

SERMON VIII.

THE DIGNITY AND DUTY OF GOD'S CALLED ONES.

"That you would walk worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory."—1 THESS. II. 12.

IN this chapter you have a relation of the apostle Paul's entrance unto the Thessalonians, how they received him, and how he preached to them. "For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: but even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully intreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention," ver. 1, 2. It was with much sincerity that he preached: "Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile," ver. 3. In opposition to worldly interests: "Not as pleasing men, but God which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, nor a cloke of covetousness; nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome as the apostles of Christ," ver. 4, 5, 6. It was with all gentleness and love: "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us," ver. 7, 8. It was with much industry and labour: "Labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable to any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God," ver. 9. It was with all holiness of conversation: "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe," ver. 10. With all manner of exhortation: "As ye know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that you would walk worthy of God," ver. 11. So here then you have the matter exhorted to, and the motive pressing thereto: "Who hath called you to his kingdom and glory." Or, here you have,

The person calling: "God."

The dignity called unto: "Who hath called you to his kingdom and glory."

The duty that flows from thence: "That you would walk

worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory.”

Hence observe, That it is the duty of all who are called to God’s kingdom and glory, to walk worthy of the kingdom and glory of God. I shall therefore shew you,

First, What this vocation or calling is; and that there is that in it, that may and should provoke us to walk worthy of God.

Secondly, That when God brings home any man to himself, he doth it in a way of calling; and why so?

Thirdly. That it is the duty of all that are called, to walk worthy of God.

Fourthly, How a man shall know that he is truly called.

Fifthly, What we should do, that we may walk worthy of God who hath called us.

First, This vocation is an act of God’s grace and mercy, whereby we are invited to the great supper of the gospel, to communion and fellowship with Christ. As it is an act of God’s grace and mercy, so it is opposed to works. “For the children being yet unborn, neither having done good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth,” Rom. ix. 11. Calling is opposite to works. So 2 Tim. i. 9, “Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling; not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace,” &c. Vocation is an act of God’s grace wholly.

Men are invited to the great supper of the gospel; that is, to fellowship and communion with Christ. “God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,” 1 Cor. i. 9.

If you look unto the persons that are invited to the great supper; Luke xiv. 16; Matt. xxii. 1, 2, 3, [that great supper is nothing but communion and fellowship with Christ] those that are invited, Matt. xxii. 3. are said to be called. “He sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the supper.” And of those that refused to come, it is said, “Many are called, but few are chosen,” ver. 14.

Only this invitation to communion and fellowship with Christ, is to be considered two ways. Merely and barely, as it is an act of God inviting by the word; or as it implies our answer or consent to that invitation. As when a man is

called to an office either in church or state, he is said to be called, though he does not accept of it; but when election and voluntary acceptance meet together, then there is a call. So our heavenly call, taking it in a large sense: all that live under the gospel are called, and invited. But in a proper and strict sense, men are said to be called only, when they accept, and consent upon Gods invitation. This distinction is very necessary: for Matt. xxii. 14, it is said, many are called, but few are chosen. And Rom. viii. 30, it is said expressly "That whom he hath predestinated, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified." If those that are called, are predestinated and justified, how is it true, "That many are called, and few are chosen?" I answer, taking calling in a large sense, for a bare invitation, many are called. Taking calling in a strict sense, as implying our answer, and acceptance, and consent thereto, so none are called but those that accept the call, and are brought home to God. God's calling is an effectual invitation of a person to the great snpper of the gospel, whereby a man does accept it, and is brought home to God.

Secondly. How does it appear, that when God brings home a man to himself, he does it in a way of calling; and why so? I answer, if our conversion be called our calling, and the saints are described by their calling, the thing is true; "Make your calling and election sure," 2 Pet. i. 10, that is your conversion. Rom. i. 6, 7. "Among whom also are ye called of God. Called to be saints." So 1 Cor. i. 2, Saints by calling. If the saints and people of God be described by, the called ones, and our conversion be termed our calling, then when God brings home a man to himself, he does it in a way of calling.

Because those that God brings home to himself, are afar off. We call men that are afar off: if they be near, we speak to them. By nature we are afar off from God; therefore when he converts men, he is said to call. Acts ii. 14, 39; "Peter standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said to them, Ye men of Judea, &c. hearken to my words. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many the Lord our God shall call." Called upon this account, because ye are afar off.

Is it not necessary, that we should be conformed to Christ our Head, and to Abraham our father, “the father of the faithful?” You shall find Abraham was called, Isa. li. 2, “Look unto Abraham your father, &c. for I called him alone.” Christ is also said to be called in a way suitable to him, Matt. ii. 15, “Out of Egypt have I called my son.” Heb. v. 4, “No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that was called of God, as was Aaron.” Isa. iv. 26, “I the Lord have called thee in righteousness,” &c. Isa. xlix. 1, “Listen, O isles unto me, &c. the Lord hath called me from the womb.” We are to be conformable to Christ our Head, and to Abraham our father, in our calling.

If God shall bring a man home to himself, according to the practice of men, he must bring him home in a way of calling: “I drew them with the cords of a man,” Hos. xi. 4. When God deals with man, it is in a way suitable to man: but why, when he brings a man home to himself, will he do it in a way of calling, when as he might do it immediately by his own infinite power? If I knew that a man would not accept my invitation to dinner, I would never send to invite him. God knows that every one will not come, what need he then stand calling and inviting? We must consider, that as God will deal with man in the way, and according to the manner of men; so he will deal with man also in the way of God too. Christ is God-man, God manifested in the flesh. 1 Tim. iii. 6. Because the work of our redemption was to be carried on by the hand of God, and by the hand of man both. Whereas should God deal with man only as God, then he would convert him presently by his own infinite power, and never make any invitation to him: and if he should deal with man only as man, he would never invite any of the dead: for who is there of you that will send to the grave, and invite a dead man to your table? But as God, he invites dead ones. There are some that think Christ need not to invite, because he can bring men home to himself by his own almighty power: but such do forget that the Deity works as a man. Others think men are to be converted only by moral suasions and persuasions; such do forget that Christ works as God too. But Christ is God-man; because the great work of our redemption and salvation, is to be carried on by the

hand of both. As God, he does invite and call irresistibly, omnipotently; as man, he invites by persuasion; as God-man, he invites, and gives a heart to accept of his invitation.

If all those blessings and mercies we are called to, are called God's blessings and mercies, (as so they are, "Who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light," 1 Peter ii. 9, "who hath called us to his kingdom and glory,") it were presumption in me to meddle with the things of God, with "the things that are God's," if he did not invite me to it; but if a beggar comes to your house, and shall sit down at your table, he does not presume, because you have invited him. God will have his people know, that they do not presume when they come at his invitation, and call and meddle with the things of God.

If all the work of christianity be bestrewed with difficulty, and affliction, we had need be called thereunto, for in the time of affliction or difficulty, what shall bear up our heart, and carry us through, but God's call? God's call is our warrant, and our strength; therefore fit that all that are brought home to God, it should be in a way of calling.

Thirdly, What is the duty, then, of all that are called to God's kingdom and glory?

I answer, It is their duty to walk worthy of God. By worthy is not meant a worthiness of merit. No; there is a four-fold worthiness mentioned in Scripture.

1. In regard of merit; so only Christ is worthy. "For thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals," Rev. v. 9.

2. In regard of acceptation; so the saints are worthy. "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy," Rev. iii. 4.

3. In regard of proportion; so "Our present afflictions are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed," 2 Cor. iv. 17. That is, there is no proportion between the glory of heaven, and the afflictions we meet with here below.

4. In regard of meetness, suitableness, and fitness. "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance," Matt. iii. 8. And thus it is the duty of all that are called, to walk worthy of God, &c.

Because dignity calls for duty; and the more dignity, the more duty: what greater dignity than to be called to God's kingdom and glory?

The more sad and dismal any man's condition is, the more he is obliged, and engaged, and bound to God, to walk worthy and answerably to God who hath called him out of that condition. The condition we are called out of, is a condition of great darkness; for that is great darkness a man is in, which he cannot rise out of, nor lie still in. This is our condition; we can neither rise out of it of ourselves, nor lie still in it. "Therefore arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," Eph. v. 14.

The more comfortable and glorious the condition is that a man is called unto, the more he is engaged to God, who hath called him to that condition. What is good in all the world, or desirable, but we are called to it, in this being "called to his kingdom and glory?" Is light desirable? We are "called out of darkness into his marvellous light." Is holiness desirable? "God hath not called us to uncleanness, but unto holiness," 1 Thess. iv. 7. Is peace desirable? We are called to peace, 1 Cor. vii. 5. Is communion and fellowship with Christ desirable? We are called to that, 1 Cor. i. 9, "God is faithful by whom ye are called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Is the kingdom of God and his glory desirable? The text says, "We are called to his kingdom and glory." What is desirable, that by our vocation we are not called unto.

But may not these be lost? No.

The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. The gifts of the creation was not without repentance. "God repented that he had made man," Gen. vi. 6. But the gift of effectual calling is without repentance; therefore the more obliged to God for calling; and therefore our duty to walk worthy of our calling.

The more dangerous it is to refuse the call of God, the more mercy it is to be called, and the more obliged we are to walk worthy of God who hath so called us. Prov. i. 24, "Because I called, and ye refused, I will also laugh at your calamity," &c. But that I would have you consider, in Matt. xxii. 1. If you mark the parable, you will find three threes run parallel one with another. Three invitations, verse 3, "He sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden" to the wedding feast formerly. Then, verse 4, there is the third invitation: "Again he sent forth other servants,

saying, Tell them which are bidden, behold, I have prepared my dinner, &c., all things are ready, come to the marriage." Three refusals run parallel with these three invitations: at verse 3, they that were bidden formerly, at the second time of the servants being sent to call them, would not come. And again, verse 4, "He sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, behold all things are ready, come to the marriage; but they made light of it." Verse 5, there is the third invitation, "And the remnant took his servants, and intreated them spitefully, and slew them," verse 6. Observe three judgments run parallel with these three refusals, Luke xiv. 24, for it is one and the same parable. In Matt. xxii. 8, it is said, "That when the king heard thereof, he was wroth," and said, "The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy." And, in Luke, "I say unto you, (says he) not one of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper." And verse 7, "The king sent forth his armies (there is a second judgment) and destroyed these murtherers, and burnt up their city;" that was a third judgment. What a dangerous thing is it to refuse God's calling and invitation. It is a great mercy to be kept from refusing; and therefore if God calls, and gives us a heart to accept it, it is our duty to walk worthy of his calling, worthy of God. Therefore,

Fourthly, When may a man be said to be called; and how shall I know if I be truly called or no?

Those that do not live under a gospel ministry, nor never did, were never called; for God does ordinarily call men by preaching of the word. But though men do live under the means of grace, if they have not a disposition suitable, they are not called effectually, though called outwardly. They have not the wedding garment; for what is the wedding garment? A call to the wedding supper, to communion with Christ in the gospel, and a disposition suitable to accept the call; so that I shall know that I am effectually called.

If the Lord hath put forth an infinite and an almighty power upon my soul, constraining me to turn from my sins to God. Do they that are called refuse? "Go out into the highways and hedges," says the Lord, "and compel them to come in," Luke xiv. 23. When a man can say, "The love

of Christ constrains me ;” I can do nothing against Christ, but for Christ ; they are effectually called.

If you are begotten by the word of promise, then you are called effectually. “In Isaac shall thy seed be called,” Rom. ix. 7. How was Isaac begotten? Not in a way of nature, but “by a word of promise,” verse 8.

If you be separated from the world indeed, from the things and persons of the world. 1 Pet. ii. 9, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, an holy nation, that ye should shew forth the praises of him that hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

If there be in you an aptness, a readiness, and a willingness to be ruled by the word in all things, then are you effectually called. So when Cornelius was called, and Peter came to preach to him, Acts x. 29, “We are all present (says he to Peter) to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.” And so when Paul was called, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” says he, Acts ix. 6.

If you can say in truth, that all things work together for your good, then are you indeed “called according to his purpose,” Rom. viii. 28. Not to them that are called outwardly, but to them that are called according to his purpose, effectually and truly, do all things work together for good. Can you say, I was under such and such an affliction or temptation, and it wrought together for my good ; and under such a desertion, and it wrought for my spiritual good? Then you are called truly according to his purpose.

If you hold forth the praises of him that hath called you, then are you called truly and effectually ; for why are you called, but “that you should shew forth the praises and virtues of him that hath called you?” 1 Peter ii. 9.

If any shall complain, I fear I am not effectually called, because I was first wrought upon by afflictions ; those that are truly called, I find are called by the servants, by the preachers of the gospel ;

To this I answer : It is true that God does ordinarily call men effectually by his ministers, who are the servants he sends forth ; but remember also it is said. “He sent forth other servants to tell them which were bidden, all things are ready, come to the marriage,” Matt. xxii. 4. Christ has other servants than these his ministers ; though ordinarily

those he truly and effectually calls, it is by these. But he sends other servants too; he can give commission to an affliction to bring home souls to himself. What think you of the prodigal? Luke xv. Was not he brought home to his father by an affliction? Was not Naaman brought home to God by his leprosy? You will say perhaps, These were providentially, occasionally. But what say you then to Zaccheus? Was it not a kind of accidental, providential call that he had? And that Christ should call Matthew as he passed by, and saw him sit at the receipt of custom? Waldus, the father of the Waldenses, he and a company of his friends had supped together, and been merry; and as they were returning home, one of them fell down dead in the street. This was an occasional means of his conversion, who was so famous a man, and an instrument of converting so many thousands to the true religion. But shall the prodigal say, I fear my conversion is not right, because affliction led me first home to my father? Shall Zaccheus say, It was but an accidental thing that I ran up into the sycamore tree, being low of stature, and so could not else have seen Jesus for the press, whom I desired only out of curiosity to see, and therefore I fear my call was not right? God knows how to make use of contingencies, occasional providences, and of your afflictions, to bring you home to himself. And if you be brought home to God by the hand and ministry of affliction, that you can say as one did, If my parents had not been undone, I had been undone for ever; be content then with affliction, and love it the better. Usually persons have the greatest love for that minister that was the first instrument of their conversion.

Again, If any shall say, I fear I am not truly nor effectually called, because I do not know the time when I was so called; there being some that can tell you the very time, and the sermon, and the particular word in the sermon, that was effectual to their conversion; but I can give no account of any of these,

I answer, The sun when it comes into a room where the windows have no shutters, comes in by degrees; but it comes into a room where the windows have shutters all at once. Where there are the shutters of profaneness, drunkenness, uncleanness, and the like, when such men are

wrought upon, the sun comes in all at once. Those that are born of godly parents, and have been educated and trained up in a godly, religious way, they are converted; but many times they cannot tell you neither the particular minister, nor the word, nor the time when converting grace came in upon their souls; it came in by degrees; shall such say therefore they are not truly converted? Suppose a man had had the stone, but had got a powder, in the use of which the stone does wear out by degrees, shall that man say, I never had the stone, because many that are cured of the stone, it has been by cutting, and with a great deal of pain which I escaped, and therefore I never had the stone? So shall I, because I have not had those terrors and troubles of conscience that others have felt, argue therefore I am not converted? No, but go and bless God that you are converted; that the stone is wrought out of your heart in a more kindly and gentle way than in others. I say, What shall I do that I may walk worthy of God, who hath effectually called me, and in so sweet and gentle a way?

Fifthly, What shall I do, that I may walk worthy of God that hath called me, since certainly called I am. I am either called outwardly only, or effectually. If a man invites me to dinner, and I do not go, I am yet to carry it answerably to his love, in inviting me: much more, when the Lord has called me, and that effectually, it is my duty to walk worthy of God who hath thus called me. I am come into a great and open field, through all these precedent gates, I may proceed to further particulars hereafter, at present only remember, that a man is said to walk worthy of God, when he walks meetly, suitably, and answerably to that God hath called him. There are four expressions bishop Davenant hath in his notes upon the epistle to the Colossians, that run into this same matter. Sometimes a man is said to walk worthy of God; sometimes of the Lord Christ; sometimes of the gospel; sometimes of the high calling whereunto he is called. But that I may speak clearly to the point, I shall begin with the first of these, and shew you how a man shall "walk worthy of God that hath called him to his kingdom and glory," that is, suitably and answerably.

Observe the attributes and excellencies of God, and let them shine forth in you, that shine forth in him. God is a

great God; and if you will walk worthy of this great God, you must do some great thing for him. Solomon when he would build a temple for God, said, "It must be exceeding magnificent, for it was for the great God." It is no great thing to believe, love, and pray, and give alms to the poor; but it is a great thing to believe in the face of impossibilities. To love over the head of injuries; to pray when one's heart is dead and down; to give alms to the poor out of but a mite or two, as the widow did; and it is said, "She gave more than all the rest." It is no great matter, says one, for a man to do great things; but to do great things, and to think himself nothing; this is a great matter. If you will walk worthy of God, do some great thing for God.

As God is a great God; so he is a sovereign Lord, absolutely free, and is determined by nothing from without, but himself, but only of his own counsels; therefore if you will walk worthy of God, what is the thing wherein his good pleasure lies? Labour to know that: and not only to do the thing he commands; but serve the good pleasure of God. Be ye more gracious, because God is so freely gracious.

God is infinitely holy, therefore it is not said, almighty, almighty, almighty, not great, great, great, but, holy, holy, holy; because God looks upon holiness as his greatest excellency: so must you, if you will walk worthy of God, "and be holy as he is holy, in all manner of conversation," 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

He is a God all-sufficient, "I am God all-sufficient, walk before me, and be upright," Gen. xvii. You give him the honour of his all-sufficiency, in being upright. When you step out from God, to fetch relief some where else, you dishonour God: "Is it because there is no God in Israel, that you go out to the god of Ekron?"

He is a faithful God. His faithfulness is twice repeated. "Faithful is he that hath called you," 1 Thess. v. 24, "God is faithful by whom you were called," 1 Cor. i. 9. Then would you walk worthy of God who hath called you; whenever God makes a promise, promise yourself that thing, because God hath promised it; not because the creature promiseth it, being big and full of second causes; but when God promiseth, assure yourself of it, because God hath promised it. This is to walk worthy of God, as he is faithful.

He is our chief good, and our utmost end, and therefore in all your affairs you are to begin with him, and to rest in him, and to be boundless and insatiable in your desires after him. A worldly man makes the world his end, and therefore is insatiable ; thinks he never has enough of it, because he makes it his utmost end.

If you would walk worthy of God, &c. Observe what the great design of God is in the world, and labour all you can to advance the same: the great design of God in the world, is to glorify himself in his Son. Now when a man does pray to God, and Christ shall do the thing for him, that he prays for ; then the Father is glorified in the Son. “ Whatever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son,” John xiv. 13. And when a man does hear Christ, and believe in Christ, and obey Christ, as sent of the Father ; then he glorifies God the Father in the Son.

In case you have any work to do, first go to God before you try other means ; it is no great honour to God to come to him in the last place, when you have no whither else to go, and to trust God when you can trust none else. But to believe in the face of impossibility, and to love over the head of injury, and to pray when all is dead and down ; this is worthy of God.

Observe what that is that hath been your god, and give that to God. Bishop Babington, who was a good man in his time observes, that the children of Israel did sacrifice to God that which was the gods of other nations ; and herein they honoured God. If you can give that to God which hath been your god ; consider God the Father gave that to you that was dearest to him. If you give him that which is dearest to you, which you have made your god ; this is a thing worthy of God “ who hath called you to his kingdom and glory.”

Take heed of sinning in secret, because God sees you ; and be sure you be much in private duty, for God beholds you. The more I walk in the eye of an all-seeing God, the more I walk worthy of God.

In case you do or have received any mercy from God, be not only thankful upon account of a benefit, but praise God. There is a great deal of difference between thankfulness and praise. I am thankful to God for a benefit, but I praise him for that excellency of God which shines forth in that benefit.

Let there be always something of God stamped upon all that you do, suffer, or enjoy. Do you think that a naked profession is worthy of God; that to pray morning and evening, and never think of God all the day after, is worthy of God? No, but if you will walk worthy of God, something of God should be stamped upon all your doings, sufferings, company, converses and enjoyments. How is it with you as to what you have heard? Observe yourselves; would you walk worthy of God? You have heard it is the duty of all that are called to his kingdom and glory; but, Lord, how few are there that walk worthy of God, of the gospel, of Christ, of that high calling whereunto they are called! Are there not some among us that sit under the gospel, that in point of righteousness live beneath heathens; that walk contrary to their profession? Is this to walk worthy of God? Are there not some of us that at the best walk in a legal way, as under a covenant of works? Either you are called effectually or you are not; called you are, outwardly, all of you that live under the gospel. If you be not called effectually, the time will come when you will have this dreadful question put to you, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?" not having a gospel disposition suitable to a gospel dispensation. If you be called effectually, you are called to a kingdom, and faithful is he that hath called you, who also will do it. "Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel, worthy of him who hath called you to his kingdom and glory."