

not how near; the world and the lusts thereof (even those that feed and foment hypocrisy) passing away, (1 John ii. 17,) and that "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation:" (2 Cor. vi. 2:) and, if you were ever serious in your lives, now be so; and if ever God spake to your hearts and consciences, the Lord in mercy speak this!—"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

SERMON XXVIII.

BY THE REV. DAVID CLARKSON, B. D.,

FELLOW OF CLARE-HALL, CAMBRIDGE.

WHAT MUST CHRISTIANS DO, THAT THE INFLUENCE OF THE
ORDINANCES MAY ABIDE UPON THEM?

O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee.—1 Chronicles xxix. 18.

IN the preceding chapter we have David's oration, or, if you will, his sermon; the design of which was, to excite the people to a contribution for the erecting of a temple, and promoting the public worship of God. It begins verse 2 of that chapter, and is continued to verse 6 of this chapter.

This sermon was effectual upon the auditory. David had the happiness (which the best orators and most powerful preachers often want) not only *πιθανα λεγειν*, but *πειθειν*; "he not only spoke what was in itself persuasive, but did actually persuade" his hearers to comply with his design. The effect thereof is expressed verses 6—8: "They offered," and, which was the marrow and fatness of their offering, "they offered *willingly*." Though will-worship be the worst service of all other, yet those that serve God willingly are the best worshippers; and therefore David in this sermon commends such service to his son: "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind." (1 Chron. xxviii. 9.) None serve God with a perfect heart, but those who serve him with a willing mind. To such a temper were the people wrought by this powerful exhortation, "with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord." (1 Chron. xxix. 9.) Hereupon David, much affected with his success in this affair, ("David the king also rejoiced with great joy,") his soul being now upon the wing, he flies to God by prayer, and there-with concludes his sermon. The prayer consists of petition and thanksgiving; both of them, not conformed to any common model, but suiting the particular occasion now before him. He blesseth God for making

such an impression upon the hearts of the people, as moved them to offer, and "after this sort" to offer, so cheerfully, so generously; (verses 10—18;) and beseecheth God still to keep their hearts in such a temper, to make this holy impression durable and abiding: "O Lord God of Abraham," &c., "keep this for ever in the imaginations," &c.: (verse 18:) where we have the enforcement of the petition, and the matter of it. It is enforced from the covenant of God, by virtue of which he was "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel," and had laid an obligation on himself to have a gracious respect to their posterity; hence this expression is frequently used, being no small encouragement to the faithful, to pray for covenant-mercies, and to pray in faith.

The matter of the petition, that which he prays for, is, that the effect which his words had upon the people might be durable and continuing; that the efficacy thereof might abide upon their souls, and every part thereof; that it might sink into the depths of their hearts, and stick fast there; that it might pierce through their fancies and "imaginations" into their mind and "thoughts," and through their "thoughts" into their "hearts" and affections; that the Lord would continue it there, and continue it long there, even "for ever."

David was apprehensive what a slippery and inconstant thing the heart of man is, how like a deceitful bow, to which he elsewhere compares it, how apt to slacken on a sudden, when it hath been bended to any good inclinations or resolutions, by the power of the word, or any other ordinance. What an unhappy womb it is! how ordinarily holy motions miscarry before the heart hath gone out its full time with them! What danger there was, lest their righteousness, which now made such a flourishing appearance, might prove like the morning cloud, or the early dew! And therefore having raised their hearts to so good a posture, he takes the best course to fix them there. His words having had a powerful influence upon their souls, he useth the best means to render it durable and abiding. Hence observe,

DOCTRINE.

The people of God should endeavour to keep the influence of the ordinances abiding upon their souls.

I must not prosecute this doctrine in the usual method, but mention it only, as leading us to the practical case at this time to be resolved. A conscientious hearer, observing what his duty is, will be presently inquisitive how he may perform it; *the duty* is made known in the observation, *the inquiry* is in the case before us:—

What must be done, that the influences of the ordinances may abide upon us?

By "the ordinances" we understand those principally which are public, the word, sacraments, and prayer. The text and this exercise lead us to have a more special respect to the word, which we shall a little observe, but so as not to exclude the rest. By the "influence of the ordinances," is meant the effect they have upon us, while we are employed in them; their gracious or comforting efficacy, that which tends to make our hearts and lives more holy or more comfortable; that whereby our souls are

quickened, strengthened, restored, or refreshed. By its "abiding on us," understand the continuance of this effect after the duty is done, that so the ordinances of God be not like those human ordinances the apostle speaks of, which "perish with the using." (Col. ii. 20, 22.) If you would have it stated clearly and more at large, take it thus: *What course must we take, that the gracious and comforting efficacy of public ordinances may not only reach us while we are employed in them, but may continue on us afterwards; so as we may walk under the sense and power thereof all along?*

To resolve this without further preamble: the course you must take for this purpose lies in the practice of some things, and the avoiding of others. The things to be practised take notice of in these severals:—

1. *Get new hearts, and get them daily more and more renewed.*—An old heart is a heart of stone; (Ezek. xi. 19;) and the hardness of it is not removed but by degrees. Now that which will sink deep into a tender heart, "a heart of flesh," (Ezek. xxxvi. 26,) will glide off from an old heart as water from a stone, without leaving any impression; and where none is left, none can continue. The good seed which fell on stony ground,—it sprang up indeed, but it continued not, as soon as it sprang up it withered away; (Luke viii. 6;) but they who with an honest and good heart heard the word, they "kept it," and brought forth fruit with patience, that is, with perseverance; (verse 15;) the fruitful influences of the word abode upon them. "A good and honest heart" not only hears the word, but keeps it; not only brings forth fruit, but persists [in] so doing. The more tender, humble, and spiritual the heart is, the more spiritual fruit and advantage doth it reap from the ordinances, and the longer doth it continue in possession of those advantages; the less the soul is renewed, the more resistance doth it offer to the ordinances; and the more they are resisted, the weaker is their efficacy; and the less their efficacy is, the less while doth it continue. A heart thoroughly sanctified is to the ordinances like tinder, which soon takes fire, and is apt to keep it till it be forced out; whereas a carnal, unmortified heart is like green wood, whose moistness, giving check to the activity of the fire, is not soon kindled, and will soon go out, if it be not well looked to. Naturalists observe, that transmutation is easy in symbolical elements, such as agree in some prime qualities; water is more easily turned into air than into fire. A holy and spiritual heart will be easily wrought-on by holy and spiritual ordinances, for here is an agreement in qualities; and the more agreement, the less opposition; and the less the opposition is, the more easily will it be mastered: the power of the ordinances will more easily both take place and keep possession. Holiness makes the soul both receptive and retentive of holy impressions. Make it but your great business to grow every day more holy, and it will not be so hard a matter to have the ordinances work effectually on you, or to have their efficacy continue with you.

2. *Labour to be much affected with the ordinances while you are employed in them.*—Slight impressions will be soon worn out; and weak influences will quickly spend themselves, and vanish. If the ordinances have but little effect upon you while you are under them, it is not like

to last long ; for that which is little is near to nothing, and that which is so near to it may soon come to nothing. It is not enough that your hearts be a little warmed, but they must burn within you, while Christ is speaking to you, or you are speaking to him, (Luke xxiv. 32,) if you would have that heavenly heat to be lasting. The good seed miscarried upon one sort of ground in the parable, because it had no "deepness of earth;" it quickly withered, because it took no deep root. (Matt. xiii. 5, 6.) If the ordinances pierce no further than the surface of the soul, if the work of them be but superficial, if they do not penetrate into the depths of the heart, the efficacy of them is not like to continue. Therefore, prepare your hearts before you draw near to God, get them so disposed as they may be capable of lasting influences. The text directs us to this : "O Lord, keep this for ever in the imagination," &c., "and prepare their heart unto thee." Then is the heart prepared to the Lord when it is made tender, and sensible, and open.

Bring *tender* hearts to the ordinances, get them broken up beforehand : "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns." (Jer. iv. 3 ; Hosea x. 12.) A tender heart drinks-in divine influences ; they insinuate themselves more easily into the intimate recesses of it. That which can make no impression at all upon a flint, will sink deep into softened wax.

Come with *sensible* hearts, apprehensive of your spiritual wants and necessities, burdened with your lusts and corruptions, pained with your inward distempers and soul-grievances. I cannot commend to you any thing more effectual, to make you capable of great and lasting advantages.

Such a quick sense of your spiritual condition will *open* your hearts, and make them ready to receive so much from the ordinances as will not be soon spent. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." (Psalm lxxxi. 10.) Now it is desire that opens the heart ; and the stronger the desire is, the wider is it opened : then is the soul wide open, when it pants and breathes after God ; when it hungers and thirsts after holiness, as appears by equivalent promises : "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled." (Matt. v. 6 ; Psalm cvii. 9.) That which we get by holy duties, is soon spent because it is so little ; and we get so little, because we desire no more. We come to the ordinances *tanquam canis ad Nilum*, too like the Egyptian dog, which laps a little as he runs by the side of Nilus, but stays not to drink ; we take but a taste of them as *in transitu*, too little and too cursorily ; whereas Christ invites us to eat and drink abundantly. (Canticles v. 1.) Such cursory tastes may cheer you a little ; but they will not furnish you with strength for continual service : you must feed, and feed hungrily, and come with a strong appetite, that you may be capacious of much : a little will not serve you long.

3. *Mind the ordinances after your use of them.*—Be much in meditation if you would have the efficacy of ordinances to continue long. Be often considering what you have heard, what you have prayed for, what you have received and are obliged to by the sacraments. Much of heaven and holiness is engraved on these ordinances ; and the seal is, as it were, set upon the heart, while you are under them ; but after-consideration lays

more weight on it, and impresseth it deeper, and so makes the characters both more plain and more durable; for the deeper they are, the longer will it be ere they be defaced.

Most men lose their souls, and the best men lose great advantages for their souls, for want of consideration. There is a quickening, a healing, a comforting, a strengthening, virtue in the ordinances; and this virtue may fall upon your souls, while you are employed in them; but you cannot expect it will stay with you, unless you fix it there; and no better way to fix it than consideration. This will rouse it up, when it lies dormant and unactive; this will put spirits into it, when it grows weak and languid; this will both diffuse and fasten it, yea, it will heighten and improve it. "My heart was hot within me," saith David: "while I was musing the fire burned." (Psalm xxxix. 3.) The heart takes fire at the mind; and it is "musing," or consideration, that kindles it, and keeps it in, and blows it up: those sparks which fall from heaven upon your hearts, while you are hearing, or praying, &c,—they will die, they will go out, and come to nothing, unless you do *αναζωοπυρειν* unless "you blow them up" by meditation. (2 Tim. i. 6.) "He sent his word, and healed them." (Psalm cvii. 20.) The word hath a salve for every soul-distemper; but that it may be effectual, the plaster must be laid on, and kept on too, till the cure be wrought: the preacher may apply it, and lay it upon the distempered part; but it will not be kept on without meditation. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste!" saith David. (Psalm cxix. 103.) How came they to be still so sweet? Why, they were his "meditation day and night;" the delicious relish of them still continued, because he kept them still upon his palate, by ruminating and musing on them.

The word of God in the scripture is as honey in the comb; there is that which is incomparably sweeter: now, by meditation you squeeze out this sweetness, and it will be still dropping comfort and sweet refreshment upon your souls, while you are pressing it by consideration. "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you." (1 John ii. 14.) If you would be strong, and continue so, the word of God must "abide" in you: now how can it abide in you, if it have not leave to stay in that which is but the portal of the soul,—if it abide not in your minds? You lose all for want of consideration: both the gracious and comforting influences of the ordinances slide from you through this neglect. And no wonder it is so great a damage to you, since it is so great a sin: you cast the word behind your backs, and throw the ordinances at your heels, when you do not mind them after you have done with them; and will the Lord encourage any with a durable blessing under such guilt? Will not this provoke him rather to curse your blessings, and blast them in the bud? Meditation is a known duty, and commonly insisted on, and therefore you may be tempted to slight it; whereas, indeed, upon this account, you should the more regard it; for since it is a known duty, the neglect of it is a known sin: now to say nothing how inconsistent it is either with grace or comfort to live in a known sin, how can you expect the efficacy of ordinances should be continued, while you neglect the means which the Lord hath appointed and commended to you, as most effectual for the continuance thereof? The

blessing of the ordinances will not abide upon him who continues in sin, especially when his sin is the neglect of that medium which should fix the blessing upon him.

4. *Let the efficacy of the ordinances be pursued presently into act.*—If they convince you of any neglected duty, fall immediately upon the practice of it. If they make you more resolute against any carnal or worldly lust, betake yourselves presently to the mortifying of it. If they kindle any holy affection to Christ or his people, give some real expression thereof without delay. If they revive any languishing grace, let it be forthwith exercised. This was David's practice. (Psalm cxix. 60.) You will find this one of the best expedients for the fixing and securing of those good motions which are raised in your minds and hearts by the ordinances. When the blossoms of a fruit-tree are once knit, though the flourish thereof be gone, and you see nothing but the bare rudiment of the expected fruit; yet you think it more secured from the injury of frosts and winds than if it were still in the flower. Good motions, when they are once reduced into act, are thereby, as it were, knit, and brought to more consistency. They are then well past one of their critical periods, where most miscarry, and so are more like to live and continue with you. Besides, the act strengthens that good motion and disposition which leads to it, and so makes you more ready for another act; and that disposeth to more acts, and those to better; and repeated acts beget a habit; and this, as the philosopher tells us, is *μονιματερον τι*, "something that will stay by you." The hearts of the people being raised by Hezekiah's zealous speech, they were kept up in that posture, till the work designed by him was finished, till religion was restored and reformed: and how came this to pass? Why, "the thing was done suddenly:" he pursued the people's good inclinations, and brought them into act suddenly; he struck while the iron was hot. (2 Chron. xxix. 3—10, 36.) When your hearts are heated by the ordinances, set immediately upon your work: the *primus impetus* ["first impulse"] affords a great advantage if it be improved; possibly in the vigour of it, you may overcome those great difficulties and oppositions which have been too hard for you formerly, and may otherwise give you impediment hereafter; and, this being mastered, your progress will be easier, you may go on towards heaven under the power of the ordinances, with less interruption and fewer intermissions of these divine influences: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer," that is, if he do it not presently, as appears by what follows, "he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." (James i. 22—24.) The glass discovers what spots and sullages are in his face, that he may wash them off; or what is disordered about him, that he may correct and compose it; but if he do not this presently, if he put it off till some occurrence divert him from the thoughts and remembrance of it, his looking in the mirror will prove but a loss of time, a vain curiosity. Your use of the ordinances is like to prove no better, if you practise not what they lead you to without delay: it is

like to be no other than such a viewing of yourselves in a glass, a mere fruitless speculation.

5. *You must take much pains with your hearts, if you would have them retain the virtue and efficacy of the ordinances.*—The effect of them should be as a nail fastened in a sure place : but the heart is so hard and knotty a piece, that you cannot drive it in without many blows ; it will require all your strength to force it in far enough, and all your care and watchfulness to keep it in when it is there. *They* grossly mistake Christianity *who* take it to be consistent with our carnal ease and slothfulness ; who place it in notions or opinions ; in fair shows, and a specious profession ; in forms, gestures, or external observances ; in conforming to this or that mode of worship or discipline. It were well for the world if one could be a Christian at such an easy rate ; but they that please themselves with such conceits, “they err, not knowing the scriptures.” The action of a Christian is, all along in the New Testament, expressed by “striving, wrestling, running, and combating, exercises ;” wherein he that will not be worsted, must intend all his spirits, stretch all his sinews, put forth all his strength ; he that is a Christian indeed, —he must *παλαίειν*, (Eph. vi. 12,) *διωκεῖν*, (Phil. iii. 12—14 ; Heb. xii. 14,) *αγωνιζέσθαι* : (Luke xiii. 24 :) his daily course must be “a combating” as for victory, “a running” as for a crown, “a striving” as for life. The power and life of holiness can neither be attained nor upheld without an effectual use of the ordinances ; the ordinances will never be effectual to purpose, unless the virtue of them abide upon the heart. Now, it meets with such reluctancy and opposition from the heart, so far as it is unrenewed, that it can never be fastened there, without striving, and struggling, and earnest contending : it must be done in despite of our own ease, and carnal humours, and natural inclination, and all the resistance of the body of death. If you think this too much, you think much to be Christians indeed, however you pretend to the name. Those that are acquainted with their own hearts find it very hard to get them raised to a spiritual and heavenly temper, very difficult to get them pulled up, though they have the advantage of the most powerful ordinances, to any good posture ; and, when with much ado they are got up, exceeding difficult to keep them there. Alas ! we seem to be forcing a weighty stone up a steep hill ; when, with much toil we have got it near the top, take but our hands off a little, leave it but to itself, and down it runs further in a moment than we can get it up again in some hours. Our way to heaven lies up the hill ; that which is spiritual and heavenly is above us ; the natural bent and tendency of our hearts is downwards : as there is no getting them up without toil and pains, so, when we have raised them a little, leave them but to themselves, grow but a little remiss and negligent, and down they run on a sudden ; we shall quickly find them at the bottom of the hill, in a carnal, lukewarm, earthly temper. When our hearts are effectually touched, and raised, and moved in the use of ordinances, there is no keeping them in a quick and lively motion, without striving and struggling, and, as it were, forcing them on with might and main. The influence of the ordinances falling upon a slothful soul is quite lost, and

merely thrown away upon it: "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting." (Prov. xii. 27.) So he loseth all his former labour, because he will not take a little more pains; a slothful soul loseth all the advantages he gets by following the ordinances, for want of care and industry to retain and improve what he hath gotten.

6. *Comply with the Spirit of God.*—These influences, both as to the rise and continuance of them, are from him. When you comply not with him, you grieve the Spirit, and provoke him to withdraw; and when he withdraws, these influences will be discontinued. If you detain the truth in unrighteousness, if you confine it to your minds, so as the power thereof descends not upon your hearts and affections, comes not forth in your lives and actions, you do *κατεχευειν*, "imprison" the truth; and that is a great affront to the Spirit of truth. If, when the Spirit of God calls you to take up the cross, to leave all to follow Christ contentedly and cheerfully in a low, reproached, afflicted condition; or if, when he calls you up to a higher degree of self-denial, mortification, and holiness, you hang back, or turn aside, and refuse to follow his conduct, this grieves the Spirit of holiness. If you decline his institution for other devices, shrink back from the work you are engaged to when it grows hazardous, strain your consciences to secure your outward enjoyments, will not be influenced by Him further than is consistent with your ease, credit, safety, and worldly interest, you dishonour the Spirit of wisdom. This provokes the blessed Spirit to withdraw; and when the fire is gone out, the heat will not long continue. If you refuse to continue under the influences of the Spirit in some things, it is righteous with him not to continue them upon you in others. If you fear the displeasure of man more than the grieving of Him; if you lean more to the hopes of this life than his supports, and consult with flesh and blood, instead of being directed by the wisdom which is from above; it will be no wonder if he give you over to your own conduct, and, intermitting his own, leave you under the influences of your carnal fears and worldly hopes.

7. *Be frequent in the use of ordinances.*—Good impressions do most usually wear off in the intervals of holy duties; and the longer these are, the more danger there is; therefore make these interims as short as may be by quick returns to the ordinances. It is observed that places under the line are not so hot as some climates at a further distance from it; and this reason is given for it:—Those under the equinoctial, though they have the sun more vertical, and the beams, falling perpendicularly, cause a more intense heat; yet the nights being of equal length with the days, the coolness of those long nights doth more allay the heat than where the nights are shorter. Long intermissions of holy duties are like long nights; you may find them by experience to be great coolers; if you live under more powerful ordinances than some others, yet if they be more frequent and diligent in the use of what they have, they are like to have more spiritual warmth than you, and that with less allay and intermission. Besides, when the advantage you have got by one ordinance is declining and wearing off, the use of the same, or of some other, may revive and recover it, if you take it speedily before it be too far gone. Further: a slight impression, such as is not like to last long, may be re-inforced for

a longer continuance, if you lay yourselves quickly under the instrument that first made it. When Elijah had once tasted of the provision the Lord made for him in the wilderness, he "laid him down," saith the text, as having enough; but the angel calls him to it again; for, saith he, "The journey is too great for thee." Hereupon he arose once more, "and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights." (1 Kings xix. 6—8.) Once tasting will not serve your turn; a little will not be enough; so long a journey as yours is will spend much; nothing but a frequent and often-repeated use of the ordinances will furnish you with such strength as will last you many days.

8. Finally: *Look up to God for the continuance of this influence.*—Pray, and pray in faith. Seek him, and depend on him for it. He will be found of those that seek him. (Matt. vii. 7.) You have his promise for it; and dependence on him obligeth him, too: "The expectation of the poor shall not perish." (Psalm ix. 18.) It is not for his honour to fail those whom he hath encouraged to rely on him: an ingenuous man will not do it, much less the faithful God. This course David takes in the text; he prays, and encourageth his faith while he is praying, by that interest which the faithful have in the Lord by virtue of the covenant: "O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel our fathers, keep this for ever." Yea, the Lord himself leads us to this, in Deut. v. 24, 27, 29: the people were much affected, in that they had heard the Lord's voice; (verse 24;) this brought them up to a noble resolution: "Speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it." (Verse 27.) Hereupon the Lord thus expresseth himself: "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always," &c. (Verse 29.) What greater encouragement can we have to desire this of God, than that he expresseth himself desirous we should have it? Faith is the main strength of prayer; and the great supports of faith are these two,—that *he is able*, and that *he is willing*. These are to faith like the two pillars of the temple, 1 Kings vii. 21; and the names of them there expressed are very apposite: "He set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof *Jachin*;" that is, "he will establish," he is willing: "and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof *Boaz*;" that is, "in him is strength," he is able. Now, faith hath both these pillars to support it in this business. That the Lord *is able* to continue his influences, you will not question, I hope: he "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us;" (Eph. iii. 20;) and that he *is willing*, he puts it out of question, when he useth such an expression as, amongst men, signifies a passionate desire, "O that there were such a heart in them," &c. Now, saith the philosopher, *Εαν τις θελη και δυναται*, &c., "That which one is both able and willing to do shall be done." Both reason and faith see ground enough to conclude this. Pray then, and pray believing; for as the Lord is able to do it, so it is according to his will; and whatsoever you ask according to his will, believing, it shall be done. (Matt. xxi. 22.)

Thus much for what you are to practise: there are some things to be

avoided, if you would have the influence of the ordinances to be lasting : these we shall comprise in four particulars :—

1. *Take heed you perform not holy duties negligently.*—A heartless, formal, negligent attendance on the ordinances will be so far from procuring a durable blessing, that it will fix a curse upon you : “Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently,” [or “deceitfully”]. (Jer. xlviii. 10 : see Mal. i. 8, 14.) If you invert the apostle’s advice, and deal with the things of God, as you should do with those of the world ; (1 Cor. vii. ;) if you pray as though you prayed not, and hear as though you heard not, and use the ordinances as though you did not use them ; they will be no otherwise effectual than if there were no efficacy in them ; it will continue on you as though it continued not ; like that of the sun in a winter day, which thaws the earth a little at noon, but so as it is harder frozen up the next night. Therefore let your hearts be engaged in every holy duty : “Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me ?” (Jer. xxx. 21.) You must hear as for life : “Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day. For it is not a vain thing for you ; because it is your life,” &c. (Deut. xxxii. 46, 47.) You must wrestle in prayer ; your hearts in this duty should be, as it were, in a conflict, in an agony ; *συναγωνισασθαι* is the apostle’s word : “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, *that ye strive together with me* in your prayers to God for me.” (Rom. xv. 30.) Your prayers should be such as the other apostle describes : “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James v. 16.) The word rendered “effectual fervent,” is *ενεργουμενη*. Now *ενεργουμενος* is “one possessed with a spirit,” and acted by it. If the word here used look that way, then, suitable to the matter to which it is applied, it imports a possession in a good sense. And *δουσης ενεργουμενη* will be a prayer full of the Holy Ghost, wherein that blessed Spirit is operative, exerting its force and *energy* ; such a prayer as shows the soul to be possessed of the Holy Spirit and acted by it, so as all the powers of that soul are set a-work and put upon motion towards God “effectually.” Such a prayer “avails much,” procures great advantages, and of long continuance.

Generally, in all holy ordinances your souls should stretch out themselves to reach the Lord ; they should spring up to him in acts of love and desire, and clasp about him with delight and complacence, and lay hold on him with a humble and filial confidence, and stir up themselves to lay hold on him. “We do all fade as a leaf,” saith the church ; (both their persons and their righteousness did so ;) and the reason thereof follows : “There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.” (Isai. lxiv. 6, 7.)

2. *Beware of the world.*—Meddle not with it more than needs must ; and when it is needful, engage not therein but with fear, caution, and vigilance. Carry yourselves amongst worldly objects and employments, as though you were amongst cheats and thieves : they have the art to pick your hearts slyly, and to rob them of that which is more precious than gold, when you little think of it.

Let not your minds and hearts plunge themselves in the world :

nothing sooner, nothing oftener, extinguisheth divine influences than this puddle. The cares, and delights, and employments of the world, when they are immoderate or unseasonable,—they “choke the word,” (Matt. xiii. 22,) they stifle the issue of holy ordinances, so as it becomes like the untimely birth of a woman.

When your hearts are warmed in holy duties, you should be as cautious and wary how you venture into the world, as you are of going into the frosty air when you are all in a sweat. What is kindled by the word or prayer, &c., how quickly is it puffed out by the world, when you rush into it unwarily! It requires as much care to keep it in, as to keep a candle in, when you would carry it through the open air in a rainy, blustering night. The further you are above the world, the longer may you retain any spiritual impressions. Geographers write of some mountains whose tops are above the middle region of the air; and there lines and figures being drawn in the dust, have been found, say they, in the same form and order, untouched, undefaced, a long time after; and the reason is, because they are above those winds, and showers, and storms, which soon wear out and efface any such draughts in this lower region. The lower your minds and hearts and conversations are, the more in the hurry of this boisterous world, the less will any thing that is heavenly and spiritual abide upon them. Let the soul be brought into never so good order by the help of holy duties, yet a little unwary engaging in earthly business will ruffle, disturb, and quite discompose it.

When your souls are, by power of the ordinance, set on motion towards Christ and heaven, if you would hold on in a continued course, you must beware of worldliness, and keep free as much as may be from earthly incumbrances and entanglements: “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” (Heb. xii. 1.) Let us persevere and hold out in that gracious and heavenly course which the gospel hath put us on: but that this may be done, one great impediment must be removed; “the sin which doth so easily beset us” must be shaken off. Now, that sin, as some expositors conceive, is worldliness; and it is probable: for *περιστασις*, being “a circumstance,” *αμαρτιαν ευπεριστατον*, if we render it literally, is “the sin that hath goodly circumstances.” And no sin sets off itself with more goodly circumstances than worldliness; no sin hath more specious pleas and pretences to excuse, vindicate, and justify itself. No sin hath more fig-leaves to cover its nakedness, and to shroud it from discovery and conviction, than worldliness. This must be shaken off: it is the great defacer of heavenly impressions, the chief interrupter of holy motions: if you would hold on when the impetus which is impressed on you by any ordinance hath set you a-going, beware of the world, beware of worldliness.

3. *Take heed of any inordinacy in affection, inclination, or design.*—Such inordinacies give the heart a strong bias; holy duties check it but a little, give it but as it were a small rub: when this is once passed over, it will hold on in that course to which it is most swayed. The ministry of John Baptist had some influence upon Herod: “He heard John

gladly, and did many things :” (Mark vi. 20 :) but, sensuality being predominant, those better inclinations were quite overpowered. The word had some effect upon Simon Magus : “ He believed,” and being taken for a believer, “ was baptized,” and afterwards “ continued with Philip,” &c. ; (Acts viii. 13 ;) but a strong affectation of vain-glory suppressed those better motions, and the worst got upmost. Take heed of any inordinacy as to lawful things ; your relations, studies, ordinary callings, &c. : this will not suffer you to come so often to holy duties, to stay so long in them, or to be so intent upon them, as is requisite for the deep impressing of their efficacy ; and, after they are done, this will hurry your souls from under those thoughts and exercises which should fix and settle their virtue and influence upon your minds and hearts. Natural bodies follow the tendency of that element which is predominant in them : a stone moves downwards, it would be at the centre ; that which stops it, offers it violence, and when the force is removed, down it falls freely. Just thus doth the heart follow the tendency of these inordinacies : if it meet with a stop in an ordinance, that is but an ungrateful violence to it ; it will struggle to break through it, will be restless till the force be removed, till the power of the ordinance be shaken off, which checks an inclination natural and acceptable to it : and what hopes in this case that the efficacy of any holy duty will long continue ?

4. *Rest not in the best performance of any duty, nor in any assistances you find therein, though they be special and more than ordinary.*— If this satisfy and exalt you, you will be apt to grow secure and careless, not looking to the improvement of ordinances when once they are over ; and that is the way to lose all. We are apt to take the most dangerous colds, when we are in the greatest heats. And it is observed that some professors have had the foulest falls, after they have been most elevated in holy employments. The resting upon the *opus operatum*, “ the mere outward performance of a duty,” when the heart is not engaged therein, is an open pit which none fall into save those that are blind ; but the resting upon the *opus operantis*, “ a duty affectionately performed,” is a more secret, and so a more dangerous, snare. He that makes account he hath done enough, because he hath done well, may be apt to think he is not obliged to look further after it ; and so the continued influence of the duty upon his heart and life, which is indeed the principal advantage of it, may be neglected and, consequently, lost for want of looking to.

5. To conclude : *Make not the ordinances your end, but use them as the means to attain it.*— They are not enjoined us for themselves, but in order to something more desirable ; their end is something further than their use. Take heed your place not all your religion in hearing, praying, communicating, &c. ; neither count yourselves religious enough, because you are much and often in these duties. This is to make them your end ; and then you will rest therein, without proceeding further ; for the motion of the agent is terminated in his end : and so you will stay short of that for which they were principally intended, namely, the keeping of your hearts and minds in a settled posture of holiness and righteousness ; and neglect that by which this main end of the ordinances is only to be attained, namely, the continuing of their influence upon you.

So much for the case propounded, which I have endeavoured to resolve, as the nature of it requires, practically; and therefore as there is no time for, so there will be less need of, application. But that I may not dismiss you without something of this nature, having laid your duty before you in the observation, and showed you how it may be performed in satisfying the case; let me now press you to the performance of it by one consideration, which will have the force of a motive, where there is any sense of soul-concernments:—

If the efficacy of the ordinances abide not on you, you cannot be fruitful under them, at least you cannot “bring forth fruit to perfection,” as the expression is. (Luke viii. 14.)—You may bring forth buds, or leaves, or blossoms, &c.; but if their influence continue not, that which you bring forth will never come to ripeness and perfection; it will be crude and sour at best: and sour grapes are as bad as no fruit, in the Lord’s account; and unfruitfulness will provoke the Lord to deprive you of the gospel and ordinances: “He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof. I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.” (Isai. v. 2, 5, 6.) The meaning of this parable, so far as concerns our purpose, is expressed by another threatening denounced for the same sin: “The kingdom of God,” that is, the gospel of the kingdom, “shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Matt. xxi. 43.) And Christ’s threatening of Ephesus amounts to as much: “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” The first impressions of the gospel were worn off and vanished. And what follows? “I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.” (Rev. ii. 4, 5.) So that this sin will pull up your hedge, and break down your wall, level all your securities, and so lay you open to the boar of the wood, and the wild beasts of the field: such as, instead of digging and pruning you, will devour and lay you waste, and Sharon will become a desert. This sin will provoke Christ to let the stars fall out of his right hand; so as you will be left to perish for want of vision. This sin will provoke the Lord to take the gospel of the kingdom from you, and leave you under the hellish influences of the prince of darkness. This sin will overturn your candlesticks, and extinguish your lights, and leave you nothing but the snuffs. This sin will deliver your strength into captivity, and your glory into the enemies’ hand. This sin will smite the shepherds, and scatter the flocks, and lay the heritage of God desolate. This sin will cause your sun to set at noon, and turn the day of your gracious visitation into a sad and dismal night. This sin will turn the place which hath been “a valley of vision” into a seat of darkness, and a “valley of the shadow of death.”

If, then, you would avoid a judgment which strikes not only at your estates and lives, but at your souls; if you would prevent that dreadful stroke which may not only reach yourselves, but your posterity, your children and children’s children; if you would not have them and your-

selves, and thousands and millions with you, bereaved of the gospel, and the means of grace and life ; take all care and pains, that the influences of the ordinances do not slide from you, that they be not as water spilt upon the ground. Be faithful and diligent in the use of the forementioned directions, and all other means which may be effectual to fix them. And if hereby your hearts are wrought up to such a resolution, the “Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of your hearts.”