

OF CHRIST SEEKING FRUIT, AND FINDING NONE.

He came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.—LUKE XIII. 6.

THESE words are part of a parable, the occasion of which we may find in the former verses. Some there present told Jesus what had befallen those Galileans, whom Pilate had slain at the altar, and sacrificed them while they were sacrificing; and so mingled their blood with the blood of the beasts that they were killing for sacrifice.

He, willing they should make good use hereof, would have them to apprehend the danger themselves were in, and thereupon to break off their sins by repentance, lest some such sudden stroke falling upon them, they should perish in impenitency.

And because he foresaw they might evade this, by imagining they were in no such danger, upon a supposition they were in no such guilt as those Galileans, he shews them the vanity of these imaginations, and tells them plainly, they had guilt enough upon them to ruin them, unless they did repent, ver. 2, 3. And, that he might make the deeper impression on them, he repeats it under another instance of like nature, ver. 4, 5, as if he had said, Do not think yourselves secure, upon a conceit that your sins are less than theirs, who were thus surprised by death and judgment; you have sin enough to destroy you, unless you prevent it by repentance.

And having told them that, unless they repented, they should also perish, it might be inquired, how they should perish? To which he seems to answer by this parable: they would perish, as this fig-tree did, which being planted in a commodious place (a vineyard), and having all advantages to render it fruitful, yet continued barren; whereupon the owner of it, after all means used to improve it, and the exercise of patience year after year, in expectation of some fruit, meeting with nothing but disappointments, resolves it shall cumber the ground no longer, but gives order to have it cut down.

This is the sum of the parable; and the ἀπιδόσκις, the meaning of it, is this: those persons who are planted under the means of grace, and have all helps and advantages requisite to make them spiritually fruitful, they ought to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. The Lord, who has so planted and privileged them, expects it of them; and if they answer not his expectation,

he may bear with them for some years, while his servants, those who labour in his vineyard, the ministers of the gospel, are taking pains with them, and using all means proper for their improvement; but if, after all this, they continue still barren, he will have them cut down; they shall have a standing no longer in his vineyard; no more care and pains shall be lost upon them; they shall not encumber the ground any longer, nor possess the place, on which others being planted, would bring forth fruit; in fine, they shall be destroyed.

The words I have pitched on are the beginning of the parable, which affords us this

Observation ; Those who enjoy the means of fruitfulness should bring forth fruit; those who are planted in the Lord's vineyard, and have a standing under the means of grace, should be fruitful.

This is clear in the words, and indeed in every part of this parable.

1. They are planted in the vineyard for this purpose. That is the proper place for fruit-trees; another place than the vineyard would serve them, if they were not set there for fruit.

2. The Lord, who gives them place here, expects it. He is said to come and seek fruit, ver. 6, 7. It is that which he has just cause to look for.

3. He heinously resents it when he finds no fruit, and expresses his resentment to the dresser of his vineyard. It is an abuse of his patience; the longer he bears with such barrenness, the more it is abused. It is a provocation that he will not bear long with. After three years' forbearance, he passes that severe sentence, *cut it down*.

4. It is an injury to the place where they stand. They cumber the ground, that is the reason of the sentence, ver. 7. It takes up that room which might be better employed; it sucks away that moisture which would make others fruitful; it overdrops the plants that are under it, hinders the spreading and fruitfulness of others. A better improvement might be made of the ground; it is a loss to the owner of the vineyard, when such a plant is suffered, *καταργεῖ*; which may signify the spending the heart of the ground to no purpose, ver. 7.

5. Those who have most tenderness for such, can have no ground to seek a long forbearance of this barrenness. The dresser of the vineyard will venture to beg no more forbearance than one year, after that he yields it up to excision, vers. 8, 9.

6. All labour and pains, all care and culture, in digging about and dunging it, is lost upon it. Those whom the Lord employs to use all means for their improvement, have nothing left them in the issue, but occasion of sad complaint, that they have laboured in vain, spent their strength for nought, Isa. xlix. 4.

7. Such will certainly be ruined. Where fruit is not found, nothing can be expected but cutting down. The lord of the vineyard will not spare them, and the dressers of the vineyard will not longer intercede for them. All in a little while agree in that fatal conclusion, *cut it down*.

All these, and each of them, make it evident, that those who are planted under the means of grace, are highly concerned to bring forth fruit.

The most pertinent and profitable inquiry, for further clearing of this truth, will be, what fruits it is they should bring forth? What we are to understand by *fruit*, and that *fruitfulness* which is so much our duty? And of this I shall give you an account by the quality, quantity, and continuance of it. To these heads we may reduce those severals, whereby the Scriptures express to us what this fruit is.

I. For quality. It must be *good fruit*. Grapes, not 'wild grapes' (as

the prophet expresseth in a parable very like to this, Isa. v. 2, 4). Wild grapes are for the wilderness, not for the Lord's vineyard, Mat. iii. 10, and vii. 19. Good fruits are acts of goodness; taking acts largely, as comprising words, thoughts, actions, motions inward and outward. Acts of goodness opposed to sinful acts; as Basil, *ἔργα δικαιοσύνης ἀντικείμενα τῇ ἀμαρτίᾳ*: good acts, opposite to what is evil and sinful. Now *bonum est ex integris causis*, that acts may be good, there must be a concurrence of all the causes requisite to make them good, and constitute their goodness. And these causes we have specified in Scripture, which I shall briefly touch.

1. As to the efficient. Good fruits are called 'fruits of the Spirit,' Gal. v. 22, Eph. v. 9; such fruits as the Spirit of grace helps us to bring forth, by sanctifying the heart, which else is no soil fit to bring forth good fruit, and influencing, moving in it, and acting it when it is sanctified. The fruits of the flesh, the fruits of our own spirit, as they are carnal, selfish, and earthly, are no good fruits. The fruits of the Spirit are good fruits, and those only.

2. As to their matter and form. Good fruits are such as are called 'fruits of holiness and righteousness.' They are acts of holiness, Rom. vi. 22, taken in that latitude, as comprising godliness, sobriety, and righteousness, according to the apostle's distribution, Titus ii. 12. Then we bring forth good fruits, when we 'live soberly, righteously, and godly.' Acts of piety towards God, and acts of justice towards men, and acts of sobriety towards ourselves, are the good fruits we should bring forth.

These are called 'fruits of righteousness;' that word being also taken largely, as containing all that we owe to God, to others, to ourselves, 2 Cor. ix. 10, Heb. xii. 11, James iii. 18.

And as to the form. Then they are good fruits, when produced in a way and manner conformable to the rule of holiness; when thoughts, and inclinations, and designs, and affections, and words, and actions, are ordered by that rule, then we bring forth 'fruit unto holiness.' When we think, and intend, and affect, and speak, and act in such a manner as the rule of righteousness requires, then we bring forth the fruits of righteousness, the good fruits which we ought to bring forth.

3. As to the end. Good fruit is such as is brought forth unto God, Rom. vii. 4; then we bring forth fruit to God, when what we think, and speak, and act, is in reference to him, out of obedience to his will, with an intent to serve him, out of a desire to please him, with a design to honour him. When the serving, and pleasing, and glorifying, and enjoying of God is the end of all; a special goodness is hereby derived upon all our fruit, it is then brought forth unto God. When we bring forth fruit unto sin, unto the flesh, unto the world, that is cursed fruit. When we bring forth fruit to ourselves, that is no fruit in God's account. Accordingly Israel is called an empty vine, because she brought forth fruit to herself, Hosea x. 1. They are empty trees that have no other fruit; it is none, or as good as none, no good fruit that is brought forth to ourselves; that is only good which is brought forth to God.

More particularly, that it may be good fruit, it must be.

(1.) Real. A show, an appearance of fruit will not suffice. If it be not real, it has not a metaphysical goodness, much less a moral or spiritual. The fig-tree in the gospel made some show of fruit; but Christ finding none upon it really, he cursed it, and it withered, Mat. xxi. 19. It must not be like the apples of Sodom, which has nothing to commend it, but only a fair outside. Fair appearances may delude men, and pass for better fruit with them than that which is good indeed. But God is not, cannot be mocked;

it is he that comes to seek fruit, and it is not the fairest shows will satisfy him, it must be real.

(2.) It must be such as imports a change of the soul, that brings it forth, Mat. iii. 8; ἀξιον εἶς μετανοίας, fruit worthy of another mind, another soul than he had before. Athanasius explains the word by μεταρτίζουσαι τὴν ψὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθόν, a change of the mind from evil to good, Mat. vii. 17, 18, Luke vi. 43. The tree, i. e. the heart, must be good before it can bring forth good fruit; but naturally it is an evil and corrupt tree, and grows wild, it must be transplanted into another soil, or engrafted into another stock, that the nature and quality of it may be changed, that its fruit may be good, else that which it brings forth will be wild grapes, corrupt fruits, not such as the lord of the vineyard comes to look for. Your natures must be changed, your hearts must be renewed, your souls must be taken off from the old stock wherein ye were born, and have continued, and engrafted into Christ ere your fruit can be good, John xv. 4, 5. The old soil of nature brings forth nothing but briars and thorns, such as is near unto cursing, 'whose end will be burning' (as the apostle, Heb. vi.); or at best, it brings forth nothing but fine weeds. The best thoughts and actions of an unregenerate person, how goodly or specious soever they may seem to himself or others, are but *splendida peccata*, gilded evils, or sins of a better gloss. The soil of your natures must be quite altered by renewing grace, before it can produce anything good in the account of God. Regeneration is as necessary before good fruit indeed, as natural life is before action. Ye must be born again before you can bear good fruit.

(3.) It must be distinguishing fruit; such as no trees can bring forth but those that are good, and such as will make their goodness apparent, Mat. vii. 16, 20; such as may approve ye to God and your own consciences, to be trees of righteousness, the planted of the Lord, and such as may make this known to men too, so far as by visible acts it may be known; such as may carry a conviction with them to the consciences of others, that you are indeed what you profess yourselves to be, such as will leave them no just exception against it, 1 Peter iii. 16.

Such fruits as no formalist, no hypocrite, no mere moralist can shew; something singular, that you may not be nonplussed with that question, What singular thing do ye?

Something more, something above and beyond, not only what the men of the world do, but what common professors can reach.

Such, by which you may be known to be not only new creatures, but of some proficiency in the knowledge of Christ, and the course of practical godliness, according to your standing. Such as will demonstrate to the world, that you are holy, humble, mortified, self-denying, public-spirited, heavenly-minded, truly crucified to the world; and have not only a form, but the power of godliness, that you do not only profess this, but are thus.

(4.) Seasonable. That it may be good fruit, it must be brought forth 'in due season,' Ps. i., Mat. xxi. 41. The lord of the vineyard looks for fruit in his season, Mark xii. 2, Luke xx. 10. There is a season for everything, Eccles. iii. 1, and then, if ever, it is good; good words are good fruit, when in season, Isa. l. 4, Prov. xxv. 11. But there is a time when they are not good fruit, and that is the time the apostle speaks of, James ii. 15, 16. Good words alone are not at this time good fruits; in such a case they are not in season, for this is the season for good works. So good thoughts are good fruit, 'when in season, when we are called to meditation, but not when we are called to prayer; then they are not good, because that is not their season.

That is most acceptable fruit, which is in due season, Num. xxviii. 2. The best offerings, if unseasonable, would be unacceptable. Even the actings and exercise of grace, if it be not in season, will not be good fruit. Patience, when we are provoked, is good; but not when we hear God blasphemed. Spiritual rejoicing is excellent fruit, but not while we are called to mourning.

The actings of grace have a more particular goodness in their proper seasons. Faith in hard trials, patience in tribulation, meekness in provocations, contentment in wants, courage in dangers, humility in the midst of applause, crucifiedness to the world, in abundance of it, in a confluence of riches and delights: here they are excellent fruit; this is their season.

(5.) Sound. A fair skin is not enough to commend fruit for good, if it be rotten within. And so is our fruit, if the inward temper and motions of the heart be not correspondent to the outward actions and expressions. If we use the words of a prayer, but the heart prays not, the soul is not in motion towards God, the affections go not along with our confessions or petitions. Or if we praise God, but make not melody in our hearts, the soul exalts him not, the mind has no high apprehensions of him, no inward motions of love and delight, while our lips speak his praise. This is to 'draw near unto God with our mouths only,' Isa. xxix. 13. The fruit is not sound, if the heart be not in it. You offer to God but the parings or the picture of fruit, without this; which is to mock God, not to offer the fruit he desires.

So when we speak of heavenly or spiritual things, without a spiritual sense of what we speak; when we relieve our brethren, but without inward affection or compassions to them; when we put the outward conversation in some handsome order, but neglect the temper and posture of the inward man: this is but such fruit as the Pharisees did bear, Mat. xxiii. 25-28. Whatsoever appear in your words and actions, if the heart tolerate unruly passions, or harbour unmortified lusts, or give free way to selfish, carnal, earthly inclinations, your fruit cannot be sound at heart; you may please yourselves or others with it, but God will never count it good; if it have the outward shape of fruit, yet there is worms and vermin in it, which make it good for nought.

II. For the quantity. It ought to be *much*, John xv. 5, 8. There should be,

1. A fulness of fruit. Those that enjoy the means, must not only bring forth fruit, but be fruitful; should bear abundance. Heart and life should be filled with it, Philip. i. 11. You count not that a fruitful tree, when one or two branches only bear fruit, and the rest have nothing but leaves, or when each branch has a fig or two; but when all the boughs are full. It is not fruitfulness when there are 'two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, or four or five in the outmost branches,' as the expression is, Isa. xvii. 6. Every branch should have fruit, and should bear some plenty of it. Both heart and life should bear fruit, and every branch of both; every power of the soul, and every part of the life, must bring forth plenty, abundance of it: Philip. iv. 17, 'fruit that may abound.' The mind should be filled with knowledge, and taken up with good thoughts. The heart should bring forth good inclinations, holy intentions, spiritual affections, all the graces of the Spirit, and should abound therein. Love, upon which the other affections depend, should abound, Philip. i. 9, 1 Thes. iii. 12. And we must abound in every grace, if we would be fruitful, 2 Pet. i. 5-8. Unless we will be barren and unfruitful, these graces, all of them, must not only be in us, but abound.

And there must be fruit in the outmost branches too, in the conversation;

this should be full of fruits, ready to bring forth every good word and work, James iii. 17.

Scriptural knowledge and good thoughts are but some fruit in the uppermost branch. If the other boughs be bare, the tree is far from being fruitful. Good inclinations, purposes, desires, are but as some berries in the middle boughs. A tree may be barren for all these. And good words or works are but fruit in the outmost branches. A tree is not full of fruit, and so not fruitful, if all the main branches do not bear and bring forth plenty. Mind, and heart, and life, must bring forth fruit in some abundance. Knowledge should abound in the mind; holy affections and spiritual graces should abound in the heart; and 'out of the abundance of the heart' should 'the mouth speak,' and all other parts act for God, so as to be 'always abounding in the work of the Lord.'

2. A proportionableness to the means of fruitfulness, to the plenty and power of them. So much as will answer the care and pains is taken with them. If a man take more pains, and be at more charge in opening the roots of a tree, and dunging it, and pruning it, in fencing and watering it, and it bring forth less or no more fruit than another that has no such care and pains taken with it, it will scarce pass for a good, a fruitful tree. That is barren ground, which brings forth less, after all care and culture, than that which has less tillage.

Those who enjoy the gospel in great light, power; who have the mysteries of it clearly discovered, practically enforced, and brought home to mind, conscience, will, affections, so as the light, force, and influence of it may reach the whole man, the whole life, and have this continued many years; if they bring not forth more fruit than such as have the gospel, but not with such advantages, under a less powerful and advantageous ministry of it, they are wofully defective in fruit-bearing; for we are told, Luke xii. 48, 'men expect more from those to whom they have committed much.' And so does the Lord; and those that answer not his expectation, in a case where reason and equity amongst men do justify it, are sinfully defective in the quantity of what they bring forth.

It cannot be well resented, if the Lord reap sparingly where he sows bountifully. When the Jews sowed much, and brought in little, Hag. i. 6, there was a judgment, a curse in it, and so some guilt and provocation. So may the Lord's husbandmen judge, those that labour in his vineyard; when they improve all their skin, run all hazards, take all pains, spare no cost, are ready to spend and be spent for the improvement of souls, and yet it comes to little, here is some curse upon the ground, or such barrenness as deserves a curse. If he who (as I have told you on another occasion) received five talents, had but gained three, or made no more improvement thereof than he that received but one, he would scarce have been counted a profitable servant. The improvement should be answerable to what is received.

It is true, all that are good ground bring not forth fruit alike, some thirty fold, some sixty, some an hundred. If thirty be answerable to the means of fruitfulness, it may be an argument of good ground; but if sixty be but brought forth, where means are used sufficient to improve it for bearing an hundredfold, the ground may be under the censure of barren.

3. An increase. Those who enjoy the means of fruitfulness, must grow more and more fruitful. The longer they stand in the vineyard, and continue under the means of grace, the more fruit they should bear. You expect not much of a tree the first year; but after it is of standing to bear, you expect it should every year increase in fruitfulness, and bring forth more and more.

So the Lord expects from us. Our proficiency and fruitfulness should be

according to our standing. The longer we continue under the means of grace, the more fruitful should we be; there should be an advance and increase of fruit every year, John xv. 2.

There must be a growth in knowledge, in grace, 2 Pet. iii. 18; a growth in faith, in charity, 2 Thes. i. 8. There must be more acts of grace; it should be more in exercise; and the actings of it should be more and more strong and vigorous.

There must be a growth in good works too, a walking on therein, Eph. ii. The longer standing, the more good we should do; we should do good to more, and do them more good; the branches should spread, and the fruits extend to the refreshing of more.

That which is little at first, must grow much; and that which is now much will not be enough, unless it grow more. It will not be sufficient, that we abound in knowledge, in holiness, in good works, or any fruits of righteousness, unless we abound more and more, 1 Thes. iv. 1. We must abound more and more in all things wherein we ought to walk, and whereby we may please God, *i. e.* in all pleasing fruit. A tree that bears no more in after years than it did the first, you will not esteem a good or a fruitful tree, Ps. xcii. 18, 14, still *תמיד*, yet more.

4. Variety. Their fruit must not only be much of some sort, but of every sort. They must not only abound in some kind of fruit, but must bring forth fruits of all kinds. It is enough to make another tree fruitful, that it bears much fruit of one sort, but a tree of righteousness is not fruitful unless it bring forth all the fruits of righteousness, of what sort and kind soever. It must be so far like that tree of life, Rev. xxii. 2, which bears twelve manner of fruits. It must bring forth all manner of fruits which become the gospel; not light and knowledge only, but heat and affection; not some only, but all holy affections; not some acts of holiness only, but the exercise of every grace in all its variety of actings, so that all grace may abound; not inward thoughts and motions only, but outward acts of goodness, and all sorts thereof; not some good works, but 'every good work,' Col. i. 10, 11. He that is fruitful indeed is fruitful in every good thought, in every holy affection, every heavenly grace, and in every good work, and labours to abound therein, 2 Cor. ix. 8. Not only in every good work, but every good thing, 2 Cor. viii. 7.

III. For continuance. It must be *lasting* fruit. Of which in three particulars.

1. The fruit they bear must continue. It must not wither and come to nothing before the Lord of the vineyard come to reap it. The apostle Jude speaks of some trees 'whose fruit withereth,' and in the next words says, they are 'trees without fruit,' Jude, ver. 12. So that withering fruit is no fruit in the language and account of the Spirit of God; and trees that bear no other fruit are barren, *i. e.* trees without fruit. Such was that fruit brought forth in the thorny ground, Mat. xiii. 7, and that in the stony ground, ver. 5, 6. Such fruit are good thoughts when they are not realised upon the heart or in the life. Thoughts of good things that never come to good, and convictions that vanish too soon, fall short of conversion in the unregenerate, and of reformation in others. Such are good inclinations, purposes, desires, that are not pursued into action; and good affections and resolutions, that never come into execution. As when a person has some thoughts and intentions of leaving an evil way, a course of worldliness, or lukewarmness, or slothfulness, or intemperance, or Sabbath breaking, but the pleasure, ease, or advantage which Satan or his own deceitful heart promises him in such a way, stifles them in the birth, so that they never see

the light; or when one inclines or purposes to betake himself to that strict way of godliness which the gospel calls him to, but persecution, or fear of sufferings, nips those resolutions in the bud; or when some good motions and affections are raised by the word, but when the sermon is ended, the cares of the world, riches, pleasures, Luke viii., of this life, or some such quench-coal, extinguishes them; or when sickness, affliction, or apprehensions of death and judgment, brings them to serious reflections upon the evil of former ways, and some intentions to abandon them and take a new course, but upon recovery of health, and the removal of God's hand, fear vanishes, and those impressions wear off, and all good motions prove but *agri somnia*, as a dream, which he forgets when he awakes, and minds no more, however it affected him when it was working in his fancy.

Whatsoever it is that thus springs up, but continues not till it be ripened, how good soever it seem, what hopes soever it gives, it is not such fruit as the Lord expects. Thus vanishing, it leaves those who bear it unfruitful, Mat. xiii. 22. They are not fruitful who bring not fruit to perfection, Luke viii. 14, *τελειοφορεῖν*, a word used of women that go their full time, do not miscarry nor bring forth abortives. She that still miscarries, and brings not forth live children, will be a childless woman, how often soever she conceive. And so will he that brings not forth lasting fruit be a barren and fruitless person, how fair soever he bud.

2. They must continue bearing fruit. The good ground did approve itself to be good, because it brought forth fruit 'with patience,' Luke viii. 15; *ὑπομονῇ*, which may as well be rendered according to the import of the word, and more congruously as to the sense of the expression, 'with perseverance.' They only are good and fruitful ground, who persevere and hold out in bearing fruit. A tree that bears the first year, but afterwards brings forth little or nothing, may be cut down amongst those that do but cumber the ground. The Galatians, who made a fair show of fruit at first, but afterwards intermitted, are bewailed by the apostle as barren, and such on whom he had lost his labour, Gal. iv. 11.

8. They must be bearing it always; not only *semper*, as a tree that fails not of fruit once a year, but *ad semper*, as if a tree should bear fruit all the year long. Some tell us of a fig-tree in Palestine that never was without leaves or without fruit on it, and that it was such a tree which is mentioned, Mark xi. 13, though that degenerated, and was then fruitless. Those of the Lord's planting should be like the best of those fig-trees, on whom fruit might be found all the year round. Their season for fruit is not only autumn or summer, but every quarter, every month, every day, every hour; whenever they are found without fruit they are culpably barren. All time whatsoever, every moment, is their season for fruit-bearing; and the Lord looks for it not only once a year, but every part of the year, and may proceed against them whenever he finds it not, though he come and look for it every hour. Every part of a Christian's life, when he is in a capacity to think, or speak, or act, is a fruit season; and every thought, word, and action should be fruit unto God in one respect or other, else he cannot answer it, 1 Cor. x. 31. It is good fruit that glorifies God, and nothing else. Whatsoever we do, not only in religious, but civil and natural actions, it should glorify God; and therefore whatever we do should be good fruit. God is most glorified when we bring forth much fruit, John xv. And when whatever we do is fruit unto God, then we bring forth much fruit, and bring it forth always.

Use 1. This leads us to take up a lamentation for the barrenness of the place, the unfruitfulness of the people of this land. No people under heaven that have the gospel, and the means of fruitfulness, with more advantages

than we; no people from whom the Lord might expect more and better fruits than from us. But when he comes year after year seeking fruit, what does he find amongst us? How few are there in comparison that brings forth good fruit; how much fewer that bring forth much fruit; how many that bring forth little or nothing but leaves! Nay, well were it with us if the generality of this people did not, instead of good fruit, bring forth cursed fruit; instead of that which should please the Lord, bear that which is a high provocation to him.

How may the Lord take up that complaint against us which he did of old by the prophet, Isa. v., he 'planted us in a very fruitful hill,' and we have turned into a Sodom. He 'fenced' us to keep out cattle and wild beasts; and those that are fenced in are turned wild beasts, beasts of prey. He 'gathered out the stones thereof;' and yet it is almost all become stony ground. He 'planted it with the choicest vine;' and it is become a degenerate plant, and brings forth grapes of gall. He 'built a tower in the midst thereof,' a place for the keepers of it, most convenient for oversight; and it is turned into a Babel. He 'made a wine-press therein,' sent priests and prophets to press the people to obedience; and instead of pressing out that pleasant liquor, grateful to God and man, it is made use of to press the souls and consciences of those that are obedient. He 'looked for grapes, and behold, wild grapes.' He looked for good, for choice fruit, and behold, corrupt, rotten, and poisonous fruit. He looked for such fruit as the choicest plants bring forth; but 'our vine is the vine of Sodom,' &c. Deut. xxxii. 32, 38, he 'looked for judgment,' as ver. 7. He looked for the fruits of holiness, and behold, the most horrid profaneness, contempt of God, rejecting of his gospel, perverting of his ordinances, corrupting of his worship, profaning of his name, of his day; superstition, atheism, infidelity, blasphemy, and overflowing perjury.

He looked for the fruits of righteousness, and behold, injustice, violence, blood-guiltiness, outrageous intemperance, brutish, impudent uncleanness. Behold, all those abominations, and more, and worse than all those for which the Lord had a controversy with degenerate Israel of old: Hosea iv. 1-8, 'Therefore does the land mourn,' because the people of it do not mourn for these rebellions; therefore do those that dwell therein languish, and complain of a general consumption.

We declare our sin as Sodom; and we that should have been the best people in the world have made ourselves worse generally, and more vile than many of the heathen. Some dim, weak principles of morality prevailed more with many of them than the gospel in all its evidence and power has prevailed with thousands and thousands amongst us.

We justify those nations whom God has destroyed, those churches which he has laid desolate for their provocation. We seem to out-vie them all in wickedness. And is there not something that aggravates our rebellions against God, and heightens the provocation of them above what can be found amongst others? Clearer light, and greater mercies, and mighty strivings with us in the ministry of the gospel.

And besides this, the impudence, incorrigibleness, and universalness—of our unfruitfulness, shall I say? that is too mild a word—of our gross, abhorred wickedness, does testify against us.

We have got a whore's forehead; we despise shame, we glory in our shame; we boast of that at which the sun may blush; we harden our faces as a rock; and he that would bring us to shame shall but dash himself against it. It is a shame not to bring forth good fruit, and he that speaks but of the fruits of the Spirit will be derided.

We are incorrigible. The Lord has been pruning us to prevent the bearing of this cursed fruit, and he has done it with a severe hand, has made us bleed again and again; and after all we grow wilder and wilder, and our luxuriances sprout out in greater length and number. He has 'laid the axe to the root of the tree,' year after year; yea, given some terrible strokes, and threatened that he will not suffer us still to be a growing reproach to him and to his gospel; but all to no purpose; nay, he has cast many thousand fruitless branches into the fire before our eyes, and hereby shewed what the rest may expect. But what effect has all this had upon us? We seem not only past shame, but past fear. We out-dare heaven, and sin in the face of God, when he appears most terrible, when he is revealing his wrath from heaven against our sin; we set at nought his dreadfulest judgments, but rush through plague, and sword, and fire in our course of rebellion; and say, in effect, Tush! we regard not what the Almighty has done or can do to us.

And this is growing universal. All flesh, all sorts corrupting themselves. Wickedness is mounted aloft, and is subduing the nation, and having all advantages, finds little resistance; it goes on in triumph; it has been too hard for that which should make the greatest opposition; the sword of justice is turned another way; the sword of the Spirit is hid too much in corners. What can stop it? What weapon is there formed against it? Who can check its successful progress? It comes in like a mighty flood, has borne down all its banks; its roarings are as the noise of many waters; it is a deluge, and as to these nations like to prove universal.

And what will be the issue of this, what heart does not tremble that considers it? If we brought forth no fruit, none that is good, that is enough to provoke God to cut us down, as you see in this parable. But when we bring forth gall and wormwood, Deut. xxix. 18; when, instead of good fruit, our branches are full of caterpillars and vermin; when we are so far from bringing forth pleasant fruits, as we bear in abundance that which God abhors: how shall we escape? How dreadfully shall we fall! By what a terrible stroke may we expect to be cut down; and what shall secure us from it? Who shall intercede for us? The vine-dresser did plead and prevail here with the lord of the vineyard for some forbearance of the fruitless fig-tree; but our vine-dressers, where are they? Are not thousands driven out of the vineyard? They may not dig about it, not dung it; they must* use the means to prevent its ruin; and those that remain, too many of them mind something else, and content themselves with other fruits than the Lord looks for.

Oh, what, how much have we done to render our condition hopeless, and past remedy! What need is there of mourning and great lamentation! What necessity of strong cries, and great wrestlings, to prevent the woful consequences of our unfruitfulness in all that is good and desirable; our fruitfulness in all that is provoking, and in that which is most so. How highly are they concerned who bear any good fruit to bring forth still more and better, that so when the tree, the nation, is an eye-sore to God, and the very sight of it provokes him to cut it down by some astonishing strokes, yet seeing some branches well replenished with fruit that he takes pleasure in, he may yet spare the whole a little longer.

Use 2. For exhortation. If those that enjoy the means of fruitfulness ought to bring forth, then are you highly concerned to take notice of it as your duty, to be fruitful, and to comply with the Lord herein. The Lord has vouchsafed you the gospel, and the means of grace; he has planted you by the rivers of waters, in a very fruitful place; he has been a dew unto you,

* Qu. 'must not'?—Ed.

and has watered you with the first and latter rain; he has sent his labourers amongst you, one after another, and has employed them to dig about you, and dung and water you; to take all pains, use all means; to spend their time, their parts, their strength, themselves for this purpose; he has been pruning you by judgments and afflictions, and thereby been lopping off whatever might hinder you from being fruitful; he has warned you, by what has befallen others for their barrenness; he calls upon you by his word, by his providence; he has declared it to be your duty, indeed the sum of all that he requires of you, that upon which hang all the law and the prophets. The whole duty of man, the whole duty of Christ's disciples, is fruitfulness. And indeed, if he had never commanded it, never required it in the Scripture, never spoke one word for it, yet what he has done to you has made it your duty, a duty of greatest moment, and indispensably so. The means of fruitfulness you have enjoyed obliges you strongly to bring forth fruit, and to bring forth good fruit; the plenty of them engages you to bring forth much fruit; the continuance of them calls upon you to continue fruitful. If you answer not this call, and these engagements, you will be inexcusable; for there is nothing more equal than this which the Lord requires of you. You will involve yourselves in dreadful guilt; for there is nothing more sinful than barrenness in these circumstances. You expose yourselves, and all that is dear to you, to the greatest hazards; for there is nothing more dangerous than unfruitfulness in this case. You bereave yourselves of the blessed advantages which attend fruitfulness, or are the happy consequences of it. Let me enforce this duty on you a little more largely by these considerations now pointed at.

(1.) Consider the equity of it. It is a duty grounded upon the greatest equity, that those who enjoy the means of fruitfulness should be fruitful. It is so equal, that the Lord appeals to the judgment of those from whom he requires it; the case being so clear that their own consciences cannot but give sentence in favour of it, Isa. v. 8, 4. And these inhabitants of Jerusalem to whom he refers it were parties, ver. 7. When the Lord has done all that is requisite to render a people fruitful, there needs no other judge, no other witnesses against them but their own consciences, if they be found barren. The case is so plain, a party may be trusted to give sentence in it. And is not this your case? May not the Lord say of you as he did of his vineyard of old, 'What could have been done more to make you fruitful, that I have not done?' If after this you bring not forth such fruit as he expects, you will be self-condemned; there will need no more evidence to cast you than what your own consciences will bring in against you; if there were no other judge to pass sentence against you, your own consciences will do it. It may be now conscience is asleep, or you are too busy to attend to its sentence; but affliction, or death, or judgment will awake it, and force you to hearken to it. And these are not far off, though you may dream so. The time is at hand, when your consciences will justify the Lord in his severest proceedings against you for barrenness. Set thyself before the judgment-seat of Christ, where thou must shortly stand; and suppose he should demand of thee, Where could I expect fruit, if not in the place where thou wast planted? Where should I look for fruit, but in my vineyard? Should I look for it in the wilderness? From whom should I expect more and better fruit than from thee, to whom I vouchsafed the means of fruitfulness with greatest advantages? 'Wherefore, then, when I looked for grapes, didst thou bring forth wild grapes?' Wherefore, when I expected fruit, did I find nothing but leaves? a specious and barren profession, instead of heart and life full of the fruits of the Spirit? What wilt thou answer in this case? Thou wilt either be speechless, or else speak nothing but the sentence of thy own

condemnation. A heathen, a wild Indian, a rude Mahomedan, a blindfold papist, or any that wanted the means, may have something to plead for himself in this case ; but thy conscience will stop thy mouth, and leave thee self-confounded ; the iniquity of thy barrenness will be so great, so evident, as thou wilt find nothing to cover it. An unfruitful soul will not have so much to say as the unprofitable servant, though what he said signified nothing : Mat. xxv. 24, thou canst not say, ' Lord, I know thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.' The Lord has been no such hard master to thee, if he be so to any. When he calls for fruit, after all means of improvement afforded, he looks but to gather where he has strawed, and reap where he has sown. And, ' Who plants a vineyard,' says the apostle, arguing from equity, ' and eats not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?' 1 Cor. ix. 7. The common sense of mankind declares the equity of God's expecting fruit, where he vouchsafes means for that end ; and that barrenness in that case is so unequal and unreasonable, that all who are guilty of it must needs be inexcusable.

(2.) Consider the sinfulness of being barren : how much, how great guilt it involves you in ; how heinously guilty unfruitfulness will make you.

[1.] It is a complex sin. It is many sins ; it is in a manner all sins in one. Its name is legion ; it has whole troops of sins under its conduct. It is not a breach of one commandment only, not a transgression of one precept or part of law or gospel, but a violation of all. It is good fruit that every command of the law, every precept of the gospel, calls for ; and he that brings not forth good fruit, makes nothing of law or gospel, tramples upon both, lives in disobedience to all. He not only disobeys the whole ' word spoken by angels,' ' every transgression and disobedience whereof receives a just recompence of reward,' Heb. ii. 2, but the word spoken by the Lord of angels. He disobeys the gospel in every part of it, and the doom of that see 2 Thes. i. 7, 8.

[2.] If you bring not forth fruit, you bring forth weeds. If you bear not good fruit, you will be fertile in that which is naught. The ground will be covered with something ; if it produce not corn, or grass, or useful herbs, it will bring forth briars, or thorns, or weeds. You will be always bringing forth something ; if it be not fruit unto God, it will be fruit to the flesh, or the world, or yourselves.

If God reap nothing of you, the devil will. The soul is a most active being, and will be still in motion one way or other, upward or downward. If it move not towards heaven, it moves towards hell ; if it be not in motion after God, it will be moving towards the world or sin ; if it act not for God, it will be in action against him ; if your thoughts, designs, affections, be not employed upon good objects, they will employ themselves upon those that are vain, or worse. It is against their nature to stay long unemployed ; or if they should stand idle, even idleness is bad fruit, if that which is sinful be so ; it is worse than an useless weed.

If you be not fruitful in good works, you will be fruitful in works that are naught, unless when you do nothing ; and that is naught too, as he found it, who hid his talent, though he employed it not to any wicked use, as you may see by his doom, Mat. xxv. 30.

Simple barrenness is not all you are guilty of, when you are unfruitful (though there is heinous guilt in that alone), but the necessary and unavoidable consequent of it, is something else which is as bad or worse. There are, and will be, cursed fruits, of one kind or other, where there is not good fruit.

[8.] Unfruitfulness renders you burdens of the earth. A fruitless soul is good for nothing ; like the vine, which, as the prophet describes it, Ezek. xv., is not of use for timber or work, no, not so much as to make a pin of, fit for nothing but the fire, and of little use there. When it is not good for fruit, it is good for nothing, it only ‘cumbers the ground,’ is but an injury, an incumbrance to the place where it grows, spends the heart of the earth to no purpose, and takes up a place unprofitably, where others being planted might bring forth fruit. If some heathens or Americans had enjoyed the means of grace and the powerful ministry of the gospel, that many souls amongst us have continued fruitless under, in all probability they would have made a better improvement thereof, and brought forth more and better fruit. Upon this account does the Lord Jesus upbraid those cities in his time, with whom the gospel prevailed not to repentance and unfruitfulness, Mat. xi. 20, 21, 28.

[4.] It is a reproach to the gospel of Christ, and the religion there taught us ; disparages its power and efficacy, when it prevails not with those who profess it, for the effects and fruits which are pleasant and acceptable to God and men, when yet it is professed to be most effectual for this purpose. It is the glory of the gospel, that it is a doctrine far transcending all that the sons of men have been acquainted with ; that it is most powerful to heal the corrupt and degenerate soul of man, and advance it to the highest improvement ; to make it partaker of a divine nature, and engender in it holy and divine qualities ; to lead men to a divine life, in all acts of holiness and righteousness, which may render them conformable to God, useful and serviceable to others, and happy in themselves.

But now in those who enjoy the gospel, profess the knowledge, belief, and embracement of it, and yet continue unfruitful, none of all this appears. The world may make use of such barren souls, as arguments that the gospel is no such excellent doctrine, has no such divine power or efficacy, produces no such desirable effects. For why ? No such thing is visible in the temper or deportment of multitudes who profess that they believe and embrace it. They are but like other men, and exceed not many who were never acquainted with the gospel ; no more humble, no more holy, no more self-denying, no more public-spirited, no more heavenly-minded, no more mortified, as to many lusts and passions, no more crucified to the world, as to the riches, delights, and splendour of it, no more candid and sincere in dealings, no more merciful, no more serviceable, no more active to do good in the world, no more fruitful in good works ; and where is then the singular excellency and power of the gospel ? The light of nature has been effectual in some, to restrain them from those enormities, from which many that enjoy the gospel abstain not. The doctrine of the heathen philosophers has led many to the practice of moral virtues, whereas many professors of the gospel are lamentably defective in points of morality. Oh, what dishonourable reflections does this cast upon the glorious gospel of Christ ! How does this tend to lay its honour in the dust, and turn its glory into shame ; and what disparages the gospel, reflects upon Christ himself, the author of it, and the divine Spirit by which it was inspired, and on whom its efficacy depends. It is well the gospel has better evidences of its power and excellency, than unfruitful professors, otherwise the divine original of it might be questioned, and the transcendent virtue and efficacy of it would be decried. However, this is the tendency of your barrenness, to make Christ and his gospel be blasphemed. If you would not be accessory to so horrid a crime as such blasphemy, you must bring forth good fruit, and much of it, and continue to bear it, that

when either God or man comes to seek fruit on you, it may not be to seek, there may be no disappointments.

[5.] It is a grievous affliction to those whom the Lord employs as his labourers, and makes them sad, whom the Lord, of all others, would not have made sad. Those whom the Lord has sent into his vineyard, and fitted for that great work, they cannot be satisfied with their wages; no, not that great 'recompence of reward' which he has promised them, unless they see the success of their labours. If their hearts be upright before God, and of a temper answerable to their calling, they value nothing like the fruits of their ministry, how much approbation, how much love soever they have, how free and liberal encouragements and supports soever they meet with. They have not the desire of their hearts, unless they see the fruits and effects of their labours upon the souls and lives of their people, unless they be brought to a fruitful profession of Christ, and grow up therein, Philip. iv. 16, 17. They were careful to supply his necessities; but this, though he took it well, was not that which he desired in comparison; nor was it acceptable, but upon that account, as it was fruit, and signified that his ministry had such effect upon them as would be abundant joy to them at the great account. He had a great, a passionate, love for souls, and an exceeding joy when he perceived they prospered, 2 Cor. vii. 8-5. He took all pains, run all hazards, to make them fruitful; he could freely spend and be spent for this, 2 Cor. xii. 15. Nor was his life dear to him in comparison of it, Acts xx. 22-24, Philip. ii. 17. Those that are faithful and duly qualified for the great work of the ministry, are in some measure like-minded, though not in the same degree. They have a great love for souls, an earnest desire to make and to see them fruitful; they travail in birth with them till Christ be formed in them, till they be born again, and till they bear fruit answerable to their new birth. And when they are disappointed, it is grievous to them as miscarrying is to a woman that passionately desires children; the frustration has in it some pain and anguish, like that of a miscarriage. Have they prayed, and wept, and studied so long, so much, to so little purpose? Have they sacrificed their worldly interest in his service, and deprived themselves of all advantages of thriving in the world, and left their dear relatives and posterity to want and contempt after them? Have they spent their time, their strength, their parts, their spirits, consumed themselves in wasting studies, and all their labours in the issue in a manner fruitless? Shall little or nothing be left them at the last but that sad complaint, 'I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought;' I have lost so much, hazarded so much, done so much, and all in vain; this people will not be gathered, or those that seem to be gathered will not be fruitful; only 'two or three berries in the upmost branches, or four or five in the outmost boughs.' Oh, where are the children that I hoped would have been given me, and that I have been so long in travail for? Alas! is the curse of a barren or of a miscarrying womb upon me? Have I been in pain, and cried out in my pangs, and brought forth nothing but wind? Shall those who for all holy fruitfulness should have been my joy and my crown, be my shame and reproach; leave themselves and me under the reproach of barrenness; barren souls, and a barren ministry? Oh how does these thoughts cut and sting those who have occasion to entertain them! Oh what tears do they wring out in secret! Oh if you were conscious to the inward wounds and heart-bleedings hereby occasioned; to the fears and jealousy, lest they have not been upright with God, lest they have run before they were sent, because they seem to have run in vain; lest they have been unfaithful, because to unsuccessful in the work of God! It is

true those that are fearful and jealous this way have ordinarily least cause to be so, but that frees them not from the trouble and afflictions of such fears; nor does it excuse those whose barrenness occasions it. And though they have this ground of comfort, that 'though Israel be not gathered,' yet their 'judgment is with the Lord, and their work,' their reward, 'with their God,' Isa. xlix. 14; notwithstanding, all this will fall heavy somewhere; those who continue unfruitful must answer for all this; their lost labour, their fruitless hazards, the consumption of strength and spirits, their torturing fears and jealousies, their grievous disappointments and afflicting mis-carriages, will all be charged on your account if you continue barren. All these will the Lord require at your hands, if you will not believe the report of Christ, or not believe it effectually and fruitfully; all these, and more than I can reckon, will add to the burden of your guilt, and make your condemnation more intolerable; all these will rise up in judgment and bear witness against you. But even the thought of this is grievous to ministers tender of the souls of sinners; that when they expected joy in their fruitfulness here and happiness hereafter, instead thereof they must be produced as witnesses against them at the great day, and make heavier the condemnation of such whose salvation they had been so great a part of their days labouring for and thirsting after. Oh, if you would not cause so grievous an affliction to those whose joy and crown you should be, if you would not be involved in so great guilt, and so dreadful condemnation, bring forth such fruits now as may prevent it!

[6.] It is a disappointment to the Lord. He looks for fruit; he comes, he sends to you for it. So in the text, and verse 7, and Isaiah v. 2, 4; he sends, Mat. xxi. 84, Mark xii. 2, Luke xx. 9, 10. Wherever the Lord vouchsafes means of fruitfulness, he expects fruit; and it is an expectation which the common sense of mankind declares to be highly just and reasonable, and so a disappointment herein will be more intolerable. If a husbandman bestow so much cost and pains upon a piece of ground, as is sufficient to make a part of the wilderness fruitful; and when harvest comes, and he expects a rich crop, he finds no more on it than if he had done nothing to it, or nothing answerable to the tillage, how will it trouble him! Such ground will undo the tenant, and make a landlord repent that ever he purchased it. So it is here, such frustrations will afflict men. But how can the great God endure it in those that are so much below him, and are more concerned, in reference to their own advantage, to bear fruit than the Lord to reap it? He has but the honour of it; you have the comfort, the profit, the happiness. Will you frustrate his expectation, when your own interest obliges you to answer it? A disappointment here is such a provocation as the Lord will not long endure. What an iniquity this is, and how the Lord resents it, is evident by what he expresseth, Jer. ii. 21, 22. The Lord had taken as much care in planting this people, viz. under his ordinances, as a man could have of the most choice plant, and expected fruit answerable; but they, as if they had been degenerate plants or wild slips, bare not such fruit as he looked for; and the blur of this iniquity was such, as all the ways or means they could devise should never either cleanse or cover it, never free them from the guilt or pollution of it; but the Lord would always have it in his sight, as a provocation of special remark. Oh if you would not be guilty of such a sin as the Lord will mark out, so as never to overlook it, never to pardon or cleanse you from it, beware of unfruitfulness! The Lord has branded this for such a sin.

[7.] It hardens the world. It tends to root religion out of the earth, at least out of the place we dwell in, and to plant atheism and infidelity in the

room of it. Those amongst us upon whom the power of religion has not yet seized, they easily discern the vanity and imposture of other religions professed in the world. If there be any worthy to be embraced, it must be the religion of Christ. Oh, but what can commend this to them, or to any, but the fruits of it? And where should they expect the fruits of it, but in those who profess they believe, embrace, and find the power of it? If such as these bring not forth more and better fruits than others, they will be ready to conclude, that their religion (even that of Christ) is no better than others, and so no religion at all worthy of entertainment. And is it not much from hence that multitudes amongst us, to comply with the custom of the country, outwardly profess the religion of it, but inwardly are atheists, and have no religion at all in their hearts? Does it not strengthen and encourage this atheism and irreligion which so lamentably abounds amongst us, when they see so little of the fruits thereof in those that profess it? Who will trouble himself much about that which is useless and worthless? And what is religion better, of what worth or use is it, if it be fruitless? If it take not them who profess it off from the world; if it mortify not their lusts and passions; if it raise not their souls above earth and self; if it ennoble not their spirits, and make them not public and active to do good, abounding in good works; if it be not full of mercy and good fruits; if it make them not better in their families, towards their relations, to all with whom they converse; it will be concluded good for little or nothing. Nothing will appear in it to attract their affections, to command reverence or esteem, or to persuade them to entertain it in their souls; nay, they will be apt to think that professors who are not fruitful are but atheists like themselves, and that they do not really believe what they profess; and so that there is nothing indeed of religion but in pretence and profession, and so they need not trouble themselves about more. Oh, 'Woe be to those by whom offences come! It were better a mill-stone were tied about their necks, and they cast into the sea.' But such offences will come, and such you will give; they will not only be offences taken, but given, if you continue barren and unfruitful in the knowledge and profession of Christ. Your unfruitfulness is an engine to exclude or banish religion out of the hearts of men, and to leave atheism and infidelity in full possession. And will you do such disservice to Christ, and to the souls of men? What can you do worse to either; or, what is there that you should more tremble at than this, which is of such a horrid and dreadful tendency?

[8.] It is a sin most highly aggravated. It has two ingredients, to instance in no more, that make a sin exceedingly sinful. It is against clear, much light, and distinguishing mercy.

First, It is a sin against all light. The light of nature discovers much of that wherein our fruitfulness consists to be our duty. The light of the law clears up that of nature, wherein it is obscured by corruption, and adds more evidence and force to it. The whole light of the gospel does still more illustrate and enforce it. The common reason of mankind shews fruitfulness to be a duty, where there are means of fruitfulness vouchsafed. There is no conscience but must come under the power of this evidence, and acknowledge it not only just, but equal.

So that to continue unfruitful is to live in disobedience to all light, to run counter to nature, law, gospel, reason, equity, and conscience. It is to offer violence to the light and dictates of all. It is forcibly to hold a truth in confinement, and violently to imprison it, when all these struggle and contend for its liberty. And what a high provocation it is to detain a truth in unrighteousness against the dictates but of one of these, against natural

light, you may see, Rom. i. 18. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against those who unjustly smother a truth which natural light would have to act freely. What wrath will be revealed against those who fetter and enslave a truth, that it cannot move and act freely in heart and life, when all light requires and strives for its liberty! The severity wherewith it is threatened shews its heinousness, Luke xii. 47.

Sins against knowledge are voluntary. There is more of the will in them, and wilful sins are presumptions, and these are 'the great transgressions,' Ps. xix. 18; such a sin is unfruitfulness. When a man knows fruitfulness to be his duty, and has means sufficient to make him fruitful, why is he barren but because he will be so? You cannot say, you know it not to be your duty; you cannot say, though you know it, ye have not means to enable you to bring forth fruit; why, then, are you not more fruitful but because you will not? Oh, take heed of sinning wilfully after ye have received the knowledge of the truth; there was no sacrifice for such sins under the law, Num. xv. 30, 31.

Secondly, It is against distinguishing mercy; it is against the gospel and the means of grace; against the end for which they are vouchsafed and continued; and these are favours which he vouchsafes not to many others, Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20.

To sin against common favours is a great provocation; it argues an intolerable perverseness and disingenuousness in him that will do it. And you will better digest an injury from a stranger, or any to whom you never shewed kindness, than one whom you have continually obliged, Ps. lv. 12.

But there is a peculiar provocation in sins against peculiar mercies; these give an accent to the sin, and make it remarkably sinful. The Lord hereby frequently aggravates the sin of his people, as being thus rendered more heinous and provoking than the sins of others, Isa. i. 2. This is it that may astonish heaven and earth, that when I have treated them, and them alone, as children, yet their demeanour should be so unanswerable to such kindness, care, and tenderness. The creatures without sense may have some resentment of such a provocation, Jer. ii. 31. If the Lord had been a wilderness to us, it had been more tolerable to have found us barren; but when he has been a Sharon, a Sorek to us, our unfruitfulness has no pretence to cover its shame. Christ may say to us, as he said to his disciples, Luke x. 24, 'Many prophets and kings have desired,' &c. And we have seen and heard such things as others had not the happiness to see nor hear; shall they be to us as vain things? Vain things they will be, and unprofitable, if they produce no fruits in us. Do we thus requite the Lord? Shall we make such unworthy returns for peculiar favours, and such as the rest of the world are strangers to? When he has made such a gracious distinction betwixt us and others, shall we bring forth no better fruits than the common? If we go not beyond all others in fruitfulness, after peculiar means afforded us for that purpose, our sin will exceed that of all others in sinfulness. You see by these particulars how heinous a crime barrenness is in those who have means sufficient to make them fruitful. And by this you may discern how dangerous it is, how much severity it will meet with, what wrath it kindles, what judgments will follow it, for these will be answerable to the greatness and heinousness of the provocation.

But to move you the more effectually to a duty of so great consequence, let me set before you the dreadful danger of neglecting it in some particulars, (1.) Barrenness exposes to the curse of God. It is a cursed evil, Heb. vi. 8. It is so 'nigh unto cursing' as there is no escaping it without better

fruit. Christ warned not only his disciples, or the Jews, but us, when he cursed the fig-tree on which he found no fruit. That barrenness must expect nothing but a curse, even from him 'in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed, Mark xi. 13, 14, 20, 21. It seems strange that Christ should curse it for want of figs, when it was not the season for that fruit. The meaning may be, it was not a seasonable or a good year for figs. Fig-trees did not bear well that year (for yet in the translation is not in the original). But even so it shews severity, and teaches us that in such places where persons are generally and ordinarily unfruitful, and good fruits are rare, much out of request, yet this will be no plea to secure any from the curse, if they be found without fruit. Christ himself, from and through whom alone we expect blessings, will curse barren souls, whatever show they make, whatever excuse they have. He works a miracle to warn us of this, and impress it the deeper on those whom it concerns. Immediately the curse takes effect, and the tree withers, and is dried up from the roots, ver. 20, and Mat. xxi. 19.

And how dreadful is it to be under the curse of God, that will cause all to dry up by the roots, estate, relations, body and soul to wither! When man curses, God may bless; or when God curses, Christ may turn it into a blessing; but when Christ curses, who then may bless? And even Christ will curse those that are unfruitful. The king of Moab thought that if Israel were but under Balaam's curse, he should smite them or drive them out, Num. xxii. 6. But what shall become of those whom God, whom Christ curses? For assuredly those whom he blesses are blessed, and those whom he curses are cursed.

Oh, if the curse of God be dreadful to you, let unfruitfulness be so too, for the curse of God is entailed upon unfruitfulness, a curse that will certainly take effect, and may do it suddenly, and can never be turned into a blessing but upon your turning from this sin.

(2.) This will put you out of God's protection, and provoke him to pull down the fences by which he secures you from the rage of Satan and his instruments, and the fury of those who would devour you or lay you waste. So much is expressly threatened for this sin, Isa. v. 4-6. And this was executed upon that people afterwards, as the psalmist expresses it, either by way of prediction, as a misery approaching, or of lamentation, as of a calamity already inflicted, Ps. lxxx. 12, 18. The psalmist's question is answered by the prophet, 'Why hast thou broken down our hedge?' &c. It was because 'instead of grapes, they brought,' &c.

This will provoke the Lord to withdraw his protection, which is your only defence, and then you lie open to all miseries, and are exposed to the will of those that hate you; then they may have their will of you, upon your estates, liberties, soul-concernments, upon all your pleasant things; then may you be eaten up and trodden down, and laid quite open to spoil and ruin. What man will be at the charge and trouble to keep up a fence about a piece of ground, of which he reaps no more than of the common, and that which lies unfenced? You may judge by what yourselves would do, that it cannot be expected that the Lord should continue to fence those in as his vineyard, who, when he looks for fruit, prove but like the heath in the wilderness.

(8.) Barrenness will deprive you of the gospel and the means of grace, Isa. v. 6. The Lord will deny the means of improvement when he finds they are afforded in vain; he will have no more labour and pains lost upon them; he will not always employ and spend his labourers to no purpose; he will either send no more labourers into such a fruitless vineyard, or call them away whom he has sent, or suffer them to be thrust out, in judgment

to those who are not improved by them, and leave them like the heath in the desert, which knows not when good comes, Jer. xvii. 6, shall have no benefit by that which is the greatest advantage to others, Mat. xxi. 43. Those who bring not forth the fruits of the kingdom, such as beseeem it, such as are required by it, the kingdom shall be taken from them, and given to those who will bring forth such fruit. The kingdom of God, i. e. of the Messiah, that blessed state and administration brought into the world by Christ, and begun at his coming; that which was of old promised as the greatest happiness that the world should ever see; that which was so ardently desired by kings, prophets, and righteous men, and for the discovery of which the angels longed; that fulness of Spirit, of light, of grace, of hope, of comfort, of happiness, of redemption, of salvation, which the kingdom of Christ holds forth, and accompanies the happy administration of it by the gospel then preached and published, and the ordinances and officers by his regal power instituted, and his Spirit in both then more largely poured out and more powerfully working: those that bring not forth good fruits are in danger to be deprived of all this, as though they were left out of this gracious administration. They shall be cut off from all the blessings, all the privileges, all the advantages of the kingdom of Messiah. They shall be left in such a state as though Christ had never come, nor had erected a kingdom in the world; as though the acceptable year of the Lord had never been published; as though the day of salvation, the day of greatest joy to all nations, had never dawned.

Oh dreadful condition! Christ shall profit them nothing; nor shall his kingdom and government anything avail them.

'The kingdom,' i. e. the gospel of the kingdom, 'shall be taken from those who bring not forth the fruits of it,' (that is in effect the same.) The unfruitful shall be deprived of all the privileges and advantages of a gospel-state; this sin will bereave a people of the gospel, upon which their glory, life, peace, comfort, and hopes depend. So that unfruitfulness will deprive a people,

[1.] Of their glory. When the gospel is gone, the glory is departed, the crown is fallen from their heads.

[2.] It hazards the life of the barren, the life of their souls; for the gospel is the word of life; for it conveys life, and preserves it. By this they are 'quickened, who are dead in sins and trespasses;' it is the immortal seed by which they are begotten, and born again, 1 Peter i. 23, and it is that by which those who are born again are nourished, 1 Peter ii. 2. It is the bread of life; and when it is taken away, the staff of bread is broken, that which upholds and keeps the soul in life; the loss, the want of it is a famine, Amos viii. 11, 13, not a famine which starves the body, but which destroys the soul. No such evil arrows of famine, as those that stick in the soul; none so dreadfully destructive: and unfruitfulness prepares such arrows, and sharpens them, and provokes God to shoot them.

[3.] It cuts you off from peace with God. The gospel is styled the 'gospel of peace,' Rom. x. 15. It is 'the word of reconciliation,' 2 Cor. v. 18, 19. Herein he offers terms of peace, upon which accepted he will be reconciled to sinners. And while the gospel is continued, he is treating with them about this happy peace; his ministers are ambassadors for this purpose. But when the gospel is gone, the treaty is broke off; his agents that managed the treaty are recalled; the Lord will no more offer peace to such; they shall no more hear of it, nor of any inclinations in the Lord to it. God of hosts hereby declares that he is an enemy, and will be so. This is like to be the dreadful issue of this sin.

[4. It robs them of all true comfort. The gospel is the ground of all our comforts ; the sum of it is 'comfortable words,' Zech. i. 18. It contains that which alone can make every relation, every enjoyment, every condition comfortable. Without this, the pleasantest place or state in the world is but as a dry and thirsty wilderness, wherein there is no water ; the best enjoyments of this world are but miserable comforters. Take away the gospel, and the sun is, as it were, turned into darkness, and the moon into blood ; and all the lower springs, from whence you fetch your comforts, send forth nothing but waters of Marah, waters of bitterness, or, which is worse, and more dangerous, streams of sweetened poison. Such are sensual delights, such are worldly comforts, when not healed and corrected by the sovereign virtue of the gospel. You may bid adieu to all that is truly comfortable when the gospel leaves you, for all the sparks which you can strike out of the world, or its enjoyments, you will lie down in sorrow and darkness—in such a dismal and comfortless condition will this sin leave you. This is the woful tendency of it, since it tends to deprive you of the gospel.

[5.] It blasts all hopes. It is through the grace of the gospel that we have, as everlasting consolation, so good hope, 2 Thes. ii. 16. There is the foundation of all our hopes ; and when the gospel is removed, their foundation is gone, they all fall and vanish. 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ' (says the apostle, 1 Cor. xv. 19), 'we are of all men most miserable.' And where have we any ground for hopes beyond this life, but in the gospel ? What but this can let in any glimmerings of hope for life everlasting ? Nay, even for this life we have no hopes in Christ, but through the gospel. Take away the gospel, and you take away from sinners all hopes, both for this life and for the life to come. When left without this, they are left without Christ, without God in the world, and without hope either for this world or the world to come. There remains nothing for them, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation. Into such a hopeless and desperate condition does unfruitfulness plunge barren souls ; it provokes God to take away the gospel, and he has threatened he will for this cause do it. They are in apparent danger to have the gospel of the kingdom taken from them, and therewith their glory, life, peace, comfort, and hopes. If this do not make unfruitfulness dreadful to you, what will, what can do it ?

(4.) This will suspend heavenly influences, without which the gospel itself can do you no good. This the Lord threatens for the unfruitfulness of his vineyard, Isa. v. 6. The rain and other influences of the heavenly bodies are not more necessary to the plants below, for their life and growth, than the concurrence, and operation, and influences of the Spirit are necessary for the life and growth of our souls. The gospel and ordinances cannot be effectual upon us without these, but these may be, and are, in some cases, effectual without them ; let the ground be never so well planted, or tilled, or manured, yet without rain, and heavenly influx, nothing will grow, or thrive, or come to maturity ; all will languish and wither away. So will our souls consume and pine away, whatever ordinances we enjoy, if the Spirit of Christ concur not, if we be not influenced from above. The ministry of the apostles, of the greatest of them, of persons extraordinarily qualified and assisted, will not take effect, will prevail for no increase without this, 1 Cor. iii. 5-7. Their planting and watering had come to nothing, if God had not concurred, if it had not been for the divine influence ; it was this that gave the increase. And if there had been no Paul nor Apollos to plant or water, no such instruments, or none at all, this could have given an increase, as we see in Cornelius.

Now these influences, without which the gospel and ordinances, in what power and plenty soever you enjoy them, will not be effectual ; which are so necessary, that without them, what means soever you have, what pains soever be taken with you, your souls will certainly wither and pine away ; your unfruitfulness provokes God to withhold them ; he threatens it, and his truth and justice requires the execution ; his Spirit will not always strive, when his strivings are still resisted ; he will not always move when he finds his motions still stifled and smothered ; he will not always suffer his influences to be lost upon you. The Spirit will withdraw, and then spiritual judgments (the first-born of his wrath) do follow. Then has the word and ordinances such a woful operation upon them, as hinders them from being converted and healed ; quite opposite to those gracious ends for which they were first appointed, Isa. vi. 9, 10. And this befell the Jews afterwards, for their unfruitfulness, and non-improvement of what they enjoyed, as is evident by the application made thereof by our Lord Jesus, Mat. xiii. 12-15.

(5.) Unfruitfulness brings temporal judgments and calamities. It brings them suddenly, and in a short time ; and such as are desolating, laying them waste ; and such as are transcendent, and speak greater severity than those which befall such as enjoy not the means of unfruitfulness.

[1.] It exposes to sudden calamities. They come swiftly upon such as are barren under the means of fruitfulness. The Lord is not wont to forbear them so long as others ; he has not so much patience, no such long-suffering for them. It is such a provocation as he will not bear long with. This is plain in this parable : three years the fruitless fig-tree is suffered to stand in the vineyard ; it might have grown many years longer, if its barrenness had not exposed it to a violent stroke, and brought it to an untimely end ; but within that time, such trees usually bear, if they be good for aught. So long he bears with it, but after three years he passes the sentence of excision, and orders it to be cut down. And though the importunity of the vine-dresser prevails for one year's longer forbearance, yet that is all that could be obtained. No longer reprieve than for one year ; if that year produce nothing, the vine-dresser also will have it cut down. A tree in the forest or the highway, though it bear no fruit, will be suffered to stand longer than in an orchard, a place of choice plants and fruit-trees ; it is a greater eye-sore there. A man will bear with weeds in the highway, or a common, well and long enough, but he cannot so long endure them in his garden. The Lord can bear with the heathen, or any that enjoy not the means of grace, their barrenness is not so great a provocation ; but those who have a standing in his orchard, and are planted under the means of fruitfulness, he cannot so well forbear, he will not so long endure, Acts xvii. 80. While they had not the light of the gospel and his ordinances, *ὁρῶντες*, he overlooked them, took no severe notice of them ; their unfruitfulness was passed by : ' But now he commands,' &c. He resolves to take another course ; he will be quicker with them, unless they repent, and ' bring forth fruits meet for repentance,' *πᾶσι πανταχού*, ' all, everywhere.' And, Acts xiv. 16, he suffered that in the wilderness which he will not suffer in his vineyard ; he will not suffer so long now as he did then ; he will cut down those speedily now under the means of grace, who might have stood long, though barren, without them. Those whom the heat and influences of the gospel does not ripen for fruit, it makes them sooner ripe for wrath and judgment.

[2.] It brings desolating judgments, such as lay a place and people utterly waste : this is threatened for this sin, Isa. v. 6. In the original it is waste-

ness, the Hebrew using the abstract to express a superlative. As Isa. i. 7, desolation, *i. e.* most desolate, so here, the fruitless vineyard shall be made wasteness, *i. e.* utterly, extremely waste; so that it shall not differ at all from the common; nothing shall be left in it, to signify that it was before a vineyard, that it was ever planted or enclosed, or any cost bestowed on it, or any special care taken of it.

This is a desolating sin; it will turn Sharon into a desert, and make that place which was like the garden of God to become a wilderness. It will ruin a valley of vision, and turn it into the valley of the shadow of death. It will make such a place as mount Zion like to ruined Babylon, as it is described Rev. xviii. 2, 'when it was become,' &c., or as by the prophet, Isa. xiii. 21, 22, and xxxiv. 13, 14.

And it is utter ruin that is denoted here in this parable, by cutting down. It is not stripping off the leaves, or cutting off all the branches, or cleaving the body of the tree, that unfruitfulness exposes to; but a greater severity, such as will quite ruin it, a hewing it down by the roots, Mat. iii. It is to be hewn down where the axe is laid, and that is, by the root, so as to leave no hope that ever it shall grow again. If you would not be utterly ruined; if you would not bring desolation upon the place of your abode, nor have a hand in bringing the axe to the very root of it, oh take heed of continuing unfruitful!

[8.] Judgment shall be more terribly executed upon such, who, having the means of fruitfulness, do not improve them, than upon those who never had them. They shall be ruined in a more dreadful manner than any other. This sin fills more vials of wrath, and fills them fuller; and they will be poured upon those who are guilty of it, and continue so, with more fury. The Lord will empty all his vials upon them; even the dregs thereof will be their portion. There is abundant evidence for this, in his proceedings against his ancient people. Israel had the privilege of enjoying the means of fruitfulness above others, Ps. cxlvii., and they not improving them, are threatened more severely: Amos iii. 2, I have done more for you than for others, 'therefore I will punish you more than any.' The execution of the threatening was answerable, Dan. ix. 10; there is their unfruitfulness, ver. 11; there is the threatening executed, ver. 12; there is the exceeding terribleness of the execution. Under the whole heavens none had enjoyed such means of grace; and under the whole heavens none met with such wrath. Tribulation and anguish will seize upon every people, 'every soul,' that brings not forth fruit; but most of all, upon those who enjoy most means: Rom. ii. 9, 'to the Jew first.' On them shall it seize most terribly, because they first, and most, enjoyed the gospel and means of grace. No other that are barren shall escape the wrath of God; but upon them the wrath came 'to the uttermost,' 1 Thes. ii. 16, *εἰς ἔσχατος*, to the uttermost, both for extremity and continuance: wrath in the highest degree, in its perfection; and wrath of largest extent, for its duration. It drew tears from Christ, to consider the dreadful issue of their unfruitfulness, though they were his enemies, Luke xix. 41-44. All this, because they did not fruitfully improve the day of grace. This brought upon them so great tribulation, as never was known in the world before that time, nor should be ever after, Mat. xxiv. 21. The world never saw such instances of dreadful severity in any people, as in those who have been barren under the means of fruitfulness. The day of a gracious visitation, the time wherein the means of grace are vouchsafed, when it is not improved, will make way for such a visitation, as will make the ears of all that hear thereof to tingle; a 'day of blackness, and thick darkness;' but blacker and darker upon those to whom the day of grace has been most lightsome.

The Lord has visited you more graciously than others. But if you bring not forth fruit answerable hereto, if you 'neglect this great salvation, how shall ye escape?' How? Why, any people in the world shall escape better than you, when another day of visitation comes. 'It shall be more tolerable' for heathens, for Turks, for papists, for the darker parts of the Protestant world, for any people on earth, than for those that are barren in this nation; nay, for many people in this nation, 'than for you.' There is more wrath treasured up, there will be more indignation poured out on you, than any, if you continue unfruitful. You have had more means; the Lord expects more fruits of you. If you bear not more, you must certainly bear more wrath. The Lord has rods for others, but he has scorpions for you. His little finger will be heavier upon you, in the day when he judges unfruitfulness, than his loins upon others.

[6.] This brings eternal wrath; the fire that never goes out was kindled for unfruitful trees. They are good for nothing else but the fire, John xv. 2. He takes it away; he cuts it off. But that is not all; it is cut off, in order to burning, ver. 6. Fruitless branches shall not be endured on the tree; such trees shall have no standing in the vineyard, they shall be cut down. To be cut down in God's wrath is dreadful. But that is not all which unfruitfulness will bring upon you; there is something more terrible follows: cutting down is in order to casting into the fire, Mat. iii. 10; so John Baptist told the Pharisees and Sadducees; so our Lord Jesus tells us all, Mat. vii. 19. Mercy itself has no more favour for the fruitless. Jesus, who alone 'delivers from the wrath to come,' will deliver none who continue unfruitful from this wrath. He it is that passes this doom upon them, 'the lake that burns with fire and brimstone' is the place for barren souls. That fire which 'the wrath of God, like a river of brimstone, kindles' and keeps flaming everlastingly, that which will burn and torment for ever and ever, is the portion of the unfruitful. Nothing less; nothing more tolerable than exquisite tortures, such as fire is to our bodies; nothing short of everlasting burnings. This will be the issue of your unfruitfulness. If you continue therein, it will be so certainly. Delude not yourselves with vain hopes; Think not the leaves of a specious profession will secure you. This will but provoke the flame, and make it rage the more.

Think not to escape, because you bring not forth so bad fruits as some others, because you wallow not in gross wickedness and open profaneness. Nothing will secure you but good fruits, such as I have before described. Those whom our Lord Jesus, at the last day, will send into everlasting fire, are not described to be gross sinners, but barren professors, Mat. xxv. 41-43. Those on his left hand are pronounced by the Judge of heaven and earth accursed, and turned into hell; not for outrageous wickedness, but for want of good fruits. Neglects, omissions, and mere want of fruit, though you abound not with vermin, is enough to damn you, and to send you from Christ's presence with a curse, amongst the devil and his angels. This shall not only be the doom of those who know not God, and are not acquainted with the gospel, but of those especially who are the 'children of the kingdom,' in respect of profession and privileges, and bring not forth the fruits of it, Mat. viii. 12. Those that know not God shall not escape. No more shall those that obey not the gospel; though they profess it, though they know it, though they believe it, yet if they obey it not, *i. e.* if they bring not forth the fruits which it enjoins and requires them to bear, if they deny not ungodliness and worldly lusts, Christ himself will be revealed from heaven, to take vengeance on them in a most terrible manner, 2 Thes. i. 7-9.

They that are barren under the means of fruitfulness, shall not only be

turned into hell, but they shall suffer more in hell than others; their torment shall be more grievous than of those who never had the means of fruitfulness. The righteous Judge will double their sufferings in the place of torment. It will be more tolerable for the worst of sinners, who perished without the means of grace, than for such, Mat. xxv. 20-22.

The ancient inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon were some of those cursed Canaanites, against whom the Lord will have greater severity used in this world than any other, give charge they should be utterly rooted out, and not suffered to breathe upon the face of the earth; yet the condition of these cursed Canaanites should be more tolerable in hell, their torments more easy than those of Chorazin and Bethsaida, who enjoyed the gospel and means of grace in power and plenty, but made no fruitful improvement thereof, vers. 23, 24. Capernaum, the city where Christ much resided and preached, was exalted above others in respect of gospel enjoyments, and as it were lifted up to heaven; but by her unfruitfulness was cast down lower into hell, and sunk under a heavier burden of wrath. The inhabitants of that city, for the wretched non-improvement of the means of fruitfulness vouchsafed them, were to suffer more in hell than the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, the most abominable of sinners, upon whom God rained a hell upon earth. Oh then, if ye will be forewarned to flee from the wrath to come; if you would escape the damnation of hell; if you would not sink lower, and suffer more than others; if you would not have that dreadful furnace made hotter, more tormenting, more intolerable to you than to those of Sodom: bring forth fruits worthy of the gospel; there is no other way to escape so great damnation.

(7.) This has actually ruined and laid desolate the first and ancient churches. This has buried in ruins the most famous and flourishing churches that ever were in the world; it has brought desolation upon a world of them, so many for number as it may astonish us. This has rooted out the Christian name from a great part of that vast empire which is called the world in the New Testament, and has left little but the name in other parts where the gospel first and most prevailed. Come see what desolation this sin has made in the earth, and tremble at the sight thereof, and learn to look on it as a sin which is followed with ruin and destruction, wherever it prevails. Its name may be Abaddon and Apollyon, Rev. ix. 11, the destroyer. It is the 'abomination that makes desolate.' ~

There were multitudes of churches and Christians in Africa, for the space of two thousand miles, such as were eminent for their profession and sufferings too, where now there is not one to be found that professes Christ.

There were once many hundred thousand Christians in Egypt, many flourishing churches in the provinces of it, which are now vanished, and almost come to nothing.

There was a glorious church at Jerusalem, very many churches in Judea and Palestine, the foundation thereof laid by Christ himself, the structure raised by the apostles. But now where are they? The structure laid in the dust, and the foundation razed. This sin has plucked up, even by the roots, that which was planted by Christ himself, and extraordinary officers divinely inspired, and miraculously empowered; and what then can stand before it?

There was a church at Antioch in which the Christian name first began; many churches in Syria, Mesopotamia, and the regions round about. But where are they now? The eye that saw them can see them no more.

There were most flourishing churches in the lesser Asia, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and other regions of that once happy country, where the gospel

rode in triumph in the ministry of Paul and other apostolical men. But now they are subdued by a barbarous hand, the seven golden candlesticks quite overturned, and more than seventy times seven besides them laid in the dust.

There were multitudes of churches in Thrace, Macedonia, in Greece and Achaia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and others in great numbers, and through all those countries. But what small, what woful relics of churches or Christians can there now be found !

Then for Italy, and other parts nearer us, where the gospel was once effectual, and religion in its power and purity in former times flourished, are now over-run with popery. It was this sin that broke down the banks, and made way for that deluge of Mahomedanism which has drowned the primitive churches, and overwhelmed the eastern and southern parts of the once Christian world, and let in that inundation of popery, which has prevailed so far and so long in the west. The apostle speaks of 'all the world,' which then brought forth fruit through the gospel, the word of truth, Col. i. 6. And it spread further, and prevailed more and more in that world, after the apostles' time. But how little of all that world has that sin left in Christ's possession ! This has divided it almost all betwixt Turk and pope ; it is but a little, in comparison, that is left to Christ's share. It was once a vine, to which that the psalmist speaks of could not be compared, Ps. lxxx. The Lord prepared room before it, and did cause it to take deep root, and it filled not only a land but a world : 'the hills were covered,' &c., vers. 10, 11. But for unfruitfulness were 'her hedges broken down, so that all they that passed by the way did pluck her. The boar out of the wood has wasted it, and the wild beast of the field has devoured it.' This is the foundation of that apostasy under which the world, which once owned Christ, now groans. God gave so many churches a bill of divorce ; God 'gave them over to strong delusions,' because they 'received not the truth in love,' i. e. because of their unfruitfulness, according to the apostle's prophecy, 2 Thes. ii. 10, 11. If they had received the love of the truth, they would have obeyed it ; if they had obeyed it, they had been fruitful. (For what is fruitfulness, but obedience to the gospel ?) Because they were unfruitful, God gave them up to those delusions and impostures which now prevail in the world, and have done for many ages, supplanting and smothering the doctrine of Christ, which once triumphed everywhere. So that it is unfruitfulness that has ruined all, and has given Satan possession of those large countries and many kingdoms which were once the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ. This sin has ruin and desolation following it, wherever it comes. What people, what church, can be secured against such a destructive engine, which has ruined a world, and amongst the rest, laid desolate those churches which were once the glory of Christ, and the joy and crown of the apostles ! This has wasted, this has consumed them. Look upon the ghastly face of them everywhere, and learn to fear, learn to abhor unfruitfulness, which has made such fearful havoc in the world, and has turned the most glorious and flourishing churches that ever the world had into ruinous heaps.

(8.) This is the main ground of the Lord's controversy with us at this day. That the Lord has a controversy with us in this nation, is so evident, as scarce any amongst us can question it. The Lord has declared it from heaven with a loud voice, the voice of terrible judgments, and such as one way or other have reached every one amongst us. He has pleaded it so, as we have not only heard, but felt it.

All will agree in this, that God is and has been contending with us ; and

also, that it is our great concernment to inquire after the ground of it. And when we descend to particulars in this inquiry, there may be some difference; men's apprehensions may be various, according as their interests, their principles, their prejudices are various; yet must all agree in this, that nothing can be pitched on with more certainty, than our unfruitfulness. Herein we cannot be mistaken, we may resolve on this, upon such grounds as cannot deceive us. For this we may observe all along in Scripture, that unfruitfulness (the means being vouchsafed), wherever it be found, is always a ground of God's controversy. And the Scripture, that is the rule by which we must now judge and discern. And so sufficient it is for this purpose, that we have no need of a discovery by special revelation.

If we have been barren under the means of fruitfulness, there needs be no doubt to any who will be directed by the Scripture, but that the Lord contends with us for this. And it is too apparent that we have not brought forth fruit worthy of the gospel; we have been far from fruitfulness, answerable to the means of grace we have enjoyed. Now if the Lord have always contended with a people, when he has found them barren, under the means sufficient to make them fruitful, and this be our case, this our guilt, we need not be to seek why the Lord has been and is contending with us. If this be the cursed thing which has always troubled those with whom it was found, and it be found in our tents, we may conclude this is the Achan, this is it which has troubled us. And indeed, whatever particular can be justly fixed on, as the cause of the Lord's displeasure, it is comprised in this, either we have not brought forth grapes, or we have brought forth wild grapes. So that all, in the issue, may be resolved into unfruitfulness; and therefore, if you would not have the Lord to contend with us still, if you would have the Lord's controversy cease, with a people that are as stubble before him, take away the ground of it; bring forth more and better fruit; cast out this Jonah, if you would have the storm laid that threatens to wreck us. This will lay it, and nothing else. Take what course you will, if you continue unfruitful, the Lord's anger will not be turned away, but his hand will be stretched out still.

(9.) This is it which has bereaved us of all we have lost. To instance only in the concernments of our souls, which should be, of all other things, most precious to us. This is it which has restrained the liberty of the gospel, and retrenched us as to that plenty of the means of grace we might have enjoyed. For we find not, in all the Scripture, that ever the Lord straitened a people in these respects, but because they did not fruitfully improve them. It is our unfruitfulness that has cut us short, and brought our souls to 'a morsel of bread.' This is it which has broken our assemblies, and removed our teachers into corners. This is it that has smitten the shepherds, and scattered the flocks, and laid the heritage of God almost desolate. To this we owe our breaches, our dispersions, our fears, our hazards. There had been no laws of any such tendency, if our unfruitfulness had not concurred to make them; no instruments to attempt any such thing, if our barrenness had not raised them.

We should overlook other things, and cast our eye upon that which has set them a-work, and without which they had never moved. That which has disturbed us, that which has abridged us, is not so far off as we are apt to look. It is in our own hearts and lives; it is the unfruitfulness of both. We need look no further upon any cause or instrument, but as that may help us to a more severe reflection upon our barrenness. Let us never be so unjust as to accuse others; let us blame ourselves as most blameworthy, and turn our anger upon that which most deserves it, our non-improvement of what

we enjoyed ; and if the condition of others be more lamentable than ours, and their hazards greater ; if any be in danger to have their souls poisoned or starved for want of spiritual food, or want of that which is wholesome, let this engage us to bewail unfruitfulness, and to fear it, and to abhor it. No souls amongst us had ever known want, or suffered by spiritual famine, had it not been for their barrenness under plenty ; and if we would have our wants supplied, our breaches repaired, and the stroke of our wound healed, the way is plain before us ; let us bring forth more and better fruit, and it will quickly be done.

(10.) This endangers the loss of what is left us. All that is come upon us will not excuse us, if we continue under this guilt : Mat. xxv. 29, [From] ' him that hath not,' i. e. who fruitfully improves not what he is entrusted with, ' shall be taken that which he hath,' though he have but a little. Whatever we have lost, which our souls once enjoyed, we have something left. The Lord, notwithstanding all forfeitures, does still entrust us with a little ; he is trying us somehow longer how we will improve it. We are now upon our good behaviour in this respect : if we improve it not to more fruitfulness, what can we expect but that he should take from us ' even that which we have' ? The sun is now clouded and somewhat darkened ; but then it will set, though it seem noon-day. The staff of bread (that by which our souls live) is cracked now, but this will quite break it ; we are cut off from a full harvest, but this will not leave us so much as the gleanings ; our teachers are removed into corners, but this will pluck them thence, so that our eyes may not so much as see them there. The scarcity will end in a famine, and that famine may not only reach us, but our posterity, and hazard the souls of this generation, and that which is coming. Our candle-stick may be quite removed, and we left like those dismal places which were once eminent churches, but are now synagogues of Satan, or ruinous heaps. If this sin have done that in the green tree, what shall be done to the dry ? And if those ancient churches escaped not, where shall we appear ? Oh, there are horrid and prodigious miseries and devastations in the bowels of this sin. If it should but bring forth what we have feared, we may think it bad enough. Oh, but it may be delivered of miseries and calamities greater than ever entered into our hearts to fear.

When I consider what this sin has done in the southern and eastern parts of the world ; how it has stripped them of gospel enjoyments ; stripped them naked, as in the day when they were born, and made them as a wilderness, which were once like the paradise of God ; I cannot keep my heart from trembling at what may befall these western parts for the same sin. I know no way, I see no hopes we have to fare better than those who groan under Turkish slavery, or perish in popish darkness, if we bring not forth better fruit.

Our barrenness is our danger ; we are afraid of other things, but then we fear, where no fear is, in comparison. We fear the malice and violence of those who bear ill-will to us, and grudge us what liberty is left us ; we fear their counsels, designs, suggestions, practices ; but none of these can prosper or succeed, unless our barrenness make them prosperous : none of these can move us, can prejudice us, unless our unfruitfulness arm God against us. The foot of pride cannot come near us, the hand of the wicked cannot remove us, if this do not open their way ; but if we continue barren, we can neither expect the return of what is gone, nor the continuance of what is left. We shall be so far from being entrusted with more, as even that which we have shall be taken from us.

Thus I have shewed you the equity of this duty. There is, there can be

nothing, more reasonable, more equal, than that you should be fruitful ; you will be utterly inexcusable, self-condemned, if you are not. How heinously sinful barrenness is ! it will involve you in the greatest guilt. How extremely dangerous it is ! it will expose you to all that is dreadful.

Let me, as a further inducement to fruitfulness, touch some of the great and blessed advantages which attend and follow it.

1. Hereby you glorify God. This is the best, the only way you have to give him glory, John xv. 8, Philip. i. 11. We glorify God, not by adding anything to his essential glory, for that is infinite, not capable of any addition ; but declaratively, by declaring that he is glorious, by giving a testimony to his glorious perfections, by making it appear that he is glorious. And there is a voice in good fruits that declares this ; a light in them that discovers it, makes it apparent to others ; and so engages them to acknowledge it, and thereby to glorify him, Mat. v. 16.

By bearing good fruits, and bringing them forth to God, we declare and acknowledge his greatness and goodness, to which his other glorious excellencies are reduced. His *greatness* ; for good fruits are acts of obedience to him, and thereby his sovereignty, dominion, and authority over us, is really acknowledged. His *goodness* too : for, by bringing forth fruit to God, and not ourselves, we seek him, and not ourselves ; we please him, we serve him, we aim at him ; we live to him, and not to ourselves, and so shew we have resigned up ourselves to him as our last end ; and so declare him to be our chief good, and that which we count absolutely best of all. And this gives God the glory that is due to him as God, as the greatest and best, *Maximus Optimus*.

And we have no other way to glorify God but by bearing good fruits. No fruit disparages him : *bad fruits* are an affront to him. There is in both a contempt of his greatness ; an abuse, a denial of his goodness. If you be unfruitful, God has no honour by you ; you do nothing but dishonour him ; you deny him to be glorious, or worthy to be so acknowledged ; you live in opposition to that great end of God, which he aimed at in all that he has done for you, or for the whole creation. You do your part to leave God without honour in the world ; for from whom on earth should the Lord expect glory, if not from you ? The inferior creatures will rise up in judgment against you, and condemn you ; for they all honour God, by bringing forth such fruits as they are capable of. You, from whom most fruits are expected, are only barren, and most a dishonour to God, from whom, in all reason, he might look for most glory.

But then, bringing forth fruit being the way, the best way, to glorify God, it is your greatest perfection, your highest excellency. The angels themselves can do nothing better, nothing higher ; they do, it is true, glorify him more ; but they cannot do more than glorify him. There is nothing higher, nothing more excellent than this, for it is the highest end of the great God himself ; you pursue the same design, which the Lord himself has been pursuing, from the foundation of the world to this day, and will be for ever ; you act in a conformity to the great God, and in a subserviency to his chief end, than which there is nothing more noble and excellent, nothing more desirable to God, or men, or angels ; you can do nothing that will more please God, or will more advance him, or will render you more like him. On this account he will glory in you, Isa. lxi. 8.

2. This is the way to have much of God's presence, much communion with him. It is the presence of God that makes heaven glorious, and it is communion with him that is the happiness of heaven. The more fruit you bring forth, the more of heaven will you have upon earth ; the more of that

presence and communion which makes heaven a place of glory and happiness. The Lord will be much with those in whom he delights and takes pleasure; and he takes pleasure in those who bear good fruit, for that is pleasant to him; he calls it 'pleasant fruit,' Cant. iv. 18; hereupon the spouse sues for Christ's presence, ver. 16. And he needs not much entreaty where there are such attractives: he comes immediately, chap. v. 1. Christ comes, and entertains himself with this fruit, which is so pleasant to him, as he expresses it by what is most delicious to us.

We cannot entertain Christ with anything so acceptable to him as the fruits of the Spirit, and he will not be a stranger where his welcome and entertainment so pleases him. If your souls be as gardens, as orchards replenished with pleasant fruit, Christ himself will frequently be with you, he will delight to walk there. It is the way to have your daily course a walking with God. None can expect such clear discoveries of Christ, such gracious visits, such blessed interviews, so constant intercourse with him, as those that are fruitful. If you have little of Christ's presence, if he be seldom with you, if you have cause to complain of distance and strangeness, examine whether he find not little in you that he likes, little good fruit. He is not wont to deal so with those whose fruits please him, Isa. lxiv. 5, 'worketh righteousness;' i. e. who brings forth the fruits of righteousness. If you would have the Lord to meet you in your worldly affairs, so that you may converse with God while you are conversing with men, if this be desirable to you, see that you be then working righteousness. If you would have the Lord meet you in his ordinances, make fruitfulness your end and design in the use of them, then will your assemblies be, as the tabernacle is called, Lev. i. 1, 'a place of meeting;' not of meeting one another, but of meeting with God. There will you see his face, and hear his voice, and spy his goings, and feel his workings, and taste the refreshments which attend his presence, and flow from communion with him.

8. This is the way to have more of the means of grace, to have them in more plenty, power, liberty: Mat. xiii. 12, 'To him that hath,' i. e. who fruitfully improves what he hath. If he have little, he shall have more; if he have much, he shall have abundance. This we are further assured of by the Lord's proceeding with those who faithfully improved their talents, Mat. xxv. 21-28. Would you have more advantages for your souls than former unfruitfulness has left you? Would you have the gospel and ordinances without restraint? Would you have his worship in public without sinful or suspected mixtures? Would you be brought out of corners, set in a large place, to praise the Lord in the great congregation? Would you have your lights no longer under a bushel, but set upon their candlesticks, and made burning and shining lights indeed? Do ye long, mourn, pray for this, that the gospel might have a free passage, that it may run and be glorified, none might obstruct or obscure it? Why, here is a plain and open way for the procuring of all this: be faithful in the little you now have, make a more fruitful improvement of it, and the Lord, in due time, will entrust you with more.

This is the way to have more means for your soul's improvement, and more of those heavenly influences which are necessary to make them effectual. Isa. xxvii. 2, 8, 'Red wine' was the best, the most generous wine that country afforded. The vineyard which produced this, which brought forth the best fruit, the Lord undertakes to water it every moment. Endeavour to bring forth better fruit, satisfy yourselves with no other than the best, and the Lord will take special care of you; he himself will water you, and do it

every moment. You shall never want any assistance, any refreshment, which may make your souls grow and flourish.

4. This will be your safety, whatever your dangers be ; your security against all attempts, whether subtle or violent. Whoever threaten or design upon you, whoever would bereave you of what is precious to you, this is the way to defeat all their attempts, to turn all their counsels into foolishness. Take this course, and it will confute all your own fears, and establish you when all things totter and shake about you. The 'vineyard of red wine,' that which brings forth good fruit, the Lord undertakes for its security, Isa. xxvii. 2, 8. If they prevail, it must be against God ; for he it is that keeps it. If they find it without defence, it must be some time that can neither be referred to night nor day ; for by night or day none shall hurt it, every moment of both the Lord himself will keep it. They may attempt, but at their peril, as ver. 4 ; it will be with no other success than if briars and thorns should make an attempt upon a consuming fire. Those that will be like pricking briars and thorns to the people under God's protection, instead of burning them, shall burn themselves ; for the Lord will keep and secure those that are fruitful as with a 'wall of fire,' that which will not only fence them, but destroy their opposers, Zech. ii. 5.

When the Lord has 'purged his people,' Isa. iv. 4, and made them fruitful, so that their fruit shall be excellent, ver. 2, and every one in Jerusalem shall be called holy, ver. 8, then does the Lord undertake to secure them and their assemblies, so that they might meet together for the worship of God without fear of danger or disturbance, ver. 5. The Lord himself will be unto them, both at home and in the places where they meet to serve him, what the pillar of fire and cloud was to the Israelites in their way to Canaan, both their conduct and a wonderful protection. As that interposed betwixt them and the Egyptians, Exod. xiv. 19, 20, 24, so will the Lord interpose betwixt his people and those that endanger them, and will as effectually secure them and their soul-concernments as if that miraculous pillar were again commanded to attend them ; and upon all their glory there shall be a defence. He will cover them when assembled for his service as that cloud covered the tabernacle when it was within filled with his glory, Exod. xl. 84, &c. Neither heat when it is fair, nor storm when it rains, shall annoy them. You see the way to be secured from the dangers of every season ; the way to have what you think in danger, and for which your hearts sometimes tremble, kept safe and secret, as though you were overshadowed by the Almighty ; the way to be kept from disturbance, and fear of it.

5. Thus you may preserve others also, and save them from ruin, who are in great danger of it. A whole tree may be spared for some fruitful branches when it is very near cutting down, Isa. lrv. 8. As a man offended with a vine that is not fruitful, according to what he expects, gives order to have it stubbed up, yet before the order is executed, spying some grapes or clusters on it which may afford good wine, is moved thereby to spare the whole tree ; so may the Lord, when he is ready to execute judgment, forbear a multitude for his servants' sake, for some few amongst them who are fruitful. When a family, a town, a country, is too generally barren, and the Lord thereby provoked to cut it down by some destroying judgment, yet if he find some branches (though not comparable in number to the whole) replenished with such fruits as he delights in, the whole may fare better for those few, and be spared for their sakes.

The holy seed, those that bring forth the fruits of holiness, may be the support of a place when it is falling into ruins, according to that, Isa. vi. 13.

The Lord would proceed in a way tending to the utter desolation of city and country, ver. 11, 12, yet there being a remnant, a small part of them, like a tenth, which were a holy seed, holy in heart and life, these should be such a security to those who had escaped, as trees are planted on the sides of a bank, which keep it from mouldering away. The holy seed, those few which were fruitful in holiness, should be the substance, *i. e.* the support of the rest, so that all should not run to ruin. You see this is the way, not only to be safe yourselves in a day of judgment and common calamity, but to preserve others from perishing, whose barrenness is bringing swift destruction upon them; you may hereby secure your families, though there be too many fruitless branches therein; you may preserve the places where you live, though under the sentence of excision, and in great danger to be cut down; you may be common saviours, so far as this title is communicable to men; yea, who knows but if the people of God would improve the means of grace, and the prunings by judgments and afflictions, to more fruitfulness, this land, under the curse of barrenness, and in danger to be cut down by desolating judgments, and whose cursed fruits provoke the Lord to make its plagues wonderful, might yet be spared and preserved from utter desolation, yea, and entrusted further with more means of improvement. The tree is not quite dead while there is fruit seen in any of the branches; and if after the danger of cutting down more fruit appear, there would be hopes that by some more improvements it might be made yet more fruitful; and so more encouragement, not only to give it time, but to bestow more cost and labour on it. So it is amongst men, and the Lord declares himself willing to proceed accordingly. If the old branches did but bring forth more and better fruit, and there were some hopes of new buds also, the condition of this people, though extreme dangerous, would not be utterly desperate. You see upon what the hopes of it depend. Oh, do not blast them! Bring not all into a hopeless state by continuing fruitless.

6. This is the most safe and certain way to get assurance. Good fruits will be an evidence that you are in a good state, that you are engrafted into Christ, John xv. 15. If you be fruitful, it will signify that Christ abideth in you, and you in him, Rom. vi. 22. Those who bring forth the fruits of holiness may conclude that they are the servants of God, and that they shall receive the reward of faithful servants, everlasting life: Mat. vii. 16-18, we may conclude what the tree is by the fruit it bears; we may conclude this probably of others, but more certainly of ourselves; we may see what others act, and are obliged in charity to think it good when it seems so; but we cannot discern from what principle, or for what ends they act, and so cannot be sure that what seems good in others is really so, 1 Cor. ii. 11. But we may discern our own principles and ends, and so may pass a judgment upon our own acts with more certainty, and consequently upon our state.

If we bring forth good fruits, this will be a surer evidence to us that our spiritual condition is good; and the better our fruit is, *i. e.* the more free from carnal, worldly, or selfish mixtures, the clearer will our evidence be; the character wherein it is writ will not be so blotted and blurred; we shall not be so puzzled to read it, and to discern the sense and signification of it. And the more our fruit is, the fuller will our evidence be; the characters will be larger, and more legible; we may discern them better, even in an hour of temptation, when others, who have them writ in a smaller hand, will be at a loss.

Fruits of the Spirit will be an argument to prove the Spirit is in us; and fruits of holiness will signify that we are sanctified; and fruits of righteous-

ness that we are in the state of the righteous. But the better, the more these fruits are, the better, the firmer grounds of assurance will they be to us. A fulness of fruit will beget a plerophory, a fulness of assurance. The richer we are in the fruits of holiness and good works, the more riches of assurance may we expect.

Those that complain for want of assurance, and are afflicted with fears and doubts as to their spiritual state, can take no more effectual course for their relief than by bringing forth more and better fruit. The less fruit, the less and dimmer light you will have for the discovery of a saving state; more and better fruit will be as the setting up of greater and clearer lights for the discerning of it.

Whether assurance is ordinarily had, by the immediate testimony of the Spirit, is a question with some. But this is unquestionable, the Spirit never testifies the state is good, but where there are good fruits. So that where they are not, it is a foolish and vain presumption to expect any such testimony of the Spirit. And to believe we have such a testimony, without such fruits, is to delude ourselves, and belie the Spirit of God.

And this is unquestionable, that the Spirit helps us to discern the sincerity and goodness of the fruit we bear, 1 Cor. ii. 12; and so testifying to our spirits that the fruits we bring forth are good, and such as are proper and peculiar to the children of God. Hereby 'the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God,' Rom. viii. 16.

So that if assurance be by the immediate testimony of the Spirit, it never testifies a good condition where good fruits are not. If it be by the immediate testimony of the Spirit, good fruits are the *medium* by which it helps us to conclude it. Therefore no assurance can be had, no testimony of the Spirit will be given of a saving state, where there are not good fruits. All persuasions of a good condition, without good fruit, are but vain, groundless presumptions; all hopes of heaven are but dangerous delusions. These will be grounds of hope, and nothing without them; and the more, the better they are, the firmer and clearer will the grounds of your hopes be, and the more will they advance towards confidence and full assurance.

7. This is the way to comfort, when it is most needful, and when it will be most comfortable. In reproaches, temptations, afflictions, yea, in death, and at judgment, when the vain comforts of fruitless souls will vanish, and end in remorse and terrors, and be as the giving up of the ghost, Job xi. 20.

In reproaches. When men speak against you as evil-doers, and your conscience bears you witness that your lives have been and are full of good fruits, either you may convince them that they wrong you and their own souls, and have the comfort of bringing them to glorify God by an acknowledgment thereof, 1 Peter ii. 12. Or if they be hardened in their prejudice, and resolute not to be convinced by any evidence sufficient for that purpose, you may appeal to God, and comfort yourselves with that blessedness which Christ makes the portion of those who have all manner of evil spoken against them falsely, Mat. v. 11. And reproach will not leave any such sting in your conscience, as in theirs who are conscious that their unfruitfulness, and not walking worthy of the gospel, has opened the mouth of reproachers.

In temptation. Satan will not so easily fix any fiery dart on you as on others, if you have been fruitful indeed; you have a better shield to secure you from the wounding impressions of them. You will have more to confute the false accusations wherewith he would disturb you, and call in question your integrity; you will have more to allege for yourselves, and that which will be harder for him to answer or gainsay; you may repel him with more

confidence, and more advantage when there is little or nothing in your conscience to take part with him.

In afflictions. It is a great comfort to know that we are not afflicted for our barrenness; and who can know that but those that are fruitful? Good fruits yield the most sweetness in pressures, and such as are able to sweeten the bitterest afflictions, and to cause the bitterness of them to pass away: Heb. xii. 11, the 'fruits of righteousness' are 'peaceable,' because they bring peace and joy, instead of that grief which the chastenings are accompanied with. This turns the storm and tempest wherewith an afflicted soul is tossed, disturbed, discomposed, into a sweet calm and serenity. This brings that 'peace of God, which' not only surpasses all that is afflictive, and is sufficient to drown the sense thereof, but 'passes all understanding, and keeps the heart and mind' in a quiet, composed, comfortable posture, when all is stormy and ruffled round about. The apostle had experience of it, when, having given an account of his great troubles and hazards, 2 Cor. i. 8-10, he adds, ver. 12, he could rejoice, notwithstanding these troubles that threatened him with present death, when his conscience bore him witness, that his conversation had abounded with good fruit (that which was sincerely good) in the world, and towards those to whom he was more particularly related.

And at death, when there is most need of comfort, and when all outward enjoyments will give out, and prove miserable comforters, what joy will it be to reflect upon the days of lives past as fruitful seasons, which have brought forth fruits pleasant to God, and advantageous to the world; to look upon our time, parts, and enjoyments as employed for Christ, in ways of fruitfulness and serviceableness to God and men; to have the testimony from our consciences, that it has been the design and business of our lives to live to God, and bring forth fruit to him, and not to ourselves; to please him, and not to gratify our own, or the humours of others; to advance him, though it laid us under reproach; to lay out what we had for him, though we and ours have suffered by it; to be able to say, as he, Acts xxiii. 1, and xxiv. 16. But their life will look upon them with as pale, and ghastly, and frightful face, as death itself, who can spy little in their days past but cyphers, and must reflect on them as unfruitful, unserviceable, insignificant days: days rather consumed than lived and fruitfully employed; days spent in the pursuit of the world, for the profits or pleasures of it, or the external advantages of themselves or their posterity; days wasted in the service of their lusts, or the service of their great idol mammon, or in the service of themselves; melted away either in idleness, or in that which God had not made their works; days so consumed, not improved for God in ways of fruitfulness. When death is approaching, what comfort can there be in such review! This is the way to make the day of death a day of blackness and thick darkness indeed. Oh, if you would have comfort in death, lay up a good foundation for the time to come; abound in the acts of holiness, and the fruits of righteousness: that is the way to do it, if you will believe the apostle, 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.

And then at judgment, if you, in the sense of the worthlessness of what fruits you have brought forth, should not venture to fetch any comfort from thence, Christ himself will bring it you, and thence derive it, as he has plainly declared beforehand, Mat. xxv. 84-86. Good fruits are not the cause of the reward; they do not deserve it, they did not purchase it; that is the honour of Christ, of Christ alone. But he alleges them as the reason of this comfortable sentence. And Christ himself will be no ground of com-

fort to you without these There is no true comfort, either in life, or in death, or at judgment, without good fruits; and the more, the better they are, the greater, the sweeter comforts both now and then, both here and hereafter.

8. This is your beauty, your ornament, your glory, in the sight of God and men. What is the excellency of a fruit-tree but fruitfulness? What leaves soever it have, what blossoms soever it shew, yet if in the season it bear no fruit, all its flourishes are blasted, and he that owns it will make no account of it. The excellency of the trees of righteousness, the planted of the Lord, is to abound in the fruits of righteousness; and as these are a glory to God, of which before, so they are an honour to the gospel, an ornament to your profession, that which renders it lovely and beautiful in the eyes of all men, and a special glory to the fruitful themselves. God himself does seem to glory in such, Isa. lxi. 3. Those of the same profession may glory in them, and those that hate and malign them will either be convinced, or silenced, or condemned, in the judgment and conscience of the world, for condemning them. 'There is one glory of the sun, another of the moon, another glory of the stars, one star differing from another star in glory;' for all the difference in degrees, all are glorious, for all are luminaries. And such is the glory of the fruitful, they are all luminaries, though some greater and some less. By holding forth the word of life in a conversation full of the fruits thereof, they shine as lights in the world, Philip. ii. 15, 16, Prov. iv. 18. 'The path of the just,' of him that bears fruits of righteousness, 'is as the shining light,' and the more fruits he bears, the more and more does he shine. Clouds of reproaches are hereby scattered; such a light will break through them, it cannot be hid; the splendour of it will be apparent and conspicuous to the world, in despite of malice and detraction, Mat. v. 16. There is a light in good fruits, which attracts the eyes of the world to it, and stays not there, but reflects glory upon the Most High.

9. Christ will own the fruitful here and hereafter, John xv. 8; so shall ye declare yourselves to be 'my disciples indeed, if ye bring forth much fruit.' Upon this account Christ will own you for his disciples, as those that have so learned Christ as he would have them, as those that have 'heard him and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus,' Eph. iv. 16, &c.; as those that imitate him, as disciples should their master; as those that follow him, and tread in his steps, and would be conformed to that great pattern. When they make it their business in the world to do good, as he 'went about doing good,' Acts x. 38; when they strive to 'be holy, as he was holy, in all manner of conversation,' 1 Peter i. 14, 15; when it is their design to 'fulfil all righteousness,' and their 'meat and drink [is] to do his will': he will not be ashamed to own such for his disciples. But barren professors he will be ashamed of, as being a real shame and reproach to him; and he will declare it, he will disown them, and thrust them from him, as we do that which is shameful to us, Mat. vii. 20-28. The most specious profession, the fairest pretences, the most splendid performances, such as prophesying, and casting out devils, and working miracles in the name of Christ, without real fruits in universal obedience, will be no plea that Christ will regard. Whatever they profess, whatever they do, though what they have done amount to wonderful works, if they have not done the will of the Father in bringing forth good fruits, Christ will disown them; they must depart from him, as those he is ashamed of, pretenders, not true disciples.

But the fruitful he will own, as here, so in the last day, and expresses it in terms so transcendently affectionate and comfortable as will leave no sense of any trouble, loss, hazard, or suffering that they have met with in the

way of fruitfulness, Mat. xxv. 84. Compare this peerless sentence with the dreadful doom of the unfruitful, ver. 41. The fruitful must 'come,' the barren 'depart;' those pronounced 'blessed,' these 'accursed;' those called to a 'kingdom,' these sent into 'everlasting fire;' those to inherit and reign with the Father and Christ for ever, these to remain with the devil and his angels. Oh, what words can be invented by men or angels apt to make so deep an impression upon the mind and heart of man as these words of Christ? If you have any sense, any regard or belief of Christ when he speaks words, each of which have the joys or terrors of an eternal state in them, there needs no more be said to engage you to fruitfulness, or to render barrenness dreadful to you. I will only add this,

10. Good fruits, good seed; whatever you do or suffer for God, you sow, and shall assuredly reap what you sow with abundant advantage. This is frequently expressed in Scripture, Hosea x. 12. The saddest act of seed-time has assurance of a joyful harvest, Ps. cxvi. 5. And the harvest shall not fail to answer the seed, 2 Cor. ix. 6, and Gal. vi. 7-9. And he makes use of this as a motive to fruitfulness, ver. 10. It is seed that cannot possibly miscarry; it is under the Lord's husbandry: not the least grain of it shall be lost, no, not that which seems to be quite thrown away, Eccles. xi. 1. That which seems as utterly cast away, as what seed is thrown into the water, shall return with plentiful increase. It is the Lord that looks after it; he is engaged to take care that it grow, and it is he that gives the increase. It depends not upon the temper of the soil, nor the seasonableness of a year, nor the heavenly influence, which may occasion a miscarriage in other husbandmen's seed after all care and pains. Your expectation will not be frustrated; yea, it will spring up beyond, above all you can expect or imagine, when your expectation is most enlarged, and your apprehensions raised to the highest. It will bring forth not only thirty or sixtyfold, but what Israel's seed produced, an hundredfold, Gen. xxvi. 12. You have the best assurance for it that heaven can give, the word of Christ, Mat. xix. 29, 'an hundred fold here in this life' (as it is expressed by the other evangelist, Mark x. 29, 30), the largest increase that any seed ever yields on earth; but hereafter it will produce so many hundred, so many thousand fold, as is past all account; it will nonplus all art, all artists to cast it up, for 'eye hath not seen,' &c.

It is expressed in a gross sum, 'life everlasting.' But how much that comprises no man nor angel can understand; so much joy, glory, happiness, as passes all understanding.

Oh, if a husbandman were ascertained of this, that how much soever be sowed, it would all yield him at last an hundredfold, he would sow all the ground he had, and labour to get more, and spare no pains, no cost; the hope of so rich a crop would let him think nothing too much. Oh, if we did believe God, and what he so clearly expresses, that all good fruit is seed, and that it will yield so much, 'the increase of God,' an exceeding great increase, we should think it our concernment not to sow sparingly, we should think we were highly injurious to ourselves not to 'abound more and more in all fruitfulness.'

And thus, if you will be moved by reason or equity, by fear or hope, I have offered something that may put you upon motion toward more fruitfulness. If this have made any impression on you, it will be seasonable to give you some directions for the promoting of your fruitfulness, and to discover what it is that keeps many so barren, notwithstanding all the means of improvement they enjoy. And to begin with this latter;—

1. Unmortifiedness is one main impediment of fruitfulness. The less

mortified we are, the less fruit we shall bear ; and that little will be the worse for it, it will neither suffer it to be much nor good. And so we may observe that the method wherein the Holy Ghost in Scripture leads us to fruitfulness is answerable : there we are directed, first, to ' put off the old man, with its deceitful lusts,' and then the new man will act in holiness and righteousness, bringing forth the fruits of both. So the apostle Paul, Eph. iv. 22-24. And the same apostle first describes ' the works of the flesh,' and will have them destroyed, and then proceeds to the ' fruits of the Spirit,' insinuating that these cannot grow unless the other be first rooted out, Gal. v. 19, 20, &c.

Unmortified lusts and affections render all the means of fruitfulness ineffectual. The word, which is the seed that produces good fruit, cannot take root, cannot be fruitful, till these be stubbed up, and therefore the Spirit of God leads us first to this, James i. 21, 22. You will be hearers only, and not doers of the word ; the word will not be an engrafted word, bringing forth saving fruit, unless these be laid aside. So, 1 Peter ii. 12, if those evils be not mortified, thrown away with indignation, purged out as bad humours, that both take away the stomach and hinder digestion, and turn what is received into the samenoxious quality, you will not grow strong nor fruitful by the word ; it will not be *λόγος καρποφορούμενος*, Col. i. 6, a ' fruitful word.' So, Jer. iv. 3, 4, rid your hearts of inordinate lusts and affections, or else nothing will thrive or grow that can be accounted good fruit ; all means of improvement will be as seed cast upon ground which is overgrown with thorns and weeds, it will come to little or nothing. Carnal, selfish, worldly lusts, while they are tolerated or not subdued, they are as weeds or vermin to the seed or to the fruit ; they hinder it from being either much or good ; either they hinder it from springing up, as brambles or thorns do ; when these grow thick, the crop will be thin ; or they spoil or destroy it after it appears. Either as locusts or caterpillars, they destroy it in the blossom ; or as worms and other vermin, they eat into it and corrupt it when it should come to maturity.

Begin with the work of mortification if you would be fruitful ; make use of all means afforded you for this purpose ; be diligent and unwearied in the use of them. Improve judgments and afflictions for this purpose, as I have lately directed you. There is no expectation your fruit should be much or good, unless you pluck up these weeds and brambles which pester your hearts and lives, and leave little or no room for good fruit ; unless you destroy these vermin which devour the seed, so that little comes up, or corrupt the fruit when it is come up, so that it is become good for little or nothing. Unmortified lusts will let little take root or grow, and afterwards they corrupt or rot that little, hinder it from being pleasant fruit to God, as that is not pleasant to you which is rotted or worm-eaten.

An unmortified Christian cannot be fruitful ; his lusts take up much of the ground where good fruit should grow ; his time, his parts, his enjoyments, yea, his soul, is otherwise employed than to bring forth good fruits, so far as it is under the power and command of these lusts ; and that little which he bears is full of vermin, the tolerated corruption of his heart corrupts and spoils it. It cannot be so much nor so good as in those who have ' crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.'

2. Worldliness. That is a principal impediment to fruitfulness. Carefulness either to get or keep much of the world, eagerness either after the plenty or the pleasures of this life, is assigned by Christ himself as the main cause of unfruitfulness : Mat. xiii. 20-22, ' The cares of the world, and deceitfulness of riches,' *συμπνίγει τον λόγον*, do as it were take it by the throat and strangle it ; or as thorns and brambles, with rank roots, suck away the fat-

ness of the earth which should nourish the corn, and so destroys it. Thus does the world engross the strength and vigour of the soul, which should be put forth in good fruits, and converts it to its own use; it stifles good motions, inclinations, affections, resolutions raised by the word, and never suffers them to come to maturity. The other evangelist is more particular in the account he gives of the world's mischievousness this way, Luke viii. 14. Here are three engines, by which the world does this mischief in worldly hearts: The cares of the world; when men are too careful, too busy about it. The riches; when they too highly value them, and too much affect them, and too forwardly pursue them; when the deceitfulness of riches seduces them to a high opinion of riches, a great affection to them, an eager following after them; when they believe what they deceitfully promise, and expect great advantage and great pleasure in outward abundance. The pleasures of this life; when they please themselves too much in the getting or enjoying much of the things of this life. This chokes the word, makes the best means of improvement ineffectual; all good conceptions hereby prove abortive. Whatsoever the word does towards fruitfulness, the world undoes it. Even when the soul is big with good motions begotten by the word, the world makes it miscarry; they become like the untimely birth of a woman, that never sees the sun, Ps. lviii. 8; such do not *τελειοποιεῖν*. When the heart of the ground is eaten out, and the moisture and fatness of it sucked away by thorns and brambles, sow what you will in it, you will find it barren. When the world takes up the thoughts, the heart, the affections, the time, the strength, the endeavours which is necessary for the producing and nourishing of good fruit, what can be expected, even under the best means for improvement, but barrenness? Indeed, if the design in seeking riches were to be 'rich in good works,' and they were accordingly so employed, the world might be helpful to us. But it is a rare thing to have it so sought, and so used, for God, and not for ourselves and relatives only or principally. And while this is so rare, worldliness, so much branded in Scripture, is common, and barrenness general. A worldly spirit, whatever it profess or pretend, what zeal soever it shew in some little things, is and will be unfruitful. 'You cannot serve God and Mammon:' you cannot bring forth fruit to God, and fruit to the world. What the world will spare for God, will neither be much nor very good. There is little time for it, there is little heart for it; the world takes it up. God must have none but the world's leavings, some crumbs that fall from its table; this will not amount to much. Nor can it be very good; it will have a tang of the world, an earthish taste; it will savour of the temper from whence it proceeds, and have some worldly mixtures that will taint it. And though others, or yourselves, do not discern it, the Lord can and will; and less like it, the more it tastes of a worldly spirit.

If ever you would be fruitful indeed, get the world crucified, get it laid low in your thoughts, get it cast out of your hearts. Demean yourselves towards it, in your daily course, as a weaned child. Get your hearts, which have been set upon the world, set upon your work, that which the Lord has sent you to do. Let it not engross your time, which is necessary for your souls, for your families, or for others whom you ought to improve and help on towards fruitfulness; that time which is necessary for prayer, for examining your spiritual state, for meditation, and working the word which you hear or read upon your hearts.

You must be more indifferent towards the world, if you would be 'zealous of good works,' of good fruits; as Christ's peculiar people should be, those whom he has purchased and redeemed from the earth; and you will not be fruitful unless there be some zeal and fervour for more and better fruits.

8. *Privateness of spirit.* When a person is confined to himself, himself single or multiplied, he and his relatives, thinks himself little concerned to look further; shuts up himself, in a manner, wholly in the narrow circle of his own concerns or that of his family and relations; seldom draws any lines beyond it, rarely acts further; or what he does of larger extent, is little and extraordinary: such a one cannot bring forth much fruit, for the sphere of fruitfulness is very large, and reaches far beyond ourselves and ours; and the Lord expects we should walk and act to the full extent and latitude of it, or else he has little fruit of us. Several graces which respect others will be unexercised, several talents will be hid and buried. Such as would be advantageous to others at a greater distance will not be employed, the improvement of which the Lord calls for. Much of that we are entrusted with, and must give an account of, will lie waste, which would yield fruit desirable to God and men. And so far we shall be accounted barren, as we do not bear fruit where we might and ought, by the employment of our graces, gifts, accomplishments, estates, and outward enjoyments. He that brings but forth fruit to himself, how much soever it be for bulk and quantity, is barren, and no better than an empty tree in the Lord's account, Hosea x. 1. He that will be fruitful indeed, must have fruits reaching as far as the apostle will have them extended, Gal. vi. 10. The household of faith is far larger than our own household and relations; but the *all* he mentions is far larger than the household of faith. Now, he that would bring forth fruits worthy of the gospel, such as it requires, must extend them beyond himself and relatives, to the household of faith; and further much than that also (though that be of large extent), even to all. He must do good to all, to some more especially, but to all in some measure. Without any limitation, but that of opportunity; nothing but want of this will excuse our neglect of any of these *all* from barrenness. Get public spirits, get larger souls; privateness and littleness of spirit, narrow and contracted souls shrunk up into themselves, seldom moving, like the snail, out of its own shell, will leave you under the guilt of much barrenness. A selfish person will be an unfruitful tree, though planted in the Lord's vineyard.

4. *Indulgence to carnal ease and slothfulness.* The calling of the husbandman is laborious; he that will improve his land in fruitfulness, especially if it be naturally barren, must be no sluggard. We must 'give all diligence' if we would not be 'barren and unfruitful in the knowledge,' &c., 2 Peter i.; otherwise heart and life will be overrun with weeds instead of good fruit, Prov. xxiv. 80-82. It is 'the diligent hand that makes rich,' Prov. x. 4. Men are easily convinced that they must be diligent in their particular callings if they will thrive; but either they think it no duty to be rich unto God, rich in good fruits, or else they think there needs not such diligence for this; both which are pernicious delusions. 'The men of this world are wiser in their generation than' those who profess themselves to be 'children of light;' they rise early, &c., to improve their estates, whereas these use little or no diligence to improve the means of grace for fruitfulness. Where is that diligence which the Scripture calls for, under the notions of striving, running, wrestling? phrases which import the putting forth of all our strength, and continuance therein.

5. *Mistaking that for good fruit which is not so.* Now, because it is necessary, and very useful for all sorts to have this mistake more fully discovered, I shall be a little more large and particular herein, and endeavour to shew how many ways we are apt to be mistaken about the goodness of our fruits; and to be satisfied with that as good which is not so in the account of God.

(1.) Some take that to be good, which is indeed bad fruit; and to be pleasing to God, when, indeed, it is a provocation to him; think they do him service, when they are serving themselves, gratifying their own corruption, and sacrificing to their own lusts. Christ tells his disciples of some who would think they did God service when they were persecuting his faithfullest servants, John xvi. 2; and this was the fruit of error and ignorance, ver. 3. Through such ignorance and error, persons and things may be so disguised and misrepresented, as that may be taken for a crime which is a duty, and that for heresy which is a necessary truth; and those for flagitious persons who are not only innocent, not guilty, but eminently holy; and so these may be persecuted with a heat, which is taken for holy or heroical zeal, when it is devilish enmity against God, his truths, servants, and ways. And herewith may they be transported, who are in the common account the most knowing and the most holy; for such were the scribes and pharisees in Christ's time, such was their esteem amongst the vulgar. They persecuted the apostles, yea, Christ himself, to the death, and thought they did therein good service to God; and it passed for good fruit, when it was the poison of asps and the cruel venom of dragons. Herein they are followed by the papists, and by those who disclaim this name, but walk in their steps; who, out of a zeal to a church which their own interest has framed, and against schism, contempt, and disobedience, which have as little ground as their other chimera, are all in thunder and lightning. And some of their judgments and consciences may be so deluded and infatuated, as to think it good service to God, and good fruit in the church, to ruin those who conform not to them; and having no hopes of fire from heaven, to gratify their blind, selfish zeal, make wildfire of their own to do it. Yea, those who are neither papists nor formalists, being under the power of error or ignorance, in particulars which they suspect not, are in the like danger. To censure those things as sins, which are innocent; and to make conscience of those as duties, which are crimes forbidden, or at least things not commanded; and to embrace those as lovely truths, which are foul mistakes: and the more zealously they act in reference to such things, the better fruit they may think it; whereas, quite contrary, the more it acts, and the higher it rises, it is still worse and worse. You have lamentable instances hereof, both concerning a mistaken church and a mistaken kingdom, and also in other less observed particulars, which I cannot insist on.

So you may see the zeal of some run out against the opinions and practices of others, under pretence they are dangerous and of bad consequence, when the bottom of all is envy or revenge speciously dignified; and the design is, the disparaging or depressing of those who are thought to outshine them. Ill-will to those whom they affect not, is the root; and evil-speaking, or detraction, the fruit of it. And yet it passes for good fruit, because it is supposed to be a good cause that is so managed, and that supposed evil to which it is opposed; but God will not account this good fruit, whatever men do.

(2.) Some take that to be good fruit which is only negatively good, in comparison of what is stark naught: conclude it good, because it is not the worst of all, or not so bad as that which some others bring forth. Such was the fruit of the pharisee, which he thought to be very good, when he is represented as boasting of it, Luke xviii. 11. The pharisee is not alone in his mistake, or his confidence; others amongst us are ready to presume their fruit is good, and they not much concerned to look after that which is better; because it is not quite so bad as is visible in many, or the most about them; they are not so profane, or so superstitious; they neither blaspheme nor

persecute; they swear not, nor forswear; they neither scorn nor hate that which is good; they are neither drunkards, adulterers, or oppressors, nor sordidly covetous; they wallow in no such ungodliness and wickedness as they see others do; they bring forth better fruit than many, and so conclude it is good enough, they need not trouble themselves further. But what a decay is this! as though it were enough to prove a tree fruitful, because it has no vermin or caterpillars on it. There is no more fruit in mere negatives, than a tree has in winter, when it has not so much as leaves to cover it. This is but one half of what the pharisee had to allege for himself; and the end of your fruit will never be acceptance with God here, nor eternal life hereafter, unless it be more and better than that of the pharisees, Mat. v. 20.

(3.) Some take that to be good, which, though it be not bad in itself, yet has no goodness in it. Such are they who are great zealots for things which they count indifferent (*i. e.* such as are neither good nor bad in themselves), yet urge them with more eagerness, and are more severe in exacting that which they acknowledge to have no goodness in it, than any of the fruits of holiness or righteousness; these are neglected, and the neglect of them excused, if those be but observed. There needs no other mouth to condemn such than their own. God calls for good fruit; that which they most mind is what they declare to be not good. The best they can say of such fruit is, that it is neither bad nor good. But it will be bad enough in consequence, when it hinders them, and makes them hinder others, from bringing forth better.

Let us be warned by the follies and excesses of others not to be much taken with anything whose goodness is not manifest. This will dangerously divert us from that which is good fruit indeed. The life, and heart, and strength, and vigour of religion, which should put forth itself in fruits of holiness and righteousness, will be sacrificed to trifles and shadows, or will run out in some worthless grain or fruitless excrescency. Be sure that person or church will not be fruitful in God's account, whose excellency is the bringing forth of that which is not confessedly good.

(4.) Others think their fruit is good, when the goodness of it is but imaginary and fancy: such as those whose religion is notional, who are most pleased with their notions, when they are most thin and airy, and spun into a fineness which makes them of no use; admire them most, when they are least intelligible; and think them the highest attainments when they are out of the common road, above ordinary capacities, if not without common sense; make most of them, and hug them with most passion, when they do them least good, and neither heart nor life is better for them. Sure, whatever excellency persons may fancy in such notions, they are plainly flourishes, not fruits. Those that love to spin religion into such cobwebs, take the course to starve their souls, and keep themselves fruitless; cobwebs will neither keep them warm, nor nourish. These are not good fruit in themselves; but that is not the worst; they will hinder those who doat on them from being otherwise fruitful. Those that are troubled with the rickets are not thriving children, though their heads be bigger than others. When religion is run up into the head in notions, heart and life being left destitute of the virtue and power of it, must needs be barren: a notional professor will have little fruit but in fancy; and the like danger there is when religion is turned into matter of quarrel and controversy. This turns the soul, which should be as the fruitful vine, into a thorn or a briar, where you may find many prickles, but little desirable fruit. The contentious ages of the church were barren, in comparison of the more ancient and primitive, when religion was a plain and easy thing, and not so perplexed with conten-

tions and controversies : *ut magnæ cujusdam artis fuerit orthodoxum esse* ; that it was a matter of great art to be orthodox (as Erasmus speaks of the fourth age). Godliness as practical, was then declining ; but it was even expiring, grown decrepit, and past fruit-bearing, when the chief supports of it were the schoolmen, who, instead of practical truths, and what would have nourished souls unto fruitfulness, threw amongst them some bare bones to pick ; hard, abstruse, intricate questions, which exercised the brain, but drew up the heat and spirits from the heart, and left that languishing : to which that may be applied, Heb. xiii. 9.

When divines and other Christians affect to be controversial, they grow less practical ; and it is in practice that fruitfulness appears. Satan would bring all religion into question, and employ all in controversy. He knows what advantage he has thereby, to divert them from that which is most fruitful and edifying. Quarrelsome and contentious spirits are no soil for the peaceable fruits of righteousness. There may be some fruit of controversy, which the corruption and perversion of degenerate minds has made necessary ; but as it is ordinarily managed, it is sour and crabbed fruit, and such as will need many correctives to render it good and wholesome.

(5.) Others think they bear good fruit, because they have something that makes a goodly show, a fair appearance. They make a great profession, they are furnished with excellent guests ; their parts and accomplishments are not contemptible ; they have a form of knowledge, a sound judgment in matters of religion, some understanding of the Scripture, abilities to pray, and to discourse of the things of God, and are apprehensive of the mysteries of the gospel. Some such fruits they had whom the apostle describes, Rom. ii. 17–20. If these had been good fruit, it had been a good foundation for the time to come ; whereas the apostle tells us, they ‘treasured up wrath,’ ver. 5. Indeed, these are not fruit, but leaves ; and though the fair show they make may give hopes of fruit at a distance, as the fig-tree did to our Saviour, yet you know the issue of that goodly appearance, when he found no fruit thereon, according to expectation, nothing better than leaves, he cursed it, and it withered, and was suddenly dried up by the roots. If you think such shows, such leaves, fruit good enough, and this conceit hinder you from care to bring forth something better, they will not shelter you from the curse of Christ, and the execution of it, nor keep the axe from the very root. If ‘every tree which brings not forth good fruit, shall be hewn down,’ &c., how can they escape who bring forth nothing but leaves ?

(6.) Others think their fruit is good enough when it is but partially good ; they do things that are good, but they do them not well ; the matter of what they do is good, but they neglect the manner, or the end, or the proportion, something integral or essential to its goodness, without which, if it be good at all, or may be so accounted, yet it is far from being completely good. It is hereby utterly maimed and crippled, or no better than a dead work. So some, they will hear the word, and hear it frequently and attentively, but not effectually, so as to obey it ; or, if they will obey, as Herod did in many things, Mark vi. 20, yet they obey it but where it pleases them, and suits their humours and tempers, but not where it crosses their inclinations or interests. And through this defect their hearing is no good fruit, nor their obeying neither ; and if they think otherwise, they deceive themselves, in the apostle’s judgment, James i. 22.

They will yield to Christ in many things, but not in all. They are but almost persuaded to be fully his disciples ; they stick at some of the terms on which he offers himself ; though they can digest many, there is something too much, themselves to be denied, something too valuable to be forsaken and

relinquished, some part of the cross too heavy to take up ; and being but 'almost persuaded' to be his, the fruit they bear, how much soever it be, is but almost good.

They will leave many sins, but not all ; or if they abstain from the outward acts, yet they do not mortify them ; or if they be in some course of mortification, they halt, and make stands in it, and will not go through.

They will be charitable, and relieve those that are in want and distress ; but then, either this must excuse them from other good works ; or else they are defective in this, not rich in distributing, though this be the end why they are entrusted with riches, and the best improvement they can make thereof. They do it not proportionably to others' necessities, no, nor to their own superfluities. They can expend more upon their own unnecessary excesses than upon the pressing wants of the members or messengers of Christ ; can spare it more freely when it ministers but to pride and vanity, and the excesses of their garb, furniture, or entertainment, than for the feeding, clothing, and refreshing of Christ mystical.

(7.) Others take that which is but questionably good, to be best of all, and accordingly mind it and pursue it as though there were not only some unquestionable, but some eminent goodness in it, and, consequently, overlook, or too much neglect, those things which are really and undoubtedly better. And this we may observe, both in matters of opinion and practice ; both in positive duties, and opposition of sin. So you may see some persons grown fond of an opinion to such a degree as to lay the greatest stress on it ; to lay out themselves almost wholly for the advancing and propagating of it ; to contend for it as for life and death ; to disparage all that are not, as they think, friends enough to it, and blast those that oppose it ; to shew more heat and passion for it than those truths that are vital and fundamental, and have the most sovereign influence upon heart and life for fruitfulness ; and yet, when it is duly and impartially examined, it may prove a question whether it be truth or no ; and a matter of great difficulty to clear it from error, if it can be vindicated at all from such a censure.

You may see others, to whom some particular practice is very much endeared ; they look upon it as a duty of greatest moment ; they are ready to censure all that concur not with them in it. Those duties that are evidently and indispensably so must give way to it, and be neglected or little regarded in comparison ; and yet, after all, to those who are without passions and pre-engagements, it may be a question whether it be indeed a duty.

You may see others have a great zeal against some things which they count unlawful ; they fly out against them, as though there were no other, or no greater wickedness ; they judge those who do not avoid them unfit for society with Christians ; they are ready to censure those who cannot see reason to be so rigid and severe against them as themselves. And those things which are plainly and unquestionably evil in themselves or others are overlooked by this means, or little taken notice of in comparison. And yet, when those who are fearful of sin, and think themselves highly concerned to suffer none to lie under guilt, whom they can convince of it, do examine the things so condemned without prejudice, they find it questionable whether they be so sinful, or else exceeding difficult, if feasible, to find good grounds for the conviction of others, and not at all advisable to condemn so peremptorily, without good ground, and such as they may hope will be convincing.

Satan, the enemy of our souls, and of their fruitfulness, makes use of diversion as one of his main stratagems. If he can but make us neglect truths or duties that are unquestionable, he cares not how much we doat upon those that are questionable. If he can but make us indulgent to our-

selves in real evils, he will allow us to be as severe as we will against others for things doubtful. He can make use of our zeal when it is misguided; of our heat let out groundlessly; to the rendering of it ineffectual, contemned and disregarded, when it is duly employed. He can set up a blind, and if we spend all our shot upon that which should be directed against real enemies, he has his design; he hereby makes that run waste which would otherwise render us fruitful. As if the heart of the ground should be spent in nourishing such plants and herbs that are of uncertain use, and of whose virtue, what it is, and whether it be any or none, we are doubtful; it must needs be to the prejudice of those fruits which are unquestionably good and useful.

(8.) Others take those for good fruits which are only artificial, and of their own devising, and commend to us a fiction of mortification, and holiness, and divine worship, not of God's prescribing, but of man's invention. Such are they who place mortification in some outward severities, and harsh usages of the body, chastening, afflicting, and pinching it, as though this were the crucifying of the flesh, which the Scripture calls for; as though they could mortify the body of sin, by curbing the outward man with a 'touch not, taste not, handle not;' and by neglecting the body, not shewing it respect due to it, in gratifying it with what is needful, according to that of the apostle, Col. ii. 23, where you may discern of what account it is with God. Being after the commandments and doctrines of men, it may have a show of wisdom, humility, and mortification, but is no such thing really.

And such is their sanctity, who, neglecting holiness of heart and life, will have a holiness in garments, utensils, and the very walls. Real holiness was at a low ebb when this counterfeit came in request; it is a weed that throve most when the church was growing a wilderness, and is but a slip of a degenerate plant where it grows rankest.

And such is that worship which the art and fancy of man devises for God; this can be no good fruit, with what colours soever it be set off; this is so far from pleasing God, as it highly provokes him. How can it do less, when it is a preferring of human contrivances before the divine wisdom? And what the fruit of it will be, we may learn by the threatenings denounced against it, Isa. xxvii., and by the censure of it: Mat. xv. 7, 'In vain they worship me,' when the doctrine by which their worship is regulated and ordered is the traditions of men; in places and times devised of their own heart, 1 Kings xii. 88. It is vain worship at the best, and that which is vain is fruitless. It supplants that which would yield most fruit, and draws with it a neglect of the commands and institutions of God, as the other evangelist shews, Mark vii. 7-9. That which is of this nature and tendency is cursed fruit, whoever bless themselves with it.

(9.) Others take that for good fruit which is no more than buds, the mere embryos and rudiments of it. Such are good motions, raised by the word or by afflictions, or apprehensions of death or judgment, but vanishing before they have taken effect. Some good inclinations, some purposes and resolutions to be better, but not pursued to execution; the heart starting from them like a deceitful bow, which returns to its unbent posture before it have delivered the arrow. Some transient impressions, which promise well, but pass away like the morning cloud; some stirring affections, which melt away as snow before the sun, and influence not the life with any lasting efficacy; some joy in the word, such as was in those hearers represented by the bad ground, Mat. xiii. 20; some delight in the ordinances, such as was in Ezekiel's hearers, Ezek. xxxiii. 82; some remorse and sorrow for sin, such as was in Ahab, 1 Kings xxi., and the Israelites, Ps. lxxviii. 47; some desires

of spiritual things, as in the Jews, John vi. 84, who yet believed not, ver. 96; some wishes for heavenly enjoyments, as in Balaam, Num. xxiii. 10; some convictions also of sin and misery, and desires of freedom, but being not followed with sincere endeavours, prove abortive, and reach not the new birth. These are hopeful in their first appearance, but resting in them is the way to fall short of fruitfulness; for they are but blossoms, not fruit, and being nipped or blasted by the world, or prevailing corruption, or the powers of darkness, and not suffered to knit, or at least to come to consistence and maturity, they prove no good fruit. Those only are fruitful indeed which bring forth fruit to perfection; when the blossoms miscarry not, but knit and come to some ripeness; when there is a patient continuance under such good impressions, and under the means appointed for the ripening of them, Rom. ii. 7; but though there be no such continuance therein, yet these, making a specious show, are apt to be taken for good fruit, and so take men off from endeavouring after that which is good indeed.

(10.) Others take that for good fruit which is good only morally, not spiritually. They are prudent, and modest, and sober, chaste and temperate, meek and patient, candid and ingenuous, true and faithful in their words, just and righteous in their dealings, and have their conversation honest in the world. Now these would be good fruits indeed (and none can be justly counted fruitful without them), if they proceeded from a right principle, and were acted for a due end; if they sprung from a new nature, and were brought forth unto God, out of obedience to him, and with an intent to please and honour him; if the Spirit of grace were the author of them, and the end why they are exercised were answerable, they would be fruits of the Spirit, good fruits indeed. But when they are the issues only of a better natural temper, of moral principles, and selfish considerations, when they have no other rise than nature somewhat refined, but not thoroughly changed, and rise no higher in their design than self, and have no other end but what is common or sinister, they are not fruits proper to the garden of God; they may be found in the wilderness, even amongst the heathen. There is a fineness, a loveliness in them; they are but finer weeds, and such as may grow in the common of the world. When they are destitute of a spiritual principle and end, they make up but an ethical and natural, not a Christian and spiritual, morality. It is a pity that things so amiable and desirable should do any hurt; but they are apt, when rested on as fruits good enough, to hinder the growth of what is truly and spiritually good, yea, and to take them off from so much as looking after that which is better. It will be harder to convince such than others that they are unfruitful, and, till such conviction, they are not so much as in the way towards fruitfulness.

(11.) Others take that for good fruit which is good only externally. Such are they who are much in the external exercises of religion, perform the outward acts of godliness and holiness in public and private, attend the ordinances of worship, and submit to those of discipline, and would have holy administrations according to divine prescription; like them best when visibly conformed to the pattern in the mount, the rule of the word; spend the Sabbath in these holy employments, attend the word diligently, repeat it to others, employ some thoughts in meditating on it; read and search the Scriptures, as hoping therein for eternal life; express a firm belief of the whole as truly divine and infallibly true; reverence the name of God, so as not to endure any gross open profanation of it in themselves, or it may be in others; pray everywhere, in public, in their families, and in secret too; discourse of heavenly and spiritual things currently, as occasion is offered; sing the praises of God, to outward appearance, devoutly; seek the know-

ledge of God and of their soul-concernments themselves, and take some pains, have some care to instruct others.

And are not these good fruits? Indeed they make such a goodly show, that those who bear them may be apt to think they are not obliged to bring forth any better. Here are the external lineaments of holiness well drawn, and to the life, so as the piece may be taken for that very thing, of which it is but a picture, and a mere artificial representation. But, you know, the draught of the best artist is not indeed the fruit of the womb, though it may be exactly like a child; there wants a soul to inform and enliven it. There is the colour and proportion of the several parts, but they are not living members. And so it is here. If the soul concur not in these exercises of religion, if that do not enliven them, and be stirring and active therein; if the heart be not in motion towards God, while the outward man is employed in holy duties; if the heart pray not, while the lips pronounce the words of a prayer, or the ear attends them; if the affections keep not time with the expressions in praises, or petitions, or confessions; if the soul comply not with the word, and run not into the mould of it, so as to admit the impressions of it intimately and effectually; if God be not worshipped in the spirit, and the heart kneel not, or lie not prostrate before him when there are outward postures of reverence; if the soul outmove not the lips in our addresses to him, and the inward man, the powers of the soul, be not thoroughly engaged in these holy services; why, then, all these religious employments are but bodily exercise, which profits nothing, is altogether fruitless. Here is but in all this a form of godliness, without the power and life of it. This makes but the picture, the mere skeleton of a fruitful Christian; the proportions and bare resemblance of him, but without life and soul. Here is the colour and the figure of good fruit, and such as may deceive the eye, but all is only the effect of art, which can represent that to the life that has no life in it, and can make that seem good fruit which is really no such thing. Yet because these are so like good fruit, they are taken to be the same, and those that bear them presume they are good enough, and are thereby hindered from minding or endeavouring to bring forth better.

This, and the other mistakes mentioned, are dangerous impediments to the fruitfulness the Lord expects from those that enjoy the means; and therefore I have the longer stayed in the discovery and removal of them.

6. Let me add another, but more briefly; and that is, looking more at comfort than at duty, studying the privileges to which we are advanced more than the service to which we are called, labouring more to get assurance than to do our work. All excesses in some things occasion defects in others. While we are too much in any one thing, we shall be too little in others, and it may be, such as are more necessary. Assurance and comforts are desirable, but fruitfulness is absolutely necessary. If we do not diligently and faithfully mind our duty in the latitude of it, and apply not ourselves wholly to the work the Lord has set us to do, we shall be found unfruitful. And then what place, what ground will there be for comfort or assurance? What claim can we lay to the privileges we are so much taken with? The end why the Lord offers us comfort and assurance of his love, is to make us cheerful in his service, and to encourage us in his work, and engage our hearts in it thoroughly. Now, if we mind the means more than the end, we act irregularly and irrationally.

What will you think of a servant who minds his refreshments more than his work? who takes more care, and spends more time about his meals than in his labour and employment? Will you think him a profitable servant, or expect much fruit of his labour? You are too like such servants

when you are eager for comforts and spiritual refreshments, but less active for God in a way of serviceableness, and more backward to do or suffer what he calls you to. This is to be more for yourselves than for him; and while you are so disposed, he is not like to find much fruit on you. It is no commendation of Ephraim when he is compared to a 'heifer that loves to tread out the corn,' Hosea x. 11. It was the way of thrashing in those times to tread out the full sheaves with the feet of their cattle; and while they were so treading, their mouths were not to be muzzled, Deut. xxv. 4, so that they were eating while they were at this work, therefore they liked this work, but were averse to the toil of the yoke and the labour of the plough, where they had not such liberty and encouragement. Ephraim was like one of these heifers; he loved the service that was sweetened with a present reward, and would pay itself while it was a-doing, but declined that which was laborious, and was not attended with such refreshments. Those of this temper will be less serviceable, and so less fruitful.

The way to get comfort and assurance, and the sweet sense and improvement of your relations to God, and the privileges wherewith he honours and enhappies his servants, is to be 'constant and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for then your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.' The issue of it will be, the testimonies of his love and acceptance. But to be earnest for joy and comfort, and remiss in the Lord's work, is the way to fall short both of assurance and fruitfulness.

Be not then so solicitous about *receiving* good, as in *doing* good. It is a more blessed thing to do than to receive. It is a directer way to abound in those fruits which the Lord will crown with rich blessings. Be not more careful to know that the Lord is your God than to shew yourselves to be his servants, by faithfulness, diligence, and activeness in the work of God. He that will mind his duty, and make it his business to be every way serviceable, and proceed in that way, though he walk in darkness, and see no light in God's countenance, is in the most probable way to comfort, but in a most certain way to fruitfulness.

7. Beware you be not much taken up with little things. These will take you off from the greater, wherein your chief and most valuable fruits consist. Let truths and duties have that proportion of your thoughts and endeavours which their weight and moment require. The 'tithing of mint, anise, and cummin,' will occasion the neglect of things which are βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου, 'the weightier things of the law.' There are some matters of opinion and practice that are but in the skirts of religion and godliness, far from the heart of it, *e. g.* the less considerable questions about rites, order, discipline, &c. If these take us up as much or more than the vitals of godliness, we are like but to make an inconsiderable improvement in the main. And then whatever our proficiency be in minute things, and such as are not material, it will turn to no great account when God comes to seek for fruit. If we be more busy about the fringe and the lace than the body and soul of religion, or if that which is but as the hair be of more regard with us than the head of it, we may be fruitful in trifles, but barren in what is of greatest value and consequence. This is as if a gardener should take much pains in watering and pruning one small branch or sprig, but should do nothing at all to the main arms, or the body, or the root of the tree. That is not the way to make it bear well.

Having discovered the impediments which hinder your fruitfulness, and therewith shewed you the necessity of removing of them, and the way to do it, I proceed to some positive directions, such as, being duly observed, may promote your fruitfulness more directly.

1. Labour to be sensible of your barrenness. The sense of an evil is the first step towards its removal. He that observes not his distemper, and has no sense of it, will not look after cure, nor so much as think of it; it is like to grow upon him, and continue so till it prove mortal and incurable. He that is past sense is often past cure, and he that is without sense is so far without hope of relief that he is not in the way to it, nor will so much as seek it. Ephraim's condition was dangerous indeed, when there was cause to complain of him, as Hosea. vii. 9. If you would be fruitful, get true and effectual apprehensions of your unfruitfulness, such as may impress a lively and stirring sense of it upon your souls and consciences; endeavour to understand what the nature of it is, how much, how far it prevails, wherein it consists, and in what particulars you are chargeable, what are the causes of it, and what the danger; labour to see these severals, so as your eye may affect your heart, and so affect it, as it may set all in motion towards cure and redress.

(1.) Labour to know what is the nature and extent of your unfruitfulness, whether it be total or partial only; whether you be wholly barren, and bear no good fruit at all, or only bring not forth so much and so good as the Lord may expect from you. Get acquainted with the state of your souls; if there be not an universal change wrought therein, if the fallow-ground of your hearts be not ploughed up, no good fruit at all can grow there. If this be your condition, and you are not sensible of it, you will never look after that great change, without which you cannot be in any capacity for fruitfulness.

(2.) If you be not wholly fruitless, but only defective in part, labour to understand where the defect is, in quantity or quality. Be apprehensive of both, and how far it reaches, and the severals wherein it appears. Get a particular sense hereof; that is the best way to an universal redress. While you have only confused apprehensions of your unfruitfulness in general, and are not sensible of the particulars wherein distinctly you are guilty, you will do little or nothing towards a cure, or nothing to purpose; neither can others do it for you. A person that complains he is ill, but minds not where or how, nor gives any account of it so as the particular distemper may be discerned, is not in the way either to help himself or to have help from a physician. Resting in confused apprehensions and general complaints of barrenness, without searching in what parts of heart and life it lies, is the way to continue still unfruitful. Neither yourselves, nor others for you, can apply themselves particularly, and so not effectually, to remove it.

Search then every part of your souls, and every part of your conversations where fruit should appear, and observe what branch of either is too bare; how far your fruit is too little, how far it is not good; where it grows not thick enough, or where it is spoiled and corrupted.

Look into your minds. What is the good fruit that should grow there? High apprehensions of God; frequent meditation of his attributes, word, works, holy thoughts, minding of heaven and things above, and minding other things in a subserviency thereto; making use of the world, the objects and occurrences therein, to make it self-pregnant with spiritual thoughts and motions heavenward. Take notice how fruitless your minds are herein, how little they are so employed, how seldom such thoughts have admission, how short their stay is, how cold their welcome, how inconsiderable their efficacy, how easily they are diverted, how often stifled, how much your minds and thoughts run waste; what vanity, impertinency, curiosity or carnalness corrupts them, so that the fruits of your minds are neither

much nor good. How near, how like you are to those who delight not to retain God in their thoughts, and the things of God. Get such a sense of this as the nature and consequence of it calls for.

Look into your hearts. The good fruits which these should bring forth are the acts and exercise of graces and holy affections to God and others. Observe if the exercise of some be not almost wholly neglected, if others be not seldom acted, though there be frequent occasions for it. If, when they do act, it be not very weakly, feebly, with much mixtures of corruption; and so, if your best fruits be not, as it were, very much worm-eaten, if not half rotten; take such notice hereof, as may strike your hearts with a due sense of it, and of the consequence of it.

Look into your lives. Observe what fruits these should bring forth unto God, yourselves, your families, those to whom you are specially related, what and how much unto the household of faith, unto strangers, unto enemies, what their several conditions and circumstances call for, what your several talents oblige you to, what variety of occasions and opportunities require, what you owe to their souls, what to their other concerns, what acts of godliness, of sobriety, of righteousness, of mercy, of charity, you should abound in. Observe how many of these are omitted, how many slightly performed, how many sorely corrupted in respect of their principle, or their matter, or their manner, or their end. These diligently observed, if either multitude or weight would make you sensible, will help you to a great and a particular sense of your unfruitfulness.

(3.) Be sensible of the causes of your barrenness. Make diligent inquiry after them, and engage yourselves to a careful observance of them. It is here, as in other cases, to know the cause is half the cure.

Take notice what weeds they are which choke the seed, what vermin it is that corrupts the fruit. You will not take pains to pluck up those or destroy these, unless you be sensible what mischief they do you. Search out those inward distempers which hinder your souls from thriving and growing fruitful. Be sensible of them, as of such a judgment as locusts, and canker-worms, and caterpillars, and palmer-worms were counted of old, when they destroyed the fruits of the earth, and made the land barren and desolate, as it is expressed, Joel ii.; such desolation will tolerated lusts make in your souls. Observe whether it be spiritual sloth or too much business; whether negligence of your souls, or too much eagerness after earthly things, or little things in religion; whether it be mistakes or prejudice. The former account given you of the impediments of fruitfulness, may be helpful to you herein. If you discover the true cause of your barrenness, and be sensible how pernicious it is, that will make you resolute against it, and so contribute much towards more fruitfulness.

(4.) Be sensible of the sinfulness and danger of barrenness, how much guilt it will involve you in, what dreadful calamities of all sorts it will expose you to. Those many particulars which I made use of as motives before, will serve also as means for this purpose. And let them be remembered and so improved to make you more and more apprehensive how exceeding sinful, how extremely dangerous it is to continue barren under the means of fruitfulness. The more sensible you are of this, the more careful, the more active will you be to produce more and better fruits; and that is the next way to more improvement. It is want of sense that hinders action, and it is through want of activeness that nothing goes forward in our spiritual course. A barren womb was counted a shame, a reproach, a curse. How impatient was Rachel of it! Gen. xxx. 1. And what an affliction was it to Hannah! 1 Sam. i. 8, 10, 11.

Spiritual barrenness is a greater grievance in itself, and should be so to us, and no less resented by us. And if we were duly convinced of our unfruitfulness in the severals wherein we are guilty, and truly sensible of it as our sin, our shame, our reproach, our burden, one of our greatest afflictions; if we had such a sense of it as would make it fearful, and shameful, and grievous, and afflictive, and burdensome to us: this would lead us (as it did them of old) to take such courses as would not suffer us to continue long unfruitful. But we are so, and we continue so, because we make little or nothing of it, we go lightly under it, we are too well content it should be so. There is no such longing for deliverance from this affliction, as from outward petty grievances; none of Hannah's sore weeping for this barrenness; we are in no such bitterness of soul on this account. And why is it thus, but either because we are not apprehensive that we are unfruitful, nor how far, nor wherefore, nor wherein; or else because we have no such sense of the evil of it as our souls should be possessed with. A due sense of it, as of a dangerous and burdensome grievance, would bid fair for an effectual redress; this would set all in a quick motion towards it; this would beget such longings, such wrestlings, such diligence and activeness for it, as would not fall short of abundant fruitfulness.

2. Get new natures. There must be that great and universal change made in your souls, by renewing grace and the Spirit of regeneration, before you can bring forth good fruit. You must be born again before you can bear much, nay, before you can bring forth any fruit at all that is truly good. Nothing more evident in Scripture than this. You must be 'renewed in the spirit of your minds,' and 'put on the new man,' Eph. iv. 23, 24. That new man, that new nature, must be created in you, which consists in holiness and true righteousness, before you can bring forth the fruits of holiness and righteousness. Holiness and righteousness planted in the soul at our new birth is the root of all good fruit. You may as well expect that herbs or corn will grow without a root, as that any good fruit should grow where holiness and righteousness is not first rooted in the heart.

Therefore that is the method of the Spirit of God in Scripture; when he calls for good fruit, he first advises to look to the root, Col. iii. 10. 'After the image of God,' which consists in holiness and righteousness, there is the root; and these being planted, he proceeds to call for good fruit, ver. 12-14, and afterwards requires relative duties, which are the fruits proper to wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants, masters, in the rest of the chapter and the beginning of the next. These fruits will not be brought forth till the new man be put on, *i. e.* till renewing grace be planted in the soul. So the Lord requiring better fruit of the Jews, that his fury might not consume them, in order thereto calls upon them to get their hearts circumcised, Jer. iv. 8. That which is called *circumcision of the heart* in the Old Testament, is *renewing and quickening by the Spirit of regeneration* in the New Testament, Col. ii. 11, 13.

The soil must be good, that the fruit may be good. The old soil of nature unrenewed bears but such fruit as that Heb. vi. 8. The fruit cannot be good unless the tree be good, Mat. vii. 16-18. So Luke vi. 43-45. He that brings forth good fruit must be first a good tree; and he is a good tree, as the metaphor is explained, who is good at heart, *i. e.* in whose heart there is a treasury of grace. No good thing, no good fruit, can be expected where there is not such a treasure within. You may as reasonably look for figs of thorns, or grapes of brambles, as good fruits from those whose hearts are not sincerely good, whose souls are not enriched with this heavenly treasure,

the treasure of grace and holiness. Nay, those who are not born again and quickened by regenerating grace, are not only bad trees, in Scripture phrase, but such as are dead. That is the state of every unregenerate soul, he is 'dead in trespasses and sins,' and some 'twice dead, and plucked up by the roots,' Jude 12. And what fruit can you expect from a dead tree? Till you be 'quickened by the Spirit' of Christ, and made 'alive unto God,' all the fruits you bear will be no better than 'dead works.'

Oh then, if ever you would bear any fruit that is good, any fruits that God can take pleasure in, if you would 'flee from the wrath to come,' that dreadful wrath which is coming upon all who are barren, mind the new birth, make sure that you are born again; mind this as that 'one thing needful,' that one thing upon which all fruitfulness, and consequently all happiness, depends. Beg this of God, above all things in the world, that he would give you new hearts and make you new creatures; that he would raze out the image and superscription of Satan, which naturally every soul bears, and impress on you his own image, created in holiness and righteousness. Give no rest to your souls till you have some evidence that you are renewed in the spirit of your minds, and in the frame and temper of your hearts; till you can say upon some good ground, 'Old things are passed away, and all things become new.'

Till then the best of your fruits will but have a show of goodness, such as may delude you and deceive others, but will never procure you comfort here or reward hereafter. 'Be not deceived, God will not be mocked,' Gal. vi. 7-9. 'He that is in the flesh' can do no other than 'sow to the flesh;' and he is in the flesh who is acquainted with no other birth but his first, his carnal and natural birth, who never knew what it was to be born of the Spirit,' John iii. 5, 6. 'Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again;' I say no more than Christ, than the apostle says; till then, you will never bear fruit of which you can reap anything but corruption, i. e. the temporal and eternal ruin of body and soul. If you expect anything better, you will find yourselves miserably deceived.

And take heed you be not deluded by others. There are some teachers admirably wise in their own conceit, who, having no experience of the new birth in themselves, or following Pelagius, who flattered nature and denied the necessity of renewing grace, they waive the doctrine of regeneration, and call upon their hearers for morality, as though that were all in all: wherein they proceed as wisely, and are [as] like to prove successful, as if they were pruning a dead tree to make it fruitful, or taking pains with a bramble to make it bear grapes, or looking for fruits where there is no root. That no fruit truly good can be expected where the new birth is not the foundation, and renewing grace the root of it, is a truth so clear in Scripture, that if an angel from heaven should preach any other doctrine, we might upon good ground count him a deluder.

8. Get the inward principles of holiness strengthened and enlarged if you would be fruitful. The first thing you are to mind is to get grace planted in the heart; without this, as I now told you, there can be no good fruit at all. The next thing is to get it fortified and increased; without this there cannot be much fruit, and without much you cannot be fruitful. The Lord expects not only *some* good fruit, but *much* of it, proportionably to the means of improvement vouchsafed. He looks for much, of those to whom much is committed. And indeed it is not good enough, though it may have some goodness in it, unless it answer his expectation. And on this account it will not be good unless it be much, and much it cannot be when the principle it produces is weak and little. For good fruits are the acts of holiness

in heart and life, and everything acts as it is; *operari sequitur esse*. That which is but small and feeble cannot ordinarily do much nor do it so well. Where grace is weak, it will but act feebly; the acts of it will neither be so many nor so vigorous, and so our fruit will neither be so much nor so good as when grace in the heart is much and strong. When it is such, the virtue of it will reach farther, and be able to fill a larger sphere of fruitfulness, and there will not be such mixtures of corruption to vitiate or rot it. When a tree is well and firmly rooted, it will grow higher, the body of it stronger and more bulky, and the branches more and also more spreading, and so it will be capable of bearing much more fruit than another. Holiness in the heart is the root of all good fruits (as I shewed before). That the trees of righteousness may be strong and spreading, and so very fruitful, you must look well to the root; you must dig about it, and open it, and water it; I mean you must be diligent, by all means, to have holiness thrive in your hearts, to make it strong and keep it active, to remove whatever may hinder its spreading, or obstruct the diffusing of its virtue into the several branches of your souls and lives. 'Give all diligence,' that every grace may increase and abound, 2 Peter i. 5-8. 'If these be in you and abound, you will not be barren,' &c. To be rich in inward holiness is the way to be full of good fruits, rich in good works, for out of the good treasury of the heart those good things proceed; and when this treasure abounds there, out of the abundance of the heart will they flow freely and plentifully. It is not enough that the soil be good, unless it be kept in heart; it is not enough that your souls are sanctified, unless they be kept up in a gracious temper, always ready and disposed to exercise grace upon all occasions. That is the way to be ready to every good work, Titus iii. 1. And so whenever the Lord comes seeking fruit he may find some.

4. Be much in the use of ordinances. They are the means appointed by God for the improvement of his people's souls to fruitfulness; and being duly used, they will not fail to attain their end, they will certainly produce good fruits. You may be as confident of it as that meat and drink will nourish you, or that rain in season will make the earth fruitful. For the means of grace are, by the Lord's appointment, that to your souls which meat is to your bodies, or rain is to the ground. That of the prophet seems spoken of a promise for deliverance, but it holds true of the word in general, and we may conclude the same in proportion of the other ordinances, Isa. lv. 10, 11. And it follows, ver. 18, those who were before unfruitful as the briar and thorn, shall be like fair and goodly trees, they shall abound in graces and good fruits. The Lord would never have appointed those means for this end, but that they are apt to effect it, and it would be a disparagement to him who so appointed them if they should not attain it. But then they must be duly used; let me tell you how, briefly, in three or four particulars.

(1.) Your hearts must be employed in them. The soul should be thoroughly engaged therein, Jer. xxx. 21. We should strongly oblige our hearts, and make a covenant with our souls to approach unto God, when we go about holy duties, otherwise we shall but do the work of the Lord negligently; and so, when the blessing of the ordinances is to make us fruitful, they may leave us under the curse of barrenness; for, Jer. xlviii. 10, negligence in worship is less tolerable than in the work there spoken of. You must hear, as for life, Deut. xxxii. 46, 47. You should pray, as if you were in a conflict; put out the strength of your souls, as if you were wrestling; *συναγίζετε*, is the apostle's word, Rom. xv. 80. So use the ordinances, and they will not fall short of their end; the blessing of them will come down upon

your souls, like rain upon the mown grass, to refresh and make you fruitful.

(2.) Come with an appetite, longing for the blessings of them ; come with souls pinched with their spiritual wants, sensible that you need them ; as your bodies, when faint or hungry, are sensible that they need refreshment, 1 Peter ii. 2. If you would grow strong and fruitful by the word, come to it as the hungry infant comes to the breast, so as nothing else will satisfy it. If you come as you do to a meal with a full stomach, no wonder if you be 'sent empty away,' Luke i. 53. He will fill with the good things of his ordinances those that come hungering after them, but the full he sends empty away, full of nothing but the soul-distempers they came clogged with. Why do so many continue unfruitful under the means of grace, but because they come out of custom, are too well content to go as they come, are too indifferent whether they reap any spiritual advantage thereby or no ? Alas ! when so exceeding much might be gained hereby, we get no more, because we no more desire it. 'The Lord's hand is not shortened,' &c., but we are 'straitened in our own bowels ;' our desires are contracted, and shrunk up into nothing ; our mouths are shut, when the Lord's hand is open. Nothing can get into our souls till desires open them ; these would make us drink in those heavenly showers, as the dry chapped earth drinks in the rain, and fruitfulness would be the issue of it in our souls, as it is in the ground, Heb. vi. If we came to the ordinances with earnest and sincere desires after the blessings thereof, a blessed fruitfulness would be our portion, we should then be under the influence of that sweet promise, Mat. v.

(3.) Content not yourselves with the ordinances without the presence of God in them. He is present everywhere, by common acts of providence, but more in some places than others, according as he more or less appears and shews himself in his power and glory. He is said to be most in heaven, because he is there most gloriously manifested ; but next to heaven, most in his ordinances : there he gives us ground to expect a more special presence than elsewhere ordinarily on earth. And then is he so present when he concurs with his ordinances, makes them powerful and effectual ; when he shews his goings, discovers his glory, exerts his power, distils his influences. Then is he present with them, when in the use of them he shines into the mind, stirs in the conscience, opens the heart, moves the will, excites the affections. So that there is no fructifying virtue in the ordinances unless the Lord be present there. So that to be contented with the use of ordinances, without the divine presence, is to be satisfied with an empty dish, instead of that which should nourish and refresh you. Heaven would not be heaven without that glorious presence ; and the means of grace will not be the means of grace, cannot be the means of fruitfulness, without this special presence. There is no healing virtue in these waters, nothing to heal those distempers which keep you barren, unless the angel of his presence descend and trouble them, or move upon them.

And therefore, whatever other circumstances commend or endear the ordinances to you, be satisfied with nothing without this special and efficacious presence. Beg this importunately before you go, as Moses, Exod. xxxiii. 13-15. The Lord had assured him, ver. 2, that he would send an angel before him ; but the conduct of an angel, without the presence of God, would not avail them, nor satisfy him. If the ordinances were administered to you by angels, yet would not they be effectual, nor you fruitful, without the Lord's presence. If Paul should preach to you, if Apollos were your minister, yet would not the word be fruitful, unless God gave the increase ; that so depends upon his presence and concurrence, as nothing, no act, that which is

extraordinary and miraculous, can yield an increase without it, 1 Cor. iii. 6, and so he applies himself to God for it, 2 Cor. ix. 10.

Be importunate for this presence of God before you come, and come with such longings for it as David expresses, Ps. lxi. 1, 2; whatsoever he saw in the sanctuary (and there were glorious things to be seen), nothing would satisfy his longings and thirstings, but the sight of the glory and power of God there; nothing but that presence which he was wont to have: 'As I have seen thee,' &c.

And when you find the Lord withdraws, when at any time you enjoy not his presence; when your hearts are hard and dead under the ordinances, not touched from above, not warmed, not affected, not in motion; when, by the ineffectualness of your attendance on them, you find reason to conclude that he is absent, that you see not his goings, feel not his working, find no footsteps nor impress of the divine presence on your hearts: let the Lord know that you count this a grievous affliction, that you cannot tell how to live without his presence; that the ordinances, however otherwise the special solace of your souls, are no joy to you without him. Give him no rest till he return, and impregnate the ordinances with his influences, and make them fruitful, and you by them, with his presence, Cant. iv. 16. By refreshing gales, and fruitful inspirations of his presence and Spirit, graces are quickened, strengthened, increased, acted; they flow forth, and abound in pleasant fruits.

(4.) Use not the ordinances for themselves. Account them not your end, but the means to attain it. Look not upon your use of them as the fruit which God expects, but as the way to that fruitfulness. Do not think your fruitfulness consists in hearing, reading, praying, meditating, conference, or communicating; this is as if the husbandman should think his harvest lay in tilling, and ploughing, and sowing his ground: if he mind nothing more, and look no further, his barn will be empty at the year's end, and he undone in the conclusion. These are not the fruits of the earth, but the way and means to make the earth yield them. So are the ordinances; if you use them, and look at no other fruit, you will reap little but your labour for your pains. Their end is something further than their use; if you rest in the use of them as the end, you will fall short of fruitfulness, which is their end indeed, and continue barren.

God will not count you fruitful, because you are much and often in the use of ordinances, no more than a vine-dresser will count a vine fruitful, because it is much dunged, and often watered; if he have no other fruit of it, his labour is lost, and the tree in danger to be cut down as fruitless. That is your case, that is your danger, if your fruit be but your being employed in holy duties. This perishes in the using, and you may perish for all this, as those that are barren. He that useth the means, as though it were his end, both abuseth the means and loseth the end. Rest not in your performance of holy duties, how much, how well soever you seem to perform them, unless you find some good effect thereof upon your hearts and in your lives. For all your diligence and exactness here'in, if nothing more, nothing better come of it, let it be as grievous to you as it would be to a gardener, if, after much pains in digging, and planting, and watering, he should see nothing spring up, or grow, he would look upon himself as in danger to be undone. And so may you; nor will the use of ordinances help or secure you, unless they help you to be fruitful; and if you would have them helpful to you this way, you must use them for this end, and not as if they were the end of their own use.

(5.) Make fruitfulness your business. Look upon it as your greatest con-

cernment in this world, and accordingly mind and pursue it. Let it not be a *πάρεργον*, something that you mind on the by, when other things you are more taken up with will give you leave; but make it the main work, and great design of your lives, to be fruitful and live fruitfully. It is for want of this usually that we remain barren. There is such a concurrence of all other things requisite to make us fruitful, that our great defectiveness herein cannot rationally be charged upon anything so much as this, that we do not make it our business to abound with good fruits. The Lord has declared himself willing, yea, desirous, that we should be filled with the fruits of the Spirit. He calls for this importunately, by his word, by his providences, by our own consciences; he threatens and afflicts us for want of them; he affords us means abundantly sufficient for this purpose; he promises his concurrence and assistance, to make them effectual; he furnishes us with abilities, opportunities, and advantages for the improvement of them. We have much more to secure our success herein than in other affairs, wherein we ordinarily succeed well enough, using but common prudence and industry. What, then, can be the reason that we are not more successful in this, that so many who are planted in the Lord's vineyard bear so little fruit? So far as I can discern, in ordinary cases, the true cause of this is, because we do not make fruitfulness our business. When we have pursued this in our thoughts so far as we can, it must at last be resolved into this as the main reason of it, we make it not our chief work and design to be full of good fruits; something else is more our business, more minded, more designed, more pursued. We have something else more in chase which diverts us; our hearts are more upon some other business; the main streams which should carry us to this run some other way. We mind this as though we did not mind, and seek it as though we sought it not. We seem to seek this, but we strive not for it; we move towards it, but we run not; we offer at it, but we wrestle not; and it is running, striving, wrestling by which effectual endeavours for fruitfulness are expressed in Scripture. We act not [at] such a rate as becomes those who make it their grand design, nor as we see others act for that which they make their business. We follow not this as a man whose heart is on the world pursues some promising worldly design; and manage not this affair as careful, industrious men manage their business. We do not take such care and pains about it. This seems to me to be the principal cause why many, who, in respect of the means they enjoy, might be filled with the fruits of righteousness and holiness, are very much to seek in many of them.

Since, then, there is a concurrence of all other things, all that is requisite on God's part, to render you fruitful, and this is the chief *remora* that stops it on your parts, resolve for the future to be no more wanting to yourselves in that which infinitely concerns you. Make it but your business, bestow but on it that care and pains which you allow to that which you make your business in the world, and you may be certain of more success than any can insure to you in earthly undertakings. It is a sure way to be fruitful, to be rich in all good fruits.

(6.) Make use of afflictions to promote fruitfulness. Pruning is a means to make a tree fruitful, Lev. xv. 3. So the Lord, when provoked to deny the means of fruitfulness, because they were not improved, threatens the barren vineyard shall be no more pruned, Isa. v. 6. Afflictions are that to the soul which pruning is to a fruit-tree; as necessary, as advantageous, to render it fruitful. Hence those plants which the Lord will have improved he will purge or prune them, John xv. 2. Those branches he has no hopes of, *ἀσπερ*, he cuts them off for the fire; but those which he intends to make

more fruitful, καθάρει, he purges, he prunes them. As a vine-dresser cuts off the suckers, lops off the twigs and superfluous branches, which are good for nothing, but spend the sap which should make the better boughs fruitful, so does the Lord, as by other means, so by afflictions, cut off those luxuries which suck away the strength of the heart that should run out into good fruits. If, then, you would be more and more fruitful, make use of afflictions and outward calamities, which the Lord exercises you with for this end. Submit to pruning, and see that it be improved for this purpose. But how may afflictions be so improved, for the rendering of us more fruitful? Briefly,

[1.] Observe what excesses you are apt to run into; what useless excrescences or luxuries sprout out anywhere in your souls or lives; what suckers there are which spend the strength of your hearts, in any degree unprofitably. Take notice what it is that takes up more of your thoughts, affections, endeavours than is due to it; what relation, what enjoyment, what design or business, what recreation or refreshment, is wont to hurry you into excesses, and to take up more of your hearts, or time, or talents that it ought to have. Make use of afflictions, to wean you from these, and to keep you within your bounds, which they tempt you to transgress. Apply them as wormwood and gall, as offered on purpose by the Lord to embitter those things, the lusciousness of which has endangered and ensnared your souls, and drawn you into too great neglects of God and your heavenly interests, upon the due minding of which depends your fruitfulness. Those excesses and inordinacies spend the sap, and strength, and vigour of your souls unprofitably, which, if it ran the right way, would turn into good fruits. Make use of afflictions to lop these off, though it go to the quick to do it; sharper chastenings must do it if others will not serve the turn, unless the Lord will leave you under barrenness. When afflictions are sharp and bitter, say, These are the issue of my excesses and inordinacies, and I am like to suffer more by them if they continue. And so make use of sufferings in any kind, to dead the heart to them; then they are lopped off and wither when the heart dies to them. And these suckers being cut off, the other branches will better thrive, and be more fruitful.

[2.] Exercise faith for this purpose. Depend on God for such an issue and effect of afflictions, that he will so order and manage them that they shall tend to make you more fruitful, that he will help you to such an improvement of them. Dependence on the Lord for it doth engage him to do it. Those that trust him 'shall not be ashamed;' i. e. shall not be disappointed, Rom. x. 11. It is disappointment that makes ashamed, when he falls short of what he confidently expected. Those that in faith expect this of the Lord, shall not find their expectation frustrated, shall not meet with any disappointment that will make them ashamed of their confidence, Ps. ix. 18. The expectation of the afflicted shall not come to nothing; the Lord will not forget to answer his expectation. Do but trust God, and he will not herein fail you. And there are two strong supports of faith, great encouragements to believe that he will sanctify afflictions, so as to make you fruitful: his design, and his promise.

First, It is his end and design in afflicting his children. It is not to satisfy his justice, nor to give vent to his anger, when he is full of it, nor to please himself in the smart of those who have provoked him; but, as he graciously expresses it, Heb. xii. 10, that is his end in chastening his children, to make them more 'partakers of his holiness' than they were before, and without chastening, and so more capable of bringing forth the fruits of holiness. So John xv. 2, when the vine-dresser makes use of the pruning-

hook, and cuts the vine, and makes it bleed, his design is not to kill it, but to make it more fruitful. And such is the Lord's end in pruning his people by afflictions; and this being his design, we may be sure he is not willing to lose it or to fall short of his end; that would be a dishonour to him, such a one as the sons of men cannot digest. And upon this ground faith may raise itself into confidence, that he will promote fruitfulness by afflictions, since that is the end he proposes to himself in afflicting, and these are the means he uses for the effecting of that end. And it is not for his honour to lose his end, or to use means which are not effectual for the accomplishing of it.

Secondly, You have his promise for it. He has passed his word, and engaged his truth and faithfulness, that afflictions shall have this effect, Heb. xii. 11; it will bring forth these fruits. This, when God's method is observed, is so certainly future, that he expresses it as present: 'It bringeth forth.' It is confirmed by experience too: *Solidissima pars est corporis, quam frequens usus agitavit* (Seneca). Rom. v. 3-5, affliction puts these graces upon trial and exercise, and exercise strengthens and increases them; and hence the fruit of affliction is more 'precious than gold,' 1 Peter i. 7. It is hereby tried, and often trials put upon frequent exercise; and the more it is acted, the more it is strengthened, and consequently the fruit of it is more and better; more both in quantity and value, precious fruit.

Now, the Lord having promised, and given experiments too, of his faithfulness in performing his promise, what can be more desired for the encouragement of our faith? Act it accordingly, believe the Lord, so shall your souls prosper. It will not only purify the heart itself, and purge out those distempers that keep you barren, but engage the Lord to make afflictions effectual to promote your fruitfulness.

[8.] Seek him for this purpose. He intends this by afflictions, and has promised it; but for this he will be sought unto. After the Lord had declared his intention, and given his word that he would plant what was desolate, yet he adds, Ezek. xxxvi. 37, Be importunate with the Lord, that he would make you fruitful by afflictions; pray, and that your prayers may be prevalent, pray in faith; and that faith may be strong, let the design and promise of God be its support. This is the way to put life and spirits both into your faith and prayer. The apostle James, having given an account of the fruits which afflictions are apt to produce, James i. 2, 3, adds, ver. 5, 'If any want wisdom,' to make such a fruitful improvement of afflictions, 'let him pray for it.' But how must he pray? Every mode of praying will not serve the turn. He tells you, ver. 6, this is the way, in brief, to make use of afflictions for fruitfulness; I have given a large account of it.

(7.) Labour to make all things subservient unto fruitfulness. Improve all that you are entrusted with, all that you can make any such advantage of, for this purpose. Make use of parts, and gifts, and other enjoyments, for this end; manage them all so as the product of them may be good fruits. It is true, holiness in the heart is the root and stock upon which, and upon nothing else without it, that which is truly and spiritually good doth grow. But other scions, though otherwise incapable of bearing good fruit, being grafted into this stock, may bring forth excellent fruit; the sap and juice of grace conveyed into them, changes their nature and quality; and instead of that which is wild and degenerate (which is their natural issue), makes them capable of bearing fruit pleasant to God and man.

And as by the influence of grace they may be improved for such fruitfulness, so the Lord expects we should actually so improve them. They are talents which are committed to us for this end; and the Lord, that has en-

trusted us with them, and made us stewards of them, looks that such advantage should be made thereof, and will call us to an account for it. We must shortly give an account of our stewardship; and if we cannot shew good fruit, as to the improvement of these talents, we shall be found unfaithful stewards, unprofitable servants, and in danger to have a process formed against us accordingly.

Those who have more advantages than others, should be careful to bring forth more and better fruits than others; or else they will not be able, when the great day of reckoning comes, to give a good account of it.

[1.] Those that have a better natural temper, have this way an advantage thereby above others. Grace in such a temper is like apples of gold in pictures of silver; it is as a diamond better set, the lustre and beauty of it more appears; but then, if we would improve it for fruitfulness, the use of it must not be to please others, or to set off ourselves, or to gain love and reputation to ourselves, but to insinuate ourselves the more advantageously into others, to do them good, to sweeten spiritual advice and reproofs, which, though for the health and recovery of their souls, yet, as bitter pills, and unpleasant receipts, would not otherwise go down; to commend the grace of Christ to those that are without, which appears more commendable thus set off, than in a crabbed, and sour, and severe temper; to render the ways of Christ more pleasant and lovely, so as to overcome prejudice, and melt obstinacy into a compliance. You know the sun is more powerful when it shines in a clear heaven, than when it was clouded, and the weather stormy; and so has grace the more advantage for a fruitful efficacy upon others, when it is not encumbered with a cloudy or stormy temper. And when it is not so improved, the advantage is so far lost, and the fruits not brought forth, to which they are hereby more than others obliged.

[2.] Natural parts should be improved to fruitfulness. Any clearness of judgment, or quickness of apprehension, or strength of memory, when it is receptive or retentive; any degree of these should be made use of for our Lord's advantage, and the benefit of others, else we let ground, which is improveable, lie fallow, and so far we shall be found barren. Those that have least of these owe something on this account; those that have more, ought herewith to be more serviceable, and so more fruitful. They are accountable according to the proportion of what is committed to them. Our faculties are not given us for nothing, or for our own use only, or to exercise them as we please; the end even of these is fruitfulness, the producing of that whereby we may please and honour God, and do good to others. Our Master gives us not tools for no purpose; he expects work, and that we should use them in his service; and the better the tools are, the better work does he look for. When we have more than others, we should be helpful thereby not only to ourselves, but also to those who have less. A good understanding should be a guide to others in the ways of God, so far as there is a call and opportunity to give them light. A quick apprehension should be a relief to the slowness and dulness of others in spiritual things; as it grasps more and more easily, so it should communicate more freely, and offer it more clearly, according as several capacities require. A good memory should be a good treasury, for the enriching both of himself and others with the precious things laid up there. Both things new and old, things taken in for daily use or laid up for constant store, as an householder, in a free entertainment, brings forth, according to that, Mat. xiii. 51, 52; and so a good man, Mat. xii. 85. The more good to ourselves and others is the issue of natural accomplishments, the more fruitful we are.

[8.] So spiritual gifts, though but common, should be improved for the

bearing of good fruit; and those who would be fruitful indeed, must so use them. A gift of prayer and utterance; a faculty of expressing ourselves to God or to man, as occasion requires; ability to discourse of the things of God, or to make use of other common things in subserviency thereto: the chief fruit of such gifts is edifying; and the apostle directs to this as that which was principally to be aimed at in the use of gifts, when they were extraordinary, 1 Cor. xiv. 12. The gift of prayer should be improved in praying for and with others, as our place requires. Those that restrain it are enemies to the fruit of it, whatever is pretended or offered instead of it. You may carve the bark of a tree, and cut it into forms and figures of grapes, or other fruit; but that is the effect of art, it is forced upon the tree; it is not genuine fruit, nor that which is expected of a fruit-tree. The gift of discourse should be improved, as there is occasion, for reproof, admonition, instruction, comfort, exhortation; for provoking one another to love and good works. This is good fruit, and tends to make others fruitful.

[4.] So power and interest may be improved for fruitfulness. Interest in the esteem or affections of others, should be made use of to draw them into ways wherein they may bring forth fruit unto God, and to lead them on to more and more fruitful walking. Interest in those that are great, to engage them to be a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat; such storms and heats are as injurious to good fruits, or those who bear them. So power or authority over others should be improved by superiors of all sorts, for the weeding out of sin, which chokes good fruit, for the bringing of those under them into fruitful ways, under fruitful influences, and for the keeping of them there; which was the Lord's confidence of Abraham, Gen. xviii. 19, and the endeavour of Moses and Joshua, in reference to their people.

[5.] Outward enjoyments, they afford advantages for fruitfulness. And the apostle calls for their improvement this way, and shews withal what fruits they may be helpful to bring forth, 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18. That is the best that can be said of riches, they give those who have them a capacity to do good; they give them the advantage to be rich in good works, which are more precious and valuable riches by far than outward abundance; and they are richest this way who are most 'ready to distribute,' most 'willing to communicate;' as ready to use for God what he gives them as to receive more; as forward to be rich in good works as to be rich in the world. It is a great degeneracy, and most unworthy a Christian, to be otherwise disposed; to be eager after much, but backward to employ much in ways of fruitfulness. Then only are we faithful stewards; then only do we employ plenty for the ends for which it is given; then only is it a complete blessing, when it runs out freely in good fruits for the advantage of God's interest in the world, for the promoting of knowledge, holiness, and righteousness, and the means that tend to promote them; for maintaining the gospel and ministry of Christ, and upholding his worship and institutions; for the repressing of his enemies, for the relief of his members; and, in the apostle's words, for doing good to all.

When they help you to rich expressions both of love to Christ, brotherly love and charity to all, then do they make you rich indeed, rich and full of good fruits. And so must you endeavour to use them, if ever you would have true comfort in them, or ever expect to give a tolerable account of them. He will never be found a faithful steward who improves them not for such fruitfulness.

[6.] The world, not only as it is an enjoyment, but as it is an object, may help you to good fruits. You may see that in the creatures, in the occur-

rences, in the course and administration of the world, which may acquaint you with God, and bring him to your thoughts, and raise your apprehensions of him, and engage your affections to him, your love, delight, fear, desire. You may see that in it that is sufficient to embitter sin; a world of motives to set your hearts against it. You may see many things in it which may help you to the exercise of holiness; much to encourage faith, to teach you wisdom, to engage you to thankfulness, to lead you to self-denial, and make you humble and vile in your own eyes; much to wean you from things below, endear heaven to you, and make ye in love with the appearing of Christ. These are good fruits; yet even this world will help us to them, if it were duly improved for this purpose. And if you would be fruitful indeed, the world, and all you have and are, must be made use of to promote your fruitfulness.

(8.) Aim at universal fruitfulness. Make it your design and endeavour to be fruitful in all things which the Lord requires of you, or commends to you as good fruit; and towards all objects and persons who ought to taste the goodness of it, and should reap any fruit of you. Be fruitful in all things which the Holy Ghost calls good fruit. Satisfy not yourselves with some small things; a little shrivelled fruit will not answer the Lord's expectation. Content not yourselves with some great things so as to neglect others, though small in your account. The want of that which you count small may be a great neglect, and things little in themselves are often great in their consequence, and the want of them may render things great in project little or nothing in the issue. And so it is certainly when nothing will be effectual or acceptable, unless all be designed and endeavoured, which is the case here, Ps. cxix. 6. Let him do what he will, he that minds not the doing of all that is required, of bearing all the fruit that is expected, will be ashamed in the issue, can have no confidence that he will fare better.

Be not contented with a few things, whatever they be, small or great, no, nor with many things neither. When *all* is a duty, neither few nor many will be a discharge. Where all is expected, even in many things (while short of all) there will be a disappointment, and that is the case here; not a few, not many fruits only, but all is our duty and our Lord's expectation. The apostle's prayer for the Hebrews shews it, Heb. xlii. 20, 21. He prays the Lord would accomplish in them whatever is wanting, so *xaragrisas* signifies. And something is wanting where there is not every good work, every good act, wherein mind, or heart, or life should be fruitful. For if we endeavour not to do all and every good work, inward or outward, we do not his will nor that which is *εὐαρεστων*, well-pleasing in his sight. He is not well pleased unless we design to do all that pleases him, to bear all pleasant fruit. Labour then to be fruitful in all.

In *holy thoughts*. Let them be frequent, Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18. Let them be pleasing and delightful, else they will not be frequent, and so the mind not fruitful, Ps. civ. 84, and cxix. 97. Let them be fixed, else they will not be effectual; let them have good entertainment till they have done their business, till they have left some impression upon the soul, whose influence may reach the life. If they vanish before, they prove untimely fruit.

Be fruitful in *good inclinations*, that the tendency of your souls may be upwards, and the constant bent of it towards God; that you may be still in motion either towards him or for him; towards him even through the crowd of earthly business, and for him in those things wherein others are for themselves.

In *good designs and intentions*, that all of them, in all undertakings, may be the pleasing, and honouring, and enjoying of God, that none may be

tolerated that cross these, none entertained or pursued but in a subserviency unto these. And a due observance of, and inquiry into them, whether they be of this nature and tendency, that according as you find them, so or otherwise they may be suppressed or promoted.

In *good purposes and resolutions*, for God, and all that pleases him; against sin, and the world, and self, and all that offends him. And look that they be firm and effectual, followed into execution, that they may not prove, as they do in too many, only buds and blossoms, blasted and perishing without any effect, but a short flourish; so they will not be complete fruit, but only vain shows of it. Let them be like those of David, Ps. cxix. 116, as firm as what is ratified by an oath, and such as will not fall short of performance; so they will not fail to prove good fruit.

In *heavenly graces*. In the acts and exercise of faith, hope, repentance, self-denial, contempt of the world, heavenliness, mortification, &c. The acts of these are the fruits of the Spirit. And that you may be herein fruitful indeed, the exercise hereof should be so frequent as that such acts may make up your life. That the life which you live may be a life of faith, of repentance, of self-denial, a life above the world, a living in heaven while you are on earth, a walking with God while you converse with men, and advance above the things of time and sense while you are in the midst of them, and a dying to self and the world while you live in it. Such fruits reach heaven itself, while their root is here below, and they will distinguish you from every degenerate plant, yea, and from such as are the planted of the Lord, but prove shrubs, and thrive not.

In *holy affections*. In love to God, his image, his people, his truths, his ways, all that he commends as lovely; delight in him, and all that pleases him; desires of him, and all that he declares to be desirable; zeal for him, his whole interest, and all his concernments; fear of sin, and hatred of every evil way and motion, above all things that are dreadful; rejoicing in God more than all things which you are apt to make your joy; and mourning for that which dishonours and displeases him as the greatest grievance; jealousy of whatever may tempt you from him, or render you disloyal to him, less regardful to him, or less affectionate to him. The acts of these affections are choice fruits, and the more you abound therein, the more will you abound in fruits which the Lord himself takes special delight in; these signify the heart is set upon God, and that is a posture which not only pleases him, but yields an advantage to derive virtue from him, which will make you more and more fruitful, even to the utmost extent of what you can desire, Ps. xxxvii. 4.

In *spiritual discourse*. Such as is the fruit of a gracious heart, and may produce the like fruit in others, Eph. iv. 29; such as is good, *ἡ ἀγαθή* *καὶ ὡφέλιμος*, for the edifying of others in things that are useful, and may promote grace, or minister spiritual advantage to them. Such fruit the same apostle calls for, Col. iv. 6; let it be such as ought to proceed from a gracious soul; let it be savoury and wholesome to the souls that bear * it, seasoned with such prudence as may accommodate it to every one's capacity, condition, and necessity, that so they may relish its gust, and turn it into spiritual nourishment.

In all good actions, Col. i. 10. Not in some few, or some small, or some eminent works that are good, but in 'every good work;' and to persist steadfast and constant in every of them, 2 Thes. ii. 17; prepared for all, 2 Tim. ii. 21; furnished for all, 2 Tim. iii. 17; ready for every one, Titus iii. 1; following them, and not staying for occasions, but seeking occasions,

* Qu. 'hear'?—Ed.

1 Tim. v. 10, and following them zealously, Titus ii. 14, as those that would be patterns unto others, Titus ii. 7; and all to be well reported of on that account, 1 Tim. v. 10; and as careful to maintain them as themselves or families, Titus iii. 8; so as to account abundance of them their riches, 1 Tim. vi. 18. Not confining yourselves either to some acts of religion, or some acts of charity, as though these were all, or these were enough; not satisfying yourselves with those of the first table, as the pharisee, or those of the second, as the moralists; but 'walking in all the commandments,' Luke i. 6; making good works your daily course, your constant walk, as God has made it, Eph. ii. 10; not baulking a step, but passing quite through it, going constantly from one end to the other of the whole walk. Let this be the design and business of your lives, to be fruitful.

2. In all things. And fruitful also towards all who should reap any fruit of you, or to whom you are obliged to bring forth good fruits.

(1.) Towards God. All good fruit must respect him one way or other, as the end and motive, though others be the object of it, else it cannot be good. But the fruit I here intend must respect him more directly and immediately; God must be the object of it, and not the end only. And that you may bear fruit, get more and more acquainted with God. A clear, and full, and effectual knowledge of God, is not only good fruit itself, but also the seed of all other good fruits, towards God, or ourselves, or others. Without some degree of it none that is truly good can either spring or grow; and the clearer, and fuller, and more efficacious it is, the more will it contribute to make all your fruit both better and more abundant. The want of it, or defect in it, is an error in the first concoction, which, according to the degrees of it, is of dangerous consequence, and hardly to be prevented; and being not redressed (as it cannot be easily if neglected at first), will run into spiritual distempers instead of good fruits.

Oh then, whatever you are ignorant of, get acquainted with God! Study his perfections and excellencies, order all other studies and inquiries, so as they may serve and promote this. You may move towards other knowledge as the way, but this you must follow as the end, and then you will not fail of it, Hosea vi. 3. Let his majesty, and greatness, and power, and presence, and wisdom, and goodness, and transcendent glory and excellency every way, be often in your thoughts, always in your eye, as that which you must mind, and are most taken with. That is the way to have his greatness and his goodness pass before you; to see him, as far as mortal eye can see him, so far as he can be seen on earth. The more you desire and endeavour this, the more full and clear sight you will have of him; and the more fully and clearly you discern him, the more effectual will your sight of God be; and the more effectual it is, the more fruitful will it be in those fruits which respect God more particularly, which we may reduce to acts of admiration, submission, and complacency.

[1.] Acts of *admiration*. Get high adoring apprehensions of God, and by the sight and contemplation of his glorious excellencies, endeavour still to raise and advance them more and more. When they are highest, they are infinitely below him; that is the unavoidable weakness of our natures and capacities. We can never give him the glory that is due to his majesty, that is better fruit than human nature can bear; but something we are capable of, and the least that can look for acceptance is to advance him in our esteem above anything, above all things that are counted worthy of esteem, so that he may have the highest place in our minds. Nothing may take place of him, nothing may come near him; all that finds entertainment

in our minds and thoughts must stoop and lower to him, and be made his footstool, while he alone has the throne in our judgments, and is exalted above every other object, even those we count of greatest value. He ought to be adored and admired, so as other things must be contemptible to us in comparison. The higher our apprehensions of him are raised, with the more force they will fall upon the lower faculties, and put them into more vigorous motions towards more and better fruit.

[2.] Acts of *subjection*. Get your wills into a posture submissive to God, and observant of him in all things. Keep it in a readiness to submit to him, and every signification of his will and pleasure, without opposition or resistance, without exceptions or reservation, without any backwardness or lingering, that this may always be the voice and language of it, 'Behold, I come,' Ps. xl. 8, and Ps. xxxvii. 81. 'Thy law is within my heart,' transcribed and drawn upon it, so that the act and motions of it within answer the severals of the law without, as a fair copy answers the original; so that the will of God may be found and discerned in the heart, as it may be seen and read in the word; as if the words and characters of it were impressed on the soul in a lively manner, begetting real motions within, in a conformity to the word without. Urge the promise and covenant for this, 2 Cor. iii. 3, Jer. xxxi. 38, Heb. viii. 10, that the Lord would make the bent, temper, dispositions, motions, and acts of the heart and will, conformable to the divine will, as it is expressed in his law, so that there may be no clashing, no differing, no varying betwixt his law in the heart and his law in the word, but a likeness, an answerableness, an agreement, a compliance, a readiness to do whatsoever he requires, to forsake and abandon whatsoever he forbids, to lose and part with whatsoever he would not have you keep and possess, to suffer and undergo whatsoever he will inflict, or may be inflicted for his sake. Such a submission of the heart to God is excellent fruit; it is the heart of godliness, and fills all the veins and arteries, all the other parts with good blood, with that good fruit wherein godliness consists. When the will is subdued to the will of God, this being the commanding faculty, all the rest depending on it, submit with it. And the power of godliness, though it may seem a paradox, consists much in submission; and then it is most powerful when it prevails most with the will, to a lowly and entire submission unto the divine will. The bearing of this fruit brings with it all the fruits of godliness. The attendant of it is an observance of God, expressed in all acts of worship, inward and outward; in the acts and exercise of graces and affections, which are the soul of worship; and in performance of those duties, and waiting on him in those ordinances of his appointing, which are, as it were, the body of worship. When soul and body are united, and we offer them up together frequently, sincerely, conscientiously, worshipping him both outwardly and in the spirit, adoring him with the whole man, honouring him both with soul and body, then we offer unto him holocausts, sacrifices acceptable to him, and not corrupt or curtailed offerings; then we bring forth the fruits of godliness, fruits unto God, such as respect him directly and immediately, and such as he expects to reap of us.

[8.] Acts of *complacency*. The glory, and power, and goodness of God are the heads to which our weakness reduces all his perfections and attributes, the fruits which we bring forth unto God, should answer all these, and be a real and honourable acknowledgment of them. Acts of admiration acknowledge his glory and excellency, acts of subjection do acknowledge his power and sovereignty, and acts of complacency acknowledge his goodness and graciousness. The acts whereby we testify that we believe he is infinitely, transcendently good and gracious, that we have tasted him to be

so, are some of the chief of those good fruits which we should bring forth unto God. And so we act, and such fruit we bear, when we move towards him as the object most desirable, and can truly say, as Ps. lxxiii. 25; when our hearts embrace him, cling to him, clasp about him, as that which is most amiable and lovely; when the heart can sincerely say, 'I love the Lord,' Ps. cxvi. 1; I love him more than all the persons and objects that ever I had affection for, above all that ever I saw, or enjoyed, or counted lovely.

When we rest in him as that which is most delightful; are more taken with him, and satisfied with him, than that which has most pleased us. When he terminates the motion of the soul, and the heart, restless and unsatisfied with all other things, stays here, and desires to go no farther, as having found that in God which contents and satisfies it, that with which it is so pleased as it is at rest, Ps. cxvi. 7, and says of the Lord as the Lord doth of Zion, Ps. cxxxii. 14, and as David, Ps. xvi. 5-9; when God is as to him, *ראש שמחתו*, Ps. cxxxvii. 6, the head, the top of his joy, the crown of his rejoicing, and that which he can really prefer before his chief joy on earth. such acts as these are sweet fruits indeed, most pleasant to God himself. It is not sorrow, and mourning, and heart-trouble, and inward dejection, and soul-affliction, that the Lord is so much pleased with; these are fruits good in their place and season, but of an inferior quality, and not desirable, but as lower steps to help us up to this higher pitch of complacency in God. A life of delights in God is a life fruitful of that which most pleases him, which most honours him. It is nearest and likest the life of heaven, and the fruit of it is very much like that which grows there; only that is fully ripe, here it is but growing. If you would be fruitful indeed, aim at all fruitfulness towards God, you see partly hereby in what acts it consists. Let it be your design and endeavour to abound more and more therein, and most in those which he counts best.

(2.) There are fruits which respect yourselves which you must mind if you would be universally fruitful. The apostle gives us all these in one word, Titus ii. 11, 12. To 'live soberly' comprises many things; it is to live temperately, and chastely, and humbly, and modestly, and contentedly. The fruits which respect our personal and private capacities are the acts and exercise of temperance, chastity, &c.

Temperance as to meat and drink. Affecting neither too much, nor that which is delicate; avoiding all excess in quantity or quality. A moderate use of these refreshments, so as may best consist with health, and render the body most serviceable to the soul, Luke xxi. 34.

Chastity. Keeping body and soul pure in every state, married or unmarried, 1 Thes. iv. 4, 5.

Humility. A lowliness of mind, esteeming others better than themselves, as the apostle defines it, Phil. ii. 3. A peculiar excellency of the religion of Christ, in the neglect of which the wisdom of the world befooled itself, their wise men not teaching it. But Christ made himself a pattern of it, his whole life being a continued example of humility, John xiii. 15.

Modesty. Repressing curiosity, boldness, uncomeliness.

Contentedness in all estates and occurrences, Philip. iv. 11, 12, 1 Tim. vi. 8, Heb. xiii. 5. These are fruits (however overlooked by any) of great value and consequence. And though something like them may be found amongst those that are strangers to God, yet those who neglect them are certainly strangers to God. And being grafted upon a new nature, and ordered by spiritual motives, and directed to spiritual ends, they are not mere moral qualities, but supernatural graces, and special fruits of the Spirit. The more we

abound in them and exercise them, [the more fruitful we shall be in the account of God. And if we be careless and negligent of the acts thereof, we shall be barren and destitute of good fruits even towards ourselves. And what fruits can be looked for, towards God or others, from such who are barren towards themselves?

(8.) Be fruitful towards others. There are many branches of heart and life that must be full of fruit to others. For direction herein take these three rules :

[1.] Be much in relative duties. Very much of our fruitfulness does consist in the duties we owe to our relations. And they are the most fruitful souls who bear most of these fruits ; and whatever show they make, they are barren who neglect these. Where the Spirit of Christ is operative and efficacious for the bringing forth good fruit in any, he not only makes the persons good in themselves, but makes them good towards all their relatives, good parents and good children, good husbands and good wives, good masters and good servants ; makes them endeavour to be good one to another in all their concernments, but especially good to their souls, careful of their spiritual interest, that these miscarry not, that this may be promoted. They are scarce good absolutely who are not good relatively. If there be any good fruit on such it is but little, and many branches must needs be bare. And this relative fruit is of so great consequence, that the apostle insists largely thereon, even in short epistles. That is the subject of a great part of Ephesians, chapter v., and of many verses of the 6th chapter. It is almost half of the 3d chapter to the Colossians, and part of the 4th. He counted such fruit of great importance, else, when he designed to be brief, he would not have stayed so long in pressing these.

[2.] Accommodate yourselves to the several conditions, capacities, and necessities of others. That is the way to do them most good, and so they will reap the best fruit of you. The apostle gives particular direction herein, 1 Thes. v. 12, to ver. 16. We find elsewhere what fruit we owe to the household of faith, viz. brotherly love, *φιλαδέλφια*, a particular affection, and special expressions of it. And what to others, viz., charity, and readiness to do them good, 2 Peter i. 7, Gal. vi. 10. To those that fall, Gal. vi. 1, 2 ; to the scandalous, 2 Thes. iii. 14, 15 ; to those that are weak, Rom. xiv. 1, and xv. 1, 2 ; to those that prosper, Rom. xii. 15 ; to the afflicted, *ibid.*, and Heb. xiii. 3 ; to strangers, Heb. xiii. 2 ; to enemies, Mat. v. 44, Luke vi. 27, 35. Rom. xii. 20, 'Heap coals,' not to consume them, that is revengeful, and condemned by Christ, but to melt them, and dissolve their enmity and obstinacy ; as refiners heap more coals upon those metals that are hard to be dissolved, not to waste them, but melt them, and make them more useful. And the apostle not only enforceth this way of fruitfulness by precepts, but commends it by his own example, 1 Cor. ix. 20-22. That which is thus suited to the several circumstances of others is fruit in season, and that is the best ; and what is not so is scarce good.

[3.] Labour to make all acts of converse and intercourse with men acts of grace and virtue, and so even your common affairs and dealings in the world may yield good fruit. When you make use of your word to others, use none but words of candour, and Christian simplicity, such as may plainly signify your meaning, that your mind may be understood by your words, and nothing concealed, or reserved, or formed so ambiguously and subtly, as to delude, or prejudice, or any way abuse those you deal with. Also to be strict and severe with yourselves as to truth and faithfulness, that your word may carry with it the security of a bond or an oath ; that you may give no occasion to that scandalous rule, which those who are a shame and

reproach to the Christian profession, have given occasion for, that every one must be dealt with as though he were a knave or a cheat. Oh what have we been fruitful in, while such a maxim is any way necessary amongst those that profess the religion of Christ?

Be just and righteous in all, and towards all, whatever you may lose or suffer by it. Whatever you may gain by swerving in the least from the rules of justice and righteousness, overreach not those who seek to overreach you. And when you have to deal with such whose weakness offers you some advantage, use equity; and when you might gain by the necessities of others, be merciful and compassionate; be meek and patient to those who provoke you, humble to those who despise you, and ready to forgive those that wrong you, Col. iii. 12, 13. You will have still occasion, in your common affairs, for the exercise of some or other of these gracious qualities; and if you would act them as you have occasion, you might make the acts of your ordinary converse gracious acts; and so your whole life would be full of good fruits, such as would be pleasant to God and man, and sweet and comfortable to your own souls. Order but your intercourse with men, according to that admirable rule of Christ in all those instances which give occasion for its observance, Mat. vii. 12, and your whole conversation in the world would be made up of gracious acts, and consequently would abound with good fruits.

And thus I have shewed you how you may be fruitful in all things, and towards all persons, and so how you may arrive at that which should be your chief aim, universal fruitfulness.

9. Though universal fruitfulness should be our aim, and the increase of all good fruit should be carefully promoted, no part of our souls or conversation should be unimproved, no branch of either should be bare or not well replenished with fruits of holiness or righteousness; yet there are some of these fruits that we are to regard more especially, and bestow more care and pains, that they may be multiplied, and grow, and ripen. The want or neglect of any good fruit is not to be tolerated, but there are some which require more care and industry, and we are obliged to concern ourselves more about them, lest they be wanting, or dwindle and thrive not, or rise not to their due proportions, or come not on, as the seasons of grace require, towards ripeness and maturity. Let me instance in some particulars, of which you should be more careful that they be not wanting.

(1.) Those to which you are more averse, and find or should observe yourselves less inclined. Such fruits you will be in most danger to neglect; and where there is most danger, there should be most care and industry to avoid it. There are some good fruits we are less disposed to, either because of the unhappiness of our temper, or because they are more out of our way, or because they consist not so well with the employments we are most taken with, or because they comply not with our worldly interest, or because opposite to some corruption not subdued, or some evils that we are more addicted to than others; or from some other cause which may be discovered by observance of, or inquiry into, your hearts and ways, or the use of other means proper for this purpose. So there are some more averse to meditation, a frequent and due entertainment of holy thoughts, find it hard to employ their minds upon God, and heaven, and their spiritual state; upon the word, or works, or attributes of God; though such thoughts be both good fruits themselves, and much tend to the nourishing of other good fruits, so that many cannot thrive without them.

Others who, it may be, can more easily employ their thoughts to good purpose, are more barren in good discourse; find it harder to raise it, or

continue it, through slowness of speech, or too much modesty ; or fear, it may be, to express themselves much in that with which their hearts are not much affected, as thinking it some kind of hypocrisy ; or because the spring in the heart is low as to spiritual things, and it is ' out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.'

Others, it may be, are swift and forward enough to *speak* of good things, but too slow to *do* them ; backward to act for God, or may be active for themselves, but not active for the good of others.

Some may be well inclined to acts of worship, and will not omit them, but too much decline acts of charity and mercy ; or will relieve the outward wants of others, but shew little compassion to their souls, in such acts as should minister to the relief of their spiritual condition.

Others may be much in holy duties, and in outward acts of righteousness and mercy too, but too little in the inward exercise of grace and holy affections, wherein the spiritual worship of God, and communion with him, consists.

Now, it is your great concernment to observe what you are backward to ; what fruits of mind, or heart, or life, which respect God, yourselves, or others, you are most apt to neglect or be defective in ; to take care that it may be discovered, and to be willing to be convinced of it, and to be apprehensive of the sinfulness and danger of it ; and to apply yourselves more to that which you are more subject to neglect ; to be most careful and watchful where you are most in danger ; to take more pains to bend the bough the other way, when you see it growing crooked. Your neglects of defectiveness, wherever it lies, may be of greater consequence to you than you are aware of. It may be this is the ground of God's controversy with you, though you have not taken notice of it. It may be this is the rise of your afflictions, and you may expect harder measures if this be not reformed. It may be this which you overlook is the way wherein you might be most serviceable, and the Lord lets you not succeed in other ways because you will not walk in this. It may be, this hinders the prosperity of your souls, and keeps you from being so fruitful as otherwise you might be in other respects. It may be, this encourages others to continue barren when they see you so, and thus diffuse the guilt of it farther than yourselves. And no doubt you gratify Satan in this, and serve him in promoting that particular design which he has herein upon you, and grieve the Spirit of Christ, striving against him within you for it. If you would be delivered from the consequences of this evil, so sinful and so dangerous, yield not to your temper, or inclination, or whatsoever makes you backward and indisposed to that fruitfulness, in any kind or degree, which the Lord calls you to and expects from you. Set yourselves against that averseness and the causes of it, so far as you can discover them, and strive to overcome it ; seek strength from above to prevail against it.

(2.) Those fruits which are too much out of fashion, such as are too much neglected by the generality of professors, in which the country or age wherein we live is too barren. It has been the unhappiness of every age to run itself into some great neglects, and to continue therein, and when an evil grows common, and those that are of reputation for wisdom and holiness are tainted with it, it gains credit, or at least connivance, it loses its name, and passes for a better and more tolerable thing than it is ; it is not accounted a sin, how sinful soever it be ; it will hardly be discovered when it has the countenance of many that are good, and some of the best ; there is little hopes of conviction in such circumstances, and so little or no probability of reformation. But where there is the greatest difficulty, there should be the most

vigorous endeavours to master it ; and where the tide runs strongest, we are concerned to take the most pains to stem it. We should not suffer ourselves lazily to be carried down with the stream, but the stronger it is, strive more against it. We must not make custom, nor common opinion or practice, no, not of professors otherwise strict and conscientious, our rule to judge of all the fruits we should bring forth, or what fruitfulness we should labour for, but go to the law and to the testimony, and what fruits Christ, and those infallibly directed by him, call for from the disciples of Christ, and in what degree and extent they require them, and order yourselves according to that rule, and follow none but as they follow Christ, and walk according to what he prescribes. And after the light of the word, other means may be useful for the discovery of barrenness, in any particulars where the sight of it is too much lost in common practice. And particularly we may make use of the charges and reproaches of enemies for this purpose. *Fas est et ab hoste doceri.* An enemy may sometimes teach us that which a friend may suffer us to be ignorant of. It is known that the papists charge us to be Solifidians, all for faith and nothing for the fruits of it, not minding good works. We are here concerned to give the world a real confutation of this charge, and to shew that the genuine principles of the gospel which we profess, our faith in Christ and love to him, is more effectual, and makes us more fruitful in all good works, than their corrupt principles of justification or salvation by the merit of works is or can be in them. Others charge us with the neglect of moral righteousness, greediness of riches, and the want of those fruits which the contempt of the world brings forth. Our course in this case is not to recriminate, though we may have ground enough, but impartially to examine how far the charge is just, and to reform whatever less or more we are guilty of, and to roll away the reproach by endeavouring to remove all occasion and suspicion of guilt in the severals of the charge, and to make it appear that a new nature and regenerating grace is more powerful to produce all fruits of righteousness than their moral principles, and that we are crucified to the world, and desire not much of it, but to enable us to do more good, and to be more serviceable to God and men. And while others accuse us, we have too much cause to accuse ourselves for want of brotherly love, and the many and precious fruits of it ; which divisions and difference in way or opinion has involved almost the whole generation of good men in the guilt of, which has been so common, and so the due sense of it so far lost, that it is well if the hand of God, stretched out against us for it, will make us effectually sensible of it. Let us examine whether we be not much to seek in those fruits of the Spirit which the apostle commends to us, Gal. v. 22, the first and principal whereof is love, and the rest dependents on it. Are not these fruits too much out of fashion ?

And since it has been a day of judgment with us, a long day, even for several years, let us observe whether we be not to seek in those fruits which the righteous judgments of God should have produced ; and particularly, since they seem to have been directed so as to strike most at our worldly interest, have we learnt hereby more fruitfully to improve the world ? neither to hug it too close, and confine the fruits and advantages of what we have to ourselves and ours, nor to let it run out in pride, and vanity, and excess in habit, accommodations, entertainments, or otherwise ? Are not the bad fruits which the world is apt to bring forth more in request than the good ? Let us take care that we be not involved in the guilt of common barrenness ; our danger is the greater here, and therefore we should have a more particular regard we be not wanting in those fruits which are too commonly neglected.

(8.) Those which you are more engaged to bring forth, either by inward abilities or outward enjoyments, or particular convictions. Great care should be taken to answer great and special engagements, especially when they are laid on us by the great God. Now these, amongst others, are the ways whereby the Lord does oblige us to some special fruitfulness, when he enables particularly for it, or gives means and encouragements to that end more than others have, or has convinced any that he expects of them, and that their neglects, in this or that particular, is sinful, and such as he will visit for and proceed against.

Those that are furnished with grace, and gifts, and accomplishments, which enable them to instruct, convince, quicken, encourage others in the way to heaven, must be careful to abound herein more than such who are not so well qualified for such purposes. Those that have much of the world are highly concerned to do more good with it than those that have less. It is the special charge of those who are rich in this world to be 'rich in good works,' 1 Tim. vi. 18. It will be a shame to such if those that have less do more, and a sin, too, which those that are faithful in a little will rise up in judgment and condemn. For those who are rich in the world to be poor in good works is intolerable barrenness.

And those that have convictions, drawing them to such and such ways of fruitfulness, should be exceeding careful to walk in such ways more especially, otherwise their own consciences will be their torturer and executioner, if they should escape other sufferings. The unprofitable servant knew what his Lord expected; this made his sin the greater, and his sentence the more severe, Mat. xxv. 24, 26. He knew and was convinced what would be required of him, and therefore should have been more careful to improve what he had fruitfully; and because he was not, ver. 80, he was cast into outer darkness.

(4.) Those fruits, whose goodness and advantage is most extensive. There is a special excellency in such fruits, which calls for a special care, that they may be cherished and increased. *Bonum, quo communius, eo melius.* That is the best fruit which does most good, which does good to most, whose goodness reaches farthest. The apostle gives those extraordinary gifts the pre-eminence whose advantage was most common and communicative, and would have preferred an ordinary gift which tended to the promoting of common and general fruitfulness before those extraordinary and miraculous gifts which were but for personal or more private advantage, as appears by his discourse, 1 Cor. xiv. 1-4. He prefers prophesying before the gift of tongues, because in the use of this he that had it did but edify himself, but the use of the other edified many, ver. 12. This is the way to excel in fruitfulness, when our fruits become a common harvest, where all that come may reap. Such fruits we should take more care and pains for, which may reach not only ourselves but others; not only their bodies, but their souls too; not only few of them, but many; and do good, not only to this or that person, but to a community. A particular person this way fruitful becomes a common good, a general blessing, and is so much more rich and valuable as a common treasury is more than a private purse.

(5.) Those which you may be tempted to neglect, either because they are difficult, or reproached, or costly, or hazardous. Your ease, your credit, your safety, your worldly interest, will be ready to interpose here, and endanger your barrenness herein, unless you be careful and resolute for them.

[1.] Those that are difficult and cannot be brought forth without pains and industry. It is enough to sweeten all, and make it easy, to consider

it is for God. For whom will you take pains if not for him? Should not what you bring forth for him be the fruit of some labour? That which can be done with ease you may do for any one, and shall the Lord have no more from you than any may challenge? None ever repented of any pains they took for God, but that ease which makes you decline such fruits must be repented of, or else it will have a dreadful issue.

[2.] Those that are reproached. Such as may expose you to scorn or derision, or hazard the reputation of your wisdom or moderation. Be sure they be good fruits, and then resolve, with David, 'I will yet be more vile than thus,' 2 Sam. vi. 22. To sacrifice our reputation with men in bringing forth fruit to God is the way to greatest honour with him, before whom the noblest and greatest reproachers are vile persons.

[8.] Those that are costly. You may be tempted to think (though nothing but a worldly unbelieving heart will think it) that it impairs your estates, or lessens the provisions you intend for posterity. Check such temptations with that of David, 2 Sam. xxiv. 4. Those that cost you most will prove best cheap; you have the Lord engaged to make it prove so. And it is for the Lord, whose stewards you are but in all you have, and should you grudge to serve him with his own? And the Lord in such cases is trying you, whether the world be dearer to you than himself. And remember how the Lord resented such offerings as were cheap, and mean, and little worth, Mal. i. 8. The blind, and the lame, and the sick, cost them little or nothing, and such they could offer freely. But what is the issue of such thriftiness? ver. 14. They are deceivers in God's account, and cursed by him, who, when they should offer to him that which is best and of most value, put him off with something that is worthless and costs them little. You see what need there is to be careful you decline not those fruits that are costly.

[4.] Those that are hazardous, and expose you to sufferings. Flesh and blood will be apt to decline these. Corrupt self, and carnal reason, and worldly spirit will call upon you, when called hereto, to spare yourselves. But such fruits most glorify God, and will most honour those who bear them. They evidence the greatest love to Christ, and will yield the most comfort, and will be crowned with the greatest reward. And therefore, as there is necessity to be careful that they be not declined, so greatest encouragement to be fruitful herein.