

PUBLIC WORSHIP TO BE PREFERRED BEFORE PRIVATE.

The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.—
PSALM LXXXVII. 2.

THAT we may apprehend the meaning of these words, and so thereupon raise some edifying observation, we must inquire into the reason why the Lord is said to love the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. This being manifest, the words will be clear.

Now the reason we may find assigned by the Lord himself, Deut. xiii. 5, 6, 11. The gates of Zion was the place which the Lord had chosen to cause his name to dwell there, *i.e.* as the following words explain, the place of his worship. For the temple was built upon, or near to, the hill of Zion. And this, you know, was in peculiar the settled place of his worship. It was the Lord's delight in affection to his worship, for which he is said to love the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

But it may be replied, the Lord had worship, not only in the gates of Zion, in the temple, but also in the dwellings of Jacob. We cannot suppose that all the posterity of Jacob would neglect the worship of God in their families; no doubt the faithful among them resolved with Joshua, 'I and my house will serve the Lord.' Since, therefore, the worship of God was to be found in both, how can this worship be the reason why one should be preferred before the other? Sure upon no other account but this, the worship of God in the gates of Zion was public, his worship in the dwellings of Jacob was private. So that, in fine, the Lord may be said to love the gates of Zion before all the dwellings of Jacob, because he prefers public worship before private. He loved all the dwellings of Jacob, wherein he was worshipped privately; but the gates of Zion he loved more than all the dwellings of Jacob, for there he was publicly worshipped. Hence we have a clear ground for this

Observation. Public worship is to be preferred before private. So it is by the Lord, so it should be by his people. So it was under the law, so it must be under the gospel. Indeed, there is difference between the public worship under the law and gospel in respect of a circumstance, *viz.*, the place of public worship. Under the law, the place of public worship was holy, but we have no reason so to account any place of public worship under

the gospel; and this will be manifest, if both we inquire what were the grounds of that legal holiness in the tabernacle or temple, and withal observe that none of them can be applied to any place of worship under the gospel.

1. The temple and tabernacle was [set] apart, and separated for a holy use, by the special express command of God, Deut. xii. 13, 14. But there is no such command for setting apart this or that place under the gospel. The worship is necessary, but the place where is indifferent, undetermined; it is left to human prudence to choose what place may be most convenient. We find no obliging rule, but that in general, 'Let all things be done decently and in order.' Men's consecrations cannot make that holy which God's institution does not sanctify.

2. The temple was *pars cultus*, a part of the ceremonial worship under the law, but there is no such ceremonial worship under the gospel, much less is any place a part of gospel-worship; and therefore no such holiness in any place now as in the temple then.

3. The temple was *medium cultus*, a mean of grace, of worship, under the law. Thereby the Lord communicated to those people many mysteries of religion and godliness; thereby was Christ represented in his natures, offices, benefits. But there is no place under the gospel of such use and virtue now; no such representations of Christ, or communications of religious mysteries by any place of worship whatever; *ergo*, no such holiness.

4. The temple was a type of Christ, John ii. 19; but all the shadows and types of Christ did vanish when Christ himself appeared; and there is no room for them in any place under the gospel.

5. The temple did sanctify the offerings, the services of that people. The altar did sanctify the gift, Mat. xxiii. 19. The worship there tendered was more acceptable, more available, than elsewhere, as being the only place where the Lord would accept those ceremonial services, as also because there is no acceptance but in Christ, who was hereby typified. But these being ceased, to think now that our worship or service of God will be sanctified by the place where they are performed, or more available or acceptable in one place than another, merely for the place's sake, is a conceit without Scripture, and so superstitious; nay, against Scripture, and so profane. The prophet foretold this: Mal. i. 11, 'In every place incense shall be offered unto my name;' in every place, one as well as another, without distinction. The Lord Christ determines this in his discourse, John iv. 21. The hour is at hand when all such respects shall be taken away, and all places made alike, and you and your services as acceptable in every place of the world as at Jerusalem. Hence the apostle's advice, 1 Tim. ii. 8, 'I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands,' not in this or that place only. And the promise of Christ is answerable, Mat. xviii. 20. He says not, when two or three are gathered together in such a place, but only 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' Observable is that of Origen upon Matthew, Tract. xxxv., *Vir quidem Judaicus non dubitat de hujusmodi*, A Jew indeed doubts not but one place is more holy than another for prayer, but he that has left Jewish fables for Christ's doctrine doth say that the place doth not make one prayer better than another. So in Homil. V. on Levit., *Locum sanctum in terris non requiro positum, sed in corde*, I seek no holy place on earth, but in the heart. This we must take for the holy place rather (*quam si putemus structuram lapidum*) than a building of stones. So Augustine, *Quid supplicaturus Deo locum sanctum requiris, &c.*, When thou hast a mind to pray, why dost thou inquire after a holy place? Superstition had not yet so blinded the world but these ancients could see reason to disclaim that holi-

ness of places which after-ages fancied. And well were it if such superstitious conceits were not rooted in some amongst us. Those who have a mind to see, may, by what has been delivered, discern how groundless that opinion is. But I must insist no longer on it.

Hence it appears that there is a circumstantial difference betwixt the public worship of God under the law and under the gospel. But this can be no ground to conclude that public worship is not to be preferred before private, as well under the gospel as under the law; for the difference is but in circumstance (the place of worship), and this circumstance but ceremonial (a ceremonial holiness); whereas all the moral reasons why public worship should be preferred before private, stand good as well under the gospel as under the law.

But before I proceed to confirm the observation, let me briefly explain what worship is public. Three things are requisite that worship may be public, ordinances, an assembly, and an officer.

1. There must be such ordinances as do require or will admit of public use; such are prayer, praises, the word read, expounded, or preached, and the administration of the sacraments. The word must be read, and prayer is necessary both in secret and private, but they both admit of public use, and the use of them in public is required and enjoined. These must be used both publicly and privately; the other cannot be used duly but in public.

2. There must be an assembly, a congregation joined in the use of these ordinances. The worship of one or two cannot be public worship. Of what numbers it must consist we need not determine; but since what is done in a family is but private, there should be a concurrence of more than constitute an ordinary family.

3. There must be an officer. The administrator of the ordinances must be one of public quality, one in office, one set apart by the Lord, and called to the employment by the church. If a private person in ordinary cases undertake to preach the word or administer the sacraments, if it be allowed as worship, which is not according to ordinary rule, yet there is no reason to expect the blessing, the advantage, the privilege of public worship.

This for explication; now for confirmation. Observe these arguments.

1. The Lord is more glorified by public worship than private. God is then glorified by us when we acknowledge that he is glorious. And he is most glorified when this acknowledgment is most public. This is obvious. A public acknowledgment of the worth and excellency of any one tends more to his honour than that which is private or secret. It was more for David's honour that the multitude did celebrate his victory, 1 Sam. xviii. 7, than if a particular person had acknowledged it only in private. Hence the psalmist, when he would have the glory of God most amply declared, contents not himself with a private acknowledgment, but summons all the earth to praise him, Ps. xvi. 1-3. Then is the Lord most glorified, when his glory is most declared, and then it is most declared when it is declared by most, by a multitude. David shews the way whereby God may be most glorified, Ps. xxii. 22, 23, 25. Then he appears all glorious when publicly magnified, when he is praised in the great congregation. Then he is most glorified when a multitude speaks of and to his glory: Ps. xxix. 9, 'In his temple does every one speak of his glory.' The Lord complains as if he had no honour from his people, when his public worship is despised, neglected: Mal. i. 6, 'If I be a father, where is mine honour? If I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord God of hosts unto you, O priests that despise my name.' By *name of God* here is meant his worship and ordinances, as plainly appears

by what follows, ver. 7, 8, 11. And he here expostulates with them as tendering him no honour, because they despised his worship and ordinances. Then shall Christ be most glorified, when he shall be admired in all them that believe, in that great assembly at the last day, 2 Thess. i. 10. And it holds in proportion now; the more there are who join together in praising, admiring, and worshipping him, the more he is glorified: and therefore more in public than in private.

2. There is more of the Lord's presence in public worship than in private. He is present with his people in the use of public ordinances in a more especial manner, more effectually, constantly, intimately.

For the first, see Exod. xx. 24. After he had given instructions for his public worship, he adds, 'In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.' Where I am publicly worshipped, for the name of God is frequently put for the worship of God, I will come; and not empty-handed, I will bless thee: a comprehensive word, including all that is desirable, all that tends to the happiness of those that worship him. Here is the efficacy.

For the constancy of his presence, see Mat. xxviii.: 'I am with you always to the end of the world.' Where, after he had given order for the administration of public ordinances, he concludes with that sweet encouragement to the use of them, *πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας*, I am with you always, every day, and that to the end of the world. Here is the constancy.

See the intimacy of his presence: Mat. xviii. 20, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' He says not, I am near them, or with them, or about them, but in the midst of them; as much intimacy as can be expressed. And so he is described, Rev. i. 13, to be in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, in the midst of the church; there he walks and there he dwells; not only with them, but in them. For so the apostle, 2 Cor. vi. 16, renders that of Lev. xxvi. 12, which promise he made, upon presupposal of his tabernacle, his public worship amongst them, ver. 11. Hence it is, that when the public worship of God is taken from a people, then God is departed, his presence is gone; as she, when the ark was taken from the Israelites, cried out, 'The glory is departed.' And why, but because the Lord, who is the glory of his people, is then departed? Public ordinances are the sign, the pledge of God's presence; and in the use of them, he does in a special manner manifest himself present.

But you will say, Is not the Lord present with his servants when they worship him in private? It is true; but so much of his presence is not vouchsafed, nor ordinarily enjoyed, in private as in public. If the experience of any find it otherwise, they have cause to fear the Lord is angry, they have given him some distaste, some offence; if they find him not most, where ordinarily he is most to be found, and this is in public ordinances, for the Lord is most there where he is most engaged to be, but he has engaged himself to be most there where most of his people are. The Lord has engaged to be with every particular saint, but when the particulars are joined in public worship, there are all the engagements united together. The Lord engages himself to let forth as it were, a stream of his comfortable, quickening presence to every particular person that fears him, but when many of these particulars join together to worship God, then these several streams are united and meet in one. So that the presence of God, which, enjoyed in private, is but a stream, in public becomes a river, a river that makes glad the city of God. The Lord has a dish for every particular soul that truly serves him; but when many particulars meet together, there is a variety, a

confluence, a multitude of dishes. The presence of the Lord in public worship makes it a spiritual feast, and so it is expressed, Isa. xxv. 6. There is, you see, more of God's presence in public worship, *ergo* public worship is to be preferred before private.

8. Here are the clearest manifestations of God. Here he manifests himself more than in private, *ergo* public worship is to be preferred before private. Why was Judah called a valley of vision, but because the Lord manifested himself to that people in public ordinances? Which he not vouchsafing to other nations, they are said to 'sit in darkness, and in the valley of the shadow of death.' Here are the visions of peace, of love, of life; and blessed are those eyes that effectually see them. Here are the clearest visions of the beauty, the glory, the power of God, that can be looked for, till we see him face to face. David saw as much of God in secret as could then be expected, but he expected more in public, and, therefore, as not satisfied with his private enjoyments, he breathes and longs after the public ordinances, for this reason, that he might have clearer discoveries of the Lord there: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.' Why did he affect this, as the one thing above all desirable? Why, but to behold the beauty of the Lord? &c. So, Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2, though David was in a wilderness, a dry and thirsty land, where was no water, yet he did not so much thirst after outward refreshments as after the public ordinances; and why? 'To see thy power and thy glory.'

If we observe how Christ is represented when he is said to be in the midst of the churches, we may thereby know what discoveries of Christ are made in the assemblies of his people, Rev. i. 13, &c.

Clothed with a garment down to the foot. That was the priests' habit. Here is the priestly office of Christ, the fountain of all the saints' comfort and enjoyments.

Girt about the paps with a golden girdle. This was the garb of a conqueror. So Christ is set forth as victorious over all his people's enemies.

His head and hairs white like wool. Here is his eternity; whiteness is the emblem of it. Therefore, when the Lord is expressed as eternal, he is called the Ancient of days.

His eyes as a flame of fire. Here is his omniscieny; nothing can be hid from his eye. The flame scatters darkness, and consumes or penetrates whatever to us might be an impediment of sight.

His feet like to fine brass. Here is his power; to crush all opposers of his glory and his people's happiness; they can no more withstand him, than earthen vessels can endure the force of brass.

His voice as the sound of many waters. Here his voice is most loud and powerful; so powerful, as it can make the deaf to hear, and raise the dead out of the grave of sin. His voice in private is a still voice, here it is as the sound of many waters.

He had in his right hand seven stars. Here is his providence, his tender care of his messengers, the ministers of the gospel, the administrators of public ordinances; he holds them in his hand, his right hand, and all the violence of the world, all the powers of darkness, cannot pluck them thence.

Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. His word publicly preached, sharper than a two-edged sword, as described, Heb. iv. 12, 13, pierces the heart, searches the soul, wounds the conscience. With this Christ goes on, conquering and to conquer, mangre all opposition.

His countenance was as the sun that shineth in his strength. Here the face of Christ is unveiled, the fountain of light and life, the seat of beauty

and glory, such as outshines the sun in his full strength. So he appears, as he becomes the love, the delight, the admiration, the happiness, of every one whose eyes are opened to behold him.

Now, as he is here described in the midst of the churches, so does he in effect appear in the assemblies of his people. No such clear, such comfortable, such effectual representations of the power and wisdom, of the love and beauty, of the glory and majesty of Christ, as in the public ordinances: 'We all here, as with open face, behold the glory of the Lord.'

4. There is more spiritual advantage to be got in the use of public ordinances than in private, *ergo* they are to be preferred. Whatever spiritual benefit is to be found in private duties, that, and much more, may be expected from public ordinances when duly improved. There is more spiritual light and life, more strength and growth, more comfort and soul refreshment. When the spouse (the church) inquires of Christ where she might find comfort and soul nourishment, food and rest, he directs her to public ordinances: Cant. i. 7, 8, 'Go by the footsteps of the flock,' walk in the path of God's ancient people. And feed the kids beside the shepherds' tents. Shepherds are (in the phrase of the New Testament) pastors or teachers, those to whom the Lord has committed the administration of his public ordinances. To them is the church directed for food and rest, for spiritual comfort and nourishment; and it is commended to her as the known way of the whole flock, that flock whereof Christ is chief shepherd.

That is a pregnant place for this purpose, Eph. iv., where the apostle declares the end why the Lord Christ gave public officers, and consequently public ordinances. He gave them, ver. 12, 'for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.' Here is edification, even to perfection: ver. 13, 'Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.' Here is knowledge and unity, even in a conformity to Christ: ver. 14, 'That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.' There is strength and stability, maugre all the sleight and craftiness of seducers: ver. 15, 'But speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.' There is growth and fruitfulness, and that in all things. These are the ends for which the Lord Jesus gave his church public officers and ordinances; and they will never fail of these ends if we fail not in the use of them. What more can be desired? Here doubts are best resolved, darkness scattered, and temptations most effectually vanquished. David had private helps as well as we, but how strangely did a temptation prevail against him, till he went into the sanctuary: Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17, 'When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.' Nothing was effectual to vanquish this temptation, till he went into the sanctuary. Thus you see there is more spiritual advantage in public worship than in private, and therefore it is to be preferred.

5. Public worship is more edifying than private, *ergo*, &c. In private you provide for your own good, but in public you do good both to yourselves and others. And that is a received rule, *Bonum, quo communius, eo melius*, that good is best which is most diffusive, most communicative. Example has the force of a motive; we may stir up others by our example: Zech. viii. 20, 21, 'There shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts.' This was frequent with

David : Ps. xxxiv. 3, ' Oh magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt his name together ; ' Ps. xcvi. 7, 8, ' Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. ' Live coals, if ye separate them, and lay them asunder, will quickly die ; but while they are continued together, they serve to continue heat in one another. We may quicken one another, while we join together in worshipping God ; but deadness, coldness, or lukewarmness may seize upon the people of God, if they forsake the assembling of themselves together. It is more edifying ; therefore to be preferred.

6. Public ordinances are a better security against apostasy than private, and therefore to be preferred : an argument worthy our observation in these backsliding times. He that wants the public ordinances, whatever private means he enjoy, is in danger of apostasy. David was as much in the private duties of God's worship as any, while he was in banishment ; yet, because he was thereby deprived of the public ordinances, he looked upon himself as in great danger of idolatry. Which is plain from his speech, 1 Sam. xxi. 19, ' They have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go serve other gods. ' There was none about Saul so profane as to say expressly unto him, Go serve other gods. Why then does he thus charge them ? Why, but because by banishing him from the inheritance of the Lord, and the public ordinances, which were the best part of that inheritance, they exposed him to temptations which might draw him to idolatry, and deprive him of that which was his great security against it. They might as well have said plainly, Go and serve other gods, as drive him out from the public worship of the true God, which he accounted the sovereign preservative from idolatry.

But we have too many instances nearer home to confirm this. Is not the rejecting of public ordinances the great step to the woful apostasies amongst us ? Who is there falls off from the truth and holiness of the gospel into licentious opinions and practices, that has not first fallen off from the public ordinances ? Who is there in these times that has made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, who has not first cast the public worship of God overboard ? The sad issue of forsaking the public assemblies (too visible in the apostasy of divers professors) should teach us this truth, that public ordinances are the great security against apostasy, a greater security than private duties, and therefore to be preferred.

For this end were they given, that we might not be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, Eph. iv. 14. No wonder if those that reject the means fall so wofully short of the end ; no wonder if they be tossed to and fro, till they have nothing left but wind and froth. This was the means which Christ prescribed to the church, that she might not turn aside to the flocks of those companions, hypocrites, or idolaters : Cant. i., ' Feed by the shepherds' tents. ' No wonder if those who shun those tents become a prey to wolves and foxes, to seducers and the destroyer. Public ordinances are a more effectual means to preserve from apostasy, and therefore to be preferred before private.

7. Here the Lord works his greatest works ; greater works than ordinarily he works by private means, *ergo*. The most wonderful things that are now done on earth are wrought in the public ordinances, though the commonness and spiritualness of them makes them seem less wonderful. It is true, we call not conversion and regeneration miracles, but they come nearest to miracles of anything that is not so called. Here the Lord speaks life unto dry bones, and raises dead souls out of the grave and sepulchre of sin, wherein they have lain putrefying many years. Here the dead hear the voice

of the Son of God and his messengers, and those that hear do live. Here he gives sight to those that are born blind; it is the effect of the gospel preached to open the eyes of sinners, and to turn them from darkness to light. Here he cures diseased souls with a word, which are otherwise incurable by the utmost help of men and angels. He sends forth his word, and heals them; it is no more with him but speaking the word, and they are made whole. Here he dispossesses Satan, and casts unclean spirits out of the souls of sinners that have been long possessed by them. Here he overthrows principalities and powers, vanquishes the powers of darkness, and causes Satan to fall from heaven like lightning. Here he turns the whole course of nature in the souls of sinners, makes old things pass away, and all things become new. Wonders these are, and would be so accounted, were they not the common work of the public ministry. It is true indeed, the Lord has not confined himself to work these wonderful things only in public; yet the public ministry is the only ordinary means whereby he works them. And since his greatest works are wrought ordinarily by public ordinances, and not in private, therefore we should value and esteem the public ordinances before private duties.

8. Public worship is the nearest resemblance of heaven, therefore to be preferred. In heaven, so far as the Scripture describes it to us, there is nothing done in private, nothing in secret, all the worship of that glorious company is public. The innumerable company of angels, and the church of the first-born, make up one general assembly in the heavenly Jerusalem, Heb. xii. 22, 23. They make one glorious congregation, and so jointly together sing the praises of him that sits on the throne, and the praises of the Lamb, and continue employed in this public worship to eternity.

9. The examples of the most renowned servants of God, who have preferred public worship before private, is a sufficient argument. It was so in the judgment of those who were guided by an infallible Spirit, those who had most converse with God, and knew most of the mind of God; and those who had experience of both, and were in all respects the best, the most competent judges. If we appeal to them, this truth will quickly be put out of question. David, who has this testimony, that he was a man after God's own heart, shews by his practice and testimony that this was God's own mind. To what I have formerly produced to this purpose, let me add but one place, wherein he pregnantly and affectionately confirms this truth: Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 'How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!' He speaks by way of interrogation, insinuating that they were amiable beyond his expression. You might better read this in his heart than in his language. Accordingly he adds, ver. 2, 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.' Oh what expressions! Longing; nothing else could satisfy. Fainting; it was his life; he was ready to faint, to die, for want of it: ver. 10, 'I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.' David was at this time a king, either actually or at least anointed; yet he professes he had rather be a door-keeper where he might enjoy God in public, than a king where deprived of public worship. He would choose rather to sit at the threshold, as the original is, than to sit on a throne in the tents of wickedness, in those wicked, heathenish places where God was not publicly worshipped. Hezekiah and Josiah were the two kings of Judah of highest esteem with God, as he has made it known to the world by his testimony of them. Now what was their eminency but their zeal for God? And where did their zeal appear, but for the public worship of God? See it of Hezekiah, 2 Chron. xxix. 2, 3, 'He did that which was right in the sight

of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done. He, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them.' Of Josiah, chap. xxxiv. and xxxv. The apostles also, and primitive Christians bear record of this. How careful were they of taking all opportunities that the word might be preached, and the Lord worshipped in public! How many hazards did they run, how many dangers, how many deaths did they expose themselves to, by attempting to preach Christ in public! Their safety, their liberty, their lives, were not so dear to them as the public worship; whereas, if they would have been contented to have served the Lord in secret, it is probable they might have enjoyed themselves in peace and safety as well as others. The Lord Christ himself, how much soever above us, did not think himself above ordinances, though he knew them then expiring; nor did he withdraw from public worship, though then corrupted. Nay, he exhorts his disciples to hear them who publicly taught in Moses's chair, though they had himself, a far better teacher. You find him frequently in the synagogues, frequently in the temple, always at the passover; and his zeal for public worship was such, as they apply that of the psalmist to him, 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.'

10. Public worship is the most available for the procuring of the greatest mercies, and preventing and removing the greatest judgments. The greatest, *i. e.* those that are most extensive, of universal consequence to a whole nation or a whole church. It is most effectual for the obtaining public mercies, for diverting public calamities, therefore to be preferred before private worship. This is the means the Lord prescribes for this end; and he encourages his people to the use thereof with promises of success: Joel ii. 15, 16, 'Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders, sanctify the people,' &c. There is the means prescribed: See the success, ver. 18, 19, *ad finem*. He assures them the issue hereof should be mercies of all sorts, temporal and spiritual, ordinary and extraordinary, and that to the whole nation. Jehoshaphat used this means, and found the success answerable: 2 Chron. xx. 3, 4, 'He set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah,' &c. This is the argument he uses, 'Thy name is in this house,' ver. 9. Immediately the Lord despatches a prophet with a gracious answer: ver. 15, 17, 'Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. Stand still, and see the salvation of God.' The event was wonderful: ver. 28, 24, 'The children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them. And when Judah came toward the watch-tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies.' Nineveh bears witness to this, who hereby prevented her utter destruction, threatened by the prophet within forty days. Nor want we instances in the New Testament. Hereby the church prevailed for the miraculous deliverance of Peter, Acts xii. 5. And wonderful were the effects hereof to the whole church: Acts iv. 31, 'When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word of God with boldness.' So Rev. viii. 4. There you have mention of the prayers of all saints, in a description after the form of public prayers, offered in the temple at the time of incense. And an answer is immediately returned, such an one as brought with it the destruction of that domineering Roman state which then persecuted them. Now, that which is of most public and universal advantage is worthily to be preferred; but such is public worship, and therefore to be preferred before private.

11. The precious blood of Christ is most interested in public worship, and that must needs be most valuable which has most interest in that which is of infinite value. The blood of Christ has most influence upon public worship, more than on private; for the private duties of God's worship, private prayers, meditation, and such like, had been required of, and performed by, Adam and his posterity, if he had continued in the state of innocence; they had been due by the light of nature, if Christ had never died, if life and immortality had never been brought to light by the gospel. But the public preaching of the gospel, and the administration of the federal seals, have a necessary dependence upon the death of Christ. As they are the representations, so they are the purchase of that precious blood; as Christ is hereby set forth as crucified before our eyes, so are they the purchase of Christ crucified, so are they the gifts of Christ triumphant. Conquerors used on the day of triumph, *spargere missilia*, to scatter gifts amongst the people. Answerably the apostle represents to us Christ in his triumph, Eph. iv., distributing gifts becoming such a triumph, such a conqueror: ver. 8, 'When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.' And those gifts, he tells us, ver. 12, are public officers, and consequently public ordinances to be administered by those officers. How valuable are those ordinances, which are the purchase of that precious blood, which are the gifts Christ reserved for the glory of his triumph!

12. The promises of God are more to public worship than to private. Those exceeding great and precious promises, wherever they are engaged, will turn the balance; but public worship has most interest in them, and therefore more to be valued than private. If I should produce all those promises which are made to the several ordinances, the several parts of public worship, I should rehearse to you a great part of the promissory part of Scripture. I shall but briefly touch some generals. The Lord promises his presence, in the places before alleged: Exod. xx. 24, 'In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.' Protection and direction: Isa. iv. 5, 'Upon all the glory shall be a defence.' The Lord will be to the assemblies of his people as a pillar of cloud and fire. His presence shall be as much effectually to his people now as those pillars were then. 'Upon all their glory.' As formerly in the wilderness, the Lord, having filled the inside of the tabernacle with his glory, covered the outside of it with a thick cloud, Exod. xl. 34, so will he secure his people and their glorious enjoyments in public worship. His presence within shall be as the appearance of his glory, to refresh them; his presence without shall be as a thick cloud to secure them, ver. 6, a tent. His presence shall be that to the assemblies of his people which the outward tent or coverings were to the tabernacle, Exod. xxvi. 7.

Light, and life, and joy, and that in abundance, even to satisfaction, Ps. xxxvi. 8, 9. Satisfied abundantly, and drink spiritual delights as out of a river. Life and growth: Isa. lv. 2, 3, 'Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness,' &c. Life and blessedness: Prov. viii. 34, 35, 'Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.' Acceptance, Ezek. xx., xlv. 4. Spiritual communion and nourishment: Rev. iii. 20, 'Behold I stand at the door and knock,' &c. He speaks there to a church, and in public ordinances he knocks hardest. Grace and glory, yea, all things that are good. There is not a more full and comprehensive promise in the Scripture than that, Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'No good thing will be withhold from them that walk uprightly.' But what is this to public wor-

ship? Why, the whole psalm speaks of public worship; and therefore, by the best rule of interpretation, we must take this as promised to sincere walking with God in public worship. Besides, the particle *for* tells us this is given as the reason why David had such a high esteem of public worship, why he preferred one day in God's house before a thousand; and therefore this promise must have reference to public worship, else there is no reason to use this as a reason. This promise is to public worship; and what is there in heaven or earth desirable that is not in this promise?

It is true, you may say, there are many great and precious promises to public worship, but are there not promises also to private duties?

It is granted there are, but not so many, and the argument runs so. The promises are more to public worship than to private; besides, those which seem to be made to private duties are applicable to public worship, and that with advantage. If the interest of one saint in a promise be prevalent with God, how prevalent then are the united interests of many assembled together? So that all the promises which the people of God make use of to support their faith in private duties will afford us much support, nay more, in public. Then add to these the promises which are peculiar to public worship, and the sum will appear far greater, and this reason of great force to prove the truth propounded; that is most valuable which has the greatest share in those exceeding great and precious promises, but public worship has the greatest share in these, and therefore most valuable.

Obj. But notwithstanding all the arguments brought to prove public worship is to be preferred, I find something to the contrary in experience; and who can admit arguments against experience? I have sometimes in private more of God's presence, more assistance of his Spirit, more joy, more enlargement, more raised affections; whereas in public I often find much dullness of heart, much straitness and unaffectedness, therefore I cannot so freely yield that public worship is to be preferred.

Ans. I shall endeavour to satisfy this in many severals.

1. Experience is not a rule for your judgment, but the word of God; that is a fallible guide, this only infallible. If you press your judgment always to follow experience, Satan may quickly afford you such experience as will lead you out of the way. Be scrupulous of following experience when it goes alone, when it is not backed by the word, countenanced by Scripture. It has deceived many. Empirics are no more tolerable in divinity than in physic. As there reason and experience, so here Scripture and experience, should go together. Those that live by sense may admit this alone to be their guide, but the event has often proved it a blind one. Those that live by faith must admit no experiments against Scripture. Nay, those that are but true to reason will not admit a few experiments against many arguments. You find this sometimes true in private, but do you find it so ordinarily? If not, here is no ground to pass any judgment against what is delivered. It may be a purge or a vomit does sometimes tend more to your health than your meat and drink; will you therefore prefer physic before your ordinary food? It may be in some extremity of cold you find more refreshment from a fire than from the sun; will you therefore prefer the fire, and judge it more beneficial to the world than the sun? Experience must not rule your judgment here, nor must you be confident of such apprehensions as are only granted upon some few experiments.

2. It may be your enjoyments in private were upon some special occasion. Now some special cases make no general rule; nor are they sufficient promises to afford an universal conclusion. For instance, it may be you enjoyed so much of God in private, when you were necessarily and unavoid-

ably hindered from waiting upon the Lord in public ordinances. Now in this case, when the people of God bewail the want of public liberties as an affliction, and seek the Lord in special manner to supply that want in private, he is graciously pleased to make up what they are deprived of in public, by the vouchsafements of his quickening and comforting presence in private. So it was with David in his banishment, yet this did nothing abate his esteem of or desires after the public ordinances; far was he from preferring private duties before public, though he enjoyed exceeding much of God in private. Nor must we from such particular cases draw an universal conclusion; either affirmatively, that private is to be preferred; or negatively, that public is not to be preferred.

8. These enjoyments of God in private may be extraordinary dispensations. These the Lord does sometimes use, though seldom, though rarely. Now, such extraordinary cases are exceptions from the general rule, and such exceptions do limit the rule, but not overthrow it. They take off something from the extent, nothing from the truth of it. It holds good still, more of God is enjoyed in public than private; except in rare extraordinary cases, ordinarily it is so. And this is sufficient, if there were no other argument to establish the observation as a truth, public worship is to be preferred before private.

4. It may be thy enjoyments in private are the fruits of thy attendance upon God in public. It may be the assistance, the enlargement, the affections thou findest in private duties, are the returns of public worship. The benefits of public ordinances are not all, nor always, received while ye are therein employed; the returns of them may be continued many days after. The refreshment the Lord affords his people in public worship is like the provision he made for Elijah in the wilderness, 1 Kings xix. 18, 'He arose and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days.' When the Lord feasts his people in public, they may walk with the Lord in the strength thereof in private duties with more cheerfulness, with more enlargedness, more affection, many days after. Those that know what it is to enjoy communion with God in his ordinances, know this by experience. When the Lord meets you in public, find ye not your hearts far better disposed to, and in, private duties? Now, if the assistance you find in private be the fruits of your waiting upon God in public, this should rather raise your esteem of public worship than abate it. That which is objected tends to confirm this truth, so far should it be from hindering you to subscribe it.

5. There may be a deceit in thy experience. All those joys, affections, enlargements, which men find in duties, are not always from the special presence of God. There may be a great flash of spirit, and much cheerfulness and activeness from false principles; some flashes of fleeting affections, some transient and fading impressions, may fall upon the hearts of men, and yet not fall from above. The gifts of men may be sometimes carried very high, even to the admiration of others, whenas there is little or no spiritual life. Vigour of nature, strength of parts, enforcement of conscience, outward respects, delusive joys, delusive visions, ungrounded fancies, deceiving dreams, yea, superstitious conceits, may work much upon men in duties when there is little or nothing of God. When men seem to be carried out with a full gale of assistance, it is not always the Spirit of God that fills the sails. A man may move with much life, freedom, cheerfulness, in spiritual duties, when his motion is from other weights than those of the Spirit.

Nay, further, not only those potent workings which are ordinary, but extraordinary, such as ecstasies and raptures, wherein the soul is transported, so as to leave the body without its ordinary influence, so as it seems without

sense or motion ; such inward operations on the soul as work strange effects upon the body, visible in its disordered motions and incomposed gestures. Such workings as these have been in all ages, and may be now, from the spirit of darkness transforming himself into an angel of light ; and therefore, if such private experiences be produced to disparage the public worship, the public ministry, or any other public ordinance of God (however they pretend to the Spirit of God), they are to be rejected. The deceits of our own hearts, or the delusions of that envious spirit, who has always shewed his malice against God's public worship, should not be admitted, to render this Scripture truth questionable, that public worship is to be preferred before private. And, indeed, the experiences of ordinary personal assistance in private duties, if it be made use of to this end, is to be looked upon as suspicious ; you may suspect it is not as it seems, if this be the issue of it. Those assistances which come from the Spirit of God have a better tendency than to disparage the public worship of God, which himself is so tender of. And this should be the more regarded, because it is apparent Satan has a design against God's public worship, and he drives it on in a subtler way than in darker times. He would thrust out one part of God's worship by another, that so at last he may deprive us of all. Mind it, then, and examine thy experiences, if there be a deceit in them, as many times there is. They are of no force against this truth, public worship is to be preferred before private.

6. It may be the Lord seems to withdraw from thee, and to deny thee, spiritual assistance in public worship for trial ; to try thy love to him, and the ways which most honour him ; to see whether thou wilt withdraw from him and his worship, when he seems to withhold himself from thee ; to try whether thou wilt serve God for nothing, when thou seemest to find nothing answerable to thy attendance and endeavours. This is the hour of England's temptation in other things, and probably it is so in this as well as others. If it be so with thee, thy resolution should be that of the prophet, Isa. viii. 17, 'I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob.' If this be thy case, thy esteem of his public worship should hereby be rather raised than abated, since this is the way to comply with the Lord's design in this dispensation, the way to procure more comfortable returns, more powerful assistance than ever.

7. You may enjoy more of God in public, and not observe it. As there may be a mistake in thinking you enjoy much of God in private when you do not, so there may be a mistake in thinking you want the presence of God in public when indeed you have it. It is not the improvement of parts, enlargement of heart, flashes of joy, stirrings of affections, that argue most of God's presence ; there may be much of these when there is little of God. It is a humble soul, one that is poor in spirit, that trembles at the word, that hungers and thirsts after Christ, that is sensible of spiritual wants and distempers, that is burdened with his corruptions, and laments after the Lord and freer enjoyments of him. He whose heart is soft and pliable, whose conscience is tender, it is he who thrives and prospers in the inward man. And if these be the effects of thy attendance upon God in public worship, thou dost there enjoy much of God's presence, whatever thou apprehend to the contrary. These are far more valuable than those affections and enlargements by which some judge of the Lord's presence in his ordinances ; for these are the sound fruits of a tree of righteousness, whereas those are but the leaves or flourishes of it, which you may sometimes find in a barren tree. So far as the Lord upholds in thee a poor and hungering spirit, a humble and thirsting heart, so far he is graciously present with thee ; for this is it to which he has promised a gracious presence in his ordinances, Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.

The Lord speaks here as though he were not so much taken with the glory of the temple, no, not with the glory of heaven, as with a spirit of this temper. As sure as the Lord's throne is in heaven, this soul shall have his presence. The streams of spiritual refreshments from his presence shall water these valleys, whereas high-flown confidants, that come to the ordinances with high conceits and carnal boldness, shall be as the mountains, left dry and parched. See Mat. v. 3-6. You may enjoy the presence of God in public, and not observe it. Now, if thy experience be a mistake, no reason it should hinder thee from yielding to this truth, that public worship is to be preferred before private.

8. It is to be suspected that what you want of God's presence, in public worship, is through your own default. Not because more of God is not to be enjoyed, more spiritual advantage is not to be gained in public ordinances, but because, through some sinful miscarriage, you make yourselves incapable thereof. Let this be observed, and your ways impartially examined; and you will find cause to accuse yourselves, instead of objecting anything against the pre-eminence of public worship. There is so much self-love in us, as we are apt to charge anything, even the worship of God itself, rather than ourselves; yea, when ourselves ought only to be charged and accused. The Lord's hand is not straitened, &c. The worship of God is the same, the Lord as much to be enjoyed in it; no less comfort and advantage to be found in it than formerly (and formerly more has been enjoyed therein than in private); how comes it, then, that there is any occasion to object against it? Why, our iniquities have separated between us and our God.

Let our hearts and ways be searched, and all, or most of all those, who have any temptation to object against it, will find it thus, and may discern the reason in themselves.

Do ye not undervalue the public worship, and the enjoyment of God in it? Are ye not many times indifferent, whether ye enjoy it or no? Is it a sad affliction to your souls, when ye leave the ordinances, without enjoying God in them? Have ye bewailed it accordingly? If not, you have too low thoughts of spiritual enjoyments to have much of them. Do ye think God will cast such pearls before swine, such precious things before those who trample on them, who condemn them?

Do ye not entertain some prejudice against some public ordinances, or against the public minister? Even this is enough to render them less comfortable, less effectual. Why was the public ministry of Christ less effectual amongst his own countrymen? Why were they possessed with prejudices against him? Mat. xiii. 55.

Have ye not neglected the public worship? Have ye absented yourselves from the ordinances without any necessary occasion? Oh how common is this sin! and how justly chastised, when the Lord absents himself from them, who are so willingly absent from his public worship. When you withdraw from the public ordinances, you withdraw from God; and is not here reason enough for the Lord to withdraw from you?

Come ye not unprepared, with slight and careless hearts, without due apprehensions, either of the Lord or of yourselves? This is to affront his majesty, this lays his honour low, Mal. i. 6. No wonder if ye find not that power and quickening virtue in the ordinances; you may find the reason in yourselves; you hereby provoke the Lord to withdraw from them, and you in them.

Where are your desires after public ordinances, after the presence of God in them, after the spiritual advantages of them? Can ye say with him, 'One thing I have desired, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord,' &c. Can ye say, 'As the hart panteth after the

water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God? My soul thirsteth for God, when shall I come and appear before God? Can you say, 'My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, to see thy glory,' &c. Can ye say, 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.' Oh, were there but such desires, there would be few such complaints, few such objections. Were there such desires, the Lord would quickly clothe his public ordinances with their wonted glory and power, cause to say, *Nunquam abs te, absque te*. But is it not reason they should not enjoy much, who desire so little?

Do ye not give way to deadness, slothfulness, carelessness in public worship? Do you stir up yourselves to lay hold on God? It is the diligent hand that makes rich. 'He becomes poor that dealeth with a slack hand,' Prov. x. 4. If the ordinances come not to you, as a ship laden with precious treasures, blame your negligence: Heb. xi. 6, 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.'

Do ye come in faith? Do your thoughts and hearts work upon a promise, when you are going to public ordinances? You know who said it, 'Except ye believe, ye shall not see the power of God.' If Christ could do no mighty works, because of their unbelief, what think ye the ordinances can do?

Do ye not come for by-ends, come for something else, something worse, than that which you complain you find not? Come ye not for custom, because it is the fashion, and shame not to come to it? Come ye not to avoid the censure, the offence, the displeasure of others? Come ye not to stop the mouth of conscience, to avoid its clamours? Come ye not for niceties, notions, novelties, as those who seek a fine weed rather than the ears of corn? Come for what you will, if ye come not to meet with God, to get life, to be filled with the Spirit, is it not reason why you should go without them?

Do ye not neglect the after improvement of public ordinances? Neglect ye not to draw out the efficacy of them in secret, by prayer, meditation, and the exercise of faith? Think ye the act done is sufficient, labouring for nothing but what ye find in the present exercise? Do ye think your work done when the minister has done? Oh no. If you would enjoy God in the word, then your work should begin. The ordinances are like grapes; it is not enough that they are given into your hands; if you would have the sweetness and nourishment of them, they must be pressed, that is your work in secret. The negligence, carelessness, slothfulness of men in not improving public ordinances in secret, causes him to withdraw himself, and his blessing in public.

These, and such evils, provoke the Lord to deny his presence, withhold the comforts and blessed advantages of public worship; so as others may enjoy more hereof in private than those that are herein guilty do find in public. You need but read your own hearts for an answer to this objection; it is not because the Lord is less to be found in public than in private, that you find less of him there, but because you make yourselves incapable of enjoying him, unfit to find him.

9. Suppose what is alleged were true, that you did find more joys, enlargement, assistance in private, that there was no mistake in these experiences, and that they were ordinary, which I am far from granting, yet, allowing all the advantage imaginable in this respect to private duties, this notwithstanding, public worship is to be preferred, for divers other unanswerable reasons formerly given. I will but now instance in two. Public worship is a more public good, it is more edifying, the advantage more common and extensive,

the benefit more universal, and therefore to be preferred before private, as much as an universal benefit is to be preferred before a particular, a public good before a private. He is a man unworthy to live in a commonwealth, who will prefer his private interests before the public good. It is a nobleness of spirit to be public-spirited; the light of nature discovers an excellency in it, religion and gospel principles much more require it, and the Lord himself does commend and encourage it with special rewards. Those that profess themselves to be servants of God should be ashamed to be outvied herein by heathen. Our first question should not be, Where may I receive most good? But where may I do most good? The saving of souls should be preferred before our comforts, and that advantage most valued which is most extensive and universal. Such is the advantage of public ordinances, and therefore they are as far to be preferred before private, as the public good before a man's private interest.

Then suppose you found more comfort, enlargement in private than in public worship, yet the glory of God is to be preferred before your advantages; and therefore that whereby his glory is most advanced, before that wherein your particular interest is most promoted. But God is most glorified in public worship; here is given the most ample testimony to his glorious excellencies, here is the most public acknowledgment of his glory. No otherwise can we glorify him than by acknowledging his glory, and the more public this acknowledgment is, the more is he glorified; but it is most public in public worship, and therefore this is as much to be preferred before private, as the glory of God before your private advantage.

Use 1. Reproof to those that undervalue public worship. Too many there are worthy of this reproof, especially two sorts:

1. Those that prefer worse things before public worship. If it be to be preferred before private duties, which are excellent and singularly advantageous in themselves, how heinously do they sin who prefer things that are base and sinful before public ordinances; those who prefer their ease, their worldly employments, their lusts or unlawful recreations, before them!

Do not they prefer their ease before the worship of God, who will not take the pains, who will excuse themselves by very slight and trivial occasions from coming to the place of public worship? The Lord has not made the way to his worship so tedious, so toilsome, as it was under the law; there is not the distance of many miles betwixt us and it, nor will it cost us divers days' journey to have the opportunities of public worship; we have it at our doors. And yet such slothfulness, such contempt there is of it, as we will scarce sometimes stir out of doors to enjoy these blessed liberties; a little rain, a little cold, anything of like moment, we take for a sufficient excuse to be absent. The people of God, in former times, counted it their happiness that they might come to the public ordinances, though through rain, and cold, and wearisome journeys, Ps. lxxiv. But where is this zeal for God's worship now? Is there not much less, when the gospel engages us to much more? May not even the unbelieving Jews rise up in judgment against the slothfulness of this generation, and condemn it? No such thing would hinder them from coming to the gates of Zion at the appointed seasons, how far soever their habitations were distant from it, how unseasonable soever the season seemed; yet many amongst us make every sorry thing a lion in the way, prefer their sloth and ease before God's public worship.

Others prefer their worldly occasions before the public worship of God, willingly embrace any earthly business offered to stay from the ordinances. Esau was stigmatised as a profane person for preferring the pottage before his birthright; but they exceed Esau in profaneness who prefer the things

of the world before this singular prerogative, of worshipping God in public. What a special privilege is this! How few are they in the world enjoy it! Does the Lord vouchsafe this honour, to have it, and himself in it condemned? Of thirty parts, into which the world may be divided, twenty-five are pagans or Mahometans, wholly without the true worship of God; but five bear the name of Christian. And of those, when you have discounted the Greeks, papists, Abassines, amongst whom the worship of God is wofully corrupted, you may judge to how small a part of mankind the Lord has vouchsafed his public worship in its purity. It is a special, a peculiar favour, a singular prerogative. Oh what profaneness is it, to prefer outward things, such as are common to all, to the worst of all, before this peculiar blessing! Yet how common is this profaneness! The thinness of our assemblies does daily testify it. One part of the day is thought enough by some, too much by others, for God's public worship; whereas we think nothing too much for the world. Oh the Lord's infinite patience!

Others prefer their lust before it; had rather sit in an ale-house, or in the seat of scorners, than wait at the posts of wisdom. Many had rather spend that time which the Lord has allotted for their souls, in sports and recreations, than in the public worship; think one whole day in seven too much, will rob God of all, or part of it, to recreate themselves. Oh that such profaneness should be so common where the light of the gospel has so long shined! The Lord prefers the gates of Zion, but these prefer Meshech and the tents of Kedar. I beseech you, consider the heinousness of this sin. The Lord styles his worship his name frequently in Scripture, as though his worship were as dear to him as himself. What do ye then but condemn God himself, while ye despise his worship? He that speaks it of his officers has the same account of his ordinances: he that despiseth them despiseth me, &c. And what do ye think it is to despise Christ? How jealous has the Lord always shewed himself of his worship! Some of the most remarkable judgments we meet with in Scripture have been inflicted for some miscarriage about his worship. For this Nadab and Abihu consumed with fire from heaven, for this Eli's family utterly ruined, for this Uzziah smitten with leprosy and Uzzah with sudden death, Michal with barrenness, for an error in the outward part of worship. The Lord is a jealous God, jealous especially over his worship. If you despise that, you are in danger; his jealousy will burn like fire against you. Now, do ye not despise it, when you prefer your ease, worldly affairs, lusts, idleness, recreations before it? This is to profane the holy, the glorious name of God. And the Lord will not hold him guiltless; it is a *peccatum*; the Lord will certainly judge, surely condemn, him that does so.

2. They deserve reproof who prefer private before public worship, or equal with it. I shall but instance in two particulars, wherein this is evident.

(1.) When private duties are used in the time and place of public worship. Now, how ordinary is this amongst us! When you come too late to wait upon God, after the public worship is begun, I see it is common to fall to your private prayers, whatever public ordinance be in hand. Now, what is this but to prefer your private praying before the public worship, and so to despise the ordinance in hand? What is it but to thrust public worship out of its season, and put private in its room? It is held indeed a great point of devotion and reverence, that is the pretence for it; but this pretended reverence casts a real disrespect upon the public ordinance then used. For the mind is withdrawn from it in the sight of God, and the outward man in the sight of men; and so public worship is hereby disrespected, in the sight both of God and men.

The intention may be good indeed, but that cannot justify what is sinful, what is evil; for we must not do evil that good may come of it. And this is evil, it is sinful, since it is sinful to prefer a private duty before a public ordinance.

It is against the apostle's rule, which he prescribes for the regulating of public assemblies: 1 Cor. xiv. 40, 'Let all things be done decently and in order.' Now that is not done in order, which is not done in its place and season; but this is neither the place nor season for private prayers; it is the time of public worship, therefore private is now unseasonable. Nor is this the place of private prayer; that is thy closet, according to Christ's direction, Mat. vi. 6; and he makes it the badge of hypocrites, to use their private prayers in public places, ver. 5. A good thing, out of its place and season, may become evil, evil in the worst sense, that is, sinful. This is not the place, the time for your private prayers, therefore it is a disorder here to use them; and what is here disorderly, is, by the apostle's rule, sinful, and therefore I beseech you let it be avoided. Do not expect the Lord will accept your private devotion, when it casts disrespect upon his public worship, which he himself prefers, and will have us to prefer before private.

(2.) When men absent themselves from public worship, under pretence that they can serve the Lord at home as well in private. How many are apt to say, they see not but their time may be as well spent at home, in praying, reading some good book, or discoursing on some profitable subject, as in the use of ordinances in public assemblies! They see not but private prayer may be as good to them as public, or private reading and opening the Scripture as profitable as public preaching; they say of their private duties, as Naaman of the waters of Damascus, 2 Kings v. 12. May I not serve the Lord as acceptably, with as much advantage, in private exercises of religion? May I not wash in these and be clean? They see not the great blessings God has annexed to public worship more than to private. Oh, but if it be thus, if one be as good as the other, what means the Lord to prefer one before the other? To what purpose did the Lord choose the gates of Zion, to place his name there, if he might have been worshipped as well in the dwellings of Jacob? How do men of this conceit run counter to the Lord? He prefers the gates of Zion, not only before one or some, but before all the dwellings of Jacob; and they prefer one such dwelling before the gates of Zion. What is this but to disparage the wisdom of God, in preferring one before another when both are equal; in preferring that which is unworthy to be preferred? What presumption is this, to make yourselves wiser than God, and to undertake to correct him? He says the gates of Zion are to be loved, public worship before private; you say no, you see no reason but one should be loved as well as the other. Who art thou, O man, who thus disputest against God?

To conclude this use, let me shew you the sinfulness of preferring private worship before public, in the fore-mentioned or other respects, by applying what has been delivered. To prefer private before public, or by not preferring public before private, in your judgment, affection, or practice, you neglect the glory of God, which is here most advanced; you slight the presence of God, which is here most vouchsafed, that presence which is the greatest happiness the people of God can expect, in heaven or on earth. You undervalue the manifestation of God, those blessed visions of life and peace, which are most evidently, most comfortably, here represented; those manifestations which are the dawns of approaching glory, the first glimpses of the beatifical vision. You condemn those blessed soul advantages which

are here more plentifully gained ; you prefer a private supposed benefit before public edification ; you expose yourselves to the danger of backsliding, which is here more effectually prevented ; you condemn the Lord's greatest works upon the souls of sinners, which are here ordinarily effected ; you slight heaven, which is here in a more lively manner resembled ; you disparage the judgment of the most renowned servants of God, who in all ages have confirmed this truth by their testimony or practice ; you make yourselves less capable of procuring public mercies, or diverting public calamities, slighting the means most conducive to this end ; you undervalue the blood of Christ, whose influence is here most powerful ; you despise those great and precious promises of the gospel, which are more engaged for public worship than private. Oh, consider how heinous that sin is, which involves the soul in so much guilt, which is attended with so many provoking evils ; bewail this sin, so far as thou art guilty of it, and let the sinfulness thereof engage thee to be watchful against it.

Use 2, of exhortation. Be exhorted to give to the public worship of God the glory that is due to it ; let it have the pre-eminence which the Lord has given it ; prefer it before private, in your thoughts, in your affections, in your practice. Get higher thoughts of public ordinances, get affections answerable to those apprehensions ; manifest both by a frequent affectionate use of these ordinances, by your praises for the enjoyment, by your prayers for the continuance of them. A duty this is which the text requires, a duty which these times call for. When there is so much disrespect cast upon the worship of God, your endeavours should be more for the advancement of it. This is the way to shew yourselves faithful to God, steadfast and upright, in the midst of a declining generation. This duty always finds acceptance with God ; but now he will take it better, because there is a stream of temptation, of opposition against it. Oh let not your souls enter into their secret, who dishonour God, by despising his public worship ; who blaspheme God, by speaking contemptibly of his name, that name which he records amongst us, and thereby does graciously distinguish us from the neglected world. I might enforce this with many motives ; but what more forcible than this in the text ? ' The Lord loves the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob.' Those that thus do are herein like the Lord. This is the highest pitch of excellency that angels or men can aspire to, to be conformable to the Lord, to be like him, to have any resemblance of him. Why, this is the way ; when we thus love, prefer the public worship, the like mind is in us that is in the Lord (so far as likeness may be admitted, where there is an infinite distance), herein you will be followers of God as dear children. Whereas those who despise the public worship of God, despise God himself, comply with Satan in one of his most mischievous designs against God and his people, and hereby do what in them lies to lay his honour in the dust. It is not out of any respect of private duties that Satan endeavours to advance them above public worship ; his design is to withdraw professors from both, he knows they stand or fall together, and the event proves it. You will find those that withdraw from public worship will not long make conscience of private ; except the Lord break Satan's design, by a sudden reducing them. If you will not be carried away with the error of the wicked, and fall into the snare of the devil, keep up the honour of public worship. To that end observe these directions.

1. Get high thoughts of God. The Lord and his worship are so nearly related, as they are either esteemed or despised together. He that has high thoughts of God, will have suitable apprehensions of his worship, wherein his glory most appears, Ps. cii. 16. We see it in David. None

had higher apprehensions of God; see with what raised expressions he extols him, Ps. cxlvi. And none had a higher esteem of public worship, as appears in those affectionate expressions formerly alleged. If you have high thoughts of God, that will be of high esteem with you, wherein he most appears, wherein he is most enjoyed. 'In the temple will every one speak of his glory,' for in public worship he appears most glorious. If ye have low thoughts of God, no wonder if you undervalue his worship! If you have a high esteem of God, you will have an answerable esteem of his name, of his worship. So Ps. xlviii., they profess their high thoughts of Zion, the public ordinances, ver. 2, 3, and the reason you may see: ver. 9, 'We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple!' If you apprehend God as great, and holy, and fearful, and glorious, it will help you to such thoughts of his worship as becomes his great, and holy, and fearful name. His worship is his name.

2. Get due apprehensions of those things, whereupon the pre-eminence of public worship is grounded. It follows, ver. 3, 'Glorious things,' &c., *i. e.* of the church and ordinances of God. It was the city of God in these respects, and in no other respect could so glorious things be spoken of it. Here is the sweetest enjoyment of God, the clearest discoveries of his glory, the powerful workings of the Spirit, the precious blood of Christ in its force and efficacy, the exceeding great and precious promises in their sweetest influences, spiritual life and strength, soul comforts and refreshments, the conversion of sinners, the edification of the body of Christ, the salvation of souls. These are the glorious things that are spoken of public worship; get a high esteem of these, and public worship will be highly valued. Look upon public ordinances in their glory, as they give the greatest glory to the God of heaven, as they are the greatest glory of his people on earth, and this will raise a spiritual mind to high apprehensions of them. Will you not honour that which is most honourable to God, that which is your greatest honour? Here the Lord, if anywhere in the world, receives the glory due unto his name, Ps. xxix. 1, 2. To worship God in public is the way to give him the glory due to his name; and is not this of highest value? It is your glory too. Public ordinances are the glory of the people that enjoy, that improve them. Where the Lord has placed his name, there his honour dwells. When the Lord has erected his public worship in a place, then glory dwells in that land; when this is removed, the glory is departed. That which is most your glory, challenges your highest esteem. Look upon this as your glory, and then you will account it highly valuable.

8. Delight in the worship of God. We soon disrespect that which we take no pleasure in; and, therefore, when the Lord is commanding the sanctifying of his Sabbath, he joins these: Isa. lviii. 13, 'If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable,' &c. If it be not your delight, it will not be honourable. If you be of their temper who say, 'When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn; and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?' Amos viii. 5; if public ordinances, praying, preaching, be a burden to you: not only private duties, but the base things of the world, will take place of it in your minds and hearts. When we are weary of a thing, take no pleasure in it, we easily give way to any suggestion that may disparage it. Let the worship of God be your delight, the joy and solace of your souls. Be glad of all opportunities to worship God in public, in season, and out of season, like David: Ps. cxlii. 1, 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of the Lord.' Let it be your meat and drink to be thus employed; go, as to a feast; sit

down under the shadow with great delight, while the fruits of ordinances, the shadow of heavenly enjoyments, are sweet.

4. Get spiritual hearts. All the glory of public worship is spiritual, and spiritual things are spiritually discerned, 1 Cor. ii. 14. A carnal man cannot discern that which renders the public ordinances so highly valuable. Custom, and other respects, may persuade him to use them, but he will never perceive the glory, the spiritual value of God's worship, till he have a spiritual eye. Christ himself was foolishness to the Greeks, because they saw no further than his outside, 1 Cor. i. 23. So was the preaching of Christ to carnal Jews and Gentiles; so it is, more or less, to all natural men, except some outward respect, some plausible ornament commend it. A spiritual eye can discern a glory in public worship, when the outside seems mean and contemptible. As the unbelieving Jews of Christ, so carnal men of his ordinances; there is no form nor comeliness therein to command any extraordinary respect; they see no beauty therein that they should desire them.

5. Look upon the public ordinances with the eye of faith. If you consult only with sense, you will be apt to say as the Assyrian, What are the waters of Jordan more than the rivers of Damascus? What is there in public reading the word, more than reading at home? What is there in public preaching, more than in another good discourse? Sense will discern no more in one than in the other; but the eye of faith looks through the prospect of a promise, and so makes greater, more glorious discoveries; passes through the mean outside, to the discovery of a special, an inward glory; sees a special blessing, a special assistance, a special presence, a special advantage, in public worship; no way so discoverable as by the eye of faith through a promise. Unbelievers want this perspective, and therefore see no further than the outside.

Faith can see the wisdom of God in that preaching, which the blind world counts foolishness, as they did the apostle's; can see a glory in those ordinances which, in the eyes of carnal men, are mean and contemptible. When the child Jesus lay in the manger, a poor, despicable condition, the wise men saw, through those poor swaddling clothes, such a glory as commanded their wonder and adoration, whenas many others, in the same inn, saw no such thing. And why so? The wise men looked upon the child Jesus through that intimation, that word from heaven, whereby he was made known to them. The outside of public worship, now under the gospel, is but like those poor swaddling clothes; but Christ is wrapped in them, there is a spiritual glory within, which a believer discerns, and accordingly values them, whenas an unbeliever sees no such thing. That worship, which, to sense and unbelief is mean and contemptible, is to faith, looking through a promise, the most glorious administration under heaven. The eye of faith must be opened, else the ordinances will not be valued. The Lord has given more encouragements to faith under the gospel, and therefore may expect more exercise of it, than under the law. And his dispensations are answerable. His children under the law were in their minority and nonage, Gal. iv. 1. The outside of his worship was then glorious, the administration of it in state and pomp, he allowed the children that which would please their senses; but now, under the gospel, they are come to riper age, he allows no such gay outside, prescribes no such pomp as sense is taken with; the glory is spiritual, and such as is only visible to faith. And yet the glory of the second temple is greater than the first, the public worship under the gospel is more glorious than under the law. Though there be no golden censer in the ark, overlaid with gold, no cherubims of glory shadowing the

mercy-seat, no such ornament to take the senses, yet there is a far more exceeding glory, 2 Cor. iii. 11, but it is such a glory as is only discerned by the eye of faith. This you must exercise if you would give to the public worship of God the glory that is due to it.

6. Labour to draw out the virtue and efficacy of public ordinances, to make the utmost improvements of them. When you find the refreshing comforts, the blessed advantages of public worship, you will not need many motives to give them their due honour: Ps. xlviii. 8, 'As we have heard, so have we seen,' &c. When they had not only heard, but seen, what God was to his people in his public worship, no wonder if they express their high esteem of it: ver. 1-8, 'Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion,' &c.

Now, that you may reap such advantage by them as may raise your esteem of them,

1. Come not unprepared. No wonder if unfruitfulness under the ordinances be so common, when neglect of preparation is so ordinary: Eccles. v. 2, 'Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God.' Come not rashly, without due consideration with whom you have to do, and what you are a-doing. Come not with guilt and pollution upon your consciences, Ezek. xxiii. 21, 29. This is it from which we must be separate, if we would have God receive us, 2 Cor. vi. 17. Come not with minds and affections entangled in the world: 'Put off thy shoes,' &c. Come not with careless, indisposed spirits, with hearts unfixed, Ps. lvii. 7. Come not with that carnal, dull temper, which your hearts contract by meddling with the world. Plough up the fallow ground. If you sow among thorns, you will reap little to raise your esteem: Ps. xxvi. 6, 'I will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord.' He alludes to the custom of the priests, enjoined under the law to wash their hands and feet, when they went about the service of the tabernacle. And this was exemplary to the people then, to us now, to teach us with what preparedness we should approach God.

2. Get acquainted with your spiritual condition. Come apprehensive of the state of your souls, whether it be the state of grace or nature, what your spiritual wants, what your inward distempers, what your temptations are; else you may hear much to little purpose, not discerning what is seasonable; else many a petition may pass unobserved, when you know not what most concerns you. Oh, if professors knew their soul's condition punctually, and were thoroughly affected with it, the word would come in season, it would be like apples of gold, the ordinances would be as rain upon the new-mown grass, they would distil a fruitful influence, and their souls would grow as the lily.

3. Come with hearts hungering after the enjoyment of Christ in his ordinances. This affection has the promise: Mat. v., 'He filleth the hungry with good things.' Sense of emptiness and indigency brings you under the aspect of this promise, under the sweet and gracious influences of it; whereas conceitedness of our own abundance, senselessness of our spiritual poverty, shuts up the treasury of heaven against us, 'The rich he sends empty away,' Ps. lxxxi. 10. Our souls should stretch themselves wide open, in earnest longings after God; this is the way to be filled with the rich blessings of spiritual ordinances.

4. Use the ordinances with holy fear and reverence, Ps. ii. 11, and iii. 7. That confidence which the Lord approves in his children is not a carnal boldness, such as some mistake in the room of it. When we are admitted

to most intimacy and familiarity with Christ, when we are invited to kiss the Son; yet there is a holy fear required: 'Serve the Lord with fear,' &c. When we have cause to rejoice in the Lord's gracious condescension to us poor worms, yet then we must tremble in apprehension of that overpowering glory and excellency to which we approach, Heb. xii. 28. The house, which the Lord prefers before the temple, is a trembling heart, Isa. lxvi. And if he choose it for his habitation, he will richly furnish it; his presence will be to it light and life, joy and strength, grace and glory.

5. What you do in public worship, do it with all your might. Shake off that slothful, indifferent, lukewarm temper, which is so odious to God. Let your whole man tender this worship. Think it not enough to present your bodies before the Lord. Bodily worship profits as little as bodily exercise. The worship of the body is but the carcase of worship; it is soul worship that is the soul of worship. Those that draw near with their lips only shall find God far enough from them; not only lips, and mouth, and tongue, but mind, and heart, and affections; not only knee, and hand, and eye, but heart, and conscience, and memory, must be pressed to attend upon God in public worship. David says, not only 'my flesh longs for thee,' but 'my soul thirsts for thee.' Then will the Lord draw near, when our whole man waits on him; then will the Lord be found, when we seek him with our whole heart.

Let your whole man wait upon God; serve him so with all your might. Let his worship be your work, and be as diligent in it for your souls, as you are in other employments for your bodies. Spiritual slothfulness is the ruin of souls, it brings them to consumptions, it leaves them languishing under sad distempers. Those that will not stir up themselves to lay hold on God, will be bowed down under many infirmities. Soul-poverty will be the issue of spiritual sloth, Prov. xviii., 'a great waster.' So far from increasing the stock of grace, as he will greatly waste it, Prov. xx. 4. It holds in a spiritual sense. His soul shall be in a beggarly condition, as though it had nothing, even in harvest, in the midst of plenty, when others are reaping the sweet fruits of public ordinances, and laying up store against winter, against an evil day. In the midst of their plenty, the spiritual sluggard shall have nothing, Prov. xii. 17. It is the diligent man that shall be enriched with precious substance, even the precious advantages of public worship. The Lord is the rewarder of those that seek him diligently. Those that are diligent in preparing for it, diligent in attending on it, diligent in after improvement of the ordinances, this man's soul shall be rich, rich towards God. The Lord will bless him with such spiritual riches, in the use of public ordinances, as will raise his esteem of them.

END OF DISCOURSES.