for his quickening presence. He brings life and liveliness with him to sleepy decaying Christians. "This is my comfort in my affliction," says David, "for thy word hath quickened me." The sun ariseth, and man goeth to work. His presence makes the bread of life nourishing indeed, strengthening the soul for duty. Honour and majesty are before him, strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Then it comforts his people under

their griefs, and with joy they draw water out of the wells of salvation. It elevates the soul in the exercise of grace, looses bands, dispels doubts, and makes them hold on their way heavenward rejoicing.

3. Be concerned for Christ's presence with your own souls. That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that your souls may be a little sanctuary for the Holy Ghost, and a throne for the Mediator. The soul without Christ, is but a dead soul in a living body. The want of it makes a soul barren, heartless and lifeless. There is never an empty heart amongst us. If Christ be not there, Satan is there. If it be not a palace for the King of glory, it is a den of hellish thieves, and a garrison for the devil where the strong man armed keeps the house and his goods are safe. Now to stir you up,

MOTIVE 1. The neglect of this is the need-nail that holds all other evils about us fast. Take that away, the rest will go. Though all as an unclean thing, yet we should be made pure and holy, get a perfect righteousness, revive as the corn, grow as the vine, and send forth our roots as Lebanon. Christ has all in hand, grace and glory, so that taking hold of him is the short way to all other benefits.

2. It is a horrid indignity done to the Son of God, and says in effect, that his presence is not worth our pains to seek it. Ye have said, "It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord." That we can live well enough without him. "Wherefore say my people, we are Lords: we will come no more unto thee." Yea, that we are the worse for his presence, and would gladly be free of him. Therefore, they say unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Like the Gadarenes, who thought they could not get their swine kept for him, and therefore besought him to depart out of their coasts. This was the sin of the Israelites, Psal. cvi. 21—26.

3. It is next step to Christ's taking farewell of a people or a soul. He must needs go when there is none to hold him still, Psal. lxxxix. 11, 12. Oh it is a sad parting. Yea, woe also to them when I depart from them. Farther application afterwards.

DOCTRINE III. Sometimes religion is at such a low ebb, and spiritual sloth so prevails among a professing people, that Christ may even go away for any that is to hold him still. There is none that stirreth up himself. At what a low ebb was religion in Jerusalem, Jer. v. 1; Ezek. xxii. 30.

I. I shall inquire whence this proceeds, and discover the sources of this woeful temper, that men stir not up themselves, &c.

1. It proceeds from love to carnal ease. Christ's own spouse is sometimes so bewitched with this, that if sleeping prayers will not hold Christ still, she will even let him go his way, ere she be at the pains to rise up and set her foot on cold ground, Song v. 3. Every one has a devil's agent within him that says, master, spare thyself. This love to carnal ease, makes the man avoid what is necessary for stirring him up. There are these two things very necessary for the restoring of a decayed soul, which love to carnal ease will by no means admit.

These are,

1. The duty of self-examination. Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Communing with our hearts, respecting our state and frame, is necessary. But this is a yoke which the delicate soul that loves ease cannot stoop to take on. They will pray, hear, and the like, for they may do these, stretched on the bed of sloth, but self-examination will disturb their ease.

The duty of secret prayer and fasting is also necessary, Matth. xvii. 21. This has been the way by which many have got a recovery; but it is to be feared it is an exercise few are acquainted with, Matth. vi. 16—18. When there is a decay on men's spirits, which spurns all other means, this ought to be tried; and none ought to say, they have not time; for some have their time in their own hand by day, and all have the night, and a night taken from sleep for this exercise, would be well bestowed. But love of ease, keeps away from this uneasy work.

2. It proceeds from abundance of world's ease. The Jews at Babylon, how zealous, Psal. cxxxvii. But at Jerusalem, how negligent and slothful, Hag. i. 2. Jacob may indeed sleep when he has a stone for his pillow, but much more when on a soft bed. The late troublous times kept people awake. When they had no rest to themselves, they gave God no rest; but now they have got rest, and find it is sweet, and it grieveth them to pluck their hands out of their bosom.

It is observable that people are very ready to fall asleep after a deliverance. It then comes to them sweet, as to a labouring man. This was the case with Noah, after the deluge; Lot, after his deliverance from Sodom, and Hezekiah, after his recovery. Compare also, Gen. xxviii. 20, with Gen. xxxv. 1, and downwards.

3. Plenty of the means of grace abused. People would think, that those that have plenty of ordinances, should be most lively; but indeed it turns oftentimes quite otherwise. The preached gospel; it is a pleasant song, which if it do not draw peoples' hearts after Christ it will lull them fast asleep, Isaiah vi. 10. The continual noise of

many waters, is apt to make people deaf. A man that has enough, if he have not all the better appetite, is seldom hungry, and thus men begin to weary of God and his ordinances. The honey comb is loathed, and they must be fed with something that please their fancy. Hence the power of religion is much injured. How many are, that would sometime ago, have gone many miles to hear the word of the Lord, when it was a scarce commodity, that will sit at home and loiter away the Sabbath, now when it is come to their doors. They have even got a surfeit of it; they are full and the bones must have rest.

4. The cares of the world, Luke xxi. 34. Many, while they are young and without care of the world, how lively and sprightly seem they to be; but when once they get a family, their religion melts away like snow before the sun. From that time many draw back. Hence, so many young saints, become old sinners. It is men's being so much taken up with the things of the world, that ruins the concerns of the soul. Cares of the world make men spiritually poor.

5. A view of unrepented of guilt, which is not so strong as to rouse men up, yet it lightly startles them. I believe one main cause of sin's not stirring up men, is, they are so far run on in the score, that they dare not take a serious view of their accounts, which is a kind of sullen despair, Jer. ii. 25.

6. A sinful want of the influences of divine grace, without which, a man can do nothing. Many have sinned away the influences of the spirit, so as they have neither heart nor hand in religion, as they have had, and that by their former grieving of the spirit. Days have been, when the Lord has been giving them one awakening after another, but they would needs sleep, and the Lord hath said, "they are joined to their idols, let them alone."

7. Love to some bosom lust, which they are unwilling to give up. As long as a man minds to keep the sweet morsel under his tongue, he will not stir up himself to take hold of Christ; for he knows if he take hold of Christ, he must let go his idol. When people's hearts have gone away from Christ, then they have always some other pillow upon which to lean their heads and take their rest. Often they never awaken till the Lord draw the bolster from under their head, as he took away Jonah's gourd, Ezek. xxiv. 25.

Lastly, what wonder men stir not up themselves, for Satan will see to it that the curtains be drawn, all kept quiet, and that they be kept warm in the bed of sloth. The curtains are drawn on many, and the light kept out of their eyes. "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the

glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Light is an enemy to sleep, but the sun may go down at noon with some. If the man can be brought to slight ordinances, and sit at home, it is well, what the eye sees the heart rues not. If he will come to ordinances, and his case be there spoken to, then Satan is at work, either to make him drowsy, or to send away his heart to be thinking on some other thing, or to put the word away from himself to some other person. And if the word continue to be so troublesome to him, he may even come to turn his back on it altogether, and hate the messenger because he never speakes good of him.

All noise that may disturb them, is carefully kept out of their ears. Conscience is a great disturber of false peace, and therefore it is either boasted or bribed to hold its peace. The consciences of some are boasted to silence, seared as with a hot iron, so that its speech is laid, 1 Tim. iv. 2. And this especially by sinning over the belly of light, and by custom in sin, which quickly wears away all sense, so as a man can sin without remorse. The consciences of others are bribed to hold their peace, and there are three things by which it is bribed to hold peace, and allow them to sleep.

1. With some good duties, even the easy duties of religion, as to wrong no man, to attend to ordinances, to recommend themselves to God while they put off or on their clothes, to say a prayer and give a sigh while they are going backwards, Hos. x. 11; Prov. vii. 14. We have heard of night-walkers, who rise out of their beds, climb up on dangerous places; people are unwilling to awaken them, but let them alone, they will go to bed again. Many such night-walkers there are in religion, who will do some duties as if they were awake, and yet are fast asleep.

2. Abstaining from gross sins which cannot but wound the conscience, Luke xviii. 11. They on whom is the spirit of slumber, will sleep in any place where there is nothing to prick them; like children, who will wallow among the dust, building their sand hillocks, till the wind blow it in their eyes. A roaring devil would awaken some, and therefore Satan transforms himself into an angel of light.

3. Fair promises to be performed afterwards, if conscience begin to mutter. "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." The man does with conscience, as the lazy man does with his friend that comes too early to him, engages to meet him afterwards; and also many make an engagement with their conscience that they never keep. However, the making of the engagement frees them from present disturbance.

Finally, They are well covered. "Woe to the rebellious children,

saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin." There is a threefold covering under which men take a sound sleep. 1. A covering of pure mercy, that hath no affinity with justice. The mercy with which the Spirit of God covers his people, has red lines of justice in it, drawn with the blood of Christ, in whom the soul is careful to have an interest, Psalm lxxxv. 9, 10. Ask many how they think to be saved? They look for mercy. Why? God is merciful. Tell them no mercy out of Christ, they yield it; but believe it not, for they are at no pains to be in him. 2. A covering of much time to come, in which they wrap themselves, and continue at ease; as when a man is on a journey, he can sleep by the way when he thinks he has much day before his hand. 3. A covering of sufficient grace, which in effect is sufficient delusion. Two sorts sleep soundly under this; first, some that can take their swing in their lusts now, and think it is but to repent and believe, and they can do that afterwards, if it were on a death-bed. There are, secondly, some that think the bitterness of death is past. They have good desires, and that is enough to secure heaven. So they are like the unthrifty tradesman, who is not greedy of wealth, thinking he has as much as will be a livelihood, he will not exert himself for more, but take his ease. Now this is an easy sort of religion. Though a man cannot work, he can lie and wish upon his bed, for a Christ, a pardon, and heaven. But woe to these desires, they will be found a covering not of God's Spirit, but of men's own spirit. "The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labour." Thus many lay down the conclusion, that the main work is already done, so they take ease. This serves many as a bulwark against all the attempts which the gospel can make on them. Is your salvation your main work? Yet at most it is but a begun work, therefore work out your salvation with fear and trembling. The Spirit of God's reasoning is, the nearer salvation is, it is so much the more high time to awake out of sleep, Rom. xiii. 11. But what do you with the work of glorifying God, man's chief end. It is a shrewd sign, salvation is far from the man, that has nothing to do with grace, but to secure his own salvation.

USE I. Of lamentation over the low degree to which religion is come in this generation. We may well take up our lamentation and say our silver is become dross. The tokens of the Lord's anger are gone out against us. Christ is on his way to leave us, the plague is begun, the ark is like to be taken, but where is the man that stretcheth up himself to take hold of the Lord; or that is fit to stand in the gap. Jerusalem is sighing and going backwards. The Lord is

angry with our mother, threatening to give up house with her, but the children generally are sleeping. Ah! we have fallen! fallen! Once a noble vine, but now the plant of a degenerate vine. Wickedness is at a height, and religion is at a low ebb. Most of us are pulling down the house about our ears. Few, very few, to hold it up. The floods are like to swallow up the ship, but Jonah is fast asleep. We shall here, *First*, give evidences of this case; and *Secondly*, shew the evil of it.

I. Let us give evidences of the low degree to which religion is come in our day: and that the text is too applicable to us. "There is none that stirreth up himself," &c.

1. The gross wickedness that doth this day abound in our land in the face of the sun, in a land where there is so much gospel light, Hos. iv. 1—3. That drunkenness, swearing, whoring, profaning the sabbath, contempt of the gospel, and such heaven-daring abominations, abound among high and low, is very evident. How rare to find a great man good. Profanity goes with many of them for a piece of gallantry, who by their profanity put themselves as far below the brutes, as God in his providence has lifted them up above other men. If a man has any sense of religion, he is judged to have been foundered in his education. No wonder the church of God has received bad treatment from such persons and others, whose religion will go no farther than their carnal interest. The meaner sort write as they can after their copy, and eagerly embrace profane causes, as they have temptations thereto, Jer. v. 1—6. If God confound them not in their counsels, ruin them not by their own devices, and return not their way upon their own head, we shall mark it as a miracle of providence. It is not long since a heavy judgment was inflicted upon the meaner sort of people, but there is reason to look, that God will destroy both head and tail at once.

2. Is not the profane spirit of the Gadarenes, gone far through the land? Men in effect saying to the Almighty, depart out of our coasts. There are many in Scotland grudging and fretting to see the Lord covering a table for us, and that would be glad Christ had not a foot of ground in the land, but hill sides and scaffolds. They are longing to see the ways of Zion mourning desolate, and to hear the word given to return back to Egypt.

3. A profane spirit of neutrality and indifferency carries away many. They are like Gallio, care for none of these things. If they get the world, their clay god in their arms, they care not what side be uppermost, whether the gospel sink or swim. They are wholly careless that way, and behave as if they were all flesh, as if their souls were but salt to keep their bodies a while from corruption. As for

Christ, they know not him nor his favour, and therefore he may go if he will for them. They never got any good by his presence, no wonder they are not concerned at the hazard of his departure.

4. The dumb devil that possesseth many hearts and families. If a Turk were in the houses of some Christians, saw them in their families and in their closets too, he would have much difficulty to know what religion they were of, or whether they had a God or not, unless it were by their swearing, or mumbling over a grace to their meat. Some make no conscience of prayer in their families, Jer. x. 25. Some perhaps will pray occasionally in their families, or join therein, but live strangers to secret prayer; these are careless daughters. I never like that religion where people have nothing to tell Christ, but what they can say before others. It is not very like that these are married to Christ. Now, lay aside all these, and there will not be very many behind to take hold of Christ. But we will come a little closer, and sift more narrowly; and I believe, ere we have done, if conviction can get entrance, we will see the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

1. How many praying persons are there in our day, who, though they have received Christ into their mouths and houses, yet not into their hearts; but are still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. As for some, their practice openly contradicts their profession. They will swear and lie, and cheat and pray, and so wound religion. It will never be the like of these that will hold Christ still, if they do not reform, Isa. i. 11—15. Others that are blameless, yet never get beyond a form of godliness, but remain strangers to the inward life of religion.

2. People confining themselves to morning and evening prayer, though God puts other opportunities in their hands. A healthy man keeps at his ordinary meals, but the sickly person that has much to do with the physician, cannot do so. Were people in the thriving, and exercised unto godliness, they would readily find an errand to God in the intervals. Alas! many are like Samson, they know not that the Lord is departed from them; and if they could not reach their knees with it, yet if they were waking, they would be often looking up by ejaculatory prayer.

3. The difficulty people have to get an errand to Christ, except what self-preservation teacheth them. They will pray for heaven, because they are afraid of hell; they will pray for pardon, but to tell Christ what ails them, except in fair generals, there is the difficulty. They that are thriving are not so. Exercised souls will have their particular cases lying near their hearts, and they must go to Christ with them. The case of their own souls will furnish them materials of prayer, in all its parts.

4. The merry life that many have of it all their days, except so much as is interrupted with crosses in the world, or some visible outbreaking, that wound their reputation. Men have their sullen dejected fits, but their sorrow is of the world. How few are walking mournfully under the hidings of God's face, prevailing of corruption, pride, and unbelief. Alas! these things are hid out of the view of many pretenders to religion, who feel nothing in their own eye, unless it be a beam. They reign as kings, without the shining of the Lord's countenance upon them. But were they really exercised to godliness, their wine would not escape being sometimes mixed with water.

5. Infrequency in reading or hearing the Scriptures read. Where is the man whose soul's case sends him away to the Bible, to see what he can get there for it? Souls that are awake, are readily thus employed. The Scriptures are Christ's last will, the magazine of Christian comfort, where there is what is suitable to the cases of our souls.

The saints turn to the Scriptures under deadness, saying, "This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me;" also under doubts and fears, saying, thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counsellors. But alas! the dust of our Bibles may witness against many of us. It may long lie by us, ere our own case make us turn a leaf of it.

6. The little relish the Scriptures have with us. To the hungry every bitter thing is sweet. God has promised his Spirit to teach us all things, and bring all things to our remembrance. An awakened Christian reads the Scriptures with another eye than others do. They say with the two disciples, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures." An exercised frame of Spirit, is a good commentary on the Bible. It is like the sun shining on a lime wall, gets light and reflects it. But the Scriptures are to many a sealed book, tasteless as the white of an egg.

7. Unacquaintedness with answers of prayer, especially in spiritual things. Prayer is the exercise of those that are kept stirring and looking up to God, and disappointments are heavy to them. "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through." It would be a confounding question to some, were they asked, if they ever had an answer to prayer in spiritual things; and hard for many to tell when they had the last answer of prayer. Ah! do we think that these prayers avail ought, that God hears not, or that these are heard, about which we are not concerned whether they be heard or not? Many are no better than Saul, 1 Sam. xxviii. 15; and worse than he, in that we are not troubled about it.

8. The great love to the world and carnality, Phil. iii. 18, 19. We sit down on worldly enjoyments. It is good to be here. Many think of the world, what Peter said of being on the mount of transfiguration with Christ, and would make a bargain with God on lower terms. They would let him keep his heaven to himself, so that he would but secure them from his hell, and leave them in the world, to shift for themselves. Where is the man "that is coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon Christ his beloved?" And saying, "henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also, that love his appearing."

9. The woeful misspending of the Sabbath day. The fourth commandment is put in the middle of the decalogue, with a "remember the Sabbath day," as being the bond of all religion. The growth of religion, or decay of it, goes hand in hand with the keeping, or neglecting of the Sabbath, Isa. lviii. 13, 14; Amos v. 8. But alas! if we take our mark by this, we may say religion is at a low ebb. Few sermons in the year serve some people, and little thing will make some turn their backs on them. If people would do with their meat, in which there is a mote, real or supposed, as they do with the ordinances, some would come quickly to the churchyard, that will not come to the church. Many spend much of the Lord's day in their beds, long in bed in the morning, and soon to it at night. Some companies by their discourse, might be thought to be going to a market, when coming to church. Betwixt sermons, how few go alone, to pray or meditate; and in company no spiritual discourse, but carnal, vain, idle talk, unfitting them for the rest of the work. In going home, no spiritual conversation. What they heard is buried, unless it be something they mind to quarrel or dispute about. At home, the day is as ill closed with many, as it was begun.

10. The little spiritual discourse that is, at any time, among professors. "Let no corrupt communication," says Paul, "proceed out of your mouth; but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." When Christian experiences are spoken by any, how little do they relish with others: It is an effectual way to silence some companies. How few have any thing to add. It is a mystery to many. A philosopher seeing a man with a fair face, and silent tongue, bade him speak, that he might see him. When scholars or merchants meet, their discourse tells what they are. Men of the same nation in foreign countries, speak their mother tongue to one another. Why not Christians?

Alas! religion is at a low ebb. Nearest the heart, nearest the mouth. When there is fire on the hearth, smoke will come out at the chimney. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

11. The little trouble ministers and fellow Christians get in our day, to solve doubts and cases of conscience, about matters concerning the state and case of the soul. This must be, either because people can guide all these concerns alone, and need no help; but often it has been seen, that they who could have helped others, have stood in need of help themselves, when the case became their own: or that people smother their exercises and cases, which is dangerous; or that they are not taken up about these matters. Indeed it is to be feared, the thing which makes many of us so easy is, either that we are sleeping or dead, and it is all one thing to such persons whether it be night or day; and therefore no asking of that question, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" It is to be feared, that many of us are as Samson, when "he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." I think we that are professors, have ground to propose that question, if it be so, why am I thus? So little exercised about our soul's state and case. I will guess at some reasons of it,

1. The truths of religion are speculatively known by many, but realized by very few, 1 Cor. ii. 14. It is one thing to know the grammatical construction of words and their meaning, another thing to see the things themselves expressed by these words. One man hears of the bitterness of gall, or speaks of it, and is not moved; another tastes it, and his whole body shivers. Were the truth of the being of a God, the nature and necessity of regeneration, holiness, and the like, realized unto us, it would be impossible for us to be so little taken up about these things as we are. Paul knew the law literally, but was not exercised about his case, till it was realized to him. "I was alive," says he, "without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Alas! God, heaven, and hell, are but lifeless speculations to most men.

2. The word heard is not mixed with faith of application, otherwise it would make some smart, Heb. iv. 2. Men having a soul ruining way of hearing. Hearing as if we were speaking to the man in the moon, so that we may say, "To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Behold their ears are uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken. Behold the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it." Alas!

many are like the sieve out of the water, they lose all. But God's word will at length take hold of them, that will not take hold of it, Zech. i. 6.

3. Many are very little at home, in the duty of self-examination. Some narrow spirits mind nothing but their own particular affairs; some are so taken up with the public, that matters at home, in their own breasts go to wreck. O! for the day, when what God has joined, men shall not dare to put asunder. Debt is a great burden to an honest heart, but some go lightly under it. Augustus hearing of one deeply in debt, who yet slept soundly, sent for his pillow, alleging there was some strange virtue in it. Want of consideration is a sleepy pillow indeed. If the sluggard manage the garden, bad weeds will get leave to grow. If there be no trial made, no wonder all pass for gold that glitters, and that bad wares go off in the dark.

4. People have some moonlight grace within, that will appear very good, if they take but a slight view of it. Men are not troubled with questions about their state and case. What is the reason? "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?" Such are not disposed to rip up things to the quick. They find they have good meanings, good desires of Christ and grace, and upon these they can charge conscience to be quiet and back the charge, Matth. v. 6; 2 Cor. viii. 12. But it is not their work to know whether their former awakenings and present desires, be of the right stamp or not. Alas! that is verified in many, "the soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing. The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labour."

5. Religion is but a by-hand work to many. It is the real business of few. The many are drowned in the thick clay of the world. Their work is like the mole in the earth, that lifts not up its eyes till a-dying. If they mind their soul's case at any time, they take but a start of that work. Many have imbibed Pharaoh's cursed principle, that religion is a work only for them that has nothing else to do. Martha was troubled about many things, and these turn the attention away from the one thing needful. People will never prosper, till they make religion their business, and season their whole conversation with it.

6. Satan who is the cause of much inward trouble to some, suffers others to be unmolested, and that because they have nothing that is worth to lose, except their souls, and these are best caught, while the man is not exercised about his case. If a soul attain to communion with God, victory over corruption, sound evidences for

heaven, then Satan never lets them rest, but does every thing he can to disturb them. It is the rich ship which the pirate attacks, and the heavy purse which the robber tries to take.

7. Many never knew what true religion meant. Hence, like children, they please themselves with a bag full of counters, as if they were gold; "they think themselves rich, and increased in goods, and standing in need of nothing." When people know no other state, but that in which they are, it is little wonder they trouble not themselves about it. One bred a workman all his days, will go to his labour, his coarse fare, and cottage, contentedly; whereas one bred up in a palace, would take ill with it, and would weep, when the other would sing.

8. Unacquaintedness with the work of wrestling with God. There is a great difference betwixt prayers. God regards not every thing which men call prayer. "They have not," says he, "cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds." Few are like Jacob, or the woman of Canaan, Mark vii. 25, in urging their requests. Nay, our coldrife, lukewarm prayers say, that our life is almost gone, and that which remains is ready to die. We are now,

II. To shew the evil of this sleepy lazy temper of spirit.

1. It is far worse than it looks to be. It is like the locusts in the Revelations, "which had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions." People are not aware of the danger of it, and so it is most dangerous, for the evil of it is not so easily discerned as in other cases; it is but an omission, and an indisposition for spiritual things. The sting of it is concealed. It is looked on as an infirmity, which the best have; for while the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. It rests like a friend in the bosom, but is indeed a bosom enemy.

It comes not to an height in an instant, but creeps on by degrees, for it is the soul's sleep, which steals on at great leisure. First they grow heavy, then slumber, and then sleep, Dent. 10—18. Conscience is not silenced in an instant, and Satan carries on his designs best by degrees. He did not presently thrust the forbidden fruit into the mouths of our first parents; but first Eve must see it, then taste, then eat, and then give to her husband.

It is also a sweet sin. O but sleep is sweet! Meat is sweet, but people soon fill themselves with it; but they are not so soon satisfied with sleep. When a man can take no pleasure in any other thing, yet he can sleep. When people have lost all delight in God, in his word and ordinances, they can take pleasure in this lazy temper.

2. It is a temper of spirit most hateful to God. "As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him." "I would," says Jesus, "thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." A prince would take it ill to be brought into a smoky house, and to have vinegar presented to him, instead of wine; so God abhors such a temper, and the services which proceed from it. God is a living God, and he cannot love but loathe dead inactive souls. Christ keeps no communion with such. They are in bed, the doors are shut, they cannot rise to let him in, therefore he goes away, Song v. 3, 6, for they prefer their ease to communion with him. With them it is heartless work, and therefore God cannot love it.

3. It is destructive to the soul, Prov. xxiv. 30—34. When men sleep, Satan will be sowing his tares, and so there may be a sowing in joy, which will be reaped in tears. The bands when laid on the soul, may be soft as wool, but as iron at the breaking them off, as in the case of David. It casts the gracious soul into a spiritual consumption, and graceless souls it stings to death. "By much slothfulness the building decayeth, and through idleness of the hands, the house droppeth through."

This temper murders convictions. It stifles the harbingers of the Lord of glory, and checks a good work in the bud, Acts xxiv. 25; Hos. vi. 4. It fares with many in this case, as with a sleepy man, who being oft called to arise, still falls asleep again, till the other depart from him. It also choaks many good resolutions. O what brave Christians would many of us have been, had we been what we resolved to be. But alas! this temper has made them like corn on the house tops, withered before it be grown; or like Rachel, beautiful, but barren. Conscience makes many resolve to amend, but spiritual laziness lets them not move a foot, for it cuts the sinews of all good endeavours, and makes men unfit both for doing and suffering. For *doing*. The Christian's work, is striving, fighting, wrestling, and running. But who will be fit to grapple with principalities and powers, corruptions and temptations, that stir not up themselves? This requires not only life but liveliness. It unfits also for suffering. For this the person is most unfit, because he loves ease, and nothing uneasy can be pleasing to him, Song v. 3. A suffering lot requires more than ordinary vigour, but the sleepy Christian has less. Its prevalence says we are unmeet for suffering. It says trials are coming on, but that the generation is very unfit for them.

4. It is a mother sin. It is both mother and nurse to other sins,

Prov. xxiv. 30, 31. It breeds other sins, as it did David's adultery. Look as death seizing on the body, breeds worms and corruption, so deadness on the soul doth produce noisome lusts. Whence is all that carnality, lightness, want of appetite after spiritual things, but from hence; they are the monstrous births of this womb. When once a man begins to awaken, these flee away; as the wind blowing, purgeth and purifieth the air. This temper not only produces but feeds them. Lusts thrive well in the heart under this temper. Satan says to it, as Pharaoh's daughter did to the mother of Moses, nurse that child for me. Hence how difficult is it to recover after men have been long lying on this sleepy pillow. If a man take his disease in time, it may be speedily cured; but let it run on, it will not be so easy. While Babel's children are yet but young, they may be dashed against the stones, but being grown up, they will be more difficult to destroy.

5. This lazy temper of spirit, is the strongest arm of the devil. It is one of his master pieces for the ruin of souls. What can he not do with people, when once he has them in this net? By it he can do two things: 1. He can draw people by it. As dyers give a dip in the blue vat to cloth, that it may the better take on black; so Satan makes use of this temper for drawing men into other sins. Let men once take a draught of this intoxicating cup, and they will dance after the devil's pipe, Prov. xxiii. 21. Thus he made Peter deny his master, and the sponse to give Christ his leave, Song v. 3, 4. Sometimes the man will be ready to say, Am I a dog to do this thing? Well, but if Satan get the man under this temper, he will soon make him do it. As he draws them by this temper, so he holds them by it. By this means he holds fast his own. Has he a mind to bring them to rank poverty, this will do it. It will shut out the foolish virgins. How did Satan hold David by it, after he had fallen into adultery. The woman informs him, that the sin cannot be concealed, she is with child, 2 Sam. xi. 5. But Satan keeps the hold. David is not awakened yet; he falls on schemes still to hide his sin, sends for Uriah, bids him go to his house, and sends a mess of meat after him, fills him drunk, and at last murders him; and thus was he held till the Lord brake the arm that held him, and awakened him.

Lastly, It is that which Satan bends all his force to maintain, as being a main pillar of his kingdom. Art thou fallen into this lazy frame, Satan's net and power shall fail, if thou get not a sound sleep. He will do his utmost, ere people be disturbed, till his time come. It seems then, he has a time, when he will allow people to be awakened. Yes! a twofold time: 1. When he has got a man

over head and ears in some gross sins, that even a natural conscience will startle at. Then he will allow them to rub their eyes, put on their spectacles, that they may see the bloody sword of justice, hanging over their heads; and so may, in a fright, leap out of one hell into another; for sometimes Satan sets the house on fire about the lazy sinner, that the smoke awakening him, he may leap out of his bed into the fire, and perish in despair. Though sometimes the Lord plucks the brand out of the fire, yet, like David, they escape not without broken bones. Again, he permits them to awake, when death is come, and time gone. If it were possible any could be secure beyond the line of time, Satan would rather awaken them himself, than that they should sleep on. The tempter turns accuser and executioner. When time is gone, he knows there is no hazard in their awakening, Eccles. ix. 10. Hence, some sleep on till the last breath, and pass off like lambs, no bands in their death.

USE II. Of exhortation. Stir up yourselves to take hold of Christ. There is much need of this exhortation. O! that I could come to every man's bed side this day, and sound an alarm. I may take up the whole congregation in four classes. A word to each,

1. Some that never had any awakening, that had never a qualm of conscience to make them say, what have I done? but can bless God they have lived in good belief all their days. Like Moab, they have been at ease from their youth, and have settled on their lees. They have not so much as a form of godliness, but live in ignorance, and profanity, or what they call morality, and sleep soundly in the devil's arms. The danger of their souls never brake their rest by night or by day. And if they heard of any under soul exercise, would be ready to bless themselves from it, or count it melancholy fits.

Awaken, O! young and old sinners, before the pit shut its mouth upon ye, for you are sleeping the sleep of death. God forbid! will some say. Nay, others see the 'devil's mark on your foreheads, though you do not. Had you been born again, you would have had some pangs, some awakenings less or more, and would have been stirred up to mind your soul's case.

1. Consider that by nature thou art a child of the devil, and an heir of hell; under the wrath and curse of God for original sin, and thou hast been adding every moment to that treasure of sin, while God has been adding to the treasure of wrath. Thy soul got a wrong set by Adam's fall, and so could never to this day step one right step; but God has the account of them all to lay before thee at length, Deut. xxxii. 34; Rom. ii. 5. Wrath is hovering over thy head. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the

wrath of God abideth on him ;” and thou art hanging over the pit’s mouth, by the brittle thread of life.

Say not you have good hearts, for the heart is the worst part of you ; “ It is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Say not that you live an honest life in the world. “ For an high look, and a proud heart, and the ploughing of the wicked is sin.” Say not that you have good meanings and desires. “ For the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.” Say not that Christ is merciful, willing to save sinners ; for he is not willing to save you in, but from, your sins. He is not willing to take dogs and swine to heaven. He cannot save you, unless you take hold of him by faith, Heb. xi. 6 ; and you will never do that unless you be awakened, Matth. ix. 12.

2. Thou hast never yet been brought the length of the first step to heaven. Esau, Felix, and Judas, were farther on than ever thou hast been ; for they were awakened and convinced, and that is the first work, John xvi. 8.

3. The devil is the master of the household with thee. Till this day, his goods are at peace. Had the devil been cast out, he would not have quit his possession with so little noise, and they with whom he dwells now, shall dwell with him hereafter.

Lastly, Awaken now, or you will get a fearful awakening. “ The sinners in Zion are afraid ; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites : who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire ? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings.” O sinner, the house is on fire about thee, rise therefore, out of thy bed, and flee for thy life. Is it not time yet to mind thy soul ? What breast plate hast thou got on, that the arrows of God’s word cannot pierce thee ? Your confidence seems to be strong. But remember Job xviii. 14 ; Isa. xxviii. 18 ; Deut xxix. 19, 20.

2. Those that sometimes have had an awakening, but now it is gone, and they are even where they were before, they are back to their old trade again. O sinner, did not God once awaken thee ? Was thy conscience never alarmed ? Are there not some who may mind, how God once took them to Mount Sinai, and caused them to hear the trumpet of the law ? Perhaps at a sermon many years since, or on a sick bed, when death came to the bed side, and stared them in the face and filled them with horror of hell following at its back : they resolved never to be again as they had been before. But when the sermon was once gone out of their heads, or they recovered out of their sickness, they turned even the old men and women they were before. I would pose your consciences with a few questions.

1. When you had the awakening, would you not have given all the world to have that undone which you had done; that you had spent the time that was wasted in pursuit of your lusts in minding the concerns of your souls? Why then have you turned back? Did you not resolve for the time to come, that you would never be so unconcerned about your souls as you had been? What have you done with these resolutions now? Were you fools to make them, or fools to break them?

3. Did you think God's wrath against sin, and his threatenings, mere scarecrows to affright children? Why look you so on them now? Could you sleep sound this night if God should send you home with these arrows in your conscience again? Perhaps you are proof against these things now. But they had need of very strong armour, to ward off the blow, that have God for their opponent.

Lastly, Was not death very terrible then, in your case; and is the turning back to your old course, the way to make it pleasant now? Is there more sand in your glass now, than there was then? It may be farther from your mind, but it is surely nearer to your heels to overturn you, than it was then. Awaken now again, ere God awaken you in wrath. It had been better for you, if you had never had that awakening. "If I had not come, said Jesus, you had not had sin, but now you have no cloak for your sin," 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. The devil hath a surer hold of you than ever. It will be a wonder if you escape; "for he that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Murdered convictions sometimes rise again when men are dying, and with horrible cries drive men into darkness.

3. Upsitten professors, of whom better things might be expected. Alas! many that have the root of the matter in them, are now under a decay; even Jonah is gone down into the sides of the ship. I have given several evidences of this. But further would you know it, try and find how the pulse of your affections beat in prayer, especially in secret, for in public people have many winds to fill their sails. Alas I fear if we view ourselves in the glass of our secret conversing with God, many of us will see ourselves so decayed as that nothing is left but skin and bone. Alas, what cold has benumbed our spiritual senses? Perhaps we are something before others, but in secret are as idols, that have eyes and see not, ears and hear not. Little heat of affection there, the body is placed on its knees before God, but the world gets away the heart. Though the eyes be shut, the man sees a thousand varieties. The heart, like a bird, gets out of the cage, and skips from bush to bush, wanders here and there. This argues a sad decay.

OBJECTION. These are but infirmities and little sins. **ANSWER:** Is it but a little sin to neglect him whom the angels adore? Would you turn about your back, speaking to a king? Be it so, what think you of the number of them? Grains of sand heaped together make a mountain; and I believe, these your little sins, sometimes make such a high mountain betwixt Christ and the soul, that the soul cannot meet with Christ in the duty, nor can its voice reach him. The bow will not shoot, unless it be bended, nor will the viol make melody, if the strings be not properly drawn. Prayer without fervour of spirit, is like a bird, whose nature is but to fly, but cannot, when its wings are clipped.

OBJECTION. It is hard to get the heart fixed. Indeed it is. But it is not impossible. David could say, "O God my heart is fixed." Were any of us under a sentence of death, and got access to the prince's chamber to petition for our life, we would not be gazing on the pictures hanging in the room. A man intent on his business in the world, hears not the first knock at his door for he is busy. O for an exchange of affections to get these which we give to the world, to give to God. The assaults of these wanderings we cannot hinder; but there is no necessity to entertain them. These wandering ghosts may knock at our door, but we need not open unless we please. We cannot hinder the birds to fly about our heads, yet we need not allow them to nestle in our hair. But O! what way shall a poor creature be kept from them. I can tell you no way how to be kept altogether free from their assaults, for I believe that is reserved for heaven. The devil is the father that begets them, corrupt nature brings them forth, and if unwatchfulness and laziness be there, it will nurse them. But it is the work of grace to starve them. But if they be not entertained they will not mar the success of our prayers, and therefore I would give you advice in that case.

1. Do as the builders of the wall of Jerusalem did, hold the trowel in the one hand, the sword in the other, that you may be ready both to build and to fight, to ward off these irregular motions of the heart.

2. If they do come on, do as Abraham did with the fowls that came on the sacrifice, drive them away. Refuse converse with them, and closely apply yourself to the work before you. The mind of man cannot be intent on two things at once.

3. Do as Samson who took meat out of the eater, and sweet out of the strong: turn them to an occasion of good, turn the cannon on corruption, and see if you can outshoot the devil with his own bow. There is a fourfold sweet may be extricated out of them by a gracious soul.

1. Humiliation of soul before the Lord. "So foolish was I and ignorant," says Asaph, "I was a beast before thee." The soul may therewith be filled with shame and blushing before the Lord. Dost thou find thy heart beginning to wander, turn thyself to the lamenting of the corruption, vanity and lightness of it. They are the nasty old friends of the bride, who beginning to draw about her while before the bridegroom, may well fill her face with blushing, and remind her of her father's house and her own people.

2. Sense of need. Many times people go to God, insensible of their needs, and so no wonder their hearts wander, like a man that goes to the market, wanting nothing, and so goeth gazing up and down. Well, turn this wandering deadness and darkness of heart; men may quicken their sense of need of help from Christ, and supplies of grace, Rom. vii. 21—24.

3. Importunity in prayer. These messengers from Satan should make us more importunate. The man going to the city of refuge, the nearer his heels the enemy is, he flees the faster, and knocks more rudely at the gates.

4. A desire of uninterrupted communication with God, and perfect freedom from that corrupt nature, that will needs draw a black score through the fairest line we can write, Rom. vii. 24; and thus the soul might be screwed up to heaven, and drawn from under the feet of these tyrants. Resolution would do this.

Now to return, our moth eaten duties, our prayers that are so run with these worms of our earthly hearts, shew, that there is little resistance made to them, and that we are upsitten very sore. And to awaken you, I would cry in your ears these following:

CRY. Jer. ii. 2, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thy espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land not sown." O upsitten professors, decayed christians, God remembers the day when it was otherwise with you, when you could not have lived as you do now. Have you forgotten the days of your youth and the love of your espousals. Where is your wilderness love now? Is not Christ as good a master as he was? Are you offended that he has taken the iron yoke off your necks and laid meat before you? Is this your kindness to your friend?

2. Abner's cry to Joab: Shall the sword devour for ever? Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the end; how long shall it be then ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren? This case is sweet in the mouth, but it will be bitter in the belly. The awakening may be very harsh, by the blow of the Lord's hand, if his word do not it. There are two ways God has awakened sleepy professors.

1. By a dreadful storm of affliction. Thus Jonah and Joseph's brethren were awakened. The Lord will not let professors sleep on, but if the word will not do it, the sword may. We have reason to fear some of us are so fast asleep, that we will not awaken till we be roused up by the cry of ourselves or relations, weltering in blood.

Or, II. By letting them be plunged in the mire of some scandalous gross sin, as Peter; the bitterest way of all. Men keep up the body of religion, and that does before the world; but the soul of life is gone, and the Lord lets them so fall, as the world may be ready to judge they were never honest at the heart.

3. The midnight cry. "Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him; or, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." The clouds are growing black above our heads. The Lord seems to be on his way, coming out of his place to punish us. The cup of these nations is filling very fast. It is high time to awake. It is not good furniture for an evil day.

4. That cry, "All flesh is grass," and all the goodness thereof, is as the flower of the field. You must die, and that ere long. Nay, how soon, you do not know. But where are thy evidences for heaven? Art thou fit to meet the Bridegroom of souls? O up and trim your lamps; all will have enough to do. It is sad travelling out of the world, when people know not where they shall next take up their lodging.

The church is crying to you to awake. Zion spreads forth her hands, and cries for help from her children. Her Lord is angry with her, threatening to give up house with her. Enemies are gathering together against her, saying, let Zion be defilled, and let our eye look upon Zion. Have you not sucked the breasts of her consolations. O stir up yourselves to plead with her Lord, for your mother. The ark is like to be carried captive, it is not time to sleep.

Posterity is crying to you. O pity the rising generation, the generation yet unborn. Murder not their souls before their bodies have got life. If they be brought up in darkness, and get poison instead of food, the present generation will bear the blame. The generation of the Jews that rejected Christ, brought his blood upon their children.

4. To those that are awake, I shall only say.

I. Be thankful. It was God that gave you grace, and he has kept you awake. You had been sleeping the sleep of death as well as others, if he had not done it. It is a rare mercy, seeing your case is as in the text. It is a rare thing, a waking, active frame. It is a special favour from heaven. The Lord comes by, and goes by

many others' bed's side, and yet while they sleep, he awakens you. It is also a seasonable mercy. If ever there was a season to be awake, to have our lamps trimmed, it is now, when the enemy is at the gate, and the Lord is saying, "prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

2. Be watchful. Perhaps your case now is not so easy, yet it is safer than before. O beware of falling asleep again. Awakening grace, is a tender bud of heaven easily hurt. "Our vines have tender grapes." Therefore I say, I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awaken my love till he please. It is hard to keep awake among a company of sleeping professors, Rev. iii. 4. Resolve now in the Lord's strength as Hezekiah, "to go softly all your years in the bitterness of your soul." Be sensible of your danger, and look to the Lord for continued supply.

3. Be diligent. This is a golden spot of time; miss it not, nor let it slip. "The substance of a diligent man is precious." Now you have a fair wind for Immanuel's land, spread out your sails and steer away, lest if you miss it, the wind fall, and you tug and row in vain. "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Redeeming the time, seeing the days are evil." Now you are even between the losing and the gaining. You are up the first step, go up the second. Take hold of him; get sure hold of him for yourself and for the church, Exod. xxxiv. 8, 9. Dig deep, build on the rock, get sure evidences for heaven.

I shall shut up all, with speaking to some important questions. There are some of the godly really exercised about the case of their souls, who think themselves under a decay when they are not so. The first question is, How a person may thus mistake his case?

That God's people may think their case worse than it is, is plain, Isa. xlix. 14—17. So also did Jacob, and the disciples going to Emmaus.

1. The wearing of some glittering, though unsanctified affections, which they had before, while religion was yet new to them. Some never had more, and therefore, when these are gone, all is gone. True converts want not these either. New converts will have more fears, desires of grace, joy and delight, than mature ones. When grace comes first into the soul, it is with the man as with the Israelites, when they came first out of Egypt. "A mixed multitude went up also with them." But this multitude came not to Canaan. The army indeed was then less, but nothing the worse for want of them. So it is in this case.

2. The settling of violent commotions, which they sometimes had.

When these are gone, then some are apt to think, O they are undone. But truly there is no loss, when more solidity comes in their room. New ale works violently, yet when it is older, it hath more life. James and John, sometimes were at that, they would have fired whole towns, that would not receive Christ, Luke ix. 54. But when they received more of the Spirit, they were not so fiery, yet certainly, they were better men. Small rivers in time of rain, run more violently, but afterwards they still run, less violently indeed, but more regularly. Some gracious souls may think, O the love they had to Christ once, by what they have now. O they could not have prayed with dry cheeks, their prayers would have affected a thousand Christians. Now it is not so. But how do you love Christ now, would you not rather part with all, than with him? Are you not grieved for offending him? Do you pray weighted with a sense of your sinfulness and unworthiness? Disquiet not yourselves. Often where water goes out, wind enters. There is much false fire in flashes of affection. New married people may be fonder, but afterwards more loving.

3. People's abating of their rashness and indiscretion. A man that is truly gracious, yet rash and indiscreet, when he reproves sin; if you do not presently yield, then he is in a flame. How sharp are his reproofs? O what zeal is there? Afterwards God gives the man more knowledge, and then he has less of his own passion and corruption mixed with his duty. There is no loss there, Num. xx. 10; Psal. cvi. 32, 33. See 2 Sam. xv. compare verse 26 with 31. Now he was no less affected, but he was more judicious. Mark that prayer, Phil. i. 9.

4. Presumption and self-confidence being much weakened. Grace mixed with self-confidence, will make a man seem far more than he is. Like a man newly recovered, thinks he is well enough, so walks stontly, till he finds his strength fails; and he does not do so again, not because he has less strength, but is more sensible of his weakness than before. O! how much transported with love to Christ seemed Peter to be, when he said, "though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." He could compare with all the apostles and go beyond them. But when Jesus said to him, "lovest thou me, more than these thy brethren?" Peter would now make no comparisons, but said, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." Did he love Christ less, think you? Nay, surely; but he was less presumptuous. The wings of love and humility were better grown, though he did not fly so high as before.

5. A decay of natural vigour and activity. The existence of

grace does not depend on the temper of the body, but yet the exercise of grace in religious duties, may be much hindered or furthered that way. There is more grace necessary to make a godly man naturally timorous, to speak a word for Christ, than to make a godly man naturally bold, to draw a sword in his quarrel. A man naturally passionate to put up with an injury, needs more grace than a man naturally mild. The one swims with the stream, and goes a greater way; the other against, and goes less, yet may be the best swimmer of the two. I take this to be the case of some old professors. Perhaps they could have remembered sermons, continued long in prayer; heard not, prayed not with dry cheeks; but now it is not so with them. Truly, no wonder; when natural vigour is gone, moisture dried up, and memory failed. Was David a coward, when his "men sware unto him, that he should no more go out with them to battle, that the light of Israel should be quenched." The man may have as great love to God, hatred to sin, desire to remember the word as ever. But he cannot make so good music as he did; not because his skill is failed, but the instrument is cracked. So with young and old ministers.

6. The failing of more than ordinary assistance, which they sometimes had. It is usual for the Lord thus to assist his people, when they first set out on his way; even to dandle them a while on his knees, till they be somewhat grown. "Behold, says he, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." As men do with their children that are learning to walk. Few young children get broken brows, till they can walk freely alone; and few young converts have been such a reproach to religion, as standing Christians, Hos. xi. 1—3. Why that now, is it because they have more grace? No; but they have more extraordinary assistance. The load may be lying more heavily on the Christian's back, than before, yet no less strength.

7. More temptations than formerly. One that is but dull and heavy, may walk more quickly than the nimblest man with a clog at his heels, the horse retains his metal, though he goes not so quickly carrying double, as he did single. People ought not to mistake here. There are times when the Lord leads into temptation, and when he holds them off.

Lastly, Felt stirring of corruption more than before, Rom. vii. 21—24. This did not say he was under a decay. Many a time corruption stirs most when it has least strength. When it is nailed to the cross, it cannot but stir and make a noise.

Let not the godly then that are exercised about their case, mistake here. Remember their is a growing downward as well as

upward, in humility, self-denial, self-loathing, and serious dependence upon the Lord, Hos. xiv. 5. People may have less comfort and less strength by sense than before, and yet have more grace, walking by faith. The safest walk a Christian has in the world, is walking betwixt his own emptiness and the fulness of the Mediator.

QUESTION 2. How these that are under a real decay, may get an upstirring and recovery ?

1. Labour to work in your hearts a deep sense of the evil of this woeful temper. Ask your own souls in secret, Is not this the great God provoking sin? Though a man be guilty of many sins, yet if he stir up himself to take hold of the Lord, his case is then not so bad as when he thus neglects the remedy. This was God's quarrel with the old world. Is not this a common sin, and shall I, with the multitude, conspire against the Lord? John vi. 67. How weak has it made me? Has it not been Delilah's lap, in which my strength has been taken away, and my two eyes put out? Is not this the very ruin of the foolish virgins, that have escaped the pollutions of the world?

2. Exercise faith in Christ for quickening influences. He is the fountain of life. Faith is the hand, stretch it out, though withered. It is the eye, open it, and with one look to thyself, behold thine own inability to recover thyself. Many times men get an awakening, but fall asleep again. The reason is, they intend to rise, not to be raised; and so they are even allowed to fall again, as people do with children that are fallen and refuse help. Faith is a self-emptying grace, it sets down the man for a cypher in his own account book, 2 Cor. xii. 11.

With the other eye look to Christ for quickening influences. It is faith that raiseth the legally dead soul, Col. ii. 12. It also raiseth the sick soul out of a faint, "They looked to him and were lightened." A look to the brazen serpent healed the stung Israelites. A look at a crucified Saviour will do wonders, Zech. xii. 10. Let faith then look earnestly to the blood of Christ, it cleanseth from all sin, and purgeth the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God. Plead by faith the end of Christ's coming, that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly. Let faith make use of the privilege of union with Christ, and lay hold of the promises suited to your case, Hos. xiv. 7; Mal. iv. 2.

3. Make conscience of godly conference, like the disciples going to Emmaus. Conversation with godly Christians may do much good. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise. You may say these are rare. But you that ever have had any experience of religion, tell your case one to another; and though you, and your

company were both alike ; yet two cold flint stones struck together, will send forth fire. "Iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour ; for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow ; but wo to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up." Experience has confirmed all this. Christ sent out his disciples two and two.

4. Reflect on former experiences. Deeply muse on the days when it was better with you than now. Recall to mind the particular times when, and where, you had something of God, which you have not now, Psal. xlii. 6. God is saying to you, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me." Old experiences sometimes give a fresh smell, when handled anew, Gen. xxxv. 3. They are like spices that have long lain by hand, yet when broken give a fragrant smell. They do also remarkably contribute to fill our faces with blushing before the Lord. Every experience comes out with that inscription, "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord ; have I been a wilderness unto Israel ? a land of darkness." They contribute much to strengthen our faith, and to give us confidence with God, who is unchangeable. He that has been often cured by a physician, may come back to him with the greater confidence. Indeed, where we pay nothing, it is just contrary among men ; but not so with God, though our hearts in a law fit may think it so. But the best return you can make to God, is to come always again, when any thing is the matter with you.

5. Comply with the Spirit in afflicting dispensations. A sinner falls asleep. Christ knocks by his word, he awakens not, God then bringeth his rod to awaken him. Affliction is a special season for awakening influences, Hos. xii. 14, 15. Strike the iron while it is hot with the fire of affliction, as it is this day.

6. Consider seriously the signs of the times, in order to be stirred up, Matth. xvi. 3. Look about you, and behold how the fields seem to be ripening for a harvest of judgment. This was the thing that roused up Jonah, i. 4. Could we but look over our beds, and see how the fire is taking hold of the house, it would make us start to our feet. Concern about the public, not improved to the advantage of our own souls, is but little worth ; but the right noticing of state affairs, would make us like Noah, best when others are worst, doubling our diligence, and getting ourselves into a posture for an evil day, like Noah in the ark. But alas ! it is to be feared the evil overtake us, and find us, as Agag or Saul, among the stall ; or Jonah, or the evil servant, Matth. xxiv. 48, 49.

7. Labour to renew your repentance. Repentance is not only the work of a sinner at first conversion to God, but ought to be carried on all the days of our life; but in a special manner ought it to be set about, after great backslidings. Then we are called to repent, and do the first works. Satisfy not yourselves to be affected with your decay on a Sabbath day, and to stuff your prayers with dry inactive complaints, but forthwith call in your heart that has too long gone a roving. What wonder the ship dash on rocks, when there is none sitting at the helm. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Watch against vain thoughts and words. Watch the beginnings of a revival, and blow up the sparks.

Lastly, Pray for quickening influences. It is a great mercy, and the church prays for it, saying, "quicken us, and we will call upon thy name." When you come to offer your sacrifices, pray as Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 37, 38. Cry mightily for it. If your hearts be dead, yet try to rouse them, and force their fervency. A person may be so benumbed with cold, he can scarcely walk; yet by going, he becomes capable to run, and running gathers heat. The residue of the Spirit is with the Lord.

QUESTION 3. What shall we do to hold Christ still amongst us.

1. Give him lodging in the best room. He is a King, and must be honourably entertained. Receive him into your hearts. Christ is standing at the door of your hearts, knocking for entrance, but threatening to go away, if you will not open. "Be thou instructed," says he, "O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited." He has been long knocking, if he go, the bodies of some may be in the grave, their souls in hell, ere he return. The Jews had much guilt lying on them, but the rejecting of the bridegroom, and marriage feast, was the great thing that ruined them, Matth. xxii. So Scotland has much guilt, but if they continue to reject Christ, that will ruin them. Come then, old and young, to Christ. "Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope." The axe is laid to the root of the tree. God has his Son in the one hand, the axe in the other. He is setting life and death, the blessing and the curse, before you.

2. Let all his enemies be dismissed, the Achans in the camp. We cannot hold our lusts and Christ too. This is reasonable. He requires us to part with nothing but what they may well spare. Personal reformatioun is necessary to hold Christ still. National reformation is also necessary, but it must begin at home. Let us, therefore, every one reform ourselves and our families, for we are all guilty. There is none to cast a stone at another. Every one has a hand in bringing on wrath.

3. Lament after the Lord. This brought him back when gone, 1 Sam. vii. 2—6. The tears of the Lord's people, and their sighs after the Lord, go very far with a tender-hearted father. There are many things we cannot help; mourn over these, the sins of former, and present times. Alas! it is easy to speak of these, by what it is to be affected with the dishonour done to God by them.

4. Give him employment. Christ riseth not to pack up his wares, while sinners are about his hand, to buy them from him. O! for a deep sense of need, and a distinct view of our wants, that would make us be hanging on about his hand; and need takes a sure hold of Christ, and he cannot go from such, Mark vii. 24—30. If any thing be the ruin of this generation, it will be wearying of God. And alas! that is written on our foreheads, and therefore God is like to be weary of us, and is saying this day, "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies."

5. Improve his ordinances for the end for which they are appointed, and labour to get, and keep up communion with him in them. God has covered a table for us, these many years. How little the ordinances are regarded, is too evident. We have lost our appetite. God seems to be calling enemies to draw our table. O! that we were wise, at length, to prize them for their worth, before the want of them convince us of their value. If popery overspread this land again, what is now lightly valued, will, it is likely, be highly esteemed.

6. Study unity, and beware of division; 2 Cor. xiii. 11; Psalm cxxxiii. Our Lord lays an astonishing weight on unity amongst his followers: "That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Let no difference of judgment, in every point, break the bond of peace and communion. Our divisions, if they grow, will make us a prey to the common enemy, as they now make us a laughing stock to them. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. If ever there was a time for professors uniting it is now; as the beasts in the ark, when the deluge was come on. It is to be feared, that the fire is begun, that will melt some to their cost, before it be put out. Shall we unite in sin? No, by no means. But mark the apostle's rule. "Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing, ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Lastly, Pray; O! pray that the Lord may not leave us. "Why shouldst thou be as a man astonished; as a mighty man that cannot

save? Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not." Our time is a time of need, that may make them pray, that never bowed a knee before. Prayer has done great things. It has opened the windows of heaven, James v. 18. Prison doors, Acts xvi. 25, 26. It hath held the destroying hand of God, Exod. xxii. 10. Prayer has defeated armies of enemies invading the land, 2 Chron. xx: Isa. xxxvii. God has all in his own hand, and prayer engageth him on a people's side. "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, ask me of things to come; concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me." Pray for yourselves, for the land, and for the church.

QUESTION 4. Whether we have any ground to think that Christ will not leave us altogether? Although we have no ground to think that we shall escape some judgment; yet that God will not utterly leave us, there are some things that give us ground to hope, as,

1. There are some, however few, in the land, that are wrestling, partly resolved never to give consent to Christ's departure, by word or deed, Psalm cii. 16—18. Moses must let God alone, ere he cut off Israel, Exod. xxii. His prayers did not prevail to hold off a stroke, but a final stroke. Never yet did God altogether frustrate the prayers of a wrestling remnant. "For the Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name, will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee."

2. There are some, whose work it is to walk with God, and to fear the Lord, and endeavouring to keep their garments clean; and however few they be, God has made large promises unto them, Isa. xxxiii. 15—20. There are some, who have Christ's love tokens yet lying by them, to bring forth in a day of distress; who if the Lord should seem to cast off this covenanted land, would bring them forth and say discern to whom these belong, and we are his.

3. Our mother is yet bearing children to her husband. We dare not say that she is so fruitful as she has been, yet she is not become barren. She is still nursing some, and bringing forth others. As there are some yet, who drew their first breath in the wilderness, so there is a holy seed brought forth since the revolution, to be the substance of the land. And in several corners of the land, some young ones are looking kindly to Christ. When the gardner is planting new slips in the garden, it is an evidence he intends not to give it over. As Manoah's wife said unto him, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would at this time have told us such things as these."

4. This land hath been married to the Lord in covenant. It was entered into a covenant with the Lord, early after the reformation from popery. That work, indeed, hath suffered many interruptions from enemies, yet it hath always got up again. Many have laid down their lives for that cause. We had their prayers for the revival of that work, and we can scarcely think we have yet reaped the full fruit of their blood and prayers; or that God will divorce a people not willing to part with him.

Lastly, Much is said of the glory of the latter days, see Isaiah ix. The man of sin will be brought down; and if the pope fall, it is likely prelates will not stand. But yet, matters in the churches of Christ, will be according to the pattern in the mount.

But after all, there is like to be a sad stroke in the first place, and that some of our eyes shall be closed, and many of this generation taken out of the way, before the Lord return, if he were once gone away, as Micah vii. 11—13. It is like, our way to it may be through a red sea; so that we may say, as Balaam, "Alas! who shall live when God doth this?"

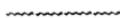
QUESTION LAST —But what shall we do in the meantime, in such a reeling time as this?

ANSWER.—You that never covenanted with God, enter into a personal covenant with him' and let others solemnly renew their covenant, and make a solemn upgiving of themselves unto the Lord. "One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." This is a chariot, in which Christ's bride may ride safely to heaven, through fire and water. And as we are again called to national fasting, so in the meantime, let that be your exercise. "And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart. All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart."

2. Lay your accounts with, and prepare for suffering. Strive, like Paul, "to be ready, not to be bound only, but also to die, for the name of the Lord Jesus." The market is like to be raised, and our lightness and frothiness like to be daunted. The tender mercies of Popish idolaters are cruel. Much blood is in the skirts of the whore and there may be more.

3. Labour to get yourselves wrapt up in a promise, Gen. xxxii. 12. Many of God's children, have dined, supped, and dwelt in a promise, in an evil day. It has been instead of all, and cheered their hearts under the want of all, Hab. iii. 17. It has been a comfort to them in distress, life, when half dead, Psalm cxix. 49, 50.

A song in the house of their pilgrimage, verse 54. When the water of God's wrath is coming down, he is a wise man that climbs to such a branch of the tree of life growing on the banks, and holds by it till the flood be over. Amen.



December 22, 1705.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TONGUE.

SERMON XXXVII.

JAMES iii. 6,

The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.

THE keeping of the tongue is one of those duties, that entitles a man to safety from evil times, and therefore must now be urged as a seasonable duty. "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." The difficulty of this duty is such, that James saith, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." The wisest monarch could hardly govern a great part of the world; how difficult then must it be to govern a world, and that a world of iniquity. The tongue is a world of iniquity, a heap of evils; as in the world many things are contained, so in the tongue.

I shall endeavour to make some discovery of this world of iniquity. As it is beyond my power, so it is not my design to make a full discovery of it. We must leave a void for the unknown parts of it. But behold a few of them: This world of iniquity is divided into two parts, undue silence, and sinful speaking. These are the higher and lower parts of this world, yet quickly may men travel from the one to the other. I shall speak of these in their order.

I. Undue silence, when the tongue rests idle, when God calls it to work. Our tongues are our glory, and should not be involved in a dark cloud of silence, when God calls them to shine forth.

1. Silence is unseasonable, when sin rageth and roareth. When men are dishonouring God, it is sad that our tongues should be nailed. When men declare their sin, as Sodom, it is sad that in our mouths there should be no reproofs. "Thou shalt in any wise