

going before it. See Dan. x. 10—12, “And behold, a hand touched me, which set me upon my knees, and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent: and when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling.” But however it be, the only cure is believing, Psalm xxvii. 13, “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” The sooner you believe, the better; for in this case a man is like one that is going to ride a great water that is increasing; the longer he delays, the water grows still the greater.

Now, the way to make use of these things, so as to draw comfort from them, is to believe. There is, in the first place, a firm assent to the truths revealed, 1 John v. 5, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” then, an act of faith, realizing these things, Heb. xi. 1, “Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” To which may be added, an act of assurance, Gal. ii. 20, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” If ye cannot reach to all this extent, yet you may reach an act of adherence. A trembling hand may draw the water of consolation out of the wells of salvation. Amen.

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SIN THAT WHICH SEPARATES GOD AND MEN.\*

SERMON II.

ISAIAH lix. 2,

*But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*

WHEN we look abroad through the world, many sad sights may be seen; but amongst the most lamentable is man, who was by the Lord planted a noble vine, wholly a right seed, but now turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine. Some are lying mouldering in the grave of a graceless state, noisome to God and to good men; some are in a withered state, their former beauty gone, and death

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has settled down on their faces, because God, the life and soul of their souls, is gone. If they inquire, with Rebekah, Why am I thus? the answer is in the text: "Your iniquities," &c.

In these words, we have, *1st*, A dreadful evil that this people was under, separation from God. *2dly*, The party at whose door the blame lies, they who have made the breach. *3dly*, The procuring cause of this evil, "your iniquities."

As to the *1st*, Separation is either good or bad, according to the quality of the term from which men are separated. But the separation here is held forth as an evil, and that the greatest evil; for it is a separation from God, an evil which is so heavy, that, when felt, it is enough to make a Cain groan, and say, "It is greater than I can bear," Gen. iv. 13. Sin makes many separations. It separates the nearest relations, it separates the soul from the body. But all these are inconsiderable in respect of this, the separation of the soul from God. It is an evil still greater, for it is a separation from a covenanted God. YOUR GOD. Free love had separated Israel from all other people on the earth, and made them the Lord's by a peculiar relation; but sin separates betwixt them and that God to whom they were thus joined. That there should be a separation betwixt God and the Gentile world, who had professedly joined themselves to other gods, is not to be wondered at; but how dreadful is this, to be separated from our God! No fall is like a fall to hell from off heaven's threshold. The higher persons are raised up, the lower do they sink when they fall.

2. Who are to blame? Why, men are ready to say, God is an austere master, and forgetful of the children of men; and from our first father we have it as hereditary, rather to lay the blame on God, than to take it to ourselves. Therefore, he clears himself of it, ver. 1, shewing he wants neither power nor will to help them, on due application; and accordingly, he lays the blame where it should be, even on themselves. They made the breach; they may thank themselves for what they lie under, for they have drawn it on with their own hands.

3. How have they done it? Has God, who is exalted above the heavens, withdrawn from them, because they are on the earth as nothing before him? Cannot infinite majesty lodge with the soul in a cottage of clay? Has he separated from them, because they are mean, hated and despised by their neighbours round about them? No, no; none of these are the causes. Their iniquities are the only cause of all. Nothing but sin could part them. Sin is the only make-bate betwixt God and you. This subject affords us this

DOCTRINE, viz. However light people think of sin, yet it is that which is of so dreadful efficacy, as to make a separation betwixt God and the sinner. Sin separates between God and a soul.

In discoursing which, I shall shew,

I. What is that separation which sin makes betwixt God and souls.

II. I shall evince the greatness of the evil of separation from God, which many go so lightly under.

III. Inquire how sin makes this separation betwixt God and the soul.

IV. Make some practical improvement.—I am to shew,

I. What is that separation which sin makes betwixt God and a soul. It is not a local separation; for “he is not far from every one of us, for in him we live, move, and have our being;” Acts xvii. 27, 28. The wicked would fain be at a local separation, and therefore, in their vain imaginations, they shut up God in heaven, that he may not see what is done on earth. But the immensity and omnipresence of God make this simply impossible; for as he is God, he is intimately present with us, even in the very centre of our souls; so that, unless our sins could undeify him, (if the expression may be used), they can make no local separation betwixt him and us. Hence it is remarkable, that even in hell the wicked shall be punished from the presence of the Lord, 2 Thess. i. 9. He will not send his strokes upon them from heaven, or from afar, though he could preserve the force of them by the way, but he will erect his throne of justice among them: “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there: If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me,” Psalm cxxxix. 7—10. But it is a relative separation, inferring a distance of opposition betwixt God and the soul, and affecting the man’s state, or case, or both. It makes such a separation as is made by whisperers betwixt friends: “A whisperer,” saith Solomon, “separateth chief friends.” This being the case, the Lord’s countenance is not towards the sinner as it was before the breach was made. And as by sin there is an alienating of the sinner’s affection from God, so in God there is something equivalent to the alienation of affections from the sinner, for affections are not properly ascribed to God. Thus, concerning every one that separateth himself from the Lord, and setteth up his idols in his heart, God saith, Ezek. xiv. 8, “I will set my face

against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people, and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

As to this separation, we observe,

1. That in it there is something negative; and that is, the Lord denies them the influences of his grace, countenance, and fellowship; they are deprived of benefits, their sins withhold good things from them. The scripture expresseth it by the Lord's hiding his face from sinners, as it is said in the text, by shewing them the back, and not the face, Jer. xviii. 17; by forgetting them, Hos. iv. 6. Thus the sun of many is gone down, they "stumble at noon, as in the night, and are in desolate places as dead men," Isa. lix. 10. They go up and down in the world, as walking statues, carrying dead souls in their bodies as living coffins; for God is gone, and his glory is departed from them.

2. There is something positive in it, sin kindles a fire against the soul. (1.) There is a standing controversy God has against sinners; Amos iii. 3, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" God is displeased with the creature, his Spirit is grieved at him. Anger rests in the bosom of God against the sinner, as long as he keeps the sinful morsel under his tongue, which, though pleasant to the poor soul in the meantime, is most displeasing to a holy God. (2.) There is a pursuing of this controversy against the sinner; some positive outgoings of God's anger against the soul, in angry looks, which, if perceived, are enough to put the stoutest sinner out of countenance. In this way did the Lord look unto the host of the Egyptians, through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled them, Exod. xiv. 24. Angry words, even sad threats, ministered by the word and the man's conscience; also sad strokes upon the soul, sometimes upon the body, sometimes on both at once, are measured out.

But to this it may be objected, says one, "Happy am I then, for I see no such thing." ANSW. Were there no more upon most of us than we feel, we would have a very light burden either of sin or wrath upon us. But take heed ye be not like Ephraim, Hos. vii. 9, "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not." Or like the Ephesians, chap. iv. 19, "Who being past feeling, gave themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Are you going on in your sins? then be sure God is going on against you, pursuing his quarrel; and even in small things, if it were but the miscarrying of a basket of bread, the curse of God is in it to a wicked man, which makes it in itself very heavy. There are two kinds of strokes upon the soul: (1.) Deadening

strokes; these are secret strokes which God gives, and they are not easily perceived. By them the conscience is deadened, the soul stupified, and thus the man is fattened for the day of slaughter. People think never to get their fill of ease, and sometimes the Lord gives them enough of it: Hos. iv. 17, "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone," (Heb. give him rest). (2.) Quickening strokes: Hos. v. 14, "For I will be to Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah; I, even I, will tear and go away, and no one shall rescue him." By such strokes the conscience is made like Mount Sinai, when there was nothing but thunder, and lightning, and the sound of the trumpet waxing louder and louder. Many men's consciences are like iron taken out of the fire, and having lain a little, no fire appears there; but when some drops of water fall on it, it makes a hissing noise.

But the objector still says, "On the contrary, I find Providence very favourable to me." ANSW. Is it in spiritual good things? findest thou that because he lives, thou livest also? Is Providence kind to thee in influences of grace, communion with God? surely, then, Christ has taken away the separation wall. But is it in external things? then know that these are no discriminating marks of nearness to God; see Job xxi. 7, God is kind to you as ye are to him; Lev. xxvi. 27, "And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me, then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury." He tells them they walked with him by accident, by the bye, when they chanced to light on him; and he says he will walk with them so too. What good the wicked does, is for another end than the glory of God; and what good he does to them, is oftentimes in wrath.

Now this separation is twofold; 1. Total, agreeing to the wicked only, to whom, in respect of their state, God is an enemy. This is that state of separation from God in which we are born, produced by Adam's sin, Rom. v. 12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." This, to some, even to the elect, is only temporary, the separation wall being pulled down, and they brought near by the blood of Christ, applied by faith at their conversion, Eph. ii. 13. To others it is eternal, who, living and dying in a state of distance from God, are separated from God, soul and body in hell for evermore; according to that, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." This eternal separation is not meant in the text, but it is a certain consequent of the other, if it is continued in, for none are brought near to God in glory, who are not, by grace, first brought near to him here.

2. There is a partial separation, which agrees to the godly, who have the root of the matter in them. Sometimes the Lord is provoked to withdraw from his own people: "I opened," says the spouse, Song v. 6, "to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn himself; my soul failed when he spake; I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him but he gave me no answer." Sometimes Christ's garden is left, so that there is no blowing of the Spirit there, Song iv. 16. Hence the saints are so often praying to God to return to them. Often may we see the King's children, having their white robes sullied with tears, and rolled in the dust, because of a departed God. What a mournful voice has the sweet finger of Israel often, under desertions and hidings of God's face! Heman looks upon himself as a burgess of the land of darkness, not only forsaken but forgotten, Psalm viii. 8. This makes them, with Job, cry out, "O! that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone on my head!"

II. I shall evince the greatness of the evil of separation from God, which many go so light under. Alas! many reign like kings with God; they be like king Saul, when God departed from him; but how sad a thing this is, will appear, if we consider,

1. What God is. Every thing in God speaks terror to those that are separated from him. I shall only take notice of these following: (1.) God is the chief good; and therefore to be separated from God is the chief evil. Our native country we look on as good; and therefore to be banished from it is a heavy trial. Relations are good, life and liberty are good; and, therefore, to be deprived of them is very afflicting. But God is the chief good; all these petty good things disappear, and dwindle into nothing, when compared with God. How dreadful, then, must it be to be separated from him! If the enjoyment of him is the highest pinnacle of happiness, separation from him is the lowest step of misery. It is often observed, as an aggravation of the sufferings of the primitive Christians, that they suffered not only from the emperors who were accounted monsters of men, but also from those who were admired by the people for their virtues. Surely, then, to be cast off by goodness itself in infinite perfection, must be very distressing. (2.) God is all-sufficient in himself, and to the creatures. The enjoyment of him makes truly happy; and therefore to be separated from him is a dreadful evil. While David thinks on God as his portion, his heart leaps for joy: "The lines," says he, "are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage," Psalm xvi. 6—9. While Cain sees himself driven from his presence, his punishment appears intolerable. The frowns of those we depend upon, and can-

not live without, are very grievous. To forsake the "fountain of living waters," Jer. ii. 13, is held forth as a great evil of sin; and to be partially separated from it, must also be a great punishment. (3.) The omnipotence of God. Job takes notice that "the arrows shot against him were arrows of the Almighty," Job vi. 4. Let all the men on earth, and devils in hell, let the angels come down and help to draw the bow, still it is but finite power against the man; but how terrible would it be, to be a mark to these arrows! how much more, when the Omnipotent God pursues the quarrel! (4.) The absoluteness of God. Let men and devils work against the sinner, let them do their utmost, there is one that can stay their hands, and say to each of them, "What doest thou?" but God is a King against whom there is no rising up. There is none who can stay his hand, or say unto him, "What doest thou?" Dan. iv. 35. Can the pots hinder the potter to dash them all in pieces? Or can worm man shake off the yoke of God's absolute dominion, and live in a separate state from him? (5.) God is eternal. If a great man be our enemy, we know always death will end the quarrel; if we have such an one to be our friend, yet death will tie up his hands, that he can give us no more favours: but God endures for ever. Had a man not only the earth, but the heavens for his portion, yet "the earth shall be burnt up, and the heavens wax old as a garment;" thieves may steal away the covetous man's treasures out of his barns and coffers; moths may consume what remains, the devil in wicked men may take away all he has in the world; only God is an everlasting friend and portion. It must, then, be very sad to be separated from such an one.

2. All created things are empty and unsatisfactory. They are a lie, alluring afar off; but when men come near, they answer not their expectations. The world, that bulky vanity, that great round nothing, can no more fill the heart, than a triangle a circle. All created things stand as two lame legs under vanity and insufficiency. He was a fool, indeed, that laid up for his soul in his barns, as if his swine and his soul could have fed at one trough. Cain had the broad world to find himself support, but all was sapless: his punishment from God's face was greater than he could bear. Where God is wanting, there is a void which a thousand worlds cannot fill up; and therefore, if you know the truth, ye would say to your sins, to your lusts, "Ye have taken away my God, and what have I more?"

3. To be separated from God is the saddest plague out of hell. When God departs, he leaves a burden on the soul behind him, which, when felt, will make the soul to roar: "Yea, woe also to

them when I depart from them," Hos. ix. 12. Who can tell the ills the sinner is exposed unto, when once sin separates between God and him. Saul felt a total separation; and what a desperate project did it set him upon! Job felt a partial separation, which was so heavy, that his soul choosed strangling and death, rather than life," Job vii. 15.

4. Nay, it is a very hell to be separated from God. Therefore David complains, "that the sorrows of death compassed him, and that the pains of hell got hold upon him," Psalm cxvi. 3. Even coals of hell are cast upon the godly in this world, when their sins have made this separation; only they are softened with love, whereas those cast upon the wicked are dipped in the poison of the curse. Men by their sins now greedily sue out a separation from God. What will hell be, but a giving them their will? For the torments of hell are summed up in that, "Depart from me, I know you not."

5. I shall only add, that those that continue in a state of separation from God, have no quarter to which they can turn for comfort in an evil day. We know not what sad trials we may live to see. When men that are seeking great things for themselves now, may think they are come well to, if they get Baruch's part, their life for a prey; but for a man to be in Samson's case, the Philistines upon him, and God departed from him, must be heavy indeed. We must all die: this we know. Let a man squeeze his cisterns, then, with which he now solaces himself in his separation from God, what will they do for him? they will not be able to stay his fleeting and fainting soul. We must rise again. Will the gods ye now serve, help you then? Will the sea, the rocks, or mountains, fall on him, will the earth cover him, who, to enjoy it, incurred a separation from God? No, no! O ungrateful earth, that the man consumed time, heart, and strength upon, while his days lasted, that will not take part with him, now when he is not able to do for himself. We must stand before his tribunal, and come near before his throne for judgment, whose presence we now forfeit for the satisfying of our lusts. What will comfort us then, when we see we have passed this partial state of separation from God, as a short preface to an eternal separation from him.

III. I am now to inquire, how sin makes this separation betwixt God and a soul?

1. There is the guilt of sin, whereby the sinner is bound over to misery for his sin. God, from vindicative justice, acts against the wicked; and this justice of his naturally requires punishment to be inflicted on the sinner, according to the law. Hence, when Adam sinned, a flaming sword was set to keep him off from the tree of life.



The enjoyment of God is the greatest good ; now, justice will not permit this, while guilt remains untaken away : and therefore, separation from God necessarily follows. As to the godly, by their guilt they are bound over to fatherly anger and chastisements, whereof that partial separation from God is the chief part.

2. There is the stain and defilement of sin. Now, God is of purer eyes than to behold evil. An unholy sinner cannot have communion with a holy God ; and in regard that some are altogether polluted, they are therefore altogether separated from God. Others are only in part polluted, by reason of some one or more sins regarded in their hearts ; therefore are under that partial separation, Psalm lxvi. 18, " If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The leper, for his uncleanness, was put without the camp ; so is the sinner. They only are admitted to stand in the holy place, who have clean hands and a pure heart, Psalm xxiv. 4. Hence says James, chap. iv. 8, " Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you : cleanse your hands, ye sinners ; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded."—It remains,

IV. That I make some practical improvement from this subject. We have,

1. An use of information. We may hence see, (1.) That it is sin which makes a land weak, mean, and contemptible, and is the cause of all national calamity ; for sin separates between them and their God. Then their strength is departed from them ; and therefore, though the people should unite with one another, there is little good to be expected so long as such abominations abound in the land, setting God against us. O that we might see the day, when, uniting with heaven, we might be zealously affected in reformation ; and the heaven-daring abominations that abound, in principle and practice, be zealously suppressed. But every one minds their own things, few the things that are Christ's. (2.) Why so few have communion with God in ordinances, public, private, and secret. Are there not many at public ordinances dead and lifeless, sitting like idols that have eyes and see not, hands but handle not ? Why, sin has separated between God and them. Hence they go as they came ; no intercourse with God. The Lord goes by them, and comes by them, speaks to the hearts of others, but not to them. They cannot walk together ; for they are not agreed. (3.) Why so many slight religious duties ? Some will not bow a knee to God ; they will not commune with their hearts, nor converse with God. Sin hath separated them ; and what pleasure can they take to converse with an enemy, or one that has turned his back to them ? Hence some are not afraid of any company so much as themselves ; and therefore, if

their consciences begin to speak, they labour some way or other to divert it. (4.) Whence is the root or cause of all the misery professors are lying under at this day? Security, barrenness, withering, desertion, and the like. What wonder that it be so? They may thank themselves for the whole. It is their dallying with some bosom idol, their grieving the Spirit, and slighting his motions and convictions, their worldliness and unwatchfulness: these are the root, the cause of all their misery.

2. A use of exhortation. (1.) To those who enjoy nearness to God. O beware of sin! If ye give way to it, it will soon turn your wine into water, and overcloud your enjoyments. Live at a distance from it; for it is the very thing from which you are in such great hazard. (2.) To those who are by their sins separated from God. Break off your course of sin, continue not in it. Is not the separation wall high enough, and thick enough already? what needs more be added? What shall you do to get the separation taken away?—Lay hold on the Lord Jesus by faith, Isa. xxvii. 5, “Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.” Jesus is the ladder that knits heaven and earth together. It is by him that God reconciles the world to himself. His blood takes away both guilt and pollution. It purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Though God hears not sinners, yet in Christ he is well pleased; and through him they may find access to, and acceptance with him. He is our peace: he is the Mediator between God and man. Repent, and turn from your sins. There is no concord between Christ and Belial. To enjoy both God and your lusts is impossible; ye shall as soon bring together the two poles. However some make a mock of sin now, yet it has separated, and will separate them from God eternally, if they separate not from it.