

THE
DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS
OF
TRUE BELIEVERS.

III. IN RELATION TO THEIR SPEECH, AND REVERENCE OF GOD'S NAME.

A CAVEAT AGAINST PROFANE SWEARING, AND A PERSUASIVE
TO PLAIN SPEAKING, WITHOUT UNHALLOWED ADDITIONS.

JAMES v. 12.

*But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath : but let your yea, be yea, and your nay, nay ; lest ye fall into condemnation.**

In these words we have three things.

I. A serious caveat against profane oaths or swearing : for otherwise an oath is an ordinance of God, Heb. vi. 16. and so to be used upon a due call thereto, Jer. iv. 2. In this caveat we have,

(1.) The matter cautioned against. [1.] Swearing by the *creatures*, as by *heaven* or *earth*, forms of oaths, it would seem, then were in use among untender men. [2.] *Any other oath* as well as these ; oaths of the same kind, namely, by creatures ; and oaths of other kinds, namely, by God their Maker. That the latter as well as the former profane swearing is here comprehended, appears from the universality of the expression, and the direction as to men's ordinary converse given in the following words, where the one as well as the other is excluded.

(2.) The manner of the caveat. It is given, [1.] Very affectionately, *My brethren*. They were so in respect of their nation, and in respect of the Christian religion which they professed, being believing Jews. Though heathens and infidels think nothing of swearing, yet it ill becomes the Christian brother-hood, being so

* The sermons on this text were preached at Ettrick in August and September, 1724.

very contrary to the laws of Christ, Matth. v. 34—37*. [2.] With a peculiar earnestness, *Above all things*. This refers to, (1.) His guarding them against impatience, ver. 10, 11. When once men let their passion loose, and lose their patience, they are apt to break out into blasphemies, horrid oaths, and curses. (2.) To a corrupt custom prevailing among the Jews of customary swearing, and therefore hardly to be rooted out: which he would therefore have them with the utmost care and diligence to set themselves against.

2. A plain direction as to men's ordinary converse. In opposition to the larding of your conversation with such profane mixtures, let your speech be plain and simple, consisting of plain affirmations or denials, without these unhallowed additions. If ye intend to assert a thing, which is yea, then say *Yea*, or *Yes*, or, It is so. If ye mean to deny a thing, which is nay, then say, *Nay*, or, It is not so.

3. A motive pressing both the caveat and direction, *Lest ye fall into condemnation; Gr. judgment, under judgment*. He looks to the third commandment, of God's *not holding guiltless him that taketh his Name in vain*. God will be avenged on those that do otherwise, and ye will fall under his judgment on that score, if ye purge not your language from these things.

The text affords three doctrines.

Doct. I. Profane swearing is a horrid evil, with the utmost watchfulness to be avoided by all Christians.

Doct. II. God requires men's speech in their ordinary converse to be plain and simple, as yea and nay, without unhallowed additions, of the nature of oaths.

Doct. III. Profane swearing, and the like ungodly speeches akin thereto, will make the guilty fall under the fearful judgment of God.

I shall prosecute each doctrine in order.

Doct. I. Profane swearing is a horrid evil, with the utmost watchfulness to be avoided by all Christians.

Profane swearing is of two sorts; swearing by God or Christ, and by creatures.

First, Swearing by God himself, and by Christ who is God. Such swearing is duty, when the matter is of weight, and men are called thereto of God, Heb. vi. 16. Jer. iv. 2. But it is profane when men swear by God or Christ,

1. Falsely, Mal. iii. 5. This is perjury, which is a falsehood con-

* The author has a set of Sermons on this text, preached also at Ettrick in 1707, but not yet published.

firmed by an oath, a breach at once of the third and ninth command. Sometimes people are called to swear by authority, and swearing falsely in that case they are guilty of perjury. Sometimes they are not called to swear, but of their own accord, without any just call, they swear, and swear what is false. This is doubtless perjury as well as the other, being a swearing falsely.

Perjury is an open affronting of an omniscient just God, and is near akin to Atheism. It is a calling of God to be witness to a lie, a playing with revenging justice, a daring of Heaven's vengeance, a wilful devoting of one's soul to destruction. For in an oath men invoke God to judge them, according to the truth or falsehood of what they swear. It looseth the bond of human society, and deservedly makes men infamous, and binds over the party to the fearful judgments of God, Zech. v. 4, "I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof." Mal. iii. 5, "I will come near to you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against—false swearers.

2. Vainly, rashly, and usually, in common converse, without any just call, whether the thing sworn be true or false, good or bad, Matth. v. 34, 37. This is that swearing so frequent among those called Christians. Some have a God thus to swear by, though not a God to pray to; as if they would own no God, but to dishonour his name. Others have found the art of joining Christ and Belial so, that one while they will be praying to God, and another while swearing by his holy name profanely. Jam. iii. 10, "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing."

This is a horrid evil. It is,

(1.) A flat contradiction to the letter of the law, even as murder and adultery is, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*. Many ways the commands are broken, though one do not directly transgress the letter of them: so is the third command by a hypocritical profession: but profane swearers cross the letter.

(2.) It is a profanation of a holy thing, which is very dangerous, Lev. xix. 8; a using that for a common, which God has set apart for a holy use only. And, [1.] It is a profanation of the holy name, which is awful, reverend, and holy, Lev. xxii. 32. It is a prostituting of that tremendous name to serve men's lusts and passions. [2.] It is a profanation of an holy ordinance of worship, appointed of God to be used holily and reverently, with hands lifted up to heaven, upon just and weighty causes, and a due call, to be an

end of strife in matters which cannot be otherwise cleared than by invoking God as witness, Jer. iv. 2. "Thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness."—Would it not make one's heart tremble, to see men profane the sacraments by a common usage of them? An oath is an holy ordinance instituted by God, as well as the sacraments. How then do men fearlessly bring swearing into common use in their common conversation?

(3.) It argues a profane contempt of God, Psal. xxxvi. 1, 3. An ordinary measure of the fear of God upon the heart, would keep a man from profane swearing by his name; and the consciences of common swearers may witness that they would take it heinously, if others should deal as freely and ordinarily with their names, as they do with the name of the God that made them.

Secondly, Swearing by creatures. The Papists worship creatures, and consequently think it lawful to swear by the creatures they worship; as by the holy bread of the sacrament, the bread of God; and no wonder, for they worship it; and by St. Mary, for they worship her too. But how many Protestants are there, who though in their principles they are against giving divine worship to any creature, yet do in contradiction thereto swear by creatures, as by their *faith, troth or truth, soul, conscience, &c.* This is in no case lawful, but in every case profane swearing.

1. It is a sacrilege and idolatry. It is a taking away from God the worship due to him alone, and giving it to the creature, Matth. iv. 10. compared with Deut. vi. 13. Swearing is an invoking of the object sworn by to be witness of the truth of what we affirm or deny, to judge and punish us in case we swear falsely, Jer. v. 7. Is your faith, troth, &c., God? No: but you make these idols. And an idol is nothing in the world. It is likely it is even so with your faith, &c. Many hug their faith, troth, &c. so in their mouths by swearing, till their consciences are seared, and neither faith nor truth is left them.

2. These things having a relation to God, the dishonour reaches to him: they are his works, and being so profaned, his name is profaned. *Heaven is God's throne, and the earth his footstool*, Matth. v. 34, 35. and therefore are not to be sworn by, according to our Saviour's reasoning. So may we say, Faith is the gift of God, truth his image, the soul his creature in a special manner, who is the Father of spirits, conscience the candle of the Lord, God's deputy in the soul: and therefore are not to be sworn by.

3. They are not so our own, that we can engage them by an oath, for the least change to be made upon them, Matth. v. 36. In these oaths men do impawn their faith, truth, soul, conscience, to lose

them, if it be not so as they say. And is this a small matter? Where have we such dominion and power over these things, as thus for every trifle to lay them in pawn? Hezekiah broke the brazen serpent when abused to idolatry. Take heed God do not so break and destroy thy soul, while thus played with?

4. It is a horrid abuse of these precious things. Is that faith, by which thou must be saved, or damned without it, no more precious in thine eyes, than thus to make a by-word of it? Is that truth, without which thou art lost with the father of lies, no more to be regarded? Is that soul which could not be redeemed but by the blood of Christ, and that conscience which could no other way be purged, to be thus used?

5. *Lastly*, Swearing by the creatures was ordinary among Pagans, and heretics were the first after the Jews that brought it in among Christians; and Papists, as has been said, maintain it as a principle agreeable to their idolatry. Oh! that men professing Christ and his truth, would be ashamed of them!

Use. I dehort you from swearing, either by God or Christ vainly, without a lawful call, or by the creature in any case. Avoid all swearing in common converse. Let such as have got a custom of it, leave it off; and those who yet are free, watch against it. I offer the following motives to enforce this dehortation.

Mot. 1. It is highly dishonouring to God, and provoking in his sight. He hath said, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*, &c. Whether we consider him as our Creator to whom we owe all reverence, or as our Saviour who has been our Helper, and offers us again the forfeited life and salvation, it is horrible. To hear men profaning the name of that God, who made them, gave them a tongue, life, &c. profaning that name by which they must be saved, or else perish, is frightful. They are made to differ from brutes, by a soul and conscience; and faith and truth makes men saints, differing for other men: how dishonouring is it to God to profane these?

Mot. 2. It is scandalous with respect to our neighbour; and that is no small aggravation of the guilt, Matth. xviii. 7, "Wo unto the world because of offences: for it must needs be that offences come: but wo to that man by whom the offence cometh." Men swear speaking to others ordinarily. And if they that hear them be godly, it wounds them, and grieves them to the heart; and that is dangerous, Matth. xviii. 6. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." If they be ungodly and profane, it hardens them, and

is apt to breed more contempt of God in them. If men be but sober, it is nauseous to them. Many a time it is a snare, involving others in guilt, always giving a bad example, and so tending to ruin the souls of others, Rom. xiv. 13, 15.

Mot. 3. It is devilish in respect of the smallness of the temptation there is to it. Profit draws the thief to steal, the unjust to cheat, the oppressor to oppress. Pleasure ensnares men into gluttony, drunkenness, uncleanness, and other sensualities. But what profit or pleasure is to be found in swearing? What fruit brings it in, but the abhorrence of the sober, and the fearful judgments of God? Which of your senses does it gratify? Other sinners serve the devil for pay; but the swearer as a volunteer, for nought.

Mot. last, It is ruining, ruining to the soul. (1.) It makes havoc of the soul's case. It wears off tenderness, makes a profane heart, insensible of duty to God. A custom of swearing sears and stupifies the conscience. (2.) It will ruin the soul for ever, and bring wrath upon the guilty. Sometimes it brings visible judgments upon men on the earth, whereof there have been many fearful instances. However, if they repent not, it will ruin them in another world, Deut. xxviii. 58, 59. "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law, that are written in this book, that thou mayst fear this glorious and fearful Name, The Lord thy God; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance."

Doct. II. God requires men's speech in their ordinary converse to be plain and simple, as yea and nay, without unhallowed additions of the nature of oaths.

This plainness and simplicity of speech in ordinary converse, we may take a view of in these two particulars.

First, It consists in men's accustoming themselves to plain and simple asserting or denying of things, according to their judgment; and not lightly bringing in sacred things to confirm what they say, or vent their passion. This is sufficient to answer the ends of common conversation, *Yea, Yea indeed, Truly,* &c. and obtains among tender persons, who are most regardful of truth.

Secondly, It excludes out of speech in common conversation, all that which is akin to oaths, where there is no sufficient call thereunto. And so it condemns not only all express swearing by God or the creatures, but,

1. All minced oaths, where the form of swearing is not used, but suppressed. Yet one may plainly perceive the words, if they have any sense at all, or be of the nature of swearing; as, *Good faith,*

faith, haith, hai', fai', d' ye, Mary, &c. Of these some have such a custom, that they can speak few sentences without them.

(1.) Though one could not be convinced that these things are evil, yet he cannot miss the conviction that they are evil-like. And you can never think that it is duty to God or your neighbour to speak so. On this very ground ye ought to forbear them, 1 Thess. v. 22. "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Jude, 23. "—Hating even the garments spotted by the flesh." Whoso will not shun appearances of evil, will easily venture on real evils.

(2.) I appeal to your consciences, whether these be the language of the most tender and serious sort of Christians, or of profane men and rough untender professors; and whether or not the more tender any one is in their walk, their speech is purged from these. Let that then have weight with you, spoken by the apostle, Phil. iv. 9. "Those things which ye have both learned and received, and heard and seen in me, do."

(3.) They are offensive to the serious godly; they grate on their ears, as the language of hell. It is grievous to them to hear men who are baptized in the name of Christ, speaking half the language of Canaan, and half that of Ashdod. And on this score they are dangerous, Matth. xviii. 6, 7. forecited.

(4.) At best they are idle words, and therefore sinful. What good purpose do they serve for? Are they of any use for God's honour, your own good, or the good of those with whom ye converse? Consider therefore that declaration, Matth. xii. 36. "I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

(5.) They are more than yea and nay, and of another kind; and so are condemned in our text. And ye must either make minced oaths of them, or ye cannot make sense of them. Is not *Good faith is't*, &c. more, and of another kind, than *Yea it is*? Take heed of them then, lest ye fall into condemnation. Is downright profane swearing a thing that it is such a pity to be deprived of the liberty of, that ye must needs retain some remains of it with you?

But some may be ready to say, They are but little sins. *Ans.* Every sin deserves God's wrath; and there is none so little, but they will ruin you for ever, if they be not washed away by the Redeemer's blood, as one little leak will sink the ship. Gal. iii. 10. "Cursed is he that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." If they are but little, how wilt thou do a great thing for God, that wilt not please him in such a small matter? Alas! if they be little, they are not few. Many grains make a mountain, and many drops an ocean. If one be

drowned, it is all one to him, whether it be in a little water or in the ocean.

2. All light or irreverent using of the name of God. His name is dreadful, and requires to be mentioned with profound reverence: and it will be found, that those who have least of God in their hearts, have most of his name interposed in their common talk. If the Mahometans find a piece of paper, they take it up, and put it in the hole of a wall; because the name of God may be written on it. Alas! if paper were put in the holes of walls, at every time the name of God is profaned among Christians, the holes of the walls would soon be full. It is profaned,

(1.) In exclamations, where the holy name is interposed at any little thing untender persons wonder at, are vexed about, or seem to fear. Hence some cry, O God! O Lord! some, God bless us, save us, guide us, forgive us! Christ or Lord have a care of us; God be wi' you; which is an ordinary salutation. What! (may some say) may we not pray to God to bless us, and be with our neighbours, &c. ? *Ans.* Yes, indeed; but then ye should use them in a praying manner, with holy reverence, answerable affections, faith in the blood of Christ as praying indeed. Of which we have an example, Ruth. ii. 4. "And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you: and they answered him, The Lord bless thee." But to prostitute that name to give a vent to your foolish passions, to use these things with a rashness and irreverence, is profane. God's blessing, &c. are matters of greatest weight; and those who are most concerned for them, will not seek them that way.

(2.) In permissions; as, *Let him do it in God's name.* I know no face can be put on this as it is used in common talk, but a profanation of that holy name. And I dare say, it is not used by those who walk up and down in the name of the Lord, and that remember his name is dreadful.

(3.) In obsecrations or entreaties; as, For God's sake, For God's love, &c. For Christ's sake, &c. No doubt, according to the scripture, these things may be used in weighty matters, so it be with due reverence; but in trifles it is profane. Let them be things that concern one's life and salvation, that ye will entreat for that way; and when ye do it, let it appear you have the awe of God on your spirits. But interpose not the holy name at every trifle.

(4.) In appeals to God in light matters; matters of no seriousness; as, *God knows.* The omniscience of God is a matter of great importance, and his people may take the comfort of it under reproaches, which otherwise they cannot fully clear themselves of be-

fore the world. But lightly to appeal to that Judge, is the way to bring wrath on the appellant. The serious thoughts of God's knowledge, may make the best to tremble; and strike such dread on the worst, as they may not make a light matter of it. We find indeed such an appeal made by the apostle, 2 Cor. xii. 3. but it was in a serious weighty affair, which none knew but God. But what is that to a profane use of it in trifles, which perhaps many do know?

3. All asseverations of the nature of oaths; as, *As I am a Christian, have a soul to be saved.* That these are akin to oaths, is evident from that form of an oath used by God himself, *As I live, saith the Lord:* and therefore they are not to be used in common conversation. And as oaths they imply an imprecation, *viz.* Let me not be reckoned a Christian, Let me not have a soul to be saved. And none will therefore, in common conversation use them, who have a due value for Christianity, and the salvation of their souls.

4. Cursing, whereby one imprecates evil on himself or others, whether absolutely or conditionally, if they do not so and so. And the more solemn and deliberate it is, it is the worse. This is one of the characters of a wicked man, Psal. x. 7. "His mouth is full of cursing." There are three ways whereby men utter this language of hell.

(1.) Sometimes God is expressly invoked in the curse. Thus profane men will invoke God to damn them, confound them, or curse themselves or others. This speaks a profane contempt of God, a defiance of his curse and eternal wrath: and surely their damnation, as it will be just, so it will be dreadful, and the more cutting to their consciences through eternity, that they have prayed for it.

(2.) Sometimes the name of God is suppressed, but the curse belched out. So some will wish that themselves or others may break their neck, that an ill chance, wo, or shame may light on them. These are curses indeed, wherein though the name of God is suppressed, yet he is called to execute their wicked wishes against themselves or others, forasmuch as these must be the effects of divine providence, if they be all.

(3.) Sometimes the devil is invoked in the curse. And thus many are found oftener praying to the devil to take themselves or others, than to God to save them. They cannot deny a thing, but the name of the devil must be in it. And the devil has several names given him to serve this purpose, as *Foul, Fiend, &c.*

Thus I have raked in this dunghill for your warning and reformation; and by what is said ye may judge of other things of this nature, which I have not named. It is a plain rule against all these, *Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay.* I proceed to

Doctr. ult. Profane swearing, and the like ungodly speeches akin thereto, will make the guilty fall under the fearful judgment of God. So the third commandment threatens.

The import of this, we may take up in the following things.

1. However lightly men look on these, and overlook them, God writes them down guilty upon every such profane speech. There is a book of remembrance written with God, whereby none of them all shall be lost. Men's Judge is their witness in these, as in other things; and if they must fall under condemnation for them, surely they are remembered. *For, says our Lord, by thy words thou shalt be condemned, Matth. xii. 37.*

2. God will call men to a reckoning for them sooner or later. Though they may now pass without a challenge, the time will come that they will get deep challenges for them, either in mercy or in wrath. Their words that they think light of now, shall sometime lie like a talent of lead on their consciences, and pierce them like swords, Matth. xii. 36. "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Jude, 16.

3. If ever they get the pardon of them, they shall be made to condemn themselves for them, and be cut to the heart for the sin and scandal of them, and go with a bowed down back on account of that profanation of the holy name, and their ungodly speeches of the nature of oaths, 1 Tim. i. 13.

4. *Lastly*, If men get not the pardon of them by faith, if they repent not of them, and reform, they shall fall under eternal condemnation by the weight of the guilt of them, Matth. xii. 37. forecited.

I conclude with an use of exhortation.

I exhort you to purify and keep clean your speech, that *your yea may be yea, and your nay, nay*; and that you will beware of profane swearing by God or the creatures, all cursing, light and irreverent use of the holy name, and all speeches whatsoever of the nature of profane swearing. For motives, consider,

1. God is a God of glorious majesty, infinitely above us and all creatures in his perfections: therefore he is to be feared by us; Job xxv. 2. "Dominion and fear are with him. Psal. lxxxix. 7. God is greatly to be feared,—and to be had in reverence." His name is reverend and holy; and what he has made secret, it is high presumption in us to profane, Mal. i. 14. *My name is dreadful*, says he. The angels adore it, the devils tremble at it; and shall only men trample it under foot without fear? He has fenced about the honour of his name with an awful hedge, Deut. xxviii. 58, 59, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayst fear this glorious and fearful name, the

Lord thy God ; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance." Let this terror make men afraid to break over this hedge.

2. Ye are God's debtors for the use of your tongue, and it is your glory that ye can speak with it. Turn it not against him who gave it you, by your ungodly speeches. He gave you a faculty of speaking for his own glory and your comfort : he might have prevented your swearing, cursing, &c. by causing you to have been born dumb. And yet it is in his hand when he will, to take the use of your tongue from you ; and so to lay the swearing tongue even before death lay it.

3. This is a sin that debaucheth the conscience in a particular manner, razing out of it any tolerable reverence of God. It is hard to say, that it is the spot of God's children, Psal. cxxxix. 20. Many otherwise loose men have had a horror of, the natural conscience startling at that sin to which there is so very little temptation. But those who are once engaged in a course of it, seldom get it laid aside : so that whereas many who are otherwise very extravagant in their youth, afterwards take up themselves ; it is often seen that this grows grayheaded with those who have addicted themselves to it. The custom in it takes away the sense of it, so that it becomes in a manner natural to them : and hence it comes out with them, ere ever they are aware, their tongue being so set on swearing or cursing run, that it outruns the mind. A sad evidence of a hardened heart and seared conscience.

4. I observed before, that it was devilish sin. I shall here add, that it is in a peculiar manner hellish. There are many sins which this life will put an end to ; there will be no gluttony, drunkenness, uncleanness, &c. in hell : but will there be no profaning of the holy name nor cursing there ? Yea, there will ; that is a sin that will go along with the cursed company to the pit, and will be carried to a height, and carried on there, Rev. xvi. 21. And an eternity will be long enough to give men their fill of such speech. In the nature of some sins there is something pleasant to the corrupt nature, which being mixed with the poisonous cup, makes sinners greedily drink it off : but cursing and swearing are in their nature malicious, and can afford no pleasure even to corrupt nature, unless it arise from the opening of the mouth against the heavens, and natively come from a heart rankled and fretted, which will be the lot of sinners signally in hell, where they will weep, roar, gnash their teeth, and blaspheme.

5. It is a sin that brings down wrath in a special manner,

(1.) On a land, Hos. iv. 1, 2, "The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Jer. v. 7, 9. How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" It is a burden to the Spirit of God, to the spirits of his people, and makes a land to mourn, Jer. xxiii. 10, "Because of swearing the land mourneth." And none needs doubt but the false swearing, the forswearing, and profane swearing in common converse, in this generation, will make Scotland mourn. How can a land miss a flame of wrath, in which are so many tongues set on fire of hell?

(2.) On families, to consume and root them out from the earth, Zech. v. 3, 4, "This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth, shall be cut off as on this side, according to it: and every one that sweareth, shall be cut off as on that side, according to it. I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof." It brings a curse that a house cannot long stand under. And therefore masters of families should take heed to themselves, and to children and servants addicted to this sin, as to those who would bring down the house about their ears. Many times things go wrong not for want of diligence, but there is a secret curse upon this and other sins that blasts them.

(3.) On the particular persons; on their bodies, Deut. xxviii. 58, 59, forecited. On their souls too. See the text. Will idle words ruin men for ever? how much more profane swearing and cursing words? Have pity on your own souls, and sacrifice them not to a wicked tongue. Remember the rich man in hell, whose tongue was tormented in that flame. Heavy judgments have been before the world inflicted on such persons, Psal. lxiv. 7—9, "God shall shoot at them with a arrow, suddenly shall they be wounded. So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: all that see them, shall flee away. And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing."

6. As it is a scandalous sin, so it is especially a scandal, *i. e.* a stumbling block, to the rising generation. It was heavy to Nehemiah, chap. xiii. 24, 25. but he soon saw where the blame lay. And is it not lamentable to hear young ones among us, as they begin to

speak, to begin to curse and swear; and as they grow in years, to grow in this hellish art? How do they learn it but from the elder people? They learn to curse and swear at those who learn them to speak, at their fathers and mothers, or profane servants, or young ones like themselves, who learn it at home. Thus these sinners transmit their sin from generation to generation; and when ye shall be dead and gone, the cursing and swearing set afoot by you shall remain and be going on; and consequently your guilt shall be increased after ye are away.

7. Your tongue shall either be for ever praising God in heaven, or blaspheming in hell. I beseech you soberly consider, whether going on in a course of cursing and swearing, you look likeliest to have the one or the other for your lot. Is it a preparation for heaven or for hell?

8. To forbear cursing, swearing, and profaning the name of God, is but a small attainment in religion. Some, by their education, who never yet had saving grace, have been kept free from these things. And the reforming thereof will but bring you out from among the number of the profane. If it is such a matter for you to reform in that point, which is but in the outward man; what way will ye come to reform the heart-lusts that belong to the inner man? But ye must have pure hearts and clean hands too, else ye will never see heaven.

9. *Lastly*, Consider the life and death of Jesus, both which were for glorifying that name, which ye profane. His speech was *verily, verily*, i. e. truly, truly. All his life-time he was blasphemed, and particularly by the thief on the cross, which was a part of his sufferings. Why will ye go on thus to crucify the Lord of glory afresh?

Now I shall endeavour to obviate some shifts, whereby sinners endeavour to sooth themselves, and ward off conviction and serious thoughts of reformation in this point.

1. These things are very common; and there are few that have not an use of some of them: therefore we need not think so much of them.

Ans. The more common the worse, as the diseases are which turn epidemic. God commands you to turn back from following the multitude, which are in conspiracy against him, trampling on his laws, Exod. xxiii. 2. And men must either cease to sin with the multitude, or perish with them, Matth. vii. 13; Rev. iii. 4. If it be ill with you, ye think it will be ill with many a one; and so it will. But it will be no comfort to go to hell with company, if we may believe the rich man there, Luke xvi. If men think that, going to hell by troops, they will be conquerors, and not sufferers, they will be wretchedly disappointed.

2. But several good people have an use of these things; and we find Peter cursed and swore.

Ans. Peter under a violent fit of temptation fell into that snare, and with the same breath denied his part in Christ: but he repented bitterly for it, and reformed. Do ye so too, and ye shall do well. There are many whom the world counts good people, whom God never counted so. You may see how the heart-searching God reckons in this case, Psal. cxxxix. 20. "They speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain." Psal. x. 7. *His mouth is full of cursing.* If there be any such good people, ye have much to reckon for that pick out their blemishes, and follow them; and they also have much to account for, who lay a stumbling-block before the blind. But it is God's word, and not men's practice, that is the rule of our life, and that we will be judged by, 1 Cor. xi. 1. *Be ye followers of me,* says the apostle, *even as I also am of Christ.*

3. We have no ill in our minds, when we use these words; they just come out rashly.

Ans. Ill words are certainly the product of an ill heart, Matth. xii. 34; Mark vii. 21, 22. But alas! most men are strangers to the ill of their hearts, Isa. xlv. 20. They that murdered Christ's disciples, John xvi. and Saul, 1 Sam. xv. when he spared Agag, and the cattle of the Amalekites, might have pretended they had no ill in their minds; yet the former were murderers, and the latter a rebel to God. It is God's law, and not men's designs, that is the rule of their words and actions. The tongue is an unruly member, and they that speak rashly with it, cannot speak well. Ye are obliged to watch it, and bridle it. This was David's practice, Psal. xxxix. 1. "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me." Your rashness is your sin, and one sin will not excuse another. Good Moses was kept out of Canaan for his rash speaking, Psal. cvi. 31, 32. They spoke rashly who made excuses for not coming to the marriage of the King's son, Luke xiv.; and see the effect of it, ver. 24. *I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden, shall taste of my supper.* Let the awe of God be on your hearts, and it will prevent that rashness.

4. But what matter of the devil's name how it be used? sure it is not holy.

Ans. He is the enemy of God, and our soul's enemy; and an intercommuned spirit, whom we are not allowed to speak to without a special call. How then dare men adventure to call on him to do this or that, as to take themselves or others? and in their words to give things to him, as if it were a bit, as *Devil a bit, Fiend a bit?*

It is known this is the very thing he seeks from his drudges, that they call him to do this or that for them; and that they offer him something, be it ever so little. But the love and fear of God would teach you, that "Their sorrows shall be multiplied, that hasten after another god; and that you should not take up their names into your lips," Psal. xvi. 4.

5. Well, it is but seldom I fall into these things.

Ans. Now and then sinning will cost everlasting destruction, if repentance prevent it not. You are allowed no time for these things, but they are forbidden you always. But a common swearer getting grace to repent and reform, is in the way of salvation, while the man that sees no need of repentance, because he is but seldom guilty, will perish. Stop however in time, lest your seldom turned to ordinary, be turned to a confirmed custom.

6. But all these things are but words, and we hope God will not be so severe for words.

Ans. It is a sad hope that is kept up over the belly of God's truth. Here is God's word, Matth. xii. 37. *By thy words thou shalt be condemned.* Must not either God's word or your hope fall then? Read the doom of such good hoppers, Deut. xxix. 19, 20. "And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven." And that ye may assure yourselves, God will be as severe for these things, as it is said of him from the word, see Zech. v. 2, 3. "And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits. Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth, shall be cut off as on this side, according to it; and every one that sweareth, shall be cut off as on that side, according to it." Compare 1 Kings vi. 3.

7. I neither curse nor swear, but when I am provoked.

Ans. (1.) Where is your patience, in which ye are called to possess your souls? Luke xxi. 19. The proper season of exercising it is when ye are provoked. Will it excuse your cursing and swearing, that in the first place ye cast off patience? (2.) I hope it is not God who provokes you, is it? Will a man tear his own flesh, or stab his dearest friend to the heart, because an enemy provokes him? Yet you will set your mouths against the heavens, because a

fellow-worm disoblige you. However, if men will curse and swear, being provoked, they may assure themselves that God will destroy them for it, being provoked with their cursing and swearing, Jer. v. 7, 9. forecited.—But flesh and blood is not able to abide the provocations I meet with. *Ans. Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* They are flesh and blood as well as ye, that bear great provocations.

8. I have got a custom of it, and it is out with me ere ever I am aware.

Ans. The greater is your sin that you have a custom of it. You are like those, Jer. ix. 5, “They have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity.” Surely ye were not born cursing and swearing as breathing: but ye have learned it. Ye learned that custom at the instigation of the devil; unlearn it again at God’s call. Is not that thief, that murderer, that has got a custom of it, esteemed by you the worst of thieves and murderers? And are not you who have got a custom of cursing and swearing, the worst of cursers and swearers? How dreadful must your case be, and how like the devil, to whom it is become just natural to profane the holy name! Look to it in time, for it is next door to a desperate case. Some have died cursing and swearing, the thief on the cross blaspheming, others roaring out horrid oaths. Now what do ye know but ye may die roving, without the exercise of your judgment? Would it be any thing strange, that ye who have a custom of cursing and swearing, should in that case go off the world, speaking according to your custom?

9. But it is no sooner out but I regret it, I repent of it.

Ans. But do ye reform it? Ye regret it; so did Pharaoh, so did Judas; but they mended not, till they were ended; and so I doubt many in hell this day are regretting what they did and spoke on earth. Ye repent of it but still ye go back with the dog to the vomit, and with the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire. What repentance is that? Harken to the call of God, Ezek. xviii. 30, 31, “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God: repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart, and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” It is a sad sign, that it has never been bitter enough to you to this day; and ye may even say with the drunkard, Prov. xiii. *ult.* “They have stricken me, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.”

10. *Lastly*, I have often resolved against it, but I find I cannot help it.

Ans. It seems you have never struck at the root of it, the sin of your nature, Psal. xxxvi. 1. Ye have never gone about it in faith, Psal. cxli. 3. But, withal, the abstaining from profaning the holy name of God, by cursing and swearing, and reforming a custom of that, is but an act of moral discipline, not beyond the power of a natural man. I make no question, but a sixpence for every oath would at length carry you over that custom. But be it so, that you cannot help it: I ask you, whether or no you desire to have it helped? And so I close with some directions.

1. Go to Christ in the way of believing, that he may help it, 1 Tim. i. 13, 14. There is help in Christ for it: there is fulness of merit in him to remove the guilt of it, and of the Spirit to remove the power of it. He is lifted up on the pole of the gospel to be looked to for the justification of our persons, and sanctification of our natures. There is virtue in him for curing us of all our heart and life plagues, those running sores not excepted, which have spurned all other remedies. Mind the woman in the gospel, of whom it is said, Luke viii. 43, 44. "And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him, and touched the border, of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanchèd." He is the great Physician, and heals all diseases of the soul, Psal. ciii. 3. No disease is the reproach of this Physician. He is by office Saviour of the world, and your Saviour, 1 John iv. 14. and he saves those who employ him from their sins, Matth. i. 21. And it is your following other methods of cure, and not going to Christ by faith for it, that makes that running sore in you seem incurable. For all other means but the blood and Spirit of Christ applied by faith serve but to skin over the sore, after which it is ready to break out again.

Quest. How should I make use of Christ in the way of believing for the remedy of this evil?

Ans. (1.) Believe that he is held forth and offered to you in the gospel with all his salvation, and particularly his salvation from that sin, Isa. xlv. 22. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." This is the constant voice of the gospel, Rev. xxii. 17. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth, say, Come, and let him that is athirst, come: And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Jesus Christ crucified is by the appointment of God the great ordinance of heaven for the sanctification of sinners, and heal-

ing them of all spiritual plagues; being made of God unto them *sanctification*, 1 Cor. i. 30.

(2) Trust on him for his whole salvation, upon the ground of the divine faithfulness plighted in the promise. Believe that he will by his grace save you from all your guilt, and all your sin, and that in particular. This has the promise of salvation, Acts xvi. 31. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Not only kept out of hell hereafter, but immediately on your believing saved from all your spiritual plagues whatsoever; so that the guilt of eternal wrath shall no more lie on you for them, nor the reigning power of them be any more unbroken. The ground of this confidence you have, John iii. 16. "Whosoever believeth in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life." But this trust must be on him for all: for faith looks to Christ for his whole salvation.

(3.) Make use of the means of reformation in the faith of the promise, 2 Tim. ii. 1. "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." The promise you have, Micah vii. 19. "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us: he will subdue our iniquities: and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." To use the means without taking along the faith of the promise is atheistical: To pretend to believe the promise without care of using the means is presumptuous. Now the proper means may be these.

2. Labour to impress your hearts deeply with a sense of the ill of these things. You have heard much about them. Be so just to your own souls as to consider the matter impartially. Weigh your profanations of the holy name, &c. in the balance of the world. They will never rightly reform that see not the ugly nature of their sin.

3. Devote your hearts, lips, and lives to the Lord, 1 Cor. vi. *ult.* Learn to use your tongues for God, and his honour in the world: for they who use them not for him, can hardly miss to use them against them. There is no neutrality in that case.

4 Labour to get your hearts possessed habitually with dread and reverence of the majesty of God; and with a due value for your own souls, and love to your neighbour. The former will keep you from profane swearing, &c.; and the latter from cursing yourselves or others.

5. Watch and pray. Keep a guard over your tongues, and lift up your hearts to the Lord, in the language of David, Psal. cxli. 3. "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips." Be not rash to speak, but consider before hand.

6. *Lastly*, Set about the reformation of your whole life at once. Put all the idols to the door at once, as thieves and robbers, else those remaining will open the door to those which ye put out. Guard against passion, be meek and calm.