

SERMON IV.

OF GOOD AND BAD COMPANY, HOW TO AVOID THE ONE, AND
IMPROVE THE OTHER.

“I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.” Ps. cxix. 63.

MY desire now is to speak something of good and bad company, and therefore have made choice of this scripture. In this section the Psalmist laboureth to confirm his faith, and to comfort himself in the certainty of his own grace, by seven or eight properties of a true believer. The first is drawn from his choice. A good man makes a right choice, he chooses God for his portion, verse 51, “Thou art my portion, O Lord.” The second is drawn from the fixation of his resolution. A good man is fully resolved for to walk with God. “I have said I would keep thy words,” verse 57. The third is drawn from his earnest desire of God’s love and favour. A good man doth desire the favour of God above all things, “I intreated thy favour with my whole heart,” verse 58. The fourth is drawn from his self examination. A good man doth ponder, weigh, and examine his own doings and ways, “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies,” verse 59. The fifth is drawn from his readiness to keep God’s commandments. A good man doth not put off or delay his duty, “I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments,” verse 60. The sixth is drawn from his adhesion to the ways of God in times of opposition. A good man will not be driven from the ways of God by the opposition of men. “The bands of the wicked have robbed me, but I have not forgotten thy law,” verse 61. The seventh is drawn from the thankfulness of his disposition under all dispensations. A good man will give thanks to God whatever his condition be. “At midnight I will give thanks unto thee, because of thy righteous judgments,” verse 62. And the eighth is drawn from his company. A good man will keep company with those that are good; “I am a companion of all that fear thee.” Which is explained by these following words, “and of them that

keep thy precepts, I am a companion of all that fear thee." Though I be a king, and they be never so poor, I, even I, David the king, "am a companion of all that fear thee, and do keep thy precepts." Where then you may observe thus much, that a good man will have good company. It is the property of a good man to keep good company, his companions are such as do fear the Lord. Yea, though they be much beneath him, yet if they be such as do fear the Lord, he will not boggle at their acquaintance and fellowship. "I am a companion," says David the king, "of all those that fear thee." So that a good man will have or keep good company. For the opening and clearing whereof,

First, We will inquire what this good company is, and when a man may be said for to keep good company.

Secondly, Why, and upon what account a good man will have good company.

Thirdly, I will answer unto some objections or cases of conscience, about this company-keeping, and so come to the application.

As for the first, If you ask what this good company is, I answer,

That is not good company which the world calls good company, nor he a good companion which the world calls a good companion. If a man will drink and take off his cups, he is a good fellow in the mouth of the world. And if a man be a jolly, frolic, merry man, that can make you laugh with some pretty tales and jests, he is a good companion; but if he be a good natured man, and will not be angry, then he is a good companion indeed. This is the world's good company, or good companion, but I say that is not good company which the world calls good company.

Neither is that good company which a man's own engagements calls good company; if a man be a good man, and I have a mind to hate him, then I will first make him wicked, that there may be room for my hatred: if a man be a wicked man, and I have a mind to keep him company, or love him, then I will first make him good, and say he is good, that there may be room for my love and fellowship with him. It was a custom amongst the Jews, that the king should once in a year read over the chief part of Deuteronomy in the audience of the people, and as their stories tell us, when Agrippa

came to those words, "One from among thy brethren thou shalt set king over thee; thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother." Agrippa's eyes trickled down with tears, in remembrance that he was not of the seed of the Jews. Whereupon, saith the story, the people cried out three times, Fear not, Agrippa, for thou art our brother. So that when men please, they can for their own engagements make a man a brother, and a good companion; but I say, that is not good company which my own judgment and engagement calls good company. But that is good company, which the saints generally call good company, and that is good which the Scripture calls good company. "Such are all those that do fear the Lord, and do keep his precepts," for so saith David, "I am a companion of all those that fear thee, and do keep thy precepts."

Now a man is not said to keep company with others, either good or bad, because he doth occasionally fall into their society. Possibly a good man may occasionally meet with, or fall into the society of those that are wicked, yet he is not thereby said for to keep wicked company, neither is this forbidden; for says the apostle, "I have written to you that you should not keep company with," &c. 1 Cor. v., yet not altogether, for then you should go out of the world: and possibly a bad man may occasionally meet with good people, and be in their companies: yet he is not therefore said to keep good company, it is not this or that occasion, that doth make a companion.

Neither is a companion properly one whom a man doth ordinarily deal with in a way of trade and commerce. For the christians in the apostles' time, did ordinarily trade and commerce with the heathens, yet did not keep company with them. But a companion properly is such an one as I do choose to walk and converse with ordinarily in a way of friendship: so that company-keeping doth imply three things, first it is matter of choice, and therefore relations as such, are not properly said to be our companions; secondly it implies a constant walking and converse with another, and so it is expressed, Job xxiv. 8; Prov. xiii. 20. And thirdly, this ordinary converse or walking with another, must be in a way of friendship, and upon this account. He that Samson used as his friend is called his companion. Judges xiv. 20.

A companion therefore properly is such an one as I do choose to walk and converse ordinarily with in a way of friendship. The apostle Paul expresses it by a word that signifies to mingle. "I have written to you that you keep not company with the world;" 1 Cor. v. 11; the word in the original is, that you mingle not with such. There is a meddling with the world, and there is a mingling with the world. It is not unlawful to meddle with the things of the world, but it is unlawful to mingle one's heart with the things of the world; so it is not unlawful to meddle with the persons of the world, but to mingle with them is unlawful, and look, when I do choose the men of the world for to walk and converse with ordinarily, in a way of friendship, then do I keep them company; but if men be such as fear God, and do keep his precepts, and I choose out such to walk and converse ordinarily with, then I am said for to keep them company. And thus now you see what good company is, and when a man may be said to keep bad or good company.

Secondly, Well but, then, why and upon what account will a good man keep good company? Why it is his duty to do it, he cannot but do it, and it is best for him to do it. It is his duty: for if it be his duty to avoid evil company, then it is his duty to have good company. Now for bad company, you know what Solomon says, Prov. i. 10, "If sinners entice ye consent thou not to them;" verse 15, "Walk not thou in the way with them, but refrain thy feet from their path." And again, chap. iv. 14, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." Was not God greatly displeased with Jehoshaphat for his walking and fellowship with Ahab and his house? Read, I pray, what is said 2 Chron. xix. 2, "And Jehu, the son of Hanani the seer, went out to meet Jehoshaphat, and said to him, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord, therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord." And ye know what is said in Ps. i., "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, that standeth not in the way of sinners, and sitteth not in the seat of the scornful." It may be you will say that you do not sit in the seat of the scornful, though you be amongst them ordinarily, but do not you

stand in the way of sinners, nor walk in their counsel? If you be found either in their counsel, or in their way, or in their seat, sitting, standing, or walking amongst them, the blessing doth not belong to you. If you be a professor, you ought not to be found in such company. It is the duty of all those that fear, to avoid evil company; and as it is their duty to avoid evil company, so it is their duty to frequent good company. Cant. i. 5, "If thou knowest not, O thou fairest among women," saith Christ to the spouse, "go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock," Cant. i. 8. And Solomon doth not only enjoin and commend this duty, but doth encourage us unto it; for, saith he, "He that walketh with the wise, shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed," Prov. xiii. 20. So that it is a good man's duty to keep company with those that are good, and as it is his duty, so he can do no other; his spiritual disposition doth naturally lead him unto it. You say, Birds of a feather will together. And what is the reason that the sheep doth converse with the sheep, and not with the swine; that the pigeon doth converse with the pigeon, and not with the raven? But because their disposition doth naturally lead them to converse with those that are in nature like to them. Now the divine nature of all good men is spiritually the same naturally; therefore as a good man, he cannot but converse and walk with those that are good; and as he can do no other, so it is best for him to do so; for in good company there is much safety; as there is danger in bad, so in good company there is great safety. Our way to heaven is a journey, and we are all travelling thither; now ye know that in a great journey, a good day, and a good way, and good company is very comfortable; so in our journey to heaven, a clear gospel day, a plain, even way and good company, is a great mercy, and a sweet privilege; insomuch as John, that wrote the book of the Revelation, glories in it; for, I pray, mark how he styles himself: I, John, am the penman of this book, and would you know, saith he, what my title is, it is this, "Your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ," Rev. i. 9. It seems then, 1. That he that lies in Christ's bosom, will lie in the bosom of the saints; of all the disciples it is written of John, that he was the beloved disciple that lay in Christ's bosom: now says he

to all the saints, "I am your brother and companion." 2. It seems by this Scripture, that he that is our true companion will keep us company into tribulation, "I am your brother and companion in tribulation." 3. You may here see, that those who are the saints' companions in tribulation, shall be companions also with them in the kingdom of Christ, "I am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." 4. That it is an honour, mercy, and a great privilege to be a companion with the saints, though it be in matter of tribulation, for herein doth John glory, "I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation;" plainly then, it is a great mercy and a sweet privilege to have good company. But to clear up this thing to you, I shall only make use of one argument, which though one, hath many in the bosom of it.

Thus if there be much benefit to be found in good company, and much hurt and mischief in bad company, then it is best for every good man to keep good company. Now in good company there is much benefit and in bad company there is much mischief. For,

As for the benefit of good company. If in case you be going into evil, ready to fall into what is evil, he will put forth his hand, and will hold you from it, saying, O my friend, do not this thing, for it is displeasing unto your God and my God. Ye know how it was with David, when he was going to destroy Nabal and all his house, he met with Abigail, and by her counsel was diverted from it, insomuch as he blessed God for her counsel. "Ye are the salt of the earth," saith Christ. Now there are two properties of salt, it keeps the meat from putrefaction, and it makes it savoury: so will good company do, they will make you more savoury in your spirits and keep you from that corruption and putrefaction which you are apt unto. And,

As good company will keep you from evil, so they will provoke, whet, and stir you up unto what is good, yea though they be of lower and meaner parts and gifts than yourself: for as the chips and shavings of wood and little sticks will set the great blocks and billets on fire, so warm and lively christians, though weak in parts, will warm and put life into others, though in parts and gifts much beyond them. Heb.

x. 24, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love, and good works." Solomon tells you, "That the lips of the righteous disperse knowledge," Prov. xv. 7; and if you look into verse 4, ye shall find, "that the wholesome tongue (which only dwells in the mouth of the righteous) is a tree of life." The word in the original is an healing tongue; there is a cutting wounding tongue, and there is an healing tongue. Now the healing wholesome tongue is a tree of life: do you therefore desire to gather and eat of the tree of life? Then must you keep company with an healing, not with a cutting and a wounding tongue. And if ye look into Prov. xx. 21, ye shall find, "that the tongue of the righteous, is as choice silver; the heart of the wicked is nothing worth;" though he saith, his heart is good, and as good as any man's, though he cannot speak of good as others do. Yet says Solomon, The heart of the wicked is nothing worth; but the tongue of the just, or righteous, is not only as silver, but as choice silver. And do you ask wherein the worth of his lips doth consist? I will tell you, saith Solomon, "The lips of the righteous feed many." Do you therefore desire to be fed, and to meet with such company as shall feed your soul, then you must keep company with those that are good and righteous. And if ye look into verse 11, ye shall find he saith, "That the mouth of the righteous is a well of life." Do you therefore desire to draw up the waters of life? Then must you get your bucket, and come unto the mouth and company of the righteous. Now if the mouth of the righteous be a "well of life," and "his lips be as choice silver, that will feed many," what a good thing is it, and profitable, for a man to keep company with those that are good. Yet,

As good company will provoke unto what is good, so in case you fall at any time into evil, they will stretch forth their hand and lift you up again. For, says Solomon, "Two are better than one: For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth: for he hath not another to lift him up." Eccles. iv. 9. Again, "If two lie together, then have they heat; but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him." Are you therefore under some great temptations, and do you fear that Satan will prevail against you,

then you must keep good company; for "if one prevail against him, two shall withstand." Or, is your heart grown cold and dead? Then must you keep good company; for, "If two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone?" Or, are you fallen into any sin? Then must you keep good company: "for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow?" Is it not a good thing then to keep good company? Surely it is. Yet,

As good company will help to lift you out of the mire when you are fallen into it, so in case you be in any outward great strait, good company will help to pull you out of that ditch and strait. For what a great strait was Daniel in, when the king would put him to death, unless he told him his dream, and the meaning of it. How is it possible for me to know what another dreams? Yet Daniel must die unless he tell the king his dream. Well, what doth Daniel do in this case? He goes up to God in his prayers. And chap. ii. 17, "He went to his house, and made the things known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah his companions." But why did he go to them? It seems they were praying companions; for says the text, "He told it to them, that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret, that Daniel and his fellows should not perish." Well, and what then? "Then (verse 19) was the secret revealed unto Daniel." Suppose Daniel's companions had been drunken, wicked companions, what help could he have had from them? But they were praying companions, and a praying companion is a great help in the time of strait. And,

As good company is a great help to a man in the day of his straits, so it is a continual blessing. For says the psalmist, Ps. cxxxiii., "Behold how good and pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity; it is like the precious ointment upon the head," &c. "It is as the dew of Hermon," &c. "For there the Lord commandeth his blessing, and life for evermore." It is not barely said, that there God blesseth, or doth pronounce a blessing; but, "there he commands his blessing," makes it effectual, "there he commands his blessing." Was not Laban's house blessed with the company of Jacob? Was not Potiphar's house blessed with the company of Joseph? Surely where good company is,

there is God's blessing; yea, "There he commandeth his blessing, and life for evermore." It is recorded of one heathen, that when he would set his house and land to sale, he caused the crier to proclaim, *Bonum habet vicinum*; thinking that it would sell the better for a good neighbour: and surely a good neighbour is a good commodity, and good company is a great mercy. "There the Lord commandeth his blessing, and life for evermore." And thus ye now see the benefit of good company.

As for the mischief of bad company, there is much mischief to be found therein. For as good company will provoke and quicken you unto what is good, so bad company will cool and quench you to what is good. Bad company is a great quench coal, and will abate your affections unto what is good. Will not water mixed with wine, abate of the strength of the wine? so will bad company abate your strength of affections unto what is good. Peter Martyr,* observing that many of the Jews stayed behind in Babylon, when others came out of Babylon with much heat and zeal to build God's house; he inquires into the reason why any should stay behind, and he concludes, that the society and company of the Babylonians, had cooled their devotions unto God's service. They had been seventy years in Babylon, and having so long mingled themselves with the people of the nations, they were now cooled to the service of God. And indeed what is the reason that many are so cooled, over what they have been, unto what is good, but because they have mingled themselves with evil company?

As evil company will quench and cool your affections unto what is good, so they will insensibly infect you with what is evil. You see how it is with diseases, though a man have an infectious disease, yet if I keep at a distance from his breath, and the like, I am not infected therewith; but if I come near him, to suck in his breath, then I am infected.† So here, though evil, wicked men are very infectious, yet if I keep at a distance, I shall not be infected with them; but if I come so near, as to suck in their breath by keeping them company, then I am infected by them. "A little leaven (saith the

* Ideo pietatis amor et religionis studium refrigerati.—Pet. Mar. in Judg. i.

† Et solent vitia alibi connata in propinqua membra perniciem suam efflare, sic improborum vitia in eos derivantur, qui cum illis vitæ habent consuetudinem. Tertul. advers. Voelnt.

apostle) leaveneth the whole lump." And he speaks of persons; though you think there is but a little leaven of malice in such or such a man's company, yet it is leaven, and a little of that leaven will leaven all the lump. Who would have thought that Alexander should be infected with the fashions of the Persians whom he conquered; yet by conversing with them, he was infected by them, say histories. Were not the Jews infected with the superstition of Egypt, by their conversing with them? Had not Joseph learned to swear by the life of Pharaoh, by being in his house? Was not Peter infected in the high priest's hall, by his converse with them? Did not Isaiah cry out, "Wo is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; for I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." It may be you think that they shall not infect you with their principles or their practices. But they do insensibly infect. Evil company doth insensibly infect a man with evil. You see how it is with a white loaf that is set into the oven, and doth stand near the brown bread, it comes out with a black patch on the side thereof. And ye have heard what he said that went thrice to Rome; the first time, said he, I saw your fashions and manners; the second time, I learned them; and the third time, I brought them away.* So the first time you go into evil company, you see their fashions, and hear their words; the second time ye learn them; and the third time you bring them away. And will you say, No, I have been often in such company, yet I have not brought their fashions and manners away? Then remember what the apostle saith, "Evil communications doth corrupt good manners." And have you not brought a black patch away with you? It may be others see it, though you yourself do not; I believe the word of God rather than your word, "Evil communications doth corrupt good manners." It will infect your judgment before you are aware, and your practice before you are aware, for evil company is infecting company. And,

As they do insensibly infect a man with what is evil, so they do, by your company with them, draw you into the fellowship and communion of Satan. For there are two great princes in the world, Christ and the devil; and Christ ruleth

* Qui semel it Romam, videre scelestum; qui secundo, cognoscere, qui tertio, in patriam referre.—Cluxeri Histor. mundi Epist. p. 687.

in the children of obedience, and those that have communion with them, have thereby communion with Christ; so Satan ruleth in the children of disobedience, and those that have fellowship and communion with them, have thereby communion with Satan. For how can a man have communion with the members, and not with the head? Now is it not a great evil and mischief to have communion and fellowship with Satan? This you have that keep company with wicked men.

And if you have communion with Satan and his members here, then you shall have communion with him and his members hereafter. There is a draught of things to come in this life. Those that stand at the right-hand of Christ here, shall stand at his right-hand in the day of judgment; and those that stand on his left-hand here, shall stand at his left-hand at the day of judgment. So those that are bound up with the wicked here, shall be bound up with them hereafter. There is a bundle of life, and there is a bundle of death. Some men there are that shall be bound up in the bundle of life, and some men there are that shall be bound up in the bundle of death. "Take them and bind them hands and feet, and cast them into outward darkness," saith Christ. Here is a company of drunkards, bind them together, and cast them into hell for ever. Here is a company of swearers, and there a company of opposers and jeerers, and there a company of unclean persons, and there a company of mere moral, civil men; take them and bind them up as so many faggots, and cast them into that fire that shall never be quenched. And I pray tell me, who do you think shall be bound up with these; shall not those that bundle up themselves with them now, that keep company with them now? "Come out of her, my people, (saith Christ,) lest you partake with her in her plagues." They that will partake with wicked men in their company now, shall partake with them in their plagues hereafter. And,

For the present, what shall you get by all your wicked company, but a reproach and a blot that shall not be wiped off. Doth not the mingling of the water with the wine alter the colour of the wine? so shall your mingling with evil company do; it shall not only abate of your strength unto what is good, but it shall alter the colour of your profession. Solomon says, It shall be a snare unto you. Prov. xxii. 24,

25, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare unto thy soul." What will not a wicked man think of himself when you that are godly shall keep company with him; will not he say, If my condition were not good, and if I were not godly, this man or woman would not keep company with me? Thus you harden and offend him by your company with him; and who among the saints is not offended at your walking and conversing and keeping company with such men. Now is it nothing in your eye to offend the generation of the righteous and the unrighteous too? Yet this do you do, that are professors of the gospel, by your company with those that are evil. Yet this is not all; but as you offend the godly and the wicked, so you offend God himself: for the more you converse with wicked men, the less you converse with God and God with you; the more you turn in to them, the more God will turn from you; the more society you have with the world, the less acquaintance you shall have with God. God is offended in a way of anger, the saints in a way of grief, and the wicked in a way of stumbling by your keeping company with them. Oh, what an evil thing, therefore, is it to keep company with those that are bad. And thus ye see the mischief of evil company. Now if there is so much benefit in good company, and so much mischief in evil company, then it is and must be best for every good man to keep good company. But as ye have heard there is much benefit in good company and much mischief in bad company, surely, therefore, it is best for every good man to keep good company. It is his duty to do so. He can do no other but do it. And it is best for him to do so. Therefore a good man will have good company.

But though a good man will have good company; yet, whether is it not lawful in some case to keep evil company?

Ye have heard, and seen, and read what the Scripture saith in this case: and the Scripture only is the rule of lawful and unlawful things. And pray do but mark what stress the Scripture lays upon this prohibition, and how it loads it with variety of expressions. Will ye instance in the persons of ungodly men, then it forbids your company with ungodly sinners and scorners, Psalm i., vain persons that have no good, but are merely vain, dissemblers, evil and wicked doers. "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with

dissemblers. I hate the congregation of evil doers and I will not sit with the wicked." Psa. xxvi. 4, 5. And what can be said more to delineate and characterise the persons themselves, whose company you are to avoid. Or will ye instance in the actions of keeping company? Mark how the Scripture loads this prohibition in that respect. Here the psalmist saith, "I have not sat with them, neither will I go in with them." If they go into an ale-house, or elsewhere, "I will not go in with them, I will not sit with them," neither will I go in with them. And in Psalm i., there are three terms, standing, sitting, and walking. "Blessed is the man that standeth not, sitteth not, walketh not with them." And in Prov. iv., there are no less than four expressions put together upon this prohibition in one verse; at verse 14, he saith, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men;" verse 15., "avoid it:" there is one expression; "pass by it," there is another; "turn from it," there is another; and "pass away," there is another. Now if you will break through this hedge of expressions with some distinctions, take heed how you distinguish over and against the letter of the Scripture that is so full, lest a serpent bite you.

Why, but may I not then converse or be with relations, husband, wife, child, or kindred, if they be ungodly?

Yes, for says Paul, "If the unbelieving husband will not depart, let him not depart;" but you must remember what I said in the beginning, that company is a matter of choice, and not of necessity; and if you shall rather keep company with your carnal, jeering and opposing kindred, than your spiritual kindred, then it is not your kindred, but the carnality of your kindred that you keep company with.

Why, but if it be unlawful for a professor of the gospel to keep bad company; whether may it stand with grace so to do? Suppose I do keep bad company, and suppose it be unlawful so to do; whether is it such an evil as cannot stand with grace?

I answer, that it is in this sin as in all other sins: now says the apostle, "He that is born of God sinneth not;" that is, he doth not so lie in his sin, but he purgeth it out; "For he that hath this hope, (saith he) purgeth himself," else he were of the devil, saith he, who sins, and does not purge out his sin, but as the fountain or spring purgeth out the dirt that

doth fall into it; so "he that is born of God sinneth not," but he doth purge it out: and so in this case, as a good man may fall into another sin, so he may fall into this sin of evil company; but if a professor be convinced of the evil of it, and doth not leave his evil company, and purge himself from it, then he is not born of God; thus it can no more stand with grace, than another sin.

Why, but if it be unlawful to keep evil company, and it be our duty to keep good company, yea, to keep company with all those that do fear the Lord; then, whether is it lawful to keep company with erroneous persons? For David saith here, "I am a companion of all those that do fear thee." Now so it is, that some that fear God have fallen into errors; whether may I therefore keep company with them? for answer.

It is ordinarily said, that a man must consider his own weakness, and their strength that are erroneous: if I will mingle a spoonful of wine with a pailful of water, shall I not lose the wine? For so say some, If I am but weak in knowledge, and will go and mingle myself with them that are strong in errors, what shall I do but lose my own knowledge? But there are two or three things that I shall speak to in this case of conscience.

Ye must know that there are some errors that are less; some that are so gross, that do manifest a wicked state and condition in them that hold them: they are called "errors of the wicked," 2 Pet. iii. 17. Now though I may sometimes converse with those that are less erroneous; yet if their errors be such, as cannot stand with grace, the gospel, or the power of godliness, then I am to shun their company, as much as the company of a drunkard, swearer, or unclean person. But,

You must observe all this verse, the Psalmist doth not barely say, "I am a companion of all that fear thee," but he explains who those are that do fear the Lord, and such as keep his precepts; now men that depart from his ordinances do not keep his precepts; and therefore though in regard of their other profession, they may seem to fear the Lord, yet if they do not keep his precepts, this scripture doth not warrant me to be their companion. And,

You know and must remember what the apostle saith, "If

any one that is called a brother, does walk inordinately, from such turn away and avoid them." So that though I must keep company with those that fear the Lord, while they stand right, yet if they do not stand right, but do walk disorderly, then I am commanded by another scripture to avoid them for a while, that they may be ashamed. And thus now I have answered to those several cases of conscience, and have cleared the doctrine.

Now by way of application, if a good man will keep good company, then what shall we think of those that never kept good company all their days, twenty, thirty, forty years old, yet never kept good company. It may be they have kept company with civil, moral men; but, saith David, "I am a companion of those that fear thee, and do keep thy precepts." Or it may be they have sometimes occasionally fallen into good society, but they have not chosen the company of such as do fear the Lord, and keep his precepts. Now if a good man will keep good company, what shall we think of those that never kept good company all their time? Yea, what shall we think of those that have kept, and do keep bad company? Every man is as his company is. The heathen could say, *Noscitur ex comite qui non cognoscitur ex se*, He is known by his company that cannot be known by himself. A man's company is a commentary upon his life, thereby you may understand a man though he be never so close and mystical. It is recorded of Augustus Cæsar, that he came thus to know his daughters' inclinations; for being once at a public show, where much people were present, he observed that the grave senators talked with Livia, but loose youngsters and riotous persons with Julia; whereupon he concluded, that the one was grave, and the other light and vain. And if you look into Ps. 1., ye shall find that God doth conclude a man to be a wicked man, by his converse and partaking with those that are wicked, verse 16, "But to the wicked, God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" Dost thou come to the ordinance, and dost thou speak of the covenant of grace? These do not belong to thee. Why? For thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind thee; for when thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with the adul-

terers. Oh, what a sad condition therefore are all those in that do keep bad company; God looks upon them as wicked, that do keep company with the wicked.

Why, but is it not better to keep bad company than none; it is not good for man to be alone, that is uncomfortable, is it not therefore better to have bad company than none?

No. For suppose you were to go a journey, whether would you choose to ride alone, or in the company of thieves? Would you not rather choose to ride alone, though it be uncomfortable, than in the company of thieves? Surely ye would. Why, such are all wicked company. *Amici temporis fures*, Friends are thieves of time, especially wicked friends; for they will not only rob you of your precious time, but of your precious duties, principles, and graces. Or, I pray, tell me which is worst, sin or sorrow? Possibly it may be your affliction and sorrow to walk alone, but to keep bad company is your sin and guilt.

Why, but are they all alike guilty that do keep bad company?

No. For there are three sorts of men that do or may possibly keep bad company. Some are wicked themselves, some are professors, and some members of churches. It is ill for a wicked man to keep bad company, it is worse for a professor of the gospel, but it is worst of all for a member of a church.

It is ill for any man to keep evil company, it is ill for a wicked man himself to do it; for the more companions that a man hath in his wickedness, the more he is enclosed therein, and the harder it is for him to break away from his wickedness. Is it not a hard thing for a bird to fly away that is taken in the lime-twigs? Why, evil company is the devil's lime-twigs; and what is the reason that many a man doth continue in his sin, who is convinced of the evil of it, but because he is held fast in the bands of his wicked company. Oh, saith one, I confess it is my duty to live otherwise, but I cannot get away from my company. So that though a man be a wicked man himself, it is an evil thing for him to keep bad company. But,

As it is an evil thing for a wicked man to keep bad company, so it is worsen for a professor of the gospel to do it. *Peccatum majus*. The more repugnancy there is between

the sin and the sinner, the worser and the greater is the sin. Now a professor of the gospel is such an one as hath dedicated himself unto God, and separated himself from the world; and therefore for him to keep ill company, is directly contrary unto his profession; the more that any man sins against his knowledge and conscience, the greater is his sin; such a sin is called rebellion. 1 Sam. xv., "And rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft." Now what professor is there of the gospel, but doth know that he ought to avoid evil company? Possibly a poor, ignorant, profane man, may not know his duty in this case, but a professor knows his duty; and therefore as it is evil in any man to keep bad company, so it is worser for a professor of the gospel to do it. But,

It is worst of all in a member of a church, for he sins against his present remedy. Sins against remedy are the worst sort of sins. It is a grievous sin for any young unmarried man to commit fornication; but if a man be married and doth commit adultery, he sins worse. Why? Because he sins against remedy, and because he hath a remedy by him. So here, it is ill for any man to keep ill company, but worst for a member of a church. Why? Because he sins against a remedy: he hath communion with the saints, he hath good company by him, a remedy by him, and therefore for him to keep bad company is the worst of all; the more any man despises the ways and ordinances of God by his sin, the greater is his sin. Now if you look into Scripture ye shall find, that when a man hath two things before him, and doth choose the one, and refuse the other, look what that is that he leaveth, that he is said to hate and despise. Now a member of a church hath two sorts of companies before him, and therefore if he shall choose to walk with those that are evil, he is said in scripture language to hate and despise the company of the saints, and is it a small thing in your eyes to hate or despise the company and communion of the saints?

Why, but though I do keep company sometimes with those that are wicked, yet I do not despise or hate the company of the saints, for I keep company with them too.

That is strange; strange in regard of yourself, strange in regard of others. Strange in regard of yourself; for if you find any savour in good company, is it not strange that you should not refrain bad company? surely good company will

either eat out the heart of your bad company, or bad company will eat out the savour of your good company. Strange, therefore, it is, if you should keep both companies; strange in regard of yourself, and strange also it is in regard of others. When the deer is shot, the rest of that herd will push him out from amongst them; and if you be shot with the arrow of bad company, it is strange that the rest of your herd should not push you out of their society, and avoid you, because you will not avoid others. But,

Again, You say that you keep company with the good too, but I pray tell me, is it not the mud of the good company that you converse withal? As in a river or pond there is water and mud, so in all good company there is the water of life and there is the mud of their infirmities and vanities; if it be the mud of good company that you converse with, then do you keep bad company, even whilst you converse with those that are good. But,

Again, You say you keep company with both good and bad, bad and good. But who art thou that dost so? I read in the Old Testament, that those creatures which live both in the land and in the water, were counted unclean. I read, also, in Scripture, of a sincere christian and a lukewarm professor; and what is lukewarm water, but that water which hath both heat and cold in some equal degrees; and what is the lukewarm professor, but one that can run with both, and comply with both companies? I read, in Hosea vii., that God compared the declining people of Israel unto a cake dough-baked, baked on the one side and not on the other. Why? But because they were for God and idols too: they could walk and converse with both. So now, when men are for both companies, they can stand with the saints and they can stand with sinners, they can sit with the scornful and they can sit with the faithful, they can go in and out with God's people, and they can go in and out with the wicked. What doth this argue, but that they are dough-baked, and lukewarm professors!

Yet, if there be any such amongst us, which God forbid, give me leave to speak three or four words unto them. You say you can walk with both good and bad; but what comfort can you have in walking at all with those that are bad? Mr. Dod said once, There are two questions, which if a man can

rightly answer he may have comfort in every condition: the first question is, What am I? the second question is, Where am I? If, said he, in answer to the first, What am I? I can truly say, I am godly, I am in Christ, I am one of those that fear the Lord in truth: and if in answer to the second, Where am I? I can say, I am in my calling, I am on God's ground, I am where God would have me be: then I may have comfort in every condition. But if you that are professors of the gospel be in company with the wicked, can you say, I am where God would have me be, I am on God's ground; surely no. What comfort, therefore, can you have in walking with such company at all? But, again, do you not know that wicked company lie in wait for your halting, and desire your falling. Mark what David saith, Psalm xli. 6, "And if he come to see me, he speaketh vanity, his heart gathereth iniquity to itself, and when he goeth abroad he telleth it." And mark what his son Solomon saith, Prov. iv. 14, 15, 16, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, avoid it, pass not by it." Why? "For they sleep not, unless they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken away unless they cause some to fall." It may be you think they love your person, but do they not hate your way more than they love your person; and will you walk with them that hate your way, because you think they love your person? Be not deceived. Do you not know, again, that in time of danger they will thrust you into danger, that they may save themselves out of danger. There was a correspondency between good Jehoshaphat and wicked Ahab; and when they went into the field, what did Ahab say to Jehoshaphat? read what he said and did, 2 Chron. xviii. 29: "I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle, but put thou on thy robes." But see the issue of it at verse 31. Plainly shewing thus much, that if a good man hold correspondency with a wicked man, in case there be any danger, the wicked will thrust the good man into danger to keep himself out. But, in the last place, if you have not considered this scripture before, yet have you not thought on that scripture, "As for those that turn aside by crooked paths, the Lord will lead them forth with the workers of iniquity?" Now is not this a crooked path, to walk with both companies, with the godly in the light and with the wicked in the dark. Well, woe be to him that doth so, God

will in due time discover him, and lead him forth with the workers of iniquity. Oh what an evil thing, therefore, is it to halt between two, to walk and keep company with both good and bad, bad and good.

Why, but I praise God, will some say, I do not keep company with the wicked at all, so as to walk and converse with them ordinarily in a way of friendship.

That is well ; but what if God will count vain company in the number of bad company ? for ye have it, Ps. xxvi. 4. Again, What if God will account those for your companions, whom you would be with, if you were not restrained by the fear and shame of your friends ? We find in Scripture that a man is said to do all that which he would do if he were not restrained. Abraham is said to sacrifice his son, because he would have done it, if God not restrained him. For look what that company is, that I would be with if I were not restrained, that company, according to Scripture, I am said to keep. Again, What if God will account all those for your companions, whom you justify, like, or consent unto in the way of your sin and vanity ? so ye read, Ps. l. 20. Or what if God will account your companions according to your servants of choice, as David said, that he would not know a wicked person. Mark how he proves it, he saith, " A forward heart shall depart from me, I will not know a wicked person," Ps. ci. 4. But says he, ver. 6, " Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me ; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me ; he that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house, and he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight," ver. 7. It is ordinarily said, *Servi sunt humiles amici*, Your servants are the lowest friends ; and though a man's servants are not properly his companions, yet his companions may be known by his servants of choice. Possibly a man cannot get a godly servant, but if a man have godly and ungodly before him, and shall choose such as are vain or wicked, this argues what his company would be, if he had his choice and his mind. Now God can turn up all our leaves, and see what grows under them. And if all these things be true, how few are there that will stand free from wicked and ungodly company. But, my beloved, either there is comfort enough to be found in good company, or there is not : if there be not enough in

good company, why should you converse with them at all; and if there be comfort enough in those that are good, why should you not walk with them altogether?

But what shall we then do, that we may avoid evil company, that we may choose good company, and improve them?

Here are three questions; I shall speak something unto them distinctly. Do you ask, What you shall do that you may avoid evil company? You must be sure to mortify your affection, inclination, and disposition to the vanity thereof; it is not the persuasions of evil company that doth lead you to them, but it is your own disposition and unmortified affections: you think it may be, that it is their spark that doth set you a fire, but it is your tinder that doth close with their spark; if there were but water thrown on your own tinder, you could not be so fired with your evil company. "The woman that thou gavest me, (said Adam,) did give me to eat," and so I was drawn into this sin; but it was his own disposition that did lead him to it. It is in this sin, as in all other outward sins, it is not the drink or wine that is in fault, but a man's own drunken disposition that doth lead him to drunkenness; it is not the beautiful object that is in fault, but a man's own wanton disposition that doth lead him into uncleanness: so here, it is not your company, but your own disposition that doth lead you into it. Would you, therefore, avoid and abstain from your wanton company, then labour to mortify your own wanton affections; would you abstain from and avoid your vain company, then must you first labour to mortify the vanity of your own heart and spirit, otherwise though you abstain from your company for a time, yet you will return again. Therefore mortify your own lusts and earthly affections.

And again, Be sure that you avoid all those occasions, which though lawful in themselves, yet through your weakness may any way open a door unto evil company. When the Nazarites were forbidden wine, they were forbidden grapes also, whereof wine was made. Numb. vi. 3. And if ye look again into Prov. iv., you shall find, that when the Holy Ghost by Solomon doth forbid you to "enter into the path of the wicked, and going in the way of evil men;" he doth in the name of God command you to "avoid it, not to pass by it, to turn from it, and to pass away," ver. 15; as if, says Mr.

Greenham, a physician should give directions to a man to avoid the plague; the great receipt, saith he, that the physician gives against the plague, is made of three ingredients, *cito, longe, tarde*; fly quickly, remove far from the place, and return slowly: so here, saith he, as if there were a plague in evil company, the Holy Ghost bids us to depart quickly, and not to come near. And what is the reason that many are so overtaken with evil company, but because they do not avoid all those lawful occasions, which through their own weakness doth lead them into it. Be sure, therefore, that you avoid them.

And if you would avoid evil company, then you must part abruptly with them, you think thus it may be, though I part with my evil company, yet I will part civilly with them, I will go but once more; and again, I will go but once more to them, and will part fairly, with them. Whereas our Saviour Christ saith, "If thy right eye offend thee, pull it out, and if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." Look what that is, that is near and dear to you, that must you part with in a way of violence; if you will part fairly with your company, then go them and say, Well I have sinned, and sinned greatly in keeping your company, now God through grace hath convinced me of it, I will never come in your company in any such way again; and he that will part with wicked company must be abrupt in his parting with them.

If you would avoid and part with your evil company, then you must humble yourself before the Lord, for all the vanity and folly of your company-keeping; some men being convinced of their sin in company-keeping, do resolve never to come in such company again: and it may be they do refrain for three or four weeks, but in a short time they are where they were. And what is the reason, that though men be convinced of their sin, yet they return again, but because they go forth in the strength of their own resolutions, and were never thoroughly humbled for their sin? Would you therefore so refrain from evil company, that you may return no more; then go and humble yourself before the Lord for the evil of it.

And be sure that you do not follow the saints to that is good for their multitude: for he that follows the multitude to good, because they are many, will also follow the multi-

tude, unto what is evil. Saith Austin,* We must not do a good thing because many do it, but because it is good; if others do that which is good, saith he, I will rejoice because they do it, but I will not do it because they do it that-I may do good; or, to do well few shall suffice; yea, one; yea, none. The way to follow the multitude to evil is to follow the multitude to good; because of this multitude take heed therefore of that.

And if you would avoid evil company, then be sure that you keep good company, and improve them. *Intus existens prohibet alienum.* It the vessel be full of wine, it keeps out air and water; good thoughts keep out bad thoughts, good words keep out bad words, and good company keeps out bad company. And what is the reason that many poor souls are led away with naughty and debauched company, but because they are not hedged in with good company, for as bad company keeps men from good company, so good company will keep men from bad company. Look what day or time that is wherein you depart from good, then are you exposed unto them that are evil; yet it is not enough to have good company, but you must improve also, and gain by them; for if you be in good company, and do get nothing by them, you will say, What need I make such a stir about my company, I see no difference; as one company talks of the world, so doth the other also; and as I get nothing by the one, so I get nothing by the other also; therefore I will return unto my old company again. Would you therefore avoid evil company, then be sure that you keep good company and improve them.

Why, but I do not know how to choose good company; I confess good company is a great mercy, and bad company is a great misery, but how shall I be able to choose my company.

You must go to God and beseech him for to choose your company for you. Mark what David said and did; in this scripture he saith, "I am a companion of all those that do fear the Lord;" yet, versé 79, he goes to God, and prayeth, saying, "Let those that fear thee, O Lord, turn unto me,

* Non faciendum, quia multi faciunt sed quia bonum ut bonum faciunt, aut bene satis mihi sunt pauci, satis unus, satis nullus.—Augustin.

Si potentiores faciunt, non faciam quia faciunt, sed gaudeo quia faciunt.

and those that have known thy testimonies." As if he should say, Of a truth, Lord, I am a companion of all that do fear thee; but it is not in my power to bend their hearts unto me; the hearts of all men are in thy hands, now therefore "let those that fear thee turn unto me." So do you go to God, and say likewise, Lord, do thou choose my company for me, let those that fear thee turn in unto me: oh, do thou bow and incline their hearts to be my companion.

If you would act herein under God, and make a right choice of your company, then must you get your nature changed. The ravens keep company with the ravens, and not with the pigeons: but if the nature of the raven were changed into the nature of a pigeon, it would flock together with the pigeons. Every thing follows its nature. Labour therefore to get your nature changed; and then though you have flown with the ravens, you will flock together with God's doves.

And if you would make a right choice of your company, then you must get a discerning spirit, that you may be able to put a difference between those that fear the Lord, and those that fear him not; between those that are civil moral men, and those that are gracious. "The spiritual man judgeth all things." And what is the reason that people keep no better company, but because they cannot discern of company; and what is the reason that they discern not between company and company, but because they are not spiritual? Would ye therefore be able to make a right choice of your company? then get this discerning spirit.

And observe who those are that are most profitable in your society; who those are that are most sound in their faith, savoury in their spirits, and most communicative and profitable in their lives, and with such close; some have knowledge enough to discourse with, but they have no savour in their spirits; some are of a savoury spirit, but they want knowledge, and are not communicative; but let those "that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies," saith David; as if he should say, Lord, I would not only have knowing men to be my companions, but fearing men. Neither would I only keep company with "those that fear thee," but with such as are knowing, and do "know thy

testimonies." Thus let his choice be yours, a knowing man, and a fearing man, a fearing man, and a knowing man, will make a meet companion for you.

And if you would make a good and comfortable choice of your company, then in case you be a man, let the friend of your bosom be a man, and not a woman, unless it be your wife; and if you be a woman, then let the friend of your bosom be a woman, and not a man, unless it be your husband; for if the special friendship be between a man and a woman, who knows how soon the spiritual friendship may degenerate into carnal affection; and if it may be, let your friend or companion stand upon even ground and a level with you; for the German proverb is often true, He that will eat cherries with noblemen, shall have his eyes spirt out with the stones thereof. Therefore affect not company too high for you. But whatever degree your company be of, be sure that it be not such as will be apt to take an offence from you, nor such as you shall be apt to take an offence from; for then your society will always be uncomfortable. Thus do, and your choice shall be right.

Well, but suppose I have chosen good company, and I can say in truth with David here, "I am a companion of all those that do fear thee, and do keep thy precepts;" what shall I do, that I may improve my company? I praise God I have good company, but I do not know how to improve them; what shall I therefore do that I may improve my good company?

You must be humbled for all the mispence of your time with good company. The way to improve a mercy is to be humbled for our not improvement of it.

If you would improve your good company, then lay your right ends together when you meet; you see how it is with a fire that is half burned, if you would mend it, you take the sticks and lay them together; but then you do not lay the cold ends together, but the hot ends together. Now there is no company so good, but hath its cold ends, and its warm ends; if ye lay your cold ends together when ye meet, what heat, what warmth, what good or improvement can you expect? Therefore lay your warm ends together when you meet together.

Observe what that grace is wherein your companions doth

excel, and labour more and more for to draw that forth, every saint and goodly man doth not excel in every grace. *Non omnis fert omnia tellus*, Every ground will not bear wheat or rye, but some one grain, and some another; so every christian doth not excel in every grace, some in one grace, and some in another: it may be he hath life, and you have light; or it may be he hath light, and you have life; and why hath he given this to the one, and that to the other, but that they may be beholden one to another, and have communion one with another? Would ye therefore improve your commnion and good company, then observe what that grace is wherein he doth most excel, and labour more and more to draw out the same.

Take heed also of pride and envy, which is the bane of all good company: pride will make a man speak, and pride will make a man hold his peace. I am a poor ignorant man or woman, saith one, and therefore I will not speak of that which is good before their company; yet this may be out of pride; I have an opportunity of doing good in this company, saith another, and therefore I will speak, yet that may be out of pride too. There was such an one spake good words at such a time, saith another, but it was little to the purpose, and that may be out of envy: now envy is between equals, and pride between unequals; either therefore you converse with your equals, or with your unequals; if with your equals, take heed of envy; if with your unequals take heed of pride.

And if you would improve your good company, and profit by them, then pray over them, and for them. Of all companies, says Mr. Greenham, I never profited and gained more by any, than by that that I prayed most for; and what is the reason that you profit no more by your good company, but because you pray no more for them, and over them. You will pray over your hearing, reading or meditation; why? because it is an ordinance: so is this of good company too. And therefore if you would improve and profit by your company, then pray much over them, and for them; yet

Do not rest secure in your good company: for though you be in a good company you may possibly get more hurt than if you had been in bad company. And what is the reason that you come sometimes from bad company into which you

have been cast occasionally, or against your will, with your soul troubled for their sin, and through God's providence do get good thereby: and you come from good company with your heart flat, and dead and dull, but because you rest secure in your good company? In the one you watch, in the other not. Wherefore rest not secure in your company, though it be never so good. Good company is God's ordinance, but it is an ordinance that doth tend unto other ordinances: some ordinances tend unto other ordinances. It is an ordinance that we should rest on the Sabbath-day. But why are we to rest then; for rest sake? No, but we are to rest in order to the positive sanctification of the Sabbath; so we are to keep good company, but why; what for itself? No, but in order to other duties. Now if it be an ordinance that lies in order to other ordinances, why should we rest in it? The more you rest in it, the less you will improve it. Therefore do not rest secure in your company, although it be never so good. Be sure that you look upon it as a duty in order to other duties; and thus you shall improve it. Which that you may do,

Consider with yourself what a great talent is put into your hand, when you are betruſted with good company; thereby you have an opportunity of gaining ſomething which you cannot gain by your public miniſtry. You ſee how it is with the candle; I can take a candle in my hand, and go down into the cellar, and ſee that thereby which I cannot ſee by the light of the ſun; poſſibly the ſunbeams may not reach that which the beams of the candle may reach; ſo poſſibly the light and beams of private communion may reach that truth which the beams of the public miniſtry doth not reach. It is poſſible that a miniſter may ſpeak to a truth in public, yet he may leave it in the dark; when I come at home, then I may beat it out more fully with good company. So that this ordinance of good company is a great talent; and will the Lord require an account of the improvement of our talents, then ſurely he will have an account of the improvement of our company. In Mal. iii. it is ſaid, "Then thoſe that feared the Lord ſpake often, and a book of remembrance was written." God hath a table-book at work upon all our ſpeeches and conferences when we meet together, and he ſets down what we ſay and what we do when we meet together;

and shall we not, then, take heed what company we come in, and what we do and speak in our company? It is recorded of Mr. Latimer, the martyr, that though he was somewhat free in his speech when he was examined, yet when he heard a pen writing behind the curtain, then he was more wary. Why, believe it, there is a pen behind the curtain that sets down what you do and say in your company, whether good or bad. Now, therefore, as ever you do desire that God's own hand-writing, that God's own table-book may not be brought out against you, take heed what company you come into, and what you do and speak in your company. Thus shall you be able to avoid bad company, to choose good, and to improve the same. And thus I have done with these arguments of good company. A good man will have good company: "For I am a companion (says David) of all them that fear thee, and do keep thy precepts."

SERMON V.

THE CARNALITY OF PROFESSORS.

"For ye are carnal."—1 COR. III. 3.

IN this chapter the apostle Paul doth charge the Corinthians with carnality, which charge he maketh good by divers arguments. The first is taken from their incapacity of receiving and digesting the strongest truths of the gospel: verses 1, 2, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, &c. For ye are carnal." The second argument is taken from the envyings, strifes and divisions that were amongst them: verse 3, "For whereas there are among you, &c., are ye not carnal?" The third argument is taken from those sects that were amongst them: verse 4, "For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?" They set up one minister against another, crying up of one that they might cry down another, and so put themselves into sects; this was carnality. And upon this account he saith to them, again and again, "Are ye not carnal?" Where then observe thus much, that it is possible for