

SERMON XXIII.

OR,

COMFORTS TO THOSE THAT ARE OF MERCIFUL SPIRITS.

'Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.'—MAT. v. 7.

4. KNOW that this is a special evidence that thou didst hunger and thirst after righteousness truly, therefore Christ doth join it thereto: 'Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness: they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.' Thou thinkest thy heart is after righteousness. God knows thou canst appeal to him that thou dost hunger and thirst after righteousness, but sometimes thou art afraid whether thy hunger and thirst be true or no. Here is one rule: Hast thou a merciful heart towards others? While thou art hungering after God's righteousness, doth thy soul hunger after the good of others, and wouldest thou do them all the good thou canst, both bodily and spiritual? this is an argument of the truth of thy hungering after righteousness. But if so be that thou shalt please thyself with this, that thou hast a desire for righteousness, but in the meantime hast a cruel unmerciful heart towards others, certainly thy hunger after righteousness is not good, for these two are joined, and they cannot be parted one from another. Blessed are such as hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are the merciful; unmerciful men do not truly desire after grace. And this makes way to speak unto the second branch in the application. Whatsoever might be further spoke by way of encouragement, we shall bring it into the use of exhortation.

Wherefore, in the second place, here is a use of rephension to unmerciful men, to such as have not their hearts affected with the miseries of others, nor mind not what becomes of others, so he it they may have contentment to themselves. Perhaps some of you may think this point that I am about is an ordinary thing to speak for mercy, and but a moral point. I know not what you lay upon it, but I find, and you may find it too, if you will examine Scripture, not only in the Old Testament, but in the New, Christ lays not more weight upon any one thing, excepting faith itself, than upon mercy. Take but these three particulars—faith, mercy towards others, and union one with another. These be the three great things

that the gospel doth most insist upon; and I know no point that is so full of Scripture as this is, the point of mercy, and that out of the gospel. Many professors of religion lay too little weight upon this point, but look upon it as an ordinary point, and so they make not that conscience of the exercise of this grace as they ought. But how little you think of it, Christ puts much in it. 'Blessed are the merciful.' Therefore know,

First, That an unmerciful heart is a wretched and a vile heart. You that mind nothing else but yourselves, if you can have your tables spread, your backs clothed, your houses furnished, your children provided for, let others sink or swim and perish, no matter what becomes of them—oh wretched, vile heart of thine, what art thou more than others? What is thy flesh more than others, that thou shouldst have so little regard to others? Should there be any regard to thee? Some there are that if they get a little more than others, are so far from letting out their souls to the relief and help of others, that they look upon them with despicable eyes, despising the poor, as in Prov. xiv. 21; they despise, look contemptibly upon such as are under them, or in a meaner condition than they. 'He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth; but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.' Take heed you do not look upon poor people as despising them, for so it is meant of poor neighbours, both by the opposition and the verse before: 'The poor is hated even of his own neighbour; but the rich hath many friends. He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth,' sinneth with a great sin; 'but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.' Such a one is mean and poor, and thou thinkest him a mean, poor fellow, and so lookest despicably upon him. Take heed of such a disposition; God will not take it well at thy hands. And others there are that are so far from shewing mercy to those that are in misery, as they rather spend their estates that they have upon their lusts. They have more than others, and that which may serve to relieve the necessities of many poor creatures that

would bless God for their superfluities; but their superfluities are laid out and spent upon their lusts, merely to satisfy their bellies, to satisfy their uncleanness it may be, whereas they will not freely give twelve pence for good uses and for relieving others. There are pounds spent upon their filthy uncleanness, or upon their backs, and upon vanity in sporting, playing, drinking. Where is conscience in the meantime, when there are so many charges of God upon you to shew mercy, and there is so much spoken of the excellency of mercy? What a blessed man the merciful man is! And thou that hast an estate above others improvest it, and layest it out only to satisfy thy lusts, thou canst sin more freely possibly than others can, because thou hast an estate more fully than they. Oh thou unwise soul, how foolishly dost thou improve thy estate, whereas thou mightest lay it out so as hundreds might be blessing God for thee! thou employest it only in increasing guiltiness upon thy soul. And others, though perhaps somewhat it is that they will give, yet grudgingly, and only that that is forced from them, what they cannot but for shame give; but there is no freedom, no cheerfulness at all in their distribution unto others, and if anything be given, they think it is merely lost, it is gone. But what goes into their own bellies, and is put upon their own backs, that is not lost; but whatsoever they give in a way of mercy to others, they look upon it as cast away: this is an argument of a carnal heart, that knoweth not the way of God. Didst thou understand what is said in Scripture, thou wouldest account that estate of thine which thou givest out of a merciful heart for the relief of others, the best part of thy estate. And so others, when they are to die, then they think that they will give something to the poor, or to others; but in the meantime, while they live, all is for themselves, they cannot trust God for anything; and as for such promises as these are, or others in Scripture, they are but as dry things unto them. I shall speak to these, and such as have cruel and hard hearts towards others, and are altogether selfish.

First, Certainly thou knowest not God. Talk what thou wilt of religion, if thou hast an unmerciful heart towards others, thou art the man or woman that knowest not God. I will give you this scripture for it: in Hosea iv. 1, 'Because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.' These two are put together—no mercy nor knowledge of God in the land; certainly where there is the knowledge of God, there will be mercy. 'The dark places of the earth are habitations of cruelty,' saith the psalmist; in dark souls that know not God are works of cruelty. You may conclude of any man that is of a cruel disposition, a hard-hearted disposition, of a penurious, sordid disposition, of a selfish disposition—

certainly this man, this woman knows not God; if they knew what God were, what treasures of mercy there are in God, and how God delights in mercy, and that it is his glory to communicate of his goodness to his creatures, it were impossible but their hearts would be more communicative.

Secondly, God hath a great controversy against thee. Thou sayest thou art not bound to relieve such and such, thou thinkest it is no evil if thou dost not wrong others; but thy unmercifulness is enough for to cause the Lord to have a controversy against thy soul: in the forenamed place, Hosea iv. 1, 'The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land,'—for what? 'because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.' God hath a controversy with that land, with that family, with that person that hath no mercy; and canst thou stand out against the controversy of God?

Thirdly, Know that thy disposition is quite contrary to God's. Surely it is a very base one then. There is no disposition whatsoever more contrary to the disposition of God than a cruel, harsh, hard-hearted disposition; for God is mercy itself. Your heavenly Father is merciful; he is the God of mercy, (as we spake before,) so that thy heart is of a disposition cross to God. There is a mighty difference and opposition between the disposition of God's heart, and the disposition of thy heart.

Fourthly, There is a curse upon thy heart. Certainly a hard heart hath a curse upon it. There are diseases in the bowels that are very terrible. Those that have hard hearts, their bowels are diseased—their bowels are corrupted; they have not bowels of compassion, there is a curse upon their spirits. There can be no greater curse upon a man's heart than to be hardened—to be hardened from God's fear, and to be hardened from doing good to others.

Fifthly, There is a curse upon all thou hast. An unmerciful man or woman hath no sanctified use of anything they have. You keep your estates, and you think it is your own, and say, May I not do with my own what I please? may I not eat and drink, and please myself with my own? Thy own, it is defiled to thee by thy unmercifulness, and cursed to thee. You have a strange expression in Luke xi. 41, 'But rather give alms of such things that you have; and behold, all things are clean unto you;' it is a very strange expression. So that it seems without this, nothing is clean to a man. Men that do not distribute of what they have, but keep it altogether to themselves, there is nothing that they have clean unto them—that is, there is nothing sanctified; all is defiled, all is cursed to them. But now, how are things clean by this? You may see the meaning by the coherence in verse 39. The pharisees stood much upon the cleaning of the outside. 'And the Lord

said unto him, Now do ye pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness; ye cleanse cups and platters and such things, and ye stand upon ceremonial cleannesses, and your own kind of superstitious cleansings. But rather give alms of such things as ye have, and behold all things are clean; rather look to what God requires in the use of your estates. Do not stand to cleanse cups and platters, to have them very neat, as many of you have your cupboard heads furnished, your plate shining, and furniture in your houses, and you delight in that as much in one way as the pharisees did in a superstitious way. You delight in it in a pompous way, but, saith Christ, rather give alms of such things as you have—that is, doth God give you estates beyond others, you have more than for necessity, and you have for moderate delight; now with the remainder relieve such as are in misery, and so make the right use of your estates that God hath given them to you for, and then all things will be clean to you. You shall sanctify all you have by this means; but if you have a base, penurious, and selfish disposition, to keep all for yourselves, for pomp, bravery, and delight to yourselves, there is nothing clean to you; and however you may make things so pompous and brave in your houses, they are all defiled, all cursed to you. Therefore it is an evil thing to have an unmerciful heart towards others.

Sixthly, Further, know that the misery of others cries continually against you. Thou art in thy house, and hast all about thee well, and feelst no pain, no hunger, no trouble thou meetest withal. But how many fatherless children and widows, how many of the saints that are in great extremities, have their miseries cry to heaven against thee, as if they should say, Lord, thou hast given to such and such men estates, and here we want bread, and it is in thy cause too. We have poor children that are ready to starve, and if we have one bit now, we know not where to have another, and we are in nakedness. These things cry to heaven against those that have superfluity here, that have wherewithal to relieve others, and are altogether for themselves and the maintenance of their lusts.

Seventhly, Know this, and this is a main thing, not only carnal people, but many that do profess religion, are very guilty herein; they have many of them very rigid and cruel hearts; they think to put off God with going to hear sermons, praying in their families, and it may be keeping themselves from the defilements of the times, and they look after ordinances, and purity of ordinances. In these things they do well to do so; but while thou art doing so, for thee to slight the work of mercy towards those that are in misery, know that all these acts of thy religion are thrown by God as tilth and dung in thy face.

God cares for none of the acts of religion where there is an unmerciful heart. Be never so forward in hearing, in praying, in fasting, in any ordinances of God, yet when thy heart is unmerciful, the Lord despises thy offering, despises all the duties of religion that thou performest. Take two or three scriptures for this that are observable. The first is that in James i. 27, 'Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.' This is pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. If this text were in the Old Testament we should have some say that this is a legal thing; but here you see the apostle hath it in the New Testament, and tells you that pure religion consists in this: You that would be kept from the defilements of the world, from defilements in worship, and have your religion more pure than others, look to your religion in this. Here is purity of religion: 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.' I would we had more puritans of this kind, such puritans that are pure in this religion, that have bowels of mercy towards others. And that scripture that you have likewise in Isa. lviii. is very remarkable for this. If you read divers expressions that you have here, it is exceeding full. Ver. 3, 'Wherefore have we fasted,' say they, 'and thou seest not,' &c. 'Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness.' It were well we had never any such fasts, to fast for strife and debate. Then in ver. 5, 'Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?' as if they should say, Lord, what is the fast that thou hast chosen? Ver. 6, 7, 'Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?' For so we are to account all, even strangers, as our own flesh: 'Then shall thy light break forth in the morning.' So that in these times of fast let us look to this. This is the fast that God requires. Fasting and alms are to go together. The more we fast the more merciful we are to be to others, or otherwise our fasting is nothing. More scriptures may be named, but these two are prime ones, to shew where there is not mercifulness all is rejected, even our prayers are rejected. Zeel. vii. 5, 'When ye

fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? and when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain?' Ver. 9, 'Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute the true judgment, and shew mercy and compassion every man to his brother.' You only minded yourselves, and regarded yourselves when you were fasting and praying; and so we find, in Acts x., of Cornelius, when his prayers were accepted of God, the text saith that his alms and prayers came up to God both together.

Eighthly, If thou hast an unmerciful heart, thy prayers are so far from being accepted and regarded of God, as they cry against thee, and are witnesses against thee; for when thou comest to pray to God for mercy, and art unmerciful thyself, the Lord will bring thy prayers to be witnesses against thee. And whenever thou art crying to God, saith God, 'Here is a cruel, hard-hearted wretch; if he get but advantage over others, he will improve it to the uttermost, and, let others perish and suffer never so much, he cares not; yet he comes to me for mercy. Know the Lord, in the time of thy prayer, will remember all thy cruelty, and all the hardness of thy heart towards others. This is the evil of thine unmercifulness.

Ninthly, Thou mayest expect that God will harden others against thee.

Tenthly, Know that this sin of cruelty and hardness of heart towards others, it is worse than a heathenish sin. Josephus in his 'Antiquities,' book xv. chap. 12, tells a notable story of Herod, whom you read of in Scripture, a wicked wretch. It was Herod Agrippa that was slain with worms. This Herod, Josephus tells of him, that in the time of common dearth and calamity, he melted all his plate that he had, all the gold and silver that he had in the court, he melted it all, and put it into money; and he spared nothing for the excellency of the fashion and workmanship. He had many curious pieces of plate that had excellent workmanship about them; but he spared none, but melted all, and bought corn with it, and gave it out unto the poor for their relief, and provided work for them too, and gave a great part to strangers. And because that the dearth was so great that they had not so much as seed to sow their fields withal, he did not only provide bread for them, but provided seed-corn to sow their ground for another year. Thus even Herod, wicked Herod, that we cry out so much upon—for he was ungodly, and a reprobate—yet, for the outward work

of mercy, he was thus merciful to those that were in misery.

But here it is said, 'That they are blessed that are merciful.'

It is true, if they be graciously merciful, if they exercise mercy as a work of faith, and tendered up in the name of Christ; but this was for the outward part of the work of mercy, and in this he went beyond a great many among us that make great profession of religion. Unmercifulness is worse than a heathenish sin.

Eleventhly, The Lord makes it to be the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. One great charge that God gives against Sodom and Gomorrah, why they were destroyed with fire from heaven, was their unmercifulness, Ezek. xvi. 49: there the Lord is charging of Sodom for their vile and great sins, and saith, 'Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her, and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.' Here is a sin which was one of the sins for which Sodom was destroyed with fire and brimstone from heaven; and therefore certainly this is a greater evil than we are aware of. The evil of unmercifulness is worse than we can imagine; and therefore look to it, I beseech you. If I should be speaking of some other sin, it may be your consciences would fly in your faces. But you have a great deal of cause to have your consciences wound you, and to go and be humbled before the Lord for this sin of unmercifulness; and who is there that hath any competent estate but upon examination his conscience will charge him with this? Oh Lord, thou knowest that much of my estate hath been spent upon vanity and my lusts, or upon my will; and yet this man for a good use will grudge to give five shillings, though hundreds of pounds shall go merely to have his will and lusts. Be humbled for this sin: the Lord looks upon it with another manner of eye than you do; and this may be the sin that may cause God in the time of your distress utterly to leave you.

But the main thing in the point, it is a use of exhortation. If Christ pronounces him blessed that is merciful, let us be in love with this grace of mercy. Oh that we had more merciful men! This is a time of crying for mercy; yet it is the worst time for hardness of heart and cruelty as ever was. Certainly whosoever shall get an estate in these times with base scraping together, may expect a curse upon that estate more than ever was upon any man's estate that was gotten at another time; and therefore this scripture is a seasonable scripture. The Lord fasten it upon your hearts, that you may go away with this written upon them, 'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.' There were never such

objects of mercy. Woeful extremity have many endured, and that in the cause of God; and others of the saints of God cry for mercy. We have received mercy ourselves; it is a time of God's mercy to us. What mercy do we hear of every day almost, every week; still one mercy comes upon the heels of another. This town surrendered, and this army wholly routed and spoiled, whereas we were afraid we should have lain at the mercy of cruel bloody soldiers. The Lord hath delivered us from them, and hath magnified his mercy in keeping England alive, in keeping this city alive, in preserving your families, in preserving your estates so much as they have been preserved. It is a time of mercy; the bowels of God's mercies are so enlarged, so yearning towards us, as calls for mercy to our brethren. Let us look round about us, we see nothing but mercy. There are places that wherever they look, they see nothing but footsteps of God's displeasure—of justice, wrath, and misery. But wherever we look we see mercy; when we are here now, we can every one of us look upon one another as objects of God's mercy. That we have these liberties thus to exercise ourselves, and to join thus publicly to call upon God, to pray to God, what mercy is here! And since these times hath not God been merciful to your souls, in revealing his gospel and the glorious things of eternal life to you? When thou goest home, what canst thou see but mercy? Look upon thy yoke-fellow, there is mercy; look upon thy children, there is mercy; look upon thy table, there is mercy; look upon thy servants, there is mercy; look into thy bed, there is mercy; look upon everything in thy house, there is mercy written thereon; look upon thy own body, there is mercy; take the Bible and read the eternal counsels of God concerning thy eternal estate, there is mercy; that a family can fall down upon their knees, and there be blessing God for preserving and bringing in all outward comforts that they stand in need of, still there is nothing but mercy round about us. And what, shall we in the midst of mercies be unmerciful? How do all these mercies call to thee for mercies towards others.

Again, Set before you the beauty and excellency of mercy, and consider of it. Chrysostom hath an expression about mercy, that it is more excellent than to have the gift to raise from the dead; if God should give one ability to raise from the dead, it were not a greater good than to have a heart to be merciful to those that are in misery; we need not go to him but to the Scripture. There are the most excellent things spoken of it in Scripture, that would make a man admire that any man professing godliness should not have bowels of mercy towards those that are in misery. There be six notable Scripture expressions concerning the excellency of this grace.

The first is this, It is called the administration of service, the service of God: 2 Cor. ix. 12, 'The ministry of this liturgy.' There are many stand for your old liturgy, and think it is a hard case that that is taken from them. Here you have a liturgy that you may keep, and that with the good-will of God and men too, and be in love with this liturgy—that is, the works of mercy, it is called God's liturgy. Whereas you use to call the liturgy divine service, here is a divine service that you may tender up to God. All of you that have estates, you may have this divine service. You complain thus one to another, Would we had our divine service again. You may have this every day, and be as acceptable to God as ever that was certainly, and abundantly more; and therefore seeing that is gone, make it up in this ministry, in this liturgy, for so is the word in the original.

The second commendation of this grace is this, That it is a grace doth manifest the professed subjection of men to the gospel; and till men come to have merciful hearts towards others, they do not come to have a professed subjection to the gospel. You are not brought under the subjection to the gospel in a professing way, till your hearts be brought to be merciful towards your brethren; and that you have in the same scripture, 2 Cor. ix. 13; speaking of the relief of others, and mercy towards others, he calls it there, the 'professed subjection to the gospel.' So it is in your books, the subjection of the profession to the gospel; so that, would you come and manifest a professing subjection to the gospel—viz., that whereas the Lord hath revealed in infinite mercy the gospel of his Son Jesus Christ unto you, and expects that all you should come and subject yourselves to this gospel, and make a profession that you do it. This is one thing wherein you should do it: thus, Lord, here we declare that the mercy which we have found from thee in thy glorious gospel, it takes off our hearts from all things in the world, and enlarges our hearts towards others that are in misery. In this, Lord, we manifest our professing subjection to thy gospel. And you shall find there is nothing doth more take off the hearts of men from scraping after the world than the knowledge of the gospel of Christ; and as soon as ever we find in Scripture that the gospel had brought any into subjection to it, they presently were ready and willing to distribute anything that they had to the necessity of the saints. That is the second commendation, The professed subjection unto the gospel.

Thirdly, It is called the exceeding grace of God; and that you have in the 14th verse of this 2 Cor. ix. The apostle there calls it the exceeding grace of God, because the Lord was pleased to melt their hearts towards others, and enlarge their bowels towards others. The apostle was so affected with it, that he saith, it is the exceeding grace of God. This we look

upon as the exceeding grace of God, more than the ordinary grace of God.

The fourth commendation is this, It is called 'the unspeakable gift,' and that you have in the last verse. The unspeakable gift, saith the apostle, that God should thus enlarge your hearts in mercy towards others. Here is a gift of God; you give to others that that he gives you. A heart to be merciful unto others; this is the unspeakable gift of God.

The fifth expression from Scripture is this, It is called a sweet smell, and that in Phil. iv. 18, 'An odour of a sweet smell.' You that would have your houses sweet, you may have them perfumed thus; it is the best perfume in the world. Great folks will have their frankincense to perfume their houses; and would you have yours smell sweet, perfume them with the works of mercy. When you do works of mercy towards others, you have perfumed your houses, you have perfumed your bodies and souls. Now there is a sweet smell unto God.

The sixth expression is, It is a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God; here be three in one. Would you offer a sacrifice to God? The work of mercy, it is a sacrifice, and a sacrifice acceptable, and a sacrifice well-pleasing to God, in Phil. iv. 18, 'A sacrifice, acceptable' or received, and 'well-pleasing to God.' Would you do a well-pleasing thing to God? Do works of mercy; they are well-pleasing to God, and they are sacrifices. So that those that are in misery, are, as it were, the altars upon which you do offer this sacrifice to God. So in Heb. xiii. 16, you have an expression to the same purpose, that it is a sacrifice well-pleasing to God. Consider, therefore, what comfort it will be to you when you die. Whether do you think it will be more comfort when you die to think thus: I have spent so much in a tavern, or I have relieved the necessities of so many poor people; I have spent so much upon my lusts, or upon a whore, or I have been a means that so many poor distressed people will bless God for me? Or thus, it may be when you die it shall be said that such a man died worth so much; but is it not a greater glory for so many families to come and bless the Lord for thee—I have found such a one a good master, I might have starved had it not been for such a one, I have cause to bless God for him. Would not this be a greater good to you when you die, than to think that you leave so much? What if you reckon less? Certainly a sweet memorial of the work of mercy were a great deal better than anything you could leave behind you. You know that the works of mercy will be a good testimony unto you in the day of Jesus Christ to witness for you. Luke xvi. 9, it is a scripture that hath some difficulty in it; saith Christ, 'I say unto you, make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive

you into everlasting habitations.' He calls riches mammon, because men do ordinarily make it their god; of unrighteousness, though all riches are not unrighteousness, but because for the most part they are got and used unrighteously; therefore they have this title from God. Make you friends, that is, by the works of mercy, 'that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.' By this we are to understand thus much; that, look what works of mercy any one doth by faith, when he shall come to fail, as ere long all rich men must fail—that is, they must leave their estates, or they must leave them—then their good works may be as testimonies unto God, whereby they may come to be received into those everlasting mansions that Christ is gone before to prepare for them; not through the merit of these, as papists teach, but these will be a testimony to thee. Learned Chemnitius upon the place saith thus, It may be when rich men fail, those that have been merciful, and come to be sick and die, it may be here comes some minister of God, that when he was a poor scholar was relieved by him, and he comes to witness for him, and saith, Lord, I was a poor youth, and had not this man been pleased in mercy to look upon me I might have spent all my days in raking up in kennels; but he was pleased to bring me up in learning, and through thy mercy thou hast made me an instrument of good in thy church; and Lord, he was a great means of it, through his bounty and mercy. Here is a witness, and this comes to witness well for such a man at the great day. And there comes another poor family, and they come and witness, Lord, had it not been for such a man, we had like to have perished and starved; Lord have mercy upon this man who thus shewed mercy to us. Thus make friends by your unrighteous mammon, by those riches that are ordinarily used in the world as weapons of unrighteousness, as means to maintain men's lusts; the more you can come to make such friends, the Lord will accept of you, and you shall be received into everlasting habitations. And what an improvement will this be of your estate, when you shall have such a testimony before God, and come to be rewarded with these everlasting habitations! You think you must provide for your house, and make it all brave and handsome; but here are everlasting habitations that are possible to be obtained. And those that are merciful in a gracious manner, they have such a promise as this.

To answer some pretences of men that hinder this work of mercy.

Say some, I am poor and mean. There is a scripture to shew that even poor people should be merciful. Though thou canst do but little, do something. You know the poor widow's mite was accepted more than all the rich men's treasure. 2 Cor. viii. 1, 2,

'Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that for a great trial of afflictions the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.' It is as elegant an expression as we can have in any author about such a business; it is such a high phrase as we cannot imagine a higher. They were poor, and it was a depth of poverty, and yet their deep poverty did abound to the riches of their liberality. Secondly, You will say, Our estates are very uncertain. We have somewhat now, but it may be all may quickly be gone; we had best to reserve somewhat. There is an excellent scripture for this, that this should be no hindrance from mercy, Eccles. xi., beginning, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.' Here the Holy Ghost makes that which thou wilt make an argument against it to be an argument for it. What saith the Holy Ghost? Is it like there may come evils upon the earth—is it like there may come troublesome times—let us spare for ourselves? Nay; saith the Holy Ghost, Give the rather; if thou beest afraid of evil times, give the rather, and be more abundant in the works of mercy because of that. 'If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth;' as if the Holy Ghost should say, Look, do you see how the clouds are gathered by many vapours from the earth, and then are filled with rain; they do not keep it to themselves, but empty themselves upon the earth. So you that have estates, you have gathered it from many in your employment, from this providence and the other; and now you are full, let it not be for yourselves—empty yourselves upon poor people that lie even upon the earth. 'And if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.' saith the Holy Ghost. The meaning is this, whereas some may say, It may be we may give, and give to some that are good, and to some that are naughty, and we do not know whether there will come good of what we give. Saith the Holy Ghost, as where a tree falls when it is cut down, yet still it is to the advantage and benefit of him that owns it. He finds it when it is fallen there; he can make use of it. So you give sometimes to good, and sometimes to bad, yet the fruit of your mercy shall lie, and you shall find the benefit of it. Or rather as others, thus: they make the tree falling to signify the death of men. Be merciful while you live; the tree will fall, and look, how it falls there it lies. You know a tree, when it is cutting down, it will fall the way that there is most boughs, and that way it most inclines to whilst it was standing. So saith the Holy Ghost, the way that your

hearts most incline to, that way you will fall. If you have the fruits of mercy and good works, that you are abundant that way, and your hearts turning that way, you will fall that way; and so you will lie and be found at the great day, according to what the proportion of your hearts and your works have been. Again, 'He that observes the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.' Mark the answer to the covetous heart that would be scant in the works of mercy: I have not fit objects to bestow my mercy upon. He that observes the wind shall not sow. If a husbandman has been looking every day, and see the wind in the clouds, and thinks it will not be fair weather, and so will not venture anything, he will never make any work of his ploughing or sowing; so, saith the Holy Ghost, be not too prying and observing of these wants of mercy, whether the object be a fit object, yea or no. It may be I may and have bestowed a great deal, but have seen no good come of it. Mark what follows in the 5th verse: 'As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God, who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.' As if he should say, Go and do all the work you can; though you see nothing come of it, yet know there are secret ways of the providence of God working about his own ends and your good; and therefore be not discouraged in doing all the good you can. For as thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb, as there is a secret providence in carrying on things in the womb, so there is a secret providence in working about good in those ways that thou art not able to understand; and therefore be not discouraged. So in the 6th verse, 'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, this or that,' &c. I have done no great good with this good action, therefore I am discouraged; yet let me try another and another. 'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand,' &c. There is likewise a notable scripture in Heb. xiii. 14, 15, 'For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.' We have no continuance in this world; we go up and down, and are driven from place to place. Then what follows in the 15th verse, 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.' That we will do, we will offer praise. But then what follows, ver. 16, 'But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifice God is well pleased.'

We have no abiding condition, yet let us bless God, and to do good and to communicate forget not. Though your estate be never so uncertain, yet do good, and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifice God is well pleased.

But I may want myself if I should give. See Prov. xviii. 27, 'He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack.' Darest thou trust God for thy soul upon his promise, and not for thy body and outward estate? There is no such way to come to want as to be of an unmerciful disposition towards others; 'he that giveth to the poor shall not lack,' saith the text; 'but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.' Thou art afraid thou shalt want; why! wilt thou engage God to thee that thou shalt not want? Here is a scripture that will engage God to thee, 'He that giveth to the poor, he shall not want.'

But that I do will quickly be forgotten; let me do never so many good things, within a while all is forgotten; for this look into Heb. vi. 10. It may be thou hast done many good things, and thou hast done them in secret, which is a good sign that thou dost them in faith, and fearest they will be forgotten. No, 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.' Mark how God engages himself; what need God regard what we do; can we do anything but that that we have from God before? Yet God binds himself thus; as if he should say, Art thou a merciful man or woman; dost thou do good in the place where thou livest? I should be an unrighteous God if I forget thee. God is not unrighteous to forget your labour of love, and your work in ministering to the saints; minister to the saints, and God will not forget your labour of love, he is not unrighteous to do it. As if he were unrighteous, if he should forget; men are unrighteous towards you—they in an unrighteous manner do forget what you do for them, but God will not be unrighteous to forget your labour of love in ministering to the saints.

Very few do anything this way, and I do as much as others. That scripture in Phil. iv. 15, 'Now ye Philippians, know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no

church communicated with me, as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. Here was the commendations of the Philippians. What a condition was Paul in, that though he was such an instrument of God's glory, yet no church did communicate to his necessities but only the Philippians. This is a high commendation, if God gives you a merciful heart rather than others. Do not you account it a great mercy and blessing if you grow rich more than others? Certainly to be rich in good works is more than to be rich in money; and this will add to your great commendations, and will add to your comfortable account in the day of Christ. Therefore take heed of vain reasonings of your hearts against the works of mercy; and whenever you are called upon for any works of mercy, take heed of such reasonings in your hearts against the same, and that for ever your vain reasonings may be stopped. In Deut. xv. 7, 8, 'If there be among you a poor man, one of your brethren within thy gates, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee; Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother.' Here is the charge, 'But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.' Then in ver. 9, 'Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, the seventh year, the year of release is at hand, and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought, and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee.' Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, the year of release is at hand. God would have his to take heed, that there be not an evil thought in their hearts to object against it. There is a work of mercy propounded, and they have twenty objections against it; but beware, saith God, that there be not an evil thought in thy wicked heart. All objections against works of mercy they do come from a wicked heart, from the wickedness of men's hearts. And so you shall find the Scripture doth go on still in giving charge to relieve their poor brother, and to take heed that no objections do prevail against work of mercy. Remember, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.'