

Ye must be converted, ye must be born again, and become new creatures.

2. Labour to reach actual preparation for the other world, being always ready to go into it at the call. Let your thoughts dwell much upon it; carry yourselves as strangers in this world, let there be no standing controversy betwixt God and you; and timely dispatch your generation work, and watch and wait till your change come. Consider what you have heard of the other world, and lay it to heart.

THE GREAT CARE AND CONCERN NOW, THAT OUR SOULS BE NOT
GATHERED WITH SINNERS IN THE OTHER WORLD,
CONSIDERED AND IMPROVED.

The substance of some Sermons preached at Ettrick, in the year 1729.

PSALM xxvi. 19.

Gather not my soul with sinners.

WHOEVER believes and considers the doctrine of the other world, must needs improve it to a horror of the state of the ungodly there, on the one hand, and a desire of the state of the godly on the other. He cannot miss to join the Psalmist in this text, saying, *Gather not my soul with sinners.* In which words we have to observe,

1. Something taken for granted, or supposed, namely, that the souls of men are to be gathered, each to those of their own sort, which is at death, Gen. xxv. 8. Now there is a promiscuous multitude in this world, good and bad together, like corn and chaff in a barn-floor, or fishes in a net; but they are gathered in the other world, some into the happy, others into the miserable company, every one to those of their own sort.

2. Something expressed, namely, a horror of the congregation of sinners in the other world. "Lord, (says he,) gather not my soul among their souls; when I remove hence, let me not take up my lodging among them; let me not drop into their company, state and condition in the other world."

3. The connection. This request comes in natively on a reflection the Psalmist makes on the disposition of his soul, and his way, in this world. His conscience witnesseth his dislike of associating with

the ungodly, ver. 4, 5, "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers; I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked;" his love and liking to the presence of God and the congregation of the saints, ver. 8, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth." So he prays with hope, *Gather not my soul with sinners*: q. d. Lord, I have no liking of the company of ungodly sinners here; it is a burden to me in this world; let me not be shut up with them in the other world. My soul loves thy house; let me not be with sinners excluded eternally from thy presence.

The text plainly affords the following doctrine, *viz.*

DOCT. Now is the time that people should be in care and concern, that their souls be not gathered with sinners in the other world.

In discoursing from this doctrine, we shall,

- I. Consider some things implied in it.
- II. Shew who are the sinners, that we are to have a horror of our souls being gathered with in the other world.
- III. What it is for one's soul to be gathered with sinners in the other world.
- IV. Consider his care and concern; or shew, what is implied in this earnest request, "*Gather not my soul with sinners.*"
- V. Give the reasons, why we should be in such care and concern.
- VI. Make application.

I. We shall consider some things implied in the doctrine. It implies,

1. The souls of men in their bodies in this world, are in a scattered and disorderly condition, saints and sinners in one place, one outward condition, all mixed through other; the tares and the wheat are in one field; corn and chaff in one floor; fish good and bad in one net; sheep and goats in one flock; Ham in the ark, Judas in Christ's family, and profane hypocrites with sincere Christians, in one visible church. This mixture has a threefold effect.

(1.) It keeps both parties uneasy, Gen. iii. 15. The saints are uneasy with the conversation of sinners, 2 Pet. ii. 7. and sinners with that of saints, who are an eye-sore to them, Gen. xix. 9. The one wearies to have the other out of their world, the other many a time to be away from among them. Their principles, aims, and manner of life are opposite; and they cannot unite more than the iron and clay.

(2.) They are an embargo upon one another, so that this world is neither so good nor yet so bad, as otherwise it would be. It is with the world in this case, as with the believer in whom there is a mix-

ture of flesh and spirit, Gal. v. 17. The conversation of sinners often infects saints, leads them into snares and temptations; handling of pitch they are defiled, and are often made to come mourning out of her company, as Peter in the high priest's hall. Sometimes again saints win on sinners, to turn them from the evil of their ways, 1 Cor. vii. 12, 13, 16. 1 Pet. iii. 1. And even where that is not gained, yet it does something to keep the world in external order, beyond what it would be if all were alike, no mixture of saints in the society, Matth. v. 13. like salt that keeps it from rotting and stinking, as otherwise it would do.

(3.) There is a mixed dispensation of providence in the world; sometimes fair weather, sometimes foul; sometimes public mercies dispensed, sometimes public calamities; for God has his friends and his enemies both in one company; and the society meets with tokens of God's good-will for the sake of the one, and tokens of anger for the sake of the other.

2. The souls of men in the other world will be orderly ranged into different congregations, according to their different natures and dispositions, saints and sinners, who will make two unmixed societies. This implies two things.

(1.) A separation of the disagreeing parties now mixed, Matth. iii. 12. The good and bad mixed in this world will be separated there; they will not make but one society more, as they did here; and the separation will be a thorough one, not one goat left among the sheep, nor one sheep among the goats, Psal. i. 5. Matth. xiii. 41. For all the mixture that is here, there will be a cleanly separation there, whatever were the ties of political, ecclesiastical, or domestical relations among them. Matth. xxiv. 40, 41, "Then shall two be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken, and the other left."

(2.) A gathering of their separate parties into their respective societies they belonged to, whereby they will be ranged according to their kind and sort; saints with saints, and sinners with sinners. For there will be two, and but two congregations in the other world, Christ's and the devil's, Psal. i. 5; the bundle of life, 1 Sam. xxv. 29, and the bundle of death, Matth. xiii. 33. Many are misplaced here, and get wrong names; some of the devil's goats appear in sheep's clothing, and are mistaken for such as belong to Christ; some of Christ's sheep are busked up by the malicious world in wolves' skins, as if they belonged to the devil. But nothing of that will be there.

3. Death is the gathering time, which the Psalmist has in view in the

text. Ye have a time here that ye call the gathering time, about the term, when the servants are going away, wherein ye gather your strayed sheep that every one may get their own again. Death is God's gathering time wherein he gets the souls belonging to him, and the devil those belonging to him. They did go long together, but then they are parted; and saints are taken home to the congregation of saints, and sinners to the congregation of sinners. And it concerns us to say, "Gather not my soul with sinners." Whoever be our people here, God's people, or the devil's, death will gather our souls to them.

Lastly, It is a horrible thing to be gathered with sinners in the other world. To think of our souls being gathered with them there, may make the hair of one's head stand up. Many now like no gathering like the gathering with sinners; it is the very delight of their hearts, it makes a brave jovial life in their eyes. And it is a pain to them, to be gathered with saints, to be detained before the Lord on a sabbath day. But to be gathered with them in the other world, is a horror to all sorts.

(1.) The saints have a horror of it, as in the text. To think to be staked down in their company in the other world, would be a hell of itself to the godly. David never had such a horror of the society of the poor, the diseased, the persecuted, &c. as of sinners. He is content to be gathered with saints of whatever condition; but, Lord, says he, "Gather not my soul with sinners."

(2.) The wicked themselves have a horror of it, Numb. xxi. 10. "Let me die the death of the righteous," said the wicked Balaam, "and let my last end be like his." Though they would be content to live with them, or be with them in life, their consciences bear witness that they have a horror of being with them in death. They would live with sinners, but they would die with saints. A poor unreasonable self-condemning thought. I believe, that if drunkards, unclean persons, mockers of religion, embracing and rejoicing in one another, should as Belshazzar see the form of a hand writing on the wall, that it is the purpose of God, their souls should be gathered with one another in the other world, they would be struck and ready to faint away with horror, thinking, "Ah! shall my soul be gathered with drunkards, harlots, mockers?" &c.

Wherefore since all have a horror of their souls being gathered with sinners in the other world, have a horror of being gathered with them now in their way. For it is an absurd thing to think, that you shall live with sinners, and yet die with saints. Balaam wished to reconcile these contradictions, but found it would not do, Numb. xxxi. 8.

II. I come to shew who are the sinners, that we are to have a horror of our souls to be gathered with in the other world. All men in this world are sinners absolutely considered, and so was David himself; Eccl. vii. 22. "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doth good, and sinneth not." But some are sinners comparatively, in comparison with others that are righteous; they are grievous sinners, as the word properly signifies; hence they are classed with publicans, a most odious sort of people among the Jews, Matth. ix. 10.

Now sinners, grievous sinners, in the scripture use of the word, are all unrighteous persons, as appears from the opposition of these terms, Psal. i. 5. "Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." Prov. xiii. 21. "Evil pursueth sinners; but to the righteous good shall be repaid." Matth. ix. 13. He that is not righteous, is in the scripture-sense a sinner, a grievous sinner. Hence,

1. All unjustified persons are sinners; for they are unrighteous before God, as being without an imputed righteousness on them, Rom. v. 29. And since all unbelievers are unjustified, whatever is their manner of life, they are such sinners; they walk naked before God, and their shame is not covered.

2. All unconverted, unsanctified, unregenerate persons are sinners; for they are unrighteous as being without an implanted righteousness, Psal. li. 13. Rom. v. 8. They are not brought back to God, but are in a course of straying from him; their unholy set of spirit remains, their nature is not changed.

Thus all natural men are sinners, whose state in the other world is horrible, whatever their appearance and way may be here. There are four sorts of them.

1. The grossly ignorant, who neither know nor care for knowing the foundation points of religion. These cannot be but sinners; for however harmless they may be among men, they are grievous sinners before God as being in darkness, 1 John ii. 11. Matth. vi. 23. And miserable will they be whose souls are gathered with them in the other world, Isa. xxvii. 11. "It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour."

2. The profane, who give the loose to their lusts, in the pollutions of the outward man. Such as profane swearers, who set their mouths against the heavens, whom God will not hold guiltless; unclean persons, whom God will judge; scoffers of piety, maligners, and mockers of seriousness, whose hands shall be made strong; in a word, all those who are loose and licentious in their lives. These

are sinners with a witness ; and wo to them whose souls shall be gathered with them in the other world, Gal. v. 19—21. " They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Luke xix. 27. " Those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me."

3. Mere moralists, who satisfy themselves with moral virtue, in obedience to the letter of the second table of the moral law, but neglect the duties of religion towards God. They are just and honest in their dealings with men, but neglect their duty to God. These also are sinners, and miserable will be the case of those whose souls are gathered with them in the other world, Matth. v. 20. " For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." They seek not God's face, and they will be hid from it.

4. Formalists, who have a form of godliness in a profession of religion, and performance of acts of devotion ; but are strangers to real religion, 2 Tim. iii. 5. Some of them are gross hypocrites, who stain their profession of religion with their untender walk in matters of the second table, Matth. xxiii. 23. Others are close hypocrites, whose outward conversation is blameless, but they are strangers to heartwork, the secret part of the Christian life, and entertain always some beloved lust or other. These also are sinners, Mark x. 21 ; and wo will be to those whose souls are gathered with them in the other world, Psal. cxxv. ult. " As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity." Matth. xxiv. ult. " And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Now all these are sinners, grievous sinners, who, if they continue so, will undoubtedly perish. They are justly called and reputed sinners, in opposition to saints. For,

(1.) They all miss the mark totally that men should aim at. The word by which the Holy Ghost expresseth sin, is properly to miss the mark, Judg. xx. 16. The mark that all men are obliged to aim at and hit, is the glory of God, the chief end of man, 1 Cor. x. 31. The saints brought to the enjoyment of God in Christ, do all hit it, though not perfectly, Phil. i. 21. Rom. xiv. 7, 8. They live to the glory of God their Creator and Redeemer. But all natural men miss it totally, Rom. iii. 23. They are conjured within the circle of self ; they live to themselves, not to God ; their lusts, morality, and religion meet all in the dead sea of self. They are a company of self-lovers, self-seekers, self-pleasers, Phil. ii. 21. So they and their

way, not being directed to God, shall perish from his presence, Psal. i. ult; and their straying will end in their falling into the pit.

(2.) They are all guilty of death before the Lord, 1 Kings i. 21; with Rom. iii. 19. The sentence of death is in force against them, and they are sons of death. The curse of the broken law lies on them, binding them over to avenging wrath. But the saints are not so; though they are not without sin, yet they are without guilt of eternal wrath. Rom. viii. 1. They are absolved in their justification; but natural men, whatever be the difference of their crimes, are all sinners, law condemned criminals.

(3.) They can do nothing but sin, Psal. xiv. 3. It is true, the saints sin in every thing they do; but yet they do things truly good, and accepted of God, Isa. lvi. 7; the imperfections attending their duties do not quite mar them, 2 Cor. viii. 12. But natural men's actions are all sins, their natural, civil, and religious actions, only evil. Their whole life is woven into one web of sin from the beginning to the end, without one thread of purity in it: so they are sinners in a most proper sense.

Quest. How can that be, since they do things that are unquestionably good? *Ans.* It cannot be otherwise. For,

[1.] The principle of action in them is quite wrong. They themselves are wholly corrupt and loathsome, and so is all they do. Put the best of liquor in a vessel used to filthy uses, and one cannot look on it, Tit. i. 15. "Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." Their filthy state defiles their duties, but their duties cannot purify them, Hag. ii.

[2.] The end of their actions is quite wrong. They are like a servant very busy, but in the mean time he is working to himself, not to his master, Zech. vii. 5. "When ye fasted and mourned—did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?"

(4.) They all sin with true whole heart and good-will, to it. The saints do not so, 1 John iii. 9. They have a contrary principle in them that contradicts the inclination to sin, so that at most it is but with a half-will, Gal. v. 17. But natural men are all flesh, wholly corrupt, therefore the heart goes with a bent-sail to sin. It is true, there may be something opposing sin in the unregenerate; but then that struggle of theirs is but betwixt the flesh in one part lusting, and in another fearing.

(5.) All their sins that ever came on them through the whole course of their lives, are still abiding on them, in the guilt, filth, and dominion of them. It is not so with the saints; guilt contradicted is done away, the filth is in part removed, the reigning power

of sin is broken. Sin in them is like mud in a spring, but in natural men like mud in a pool. Sin is ever coming on, never going off; but all sticks, original and actual; for there is no remission of sin to them, and no sanctification by the Spirit. Unbelief is a need-nail to all their sins, John viii. 24.

Lastly, They continue sinners in the other world, Prov. xiv. 32. "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness." In the moment of death the saints are perfected, they are no more sinners; but natural men have sin left on them, when they die; then the sentence takes place, Rev. xxii. 11. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still, and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still," and they are cast out as unclean into the unclean place.

III. I proceed to shew what it is for one's soul to be gathered with sinners in the other world. It implies,

1. All men's souls are to be gathered out of their bodies by death, Job xxxiv. 14, 15. "If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust." Man consists of a soul and a body; the body was originally dust lying here and there scattered on the earth; and at death it must be reduced to the same condition again; the soul came immediately from God, and at death must return to him, Eccl. xii. 7. And no man can have power to retain it in the body, but it must be separated from it, and so the man dies.

2. There are very different receptacles of separate souls; there is a blessed receptacle of the souls of saints, wherein they shall all be together in the other world; and a miserable receptacle for the souls of sinners, where they also shall be together in that world. Though the receptacle of the bodies of saints and sinners is common to both in this world, both lying in the same church-yard, yet that of their souls is not so.

3. A separation of the soul from the society of saints, Matth. xiii. 41. At death, sinners that were mixed with the saints in this world are gathered out from among them, like weeds from among the corn, and tares from among the wheat. And we should be concerned now, that that be not our lot. For it will be a most terrible excommunication, Psal. i. 5. "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."

Lastly, A placing of the soul in the society of sinners in the other world, putting them in the same place with them, and in the same state. This is to be deprecated, "Gather not my soul with sinners." To be gathered to sinners as our people, shut up with them in the same receptacle of spirits, to have our lot with them in the other world, and fare as they fare for eternity, is what we should be in the greatest care and concern, that it be not our lot.

IV. I shall consider this care and concern; or shew what is implied in this earnest request, "Gather not my soul with sinners." It implies,

1. A sure and certain expectation, that our souls must be gathered into the other world by death. The Psalmist prays not against the gathering simply, for in that case neither prayers nor tears can prevail, force nor fraud, Psal. lxxxix. 48. "What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?" But since they must be gathered, they pray that they be not gathered with sinners. There is no may-be here, but it must be, as it is "appointed unto men once to die," Heb. ix. 27. We must lay our account with it, as an event inevitable.

2. A belief of the miserable state of sinners in the other world, and the happiness of saints. If one is not persuaded of these, he will be in no concern about the matter. But we must look beyond this world into the other, and in the glass of the word take a view of the state of sinners and saints there, to raise us to due concern in it. Often do men look into the state of sinners here, and behold the easy life they have of it, and they wish in effect to be among them; but if we look to them in the other world, we will wish to be far from them, to have nothing ado with them.

3. A horror of the state of sinners there. The man looking to it shrinks back, saying, Save me from it! Their state there duly apprehended, is apt to breed such a horror, as not only cures the envy at their present prosperous state, but makes the man that he would not for a thousand worlds, his soul were in their souls' stead, Psal. lxxiii. 18—20.

4. An earnest concern to be delivered from it. The man takes a view of it seriously, and he is not indifferent in the matter. He is not negligent as to the future state of his soul in the other world: but timely lays down measures for eternity, knowing that to miscarry in that point is a loss that can never be made up.

5. An acknowledgment that God may in justice gather one's soul with sinners. The best have as much sin as deserves it, and all are by nature liable to it, Rom. iii. 19. And every one that sees the ill of sin, and its just demerit, will see that if justice take place against them, they will be gathered with sinners in the other world.

Lastly, A betaking one's self to the mercy of the Judge, in his own way, for the pardon of sin, and the removal of the just punishment, Job ix. 15. And that is to confess sin, flee to lay hold on the altar Jesus Christ by faith, separating from the society and way of sinners in time.

V. I come now to give reasons, why we should be in such care

and concern, that our souls be not gathered with sinners in the other world.

1. Because to be gathered with them is to be separated for ever from God, and the holy and happy society whereof Christ is the head, Matth. vii. 23, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." The whole herd of sinners in the other world will be in a state of excommunication, banished from the comfortable presence of God, the place of his glory, Psal. v. 4, 5, kept out of the society of Christ, the holy angels, and saints, Matth. xiii. 41. And to be gathered with them must needs then be horrible.

2. They will be gathered into a most doleful place, Isa. xxiv. 22, "They shall be gathered together as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison." At death sinners are gathered into the prison of hell, shut up there to the judgment of the great day; and from the tribunal they will be driven away thither again all together, there to be shut up for ever, Matth. xxv. 41. The horror of the place they are gathered into, the eternal gloom there, the chains of darkness that will hold them there, the mist of darkness that never clears there, may all move to say, "Gather not my soul with sinners."

3. Because they will be gathered unto the most frightful society there, with the devil and his angels, Matth. xxv. 41. They will be cast into the lake of fire with the devil that deceived them; and that will be more terrible than to be gathered with dragons, serpents, and vipers here, which would quickly make an end of one. O that men would consider how the service of the devil in sin here, will bring them into the society of him and his angels hereafter, that they might have a horror of being joined with sinners!

4. Because sinners will be in a state of punishment there, heavy beyond expression; being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," 2 Thess. i. 9. Now is the time wherein sinners take leave to commit their crimes, trampling on God's laws, despising his Son, and grieving his Spirit; then will be the time that they must suffer and pay for all to the satisfaction of injured justice. And the view of that terrible reckoning may cause one say, "Gather not my soul with sinners."

5. Because they will be left in their sin there, Prov. xiv. 32. "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness." John viii. 24, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." At the moment of death, it is said to the sinner, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still;" and he is cast away as an unclean person into the unclean place, with all the guilt, filth, and power of his sins upon

him, never to be removed. And here consider, (1.) The perverse frame of spirit, which is natural to man, being enmity against God, will remain with them there; for there is no sanctification of the Spirit begun on the other side of death. And it will be undisguised there, the peace being blocked up, and the war for ever betwixt God and them proclaimed. It will be irritated by their hopeless miserable state, Rev. xvi. ult.

(2.) Their sin will be their punishment there; a just revenge of cleaving to it over the belly of all reproofs, warnings, and entreaties? So they will be filled with their own ways. And,

[1.] They will be cut with tormenting passions, envy at the happiness of the saints, fretting under their own misery, and despairing for ever of relief, Matth. xxii. 13, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

[2.] As for their pleasurable sins that their hearts were set on here, the desire of them will continue, but the satisfying of them in any measure will be impossible. So they will be for ever racked between the desire and the denial of satisfaction to their lusts. Who then would not say, "Gather not my soul with sinners?"

Lastly, Because being once gathered with them, they will never more be separated from among them. As the tree falls it must lie. They that are gathered with sinners at death, must be gathered with them at the resurrection, and shut up with them in the pit of destruction for ever.

I shall now make some application of this subject.

USE I. Of information. We may learn from it,

1. That the state and condition of sinners, whatever advantages of ease, wealth, &c. it be attended with, is a miserable one, to be pitied, lamented and avoided, not to be envied or desired. For it is impossible that all the wealth of this world should counterbalance the wo in the other world that is abiding them. Who would desire his lot with a condemned malefactor, though he fared deliciously every day; or quietly enjoy the best covered table, while a sword was hanging by a hair over his head?

2. That the great business of our life is to learn to die, and the great business which we have to do in this world is to prepare for the other, Job xiv. 14 "If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come." Here we do but sojourn, there we are to abide: here we are on our journey, there we come to our dwelling-place: and it is of the utmost consequence which part of that world we arrive in, Matth. xvi. 26. And they who do not see to that in the first and chief place, are fools with a witness.

3. That we are in hazard of miscarrying with reference to our abode in the other world; and carelessness about it will have a fatal issue. If all were to be gathered there into the happy receptacle without destination, we might be easy; but it is not so; there will be a gathering into the region of horror, as well as into the region of bliss. And we will be sure to miscarry, if we do not in time secure our happy reception, in the way appointed.

Lastly, That the hazard of miscarrying in it should quicken us to suitable endeavours for securing our happiness in the other world. Our eternal state is our greatest concern, and every thing being to be plied according to its weight, it should be seen to with the greatest care, and nothing laid in the balance with it, neither cares, profits, nor pleasures.

USE II. Of reproof to several sorts of sinners. It reproves,

1. The *careless* sinner, who is careless about the other world, and his future state. How many are there, who never once seriously consider, where they are like to take up their abode in the other world? But they live as if there were no other life but this. O what do you think, that you will get away in a dream to the region of bliss, that you will stumble into heaven which you are not looking out for? No; you may drop into the pit that way, but not get up into the holy hill, Isa. xxxii. 9, 10. The foolish virgins that were careless about oil to their lamps, got their head and heart full of care out of time, Matth. xxv. and so will ye, if ye continue in that careless temper.

2. The *slothful* sinner, who cannot bestir himself to be at due pains in this matter. Though such are not quite unconcerned about the other world, yet they do nothing to purpose in it. If lazy wishes and faint endeavours would do it, they would be happy; but they cannot stir up themselves to take hold of an offered Christ, covenant, and salvation, Isa. lxiv. 7. to cut off offending right hands, and pluck out offending right eyes; to take the kingdom of heaven by force, and press into it. Alas! this is not a business to be managed on the bed of sloth, Eccl. v. 18. Remember the doom of the slothful servant, who was cast into outer darkness, Matth. xxv. 26, 30.

3. The *delaying* sinner, who puts off the business from time to time, till it be out of time, and he is ruined. The young put it off till they should become aged, the aged to a sick-bed, and the sick often find they have enough ado otherwise. So the proper time of securing happiness in the other world is lost, as in the case of Felix, Acts xxiv. 25. But why will men delay what must needs be done, or else they are ruined, especially when time is uncertain?

Lastly, The *malignant* sinner, who hates the society of saints, and seriousness, a religious life and religious exercises; making the society and way of sinners his choice. O what confidence can ye have to cry to God, not to gather your soul with sinners in the other world, who are those in whom is all your delight in this? How can ye think to be gathered with saints in heaven, to whom with their way and exercises you have so great aversion on earth? Nay, that malignity against God's people shews you to be none of them; and you must be gathered to your people, your own people.

USE III. Of comfort to those who are in due care and concern now, that they be not gathered with sinners in the other world. This is a weighty concern to them that have it, and they will need comfort. And there are four things comfortable in it. It is comfortable,

1. That you are in the way of duty with reference to the other world, Matth. xxiv. 46, "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing." While others are going on fearlessly, you are looking about you, concerned how it may be with you in the end. It is a piece of wisdom, and hopeful, thus to be exercised in considering your latter end, Dent. xxxii. 29. God's word speaks comfort to such, Isa. xxxv 3, 4. "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense, he will come and save you."

2. That you take your work in time, while yet there is hope; and so your care and concern may come to issue well, Isa. xxxii. 20. "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters." There is no son nor daughter of Adam but will be in that care and concern one time or other; so that there will not be two of the whole herd of sinners that will desire to be gathered together; but alas! with the most part it will be out of time, Matth. xxv. 11, 12. Now I say it is comfortable in your case, that you timely entertain concern about it, while the judge is on a throne of grace to receive such applications. I may allude to that, 1 Sam. xxv. 8. "Ye come in a good day;" with 2 Cor. vi. 2, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

3. This care and concern is wrought in all God's elect, by the Spirit of Christ. The word calls for it, Acts ii. 40. "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." The Spirit works it accordingly, Rom. viii. 26; 2 Cor. vii. 11. He it was that breathed that desire in the Psalmist; and those appetites and desires that are from the Spirit cannot be in vain. So that the care and concern is

common to you with all the children of God, who all join you in that spiritual breathing, "Gather not my soul with sinners."

Lastly, You have to do with a good and gracious God, that has no pleasure to the ruin of sinners, Ezek. xxiii. 11, "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." No tender man will give his oath without necessity, or where there is no controversy to be decided by it. So here there is one, namely, the devil allegeth to sinners against God, that there is no pleasing of him, otherwise than in the sinner's ruin, and therefore all care and concern that way is needless. The slothful servant licketh up his vomit, Matth. xxv. 24, 25. "Lord, (said he) I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." And God purgeth himself by an oath of it; believe it then no more. Encourage yourself from the goodness of his nature in Christ, be that your care and concern.

(1.) Have you already got your heart's fill of the state and way of sinners out of Christ, so that you desire no more of it, but would fain be out of the reach thereof? The goodness of God's nature in Christ will not suffer the gathering of such a one with sinners in the other world, Psal. xxvi. 4—9. Will a good God take a sinner already groaning under, burdened and wearied with the state and way of sinners out of Christ in this world, and stake him down with them for ever in the other world? No; be it far from him.

(2.) Have you got a longing after holiness, perfect holiness, and a liking of the purity of the shining ones there, that your soul cries, "Gather not my soul with sinners," but with saints in the other world? Truly that is the work of the Spirit of Christ in you; for "the carnal mind is enmity against God," Rom. viii. 7. Hence is the promise, Heb. viii. 10. "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." And it is the society of sinners, not as sinners, but as miserable, the hypocrite is frightened at; and the society of saints in the other world, not as saints or holy, but as happy ones, that they desire it. It is inconsistent with the goodness of God then to create such longing and liking, and yet never satisfy it; so to open the mouth of the soul, and then to put an empty spoon in it.

Object. But a concern not to be gathered with sinners in the other world is a common thing, which Balaam and the foolish virgins had, as well as the godly; what comfort then can be in it, since one may have it, and yet be gathered with them in the end? *Ans.* There is a very great difference betwixt this concern in sincere Christians

and others. There are four things, which, if you find in your concern in this point, you may conclude that you shall not be gathered with sinners in the other world.

1. If their separation from Christ as the chief object of your soul's love, makes you averse to be gathered with them, Psal. xxvi. 8, 9. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth: Gather not my soul with sinners." The ungodly, if all were right to that with them in the other world, could digest that; for Christ is not the chief object of their love. But this argues your esteem of Christ above all, 1 Pet. ii. 7. and your desire of communion with him as your chief happiness, Phil. i. 23. You look upon sinners as seated in the other world, and you see Christ is not among them; and since he is not with them, your soul cries, Then, Lord, let not me be with them neither, for the chief object of my love is not among them. If this is the case, truly your soul shall not be gathered with them, John vi. 7. "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." Psal. lxxiii. 24, 25. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.

2. If you have a horror of their being left in sin in the other world, as well as of their being laid under punishment there, Rom. vii. 24, 25. "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death! I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Nobody believing the unspeakable torment of the damned in the other world, but must have a horror of it, because they love themselves. But laying aside the consideration of that, soberly ask yourselves, what think you of that part of the sentence, "Let him that is filthy, be filthy still," in itself? Abstracting from the torment joined with it, that would be no hard thing to most men, their hearts being wedded to their lusts, and not knowing how to shift without them. If then you find that thought of itself to be killing to you, and sufficient to make a hell; that argues you partakers of the new nature, that hath a horror of sin as its opposite, and desires to be holy and without sin, which is its perfection. And certainly God will not deprive the new nature of its desired perfection, and consequently will not gather a soul thus disposed with sinners in the other world, Psal. cxxxviii. ult. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me." Matth. v. 6. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

3. If you are with purpose of heart coming out from among them, out of their society, way, and manner of life in this world. Many would be content to live with them, though not to die with them,

Numb. xxiii. 10. But are ye not content to live with them neither, no more than to die with them? Have ye conceived an aversion to the life as well as the death, not only of the grossly wicked, but of all that are out of Christ, strangers to the power of godliness, being drawn to the love and choice of the fellowship of the saints by the lustre of the divine image on them? Fear not, God will never gather you with them in the other world, Psal. xxvi. 4, 5, 9; 1 John iii. 14; 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. Their company will not be made your punishment in the other world, that you would not make your choice here.

Lastly, If the hope of not being gathered with sinners in the other world, puts you on the study of universal purity, 1 John iii. 3. The hope that ungodly sinners and hypocrites have of this tends to make them secure in sin, and leaves them at ease in the embraces of some one lust or other; the reason is because their concern that way is only to be freed from misery, not from sin. But the hope of the sincere is a lively one, a hope to be freed from sin, 1 Pet. i. 3. and this makes them bestir themselves against it in time impartially, Psal. cxix. 6.

Use ult. Let me exhort all of you now to be in due care and concern, that your souls be not gathered with sinners in the other world. This due care and concern is very extensive, and therefore I will branch out this exhortation in several particulars. And,

1. Lay the matter of the other world to heart, and be no longer careless about what shall be your lot in it, Rom. xiii. 11, 12. A careless unconcerned life about the other world, will make a frightful awakening at death, Luke xii. 20. If you were to be removed out of a farm or a cot-house, you would look out for another before hand: and since you are to remove out of this world, look out for a comfortable settlement in the other, and shew yourselves men, wise men, and not fools.

2. Delay it no longer; for it is no due concern that admits of one day's delay; the reason is ere to-morrow come, your soul may be gathered with sinners, and staked down with them for eternity, Heb. iii. 15. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." No doubt there are many in hell, who once hoped never to come there, and to have set all to rights before gathering time; but the misery was, it came ere they were aware, and swept them away with sinners. They have been carried off in childhood, that hoped to be religious youths; and they have died in their youth who hoped to make all right by the time they should enter in age. The little sleep, the little slumber they indulged themselves in, proved their ruin; for their poverty came upon them as one that travelleth, and their want as an armed man.

3. Let your souls be now gathered unto Christ by faith in the bond of the covenant, Gen. xlix. 10. He is the Captain of salvation, and none come to heaven but at his back, John xiv. 6. as the members of his mystical body, Eph. v. 23. Whosoever are not united to him, and brought personally within the bond of his covenant, will be left to be gathered with sinners. Therefore consider the covenant offered to you in the gospel, and sincerely take hold of it, as you would not so be gathered.

4. Give up with the society of sinners here, I mean not absolutely; but make them no more your choice, your familiar companions; for death will gather every one to his own people; and therefore "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed," Prov. xiii. 20. The blessed man is known by the company he chuses, and most delights in, Psal. i. 1. And he that is not concerned to separate from the company of sinners here, is in no due concern not to be gathered with them in the other world; for it is vain to think to live with sinners, and die with saints.

5. Lay by your malignity against professors of religion, against seriousness, and godly exercises. Calmly consider what ye would be at. Are you really not able to endure any appearance of religion, seriousness, and godly exercises? Then there is nothing for you, but to be gathered with sinners in the other world, where you will see nothing like it for ever. But if you have any the least thoughts or hopes of heaven, you are quite unreasonable to think to get there, while you bear such a grudge against the very first draughts of that which is carried to perfection there. I wonder what sort of a heaven they imagine to themselves, that have a heart rising at holiness; what kind of men and women they expect to see there, that are always sure to have a thrust at any serious person here, however they have a vail to cast over the godless and profane.

6. Associate yourselves with the godly; gather together with those that you would be gathered with in the other world, Psal. cxix. 63; "I am a companion of all them that fear thee," says David, "and of them that keep thy precepts." If you mind to lodge with them at the journey's end, it is reasonable to travel on the way with them too, and not with those that are holding a quite contrary route. Let not the faults you espy about them make you despise their society; there are no faultless companions to be had in this world; but it must be a dreadful cast of spirit, that makes every body's faults tolerable but theirs. That must spring from a deep-rooted enmity. But a lover of the King will reverence his children, though in rags; and God tries your love to him by the faults he has left in his people, 1 John v. 1. Psal. xvi. 2, 3.

7. Do not make light of withdrawing or absenting from the congregation of the Lord's people in public ordinances. The Sabbath congregations are the thing that in all the earth is likeliest to heaven; and therefore they are that which has most of the saint's heart, Psal. xxvi. 8, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth." Let the thoughts of the gathering with the one great congregation in the upper house, recommend the gathering together with the congregations in the lower. From whatever principles or motives people forsake the congregations of the saints here in public ordinances, they must either be gathered with them in the other world, or with sinners; there will be no separate heaven for them there.

Lastly, Carefully keep off the way of sinners here, and let your whole life be a going forth by the footsteps of the flock, Cant. i. 7, 8. Heb. vi. 12. As is your course now, so must your end be. If you go the way of sinners, in this world, ye will be gathered with them in the other; if ye go the way of saints, ye will be gathered with them there.

To enforce this exhortation,

(1.) Consider the importance of your gathering in the other world, than which nothing can be greater. You have had the other world described to you in both its parts; and I may obtest you by all the joys and glories of heaven, that you lay this matter to heart; and by the dismalness of the place, the horrors of the society, and the dreadfulfulness of the state of sinners in hell, that you be in concern that your souls be not gathered there with them.

(2.) Make of your other concerns what you will, if you see not to this in the first place, ye are ruined to all intents and purposes, Matth. xvi. 26. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Nothing will compensate this loss.

(3.) This is the only proper time for that concern, wherein it may be effectual; 2 Cor. vi. 2, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." If you miss it, in vain will ye cry; for a deaf ear will be given to all your cries, Prov. i. 24, and downwards.

Lastly, The gathering there will be eternal, and unalterable for ever; and therefore it highly concerns you now, that your souls be not gathered with sinners then.

Wherefore, upon the whole, let me obtain of you, (1.) That you will take some serious thoughts of the other world in both parts of it. (2.) That you will inquire what case you are in for it. And, (3.) That you will lay down measures timely, that your souls be not gathered with sinners there. May the Lord persuade and incline your hearts unto this course.