

of righteousness, than, after you have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto you, 2 Pet. ii. 21. If ye go back ye shall not feed on the seat at so cheap a rate as before. (6.) A weaned soul will fit you for suffering; and you have need of it, when the work of God is in such danger. It will keep you safe in times of trial, when others, glued to the world and lusts, will turn their backs. (7.) It will fit you for communion with God, and you shall have it. The manna fell, when the provision brought from Egypt was done. *Lastly*, It will fit you for heaven; and there you shall be filled.

In conclusion, study the mortification of your lusts. What need for these things, if you had not living lusts to feed on them? Feed on Christ and spiritual things. Take him instead of that which the world and lusts offer. Amen.

THE DANGER OF NOT WAITING ON GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER.*

SERMON V.

1 CHRON. xv. 13,

For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order.

THE ark of God having been brought from Kirjath-jearim, and left at the house of Obed-edom, upon the account of the death of Uzza, whom God smote, God blessed that man and his house, where the ark was. The news of this coming to David's ears, he resolves again to attempt the bringing of the ark into his own city, 2 Sam. vi. 12. In this transaction, observe. 1. That the fear of mismanaging a duty may sometimes prevail so far with the people of God, as to make them lay by the duty for a time. David had seen how dear a rash touch of the ark had cost Uzza; so, says he, 2 Sam. vi. 9, "How shall the ark of the Lord come unto me?" The fear of God, by reason of corruption, easily degenerates into a slavish fear, which cuts the sinews of holy endeavours, and leaves people neither heart nor hand for the work. 2. Lay by duty who will, God will always have some that will take it up. If David have no will for the ark to be with him, Obed-edom will entertain it. Many, in our own day, turn their backs on Christ, and his service; shut their hearts against himself, and their houses against his worship;

* Delivered August 2, 1707.

but God will always have some that will put their shoulders to his work. 3. They are great fools that lay aside duty. They stand in the way of their own mercy, and deprive themselves of that blessing that attends the service of the Lord. 4. The people of God, when they take up duty again, will see themselves the greater fools that ever they laid it by. Well, David, being resolved on the work, proceeds with great caution and circumspection, as we see in the verses preceding that of our reading: the reason of all which we have in the text.

In which words there is, 1. An old story brought fresh to mind: "The Lord our God made a breach upon us." The stroke reached Uzzah, and cut him off, while all the rest were safe; yet the holy man looks on that as a stroke to the whole congregation. 2. There is the cause of the stroke: The stroke was dreadful and astonishing, but the holy man lays not the blame on God, but on themselves, and so justifies God. The sin of the Levites was the cause of the stroke: "For because ye did not at the first," namely, sanctify yourselves when ye first began to remove the ark from Kirjath-jearim. They did not sanctify and prepare themselves, by solemn prayer and services, in consideration of God's will, as to the way of carrying the ark; as if he had said, We have smarted already by your carelessness, beware of it therefore at this time. The sin of all the congregation, wherein he takes in himself among the rest, also produced the stroke; and that because it was his and the people's duty to have been acquainted with the word of the Lord; and the oversight of the Levites did not excuse them. We sought him, indeed, bringing the ark, the symbol of God's presence, from the place where it was, to be in the midst of us; but our way of doing marred all. It was God's ordinance that the ark should be carried on the Levites' shoulders, Numb. iv. 15, and vii. 9; but the Philistines had put it on a cart. God did not punish them for this transgression, and this emboldened Israel to follow their example: but they learned by sad experience, that God would not bear that in the one, which he did in the other.—From this subject, I take this

DOCTRINE, God is highly displeased with persons who perform duties, but are not careful to perform them in a right manner.

In discoursing which, I shall shew,

I. How it comes to pass that men perform duties, but are not careful to perform them in a right manner.

II. How the Lord testifies his displeasure against such persons.

III. Why is the Lord so highly displeased?

IV. Make some practical improvement.

I am to shew,

I. How it comes to pass that men perform duties, but are not careful to perform them in a right manner.

1. Because to perform duty is the easiest part of religion, but to do it in a right manner is very difficult; and few people have a heart to manage the difficulties of religion. Ease is sweet; and in other things we see it very ordinary for men to take what is most easy instead of what is most profitable. It is an easy thing to think, to hear, to eat bread, and drink wine; but to plough up our corruptions, to engage in good earnest in the service of God, and to get the heart in a case for fellowship with Christ, is not easy, and sloth prevails.

2. Because the bare performance of duties is within the reach of all, the performing of them in a right manner is beyond the reach of the most part. Natural abilities will serve for the one, gracious abilities are necessary for the other. John xv. 5, "I (said Jesus) am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." "By faith (says Paul, Heb. xi. 4), Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he, being dead, yet speaketh." Grace, you see, is necessary, and grace is very rare. A natural man is conjured within the circle of self, beyond it he cannot move; this is his principle, and this is his end. Nature cannot carry a man above itself, more than the mouth of a river can be higher than the spring-head. This, then, mars all, so that the service can no more be acceptable to God, than a man sowing his master's ground with his own seed, to reap it for himself.

3. By the bare performance of duties, men attain the base and low ends which they propose to themselves in the service of God; namely, (1.) Peace of mind, such as it is. The consciences of some are but half awakened; thus a little thing quiets them, even the external performance of duties; but should these neglect duties altogether, they could have no peace. (2.) It gains a man credit in the world, and that is a strong cord to draw men to the outside of duties, namely to be seen of men, and to have glory of men, as our Saviour expresses it, Matth. vi. 1, 2. It is to them no small matter to have a name to live; to be called good is affected by such as are at no pains to be good.

What shall we say of these that will set about duties, and attend sacraments, even while they are sure that they will be mocked and reproached for it by the wicked? **ANSW.** It is good in so far as they are carried over these things; for, alas! there are some so pitifully weak, that they will be blown over with the wind of the

mouth of the wicked. A broad laugh, or silly taunt, out of the mouth of the profane, is an unanswerable argument against religion and seriousness, to some who are in the cause of Christ like silly doves without heart. Such as are thus chargeable are very inconsiderate; Christ gives a solemn warning to them, Mark viii. 38, "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels." We doubt not but a hypocrite may come this length. We do not wonder if even a miser, a covetous wretch, part with his money to buy land; neither need we wonder if a hypocrite should sacrifice credit among the profane, to gain credit among the godly. He does but as a man on a ladder, tread on the lower step to win to the higher.

4. Because men may get duties done, and keep their lusts too. For instance, they may go to a communion-table one day, and the next to the table of devils. But to perform duties in a right manner, is inconsistent with peace with our lusts: Psalm lxxvi. 18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Hence, over the belly of an express commandment, people will venture to the Lord's table without self-examination, or at least without searching to the quick. They cannot, however, communicate aright without a due attention to it. No, indeed. Says the apostle, 1 Cor. xi. 28, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." Many, notwithstanding, can communicate without it, and keep their lusts too; here is the hellish advantage. There are secret lusts, which the man is unwilling to disturb, therefore he will not light the candle and search, lest he be obliged to cast out the old leaven.

5. Because most men have low and mean thoughts of God, Mal. i. 6—8, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master, if, then, I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name: and ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon my altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts." It is not every one that knows the Lord. Many men worship they know not what, and therefore they offer him for worship they care not what. If men had awful apprehensions of that God whom they worship, as a God greatly to be "feared in the

assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him," Psalm lxxxix. 7, doubtless they would see, that there is none in heaven or earth like him, and they would worship him in another manner.—Therefore the apostle, to engage men to take care how they perform duties, says, "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire," Heb. xii. 28, 29.

I am now to shew,

II. How the Lord testifies his displeasure against such persons. He does so,

1. By withdrawing from them in religious services: "Son of man," says God by Ezekiel, chap. xi. 3, "these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face; should I be inquired of at all by them?" And by Hosea he says, chap. v. 4, "The spirit of whoredom is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord." It is granted, ordinances are the galleries wherein the King is held; they are the trysting-places where Christ meets with his people; but if they be not gone about in a right manner, they will be but an empty sepulchre: "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" The living God is not to be found in a dead worship; when men withdraw their hearts from the service of God, then he withdraws himself from them; and it is but sorry entertainment a man can have at this feast, when the Master goes away.

2. By rejecting their services, Mal. i. 13, "Ye said also, Behold what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this at your hands? saith the Lord." God will not accept of such duties, whatever pains men may take about them, Isa. i. 11, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord." It is better to go halting on in the right way, than to be going straight in the way of error: "The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city," Eccl. x. 15. It may well be applied to the duties of some, what is said, Hab. ii. 13, "The people shall labour in the fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity." To labour in the fire signifies great pains, and great disappointments; they work in the midst of scorching flames, and what they do produce consumes between their fingers, they get no good of it.

3. By spiritual strokes upon their souls. There is a curse denounced against them, Jer. xlvi. 10, "Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully;" and Mal. i. 14, "But cursed be the

deceiver which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing. This will pierce the soul; and they are of two sorts: (1.) They are deadening strokes; these are silent blows, arrows that fly without noise from the hand of an angry God into the soul; "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert, and be healed," Isa. vi. 10. Sometimes men are like Saul among the prophets, but afterwards they are knocked on the head, it may be on a communion Sabbath, and from that time God answers them not. Many are sprightly professors for a while, but at length God is so provoked, that their hearts are deadened, their affections withered, their consciences stupified, their souls blasted, and they are then prepared to be pruned off, and cast over the hedge. (2.) Quickening strokes, whereby the man's name is changed; he is Mager-Missabid. The conscience is made like Mount Sinai, where nothing but thunder, lightning, and the sound of the trumpet, are to be heard. God takes the filthy rags of their lifeless duties, wraps them in brimstone, and then sets them on fire about the sinner's ears; so that, like the house built upon the sand, to which the man betook himself for shelter, the whole falls into ruins. As to this, you will observe what the prophet declares, Hos. v. 11—14, "Ephraim is oppressed, and broken in judgment; because he willingly walked after the commandment. Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound; then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jereb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound. For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah; I, even I, will tear, and go away: I will take away, and none shall rescue him."

4. By strokes upon their bodies. Sometimes the Lord has mingled his people's blood with their sacrifices. Thus he did with Nadab and Abihn, Lev. x. 1, 2. A wrong look into the ark cost the men of Bethshemesh dear: "The Lord smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men," 1 Sam. vi. 19. Uzziah, taking hold of the ark, was struck dead, 2 Sam. vi. 7. And the apostle tells, 1 Cor. xi. 30, that for profaning the Lord's supper, "many (among the Corinthians) were weak and sickly, and many sleep," that is, were dead. One dies before his time, even in his strength; another falls sick, it may be after a communion. At communions there is a great throng; perhaps one has got a thirst, another has caught cold, but unworthily communicating has more often done the deed.—I shall enquire,

III. Why is the Lord so highly displeased?

1. Because God commands his service to be done in a right manner. The matter and right manner of performing duties are, in the command of God, linked together. He will have his service well done, as well as really done. We must serve God with a perfect heart and a willing mind, for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if we seek him, he will be found of us; but if we forsake him, he will cast us off for ever, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. Masters on earth challenge to themselves a power to oblige their servants, not only to do their work, but to do it so and so; and though they do the thing itself, yet if not in the manner required, it cannot be accepted. So they brought the ark, but they brought it on a cart, which was opposite to the command, for it should have been on the shoulders of the Levites; and therefore their service was rejected with vengeance.

2. Because the doing of a duty in a wrong manner alters the nature of it, and makes it sin. Hence the plowing of the wicked is sin. Hence prayer is accounted a howling on their bed, Hos. vii. 14. And unworthy communicating is not to eat the Lord's supper, 1 Cor. xi. 20. If a house be built of never so strong timber and good stones, yet if it be not well-founded and right built, the inhabitant may curse the day he came under the roof of it.

3. Because duties not performed according to the right order, are but the half of the service we owe to God, and the worst half too. The Jews had it written about the doors of their synagogues, "Prayer without intention is as a body without a soul." A skeleton of bones without the flesh would have been a very abominable sacrifice to have laid upon God's altar; no less abominable are our services, when the heart is not engaged, and when the soul is not lifted up to God: "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," John iv. 24.

Lastly, Because duties thus performed are very dishonourable to God. See again, Mal. i. 6—8. Now, God is a holy God, and will be sanctified in them that come nigh him, and before all the people he will be glorified, Lev. x. 3. He is a jealous God in the matter of his worship, Josh. xxiv. 18.

IV. I am now to make a practical improvement. And this,

1. In a use of information. We may hence see what a mercy it is that we have a pure worship amongst us at this day; a worship neither defiled by idolatry, nor corrupted by superstition, but after the divine order, according to the pattern shown on the mount. It is dangerous to join in a way of worship not warranted by the word of God.

2. Let this fill us with a holy reverence of God when we approach

his presence in this venerable ordinance, Psalm lxxxix. 7. Let us know and remember, that the God with whom we have to do is a heart-searching, holy, and jealous God, who will not hold them guiltless that profane his ordinances. Was he so displeased with Belshezzar, for abusing the vessels of the temple? how much more with us, if we profane the symbols of the body and blood of his Son! The danger is great, both for soul and body. But there are two sorts that are ready to abuse this. (1.) The stiff-necked careless sinner will cloak his contempt of communicating, and his sloth with this: "If it be so, then we will do best not to meddle with it." But, O Sirs! is there not an odds between rushing on the sacrament, and forsaking it? Assure yourselves this contempt of the sacrament is damning. God can reach a blow to you, though ye stand far off from his table; and so much the more, that you slight the love-token of a dying Lord. (2.) The poor broken-hearted sinner will be ready to drink up discouragement from this, fearing that he may be the person on whom the Lord will make the breach. But, poor soul! I would say to thee, Where wilt thou be safe, if thou keepest thyself without the ranges? the sword of the Lord may overtake thee there, for the neglect of your duty. Therefore come, though trembling, venture thyself at his feet; acknowledge, that if he should make thee a monument of his justice, he is most just, thou deservest it. A trembling hand may receive a pardon. Be diligent to prepare thyself; and when thou hast done all, lay no stress on any thing, but flee to Christ, and get him between an offended God and thy soul. Dry stubble may be safe before a consuming fire, if there be a crystal wall between it and the fire.

I conclude with exhorting all that intend to sit down at the Lord's table to-morrow, to take heed how ye communicate. I would urge you to do it in the right order. Ye have heard the danger of an opposite conduct; this may be sufficient under this. Another motive is, that duty done in a right manner, and that only, has the blessing connected with it: mark Matth. xxiv. 26, "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing." A man may pray a thousand times, and never be heard; go from one communion to another, and never be sealed; one sincere groan from the heart will do more than all these. If ye mismanage this sacrament, your souls may get such a stain that they will never cast again; and if ye manage it rightly, ye may get such a taste of the goodness of the Lord as ye never got before. With this view, see that ye be right as to your state; that you be the friends of the Bridegroom, or you have no right to sit down at the marriage-feast. It is not the due order, for persons dead in sin to sit down

at the table of our Lord; it is an ordinance only for those who are quickened, and made spiritually alive; it is the children's bread, and therefore they only, who are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, have a right to it. Endeavour to be in a right frame; to have grace in exercise; a holy hunger, faith, repentance, and love. It is not enough that you have oil in your lamps, you must also have your lamps trimmed, and the oil burning. Your graces must be in exercise. If this be your state, and this be your frame, then surely it will be good for you to draw near to God at his own table: "They that thus wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up on wings like eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint."

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THE PERFECTION OF PROVIDENTIAL DISPENSATIONS.\*

SERMON VI.

PSALM xviii. 30,

*As for God, his work is perfect.*

THE Psalmist by this time had followed the Lord through many a deep step, and he had endured various troubles. Here, in the text, he looks back on these ways in which the Lord had led him, and gives his verdict as to them: "As for God," &c. In the words there is,

1. A magnificent preface: "As for God." He stands up here in his defence against an ungodly world, to justify his proceedings: "As for God," I that have tried his way can speak to his commendation.

2. What of God he commends: His way. There is a twofold way. (1.) That wherein men walk to and with God.—Personal; Christ, who is the way to the Father:—Real; holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. None of these are here meant. (2.) The way wherein God walks with men, the way of his providences, his dispensations, the way he takes with men in disposing of them.

3. The commendation is perfect; there is no flaw in that way. Be his dispensations never so hard, there can be no fault really observed in them by the most discerning eye; they are faultless. These words afford us this