

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 affectionate 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

do. Thou art weak and hast many failings in thee, and thou canst not do what thou wouldst do; thou wouldst obey more, thou wouldst pray better. Oh, know for thy comfort that God hath the better part of thee; and that which is thy best part God hath obtained, and that which he doth most prize. Therefore do thou look upon it as the best part, and do thou prize the gaining of thy will more than any service thou art able to do besides. Most people think the will is nothing, but would do better. Many say my heart is good, and my will too; I would be better if I could. Thou dost not know what the changing of the will means, that hast such slight thoughts of the gaining of the will. It is the difficultest work of all, even the gaining of the will of the soul of a sinner to the obedience of the truth.

Fifthly, Know for thy further comfort, where there is the least degree of grace, there will be increasing, there will be a growth; where there is true seed sown there is the blessing of God in it, and God, that hath begun his good work, will finish it in his good time. God never begins a work and lets it lie; he doth always perfect his own works. God's works are like himself; as God is perfect in himself, so whatever he works upon the soul he works perfectly; and however weak and feeble grace may be at the first, yet know that God, as he hath begun, so he will carry on to perfecting the work. When thou findest thou hast a desire after good, and longest after this righteousness, and canst not do what thou wouldst, thy desires are better than thy ability. Thou shouldst reason thus: that God makes thee to see the vanity of thine own heart, in thinking it an easy matter to overcome corruption, a thing of nothing to stand against a temptation, herein thou shouldst support thyself. Now the Lord convinces thee of this thing, thou findest a difficulty in it, and canst not do it; now hereby thou art convinced of thy folly and vanity; be quiet then in submitting to the dealings of God in this thing. God doth not intend me any hurt in this. We should not make such hard and ill constructions of God's dealing in this kind, but we should improve such dispensations of God for our good; as thus to conclude, that the Lord in this doth not intend my ruin, but the discovery of that foolish opinion which I had formerly, what an easy matter it was to overcome the base distempers of mine own heart. The Lord now intends by keeping me low in a sad condition, that thereby he might raise me up unto higher glory, that he might prepare me for greater degrees of comfort. He keeps me low and in a sad condition, that he might keep my heart sensible of its former vanity, and that thereby he might make a discovery of the excellency of his grace; therefore thou must not now conclude that God hath forsaken thee, and that thou shalt never have the

righteousness of Jesus Christ, because thou canst not find upon the seeking of it that thou hast obtained it. No, but thou must reason thus: God's intentions are to humble me and not to leave me.

In the last place, Consider, for thy support, when, after a long time in the use of means, thou dost not find that God doth come into thy apprehension, and to satisfy thee that thou hast grace, and that the righteousness of Jesus Christ is thine—consider this, that God would have the work of righteousness appear in the abasing and humbling of thee, rather than in giving thee power over thy corruptions, and that is God's design in this thing. And thou shouldst interpret the dealings of God with thee thus, that God hath various ways for the working of his own grace; that this is God's dealing to keep thee humble and low, and herein grace is exercised: and thou shouldst say, Is this the will of God, to keep me in darkness, and not to know in what estate and condition I am; that I should walk warily? good is the will of the Lord. Thou shouldst believe God in this condition as much as if so be thou hadst sensible apprehensions of thy interest in righteousness. We would have righteousness many times to work upward in joy, in enlargements, and in comfort; and when it doth thus work, then we have good hopes, and then we think our peace is made with God, and our interest is sure. But if God will have it work downward in self-abasement, soul-humbling, and spirit-dejecting, this is as well a working of the truth of righteousness in the heart as if it did work up never so high in joy and consolation, and this doth as much discover the truth of righteousness in thee as if thou hadst the greatest raptures and elevations; and therefore quiet your hearts in this, it is a mercy that the work of God is upon thee any way. There was a time, thou mayest say, that we did not mind anything of God, but that our faces were turned against God, and that we did mind the things of the flesh. But now the Lord he hath begun to work; and if the work be but yet in humiliation, if it be but in working downwards in the root, bless God for this, and know it is a mercy which thou canst never be thankful enough for; for when the work of grace works downwards, it is as sure an argument of the truth of righteousness in thee as if thou hadst the greatest elevations and raptures of joy. And thus I have done with the second thing proposed in the first use.

There remains but one thing more, and that is for rebuke and reproving of those that do not thus hunger and thirst after righteousness. There are many who will say, this is a very choice point, and blessed be God we do hunger and thirst after righteousness; and though we are able to do but little, yet this we can say for ourselves, our desires are good. But take heed you do not deceive yourselves in your

desires, for there are many who do desire, but their desires will never come to any good. I did in part discover to you what those desires were before, which did demonstrate a soul that did truly hunger and thirst after this righteousness, but here I shall add something by way of reprehension of false desires.

First, Such as see no excellency in grace, these are to be reprov'd. As those that do not desire after grace, how canst thou say thou desirest after that which thou seest no excellency in? Are there not many among you that say as those in Job xiv. 21, 'They say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy law'? These are a wicked generation. But you will say, it is not our case; surely there are none amongst us that are so vile and wicked that shall dare to bid the Almighty depart from them. Though few men dare be so wicked as to say it in their words, yet how many are there that are so wicked as to say it in their practices. Many secretly in their hearts say this: what are the meaning of those speeches of yours else to this effect? what need we have so much means, so much preaching, such reformation? can we not have our old ways? can we not go to heaven in the ways that we were formerly taught in? these are new ways. We never heard of such talk about government and worship, and the straitness of the ways of heaven, as you tell us of; may we not do as others do, and yet be saved? Formerly it was accounted a dishonour to men to wait upon the word, and they were nicknamed and accounted for Puritans by this very sign, because they did constantly attend upon the means of grace; but now it is accounted a dishonour for men not to come to the word. Oh the change that there is among men! But yet among most, the preaching of the word it is a flat, dry thing to them. Let us have the fulness of the creature, say they, and let righteousness go where it will. There is a dog-like appetite in men to the creatures—they would have more still. The dog, when you have given him as much as you can, still he desires and craves: so men, when they have never so much of the creature, they are still craving, and their appetites are longing after the world still. But you will say, We pray to God, and come to church, and we hear the word, and what would you have us do more? we live quietly and civilly, and we do no man any wrong; and surely will not this carry us to heaven? These men they have enough of righteousness; they see no need of this glorious, excellent righteousness of Jesus Christ. But those that know what righteousness means, they desire it more and more; they never are satisfied with any righteousness but this, neither are they satisfied with any degrees of righteousness attained.

Secondly, But to come more close to the point in hand. A second sort that are reprov'd from this point

are those that do content themselves in desires; that when they have desires think the work is done, and that they need go no farther; they will say this is a good point, and blessed be God they can find desires in them—we do desire. But let me tell you, are not your desires false? are your desires true? yea or nay. There are many that desire, but their desires are cold and lazy desires, such as shall never do them good; and therefore false desires they may be known by these characters:

First, Their desires are false who satisfy themselves with ignorant desires. Hath God enlightened your hearts to see the excellency of grace, that is more precious than rubies, of more worth than the gold of Ophir—hath God discovered to you the need of grace and your undone condition without righteousness? If it come not from these grounds they are but false desires. Many have a false appetite; as sick men think they could eat food, but when it is brought to them they cannot eat it—their stomachs fail them. So these men, they desire righteousness, they see worth in it, and nothing is dearer to them than righteousness; but when God in the ministry of his word tenders grace to them, holds forth his righteousness in the ministry of the gospel, they have no hearts, no mind to it. How often hath God moved thee by his Spirit, and then thou hast refused to hearken; though thou sayest thou desirest with all thy soul, yet when God comes to make a proffer thou hast no desire. Were thy desires right at any time, they would be right at all times; but this shews thy desires are not true, but that it is a false appetite which thou hast, because it is not constant.

Secondly, Such desires are false who satisfy themselves with foolish desires. When men desire the end, and not the means, when men would be happy, but will not use the means that leads to happiness, will we not account that man a foolish man that shall desire food—Oh that I had something to eat! oh that I had bread or meat!—but will not seek for it, will not take pains to get it? So a man would be at such a place, and he earnestly desires to be there, but he will not step one foot in the way that leads to it; he lies still and stirs not: so when men desire grace, and not make use of all means, nor beg of God to bless the means to them. Can you say thus, are you able to appeal as in the presence of God: Lord, whatsoever means I know thou hast appointed in thy word to attain such a thing, I have made use of it, and I have neglected no opportunity wherein I could enjoy the means for the furthering of me to such an end. Art thou able to say thus? Then thou mayest have comfort that thy desires are right; but when thy desires are large, and thy endeavours cold, and dost not make use of all means, never flatter thyself—thy desires are not right.

Thirdly, When men's desires are absurd, such desires are false. They desire grace, and yet live in that which is quite contrary to grace, which is inconsistent with grace; they would have grace and righteousness, but they would have their lusts too. To desire righteousness, and yet to take pleasure in unrighteousness, how canst thou say thou desirest after righteousness? But you will say, Is there not some unrighteousness in the best, have not they their weaknesses, do not they sin as well as others, those that make great profession? *Ans.* Though there be unrighteousness in the best, yet there is no taking pleasure in unrighteousness; taking pleasure in unrighteousness cannot stand with desire after righteousness. Therefore those desires which are so absurd as to desire grace, and yet to desire that also which is inconsistent with grace, is not true.

Fourthly, Such as satisfy themselves in cold and weak desires, whose desires are turned all into wishings and wouldings; they could wish that they had grace, and oh that they had righteousness, oh that they were delivered from wrath to come! but they are not so preemptory upon it as to conclude, I must have it or I die. Now these desires they come to nothing, they will not grow up. A man that desires grace for itself, he is resolved upon it, he must have it; as the hungry man that is ready to famish for want of bread—give me bread or I die, give me food or I perish. So saith the soul, Give me grace, let me have Christ or I am undone for ever; what will it do me good to have abundance here, and yet to have no grace? These are like little sprigs; their desires are superfluous, as the little sprigs that come out of the body or root of the tree, which do not bear any fruit, but doth the tree a great deal of hurt; they draw sap from the root of the tree and hinders fruit-bearing. Such desires and wishes as these they will never satisfy God, neither will they ever be able to satisfy your own consciences.

Fifthly, When men's desires are conditional. Conditional desires are false desires; that is thus, they would have grace and holiness so far as might stand with such and such ends, and to carry on such and such designs of their own—as to keep their estates and their liberty, their ease and credit in the world. So far as religion will ride with their designs, so far they will bear it company; so far they like the ways of holiness as they stand and suit with their ends; but if their desires were right they would be resolute. Let me have grace upon any terms; grace is able alone to make me happy, and therefore whatsoever becomes of me let me have grace. Though I perish, though I endure never so much hardship, so I may have grace, it will make amends for all; I am willing to let go anything so I may have grace, for in it I shall be happy.

Sixthly, When men's desires are fleeting and unconstant desires, they have desires in some good moods,

and in some pangs of conscience when the terrors of God are upon their spirits. But such desires as these they are hypocritical; they desire grace merely to serve their own turn, to stop the mouth of conscience, and not for grace sake. They do not see an excellency in grace which causes them to desire it, but for the ease of their tormenting consciences, and the stopping the mouth of their disquieted spirits.

Seventhly, When their desires are lazy desires, such are false desires; they are not willing to take pains for what they do desire. The Scripture is very remarkable; and a terrible scripture for this we have in Prov. xxi. 25, 'The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.' I much fear that this text may prove a most dreadful text to many. The desires of many they kill them. They desire after that which is good, but they rest in them, and trust to them, and think they have a work of grace upon their hearts, whereas in truth it is nothing so; so that they deceive themselves in this great business. In Prov. xiii. 4, 'The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing.' You are desiring that which is good, but you have nothing, like those women that the apostle speaks of in Timothy, 'that are ever learning, but they never come to the knowledge of the truth.' You have lazy desires, that take no pains to get what you do desire. People they do not examine what becomes of their desires. Have we got those things that we were so taken withal? How many times have our spirits been wonderfully affected in the hearing of the word, but what pains have we taken for the obtaining of that which we desire so strongly after? Luke xiv. 15, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.' Here they were mightily taken with the miracle that Christ had wrought, but it did vanish quickly. They were not truly taken with the things of the gospel; for the text saith they minded their estates and outward enjoyments more than the offer of mercy. So many; they come to hear the word, and are taken with it, but it doth not stir them to purpose. This will lie sad upon the consciences of many thousands another day, that these things were no more observed and taken notice of by them. But you will say, What would you have us do? We do what we can—we cannot do more; we do what we can for our lives. It is well if you do so; but let me propound two or three things to you. Take heed of the dangerousness of this plea.

First, You say you do what you can. Will it prove so in the end? Can you go into the presence of God, and say thus, Lord, I have done what I can. There is no means but that I have made use of to attain grace, and yet I cannot find it; and no other means there is that I know to be made use of. Lord, I have done what I can. Go into the presence of

God, and there faithfully examine your hearts, and see whether you have done your uttermost. Canst thou say that in the morning, when I arise, I arise with a spiritual heart; when I was up, I went to prayer, to seek God for myself and my family; but yet I cannot find my heart so as I desire; and I pray that the Lord would keep my heart close with him. And after prayer I had a watchful eye over my heart and thoughts, and over all my words and actions, that they might be holy, that they might be such as are warrantable by the rule; and what opportunity thou, Lord, didst afford me for my soul's good, I did take it. At night, can you say you have done this? Can you say so to God? To men, it may be, you can say so, and put them easily off. But can you tell God that from the morning to the evening you have done so? How comfortably might you live were you really earnest in this! How sweetly might you sleep and lie down in the evening, when you have kept such a watch over your own hearts! And though you have many weaknesses and failings, you might comfort yourselves in this, that your hearts have been right. Many never mind God at all in their lives. Now do you what you can when you never think of God? And therefore they put this off, and say, What can we do without the grace of God? But know for this, that God doth give thee some common grace, which would enable thee to do more than thou dost; but thou dost not put forth that strength which you might do by the power of common grace. Take heed of this plea, lest God take you at advantage.

Secondly, Suppose God should take you at your word, at this advantage, and say, Sinner, dare you venture your eternal estate upon this plea? You say you do what you can, and you know nothing more but that you would do, did you know it. Be it so; you shall be tried by this plea, that you do what you can. If I am not able to convince you you might do more, then I will yield to you that you have done what you can; but if you have not done what you can, you shall miscarry, your eternal estates shall be cast upon this plea. Dare you stand to such a plea as this in time of sickness? You find you could have done more than you have done, and you cry out, I might have done more than I have done; I might have had more communion with God, more acquaintance with the saints. Now that which a man's conscience in sickness tells him he might have done in health, that he may do; for sickness doth not infuse any power into man to act, but it stirs up men's parts, and convinces them what they were able to do. When men come to sick and dying beds, then they see they might have done more for God, and been more holy than they were in the time of their healths.

Thirdly, For the convincing of thee that thou dost not do what thou canst, what dost thou think that a damned soul in hell would do if God should bid him go and improve his time, and according to his improvement of such a stipend of time, it should either go to hell again or come to heaven? Do you think such a one would neglect any opportunity? What think you that these would not do? The torments of hell they do not put any new strength into men, but they convince them that they might have done more. I might add many more things, but these may serve as so many convictions that we do not what we can. And therefore from this point we are to be reproved which plead this plea. 'But blessed are they' that do thus; 'that hunger and thirst after this righteousness, for they shall be filled.' And thus I have finished the fourth beatitude, which hath held us the longest of any, having the most in it.

Ver. 7. 'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.'

Here we see in this beatitude a sweet conjunction between the two verses, 'Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be satisfied,' and 'Blessed are the merciful.' You would have mercy, saith Christ; and that is a sweet argument to you; and you would have a share in mercy, but do you desire righteousness as well? You would have righteousness, you would have a share in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and you would have the mercy of God to pardon your sins, but are you merciful? There is nothing fills the soul with more mercy than the consideration of this, that we have our sins pardoned in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is that that fills the soul with bowels of mercy. There are many arguments that may press a man on to mercy, kindness, and pity; but there is no argument that prevails more with the soul unto mercifulness than this, that the soul hath obtained mercy in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Those that are acquainted with the righteousness of Christ, and the righteousness of inherent grace, they would have all others know what it is to have a share in the mercy of God as well as they themselves. Do you hunger and thirst after righteousness, and are you merciful? Then 'blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.'

But who is this merciful man—what manner of man is he? Mercy in the general, it may be thus described:—

It is that grace of God whereby the soul comes to be truly grieved with the miseries of others, and unfeignedly desirous to help and relieve them according to their ability. Mercy hath misery for its object; as an envious man hath the prosperity of others to be the object of his envy, so the misery of another man is the object of my pity and my compassion,

who am a merciful man. For my part, saith the soul of a merciful man, I bless God my estate is comfortable; I want nothing, I have everything about me my heart can desire, but the saints about me are in misery. Oh that I could help them that are in misery! Men are made sensible by them that are in misery. A saint's mercy is drawn forth by the miseries of others that are about him.

But you will say, The papists and the heathens they are merciful men, they are pitiful. But what difference is there then between the mercy of a man truly gracious and the mercy of others?

Therefore you may remember in the description of mercy in the general I told you that it was a grace of God's Spirit, whereby the mercy of a man is drawn forth to them that are in misery.

SERMON XXII.

OR,

THE SEVERAL WORKINGS OF MERCY IN THE HEART.

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

THE work we have now to do is to shew you,

First, The several workings of mercy in the heart.

Secondly, The motives unto it.

Thirdly, The object of mercy.

Fourthly, The gracious manner of the work of mercy. And then we shall come to this promise that is here made to them that are merciful, that they shall obtain mercy.

For the several workings of mercy in the heart, they are these:—

The first act of mercy upon the taking notice of the miseries of others, it grieves for them; there is a compassion towards those that are in misery. A merciful man will not slight the miseries of others, much less will he despise them, or condemn others that are in misery. A merciful man doth not think the miseries of others not at all to concern him, but he looks upon them as concerning himself; he is grieved, his heart is touched with the miseries of others.

Secondly, From these there is a working desire in his soul to relieve them. Oh that I could tell how to relieve and help souls as I see to be any way in misery, bodily misery, or spiritual misery!

Thirdly, The heart is solicitously careful about ways of help; not only wishes and desires to help, but the thoughts of the mind are very solicitous what way I may compass to be helpful to those that are in misery. You have an excellent scripture for that in Prov. xiv. 22, 'Mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good.' Here is the merciful man described, and the promise of mercy to him; he is one that deviseth good. A merciful man looks upon

others in misery, casts about him in his thoughts when he lies upon his bed, and is devising how he may do good. I am here lying quietly in my bed; I am warm, others are in misery; how may I be any ways useful to them, to do them any good? He doth devise good: and in Isa. xxxii. 8, 'The liberal deviseth liberal things.' A merciful man is not only liberal and helpful when you put him upon occasion, when you come to him, when he cannot for shame, but he must give you something. No; but he himself deviseth liberal things; he plots with himself what he may do to be instrumental for the good of those that are in a sad conditional. A covetous man doth not more devise how he might gain to himself to get a good bargain, than a merciful man devises how he may distribute, how he may do good. That is the third act of mercy, it is solicitously careful.

Fourthly, A timely improvement. He doth not keep his mercy in his own thoughts, but he doth improve what he hath for the good of others that are in misery, if he hath an estate, parts, friends, strength of body; or if he be poor and mean, and hath nothing else, then his prayers, all that he hath, shall be some way or other improved for the help of such as are in misery. A merciful man doth not think that God hath given him any good thing merely for himself, but for improvement. I was not born for myself, I have not an estate for myself, neither have I parts of nature or grace for myself, but I have them for to be of public good as much as may be. That is the fourth thing, a careful improvement.

Fifthly, The act of mercy is to be willing to part with much for others. Improve it I may for their