

THE FOLLY OF TURNING ASIDE FROM THE LORD.*

SERMON XLV.

1 SAM. xii. 21,

And turn ye not aside ; for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain.

YE have been professing to forsake your wandering life through the empty creation, and to turn to the Lord as your portion, as your soul's rest, and as your great Lord and Master from henceforth. There is one thing of which I would persuade you, the faith of which would keep you ever with him; and this is, that if you were to change every day, you can never do better, never do so well. This is the scope of our text; in which we have Samuel's reason to the Israelites for their not turning aside from the Lord in any case; which is, "For then should we go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain."

These words (without any supplement, and to the same sense, but more forcibly expressed) may be read word for word thus: "And ye shall not turn aside, but after vain things," &c.; that is, ye cannot turn aside, but you must, by doing so, go after vain things. The text is a defiance held out to men in their attempts to mend their condition by departing from the Lord. In which there is,

1. A case supposed, which is, That they should turn aside from the Lord; and having done so, they have the wide world to choose upon, let them take to the right hand, or to the left, choose the best they can pitch on, some or all, that what is wanting in one, may be made up in another. This is the utmost extent to which it can be carried.—There is,

2. The determination in this case, which is expressed in the text with all confidence. Ye shall not, ye cannot for your hearts, turn aside, but after vain things; I defy you to find out a substantial good for yourselves in the whole creation, separate from God. Betake yourselves to what you will, to idols that are so already, to other things to make idols of them, make your best of them, you shall never make more of them than vanity, they are unprofitable, empty, helpless nothings.—From this subject I take the following

DOCTRINE, That no man shall mend his condition, but will ruin it, by turning aside from the Lord, let him turn to what hand soever he will.—For illustrating this doctrine, I shall,

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I. Offer some things for explaining this point.

II. Evince the truth of this weighty point.

III. Add the practical improvement.

We are then,

I. To offer some things for explaining this point.—Here I observe,

1. That no man, by turning aside from the Lord, shall mend his condition, but ruin it, in point of rest to his heart, and satisfaction to the desires of it: Isa. lvii. 19, 20, “I create the fruit of the lips; peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” Every man’s heart within him is naturally an hungry, empty thing, which must be filled from something without itself, or it cannot rest. Some, hearing of the soul’s satisfaction to be had in God, come away to ordinances, and are for a time found about the Lord’s hand, like the mixed multitude from Egypt among the Israelites. They do not at the very first find that satisfaction for which they look, and they cannot wait; but for haste to be filled, they go back to the world and their lusts. In this case, the more haste, the less speed; they are farther from it than ever.—I observe,

2. That no man, by turning aside from the Lord, shall mend his condition, but ruin it, in point of comfort and ease to his conscience; Psalm xxxii. 3, 5, “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” This is the true way to get ease. But some awakened sinners seek ease by their tears, confessions, resolutions, and the like, not by the blood of Christ: but, alas! those plasters will not stick, they will never draw out the thorn of guilt. Some divert the pain of conscience, by filling their hands and heads with business, like Cain. Some stifle it by sinning, yet more over the belly of convictions. But the sore healed with any of these, which are but mere palliatives, will break out more dreadfully than ever, though perhaps not till there is no remedy. And how is the case thus mended? is it not ruined?—I observe,

3. That no man, by turning aside from the Lord, shall mend his condition, but ruin it, in point of his interest and advantage: Jer. ii. 13, “For my people have committed two great evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” He who changes, changes

for what he accounts the better for himself; yet men often find themselves disappointed. Nothing draws persons more away from God than interest; but heaven shall be turned nethermost, and earth uppermost in the universe, ere any man, manage as securely as he will, shall ever be a gainer by turning aside from God. For this ye have the concurring testimony of all true penitents, whose eyes have been opened: Hos. ii. 7, "And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them; then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now."—I observe,

4. That no man, by turning aside from the Lord, will better his condition, but ruin it, in point of security from evil: Prov. xxviii. 18, "Whoso walketh uprightly, shall be saved; but he that is perverse in his ways, shall fall at once." Sin often promises, but can never afford a solid shelter. Any hiding-place or defence to which persons betake themselves, turning away from God, is but vanity, and cannot deliver; nay, it exposes them to the way of evil: Amos v. 19, "As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand upon the wall, and a serpent bit him." The Jews, in their crucifying of Christ, are a standing witness to this: Johu xi. 48, "If we let him alone," said they, "all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come, and take away both our place and nation." Matth. xxii. 7, "But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city."—We now come,

II. To evince the truth of this weighty point. That no man shall mend his condition, but will ruin it, by turning aside from the Lord, let him turn to what hand soever he will.—We shall do this,

First, By considering to what a person turns aside when he turns from God.

Secondly, By taking a view of what he turns aside from. And,

Thirdly, By inspecting the pretended gain which he acquires by turning aside from the Lord.

First, We are to evince the truth of this weighty point, by considering to what a person turns aside when he turns from God. It is but vanity, which cannot profit or deliver. There are but two things to which a person can turn aside, though the particulars are numberless. The character agrees either,

1. To sin, that is, to sinful ways, courses, or practices. And while there is a God in heaven to avenge the affront, no man shall mend his condition in this way. You will not, indeed, want an invitation

to turn aside, and go in at this door; but know for a certain that it will ruin you, for "the dead are there, and her guests are in the depths of hell," Prov. ix. 18. Sin is the way in which you will never find rest to your souls; on the contrary, it will produce a sting to your conscience, a constant restlessness to your heart, and eternal ruin to the whole man, if mercy recover you not, and bring you back to God.—Or the character agrees,

2. To the creature, to which, when men are turning aside from God, they turn to seek their happiness. This comprehends all created comforts whatsoever. Of them we have two things to say.

(1.) They are all uncertain, a person can never get a sure hold of them: Prov. xxiii. 5, "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings, they flee away as an eagle towards heaven." Unchangeableness is an essential property of that which makes truly happy and fully satisfies, for otherwise the very fear of losing the thing mars the full rest of the heart in it. But where is this to be found but in God? The creature is so uncertain, that there is not one moment in which we may not either be taken from it, or it from us; so that a person may rest as well on the top of a wheel, as on any creature. And turning aside from God to it, is turning from the fountain to a cistern, which, in that very moment when a person goes to drink out of it, may run dry.

(2.) They are utterly insufficient. It is not in them to answer the cravings of the human heart, of an immortal soul. Hence it is said, Isa. lv. 2, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" [1.] There is no suitableness in them to the soul, for they are not commensurate to the desires of it; God only is so, being an infinite good. Wherefore, wherever you go to make your bed among them, you will find it shorter than you can stretch yourself upon. [2.] They have no divine appointment for that end, without which grass would be no more satisfying to the flocks than sand. God has kept the satisfying of the soul to himself, as his peculiar prerogative.—Therefore the turning aside to such emptiness can never make a man happy.—Here, however, may be stated this

OBJECTION, What! does not every body know that there is a goodness in the creature? ANSW. But every body should likewise know that it is uncertain and insufficient, and therefore not worth the turning aside to from a good God. Besides, know this farther, that no creature can be to thee more than this God, from whom thou turnest aside, makes it to be. So thou mayest get it, and at the same time there may come a withering curse with it, that thou

shalt find no more sap in it than Haman in his riches, family honours, which, by his own confession, availed him nothing, Esther, v. 13. Yea, thy ruin may rise from it, as Achan's from the golden wedge.

Secondly, For evincing the truth of this weighty point, consider what a person turns aside from, when turning aside from God. He turns from an upmaking portion; Psalm lxxiii. 25, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Cleave to the Lord, turn not aside from him: for,

1. Thou art enriched for time: 1 Tim. iv. 8, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." The everlasting covenant secures all that thou needest. Thy provision is sure: Psalm xxxvii. 3, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Isa. xxxiii. 16, "He shall dwell on high, his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks; bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure." Thou shalt not want lodging: Psalm xc. 1, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." Fear not want of clothing: Matth. vi. 30, "For if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" What want ye more, then? Why, some would have land also. Then cleave to Christ as thy Lord and Husband. He is Lord of all the land in the world; the earth shall be thine in the right of thy Husband: Matth. v. 5, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." But what will a person do for money? Why, cleave to the Lord: Job xxii. 24, 25, "Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver." —Here some may propose this

OBJECTION, These are fine words, but what will they bring into our mouth, or on our back, what will they bring into the coffers? **ANSW.** They are God's words, and his words are better than all the world's good deeds. Some to whom God has no special love, he gives them their portion in their hand, and sets them off; others, who are his dear children, he gives them the good words of a promise, and keeps them at home with himself. Say now, which of these have the best of it? The following words determine it: Matth. xxv. 34, "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." God approves not of those men who say to the needy, Depart in peace, and be ye warmed, and be ye filled; notwithstanding, *they* give them not

those things which are needful to the body," James ii. 16. And will He himself treat his people so? No, no. Many a saint has trusted to these words, when they had nothing else to trust to, and they have all been made out to them: Psalm xxxiv. 8, 9, "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 there is no want to them that fear him." The unbeliever's mistake is, that God's bond cannot be paid, but in giving the very thing itself. Even this is often done, but he also gives his people more frequently what is as good. Moses, wanting meat forty days, had no reason to complain, when God in those days took away his stomach, and satisfied him otherwise than by meat. Adam lived well when the heavens were the roof of his house, and God was his God. All the enjoyment of God still will abundantly compensate the want of all these things.

2. Cleave unto the Lord, turn not aside from him, and thus thou art enriched for eternity, 1 Tim. iv. 8, quoted above. Come death when when it will, what then? thou shalt be carried where thy happiness shall be completed: John xiv. 2, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you." The law cannot debar thee from this happiness, it is satisfied; justice has nothing to say against thee, for the debt is paid: God is thy God; and the tongue of men, nor of angels, cannot fully express this privilege.

Thirdly, The truth of this weighty point in the text will farther appear, by inspecting the pretended gain which is acquired by turning aside from the Lord.—It may all be summed up in these two particulars.

1. It is nothing; Prov. xxiii. 5, (quoted above). All the gain is but children's gain, which they have won off their fellows, of which grown persons make no account; and as little will a spiritual heart account of gain got by turning aside from the Lord. It is a poor trade where a person is not gaining for his soul; and no person will gain for this by turning aside from God.

2. It is worse than nothing. Whatsoever thou thinkest thou gainest by turning aside from the Lord, a thousand times more is going to destruction in the meantime. Count what thou givest out, as well as what thou gettest in, and thou wilt soon see the gain worse than nothing: Matth. xvi. 26, "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

From all which it is evident, that no man shall better his condition, but ruin it, by turning aside from the Lord, let him turn to what hand soever he will.—I now proceed,

III. To make some improvement of this subject, in an use of information.—Hence,

1. You who have never yet turned to the Lord, but have been going aside from him all your days, know, that ye are yet in a ruinous condition; there is nothing you can call yours, but what is vanity, and cannot profit or deliver. Ye will not be persuaded of this; but remember it is explicitly told you; and if grace do not open your eyes to see it timely, death will open them to see it when it is out of time to mend the matter.

2. Backsliders, be all of you convinced of the foolish choice ye have made, repent, and turn again unto the Lord. What have you gained by your departures from him? Where is the advantage of the sad exchange? Blasted profits! short-lived pleasures! leaving a sting behind them in the conscience these will not compensate for what ye have lost.

3. Ye who have got near God in this ordinance, ye may see that it is your duty and interest, by a holy tender walk, a living by faith, to hold where you are. If you step aside from God, you may well mar your case, you will never mend it this way. Entertain no curiosity to be on the other side of the hedge; satisfy yourselves that there is nothing there but vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain: Isa. xxx. 7, "For the Egyptian shall help in vain, and to no purpose; therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still."

4. Disappointed communicants may hence be satisfied, that if you love your own souls, it is not for your profit to go aside to another door, to get your loss at the door of God's house made up another way. Your case, it is likely, is sad, and Satan will strike in with the occasion to make you a fair offer. But know of a truth, if you embrace it, instead of mending your condition, you shall make your sad case yet sadder. Be peremptory in your resolutions that you will wait upon the Lord, and not give over, how long soever ye be without sensible success: Gen. xxxii. 26, "And the angel said to Jacob, Let me go, for the day breaketh; and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Go thou, and do likewise.

5. Ye carnal ones, who are weary of waiting about the Lord's hand, and are longing to be back to the world as your element, saying in your heart, "When will the Sabbath be over?" Ye may see the propriety of checking these carnal motions: stir up yourselves to seek the Lord, and to improve the present opportunity for making a happy settlement for your souls; otherwise, if you miss such an occasion of mending your condition, ye know not if ever ye shall have it again: and by neglecting it, ye run towards the ruining of your souls.

Let all be exhorted to cleave to the Lord, and tremble at the thought of turning aside from him. Be exhorted, with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord, Acts xi. 23. Turn not aside from his precious truths, his holy ordinances, the way of holiness and tenderness in the whole of your conversation; but cleave to the Lord, his word, his way, and to whatever bears his stamp. Turn not aside, whatever may be the temptation or allurement. Know of a truth, that it is but poison presented in a golden cup to you, which will work the ruin of your condition; it is but a gilded vanity, to cheat you to cut off a substantial good: it is what will not fail to be bitterness in the end. Have your eyes in your head, then, and forfeit not God's favour or smiles for lying vanities.

Again, turn not aside, whatever be the hazard of holding on. Let devils and men run that as high as they will, as sure as God's word is truth, the greatest hazard is ever on the other side; and they who turn aside run the most fearful risk.—Wherefore, take it home with you, lay it up in your hearts, and improve it in your daily walk; decide all your controversies with temptation, managed by a subtle devil, a carnal heart, or the men of the world, by this,—That you cannot turn aside, but “after vain things, which cannot profit, nor deliver, for they are vain.” Amen.

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JESUS COMPLETELY QUALIFIED FOR HIS WORK.\*

### SERMON XLVI.

ISAIAH lxi. 1,

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me.*

THIS text is that upon which our Lord Jesus himself preached to the congregation at Nazareth, Luke iv. 16—19. And if we ask of whom the prophet spake, Jesus tells you, ver. 21, that it was of him. Though the prophet perhaps had an eye to himself, and to the promised deliverance from the Babylonish captivity; yet certainly Christ, and the spiritual deliverance by him, is the principal subject. Jesus is here described as the Mediator between God and man. In the words we have two things:—

1. The glorious qualifications of our Mediator: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me.” Here are the three persons of the Trinity

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