

3. *Lastly,* Many trust to deathbed repentance that never see it. Some are surprised into eternity; some are tossed so with sickness that they cannot have a composed thought; some quickly lose the use of their senses and reason; and most part die as they live: Therefore repent ye in time, and delay no more, lest ye bring the ruin on your souls that will never be recovered.

GOD'S DELAY OF EXECUTING THE SENTENCE OF CONDEMNATION AGAINST UNGODLY MEN, OFTEN MISERABLY ABUSED BY THEM.

Several sermons preached at Ettrick, in summer, 1728.

Eccl. viii. 11.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

This book of Ecclesiastes is in a particular manner a book of providence, wherein Solomon gives his observations upon it. It is a subject that has puzzled the best of men, how to reconcile it with the being and attributes of God: but there is no inconsistency; all odds will be made even at length.

He had observed some set on high to their ruin, made rulers of others to their own destruction, to the feeding of their own lusts, and so aggravating their own condemnation, ver. 9. He had observed them live prosperously in their wickedness, die in honour, and buried magnificently, ver. 10. He opens the secret of this dispensation in the text, namely, That a reprieve is no pardon. In the words we have,

1. God's patience with, and forbearance exercised towards ungodly sinners: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily." (1.) It is supposed that sentence is passed in their case. There is a righteous sentence standing against an evil work, and the evil worker for what he has done: it is not overlooked, nor forgotten. (Heb.) doing of the evil; by which is meant an ungodly course. This is plain from 1 John iii. 8, 9, "He that committeth sin, is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he can-

not sin, because he is born of God. See the sentence, Rom ii. 9, "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil." (2.) The execution is oft-times delayed; it is not speedily execute. Though the word is gone out of the mouth of the Judge, he does not presently bring on the blow; he spares the criminal a while for holy ends. (3.) It supposeth, that though the execution be slow, yet it is sure, if the sentence be not got reversed, and a pardon obtained. Saying, that it is not speedily executed, he intimates that it will be executed at length.

2. The wretched abuse sinners make of this patience of God with them. "Therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Because sentence is not executed speedily, they think it will never be executed; and so they give themselves the loose. "Their heart is fully set in them to do evil." They find providence gives them head, does not check and strike them down in their course: and so they even run away with themselves. Their impunity fills their heart for their sinful courses, that they drive on like a ship with a full sail before a brisk gale.

Three doctrines may be deduced from the words thus explained.

DOCTRINE I. There is a sentence passed in the court of heaven, and standing, against ungodly men, evil-workers, however easy they be under it for a time.

DOCTRINE II. The Lord oftentimes does not soon come to the execution of the sentence against ungodly men, evil-workers; but delays it for a time.

DOCTRINE III. God's delay of execution is often miserably abused by sinners, to the filling of their hearts to do evil, and sinning more and more.

I shall handle each of these doctrines in order.

DOCTRINE I. There is a sentence passed in the court of heaven, and standing, against ungodly men, evil-workers, however easy they be under it for a time.

In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall,

I. Shew, that there is a sentence passed in the court of heaven, and standing, against ungodly men, evil-workers.

II. Explain the nature of this sentence.

III. Make some practical improvement of the subject

I. I shall shew, that there is a sentence passed in the court of heaven, and standing, against ungodly men, evil-workers.

1. They are already judged and condemned of God: John iii. 18, "He that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Ungodly

men, evil-workers, are unbelievers; and being unbelievers, they have not the benefit of absolution by Christ: so they are under condemnation of the law for their evil works. For whom the gospel doth not absolve, the law doth condemn.

2. Only those that are in Christ, are not under condemnation; and their freedom from it is of no older date than their believing: Rom. viii. 1, "Their is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." But evil-workers are not in Christ, 1 John iii. 8, 9, forecited. If they were in Christ, they would be new creatures; 2 Cor. v. 17, "For if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Therefore they are still under condemnation.

3. They are in a state of death, dead in sin, Eph. ii. 1. They who are morally dead in sin, being without a principle of spiritual life, Eph. iv. 18, are legally dead too; they are dead men in law, under a sentence of death, John v. 24. Hence they are called children of wrath, of hell, &c.

4. The power that Satan has over them, proves this. They are close prisoners, bound hand and foot, Is. lxi. 1. Satan is the keeper of the prison, Heb. ii. 14; and they are under his power, Acts xxvi. 18. What gives him the power over them, but that they are condemned in law? Let the sentence be reversed, and he has them no more under his power, 1 Cor. xv. 56.

5. *Lastly*, The spirit of bondage witnesseth the truth of this, convincing the sinner that he is a dead man, Rom. vii. 9, and that he stands in need of a remission, chap. iii. 19. This testimony is true; for it is the testimony of the Spirit of God, whereby he brings sinners to see their need of Christ.

II. To explain the nature of this sentence, consider,

1. Every evil work is a breach of God's law; and every sinful thought, word, or action is an evil work: 1 John iii. 4. "Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." No man is lord of himself but is answerable to God for every action of his life: and being guilty, if out of Christ, he is liable to vengeance, under the curse; if in Christ, he is liable to temporal strokes. So all ungodly ones, evil-workers, are liable to the curse for their sins.

2. The law is the accuser, that accuseth the sinner of rebellion against God, and demandeth vengeance on him, John v. 45. Every command broken by the sinner accuseth him before God; and as many breaches as he has made of it, as many articles there are of the libel against him. And though these be innumerable to men, and many of them unknown to them; they are not so unto an omniscient God.

3. God is the judge that judgeth and passeth the sentence against the guilty, Psal. 1. 6. And he is a judge whom no artful concealment can beguile. He cannot be blinded, bribed, or biassed, 1 Pet. i. 17. His sentence, hower severe, is always righteous, Rev. xvi. 7. And there lies no appeal from his tribunal; for there is none above him who is the Most High. Only, while the sinner is, in this world, there is access to a remission in Christ.

4. The sentence is a sentence of death, Gen. ii. 17; death in its full latitude, comprehending all miseries of soul and body; eternal death, in which the gnawing worm never dies, nor is the fire quenched. The sentences of men are at most the death of the body: but his sentence adjudgeth the soul to die eternally. The reason is, the infinite dignity of the divine Majesty offended by sin.

5. The grounds of this heavy sentence, are the transgressions of God's holy law: Gal. iii. 10. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." The holy law is a transcript of the purity of the divine nature; in it he hath set forth his own image. That image the sinner does what he can to deface, by violating the law: but God will magnify the law, and make it honourable, though in the destruction of the sinner.

The grounds of it more particularly are,

1st, The sin of nature, original sin imputed, Rom. v. 12; and original sin inherent, that corrupt frame of soul that is natural to us, whereby we are prone to evil and averse to good, Gen. vi. 5. By reason of this we come into the world under the sentence of death. And as serpents and vipers are objects whose destruction men seek on the first sight of them, because of their poisonous nature; so it fares with men, the very first sight of whom, in respect of their original sin, is loathsome unto a holy God, and thereby they become objects fit only for destruction.

2dly, The sins of the heart, Psal. xxiv. 4; Matt. v. 28, 29. Heartsins are not liable to man's judgment: but how can they escape the judgment of God, to whose all seeing eye our hearts are just as open as our lives? He sees the rottenness that is within the whitened sepulchers, and passes his sentence against lusts of covetousness, uncleanness, malice, revenge, &c. burning within the heart, as well as against the same defiling the conversation.

3dly The sins of the tongue, Matt. xii. 37. It is a channel by which the heart vents much of its inbred corruption, contempt of God, &c. Jude 15, in his mocking, maligning, and running down seriousness, and agenting the cause of irreligion; and contempt of our neighbour, in railing, reproaching, obscenity, lying, &c.;

which may shew why the rich man in hell is represented as seeking water to cool his tongue.

4^{thly}, The sins of the life, wicked actions, whether of impiety against God, unrighteousness against men, or intemperance against ourselves, Jude 15. None of all these will escape the judgment of God, however craftily they be managed, whatever fair colours be drawn over them: Eccl. 12, ult “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” Sinners may forget them, and let them slip out of mind: but “the Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works,” Amos viii. 7.

5^{thly}, Omissions of duty, Matt. xxv. 41, &c. Men will find sentence passed on them by a just God, not only for the ill they have done, but for the good they were obliged to have done, but did it not. The man that hid his talent, and improved it not for his Lord, is doomed to outer darkness, Matt. xxv. 24, 30.

6. This sentence agaist the ungodly is openly pronounced in the word: Rom. ii. 8, 9, “But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness: indignation, and wrath; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil.” God speaks from heaven to men, Heb. xii. 25; not by a voice coming through the clouds, but by his voice in the written word, 2 Kings xxii. 19, compared with ver. 11. The Bible is God’s word to us, whereby he is speaking to us, and will speak to men unto the end of the world, either absolution or condemnation according to their state.

7. It is registered there too; Gen. ii. 17, “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” Ezek. xviii. 4, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” The Scripture is the records of the court of heaven, where the ungodly may read their doom, and see the sentence standing against them. And that certainly is one of the causes of the neglect of the Scriptures in our day; for in it “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness,” Rom. i. 18. Ahab hated Micajah, because he never spake good of him. The Scripture never speaks good of a man that is wedded to his lusts, and has no will to part with his beloved liberty in the way of sin; and therefore he hates or neglects it.

8. It is secretly intimated by the conscience sometimes, 1 John iii. 20. Conscience is God’s deputy within the man; and when his corruption drives him full to do an ill work, and when he has done it, to defend it; conscience will be condemning it, and him too, from the holy law, Rom. ii. 15. And when it is thoroughly

awakened, it will so pronounce the sentence against the man as will fill him with the greatest terror.

9. It will be openly pronounced before all the world at the last day: Matt. xxv. 41, "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Where it is observable, that they are declared cursed and condemned ones, before that solemn publishing of the sentence against them. For none will be condemned then, but such as are in this world before that in this life condemned already.

10. *Lastly*, Howbeit, the time of the execution of the sentence, in particular, is not now intimated to the sinner. The Lord keeps that a secret, that sinners may not adventure to live a moment in the state of condemnation; but not knowing but it may be executed next moment, they may not put off a moment the suing for a remission.

USE 1. Of Information. Hence learn,

1. The state of every ungodly person, worker of iniquity, and all unbelievers, is a miserable state, a state of condemnation. They are as really under a sentence of death, as ever any malefactor was: John iii. 18, "He that believeth not, is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Think on this, ye young and old ungodly ones: though the sentence is not executed against you, it is passed on you; look into your Bible, and see it.

2. As silent as God sits on heaven, while sinners on earth are neglecting and affronting him, he is no idle spectator of their way and manner of life: Psal. l. 21, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." He has sentenced them, and "sees their day is coming," Psal. xxxvii. 13. They have their sinning day, and God sees their day of count and reckoning is coming on, wherein every item shall be distinctly charged on them: Eccl. xi. 9, "Know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." They laugh at the evil day, because they do not see it come; God laughs at them, because he sees it coming; and his will be when theirs is done, Prov. i. 26, when he will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh.

3. It is not strange, that the world is filled with the noise of men's lusts and ungodly lives. If ye were gone into a prison filled with condemned men, ye would think it melancholy indeed, but not strange to hear the iron chains rattling in every part of the room.

This world is such a place, crowded with condemned people ; unmortified lusts are the chains on them : and that is the reason of the grating noise which the serious godly hear from every corner. And the jailor, the devil, is going among them.

4. *Lastly*, No wonder that most men love this life, so as to loath exchanging it for another ; Psal. lv. 23, “ But God shall bring them down into the pit of destruction.” The prison is a heavy place to the condemned man ; but to go out of it is more so, for that is to go to execution, Jer. xvii. 11. Death brings the execution of the sentence. *

USE 2. Of trial. Try whether that sentence is standing against you, or whether it is reversed, and ye jnstified.

To move you to put this to the question, consider,

1. One thing is sure, that once it was passed and standing against you : Eph. ii. 3, “ And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. Gal. iii. 10, “ Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Compared with Rom. iii. 19, “ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law ; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” Now, what course have ye taken to get this sentence taken off ? and if you have been aiming at it, have ye carried it ?

2. As your state is in this life, condemned or jnstified, so it will be determined at death and judgment : Ecel. ix. 10, “ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest. Now, there is access for a remission ; but when death comes, there will be no more for ever.

3. Men are apt to mistake in this point. Many draw an absolution from the sentence for themselves, which God will never set his seal to : Luke xvi. 15, “ Christ said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men ; but God knoweth your hearts : for that which is highly esteemed amongst men, is abomination in the sight of God.” Is. xliv. 20, “ He feedeth of ashes : a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand ? The foolish virgins called themselves the Bridegroom’s friends ; but he shut the door on them as his enemies.

4. *Lastly*, A mistake here is very fatal. By it men let the time of obtaining a remission slip. The oil might have been got for the lamps, if they had missed it timely. It brings a ruining surprise : dreaming of peace, they are awaked with the noise of war for ever.

MARK 1. They that never saw themselves in a state of condemnation, are under it to this day. For they are strangers to the very first work of the Spirit, conviction, John xvi. 8, "The law is our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith, Gal. iii. 24. They that have never been at the law's school, to learn that they are cursed and condemned sinners by nature, are not Christ's disciples.

MARK 2. They only are absolved, who laying hold on Christ in the covenant of grace have applied to the law's sentence of condemnation against them, the righteousness of Christ wrought by him, and offered to and accepted by them. Hence says the apostle, Phil. iii. 7, 8, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord:—and do count them but dung that I may win Christ." They continue not in mere suspense, but renouncing self-confidence, law-confidence, and creature confidence, have betaken themselves to him as their only refuge, casting anchor on the promise of the gospel.

MARK 3. If the condemning power of sin is removed, the reigning power of sin is removed too, and contrariwise: Rom. vi. 14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." If the condemned man has got his remission, he is taken out of his irons, and his prison, and the power of the jailor. The chains of reigning lusts rattling about thee, declare thee a condemned man still; but it is otherwise with the pardoned, Rom. viii. 1, 2, "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death." If ye are justified, ye are washed, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11.

MARK 4. If the sentence be reversed, ye will be habitually tender in your conscience with respect to temptations, sin and duty, and appearances of evil. Hence Paul could say, Acts xxiv. 16, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." The man who under the sentence of death, has obtained a remission, will readily fear falling into the snare again. Hence we find this was Hezekiah's exercise, Is. xxxviii. 17, "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Ver. 15, "What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul." Absolved persons may be guilty of acts of untenderness; but habitual untenderness is a black mark of condemnation.

MARK ult. The fruits of faith in a holy life follow the reversing of the sentence. We are justified by faith without works; but the faith that justifies, produces good works. Hence we read, Acts xv. 2, of purifying the heart by faith. If the curse is removed, the fruits of the Spirit will spring up in the soul, Gal. v. 22, 23, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." The apostle James shews that faith not to be true, that is not attended with the fruits of holiness."

Now, if the sentence once standing against you is reversed, then,

1. Love the Lord, who freely gave you your remission, instead of leading you forth to execution; as did the woman of whom our Lord says, Luke vii. 47, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much." Remember the day when ye stood self-condemned and law-condemned before the Lord, and he said, Job xxxiii. 24, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom."

2. Pity and be concerned for those that are as yet under the condemnation which ye are freed from, Tit. iii. 2, 3. Where people's contempt and disdain have the heels of their pity, compassion, and concern for the welfare and recovery of sinners, it is a sad sign; speaking forth more of pride and presumption, than of themselves being in a state of remission.

3. Walk humbly and tenderly. The remembrance of the sentence of death sometime lying on you, may humble you while ye live. It sets us ill to be proud and conceit, who owe our life to a remission. Stand aloof from the deadly snare; a pardoning God has said, "Go, and sin no more," John viii. 11.

4. Bear your troubles and trials in a world patiently. Your life was forfeited, and that is safe by grace. Why does a living man complain? This is a day wherein the Lord seems to be rising up to plead against the generation, bringing on common calamity. Take thankfully what falls to your share of it, in consideration that the sentence against your soul is reversed. If the seed should rot under the clod, and the beasts of the field perish under the stroke; kiss the rod, and be thankful, that the execution is not upon yourselves.

5. *Lastly*, Be of a forgiving disposition: Eph. iv. 32, "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." The Saviour that brought in remission of sins, binds us to love our enemies; and the bitter revengeful spirit against others speaks us unforgiven, Matth. vi. 15, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

But if ye are of those against whom the sentence still stands in the court of heaven, lay the matter to heart, and consider it as a most heavy case, as it is indeed, deserving tears of blood. And so I proceed to

USE 3. Of Lamentation. We may here lament over the case of every ungodly one, and natural man. The state of one under sentence of death, is a lamentable case. O ungodly sinner, however easy thou art, God's law has condemned thee, and thou art under the sentence of eternal death, John iii. 36, "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." See thy heavy case in this glass.

1. You are forfeited of your covenant-right to the creatures, as a condemned person. Whether thou hast little or much in the world, it is a sorry right you have to it; a mere providential right, such as a condemned man to his meat, till the day of execution come. Therefore "a little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked," Psal. xxxiv. 16. There is little satisfaction in that.

2. God is your enemy, befriend you who will, John iii. 36. foreclosed. He bears a legal enmity against thee, as a just judge against a condemned man. Ye can have no communion with him: Amos iii. 3, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" All comfortable intercourse betwixt God and thy soul, is drowned in the gulf of thy state of condemnation. There can be no peace between God and you. To allude to the conference between Joram and Jehu, 2 Kings ix. 22, "And it came to pass when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu? And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts are so many?" How can they have peace with God, whom his law condemns? What peace ye have in your consciences, God allows not, Is. lvii. 21.

3. Nothing you do can be acceptable to God; there is a lasting cloud over your heads that never clears: Psal. vii. 11, "God is angry with the wicked every day." While the condemning curse of the law lies on a man, it blasts all the good he does: Tit. i. 15, "Unto them that are defiled, and unbelieving, is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." Hag. ii. 12, 14, "If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands, and that which they offer there is unclean." It mars sanctifying influences,

without which there can be no fruit, John xv. 5, "for without me ye can do nothing." Hence all ye do is turned to sin.

4. The sentence against you is confirmed daily. The truth of God confirms it: Num. xxiii. 19, "God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? And the cords of thy guilt are growing stronger and stronger; for the grounds of condemnation against thee are multiplying; while none of the old debt is removed, but new is still contracted. And though one may think, that it is but dying for all; yet the punishment will be increased, as evil works are; for men will be rewarded according to their deeds.

5. Justice craves execution against thee. There was a cry to heaven against Cain, and against Sodom: and so there is against every ungodly sinner, Jer. ix. 9, "Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the Lord: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Mercy may suspend execution a while against the ungodly; but if they continue in that state, it cannot reverse it; since God cannot cease to be just.

6. All is ready for the execution. The bow is bent to let fly the arrows of wrath against thee, the arrows of death, Psal. vii. 12, 13. The pile of fire is set on, Is. xxx. 33, "For Tophet is ordained of old: yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood, the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it." When thou liest down, thou hast no security, that it shall not be executed ere thou arise, &c.

7. *Lastly*, Thy life depends, as to thee, only on God's long-tried patience and long-suffering, procuring thy reprieve from day to day, if so thou wilt sue out thy pardon. As secure as thou art, the sword of justice hangs over thy head, by the worn hair of long-tired patience; which if once broken, thou art gone for ever.

USE ult. Of Exhortation. Wherefore bestir yourselves to get out of the state of condemnation, to get the sentence reversed.

MOTIVE 1. It is a sad and miserable life to live in the state of condemnation. For in effect such a life is a continued death. (1.) It is a dishonourable life. Condemnation fixes a blot and stain on man, speaks him guilty of crimes for which he is not worthy to live. And surely the judgment of God is according to truth. (2.) It is an uncomfortable life: Is. Ivii. 21, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." There is enough in it to squeeze the sap out of all created comforts; and for the con-

solutions of God, they can have none of them, Amos iii. 3, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" The joy and comfort of a natural man is but like that of a madman; and so when he comes to himself, all is swallowed up in that, he is a condemned man. This the prodigal found, Luke xv. 17, "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! (3.) It is an unsafe life; John iii. 36, "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Amidst all thy mirth and jollity, the sword of justice is hanging over thy head by a hair, and every moment, for all that thou knowest, it may fall, and cleave thee asunder. This our Lord threatens in the parable of the wicked servant, Matth. xxiv. 50, 51, "The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of; and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

MOTIVE 2. The reversing of the sentence by a remission, is not so easily obtained as men are apt to imagine. Many think there is no more ado, but after a careless graceless life, when they come to die, to commend their souls to God, with a "God have mercy on me;" and all will be safe. But they that get out a remission, get it so as they are taught other thoughts of it. Hence is that exclamation of the church, Micah vii. 18, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." Consider,

1st, Sin is the greatest of evils, the deepest of all stains to wash out. Fair words, nay tears, nay not the blood of bulls and goats, not the blood of one's own body will wash it out; only the blood of the Son of God: Heb. xi. 22, "Without shedding of blood is no remission." Compared with 1 John i. 7, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Sin is the most contrary to God's nature: Hab. i. 13, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." And therefore it is the object of his greatest loathing. Going on in sin, thou art engaged against all the attributes of God. Sin has marred the whole frame of God's workmanship, provoking him to break it in pieces. Can it be easy to get all this buried in forgetfulness with a jealous God?

2dly, God's giving remissions, is one of his greatest works. Hence is that prayer of Moses, Num. xiv. 17, 19, "And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people,

according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." This is a work greater than the making of a world. That was done by a word spoken. But in this case, justice stands up for satisfaction, truth for the honour of a broken law, and wisdom finds a way for mercy only by the blood of Christ: John iii. 16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."

3dly, Sad breakings of heart do sinners ordinarily endure, ere they being once touched with sense of sin, get the pardon of it. This was the case of Peter's hearers, Acts ii. 37, "They were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Paul can tell you from his experience of the terror of the Lord; David of broken bones. However lightly ye think now of the way of coming at it; a medicine given you for sweating out the poison of sin, will readily make you sick at heart, and perhaps bring you to the last gasp, Is. xxxiii. 24.

MOTIVE 3. Howbeit, God is now on a throne of grace to grant remissions: 2 Cor. v. 19, "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Ye may get a pardon now in the Lord's own way: Is. lv. 7, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Heaven's white flag of peace yet hangs out, the market of free grace stands open, an indemnity is proclaimed in the gospel: Acts xiii. 38, "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."

MOTIVE 4. *Lastly,* Access to remissions will not last: Is. Iv. 6, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Abused patience will break out into fury: Luke xiii. 24, 25. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer, and say unto you, I know you not whence you are." Beware ye sit not your day of grace, and delay not till ye will find no place for repentance: Luke xiv. 24, "For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden, shall taste of my supper."

OBJECTION. My sins are great. ANSWER. Neither the greatness multitude, nor backsliding into them will hinder: Is. i. 18. "Come

now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as now; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Is. lv. 7. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Jer. iii. 22. "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." The Lord has set up instances of pardoning mercy, that none may despair; as Adam, Manasseh, Paul, and the Jews, crucifiers of Christ.

DIRECTION 1. Be sensible of your sin; of the evil of it; of the mischief done to yourselves, and the injury and dishonour done to God. Look to the law, the justice of God, &c.

DIRECTION 2. Go to God, and confess your sins fully and freely: and condemn yourselves, acknowledging yourselves justly condemned by the law, and God to be righteous if he should execute the sentence.

DIRECTION ult. Look to Jesus Christ the propitiation held forth to you in the gospel, his unspotted righteousness offered to you, and the covert of his blood, the retiring place for safety to guilty creatures. Believe the gospel, that these are made over to you therein, and take possession thereof, by trusting wholly thereon to your remission, and the sanctification of your nature; John iii. 16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish but have everlasting life." So shall ye be united to Christ by faith.

Take that advice, which the servants of Benhadad offered to their master, 1 Kings xx. 31. Put on the sackcloth of deep humiliation, ropes about your necks, acknowledging ye are worthy of death, and go forth to Christ by faith; for the King of Zion is a merciful king, and will save your life.

DOCTRINE II. The Lord oftentimes does not soon come to the execution of the sentence against ungodly men, evil-workers; but delays it for a time.

In prosecuting this doctrine, we shall,

I. Take a view of the method of Providence in this matter.

II. Account for this slow method of Providence.

III. Make application of the subject.

I. We shall take a view of the method of Providence in this matter. There is a twofold method of Providence with the ungodly, evil-workers, in respect of execution against them; namely, a swift and a slow method.

First, There is a swift method the Lord sometimes takes with

sinners: Mal. iii. 5. "I will come near to you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers," &c. Sinners adventure on evil works; and God sentences them for them presently, and pursues them hard with execution, without delay. (1.) Sometimes the sinner has an ill work in design, and the Lord counts his will for the deed, and prevents by a speedy execution; as in Haman's case. He hatched the mischief, but he did not see it come forth. (2.) Sometimes the sinner is in actual motion to the ill work, and execution is done on him ere he get it performed. So it fared with the rebellious Israelites, in their attempting to go into the promised land, Num. xiv. 44, 45. And so it fared with Jereboam, putting forth his hand to lay hold on the prophet, 1 Kings xiii. 4; and with Uzziah having the censer in his hand, 2 Chron. xxvi. 19. (3.) Sometimes the execution trysts with the very doing of the ill work, so that the sinner is taken away with the stroke in his sin. Thus fared it with Nadab and Abihu offering strange fire, Lev. x. 1, 2; with Zimri and Cozbi cut off in the act of uncleanness, Num. xxv. 8; and with Herod, who was eaten up of worms for his Atheism and blasphemy, Acts xii. 23. (4.) Sometimes as the ill work is done out and ended, the execution begins. So it fared with Sennacherib's blasphemous letter. He had writ it, and it was read; so his sin was completed; and that very night the Lord smote his army, and soon after himself, 2 Kings xix. 14, 35. &c. (5.) Sometimes the execution keeps pace with the ill work, and the one goes on as the other does; judgment in the several degrees following hard at the heels of the sin. So it fared with Hiel, in his building of Jericho, 1 Kings xvi. ult. (6.) Sometimes execution begins with the sinner's beginning to reap the fruit of his sin when he leans upon his wall, a serpent bites him. So it fared with Ahab taking possession of Naboth's vineyard, 1 Kings xxi. 18, 19. And so it fared with the lusts in the wilderness, Psal. lxxviii. 30, 31. (7.) *Lastly*, Sometimes when one's sin begins to work, in its bitter fruits and effects on others, it recoils on the sinner himself. So it fared with Judas the traitor, Matt. xxvii. 3, 4, 5. It is a sport to some to do mischief to others; but ere all be done, it may, in the just judgment of God, come as heavy on themselves as on their neighbour.

Secondly, There is a slow method the Lord takes oftentimes with sinners, Neh. ix. 17. They commit their evil works; the sentence is presently passed for them: but then the execution is delayed, Psal. l. 21. And that is what is particularly noticed in our text. Concerning this method I offer these observes.

1. The sinner may get his evil work contrived and accomplished,

without any let in this way from Heaven, by any execution against him. There is a God in heaven who has his eye upon him all along; but that God keeps silence, and lets the sinner take his swing, Psal. l. 21. He could cut him off from the purposes of his heart, and break his arm, that he should not accomplish his work: but he does it not.

2. The ill work being done without let, the sinner may also for a time pass unpunished, and as little notice may seem to be taken of it, as if there were not a God to judge upon the earth, Ezek. ix. 9. There are times wherein holy Providence, as it were, winks at ungodly sinners, Acts xvii. 30. Hence God is said to awake to judgment, when that time is over, Psal. vii. 6.

3. Yea, ill works may not only for a time escape unpunished, but undiscovered too, Hos. xii. 7, 8; Prov. xxx. 20. There are many abominations that appear with open face in the world; but there are perhaps more that are not discovered, being reserved to the judgment of the great day, 1 Tim. v. 21; Rom. ii. 16. An omniscient God could pull the vail off them, but in the slow method it is long a-doing.

4. Sinners finding it go thus, encourage themselves in evil, repeat their evils works, add sin to sin, and give themselves the loose in their sinful courses. This is observed in our text. None go to the highest pitch of wickedness all of a sudden, but by degrees.* Ill works at first have a terror about them, and the sinner trembles under some fearful expectation at first: but a long-suffering God strikes not, thence the sinner gathers courage, Psal. lxiv. 5. and ventures again, and the terror wears off by degress.

5. Nay sinners may prosper in an ill course. So far may they be from execution done against them, that they may thrive in the world in it: Psal. xxxvii. 35, "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree." The sun of worldly prosperity may shine light and warm on men in a course of sin, gone away from God, and God from them. Yea, objects of God's indignation may in that respect be treated as if they were the darlings of Heaven; and the objects of God's special love, as if they were the buts of his wrath: Eccl. viii. 14, "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous." This has been sometimes puzzling to the saints, as to Jeremiah, See chap. xii. 1, 2.

* *Nemo repente sit turpissimus.*

6. More than that, they may prosper by their ill works, they may enjoy the fruits of their sin, and thrive by their ill courses; as Ephraim did, Hos. xii. 7, 8. Riches are called the mammon of unrighteousness, because oftentimes they are got together by unrighteousness. Many a fair estate, and great worldly wealth has been got together by oppression; yea the foundation of some has been laid in blood, Hab. ii. 12. A plain evidence, that men may not only prosper in, but by sin.

7. Sinners may get a long time of it, wherein they sin, and God spares still. The old world got a long day of 120 years. Job observes, that the wicked may live, and become old, and continue prosperous too, Job xxi. 7, and Is. lxxv. 20. Sometimes God quickly cuts off men in a course of sin: but it is not always so; but men may grow gray-headed in the way of wickedness.

8. The Lord may seem to be in his way to execute the sentence sometimes, and yet may give another delay; his hand stretched out, he may withdraw again, Psal. lxxviii. 38. Criminals may be set on the brow of the hill, and yet be returned safe, and make a very ill use of the deliverance, turning worse on the back of it. The 120 years being out, the old world got seven days more respite, and they gave themselves the loose. See Matt. xxiv. 38.

9. When execution is at length begun, it may be carried on very leisurely for a time: the drops may come very few and soft before the shower, Is. ix. 1. God may deal very gently with impenitent sinners, even when he is risen up against them, before he come to the full execution. God's judgments coming with iron hands, may yet proceed with leaden feet in slow pace.

10. *Lastly,* More than all that, the execution may be entirely put off during this life. Men may live wickedly and prosperously, die peaceably, and be buried honourably; and so would wholly escape with their ill works, were it not that there is another world and an after-reckoning, and that there is no delay of execution there. This is plain from Eccl. viii. 10, "I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done." Luke xvi. 19, 22, "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. The rich man also died, and was buried." Psal. lxxiii. 4, "There are no bands in death: but their strength is firm." Sometimes God makes the world witness to the execution of the sentence against an ill work: but oft-times men get out of the world without it, in this slow method of providence.

II. We shall account for this slow method of providence. And

there is much need to do it, because there is a mystery of providence in it that is not easy to unriddle, and among men there are sad blunders about it. And,

1. It is wrested by many a sinner in his own case, to his own ruin, Prov. i. 32. We naturally have such high thoughts of the world's smiles, that we are apt to imagine God thinks highly of them too, and that he expresses his special love and kindness by them. But quite the contrary: Rev. iii. 19, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Hence a prosperous sinner can hardly imagine himself not to be a favourite of Heaven, at least cannot think God is so angry with his way as some would give out; and so he continues secure in his course, Psal. l. 21.

2. Being misunderstood, it is ruining to many spectators, and is in hazard of turning them atheistical, and contemners of religion: Mal. iii. 14, 15, "Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it, that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the proud happy: yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered." There are many who have no inward principle of religion. Now, when these see that there is worldly advantage to be got by it, they embrace it, like the mixed multitude from Egypt: but when they see the way of wickedness prosperous, and sinners to keep the road for all the threatenings against them, and the godly afflicted and bowed down for all the promises to them; they are ready to think, that the threatenings and promises of the word are both but empty sounds, and that they see so.

3. There is a difficulty in it, that has puzzled many a great saint, and made him to stagger. So ready are we to walk by sense, not by faith. This was a knotty piece of the book of providence to Jeremiah, though he resolved to believe over the belly of sense, Jer. xii. 1, 2; and to Habakkuk, chap. i. 2, 3, 4. It had almost carried Asaph quite off his feet, Psal. lxxiii. 2—13, 14.

4. There being a darkness on the minds of all men with respect to the methods of divine procedure, they are apt to imagine an inconsistency of this method of providence with the perfections attributed to God. And there are four divine perfections, that are apt to run a risk with poor sinners blind and rash in judging.

1st, His omniscience, whereby he seeth and noticeth all things done in the world, Prov. xv. 3, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." But when men themselves are conscious of their own wickedness, and yet see that God does not proceed against them for it, they are apt to say, as Ezek. ix. 9,

"The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not." So the Psalmist represents men going on in their wickedness, secure as to any notice to be taken of it from heaven, Psal. xciv. 5, 6, 7, "They break in pieces thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The Lord shall not see: neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." Therefore Job asserts it on that occasion, chap. xxiv. 1, "Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him, not see his days?"

2dly, His holiness, whereby he is pure in himself, and cannot but hate all impurity and sin in his creatures. It is certain that it is so. The angels proclaim it, Is. vi. 3, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." The Psalmist pointedly declares it, Psal. v. 4, 5, "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity." But when men see this method of providence with ungodly sinners, they can hardly believe it, Psal. l. 21, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." For, think they, if it were so, how could he bear with such unholiness in sinners affronting him, and trampling on his laws? Therefore the Prophet asserts it on that very occasion, but withal owns a difficulty of reconciling this method of providence with it, Hab. i. 13. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and caust not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?"

3dly, His justice or righteousness, whereby he so hates sin that he cannot but punish it. It is certain it is so, Gen. xviii. 25. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" He has demonstrated it in the death of his own Son. But when men see ungodly sinners going on in their sin unpunished, they are apt to think, that God is not so very just in that matter, as some give him out to be; for they cannot see sin get a just recompence. Therefore Jeremiah asserts it on that occasion, Jer. xii. 1. "Righteous art thou, O Lord."

4thly, His goodness to his own people, whereby being good in himself, he does good to them that are good. It is certain it is so, Psal. xxxiv. 8, 9, 10. "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for their is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." The prophet got it in commission, Is. iii. 10.

"Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." But when men see this method of providence dangling ungodly sinners, and smiting the godly, they are apt to think it is not so. And therefore Asaph asserts it on that occasion, Psal. lxxiii. 1. "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart."

Now, to remove these misconstructions, and account for the slow method of providence, I offer these considerations.

First, This method is taken to bring sinners to repentance, and prevent their ruin, 2 Pet. iii. 9.; and it is becoming the perfections of a merciful God, therefore to use it. By this means sinners,

1. Have time and space to repent given them, Rev. ii. 21. Were they always taken away just in the heat of their unmortified lusts, we would be ready to cry out of severity, Num. xvii. 12. But God gives them leave to cool ordinarily, if so they will bethink themselves, and turn to the Lord, and so prevent their own ruin.

2. They are invited to repentance, and drawn towards it with the softest methods. Rom. ii. 2. Every sparing preventing, bounteous mercy the impenitent meets with, calls aloud to him to repent. It says to him, "Do thyself no harm:" it upbraids him with wilfulness for his own ruin, why will ye die? with ingratitude, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? And so hereby,

1st, God has the glory of some perfections, which otherwise would not shine forth so illustriously.

(1.) He has the glory of his long-suffering and patience: 2 Pet. iii. 9. "The Lord is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Grave observers of the method of providence must cry out, O wonderful long-suffering of a God! The patience of the meekest man on earth, would be quite worn out with less than the half of what a God bears with.

(2.) He has the glory of his universal good-will to poor sinners of mankind, 2 Pet. iii. 9. forecited. 1 Tim. ii. 4. "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Justice is his act, his strange act; but mercy is what he has a peculiar delight in. He is slow to anger, but ready to forgive. This is written in very legible characters in this method.

(3.) He has the glory of his overcoming goodness. To do evil for good, is devilish; to do good for good, is human: but to do good for ill is divine. Here shines forth the glory of the divine goodness, overcoming evil with good, Luke vi. 35. This is goodness becoming a God!

2dly, As to the sinner, it issues always in one of two things.

(1.) His recovery, to the saving of his soul from sin, and perishing eternally. And God, who has a due value for immortal souls, sees that a great thing; and treats it as worth the waiting on, Luke xv. 7. The Scripture holds out this as a noble attainment, Jam. v. 20. "Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins." How many are there singing Hallelujahs in heaven this day, by means of the slow method, that by the swift method had been roaring with the damned? "Had I died before threescore and sixteen, I had perished, for I knew not Christ." Turk. hist. pag. 96.

(2.) Or else his being left inexcusable, Rom. i. 20. The longer God has borne with, and the more kind he has been to impenitent sinners, the more inexcuseable they will be; and the more will God's severity against them be justified. And so this method tends to the clearing of God's justice.

Secondly, In the slow method God takes with sinners, he often has an eye to posterity; and that,

1. To posterity in general. And it is of use to them, whether the sinner so spared repent or not. If he repent, it is of noble use to encourage them that come after, to turn to God. How useful to many one has been the slow method which God took with Manasseh and Paul! 1 Tim. i. 16. If he repent not, and vengeance seize him at length in sight of the world, he becomes a warning piece to others that come after, Psal. xxxvii. 35—37. Though it do not, his memory rots; and the conscience of every one that notices his wickedness silent and at an end in the grave, judges him to have spent his life foolishly, Job xxiv. 19, 20. Thus many who are of no use in the world to others but for mischief, God in his providence makes good use of them.

2. To the sinners' own posterity; and that,

1st, To their posterity yet unborn. There may be vessels of mercy in the loins of vessels of wrath. Many graceless parents have been fathers and mothers of gracious children. It is for the elect's sake that the world is kept up; and if the last elect were born and brought in, the world will quickly be at an end. The law spares a condemned woman, if she is with child, till she has brought it forth: and God often spares long, condemned sinners, for the elect that may be in their loins, Matth. xxiv. 22. There was a sentence passed against the generation which came out of Egypt, which for this very reason was about thirty-eight years ere it was executed on some.

2dly, To their posterity already born; and that two ways.

(1.) As Satan gives some a surfeit of religion and sobriety in their parents; so God makes reprisals on him, by giving others a horror of sin and wickedness in theirs, Ezek. viii. 14. And God spares them, that they may be a glass wherein their posterity may have a view of the hatefulness of sin. A wretched office, but it justifies the slow method of a holy God.

(2.) Men are often punished in their posterity. Many a poor child has smarted upon the occasion of the parent, and many a fair and flourishing family has wickedness raised. A holy just God sometimes pursues quarrels against some evil-workers through several generations, as is threatened in the second command. The third and fourth generation are mentioned, because men may live to see themselves punished in their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. And they may be spared in this slow method for that very end. Witness Zedekiah.

Thirdly, In the slow method God takes with sinners, he has an eye to his own people: 2 Cor. iv. 15, "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God." As the world is kept up for the sake of God's people, so it is guided as it is by providence for their sakes. And it is their good that is designed by it: Rom. viii. 28, "And we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The way that it comes to be for their good, is by means of the sharp trial they have by it. So God takes the slow method with ungodly sinners for the trial of his own children. And it is a sharp trial to them two ways.

1. They smart sore under their wickedness. Ungodly men are God's rod, as the Assyrians was God's hand against his people, Psal. xvii. 14. Oft-times they feel as much at their hand, as makes them smart by the rod: Hab. i. 12, "O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment, and O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction." They always see as much of them, as occasions to them many a heavy heart, ver. 3, "Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention." Wherefore since God's people need the rod, it is preserved, and not flung into the fire.

Meanwhile this tends to their good. The ungodly oblige them to pray, watch, live in the exercise of faith, more than otherwise they would do. Hence many times the most tender Christians are found among the most notoriously profane neighbours, like Lot in Sodom, who carried not so well in the cave. For as the godly are

eyesores to the wicked, so the wicked are often as whetstones and files to the godly.

2. They smart the sorer under their own afflictions : Psal. lxxiii. 10, "Therefore his people return hither : and waters of a full cup wrung out to them." The prosperity of the wicked carries the afflictions of the godly to a pitch ; and sometimes to a dangerous pitch, through the sleight of Satan improving it against them. This was the case of Asaph, Psal. lxxiii. 12—14, "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." Job's friend's acted Satan's part on that bottom, endeavouring to prove him an unsound man, because he was a man so afflicted.

But this also tends to their good. It makes them look more concernedly into their Bible, and find sweet and relief where otherwise they would find no more than others do ; as we see in Asaph's case, Psal. lxxiii. 16, 17, "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me : until I went into the sanctuary of God ; then understood I their end." And it makes them to look more narrowly into their own hearts, and to their sincerity, Job x. 7. It obliges them to live more by faith, and not by sight ; to the exercise of hope, patience, &c.

. *Fourthly*, In this slow method, God often carries on his awful yet holy work of hardening sinners. There is such a work : Rom. ix. 18, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy ; and whom he will, he hardeneth." And it is a most dreadful plague and judgment, whereby God ceasing to punish men for their sins one way, punishes them another way in a dreadful manner. This appears, if ye consider,

1. It is a spiritual stroke, lighting on the soul, and therefore, more terrible than external strokes on people's bodies or substance, Rom. i. 28. Hereby the mind is blinded, the will doubly enslaved to lust, and the conscience seared : a kind of stroke rife this day.

2. It is a stroke, whereby the disease of sin is increased, and the gospel-remedy is rendered ineffectual. The heart being hardened, the loose is given to lusts that before were under some restraint, Eph. iv. 19 ; and the means of grace become useless, if not noxious : the hardened heart turning the food of the soul, as it were, to poison in effect, Is. vi. 10 ; 2 Cor. ii. 16.

3. It is a fearful preparative to utter destruction, Rom. ix. 22. A nasty earthen vessel, that gets leave to contract more and more nastiness, and is not purged and cleansed, is designed to be broken

in pieces, and thrown away : Ezek. xxiv. 13, " In thy filthiness is lewdness : because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." So it is awful.

Yet it is a holy work in the hand of the Lord. God is holy in his hardening, as well as in his softening-work, Is. vi. 3, compared with ver. 10. For,

1. God hardens no soft hearts, hardens none but those who first harden themselves, Rom. i. 28. Men first shut their own eyes to the light, and then a just God blinds their eyes : they are wilful in their sin, and God gives them their will, Hos. iv. 17. For who can say he is obliged to strive on with them still ?

2. Sin is a meet punishment of sin, Rom. i. 27. And therefore it is just with God to punish sin by sin, to take off the restraint from those who cannot endure it ; to let them fall into the mire, and lie in it, that will needs be in it.

Now, God in this slow method often carries on this hardening work ; and that both on the sinner himself and others.

1. In this method oft-times the sinner himself is hardened judicially. God is at much pains with sinners to bring them back from their sinful courses ; he trysts them with rebukes from his word, convictions, terrors, and anxieties, and adds to these sharp crosses and afflictions. But they struggle against all these, and over the belly of them pursue their sins : so God judicially hardens them, and carries on that fearful work in the slow method.

1st, Denying or withdrawing his grace, and giving them up to their own lusts, Psal lxxxii. 12. There is restraining grace given to many, who never get sanctifying grace ; good motions, thoughts, and convictions are put into their hearts : these the Lord withdraws, and leaves men to the swing of their corruptions ; as he did Ephraim, Hos. iv. 17, " Ephraim is joined to idols : let him alone." They rebel against the light, and the Lord lets it die out. They are impatient of restraint, and the Lord takes it off. They like the government of their lusts, and the Lord gives them up to them.

2dly, Giving them up to Satan to be hardened by him, as the executioner of God's just vengeance, 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. Men resisting, grieving, and vexing the Holy Spirit of God, provoke him to depart, and to leave them in the hand of the evil spirit, who then finds easy work with them ; as in Saul's case. Hereby Satan's power over them is confirmed, the opposition to his interest in them is much removed, and so his influence over them is increased.

God proceeding in the slow method with the sinner in this case, doth awfully carry on the hardening work upon him. In which we may observe,

(1.) Their impunity hardens them. They venture on sin, God in anger lets them go on unpunished, Hos. iv. 14. And Satan and their own corrupt hearts improve that to the encouraging and strengthening them in their sins. Thence a wind from hell rises that fills their sails. Hence in the text, Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

(2.) Their prosperity in the world hardens them: Psal. lxxiii. 5, 6, "They are not in trouble as other men: neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain: violence covereth them as a garment." The hotter the sun shines, the clay becomes the harder: and the warmer the sun of worldly prosperity shines on the sinner given up to his own lusts and the power of Satan, he, like a dunghill, becomes the harder, and sends forth the more rank savour.

(3.) In the soft dealings of Providence with them, objects, occasions, and means to do their ill works, are justly laid before them: they are tempted, flattered, and encouraged by others. And thus the warm influence of providence on them in external things, which should lead them to repentance, is, by means of their own lusts to which they are left, turned hardening and ruining to them: Prov. i. 32, "For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." These are to them like a full wind to a ship without ballast, in a storm.

(4.) Proper means for checking them are in the just judgment of God rendered ineffectual, and that hardens them. Thus it was with Pharaoh: the miracle of the rod turned into a serpent, waters into blood, bringing in the frogs, seemed to Pharaoh's eye-sight done by the magicians too. And thus were they rendered ineffectual to him.

(5.) *Lastly*, The adversity and frowns of Providence on the serious godly, harden them, Job xii. 4, 5, 6. These are improved, by the sleight of Satan, to the contempt of both the religious and religion.

2. In this method God carries on a hardening work upon ungodly spectators of it. Hence there is a woe to the world, because of offences, Matth. xviii. 7. The generality of men have so little sense of religion, and insight into the mysteries of Providence, that they are apt to think that that is the best way which is the most prosperous, Prov. xix. 4. Hence there was a generation that would needs make that the standard of religion; Jer. xliv. 17, 18, "But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out

drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword, and by the famine." And so the Lord doth in his holy providence lay that method of it before worldly and carnal men, at which they, by reason of their own wilful blindness, do stumble, to their own ruin, Mal. iii. 14, 15, forecited.

Fifthly, The general method of Providence in managing the world, is soft to his adversaries, and sharp to his own children in this life: 1 Cor. xv. 19, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Rev. iii. 19, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." This is the general rule, thought it admits of exceptions, both in the case of the one and the other. God's adversaries sometimes meet with sharp things, his children with soft. But the general and ordinary course of providence is soft to the former, and sharp to the latter.

This appears particularly in two things.

1. God's children are held shorter by the head, in point of particular rebukes of Providence, than his adversaries are.

1st, God sharply noticeth many things in his own, that he will pass in others, and greater too. Hence said Job, "If I sin, then thou markest me, and thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity," chap. x. 14. The common proverb holds here, One man had better steal a horse, than another look over the hedge. A child of God many times pays dearer for a vain thought, than others for a vile action; for a rash word, than others for blasphemy and contrived wickedness. How did Moses smart for an unadvised word? Psal. cxi. 32, 33, "They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips." Compare Num. xx. 10, 12, "And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel; therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." But see Psal. lxxiii. 9, 10. "They set their mouth against the heavens; and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them."

2dly, When both meet with rebukes for an ill thing, his own oft-times get the sharpest. Hence the lamenting church says, Lam. i. 12. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me, in the day of his fierce anger." The controversy for unworthy communicating was pleaded with some godly Corinthians, to the sickening of their bodies, yea even to death, 1 Cor. xi. 30. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep.

2. A lot of adversity is in a peculiar manner the lot of God's people in this life, and the world smiles most on its own friends: John xvi. 33. "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Psal. lxxiii. 10. "Therefore his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them." In the case of the church and people of God in this life, adversity seems to be the rule and ordinary course, prosperity the exception: but in the case of the men of the world, prosperity the rule, and adversity the exception. This appears,

1st, From the Scripture, wherein we find the rod of adversity the beaten path in which the saints under the Old and New Testament have walked: the godly often groaning under the weight of their own afflictions, and the weight of prosperous wickedness in their enemies. The Cainites build cities, and have the harp and organ among them; while the church dwell still in tents: Abraham a stranger in the land of promise, while the cursed Cannanites enjoy it: Jacob's posterity in slavery in Egypt, while the Edomites were settled in their own land, having a king of their own. Perhaps among the Jews in Canaan worldly prosperity was more annexed to piety, agreeable to the dispensation they were under, wherein temporal promises bear great bulk. But consider that people in comparison with other nations, and ye will find their prosperity very short, in comparison of their neighbours, and their adversity very long: Zech. i. 11, 12. "And they answered the angel of the Lord that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest. Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem, and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?" But under the New Testament the thing is most clear. Our Saviour points out this as the stated method of Providence; Luke vi. 20—26. "And Jesus lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for

yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye that when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for behold your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich: for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full: for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now: for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you: for so did their fathers to the false prophets." Chap. xvi. 25. "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

2dly, From experience and observation. One needs but to open his eyes, and look about through the world, and he cannot miss to see the world's greatest favours bestowed on them who have least sense of God and religion; wickedness triumphant, while serious godliness is pressed down; sinners often laughing while saints weep.

Now, this method becomes the divine wisdom. For,

(1.) At this rate the evil have a taste of good, and the good a taste of evil, Luke xvi. 25. forecited. The former, who will at length drink deep of endless sorrow, are patiently borne with, to bring them to repentance: the latter, who shall rejoice for evermore, have now the trial of a weeping time.

(2.) As a father is more concerned for, and exact in the correcting of the faults of his own children, than of his servants; so is our Father in heaven with respect to his family. The more he loves, the more he corrects with his rod: Amos iii. 2, " You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." There are some who are to dwell with him for ever: there are others who are to depart from him for ever. What wonder, that he is at more pains to purify the former than the latter !

(3.) This is most agreeable to the way he took with his own Son and his enemies. While Christ was in the world, he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; the wind blew in his face continually, till he was cruelly put to death on the cross. The axe lay at the root of the Jewish church and state, his enemies; yet was it not wielded against them all the time he was among them, nor till about forty years after. This was the pattern that is copied after in this method: Rom. viii. 29, " For whom he did foreknow, he also

did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren."

Sixthly, Though the slow method seems strange to us short-sighted creatures, it is not at all strange being viewed in the glass of the infinite perfections of the divine nature. A thing will appear in a shallow river, that being cast into the sea will appear no more. We wonder at the slow method of providence, while we look to men; but we will cease to wonder if we look to God, and observe, that,

1. God is eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, Psal. xc. 2. If men do not soon pursue their quarrels, death may snatch them away, and they can have no access more to do it: but however long the Lord delays pleading his quarrel, he can lose no time, for he is eternal.

2. In God's eternal duration there are no differences of time; all is present to him. Time is for measuring created beings, but not the infinite being. So a thousand years and one day are alike unto him, whatever odds there is betwixt them to us: Psal. xc. 4, "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." This consideration the apostle suggests, 2 Pet. iii. 8, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

3. He sees exactly the time appointed for execution against every impenitent sinner, and will not let it pass beyond that, one moment: Hab. ii. 3, "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." We see the beginning and middle of things, but cannot foresee the end. God sees all at once. Well can he bear with ungodly sinners, for he sees their day coming with speed, Psal. xxxvii. 13. What needs haste in respect of God? for he sees the sinful creature is fading, and will drop down into a grave ere long, Psal. lxxviii. 38, 39.

4. He knows what he intends to do, and none can hinder: Dan. iv. 37, "All the King of heaven's works are truth, and his ways judgment, and those that walk in pride he is able to abase. The prince that is afraid of the rebels, will strive to crush them ere they gather to a head; but he that knows he can crush them when he will, may let them gather all their strength together. God can carry on the designs of his glory, by bearing long with impenitent sinners: Rom. ix. 17, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." Thus also he can laugh at the trial of the innocent:

Job ix. 23, "If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent." Like a father holding his child in his hands over a deep pool; the child cries, and the father smiles.

5. *Lastly*, He is infinitely blessed in himself; and nothing the creature can do against him can hurt him; nor in the least disturb his repose in himself: Job xxxv. 6, 8, "If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man." If the whole creation should conspire against him, opening their mouths against the heavens, and doing to the utmost of their power against him; he might contemn their impotent malice, they would be but like men running their heads against a rock. The longest interval of time cannot make him weary: Is. xl. 28, "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"

Seventhly, There is a necessity for both the swift and slow methods being used by Providence in the government of the world; it is so corrupt and atheistical. And,

1. The swift method is necessary to shew, that there is a God to judge upon the earth: Psal. lviii. 10, 11, "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth." For as ordinary as the slow method is, there are never wanting instances now and then of swift process against ungodly sinners: which is necessary to bear testimony to the being of a God, and of a providence concerned in human affairs. And there are as many of these, as may give sufficient warning to all.

2. The slow method is necessary, to shew there is a judgment to come: 2 Thess. i. 4—7, "We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure. Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us: when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels," &c. What the carnal world improves in behalf of Atheism, is necessary to prevent Sadduceism: for if all men's wickedness were punished in this life, it would thence be concluded, that there were no after-reckoning: but there is never a sentence passed against an evil work, that is missed to be executed now, but is a pledge of the judgment to come.

Lastly, The slowest vengeance against impenitent sinners will be sure vengeance; and the slower it is in coming, it will be the sorer when it comes: Deut. xxxii. 35, "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste." The old world was spared a hundred and twenty years, but was swept away at length.

1. Let sinners be spared never so long, not one of all their ill works will, or can be forgotten. They may have forgot them themselves, but God never will. There is a book of remembrance of their ill, as well as of the saint's good words and works: Amos viii. 7, "The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works." Psal. 1. 21, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."

2. The longer sinners are spared, their counts will be the greater, and all will come on at once, Luke xi. 50, 51; 1 Sam. iii. 12. It is people's mercy, that God ceaseth not to be a reprover to them; as it is the mercy of weak people to pay their debt by littles, whereas they are broken if it get leave to run on.

3. When it comes on the impenitent sinner, God will charge both the interest and the principal sum together. They shall not only pay for their ill works, but for their mercies, and the sparing they have gotten: Rom. ii. 4, 5, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasures up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." What aggravated their sin, will aggravate their condemnation and punishment.

And how long soever the execution of the sentence against ungodly sinners, evil-workers, may be delayed, and how many external favours of providence be heaped on them; all will appear but small and short, when one considers,

1st, The severity of the execution when it comes. They will at length be cut asunder, Matt. xxiv. 51. In flaming fire he will take vengeance on them, 2 Thess. i. 8. They will fall into the hands of the living God.

2^{dly}, The eternity of it. That is a killing aggravation in the sentence, Depart into everlasting fire. If the worm were once awakened, and set on them, it dieth not; the fire once kindled, will not be quenched.

USE 1. Of Information. What is said may inform us.

1. That present ease and prosperity in the world is not a sure sign of God's special favour, Eccl. ix. 1, 2. Indeed men are apt to construe it so; and Satan and the deceitful heart help them to draw such a conclusion. But so far is it from being such a sign, that it may very well consist with their being in a state of wrath, under a sentence of condemnation; and is so with many.

2. That present ease, impunity, and prosperity, is no security against the time to come. Men are ready to be secure upon it, and to dream that to-morrow will be as this day: Psal. x. 6, "He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity." But the mountain may be standing sure now, that ere long may be overturned. The sun shined fair on Sodom, the morning of that day in which God rained fire and brimstone on it. The rich man was full of thoughts of ease in that day, in the night whereof he was struck, Luke xii. 18, 19, 20.

3. There cannot be such worth in outward prosperity, nor such evil in affliction, as we generally imagine. For a holy, wise God would never heap what is really best on the objects of his wrath, and what is really worst on the objects of his love. Were there as much real value in the world's wealth, ease, and honour, health, strength, silver, gold, &c. as we imagine; or were there as much evil in trouble, adversity, &c. as we think, would they be so dealt, as that the greatest share of the former should be given to the condemned, and of the latter to the justified? It is owing to the weakness of human sight, that so much beauty appears in some human faces, and in some victuals we feed on. If they were looked to with a microscope, the beauty would disappear. Faith is the microscope here, Eccl. i. 2; 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

4. God is a patient and long-suffering God, not subject to passions as we are, 2 Pet. iii. 9. If he were liable to the transports of passion as we are, the world would have been many times burnt to ashes ere now; considering the provocations given to the eyes of his glory. But the infinite mind enjoys the profoundest serenity and calm, beholding all the confusions of evil-workers in the world.

5. *Lastly*, Sad and heavy strokes may be abiding a land and generation, though long warded off. Long has the Lord borne with this apostatising generation in principle and practice; and long have we been threatened: and through the delay, we have been brought to say, "The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth," Ezek. xii. 22. But a reprieve is no pardon; the cloud is still hanging over our heads, and it is to be feared, that some will live to see a fearful breaking of it.

USE 2. Of Exhortation. And,

1. Let ungodly sinners be exhorted to repent of their evil works, and beware of abusing the divine patience with them. Ye have heard the slow method rationally accounted for: If hereafter ye will deceive yourselves, and turn the grace of God into wantonness, encouraging yourselves in sin from your impunity and prosperity; know, that ye are wilfully blind, that ye shall be inexcusable, and your blood will be on your heads. But,

1st, Let the sense of gratitude move you to repentance, Rom. ii. 4. Think with yourselves, what case ye had been in, if God had struck you down, as he could, in the very act of your evil work; how you might have been beyond all hope and possibility of recovery. You owe your life to the slow method of providence; his patience exercised towards you has kept your soul back from the pit. Therefore repent, and go no farther on.

2dly, Let the account ye have heard of the slow method, frighten you from abusing it. I am sure, ye cannot but see now, that there is no ground to take encouragement to sin from it. Consider what has been said, and shew yourselves men. If ye go on to abuse it so, ye make a jest of a most serious and wise dispensation of providence. Ye turn your food into poison, and stumble at noon-day. And it will be a sure presage of everlasting ruin to you: Hos. xiv. 9, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein."

2. Let all beware of censuring the slow method of providence with ungodly sinners, evil workers. Take heed how ye speak on that head; beware of risings of the corrupt heart upon it. For however rationally ye think ye pronounce upon the matter, sooner or later ye shall be made to recant that sentence, either in mercy, as Job did, chap. xlvi. 3, and as Asaph did, Psal. lxxiii. 22, or in wrath, Mal. iii. 14, 15, with 18. Consider,

1st, There may be a mystery in the dispensations of providence; but there can be no iniquity, error, or mistake: Deut. xxxii. 4, "He is the rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he." Silently adore that wisdom and the deep design of providence which ye cannot see through, that certainly are in the slow method God uses with some ungodly sinners, evil-workers. Though ye cannot see how God's glory can miss to suffer by it, believe that God will doubtless get glory by it.

2dly, The mystery of that dispensation in the case of every ungodly sinner, will be opened out before the world at length, to

the satisfaction of all humble waiters ; and the confusion of the impenitent evil-workers, scoffers, and murmurers : 1 Cor. iv. 5, " Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts : and then shall every man have praise of God. Be not rash, wait the end, and then ye shall be allowed to judge : Prov. xviii. 13, " He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." But why should ye jndge of the web of providence ere it be wrought out ?

3. Fret not at, neither envy prosperous wickedness : Prov. xxiii. 17, " Let not thine heart envy sinners : but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long," Psal. xxxvii. 1, " Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity." Who would envy the state of a condemned man, though he have a long reprieve, and enjoy many comforts in the iron house ? Such is the case of the ungodly, whatever world's ease they have. And therefore they are just objects of pity and compassion, but not of envy. One had better be a pardoned one in the depth of worldly misery, than in a state of wrath and condemnation in the top of worldly felicity, " 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 ? Matth. xvi. 26. Consider,

1st, Such fretting and envy proceeds from a distempered heart : Psal. lxxiii. 22, " So foolish was I, and ignorant : I was as a beast before thee." See Mal. iii. 15. It is the produce of a mixture of ignorance, rashness and inconsideration, unbelief and worldly-mindedness. And there needs only to cure it, to have our eyes opened, to see things in their true state ; the laying aside of unruly passions ; faith and due weanedness from the world : Psal. xxxvii. 1. 2, " Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb."

2dly, Every one's state is to be rated, according as it is before God. If God be one's friend, he is a happy man, though the world should never give him its word nor kind look. If God is one's enemy, he is a miserable man, though all the men and things of the world should favour him to his wish. For as is one's state with God, so is his present safety ; and so will be his well or woe through eternity.

4. Let all learn to regulate their conduct by the example of God in this his government of the world, so far as it is proposed for our imitation : Eph. v. 1. " Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children." And we may learn from it,

1st, To be patient and slow to anger. How ill does it become us to be so ready to fire at every provocation, against our fellow-creatures; when the highest One uses so much patience towards us? Matth. xviii. 23, &c. The more meekly and patiently one carries himself, he is the more like unto God, who hath set us an example.

2dly, To learn to bear with sinners, in order to the seeking of their recovery: Gal. vi. 1. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the Spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Not that we are to suffer sin upon him, so far as it is in our power to remove it. God can bring good out of evil, but we cannot do that: therefore that part of the conduct of Providence towards the ungodly, we are not called to imitate. But let us be followers of God, in dealing still with the worst of sinners to recover them, and not give them over for hopeless.

3dly, To do good to the worthless, unthankful, and evil: Luke vi. 35. "Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again: and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil." It is a naughty world, that people had need of such a principle to prompt them to do good to others. If we confine our good to those that do good to us, what do we more than others? If we confine it to those worthy of it, we do it only for the creature's sake. But if we propose to follow the example of God, we will do good to all as we have access, and act from a Christian principle in it.

5. *Lastly*, Let us not be secure with respect to the ease of the land and generation we live in. Let us not think that God has forgotten the iniquity of our fathers in their perfidy and cruelty against the godly for his cause; or that he approves of the course of apostacy from the truth and holiness of the gospel this day, whereby the present generation has entered itself heir to the apostatising, persecuting generation that went before. The sentence is not executed, yet it is but delayed; therefore we may look for it, if repentance prevent it not.

DOCTRINE III. God's delay of execution is often miserably abused by sinners, to the filling of their hearts to do evil, and sinning more and more.

In discoursing this doctrine, I shall,

I. Point out the abuse of God's patience in the delay of execution, that ungodly sinners make, to the filling of their hearts to do evil.

II. Shew how it comes to pass, that sinners so abuse God's patience with them.

III. Make application of the doctrine.

I. I shall point out the abuse of God's patience in the delay of execution, that ungodly sinners make, to the filling of their hearts to do evil.

1. They abuse it to carnal security: Psal. x. 6, "He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity." Finding that God does not execute his threatenings against them, they conclude they are in no hazard: and they begin to look on them as mere scarecrows, ver. 5, "His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight." And so they go on securely in their ungodly courses. Hence it is that the execution overtakes them quite unexpectedly: 1 Thess. v. 2, 3, "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

2. They abuse it to a sensual life, wherein their aim is not to keep a clean conscience, but to gratify their senses, as their circumstances in the world will permit; as the rich man did, Luke xii. 19, "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry." So the more that Providence favours them in external things, the more sensual they are, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind: Hos. xiii. 6, "According to their pasture, so were they filled: they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me." Hence the lives of many are trifled away, and wholly spent in making provision for the flesh, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." And that is endless business: Eccl. i. 8, "All things are full of labour, man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing."

3. They abuse it to impudence in sin, Jer. vi. 14, 15. When God strikes men in a sinful course, they are ashamed readily as pointed at by the hand of heaven, as transgressors: but when men prosper in a sinful course, they put on a brow of brass, they gather a stock of impudence in sin, as if Providence had given them a patent for wickedness: Psal. lxxiii. 5, 6, "They are not in trouble as other men: neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain: violence covereth them as a garment."

4. They abuse it to contempt of God, and all that is sacred: Psal. lxxiii. 9, "They set their mouth against the heavens; and their tongue walketh through the earth." Agur saw the danger of this snare, and therefore prayed thus, Prov. xxx. 8, 9, "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty, nor riches,

feed me with food convenient for me : lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord ? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." Israel fell into it : Deut. xxxii. 15, "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked : thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness ; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." The ungodly have not love to God : if they have any thing that way of such affections, it is fear of him, a slavish fear of his wrath, springing from the love of themselves : this fear they lose also, when God delays to strike. And so it issues in contempt, as is natural in the case of one we neither love nor fear. And then all that is sacred is despised.

5. They abuse it to sinning more diffusely, giving loose reins to their several lusts, Jer. vii. 9, 10. One sin makes way for another, and prosperity in a sinful course gives many occasions of sin : and as the vicious stomach, the more it receives, breeds the more ill humours ; so the more one prospers in a sinful course, the more vile does he grow.

6. They abuse it to sinning more eagerly ; Eph. iv. 19, "Being past feeling, they have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." The more that lusts are fed, the more strong they grow, and carry out the man more violently to satisfy them. So that the heart in that case is like a ship having a full gale of wind, and is eagerly set to do evil.

7. *Lastly,* They abuse it to incorrigibleness and obstinacy in sin, Jer. xxii. 21. A prosperous sinner quickly gets above reproofs, Hos. iv. 4. As affliction tends to humble, prosperity puffs up an ungracious heart : and the heart swelled with pride scorns to stoop, till God by his grace or judgments do lay it.

II. How comes it to pass that sinners so abuse God's patience with them ?

1. Sin reigning in the ungodly, fear of wrath is their highest motive to good, and most forcible restraint from evil : and so when that restraint is taken off by the delay of execution again and again ; the heart naturally goes to its own bias, and is like the wild ass's colt snuffing up the wind at her pleasure. The love of holiness for itself, and likeness to God, would prevent it.

2. They mistake the design of providence. They misinterpret the slow method of procedure with them, Psal. l. 21. The design of it is to lead them to repentance ; but that they notice not. But they construe it, as if God approved of their ways, or had such a regard for them, that he will not be so angry with them, as one would make them believe : they cannot think that he is so very

angry at their sin, while they prosper in it by his providence.

3. There is a root of Atheism in the hearts of all men naturally, and it reigns in the ungodly: Psal. xiv. 1, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." Unless God be every now and then proving his being, providence, and justice to them, by his works of judgment on themselves; they are apt to forget him, and deny him. It is the interest of men wedded to their lusts, that there were not a God; or, if there be, that he were not such as the scripture represents him. So they are ready to entertain every thing that may favour it.

4. *Lastly*, The Lord often in that way carries on a holy hardening work. In which case, Satan and the evil heart conspire to this abuse.

USE 1. Of Information. This lets us see,

1. That we need not be surprised to see sinners escaping with one evil work fall into another, and so on; growing still more vile, the more outward favours are heaped on them. It is but a fulfilling of this scripture. Providence often has an odd aspect in our view, till we carry the matter to the Bible; and there we see it exactly answering the word.

2. It is good for men to be under frequent rebukes of Providence. Affliction is sore, but it is the more safe lot, Psal. cxix. 71. In the one men are put in mind of their sins, in the other they are apt to forget both their God and themselves. It would be profitable for the afflicted to consider the wretched abuse the heart is ready to make of ease and prosperity.

3. Slow vengeance will be sore vengeance, when it comes. For the longer it is a-coming, sin goes the deeper: the more God spares impenitents, the more they treasure up wrath against the day of wrath; the counts run on, and swell the more. So whether we consider it coming on in time or in eternity, the heavier will it be.

4. *Lastly*, Great is the corruption of human nature. See it here as in a glass, how the mercy and goodness of God is despised by the corrupt heart, that will not be drawn by such cords of love. See how it turns our food into poison, and that which should be for our welfare into a snare and trap. See it an ungrateful nature, apt to be insensible of the ties of gratitude to our best benefactor.

USE 2. Of Exhortation. Take heed of abusing the patience of a long-suffering God, of turning his grace, goodness, and forbearance into wantonness, of your heart filling to do evil while God spares.

1. Consider the evil of it. There is in it,

1st, An over-valuing of ourselves, as if we deserved not to be worse treated, and therefore were nothing obliged to our benefactor: Hab. i. 16, "They sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag: because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous." Men, who are not bettered by God's goodness, their hearts swell in pride, as patience is used towards them: Psal. lxxiii. 5, 6, "They are not in trouble as other men: neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain: violence covereth them as a garment."

2dly, An undervaluing of others whom providence doth not treat so softly. Hence Job said, chap. xii. 5, "He that is ready to slip with his feet, is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease." How lightly do many that are at ease, look on the heavy things others suffer? They are as unconcerned with them, as if they were creatures of an inferior rank. Were men sensible of God's goodness, in his patience towards them, it would make them sympathize with others, wondering that it is not worse with themselves, 2 Chron. xxviii. 10.

3dly, A monstrous abuse of the creature, and comforts of life, Hos. ii. 8. The use of the creature was given to man, for his comfort indeed; but always in subserviency to the glory of God. But abusers of divine patience turn the weapons against God, which he has armed them with for his service: Deut. xxxii. 15, "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." They are called adulterers and adulteresses, James iv. 4, because they bestow God's good gifts on their lusts, ver. 3. Hence the creation groans under the burden of the ungodly, evil-workers, Rom. viii. 22.

4thly, A denying the due tribute to our Sovereign Lord and King. All that we have we hold of him, in the way of free mercy, Lam. iii. 22. The king in his palace, and the beggar in his cottage, is God's tenant: our food and raiment, coarse or fine, with conveniences of life, are given us of God. We can pay him nothing, but the tribute of praise in our lips and lives: and that is denied. Hence,

5thly, Monstrous ingratitude, a sin of a deep dye: Deut. xxxii. 6, "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?" It is a devilish disposition of heart, that cannot be won with benefits; a base spirit, which good done them cannot engage. But abusers of mercies, the more God loads them

with benefits, the more they load him with their provocations. Ah! shall men sin, because grace abounds? shall their hearts be filled in them to do evil, because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed?

6thly, Practical blasphemy, as if men should say, they are hired to be vile, Jer. vii. 9, 10. Abusers of the doctrine of the gospel, to licentiousness, make Christ the minister of sin: therefore abusers of the kind providence of God to that end, make God in his government of the world so. While Heaven smiles in outward favours on men, and they use them so, the language of that practice is blasphemous.

7thly, Much Atheism and contempt of God. It is a denial of his providence, as if he had no concern about human affairs, Ezek. ix. 9. It makes a jest of his threatenings in his word, 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4. It misrepresents his holy nature, Psal. l. 21, or bids him defiance, Is. v. 19, and throws off his yoke, Psal. xii. 4.

2 Consider the danger of it. If ye go on so,

1st, Ye will make your recovery aye more and more hopeless, Jer. vi. 29, 30. Sin is a current, the farther it runs, the deeper it grows: and the more goodness men sin against, the more is their heart hardened, and their consciences seared. Withal it provokes God to give up with men, leave striving with them, and give them up to their lusts, and to the devil, to be hardened more.

2dly, If God have any thoughts of good towards you, it will make your recovery more difficult. Strong diseases must have strong remedies: and long abused patience will make broken bones, at best; if ye be saved, it will be so as by fire. At best ye are but laying up for bitter repentance: the more loose and licentious one is in an unconverted state, the more severe pangs and throes he will readily find in the new birth. Witness Manasseh, Paul, &c.

3dly, Be it as it will, that patience will have an end; ye shall not sin on and God spare on very long. The coupling of these two will be broken, and God will shew you that he will bear no longer with your abuse: Eccl. vii. 6, "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool." Ye will find God will awake to judgment, and wake you out of your dream; and ye will either be his converts, or broken to pieces by him.

4thly, The breaking up of patience with you is likely to be very sudden and surprising, 1 Thess. v. 2, 3. So was it with the rich man, Luke xii. 19, 20. God bore long with the old world, but at length the deluge came on like a thunderclap, in the midst of their carnal mirth and jollity. God does it in just recompence of long abused patience.

Lastly, Abused patience, when it breaks off, will turn to fury ;* and the longer God has delayed execution, the more severe will it be when it comes on, Lev. xxvi. 28. The more a man has had in trust, his accounts will be found the greater and the harder to clear off, when once the creditors fall on him. It is most pleasing to the flesh, to live in ease and fulness ; but the abuse of these will make a more fearful reckoning, than otherwise.

DOCTRINE IV. Though the execution be never so slow, it will be sure, against impenitent sinners, evil-workers,

In handling this doctrine it is proposed to shew,

I. In what respects the execution against impenitent sinners, evil-workers, will be sure.

II. That the execution against them will be sure.

III. Apply the doctrine.

I. In what respects will the execution against impenitent sinners, evil-workers, be sure ? It will be sure, in respect of,

1. The full tale of their evil works : Eccl. xii. 14, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Neither the multitude of them, nor the long time they lie over unreckoned for, will cause any of them to be forgotten. But the ill works of the several periods of the sinner's life, will be charged home upon him exactly. For God keeps a register of all their evil works, a book that will be opened at the last day, Rev. xx. 12 ; and has sworn that none of them shall be forgotten, Amos viii. 7.

2. The whole aggravations of their evil works, Jude ver. 15. A just God will remember against impenitent sinners, the manner as well as the matter of their sins ; the time, place, and other circumstances of their evil works, will be remembered against them. Their abused mercies, the light they rebelled against, the warnings from the word and providence they slighted, the effects their ill example had on others, the snares others were entangled therein by their means, &c. will all be charged on them.

3. The conviction of their own consciences, Jude ver. 15. Sinners now find ways to cloak and cover their evil works, to deny or mince them : and few will now suffer themselves to be admonished or reproved, but they have a great deal to say in their own defence ; but the lying lips, and tongues that speak proudly, will then be put to silence, Matt. xxii. 12. The light of conscience will then be like broad day-light, that is now as the darkness of the night. It will convince them clearly of what shall be laid to their charge, that

* *Patientia suepe lasa sit furor.*

they can no more deny it, John viii. 9 ; and of the justice of God in proceeding against them, Psal. l. 6.

4. Just punishment brought on them for their evil works, 1 Thess. v. 3. While God delays, men dream with Agag, that the bitterness of death is past : but they will find themselves deceived, as he when Samuel took the sword and hewed him in pieces before the Lord. They cannot escape the due demerit of their sin at length ; but as the needle draws the thread after it, sin will draw wrath. Judgment is sin's shadow.

5. The correspondence there will be between their sin and punishment. God will write every ungodly sinner's sin in his punishment. Oft-times it is so here with them, as in the case of Adonibezek, Jndg. i. 7 ; but always so hereafter, as in the case of the rich man, Luke xvi. 19, with 24. Hence the worm is said never to die ; signifying the eternal remorse they shall have for their evil works. And the degrees of punishment will be suited to the degrees of their sin. They that have committed many sins, shall have many stripes.

6. Its inevitableness, when once patience is come to an end : Luke xiii. 24, 25, " Strive to enter in at the strait gate : for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us ; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are." The door of mercy may stand open long, but it will be shut at length. And then there is no more escaping. For,

1st, Omniscience will find out the flier, and discover his most secret crimes, and overthrow all his defences : Heb. iv. 13, " Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight : but all things are naked, and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Psal. cxxxix. 7, " Whither shall I go from thy Spirit ? or whither shall I flee from thy presence ?" There is no blinding of the eye of an omniscient judge.

2dly, Divine power will bring him under, and cause him to stand and receive the just reward of his deeds : Job ix. 4, " He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength : who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered ? There will be no resisting of omnipotence : the stoutest sinner will be poured out like water before an angry God.

3dly, The divine severity will proceed over the belly of all entreaties, made out of time : Luke xiii. 24, 25. forecited. They that slight mercy while God's time for it lasts, will get no mercy when God's time is out, and theirs is come.

7. *Lastly*, Its eternity. The execution once on, will never be off; once begun, will never end: Mark ix. 44. In hell the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. While God is, he will pursue the quarrel. The ungodly sin on as long as they are in the world, and live on as long as they will, they will not alter their course: and God will pursue them for ever, when once he has broke off.

II. That the execution against them will be sure, appears,

1. From the inviolable regard God has to the honour of his holy law, Is. xlvi. 21. Sinners trample on it, slight its commands, and despise its threatenings; but God highly regards it, as that wherein he has eminently expressed the holiness of his nature. If sinners then honour it not in the way of duty, it will be honoured upon them in a way of judgment. God's regard to his law may be seen clearly,

1st, In the works of providence. As soon as sin entered into the world, and the law was broken, the face of providence on the world was quite changed. And it has blown continually since in the face of the creation less or more, Rom. viii. 22. Oft-times it has risen to violent storms, to avenge the quarrel of the dishonour of the holy law by sinners. Remember how, in that quarrel, Adam was driven out of Paradise, the world drowned by the flood, Sodom burnt, Jerusalem destroyed, with the many awful strokes brought on impenitent sinners in latter times.

2dly, In the work of redemption. God chose some from eternity unto salvation: but being breakers of the law, they behoved to be redeemed, and the price paid to the full reparation of the honour of the law. Christ the Son of God was their Redeemer; but that the law's honour might be seen to, he met with no sparing: Rom. viii. 32, "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." So God wrote his regard to the law in the salvation of his elect, and blood of his Son.

2. The truth and veracity of God insures the execution. He has said, he will do it: Gen. ii. 17, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." His Son has intimated to us from heaven, that impenitent sinners shall not escape: Luke xiii. 3, "I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Every leaf of the scripture almost, has something to this purpose: "and hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Num. xxviii. 19. God's truth must either fail, or ungodly sinners be reckoned with at length.

3. The justice of God requires it: Gen. xviii. 25, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Men may be unjust judges, but God cannot. He will give every transgression a just recompence of

reward: for it is in his power to do it, and his nature requires it. He hates sin, and cannot but hate it; and therefore though he delay for a time, he will punish.

4. The constant conduct of providence hitherto confirms it. There have been multitudes of ungodly in the world; but may we not put the question, Job ix. 4, "Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?" Some have indeed been long spared, but did they not at length either bow or break before him? What came of the giants in the old world, of Pharaoh, of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? These things happened for warnings to us. And if any have escaped during life, is there not sufficient evidence of execution on them in another world? as is evident from the case of the rich man, Luke xvi.

5. *Lastly*, The peremptory appointment of the day of general judgment, puts it out of question: Acts xvii. 30, 31, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." The Judge is named for that effect already, the commission to him for that end has passed the seals in his resurrection; it is to be general, all must be judged by him; yea the sentence against the ungodly is conceived already, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

For USE I shall drop a word to,

1. The ungodly, evil-workers. And to you I would say,

1st, Let not your impunity for the present, make you secure for the time to come; as is the case of the wicked man, Psal. x. 6, "He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity." As sure as ye think your mountain now stands, it may suddenly be overturned; yea it shall assuredly, if ye repent not. God is giving you space to repent: do not trifle and dream it away, lest ye repent when it is too late.

2dly, Let not your observation of the prosperity of other sinners, encourage and harden you in your sinful course: as it did those, Mal. iii. 15, "And now we call the proud happy: yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered." Ye have seen much of their sinful course, and of God's patience. But ye have not seen the end of it yet: Is. xvii. 11, "In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief, and of desperate sorrow." Many a day

has begun fair, and held on long so, that has had a foul evening. And whatever ye have observed of them, their prosperity in their ill course shall be their end in bitter repentance, or in their destruction, or else the word of truth fails.

3dly, Take the alarm in time, and flee from the wrath to come: Is. lv. 6, 7, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Know ye cannot prosper to the end, in your loose and licentious ways. Ye must come to Christ by faith, and leave the world lying in wickedness; must break off your sins by repentance; or else ye will perish. If ye do it not, ye will mind that ye have been fairly warned, and lament for ever your slighting it.

2. To the godly I would say,

1st, Beware of entertaining any idol of jealousy in your heart, wherewith the Lord may be provoked against you. He is impartial in his judgments, and even his own shall not escape: Is. xlvi. 24, "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the Lord, he, against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his laws." Though being in Christ ye have shut the gulf as to condemnation, ye may be severely chastised; and ye may get broken bones for your transgressions, though ye cannot lose your souls.

2dly, Be not discouraged in the Lord's way, because in it ye meet with many sore trials, while others that are far from it go at ease. The work-ox goes with the yoke on his neck, while the slaughter-ox is full fed. But the former is preserved, while the latter is slain and hewed in pieces.

3 *Lastly*, To all I would say,

1st, Know that God is a holy jealous God. The way of sin is dangerous, and there will be no peace in the end of it.

2dly, Let us prepare to meet our God in the way of his judgments. God's proceedings against the land are slow, but they are like to be sure and sore. He has made the earth to quake beneath us, shown his anger from the face of the heavens above us.