

SERMON XX.

OR,

RULES TO HELP SOULS IN THE WAY OF HUNGERING.

'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.'—MAT. V. 6.

THERE are three things remaining in the text.

First, The propounding some rules for the help of souls that are in a way of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and yet cannot find righteousness.

Secondly, The shewing what may support souls that are in a hungering condition after righteousness, and yet cannot find that they do grow righteous.

Thirdly, The rebuking of the want of this true hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

For the first, Is it so that the Lord hath brought thy heart to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Can ye say that this is your condition, else you can say little; or those have the weakest degree of grace should be able to say thus, at least, that they find a hungering and thirsting desire. Now, if it be so, observe these rules in thy hungering and thirsting, that thou mayest not miscarry.

First, Though thou hast not what righteousness thou wouldst have, yet be sure to renounce all unrighteousness. I am yet in a hungering way, and cannot find that righteousness I do desire; but, O Lord, this I hope shall be my care for ever, whatsoever becomes of me, I will renounce unrighteousness. Indeed, I cannot get such ability to serve God with that enlargement of spirit that I desire; I do not find that I do grow as I would grow in grace; but, Lord, this through thy mercy I hope I shall keep for ever in my heart, that whatever appears to be unrighteousness, I will not meddle with that, I will have nothing to do with that. In Ps. exix. 2, 3, saith the psalmist there, 'Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart: what follows? 'They also do no iniquity; they walk in his ways.' They that seek the Lord with their whole heart, they do no iniquity—that is, in the meantime while they are seeking God, if it be with their whole heart, they do renounce all iniquity: there is no way of sin but they do abhor it as hell, and will renounce it. Though I am not able to guide myself as I would, and to do what I ought, yet thus far I will have nothing to do with my former unrighteous way. This is of great use to those souls

that God is bringing unto himself, in a way of seeking him, but yet do not apprehend they have found him; they will renounce unrighteousness. Many men and women they seek for righteousness—they think so at least; but in the meantime they give way to themselves to some unrighteousness; and so they flatter themselves in their desires, and think that God will accept of their desires for righteousness, though they give way to themselves in some ways of unrighteousness. Take heed of that.

Secondly, In thy hungering and thirsting after righteousness, do thou often express these thy desires before God, often express thy desires in the presence of God; when thou art alone in secret tell God of all thy desires that thou hast after his righteousness, after his ways; appeal to God of thy desires. It is an easy matter to tell men that thy desires are thus, but express to God daily thy desires after his righteousness.

Thirdly, Look to it that it be after his righteousness that thou dost hunger and thirst. Do not satisfy thyself in this, that thou hungerest and thirstest after somewhat, that thou hast a desire after something in the ways of godliness, but let it be after all the ways of righteousness; let there be no way of righteousness, but thou findest thy heart thus upright with God to hunger and thirst after it. And thou canst freely express thyself to God, that he that knows all things knows that thy heart doth make after all righteousness whatsoever; it is that thou longest after all his ways and all his commandments that thou mightest fulfil them, that thou wilt not give liberty to thyself in anything that is not according to his ways. Hunger after all righteousness.

Fourthly, When thou hast expressed thy desires to God, and that after all righteousness, look after thy desires; often consider what becomes of thy desires. How long have I thus hungered and thirsted after righteousness? When did God begin to open my conscience, and to stir my heart after righteousness? Think, hath it not been ever since I can remember, or for a long time. What then hath become of my desires all this while? What hath become of my

many prayers that I have put up to God that he would come in with his grace and renew his image in my soul? Look after thy desires; see what becomes of them. Many men and women have a kind of form in praying to God, and wishing that it were better with them; but they do not look back to their wishes. Either God grants my desires, or he doth not; either I do get more power over my corruptions, and more ability to serve him in the ways of righteousness, or I do not. If I do, then I have matter to praise and bless him; if I do not, I have matter of humiliation. But where is the man or woman that every day examines what becomes of their prayers after grace, to make either God's granting their desires matter of praise, or God's denying their desires matter of humiliation.

Fifthly, Be sure to manifest thy desires in the use of all means. Observe that rule, and observe this particular in it, that if some means will not do, then add others; if ordinary will not do it, then add extraordinary; but especially observe this in the use of means, let it be righteousness thy soul longs after and labours for. As, for instance, it may be you will say, As I have good desires, so I do use means; I pray, I hear God's word, I read, and confer with God's people. But when thou art doing all these, is it righteousness thy soul works after and longs for? Canst thou say when thou goest to prayer, O Lord, I pray, and that I would have in prayer is righteousness, that I might get somewhat this morning, some further improvement of righteousness, and increase of it. And art thou not satisfied in thy prayer except thou findest that thou hast got some further righteousness, that thou canst that day overcome thy corruptions more than before? And so when thou goest to hear the word, Why, I am going to hear a sermon; and what is it that I long for, saith a gracious soul, Oh, righteousness! oh that God would speak to my heart, whereby I might get power over my corruptions, and be more strengthened in his way, and find grace increased, find more wisdom, humility, and the fear of his name, and more spiritual mindedness than ever I have had! Oh that I might have that in the word! That is a good sermon wherein God speaks to my heart, for the furtherance of righteousness in my heart; and if I come to the word and do not meet with God there for the furtherance of the graces of his Spirit in my soul, that sermon is not good to me, whatsoever it be to others, because I do not find the work of God's grace furthered in my heart anything the more. How many times do we come to sermons, one after another, and never think of this, to come with panting desires after righteousness.

Further, For the use of means, I will give you a scripture to shew that it is not enough for you to hunger and thirst after righteousness, except you ex-

press it in the use of means. In Ps. cvii. 9, there is a gracious promise from God to such: 'He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.' He satisfieth the longing soul; the longing and hungering soul are the same, but now the word that is translated in your books the *longing* soul, it is in the Hebrew נפש שקקה, the *running* soul; he satisfieth the soul that runs up and down, that is the propriety of the word. A longing soul is a soul that runs up and down from one means to another; if one thing will not do it, another it must have; its desires must be satisfied or it cannot tell how to live, but runs up and down from one means to another. So in Mark vii. 24, 25, you have a notable scripture to shew that where the heart is set upon a thing it will leave no means unattempted. It is said of Christ that he arose and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and went into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid. For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, &c. The meaning is this, that the poor woman being affected with the misery of her daughter having an unclean spirit, and believing Christ was able to help her, though Christ was hid, the poor woman resolves if he be above the ground to find him, and to have him one way or other. And therefore the scripture observes, that though Christ would have none to know where he was, yet he could not be hid because of the poor woman. So it is here; if the Lord shall be pleased to withdraw himself from the soul in one means, yet the soul that is sensible of want of righteousness it will follow after God in one means after another, and will never be at quiet and rest until it meet with God, until it come to enjoy God in the ways of righteousness according to his desire. That is the fifth rule, Let thy hungering and thirsting work in the use of all means.

Sixthly, In thy hunger and thirst, take heed that thou dost not rest in thy desires; do not rest in this, and think it enough: I have desires; God hath wrought desires in me, and that is sufficient—what need I any more? Though it is true there are many encouragements to those that have true desires, but this is as true, that when desires are right, the soul will not rest in those desires. I have desires, but it is the thing itself that I look after for the obtaining of my desire. We read in Prov. xiii. 12, 'That hope deferred makes the heart sick; but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.' 'Hope deferred'—that is, when the soul would have a thing, and it comes not; 'but when the desire cometh, that is the tree of life.' Therefore the soul that is rightly wrought upon will not rest in desires, will not think, God hath begun to work some desires in me, I hope that is grace; and if I have but the least degree of grace, that will be enough to bring me to heaven.

No; I have desires, but nothing shall quiet my soul until I come to the obtaining of my desires.

Seventhly, Exercise faith upon Jesus Christ for righteousness; that is the way to come to have thy desires satisfied. Thou dost use means? yea, that I dare not but do—my conscience puts me upon it, to pray, read, hear, and so to use all means I can, but yet I do not find my desire satisfied. This, therefore, is another rule: thou must, in the use of means, look beyond the means, and take heed of resting upon means as well as upon thy desires, but look up to Jesus Christ, from whose fulness the hearts of the saints do receive grace for grace. The Father hath put a fulness into his Son; all righteousness is in Jesus Christ; there is all grace, righteousness, and holiness in Christ beyond all measure. Now the way to attain righteousness, it is not merely to pray, hear, and use means, but by an eye of faith to behold Christ filled full of all grace as a fountain, so that the souls of those that hunger and thirst may, by acting upon him, fetch grace from him, and so come to be satisfied. It is Christ that is the tree of life; it is from him that all grace doth come into the soul. And I verily believe that there are many kept under a great spirit of bondage in the times of their hungering and thirsting, labouring for grace, because they did not look beyond means. They do not look upon Christ, that is the fountain of all grace, to act their faith upon him. They think that they must have righteousness before they come to Jesus Christ. Now, there is a mistake: thou must come to Christ that thou mayest have righteousness, for all righteousness is in him. The truth is, there is no saving righteousness but it comes through union with Jesus Christ—it comes from communion with Jesus Christ—it comes from the Spirit of Christ let into the heart; and therefore the first act should be a going to Christ for this righteousness. Act thy faith more upon Christ; labour to look upon him as he that hath all treasures of grace in him from the Father on purpose to communicate to the souls of those that shall be saved; and this is the way to have the desires of thy soul satisfied. Thou sayest thou hast been tugging and labouring, and nothing comes. Try this means, try this way, to act thy faith upon Jesus Christ for righteousness. Thou sayest, I fear I shall presume; but never fear presuming in acting upon Christ for righteousness. There is fear of presuming when thou dost act upon Christ merely to save thy soul, and to deliver thee from hell; but when thou dost act upon him for righteousness, there is no fear there. When thy soul is after righteousness, and thou findest that Christ is appointed by the Father to be the conduit of conveyance of all grace from the Father, and thou art called to cast thy soul upon him that thou mightest have

some work of his Spirit conveyed to thee, for the subduing of thy corruptions, and for the enabling thee to live righteously before God in this world, fear not presuming in this case; for presumptuous hypocrites would believe in Christ only to be saved from hell, but they do not prize the righteousness of Christ much. They would seek the kingdom of heaven for deliverance from pain and torment, but to seek the kingdom of heaven and the righteousness thereof, they do not so much look at that; it is not that that will feed their souls. But now, when thou hast a hungry soul after righteousness, and comest to Christ to close with him, know that his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed, both for justification and sanctification likewise.

Eighthly, If thou findest in thy hungering and thirsting after righteousness that thou hast not yet thy desire, resolve this with thyself, If my desire cannot be satisfied in this, I will never suffer my desires to wander after other things any more, till I can be satisfied here. Keep thy heart in this resolution, and this will keep thy heart in such a frame as righteousness will come. Many men and women they have good desires stirred in them for a time, but they vanish away; because, not having their desires fulfilled, they come to let out their desires to other things. But when the heart comes to this, O Lord, my desires are so set after the renewing of thy image, after righteousness, that, Lord, if I have not satisfaction here, I will not have satisfaction in anything else. It is of very great consequence for thee to labour to keep thine appetite continually after righteousness. Take heed of those things that will take away thy stomach after this righteousness. There are three things that will take away the stomach; as in the body, so in the soul.

First, A man hath his stomach taken away, either by somewhat that clogs his stomach. There is some humours that is got into his stomach, and so takes it away; or,

Secondly, By wind that may fill his stomach, and so he hath not an appetite to his meat; or,

Thirdly, For want of exercise; because he doth not stir and act. So it is in the appetites of men after righteousness. These three things will take their appetites away, either, 1. when some ill-humours are got into their hearts; by that I mean some corruptions, some ill distempers that they have given way to themselves in, and so defiled their souls. Many in their young time were wont to have mighty appetites after righteousness. They would run to the word, and how earnestly would they pray, as if they would rend the heavens again; but now we find no such thing in them. There hath got some fearful stuff into their hearts that hath defiled their souls.

Or, secondly, Some windy stuff; by that I mean,

when the heart lets out itself to carnal contentments. There be many that have made forward professions, and mighty hungerings and thirstings they have seemed to have; and the ordinances of Christ, how precious were they to them; but now they are altogether for the world, and give themselves up unto the delights of the flesh. And what company is it that now they prize most, but that company wherein they have most contentment to the flesh; that they prize most. There hath got windy stuff into their stomachs that hath taken away their appetite.

Thirdly, For want of exercise. Many Christians, they grow dull and heavy. It may be they keep themselves from the sin of the times, and from satisfying the flesh in carnal things; but they grow dull and sluggish and negligent, and there is no exercise in them, no stirrings of heart after God; whereas, if thou wouldest keep thy heart warm, every morning do not for fashion sake merely go to prayer, but pray till thou gettest thy heart warm again. As if a man hath not a stomach, it is good to go abroad in the air—that may do somewhat; but if his stomach be far gone he will not only walk abroad a little, but continue walking till he finds himself warm, and then he comes home and finds a good stomach. So let Christians be much in spiritual exercises, that will keep their appetites after spiritual things.

Ninthly, Let not your desires after more righteousness make you forget that you have: look to that. If God hath been pleased in any measure to give you any power over your corruptions, any ability to do any service for him, take notice of it, bless God for it. And because you have not all your desire, do not say you have none at all, do not wrong the grace of God, and think that all is but counterfeit, because you have not such a desire as you would have. As if a man should give a kinsman so many pieces of gold to set up his trade withal, and he should say, What hath he given me? they are but a few counters; a kinsman would think himself wronged by his saying so. So it is with many a soul that is seeking after righteousness. The Lord hath given thee the graces of his Spirit already, that are so much gold, that so thou mightest set up for heaven; but because thou hast not so much as thou wouldest have, thou thinkest it is all but counterfeit. Take heed of this, thou shouldst bless him for every little, every good motion, every good inclination; bless God for this, and so expect more. For poor bodies that were ready to starve, if you should give them but a piece of bread, they would be ready to thank you for that, and bless God for that; but if they should say, What is this—will this satisfy our hunger? and so scorn it, you would give them no more. So it is with the soul; if God gives anything, bless him for that, and

say, Lord, I find this sweet, I find the beginnings of the work of thy grace sweet to my soul; oh that I had more!

Tenthly, A further rule to be observed in this hungering and thirsting after righteousness, is, Take heed that thou seekest not after this righteousness for thy justification; that is a rule that is of very great use. You have heard before what the righteousness of Christ is, and it is that only justifies the soul before God; but now this righteousness of sanctification, it is that whereby we are enabled to serve God according to his way. But that is not the righteousness whereby I can stand just before his tribunal at the great day. Now there is a mighty mistake here. Many poor souls would fain have more grace; but why? Because they think that by their grace they shall be enabled to stand before God for acceptance to eternal life. They think thus: Were I enabled to overcome my corruptions more, and to do my duty more, by that means should I be able to look upon God's face with comfort and joy; but thou art mistaken in this. It is true, it is a comfortable evidence of God's love to thy soul, even the work of his Spirit; for it is that that God loves and takes delight in. But now thou must never think to tender up thy righteousness to God for justification; therefore, hunger and thirst after this righteousness, but as in the second place, and say, Lord, it is the righteousness of thy Son by which I expect to be justified. But now that I might serve thee in ways of righteousness, therefore I desire this grace to be in my heart, not for my justification, but for my sanctification.

Eleventhly, In thy hungering after this righteousness, let thy soul be willing to go through all discouragements that thou meetest with, and trample down all difficulties, all hindrances that lie in thy way. When thou art hungering after righteousness, it may be thou mayest meet with more temptations than ever, more stirring of corruption than ever; you must make account of this. And all those that have found this work of God in their hearts, they can by experience tell this, that when they began to stir and labour after righteousness they found more strong temptations than ever, more stirrings of corruption than ever. Ay, but this would not discourage them; they got over this, as we read of the poor woman, Mat. xv. 22-28, 'A woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not

meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.' It is a most notable scripture of any we have in the book of God, to shew that where the heart is set upon a thing it will trample upon all discouragements. For mark, one cannot imagine more discouragements than this poor woman had at this time in seeking to Christ.

First, She comes and seeks to Christ, and cries to him, Have mercy on me, O Lord; but he answers not a word. When thou art hungering and praying to God for grace, if God do not answer thee presently, thou art all-a-mortand discouraged. This woman cries, and Christ answers her not a word. This did not discourage her; neither let it discourage thee, though Christ doth not answer thee presently upon thy seeking to him.

Secondly, There came the disciples, and they besought Christ, 'Send her away, for she crieth after us.' The disciples they speak churlishly; so many poor souls that are seeking after Christ, their friends come and discourage them, they are churlish towards them. Well, it may be this hinders thee, but if thy desires be right, this will not discourage thee neither. It did not discourage this poor woman.

Thirdly, Christ answered, 'I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,' saith Christ; 'what have I to do with this woman; she is none of the house of Israel, and I am not sent to her.' This was a fearful discouraging answer, when that Jesus Christ should say that he was not sent but to the lost sheep of Israel; what should this poor woman do now? Thus it is with many in their seeking after grace. Saith one, It may be I do not belong to the election of God; I am none of that little number that Christ was sent for. Though Christ did say thus to her, yet this did not discourage her, but she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. She would not stand answering what Christ said, but her desire was strong: Lord, help me.

Fourthly, He answered and said, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs.' Here is a fourth discouragement. Saith Christ, You are a dog, and this is children's meat. If God should speak thus to you, as it may be you think sometimes that God speaks thus to you, you are crying for meat, that you might be satisfied with righteousness; but if God denies you awhile, you think he rejects you as a dog. Christ did tell the woman she was a dog, and one would have thought this should have beaten her off, but this would not discourage her. She came and said, Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the children's table. Truth, Lord, I am a dog; I am unworthy; but, Lord, one crumb, one crumb even for a dog; and upon this Christ heard

her, and then she was satisfied. This was from a mighty work of the Spirit of God in the heart of this woman; so in your desires after this righteousness, do you do thus. When you have discouragements, yet get through them, and you will be satisfied at last. There is thousands that have had good beginnings, but they have been taken off by discouragements; therefore labour to trample down hindrances what thou canst. It is very observable the story that we read of in the book of Kings. There was a time that there was a great famine in Samaria, and the prophet told them, that by the morrow this time, corn should be thus and thus cheap. Saith the captain, It cannot be, though God should open the windows of heaven. Saith the prophet to him, You shall see it, but not taste of it. And when the time came the people did so unreasonably seek to get some part of the corn that they might satisfy their hunger, that they trod upon the captain; and though he were the second man to the king, yet they trod him down to the ground, and all through their earnest desire that they might have to satisfy their hunger. And so the soul that is thus hunger-starved, as it were, saith, Oh that I might have grace, I am undone else; let there be whatever hindrance in the way there will be, I care not, I will be willing to part with all, so be it I may have grace. As we read of the poor people in Egypt, they wanted corn, and were hunger-bitten. They came and brought their money to Joseph to buy corn; then they brought their cattle, and they sold their lands and possessions that they might have corn; and then they came and sold themselves to be as bond slaves unto Pharaoh, that they might have corn to satisfy their hunger. Nothing stood in their way that so they might have their hunger satisfied. Thus it is, the soul will trample down anything that is in its way, and will be contented to part with anything for the furtherance of the grace of God in it. And thus much for the rules to be observed in our hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

The next thing is to shew what may support the hearts of them that hunger and thirst after righteousness, but find not that they do grow righteous.

The first is this, Consider that if there be but the least degree of grace, it is as true and as sure an earnest of eternal life as the greatest degree is. It may be some that are carnal may abuse what is said out of the word, but let not children lose their portion for that. The soul that finds such a working as this is after righteousness, though thou hast not righteousness as thou dost desire, yet this may support thee, that the least degree of true grace, the least seed of it—and some seeds there must needs be in that soul that hath this desire—is as true and as sure an earnest of eternal life as the greatest of all is. I do not speak this that you should rest in any degree of

grace; for that is a base spirit to say, What need have I then of more? But I speak to those whose hearts are upright—that will not so abuse it. It is called the earnest of the Spirit; and a man in a bargain, when he gives earnest, though the matter be not great, he can bind a bargain if he give but twelve pence, as well as if he give twenty shillings. So it is here, though, it is true, where there is a little grace there cannot be so much honour to God as where there is a great deal; yet the least degree of grace binds the bargain with God for eternal life, and makes it as sure to thee as if thou hadst as much grace as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It may be because thou hast but a little thou shalt not know it so fully, and so have the assurance in thy conscience; but it is as sure with God. Thou art as certainly translated from death to life, as if thou hadst the greatest degrees of all.

Secondly, Where there are true desires, there the Lord looks upon thy imperfections, not as thine, but as sin that dwelleth in thee. That is it the apostle saith, 'It is no longer I, when I express mighty desires after grace, and found corruptions strong, 'it is no longer I, but sin that dwelleth in me.' So I say to the soul that is strong in the desires of it after grace, though there be many imperfections remaining, the Lord doth not now look upon thy imperfections so much thine, as sin in thee; there is a twofold self, as it were—there is a self corrupt, and a self grace. It is not I, but sin; the Lord charges not the remainders of sin on the soul that hath these sincere desires after the work of his grace.

Thirdly, Further, so long as thy corruptions are in thee, and be thy sickness, (observe it, for so doth the soul that is in this case find the remaining corruptions that are in it to be its sickness,) so long as thou findest the want of this righteousness to be thy sickness, know that it makes thy soul to be an object of God's pity and compassion, and not an object of God's wrath and hatred. Here is the difference between the remaining part of sin that is in the saints, and the corruptions in the ungodly. The sin that is in ungodly men and women makes their souls to be the object of God's wrath and hatred, for so the scripture saith, 'The Lord hates the workers of iniquity;' but the saints that have any beginnings of grace, though there be much unrighteousness still in the soul, this unrighteousness being thy sickness, it makes thy soul now not an object of God's wrath, but an object of his pity and compassion. As your children, when they are sick and weak, do not you love them as well as when they are at the strongest and most healthy? I appeal to any tender mother; she loves the child when it is in health, and can go up and down, and so can play with it; but when the child is sick, doth not her bowels yearn towards the child then?

When it is sick, and can do nothing for the mother, but lies sprawling, crying, and is troublesome to the house, what delight can she take in it then; but her bowels yearn towards it, and the child is sick, saith she. So the unrighteousness that remains, it is the sickness of the soul, and the bowels of God's compassions are towards his sick children, as well as towards his strong children. I will put this to a father or mother—suppose that thou hast a child that is weak, but would fain do whatsoever you would have him, and this child is got alone into a room, and the door shut upon him, so that the child thinks nobody sees it. Well, it may be thou lookest through a keyhole and seest the child what he is a-doing; he is crying and bemoaning himself, Oh that I should be so untoward as I am! oh that I should not please my father and mother more! oh how little am I able to do for my father and mother! oh that I were able to shew myself more dutiful than I have been! oh that I could so walk before them as I might never be undutiful any more! this would be the happiness of my life, if I should never be any more undutiful to father and mother. Suppose any of you should look through the keyhole and see your child thus bemoaning himself because he can be no better, and thus desiring that he might live to be more dutiful, would not your bowels yearn towards such a child? You know the child doth not think you see him, but by accident you do come to see him, would not your bowels yearn now toward him? Know that God is a compassionate Father. From whence is it that you have such compassions toward your children? is it not a drop of that infinite compassion is in God? When thou gettest alone, and art bewailing thyself that thou canst not live to the honour of God more, if thou couldst thou wouldst account thy life to be happy, know God hears all this, God looks upon thee and observes all this. Surely God will not cast off such a one as hath his heart thus hungering and thirsting after what might be acceptable unto God. You know the Scripture compares Christ to a shepherd, and believers to sheep, now saith he, My sheep hear my voice. That expression is taken from the way of those countries where shepherds did use their sheep so to the voice of them, as if they called the sheep the sheep would come after them, (as when you call a dog,) and therefore saith Christ, 'My sheep hear my voice, and they will follow me.' Suppose, when the shepherd came, a great part of the flock came after the shepherd upon his call, but one or two sheep that were entangled in the briars, and were striving and struggling to get out of the briars, but could not; they knew the shepherd's voice, and would have followed the shepherd, but when they see they cannot follow him, then they fall a-bleating and crying after the shepherd, till the shepherd take notice of them;

and when this shepherd comes to the place and sees the poor sheep labouring to get after the shepherd, will he not pity this sheep, and so untangle it from the bushes that it is got into? This is the poor weak Christian's case that is got into the briars of some corruption, and entangled in some distemper of heart or other, and Christ calls to the soul, and the soul knows the voice of Christ and loves Christ, and it would fain follow after Christ, whose voice it hears, and the soul is tugging and striving, but it is got into

the briars. Now Christ hears the voice of this sheep, and comes and sees it in the briars, and observes how it would fain get after him, and pities this poor sheep, and so at length gets it out of the briars, and doth provide for it as much as for any of the other. If this be thy condition, though grace be not come yet, yet from thy desire thou mayest have comfort, and comfort from this very text: 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be satisfied.'

SERMON XXI.

OR,

CONSIDERATIONS TO SUPPORT THE HEARTS OF THOSE THAT HUNGER AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS, YET WANT GROWTH IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.'—MAT. v. 6.

THE fourth thing for the support of such souls as are seeking after grace in the use of means, but cannot find that they have obtained it, is this, Consider that the conquest of the will of a sinner is a principal work of God upon the soul, and it is such a work as God doth accept of. When God conquers the will the great work is done. The will it is the great wheel of the soul, which, when it turns, all the lesser and inferior wheels of the soul move likewise; and the great difficulty of bringing a soul into eternal life it lies in this, the conquering of the will. All the inferior affections they are easily wrought upon, they are even compelled to obedience when the will is overcome; the understanding it may be forced to assent to the truth when it is discovered; the affections they will close with the truth, love it, fear it, obey it, when the will is gained to yield itself up unto the truth. But now the will, that is the great hindrance; the difficulty lies in gaining that. It is a greater work for the will to be conquered and brought into subjection unto God, than for any man to do the thing that God requires. God doth more look at the gaining of the will to obey than if so be we were able to do the thing that we desire. We would think that, could we but do the thing that we desire, we should be happy, and that then we should be accepted. Know for thy comfort, that what thou

wantest in obedience to the will of God, if thy will be gained with desire to obey God, God doth accept of the will, as if so be thou wert able to do the thing to the uttermost of thy desire. In 2 Cor. viii. 10, saith the apostle there, 'Who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago.' You did such a thing; but herein I do not so much commend you, as in this, that you had a will to do it before you had ability; the will was present long before you had the ability to do. The apostle commends them more for having a will to fulfil the mind of God than to do it to their power. Thou hungerest after God, and thou wouldst enjoy communion with him; thou wouldst serve and honour him to the uttermost; thou wouldst look upon it as a great privilege if the Lord would enable thee to pray and sanctify his name as other saints do; but thou canst not attain to the doing of what thou dost desire. Know that God is as much honoured in thy will to do, as if so be thou didst do the thing; this is more than if thou couldst do the thing. A hypocrite may do any external act; there is no external act of obedience but a hypocrite may come up to the managing of it, but the will of a hypocrite is never brought under the obedience of the truth. Therefore this may be a great support to our souls, when we find our wills brought under, though we want a power for to