

your hand by a particular providence, will have a double sweetness in it. That bread will not be lost which is thrown upon these waters; after many days you shall find it: Matth. xix. 29, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit eternal life." Himself will be to you instead of all, and better than all here; and heaven will fully make up all hereafter.

If any shall say, "But, O! I fear I shall never be able to carry through," I would say to such, You know that the foundation of your throughbearing is laid, if your heart be loosed from all things besides Christ, and if he be dearer to you than what is dearest to you in a world: Psalm xlv. 10, 11, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." When the king thus greatly desires thy beauty; he will see to preserve it; John x. 28, 29, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." You have taken him for all, and it lies upon his honour to see you carried through. Live by faith, and draw your daily supplies from him: Hab. ii. 4, "The just shall live by his faith." Isa. xl. 31, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Amen.

~~~~~

A RICH REWARD TO DILIGENCE IN RELIGION.\*

SERMON XXXV.

Hos. vi. 3,

*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.*

IT is an observation of Soloman's, Prov. xii. 27, "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting." Men are at some pains to get something, but when they have got it, they let it slip through their fingers. Hence our religion, good frames, attainments, resolutions, &c. turn to small account. We are at some pains to acquire something when attending divine ordinances, but then we put it in

\* Delivered at Tweedsmuir, April, 1712.

a bag with holes. Now, the text tells us how to remedy this loss, and to bring our religion to some good account : and that is, when once our hand is in, to follow on eagerly : “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.”—In these words consider,

1. What is the sum and substance of all religion. It is “the knowledge of the Lord,” that is, the practical knowledge of him, who can only be truly known in Jesus Christ. That thus the knowledge of the Lord is here to be understood, is evident, not only from the nature of the thing, but from other scriptures : John xvii. 3, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” See also Hos. vi. 6 ; Jer. xxii. 16.—Consider,

2. The beginning of religion supposed. This is supposed in the particle *then*, namely, when we have turned to the Lord ; and likewise in following on to know the Lord.—Consider,

3. The pursuit of religion, or the knowledge of the Lord proposed. We shall follow on, if we shall not content ourselves with the measure attained, but go on still farther, improving the beginnings. (Heb. pursue), which is an eager sort of following, as is the case when we follow a fleeing enemy.—Consider,

4. The benefit of this pursuit : “Then shall we know,” we shall thrive in our religion, get a larger measure of it even of a practical experimental knowledge of the Lord. We shall be still adding a cubit to our spiritual stature. The more we pursue, the more we will gain.—From this subject, I observe the following

DOCTRINE, That the way to thrive in religion is to follow on, to pursue, to hold our hand to it, when once our hand is in it.

It is evident, this is a day in which there is little thriving in religion. It is long since the generation began to weary of God, and professors to decline ; yet sometimes there is a blowing up of the spark, but, alas ! it dies always out again. Sometimes people look so well when attending upon ordinances, we would almost think it was a pity they should ever go from them ; but when they are away, and the communion-frame has worn off, they look so ill, that one would think it was a pity that ever they should come to them again. We would show you how to prevent this ; and, that things may apply the more closely to your consciences, I shall,

I. Shew who they are whom we may call to follow on.

II. I shall show what it is to follow on, or how you must hold your hand to religion, that you may thrive in it, now that your hand is in it.

III. I shall confirm the doctrine, and shew you, that it is the true

way to thrive ; and the belief of it would be a great spur to diligence. Then,

IV. Conclude with the improvement of the subject.

We are then,

I. To shew who they are whom we may call to follow on.

There are some we cannot call to follow on, because they have not yet stirred a foot in religion. There are some who, for all that they have heard and seen, are quite stupid and unconcerned, lying asleep in their chains ; they have no good motions on their spirits, and feel no concern for the want of them. Our text calls us to leave you, but a word or two before we part.

1. What would you think, if you saw the showers of heaven, after a great drought, fall all around your land upon your neighbour's ground, but not one drop on yours ? would you not think you were the mark at which God aims his arrow ? Now, what can you think of yourselves, when God touches the hearts of others about you, but never touches yours ? when he goes by you, and comes by you, speaks to those on your right hand and on your left, but not a word to you ? Does not that look very like what is in Hos. iv. 17, " Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone." To see a tree in the winter without leaves, is nothing ; but in the spring, when all is flourishing about it, such a tree is fit for the axe, and is near to the fire.

2. Do you think the world will always last with you ? will you always sleep in a sound skin ? Nay, sooner or later you shall get an awakening, in mercy or in wrath : Isa. xxxii. 9, 10, " Rise up, ye women that are at ease ; hear my voice, ye careless daughters, give ear unto my speech. Many days and years shall ye be troubled, ye careless women ; for the vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come." If you should sleep it out all your days, you shall at last awaken, Luke xvi. God will one time or another take the filthy garments of your sins, wrap them up in brimstone, and set them on fire about your ears.

But there are several sorts of persons, whose hands we may say are now in their work : and their business is to pursue.—Such as,

1. There may be some whom the King has brought into his chambers, and assured them of his love, and they have got the covenant sealed, not only with the public seal of the sacrament, but the private seal of the Spirit. Your business is to follow on, and improve the precious season for the church of God, and for yourselves : Exod. xxxiv. 8, 9, " And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us."

Follow on to know. There is more in that God, that Christ, that covenant manifested to you, than you have yet seen.—There are,

2. Others that have got but some glimmerings of solid hope from the Lord. It may be that they come here in a dark night of desertion, saying, "My hope is perished from the Lord," Lam. iii. 18. But now the day begins to break, and they have some hope that there may be yet room for a backslider. Follow on, his going forth shall be as the morning, which grows lighter and lighter to the perfect day.—There may be,

3. Some who, it may be, Christ has treated, as Joshua did his captains, when he made them set their feet upon the necks of the captive kings, Josh. x. 24. Some lust that has long kept them under, they have now got subdued, the bonds of wickedness are broken, and the gates of brass pulled down; so that now they are conquerors over their spiritual foes. To such we would say, Bestir yourselves and pursue. Wounded lusts, when they get time to recover, have made sad work at a second onset; you are not yet there, where the gates shall not be shut at all by day. You are, however, strong for the present; follow on, and you will be yet stronger: Zech. xii. 8, "In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among you at that day, shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them."—There may be,

4. Some who have not come so far forward yet, though they are come the length to be heartily content that they and their lusts were freely parted, though they cannot tell how it will be accomplished. Follow on, pursue, you have them at a fair advantage. The throne of sin in the heart is shaken. Lusts sit looser than they did. Press hard upon the tottering fabric, and it may come to fall altogether; so that you may soon be ready to say with Ephraim, "What have I any more to do with idols?" Hos. xiv. 18.—There may be,

5. Some who have not come so far, but yet they have some desires after Christ and religion. They have a hungering after him, and they are more squeamish as to their lusts than they were: though they cannot as yet see, if they forego the world and their lust, how their loss will be made up. Truly this is not much; but every thing must have a beginning. Follow on; that cloud, like a man's hand, may come to darken the heavens at length. The conversion of Zaccheus had as slender a beginning, Luke xix. 3. You have seen, you were touched, look on, take a better look of the Plant of Renown, and ye may come to be affected, allured, and captivated.—There may be,

6. Some who have not come even so far, but they have got some

convictions of sin; and though they have no will to part with their lusts, yet, they cannot see how to live with them, and as little can they see how to live without them. Their conscience is awakened, but their heart is just where it was. It is a small length this indeed; but follow on. If the conscience has got the first touch, the heart may get the next. If sin is become uneasy to the conscience, it may become a burden to the heart next, and so the sweet morsel may be vomited up.—There may be,

*Lastly*, Some who have not come so far as to have any particular conviction, or quick touches of conscience, only they have a sort of uneasiness with respect to the case of their souls, a secret dissatisfaction with their state and case, which they see is not good. This is even as little as can reasonably be concluded to be any beginning of good; yet follow on, pursue this, think more attentively upon it. If the dry bones be but beginning to move, they at last may come together, and live,—We now proceed,

III. To show what it is to follow on, how you must hold your hand to religion, that ye may thrive in it, now that your hand is in it. The word imports a violence and eagerness, such as men have in pursuing an enemy, persecuting the people of God, or in hunting for prey.—Wherefore, when following on,

1. You must make religion your great end. As every man who pursues has something in view, so your great design must be to know the Lord: “Not,” says Paul, “as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” There was a prospect which misgave at first with Adam, because Satan laid the measures for it, Gen. iii. 5. But you must take it up again, as the Lord himself will have you: Matth. v. 48, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” When once grace touches the heart, it produces a certain restlessness there, till the soul be perfectly united with God. You will never make any good of religion, till you make it your grand object in the world. You must not be merely occasional customers to religion, of which see an instance, Judges xviii. 5, but stated and constant.—When following on,

2. You must be persuaded of the weight and worth of religion; for no wise man will pursue what he thinks not worth the pains. What is the reason that the men of the world do not follow on to know the Lord? Why, truly, the most part are of Pharaoh’s opinion, that religion is only for those who have no other thing to do. Hence it may be, they have got something to do here for the present; but if they were at home, they have another thing to do than to

follow it out: Matth. xxii. 5, "But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise." The shadow of the world is substance with them, Hos. xii. 1, 8; and the substance of religion is a shadow; but O! consider, "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?" A wedge of gold would make a sluggard run, and shall not a weight of glory make us follow on?—When following on,

3. You must hold fast what you have; the pursuer will be very loth to go back a step; Rev. iii. 3, "Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent." Beware that the spark does not go out, for thus you may quickly have a cold coal to blow at. Make much of any good motion put into your heart. Say not, it is not much you have to hold; for the less it is, it will die out the easier, and there is thus the more need to keep it in. It cannot be so little, but Satan will think it worth his pains to rob you of it. The kingdom of heaven in the soul has a small beginning, like a grain of mustard-seed, and must be cherished.—When following on,

4. You must not stand still, but be moving forward, labouring for more, be it much or little which you have: Phil. iii. 12, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." A man who sits down on his attainments, will quickly be empty-handed. The fire will go out, if constant fuel be not furnished to it. Good beginnings will be lost, if they be not cherished. Hast thou but one conviction? follow on to get it more deeply rooted. Be earnest that it spread further into thy heart and life, that thou mayest bring forth fruits meet for repentance.—When following on,

5. You must habitually attend upon religion, and make it your chief business: 1 Thess. v. 15, "See that none render evil for evil unto any man, but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." Fits and starts of religion cannot be reckoned a following on, or holding our hands to it. You must labour to weave the whole life into one continued web of religion: 1 Pet. i. 15, "As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." Whatever way you may turn, you should still be pointing towards God. You must not be sober at home, and loose abroad: not a church-saint, and a house-devil; a pretender to piety, and a renouncer of honesty. You must say to all temptations which would take you off your way, as Joab, in his pursuit, 2 Sam. xviii. 14, "I may not tarry thus with thee."—When following on,

6. You must be resolute and vigorous in your endeavours: Eccl. ix. 10, "Whatsoever they hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Mere endeavours will not reach heaven: Matth. xi. 12, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Our iron is blunt, we must therefore apply the more strength. Our work is great, our strength small, our opposition powerful; but we must do or die. The work of religion will not prosper with only good wishes and folded hands. No; we must exert our hands, and set down our feet: Prov. ii. 4, 5, "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hidden treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."—When following on,

7. You must entertain a hope of success. No man will pursue but in hopes to overtake. We will have difficulties to grapple with in this pursuit; but let us "who are of the day be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation." When the heart grows hopeless, the hands will hang down, and the knees be feeble: Heb. x. 35, "Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." You must learn to hope against hope. You have the promise in the text to encourage you. What though many attempts misgive? The tree falls not down at the first or second stroke of the axe; and the water, by continued dropping, wears the stones.—When following on,

*Lastly*, If you fall, you must get up again, and quicken your pace; and the sooner the better. The longer you lie, you will find it the harder to get up. If you find the impressions on your spirit begin to decay, take them in time, and go to God with them for a revival: Rev. iii. 2, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die."

From what has been observed, we may learn, that the world shall never be able to ruin religion, as long as there are some remaining who will honestly follow after it. The hostile designs against religion are plainly exposed at this day, and its enemies have begun to put them in execution. There are contrivances on foot to debauch men's consciences, and mischief is framed into a law. Such a toleration of superstition, errors, and blasphemies, is set on foot, as is a shame to a Christian country, no point of Christianity being protected from the insults of vile men, but the doctrine of the Holy Trinity; and withal, patronages are restored to make way for introducing the most naughty men into the ministry, while the most conscientious will find more difficult access. The discipline of the church is left to be trodden under foot of profane men. And what

is all this, but to ruin religion, and the covenanted work of reformation? But while our text remains, religion shall never be ruined, if we will follow after it. Let men and devils do their utmost, it shall stand, till its followers abandon and give up with it. And therefore, if it be ruined, the ruin will lie at our own doors, in not cleaving to it; but woe be to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed!

You may see here how to turn the cannon on the enemies of religion this day. It is very natural for zeal to grow by opposition. Now, the friends of religion in Scotland have been long at a stand, and its enemies have begun to drive the work back. Should we now awake, and follow it more vigorously, then should *we know*. We should discern the flame to spread more and more, we should see the Lord going forth as the morning, his work prospering over the belly of opposition, superstition and profanity gliding away as the darkness of the night at the morning-dawn. We should perceive him as a giant refreshed with wine, rising to defend and carry on his own work.

Be exhorted, therefore, to hold your hands to religion now when your hand is in it. As ever you would do a good deed to the church of God, and to your own souls, follow religion closely in your practice. It is observed of some of the builders of the wall of Jerusalem, that they repaired each over against his own house, Neh. iii. 23, 28, 30. Make it your endeavour, that your own exercise be right; this will be so much reformation. If you have got never so little, hold your hands to it, labour to get it strengthened this night.

---

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.\*

SERMON XXXVI.

Hos. vi. 3,

*Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.*

HAVING, in the former discourse, attended to the two first heads of the method we laid down, we now proceed,

III. To confirm the doctrine, or show you, that the way to follow religion is, to follow on, to pursue, to hold your hands to it, when once your hand is in it.—And the belief of this would be a great

\* Delivered Monday, Sept. 1, 1712.

spur to diligence. If a person, digging with great labour in the earth, was almost ready to give it over, but another comes to him, and persuades him, that if he will hold on, he would assuredly find a treasure, he would unquestionably renew his resolution, and vigorously follow it out. This I would persuade you of, in regard to religion: however small your beginnings or hopes may now be, yet persevere: "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due time ye shall reap, if ye faint not."—To convince you as to this, consider,

1. You have God's word of promise for it: Matth. xxv. 29, "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance." A man hath no more in God's account, than what he keeps and improves for God's glory and his own salvation. Now, God does not set down all his children with equal stocks. There are fathers, youths, and babes in Christ. Some get more, some less; but there is a promise of more given to them all, on their holding their hands to what they have got. It is God's goodness to most of us, that we are held short by the head, and that any thing we get, we know well how we come by it. This is necessary that our light hearts may not grow vain, and that our careless spirits may be aroused the more. But a little thing, with a promise, will be like the five loaves that multiplied in the distribution.—Consider,

2. That it is the Lord's ordinary way in his works, to bring great things by degrees out of small beginnings. He could have made the world in a moment, but he took six days to it; at first there was but the rude mass, which day by day was brought to perfection. See an instance, 1 Kings xviii. 43, and downwards. See how another great work began, Esth. vi. 1. Both which places consult. See also in the text: "His going forth is prepared as the morning." In his works of grace, as in the works of nature, he ordinarily keeps that way of advancing by degrees.—Consider,

3. That the works of grace in the soul ordinarily arise from very small beginnings. The grain of mustard-seed, called the smallest of seeds, is used as an emblem of this, Matth. xiii. 31, 32. It is a seed springing so leisurely, that the springing of it cannot sometimes be discerned in the time, Mark iv. 27. It springeth and groweth up, we know not how. See how low the beginning of good may be, which the Lord will cherish, and bring to perfection: Isa. xlii. 3, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench; he shall bring forth judgment unto truth."—Consider,

4. The bountiful nature of God, who surely will not always flee from those who follow him, but will at length be found of them. If at any time he seem to flee from them, it is that they may follow him the more vigorously: if he hold meat from them a while, it is that

their appetite may be the more sharpened, Luke xxiv. 28, 29. But resolute following on cannot miss to find him. See an eminent instance of this in the Syrophenician woman, who besought Jesus to cast the devil out of her daughter, and persevered till she obtained her request, Mark vii. 25—29. For good being in its nature communicative of itself, goodness itself cannot fail to be so. The spouse had experience of this, Song iii. 1—4. Consider,

5. That no person gets a refusal from heaven, but those who court it by their own indifference: and indeed a faint way of seeking is to beg a denial. God is more ready to give, than we are to seek: Psalm lxxxi. 10, "Open thy mouth wide," says he, "and I will fill it." He loves importunity, and cannot deny an importunate suitor; and though some such have stood long at his door, there was never a single individual who fell down dead at it; their long waiting was always made up by the greater incomes of favour which they experienced, Matth. xv. 21, and downwards. The richest treasure is that which lies deepest.—Consider,

6. That as importunity is usually in all cases the way to come speed, so it has special advantages in this case which promise success. The Lord gives much to importunity; Luke xi. 9, "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The word in the eighth verse rendered "importunity," is in the Greek "shamelessness." Pinching need makes people shameless. It is not here as with men, that a shameless seeker must get a shameless refusal; they who will not, cannot take a denial, shall not be troubled with it: and when there is enough and to spare to the needy, this and their condition makes them shameless; both concur to make them importunate.

7. But further consider, that such followers the Lord does not bid them go back; and is not this very encouraging? If a beggar be following a man for an alms, and he knows it, there is always hope while he does not command him away. Now, you will follow long ere the Lord bid you go away; but if there were no hope, you would soon get your answer. Thus the foolish virgins were soon answered with a "Verily I say unto you, I know you not," Matth. xxv. 12.—Consider also,

8. That the Lord commands you to follow on: Luke xi. 19, "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And is not that encouraging? I know unbelief will be ready to shape an answer to the soul, taking God's delay for a denial, that the soul may follow no further: Jer. ii. 25, "Withhold thy foot from being unshod,

and thy throat from thirst; but thou saidst, There is no hope; no." It is, however, better to hang on about God's door, than go back to fill our belly with the husks which swine devour. He commands you to follow on, and he would not do it if there was no hope.—Consider farther,

9. That it is the Lord who has given you the foot to follow him: James i. 17, "Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." If you have any desire after him, or the least good motion, it is from himself; and though he should have no regard for you, he will regard his own work in you, if you do not put it away from you. God opens not his children's mouth to put an empty spoon in it; but he who forms the desire will satisfy.—Consider,

*Lastly*, That the very nature of the thing confirms it, that the more we apply ourselves to the business of religion, we shall bring it to the better account. It is true, we own that religion in the principle of it is infused into the heart; but the Christian having both to will and to do wrought in him by God, must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, Phil. ii. 12, 13. Grace, by its exercise, increases. Whatever good motions the Lord has put into the heart, it is like a spring; the more opening which it gets, and the more it runs, the more water comes into it; whereas, if it be stopped, the water turns away, and seeks another opening.

IV. We are now to make some practical improvement,

I. In an use of information.

Is it so that the way to prosper in religion is to follow on to know the Lord? Then we may learn,

(1.) That those who have not yet begun to look and seek after the Lord, they are neither prospering in their souls, nor are they in the way to it. Hearken, O ye stupid souls, whose hearts within you are this day dead as stones, moving still towards the earth, but having no motion in them towards God. Your case is sad, and there is no appearance yet of its growing better; it is dark night with you, and there is no appearance of the morning light. Your hearts are shut against Christ, and there is no putting in of his hand at the hole of the door; you have not the smallest prospect of happiness.—We may see,

(2.) That it is no wonder though backsliders have lean souls. How many are there this day, who, comparing their own case with what it has been formerly, may cry out, as in Isa. xxiv. 16, "But I said, My leanness, My leanness, woe unto me." They have lost the delight they sometimes had in God; there is now little or no communication

between heaven and them. Whence does this take place? Why, they did not follow on, when they were once set fair off, but went backward. When the wind was fair for Immanuel's land, they trifled away their time, busy here and there about other things; and their fair occasions were lost.—We may see,

(3.) That they are in no prospering case who are at a stand in religion. There is a generation who think they have got as much grace as will carry them to heaven, and therefore they are not pressing forward. Paul had more than ever they could pretend to, yet says he, Phil. iii. 12, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Truly, if you continue thus, it will be an evidence that you have no grace at all; for, Prov. iv. 18, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

(4.) You may see how the smallest spark which you now have, may be brought to a great flame. Do but follow on to know the Lord, and then you shall know, you shall make progress; and though your stock be but small, you may come to make that blessed account of it which is in Luke xix. 16, "Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds." Hold your hands to what you have got here, when you are gone from this place, and you will find it will grow in your hands; it will increase in the using.—But here some may propose an

OBJECTION: "I am a fearful backslider, who have wasted my stock which some time increased with me in that way, and can I think ever to recover it again? ANSW. Return, O prodigal! there is yet room for thee in thy Father's house. The promise in the text concerns you as well as others. See also Hos. v. 15, and chapter vi. 1, and downwards, where there is great encouragement to returning backsliders. Are you convinced of your folly? are you touched at the heart with your backsliding? are your souls moving for a return? as in Jer. xxxi. 18, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou has chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God." Then it may yet be as well with you as ever it was, Joel ii. 23—27.

*Lastly,* We may hence see what is the ruin of many communicants, and others who attend upon ordinances. It is not so much that they get nothing at them, as that they carry nothing away with them; or if they do, they do not hold their hands to it when they are at home. You who think that your work is over when the communion is over, you will make no good account of what you have

been doing. Would you not think him a foolish man, who would employ himself on the meadow sharpening his scythe, and then lay it by when he has got it sharpened? Wherefore came you here, but to get a meal for your journey heaven-ward; and if so, then go in the strength of it, go from strength to strength unweariedly, till you appear before God in Zion.—I come,

2. To an use of exhortation.

I would exhort you all to follow on, to hold your hands at religion, however small the beginnings of it may be with you; and to prevail with you, I would lay before you the following motives:—

MOT. 1. The way to prosper in religion is, when we find the least moving, to bestir ourselves, and hold our hands to it, as David, 2 Sam. v. 24, 25. We would all take measures for improving our bodies and estates, why not also for improving our souls? I am sure, there are sad symptoms of a spiritual consumption and decay on the generation in which we live; we have need to use the remedy for ourselves against it. These symptoms are such as the following—The stomach for our spiritual food is gone; ordinances are not prized; we look generally as if we had got a surfeit of the gospel; farms and merchandise go much nearer people's hearts than opportunities of communion with God, for which they will be loth to lose a day's work; an evidence this that we may have to fast till we find our stomachs again.—Another symptom is, that professors have generally lost their colour; their former beauty is gone. That heavenliness, spirituality, and tenderness, that savour of godliness which was sometimes about them, is also gone; and formality, worldly-mindedness, deadness and lifelessness, have come in their room; so that we may well say, "O our bones are dried!" Any growth there is, is in pride and self-conceit: like rickety children, a large head, but a poor lean body. Indeed, not a few are even turned the colour of the earth, that their profane neighbours may say, Behold, the man is become like one of us. It is a day in which God is drawing the veil from off many faces; and all this is drawing on to a national apostasy from the Lord. The alarm is sounded already to carry back this church into Egypt. Breaches are made to let in a deluge of superstition, error, and profaneness. The ruin of this church, and the covenanted work of reformation, is threatened. It is high time we were bestirring ourselves to hold our hands to the truths and ways of the Lord, handed down to us from our fore-fathers, that we may transmit them also to our posterity, by a faithful adherence to them, over the belly of all opposition, whether from open enemies or professed friends; and for that end, to be following on after the Lord's work in our own souls.

MOT. 2. Follow on, hold your hands to religion, however small a measure of it you have : for you shall know, if you follow on to know.

You shall know that a going foot in religion is always getting: Isa. xlv. 19, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain." They who are hanging on about the Lord's hand, will always find some off-fallings. Though they do not soon get the very thing they would be at, they will always get something in the mean time, well worth all the pains. If you be following on for comfort, this may be denied for a while, but you will be ready to get a deeper conviction to prepare the way for it; if, for deliverance from temptation, you may, like Paul, get grace to wrestle against, and to overcome it.—Again,

You shall know that religion is a reward to itself: Psalm xix. 11, "In keeping of them, (thy commandments), there is great reward." There is a pleasure in attending the very posts of Wisdom's door: Psalm lxxxiv. 10, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." There is a sweet peace in the Lord's way: the strictest ways of religion are a pleasure; Prov. iii. 17, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." There is a great pleasure in seeing the bosom-idol on the cross, sin dying, and grace reviving in the soul.

You shall know, that the more you follow on, it shall be the easier; the more you walk in this way, you will be the more expert: Isa. xl. 31, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." That which makes religion so difficult to us, is our not holding at it, our taking it but by fits and starts. Is it not always the easier to you to seek the Lord, the oftener you are at his throne? But omit one occasion, you will find yourselves the less fit for the work.

You shall know, that some difficulties in religion, which are like mountains afar off, shall turn to mole-hills, when you resolutely come up to them. God will make iron gates open of their own accord to his people who are resolute to be through. Unbelief and carnality make difficulties where there are none. "A lion," says the slug-gard, "is in the way." They make real difficulties greater: Exod. xiv. 15, 16, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward. But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it; and the children of Israel shall go on dry land through the midst of the sea." See David's experience, Psal. xviii. throughout.

You shall know that his goings forth are prepared as the morn-

ing. The manifestations of himself are certain. As the morning will certainly follow the darkest night, so the darkest time which a follower of the Lord has, will certainly issue in a morning-light of refreshment at length. These manifestations are also gradual. There is always more and more of God to be known, to be given out, according to the soul's diligent waiting and following on.

MOR. 3. You will be great losers if you do not follow on; you will lose what you have got. The sacred fire in your hearts will go out, if you do not cherish it, and if this should take place, you will be a step farther from heaven than you were. Nay, if you lose it, who knows if ever you will recover it again; if ever the wind will blow as fair for you to Immanuel's land, remember that which is in Luke xiv. 24, "For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." And if it should recover it, you will have to begin again, and it is a sad matter for people always to be but beginning; ever learning, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth, because they forget as fast as they learn. You will lose also all the pains you have been at to get what you have: Prov. xii. 27, "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting; but the substance of a diligent man is precious." What a sad matter is it to be at pains for something, and then when it is got, just to let it slip through our fingers! We have work enough besides. There is no propriety in always doing and undoing again. In a word, you will lose your souls, if you do not follow on to know the Lord; Luke ix. 62, "And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven." Heb. x. 38, "Now, the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." And it will be a bitter ingredient of hell in your heart, that sometime you was not far from the kingdom of God, and yet missed it.—To this may be proposed these objections:—

1. I have met with so many disappointments, how can I follow on further? ANSW. You are not the first who have met with disappointments, Job xxiii. Song iii. And yet such have found him at length. Disappointments are useful to the people of God; they sharpen their appetite; they are necessary to give us honourable thoughts of, and to learn us to stoop to divine sovereignty, for our time is always ready, while his time may be not yet come. They make the enjoyment more sweet, when we are favoured with it. And therefore follow on, and wait the Lord's time.

2. My case grows worse and worse. ANSW. What then? his goings forth shall be as the morning, and the darkest hour is usually before day-break.

I shall, in conclusion, offer the following directions:—

1. Look to God through Jesus Christ, from whence must come all your strength. Let your resolutions be taken up under a sense of weakness, and a persuasion of the supply to be had from the Lord himself.

2. Be much in prayer and meditation. These are suited to keep the impressions of God fresh upon your souls.

3. Make conscience of self-examination, that ye may the better know how it is with you, whether you be going backward or forward.

4. Beware of looking back, much more turning back, to your old sin, especially the sin which has been the great make-bate betwixt God and your soul. Keep special watch against it.

5. Beware of evil company, and follow only such as are following the Lord.

6. Live above the world while ye live in it. It will not be possible to follow on, if we come not to an holy indifference about the world.

*Lastly*, Keep the prize in your eye, and remember how short a time it will be before you arrive at your journey's end. This consideration will animate you to follow vigorously, because the time will not last, and the work must be done. It will dispose you to recollect, that ere long you will be at the end of every difficulty, that the days of your sorrow and mourning shall be ended. Amen.

---

THE ACCEPTABLE MANNER OF DRAWING NEAR TO GOD.\*

SERMON XXXVII.

HEB. x. 22,

*Let us draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

I HAVE been, in our last discourses, urging and directing you to evidences for heaven; and we are shortly to celebrate that ordinance which is a special evidence of the Lord's love to his people, and appointed to evidence it to them. That it may be so in effect to us, let us hearken to the advice in the text; which is an improvement of the doctrine as to the great privileges of Christians. They

\* Delivered May, 1715.