

SERMON IV.

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WHAT RELAPSES ARE INCONSISTENT WITH GRACE?

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.—Heb. vi. 4—6.

I COULD say, beloved, of the interpretation and application of this scripture, before I begin to open it, (containing the doom and sad sentence pronounced against apostates and relapsarians,) as once Daniel did to the king, before he opened his mouth to give the sense of his ominous dream: “The dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.” (Dan. iv. 19.) Yet shall I not wish so much ill to our worst enemies; but the text be to them that hate God; and the interpretation, only to the enemies and despisers, or despisers, of his grace.

It is one of the most startling scriptures in all the Bible; and one of the most terrible flying fiery rolls in all the book of God, utterly consuming the house of the hypocrite-apostate, “with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof,” and dreadfully affrighting his truly-religious neighbour, “who trembleth at God’s word.”

The Novatians, or *Cathari*, abused this place of old, to shut the church-doors and gate of grace upon such as had fallen after their profession of Christianity. And many poor souls and troubled consciences have as often quite perverted or misunderstood it, to the shutting-up the gate of heaven and door of hope against themselves, after their bitterly-bewailed falls or slips: but both unjustly.

But as Joseph’s interpretation once of the same night’s dream, when rightly applied, did rid the butler out of his misapprehended fears, and only left the more-secure baker under that execution which the other apprehended, but himself never dreamed of; (Gen. xl. 5—23;) so neither this nor any other scripture speaks a word of terror to any sin-troubled soul, that trembles at God’s threats. But all the prophets prophesy good with one consent to these; and my word shall be like one of theirs.

It was indeed once a joyful sight which Jacob beheld at Bethel: A ladder whose foot stood “on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and angels ascending and descending upon it.” (Gen. xxviii. 12.)

But here we see a ladder whose top spires toward heaven, but the foot resteth in hell, where *seeming* angels of light ascend, or such new strange gods as the witch once saw ascend out of the earth; (1 Sam. xxviii. 13;)

but black apostate angels descend. *Intrat angelus, exit dæmon* ["The angel enters, the devil departs"].

I am to speak of the case of relapses, and my text is the fairest glass [in which] to discover so foul a sight that I know.

Here we have the rise and fall, the first and the last, the better and worse part, of an apostate-hypocrite described.

1. The former,—*his rise, his first and better part*, set out in five particulars: (1.) *Enlightening*. (2.) *Tasting the heavenly gift*, as of some common faith, or repentance, or the like. (3.) *Partaking of the Holy Ghost*, which is not to be understood of the sanctifying graces of the Holy Ghost, but the common, or extraordinary gifts, as of tongues, &c., of the sanctifying Spirit. (4.) *Tasting the good word of God*. (5.) *And the powers of the life to come*. Had they had to these five steps two other more, *sincerity* at the bottom of the ladder, and *perseverance* at the top, they had been safe.

2. The latter,—*his fall, his last and worse part*, is set out in four things.

(1.) *His fall is a break-neck, fatal down-fall*.—"They fall away."* It is not an ordinary slip or stumble, but a down-right; not fair fall, but a foil given them by Satan; such a fall as his own was at first.

(2.) *The irrecoverableness of that fall*.—They are past grace: and grace and mercy have done with them; "they cannot be renewed to repentance." As is said of Esau, "there is no place for their repentance, though he sought for the blessing with tears." (Heb. xii. 17.)

(3.) *The certainty of that irrecoverableness, in that it is said to be IMPOSSIBLE, &c.*—He doth not say, It is hard, or unlikely, or seldom seen; but, "is absolutely impossible," *ἀδύνατον γαρ*, it was never seen, nor ever shall be. IMPOSSIBLE, not so much *ex naturâ rei*, ["from the nature of the thing,"] as some things are utterly impossible which imply a contradiction, as that true should be false; good, evil; light, darkness; these impossible because inconsistent with the nature of the things themselves: but IMPOSSIBLE *ex instituto Dei*, ["from the appointment of God,"] because inconsistent with God's decree and declared will; as impossible as," we say, "an elect or true believer should perish, or an impenitent person be saved;" so we mean *impossible by reason of God's irreversible decree concerning such*.

(4.) *The cause that makes all this dead-sure, and seals the stone of this certainty*.—"Seeing they crucify to themselves afresh the Son of God, and put him to open shame," and make no account of the blood of Christ, and the grace and promise of the gospel, and of the comfort of the Holy Ghost; and are therefore said to sin against the Holy Ghost, because they directly slight, resist, and oppose the gracious office and workings of the Holy Spirit.

But I must stay no longer upon the words, by reason of that brevity expected in this Exercise.

* He saith not, *ἀμαρτανωντας* or *παραβαινοντας*, but *παρακεινοντας*, *ut cum edificium male sartum prorsus corrui*.—PAREUS *in loc.* "He saith not, 'If they shall sin,' or, 'If they shall transgress,' but, *If they shall fall away*; like an edifice which, after having been imperfectly repaired, falls down at once, and is broken into fragments."—EDIT.

DOCTRINE.

Our observation is :—It is the most fearful and dangerous condition in the world, to begin in the Spirit and end in the flesh, to rise and fall in religion, to decay and apostatize from grace ; to have had some work of the Spirit and the word upon their hearts, so as to have light, and love, and taste, and gifts, and favour, and seriousness, and hopes, and fears, and, after all, to cool and give over ! O how desperate is such a case !

To go to hell with so much of heaven, O what a hell is that ! “ For if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment,” &c. (Heb. x. 26, 27.) “ For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them,” &c. (2 Peter ii. 20—22.)

Such a thing there may be ; *possibly* the text supposeth it, that such may fall, and fall away totally and finally, only [it] pronounceth an impossibility of their rising again.

Some are said “ to fall from grace.” (Gal. v. 4.) The stony and thorny ground did so in a parable. Demas, Judas, Saul, Hymenæus, did so in good earnest. A great apostasy was foretold, in the first days, to let in Antichrist, (2 Thess. ii. 3,) and in the reign of Antichrist more. (1 Tim. iv. 1.) All are warned : “ Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.” (1 Cor. x. 12.) “ Look diligently lest any man fail of,” or fall from, “ the grace of God.” (Heb. xii. 15.) Some of John’s [the Baptist’s] hearers, after a while, left him. (John v. 35.) Many of our Saviour’s hearers quite left him. (John vi. 66.) Many of Paul’s supposed converts were turned away ; all they of Asia. (2 Tim. i. 15.)

Some have left their love. (Rev. ii. 4.) Some left the faith. (1 Tim. v. 12.) Some have turned after the world ; as Demas. (2 Tim. iv. 10.) “ Some have turned aside after Satan.” (1 Tim. v. 15.) And would to God there were no example to be given in our age and observation ! It is that which the professors of a true religion are more subject to, than those of a false. “ Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods ? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.” (Jer. ii. 11.)

Now there are three falls to which men are subject :—

I. Some fall, as wood or cork into the water,—sink at first, but get up again, being helped by the hand of divine grace, as Peter ; (Matt. xiv. 31 ;) or brought off by a miracle of mercy, as Paul and his company, after all hopes of safety were quite taken away. (Acts xxvii. 20—44.)

This the fall of the godly.

II. Some fall, as lead or stone, into the bottom of hell ; as Pharaoh’s host into the bottom of the sea ; (Exod. xv. 4, 5 ;) and never rise again, having neither promise of God, nor seed of God to raise them up again,

but make a final "shipwreck of faith and conscience," and of their souls together. (1 Tim. i. 19.)

This the fall of the wicked.

III. There is a mixed fall common to both, which is like the falling into an epidemical disease; whereof many die, and as many recover: of which in their order.

There are four kinds or degrees of falling, which the people of God are subject to; and four kinds or degrees to which the wicked are subject; and each latter is worse than other in them both.

I. FOUR FALLS OF THE GODLY.

1. The first and lightest fall of the godly, is that in their daily combat between flesh and spirit, set out in Romans vii. at large, and in Galatians v. 17. "We cannot do what we would," but fail or fall short after our best endeavours. Our duties are imperfect, graces defective, our gold and silver drossy, "our wine mixed with water." Sin deceiveth, surpriseth, captivateth,* slayeth, yet reigneth not all this while. "It is not I, but sin that dwells in me. I consent to the law; I delight in the law of God, even in my inner man," &c.

These falls or slips are unavoidable and involuntary. There is no saint but complains of them, no duty but is stained with them. In our clearest sunshine we see a world of such motes, which yet hinder not the light and comfort of our justification, and destroy not sanctification. True grace consists with these; yea, is not separated from the assaults and indwelling of such motions. "Will we, nill we," said Bernard, "We are pestered with swarms of these Egyptian flies, and have these frogs in our inmost chambers." †

We are none of us *supra*-lapsarians in this sense; but *sub*-lapsarians all; yea, and *re*-lapsarians too. "The just falleth seven times a day," by this infirmity, "and riseth up again;" (Prov. xxiv. 16;) and taketh no harm, but is kept humble and depending thereby. Every son and daughter of Abraham is kept bound "under this spirit of infirmity," to their dying day.

This first fall is but like the fall of a mist in a winter morning: the sun gets up, and it is a fair day after.

This is the first fall: the second is worse, which is,

2. An actual and visible stumble as to offence of others, yet occasioned by some surreptitious surprise of temptation, for want of that due consideration which we should always have: this the apostle calls "a man's being overtaken with a fault," who is "to be restored with a spirit of meekness, considering we also may be tempted." (Gal. vi. 1.) Such falls (or slips rather) all or most are subject to. Πολλα γαρ πταισομεν ἅπαντες, "In many things we offend all." (James iii. 2.) We sometimes trip, or slip, or "miss our hold," (so the word signifies,) and so down we come, but not out of choice. Thus did Peter slip or halt, when he did Judaize out of too much compliance with the Jews; whom therefore Paul did rebuke and restore. (Gal. ii. 11, 14.) Thus the dis-

* All editions, previous to the fourth, have *captiveth*.—EDIT. † *Velimus, nolimus, irruunt in nos Egyptianorum muscæ, et obstrepuunt ranae in cubilibus regis*.—BERNARDUS.

ciples slipped, when they, in zeal to Christ, would have fire fetched down from heaven upon those that would not receive them ; whom Christ set right with a spirit of meekness. (Luke ix. 54, 55.)

These slips or falls are like those of him whose foot is wrenched or out of joint ; whence he halts till it be set right. Thus Peter is said to halt ; he did not * *παρῆπιπτεν*, ["fall or tumble,"] only not *ορθοποδεῖν* ["walk uprightly"]. But when Paul had set his wrenched foot, he went upright ever after. Hence that word, *καταρτίζετε*, "restore," is a surgeon's word, "to set him right," as a bone out of joint. (Gal. vi. 1.) He that shall be censorious and severe against these two first kind of falls incident to most, "let him," as Constantine said to Acesius the Novatian bishop, "get himself a ladder, and climb up to heaven by himself : he should have but a few come there else." (SOCRATES, lib. i. c. 7.)

3. The third fall is much worse, "a fall from the third loft," whence, like Eutychus, they are "taken up dead" for the present ; but they come to themselves again. These are falls into grosser and more scandalous sins which do *vastare conscientiam*, "set the stacks or corn-fields of conscience on fire ;" whereas the other two forenamed, especially the former, are such as Tertullian calls *quotidianæ incurisionis* ["of daily incurision"]. These are very dangerous, and befall not all professors : (they had not need !) but, now and then, one falls into some scandalous sin ; but they not usually again into the same sin after sense and repentance of it. Thus fell David and Peter into foul flagitiousness, but not deliberately, nor totally, nor finally, nor reiteratedly. Sin raged indeed, and seemed to reign for the present. Moses's hands grew weak, and the hand of Amalek prevailed for the present. But a "seed of God" was in them, and they "could not sin" unto death ; (1 John iii. 9 ;) but were renewed to repentance, and their sins are blotted out.

This fall is like the fall of the leaf in autumn. Life remains safe ; a spring in due time follows, though many a cold blast first.

4. There is yet one worse fall than the former, incident to a child of God too,—to be of the decaying hand, and to remit and lose his former fervour and liveliness.

And it may be he never comes (as the second temple) up to the former pitch and glory. (Ezra iii. 12.) Thus Solomon's zeal and love were abated in his old age. As his father David's natural heat was in his age, that he needed an Abishag to lie in his bosom ; so was Solomon's spiritual heat cooled by the many Abishags that lay in his bosom : and though he was beloved of his God, his sun set in a cloud, his last was not like his first.† (1 Kings xi. 4, 9, 10.) Thus Samson, after many triumphs over the Philistines, was at length circumvented and betrayed into their hands, who bound him, put out his eyes, made sport with him ; who, though his hair and strength grew again, and he died in the quarrel, and died a victor, yet never did he regain his sight or liberty to

* Not is left out in the other edition, so as to alter the true sense.—EDIT.

† *Incepit melius quàm desinit, ultima primis
Cedunt : dissimilis hic puer, ille senex.*

"Unlike the hopes with which his life began,
YOUTH yielded blossoms, but no fruit the MAN."—EDIT.

his dying day. These kinds of decays are dangerous, and make the people of God go mourning to their dying day; and they are saved as by fire. But [they] are not inconsistent with grace.

This is like the fall of the hair in aged persons. Life yet remains; but strength, native heat, and radical moistness decay, and the hair never grows alike thick again.

These are the fallings of the children of God; and there are four worse than these follow of the unregenerate, and each worse than [the] other.

II. THE FOUR FALLS OF THE UNREGENERATE.

1. The first whereof is a *final* fall, but not a *total* at first, but insensible, by degrees, *sensim sine sensu*, ["gradually and without perceiving it,"] grow worse and worse; as the thorny ground, choked with cares, or drowned with the pleasures of the world. This proves like Eli's fall; they fall backward, break their necks, and die of it; (1 Sam. iv. 18;) and may, with him, be much lamented and pitied; but they are dead and lost.

2. Some fall *totally and finally*, but not premeditatedly and voluntarily at first; but are driven back by *the lion* of persecution and tribulation *in the way*, and they retreat. "These endure for a season," as the stony ground; (Mark iv. 17;) and, leaving God, they are for ever left and forsaken of him. (1 Chron. xxviii. 9.)

This is like the fall of Sisera at the feet of Jael: "At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell and lay down dead." (Judges v. 27.)

3. Some, more fearfully, *totally, finally, voluntarily, deliberately*, but not yet maliciously. Thus Demas is supposed to fall, who, of a forward disciple or teacher, is said to have become after an idol priest at Thessalonica; so Dorotheus reports of him. Thus fell Saul; who having rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord rejected him; and "the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." (1 Sam. xvi. 14.)

Of these three last, I may say as Elisha to Hazael of Benhadad; These may certainly recover: "howbeit," saith he, "the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die." (2 Kings viii. 10.) These have not yet crucified the Son of God afresh, nor done despite to the Spirit of grace; therefore it is not impossible they should be renewed again to repentance.

These are like Sardis; [they] may "have a name to live, but are dead." (Rev. iii. 1—3.) Their works not perfect before God, ready to die, yet are [they] called once again to repentance, otherwise certain destruction [is] threatened.

But this is like the fall of Haman, whose doom was read by his wife and best friends: "If once thou beginnest to fall, thou shalt not recover, but shalt certainly fall irrecoverably." (Esther vi. 13.)

And these end fearfully, usually, and unpitied spectacles of God's wrath, to astonish and warn others; as Spira once.

4. The fourth and last fall follows, which is like the opening of the fourth seal, and the fourth horse appears; "a pale horse, and he that sat on him is called death, and hell followed with him:" (Rev. vi. 8:)

when men fall *totally, finally, voluntarily, and maliciously*. Thus Simon Magus, Julian the apostate, Hymenæus, and Alexander, whose names are in God's black book. Here the gulf is fixed, and there is a *nulla retrorsum* ["no retracing of the steps"] hence. These are not to be renewed by repentance.

This fall is like that of Jericho's walls: they fell down flat with a curse annexed; (Joshua vi. 26;) or as Babylon's walls, with a vengeance; (Jer. li. 58;) both without hope of repairing: or like the fall of Lucifer the first apostate, without offer, or hope of offer, of grace any more for ever: or like the fall of Judas; who, "falling headlong, burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." (Acts i. 18.)

III. THE MIXED FALL.

There is also another kind of fall, of a mixed or middle nature: and to which side of the two (*godly or reprobate*) I should cast it, is not so easy to determine. [It is] a reiterated fall into some foul act or course of sin: and herein I must proceed as warily as the priest of old in a doubtful case of leprosy, whether to pronounce *clean* or *unclean*; and by his rule I shall go. He was to shut him up seven days, and look upon him better ere he could give his definitive sentence. (Lev. xiii. 4—59.) If therefore,

1. I see the sore be but skin-deep, (Lev. xiii. 4, 34,) and have not corrupted the blood:

2. If it stand at a stay and spread not further: (Lev. xiii. 5, 6; so also verses 23, 28, 34, 37:)

3. If all become white by repentance and mortification: I shall pronounce him *clean*. It is a scab, it is but a scab, or a scall. (Lev. xiii. 6, 34.) It is no deadly leprosy.

But, on the other side, 1. If it be deeper than the skin, having taken the heart with the love and liking of it: (Lev. xiii. 20, 25, 30:)

2. If it spread further and further, by renewed acts: (verses 8, 27, 36.)

3. If there be proud raw flesh in the rising, (verses 10, 14, 15,) and the man presumptuously live in it, and plead for it: I shall pronounce him *unclean*. "It is an old leprosy." (Verse 11.) It is "not the spot of God's children." (Deut. xxxii. 5.)

Concerning relapses, I shall desire you to take notice of these eight observations:

1. It is very observable, that the Holy Ghost is very sparing in setting down in the scriptures instances in this kind, well foreseeing how apt flesh and blood is to abuse and pervert such examples to their own destruction. Such examples are, as Simeon said of Christ, "set for the fall and rising again of many, and are a sign spoken against." (Luke ii. 34.) How have David's and Peter's falls emboldened many to fall and live in sin! There is *not one* instance in all scripture of any saint that laid violent hands upon himself, lest any should presume to do the like: *but one* example of late repentance accepted, lest many should presume; *yet one*, lest any should despair. Those falls are not set as land-marks to *guide* you, but as sea-marks to *warn* you.

2. It is certain Paul returned not to persecute the church after his conversion, or Manasses to re-erect idolatry, or Matthew to the receipt of custom after he was called thence.

3. Nor did David and Peter fall again into the same foul act of sin, after they had truly repented.

4. They were only wicked ones, as Ahab, Pharaoh, Saul, Jeroboam, who persist and return to sinful courses, from drunkenness to thirst, from thirst to drunkenness. Of Jeroboam it is said, "After this thing"—the prophet's warning, his arm smitten, his prayer thereupon, the recovery upon the prophet's prayer—"did he return again, and made of the lowest of the people priests of his high places," &c. (1 Kings xiii. 33.) Neither warning, nor judgments, nor mercies could work any amendment in him.

5. It is certain that "he who is born of God doth not commit sin," (1 John iii. 9,) so as to make a trade of it, returning to his vomit. But "he that is born of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not." (1 John v. 18.) He hath paid too dear for such a miscarriage. It was not so light a matter to lie under God's wrath, [to] lose his former peace; nor was his comfort so soon restored, and God's favour regained; that he should hazard all anew, and buy repentance at so dear a rate.

6. Very dreadful is that threat of God: "If there be among you man or woman.....or a root that beareth gall and wormwood: and it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, adding drunkenness to thirst: the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord shall separate" (and single him out) "unto evil," &c. (Deut. xxix. 18—21.)

7. Relapses into sin are like relapses into a disease after hopes and beginning of recovery. If, by taking cold, or want of heed-taking, or [by] other disorder, the disease return, and the man [be] down again, this is worse than the first ill fit, and [it is] long ere such recover. But if, as soon as he get a little strength, he fall into a new relapse, we reckon his case very doubtful, if not desperate.

8. Yet it is not to be denied but there are some sins of human infirmity which, though repented of, a godly person may be again overtaken with and foiled; yet [will] not his last end [be] worse than his beginning. Thus was Jonah overtaken with his passion a second time; Abraham with his excusatory lie; the disciples, after a former rebuke, a second time contending for superiority. (Matt. xx. 25, [compared] with Luke xxii. 25.)

The first fall in this kind I should liken to a sad and dangerous fall, by which one hath broken a bone in his leg or arm; which, though it put him to much pain, is well set again, and he becomes as strong as before, but more wary while he lives. David speaks of his fall into sin, that it was as "a breaking of his bones." (Psalm li. 8.) But a second fall is

like the breaking of the bone the second time ; which is more hardly set, and puts to more pain, and, it may be, the man feels it at times to his dying day.

But a third, or more frequent, relapse is like the putting of an arm out of joint, again and again ; [which] not being well bound and looked-to in time, becomes habitually loose, and never keeps the place. So it is here : crebrous and frequent acts of sin beget an habit and custom in sin ; and then as soon may "the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots," as one "accustomed to do evil," ever learn to do well. (Jer. xiii. 23.)

Bernard describes the steps of sin, how it comes to its height : "First time, it is importable ; next time, heavy, no more importable ; then easy, then light, then sweet, at last necessary ; and what was at first importable to be committed, is now impossible to be omitted."* And St. Austin confirms this by a story of his own mother, who, by sipping of the cup at first when she filled the wine, learnt at last to take almost whole cups.† *Qui modica non spernit paulatim decedit*, is his good note upon it : "He that makes a small matter of small sins, is in the ready way to fall into the greatest." Every new relapse into a former sin is like the adding of a new figure to the first cypher ; which raiseth the sinner's account ten or an hundred times more.‡

Therefore if thou hast been overtaken once, stop and be humbled, and say, "Once I have spoken," or done amiss ; "but I will not answer," to plead for myself. Beware the second time, the second fall, as the second blow makes the fray ; but if a second time, say, "Yea, twice ; but I will proceed no further." (Job xl. 5.) But be sure thou take heed of drawing sin with a threefold cord, or "cart-ropes : " (Isai. v. 18 :) this "threefold cord is not easily broken." (Eccles. iv. 12.) Take heed of a third act ; "fear, and the pit, and the snare are before thee : " O bold and presumptuous sinner ! if thou escape the fear of the *first* act, thou mayest perish in the pit for the second ; but if thou escape the pit, thou wilt be taken in the snare, the third time. (Isai. xxiv. 17, 18.) "Upon the ungodly, God raineth snares ; " (Psalm xi. 6 :) God gives [them] once to a reprobate mind, and they are gone. Think not, after a third or fourth act of presumptuous sin, to go and shake thyself, (by prayer and repentance,) as Samson once, and that thy strength may return to thee to be delivered from these Philistines which lie in wait for thee. He did so, "but wist not," till he found it by woful experience, "that the Lord was departed from him : " (Judges xvi. 20 :) so may it be with thee, therefore be warned.

USE I.

1. This informs us, that possible it is for men (yea, too ordinary) to fall from grace. The text supposeth it ; and in another place the apostle

* *Primo importabile ; processu temporis grave ; paulò post leve ; postea placet et suave est ; ad extremum, quod erat importabile ad faciendum, est impossibile ad continendum.*—BERNARDUS *De Conscientiâ.* † *Ad illud modicum quotidiana modica addendo, in eam consuetudinem lapsa erat, ut prope jam plenos mero caliculos inhianter hauriret.*—AUGUSTINI *Confessiones*, lib. 9. ‡ *Est voluntate perversa facta est consuetudo, et dum consuetudini non resistitur facta est necessitas.*—*Idem, Confessiones*, lib. 8. "A bad habit has its origin in a perverted will ; and while it prevails without resistance, it becomes at length a necessary habit."—EDIT.

items us to "look diligently lest any man fall from the grace of God." (Heb. xii. 15.) The angels did so at first, and Adam soon after; and that which was *morbus angelicus* then is *morbus Anglicus* now.* The Lord may complain of us, as justly as ever he did of Israel: "My people are bent to backsliding from me." (Hosea xi. 7.) And: "Why should ye be smitten any more? ye will revolt more and more." (Isai. i. 5.) And: "Why is this people slidden back by perpetual backslidings? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return." (Jer. viii. 5.) This is, and of late hath been, the case and epidemical disease of England. It is no new thing to see the sons of fallen man to fall, and fall away. Saul, Joash, Amaziah, Judas, Demas, Alexander, fell away of old. Of all Israel that came out of Egypt with Moses and Aaron, only two, Caleb and Joshua, "followed God fully." (Num. xiv. 24.) Of the four grounds in the parable, only one held out. Many of John Baptist's hearers left him and fell away: (John v. 35:) many of Christ's hearers and disciples: (John vi. 66:) many of Peter's: (2 Peter ii. 20:) many of Paul's: (2 Tim. i. 15; 1 Tim. v. 15:) many of John the Evangelist's hearers: "They went out from us, because they were not of us; for had they been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us." (1 John ii. 19.) But none of these were ever sincere Christians and sound at the heart.

We wonder not to see a house built on the sand to fall, or seed not having root wither, or trees in the parched wilderness decay, (Jer. xvii. 6,) or meteors vanish, or blazing stars fall, or clouds without rain blown about, or wells without springs dried up. So, for hypocrites to prove apostates [is] no strange thing, and utterly to fall away. There are four wills some have observed: (1.) The Divine will never alters or turns. (2.) The angels' will hath turned, never returns. (3.) The will of man fallen [hath] turned, and in conversion returns. (4.) The will of apostates, after that grace received and abused, turns away and never returns, but becomes like [that of] the fallen angels.

2. Even godly and gracious persons are subject to fall, and therefore must not be secure: they must "work out their salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. ii. 12.) They are bidden to "fear lest they should fall short:" (Heb. iv. 1:) "stand fast:" (1 Cor. xvi. 13:) "take heed lest they fall:" (1 Cor. x. 12:) "look diligently lest any fail of," or "fall from," (so is the other reading,) "the grace of God:" (Heb. xii. 15:) "take the whole armour of God, that they may be able to stand." (Eph. vi. 13.)

Even the very elect have this root of bitterness and seeds of apostasy within them. Even Peter had sunk, if Christ had not put forth his hand to save him from the water; (Matt. xiv. 31;) and had been winnowed as chaff, if Christ had not "prayed for him that his faith should not fail." (Luke xxii. 31, 32.)

Let not him therefore that puts on his harness boast as he that puts it off. (1 Kings xx. 11.)

3. Yet a truly regenerate soul, a plant of God's planting by the water-

* "That which was then the disease of angels, is now the disease of Englishmen."—
EDIT.

side, a plant or graft grafted into Christ, and rooted in Christ, can never fall away totally or finally: Peter could not, when Christ prayed for him: the elect cannot. (Matt. xxiv. 24.) In the general apostasy of the Christian world, and the greatest persecutions under Rome-pagan, and Rome pseudo-Christian, *antichristian* both times, when all the world "wondered after the dragon and the beast;" they who had their "names written in the Lamb's book" held out, and warped not. (Rev. xiii. 8; xvii. 8.) The elect are as Mount Sion that cannot be moved, and are as fixed stars that fall not. The house on the rock stands firm in all weathers; the tree by the water's side; (Jer. xvii. 8;) seed in good ground. (Matt. xiii. 8.) They who have a seed of God in them cannot so sin: (1 John iii. 9:) and "they that are born of God," (1 John v. 18,) they who are in the hand of Christ, "none can pluck them out." (John x. 28.)

Yet as to the fallings of the elect, not presuming to tell you the *minimum* or *summum quod sic*,* we shall make these concessions or observations:—

POSITION 1. We grant that the godly, as well as others, are subject to this *falling-sickness*, having seeds of apostasy in them; and would certainly fall irrecoverably, if left to themselves. "By strength" (his own) "no man shall prevail" or stand. (1 Sam. ii. 9.)†

POSIT. 2. Grace received, truly-sanctifying, is not for its measure so great or for its nature so immutable and invincible, but might be overborne; and would, if not divinely supported and continually supplied; as the widow's oil kept from decay, fed by a spring of auxiliary grace; as "Joseph's bow abode in strength by the arm of God, and his bough green and fruitful, fed by a well of living water:" (Gen. xlix. 22—24:) so that it is not the grace *in us*, but the grace *with us*, 'H χάρις του Θεου συν εμοις' ["Yet not I, but the grace of God which was *with me*;"] (1 Cor. xv. 10;) grace supervening and additional,‡ which keeps us from falling. Even the good ground, were it not for the influence of the sun and rain, would prove as the stony and thorny ground.

POSIT. 3. There is no such state of consistency in the effectually called; but there is a daily combat, and oft-times a great inequality in his pulse. Sometimes Amalek, sometimes Israel prevails; and this war lasts not, as that between the house of Saul and David, for certain years; (2 Sam. iii. 1;) but as that "between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, all their days." (1 Kings xiv. 30.)

Paul sometimes, as in the third heaven, cries out: "We are more than conquerors," &c. "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" &c. Sometimes, as under foot, [he] cries out: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

POSIT. 4. Even godly persons may fall for once, very foully, as Peter: yea, lie long, as David: (it is hard to say how low they may fall, and how long they may lie:) yet sin not unto death; as the sun

* "What may be the quality of the smallest lapse or of the greatest."—EDIT. † "In te stas et non stas.—AUGUSTINE. "Thou standest in thyself; and yet thou art not stable."—EDIT. ‡ *Gratia gratiam postulat*. "Grace requires more grace."—EDIT.

is for many months absent from some climates, yet returns again : so that they may then say with the church : " Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy : when I fall, I shall arise ; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." (Micah vii. 8.)

POSIT. 5. There may also possibly be a relapse, or falling anew, into the same act of sin through human infirmity ; as Abraham twice denying his wife, the disciples twice contending for supremacy. And as I will not say how oft thy brother trespassing and repenting is to be forgiven, " not to seven, but to seventy-times seven ;" so I cannot say how oft through infirmity a sinner trespassing, and returning with repentance, may be forgiven,—God's mercies and thoughts being so far above man's.

POSIT. 6. The Christian may, as to his own sense, be reduced to a very sad and low state. (1.) He is poor in spirit, he mourns, he hungers, thirsts, pants, doubts, dislikes all. (2.) He judgeth of himself as (under present prevalency of corruption) " carnal, sold under sin," a forced slave to it. (Rom. vii. 14.) (3.) As if nothing had been done yet, and all was to do, he begs : " O God, create a new heart in me !" (Psalm li. 10.) (4.) He may be apt to conclude against himself, " I never did yet truly believe or repent ; and, which is worse, with Thomas, I never shall believe." (John xx. 25.) (5.) In this case he lies bound, as Peter, and cannot help himself till the angel comes and strikes off the bands, and opens the iron gate. (Acts xii. 6, 7.) (6.) And as to comfort, he may be at an utter loss ; [may] walk in darkness ; (Isai. 1. 10 ;) judge himself " cut off ;" (Ezek. xxxvii. 11 ;) his " hope perished ;" (Lam. iii. 18 ;)—God hiding his face ; Satan showing his teeth, casting forth a flood, and shooting in a peal of fiery darts : " Curse God and die ! Thou art mine as sure as death, as sure of damnation as I myself !" Then how doth a poor soul mourn ! " I am forsaken, and quite cast out of sight, I am as a bottle in the smoke of hell, like a broken vessel, or fire-brand reserved for hell !" " As possible for this Venice-glass," said that distressed gentlewoman Mrs. Honeywood, " not to be broken when it falls on the ground, as for me to escape the damnation of hell." " God can do much," saith he ; " but doth he ' show wonders among the dead ?'" (Psalm lxxxviii. 10.) Then pray he would, but cannot ; hope he would, but cannot ; believe he would, but dare not ; fear he would not, but must ; resolve he would to cast himself upon God, but he sees his resolution set another way, and he cannot, he thinks, change it ; therefore doth he not go about it. To God he saith, " I am cast out of thy sight : " (Psalm xxxi. 22 :)—to Satan, *Vicisti, Satana !* [" Satan, thou hast conquered."] " Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ?"—to despair, " I yield, but call not for quarter, nor beg I mercy." To affliction he saith, " I am in the belly of hell, the weeds and chains of hell wrap me about." (Jonah ii. 2, 5.) To ministers and other friends he saith, " Stand away ! go not about to comfort me !" (Isai. xxii. 4.) To promises and experience he saith, in his haste, " All are liars !"

Yet may the tide turn ; and the Sun of Righteousness arise, after a long winter and continual night,—as * in those remote climates who sit in

* To make the sense of this clause complete, the subjoined addition is required : " as the natural sun does upon the people in those remote climates," &c.—EDIT.

the region and shadow of death,—and come “with healing under his wings;” and he may cry out: “Rejoice with me! I have found Him whom my soul loveth!” The lost sheep is found by the Good Shepherd, the lost Saviour is found, (Luke ii. 43—50,) the lost star seen again; (Matt. ii. 10;) and the utterly despairing hopes of salvation are disappointed by a safe though hazardous coming to land. (Acts xxvii. 20—44.)

For God’s election stands firm, and his love is unchangeable, and his gifts [are] without repentance: and the undertaking of Christ is, to keep his to the end, that none shall pluck them out of his hand; and whom he gives himself for, he presents them spotless and blameless before his Father.

Therefore are the godly as firm and safe from utter falling away, as Mount Sion from being removed, or an house on a rock from being subverted.*

USE II. OF TERROR.

Here follows an use of terror, and speaks to four sorts.

1. *This text is thunder and lightning against apostates.*—Awake, you drowsy professors! “There is no sin like apostasy: adulteries, manslaughter, theft, idolatries, &c., nothing to this. No IMPOSSIBLE written over them: they have been renewed to repentance.” (1 Cor. vi. 10, 11.)† Mary Magdalen’s seven unclean spirits, and Manasseh’s ten or more, not so bad as the unclean spirit going out, and a return with an *ogdoas malorum spirituum*, as Irenæus calls it, “with seven other spirits more besides itself.” Thou art in the high-way to perdition, to the sin against the Holy Ghost. Sins and judgments meet together in this sin. The cataracts of upper and nether springs, all “the windows of heaven, and fountains of the great deep,” (as in that great deluge, Gen. vii. 11,) are “broken up” to drown thee in perdition; thy sins making way for more judgments, and this judgment making way for more sins, till, between these two seas, thy soul (as that vessel, Acts xxvii. 41) is eternally shipwrecked.

If thou art not altogether past feeling, crucifying the Son of God afresh, and treading his blood and covenant under foot, I sound this trumpet to warn thee, or to deliver my own soul: “Remember whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works.” (Rev. ii. 5.) “Be watchful, and strengthen what is ready to die.” (Rev. iii. 2.) Haste, “escape for thy life! look not behind thee!” as was said to Lot; (Gen.

* *Gratia nec totaliter intermittitur, nec finaliter amittitur. Actus omittitur, habitus non amittitur; actio pervertitur, fides non subvertitur; concutitur, non excutitur; defuit fructus, latet succus; jus ad regnum amittunt demeritorie, non effective.*—PRIDEAUX. *Effectus justificationis suspenditur, at status justificati non dissolvitur.*—SUFF. BRIT. “Grace is neither totally intermitted, nor finally omitted or lost. The act is omitted, but the habit is not omitted or lost. The action is perverted, but faith is not subverted: it suffers a *concussion*, but not an *excussion*, or an utter casting away. The tree ceases to produce fruit, but the latent sap remains. The right or title to the kingdom is lost through the demerits of the sinner, but not in effect.”—PRIDEAUX. “The effect of justification is suspended, but the state of the justified person is not dissolved.”—“SUFFRAGES OF THE BRITISH DIVINES at the Synod of Dort.”—EDIT.

† *Hic videmus quanta sit apostasie atrocitas: nihil ad eam homicidia, adulteria, furta, &c.*—PAREUS in loc.

xix. 17;) or as Jonathan in another case, Away, "make speed, haste, stay not!" (1 Sam. xx. 38.)

2. *This speaks terror to professors fallen, or lying in scandalous sins.*—You cannot sin at so easy a rate as others. You know your Master's will, and do it not, therefore [ye] "shall be beaten with more stripes." (Luke xii. 47.) You are as a city set on an hill. Your fault cannot be hid, no more than an eclipse of the sun. When the moon or other stars totally eclipse, no notice is taken of them. You make "the enemies of religion to blaspheme," (2 Sam. xii. 14,) or deride godliness. "You make the Lord's people to transgress." (1 Sam. ii. 24.) Your sins are more infectious than others'. Your repentance had need be extraordinary, not only for pardon which you haply may obtain, but for the scandal which others may take, [and] which you cannot possibly prevent.

3. *Terror to such as, after conviction and engagements under affliction and distress, after some prayers, vows, and a begun or resolved reformation, return to former courses.*—As they, after what they promised in their distress, returned when delivered, and started aside like a broken bow. (Jer. xxxiv. 15, 16.) The new broom of affliction swept the house clean for the present; but afterwards the unclean spirit returns, and this washed sow is wallowing in the mire again.

4. *[Terror to] such as lapse and relapse into the same sin again.*—As Pharaoh, Jeroboam, and those antichristian brood which repented not. (Rev. ix. 20, 21.) Notwithstanding all judgments, convictions, confessions, promises, [they] go from evil to worse, from affliction to sin; from sin to duty, and from duty to sin; repent and sin, sin and repent; (Jer. ix. 3;) and from repenting of sin in distress, go to repent of their repentance when delivered. Pharaoh unsaith all he had said, and saith his repentance backward. As the door turneth and returneth on the hinges, is sometimes shut, by and by open again; so these [are] in no constant posture. Their goodness [is] like a "morning dew," a little devotion in a morning; for all companies till night comes, then a little evening dew again. [They are] *amphibia*, that live in both elements. *Modò ecclesias, modò theatra replentes*; "now you see them at a sermon, anon at a play-house;" * as Solomon's harlot, sacrificing in the morning, prostituting herself to all filthiness at night; (Prov. vii. 14, 15;) or as Solomon's drunken beast, that hath had knocks and blows, yet, being besotted with his drink, or company, saith, "They have stricken me, and beaten me, but I felt it not; when I awake I shall seek it again;" (Prov. xxiii. 35;) or as Isaiah's debauched watchmen, who, having drunk sufficiently one day, say they will do as much to-morrow, and more too; and so had their drinking matches and rantings from day to day. (Isai. lvi. 12.)

USE III. [OF DISCRIMINATION.]

The third USE is of discrimination, to discover who is clean and who unclean in respect of falls and relapses; and "to put a difference between the holy and profane," which is the proper work of a faithful prophet. (Ezek. xxii. 26.) To some we are to open the door of hope; to some,

* St. Augustine.

to shut it: Every sin "is not a sin to death;" (1 John v. 17;) every disease not the plague; every ulcer not a leprosy.

1. There are some who have fallen into foul sins; and they think their case desperate, because of the greatness of their sins. But their sin is not the sin against the Holy Ghost, because not committed after light, taste, partaking of the Holy Ghost, &c., but in the days of their ignorance, as Paul once. Some fall foully after conversion, as Peter, but not deliberately, maliciously; and both these may be the spots of children: they see "the plague" in their heart, (1 Kings viii. 38,) feel the smart. These have foul scabs; but they go to Jordan and wash, go to "the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness;" and then, "though their sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though red like crimson, they shall be as white as wool." (Isai. i. 18.)

2. There be some relapses through human infirmity, which are truly bewailed. This is not the sin against the Holy Ghost neither. Come into the camp, I pronounce such clean: for, (1.) There is no raw flesh of pride and presumption in them. (2.) All is turned white, by true repentance: it is a scab, and but a scab. (3.) It is but skin-deep; the heart was not tainted. (4.) It standeth at a stay. (Lev. xiii. 4—6.) These four signs show it to be no plague of leprosy: such are not to be shut up, or put out of the camp. And God, as he pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin, so he promiseth "to heal" and pardon "their backslidings." (Hosea xiv. 4; Jer. iii. 22.)

3. But there are others that make a trade of sin, "drink up iniquity like water," that "add drunkenness to thirst," and fall and rise, and rise and fall: they lapse and relapse, and slide away as water. Shall I say such shall have peace? No! What peace to such so long as their sins remain? "The wrath of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and he shall blot out his name from under heaven." (Deut. xxix. 19, 20.)

Call not this a scab; this is the plague of leprosy; this is more than skin-deep; this doth not stand at a stay; here is proud raw flesh; this is an old sore, thou must out of the camp, thou art unclean. (Lev. xiii. 10, 11, 14, 15.) "God will wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of him that goeth on still in his trespasses." (Psalm lxxviii. 21.)

I shall, to conclude, give a few short directions, to prevent falls and relapses, but cannot now enlarge upon them.

1. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.* (Matt. xxvi. 41.)—This is the old and great receipt, and daily experimented with every ordinary saint; *probatum est*. Watch in prayer, watch after, watch when alone, watch when in company, especially against ill company and all occasions of sin.

2. *Keep conscience tender, and shun the first motions and occasions of sin.*—"If thou find thyself given to appetite, put a knife to thy throat," is the wise man's counsel; if to wine, "look not on the glass;" if to wantonness, "come not near her corner." The consecrated Nazarene must not only forbear the wine, but the grape; and not only the juice, but the husk and kernel of it. (Num. vi. 4.)

3. *Take heed of having slight thoughts of sin.*—As to say, “As long as it is no worse;” “It is the first time;” “It is but now and then, a great chance, when I meet with such company;” and many have such foolish pleas, and so play at the mouth of the cockatrice’s den till they are stung to death.

4. [*Take heed*] *of having light thoughts of God’s mercy.*—“I shall have peace, (Deut. xxix. 19,) I shall have mercy, when I do but ask; *At what time soever*, will save me. We cannot out-sin the mercy of God. When sin abounds, grace superabounds,” &c. The Lord saith, he “will not spare” such, nor be merciful to them.

5. *Take heed of reasoning from God’s temporal forbearance, to eternal forgiveness.*—“Because sentence is not speedily executed against” an evil-doer, his “heart is fully set in him to do evil. But though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged,” &c., “yet it shall not be well with the wicked” at last. (Eccles. viii. 11, 12.)

6. *Take heed of presuming of thy own strength:*—“I can, and I mean to repent; I can when I will, and I will when time serves. I trust I am not so bad, that God hath not given me over. Many have gone further than I: why may I not repent at [my] last hour?”*

7. *Take heed of a mock repentance:*—Saying, “I cry *God-mercy! God forgive me!* I sin daily, and repent daily. When I have sworn or been drunk, I am heartily sorry. Is not this repentance?” I answer, No! Repentance is quite another thing. “The burnt child,” we say, “dreads the fire.” Thou hast smarted for suretiship, and hast repented of it. Thy friend comes again and desires thee to be bound with him once again. Thou repliest: “I have paid dear for suretiship already. I have repented of my folly. I have resolved to come into bonds again no more; no, not for the best friend I have.” Thou art importuned by many arguments, but peremptorily refusest: “Urge me no more, I have vowed and resolved against [it], and have made an oath, I would never be taken in that fault again.” Now I believe thee, that thou hast truly repented of suretiship: why dost thou not *thus* when thou art enticed unto sin again? why dost thou not say?—“I have smarted, confessed, bewailed, been heartily sorry, for my former folly. Now speak no more of it, *I have sworn, and will perform it, to keep God’s commandments.* (Psalm cxix. 106.) Away from me, ye wicked: I must keep the commandments of my God.” (Psalm cxix. 115.) This would be somewhat like true repentance. But take heed of a mock repentance; lest, as true repentance meets with a true pardon, thy mock repentance should be answered with a mock pardon, as Tertullian excellently saith. “There be some that say,” saith he,† “their heart is good: they fear God, grieve for sin, though yet they fall into sin:” they can *salvâ fide et metu peccare, &c., sic et ipsi, salvâ veniâ, in gehennam detrudentur, dum salvo metu peccant:* “They can live in sin, nevertheless,—notwithstanding their faith and repentance; and God can damn them nevertheless,—notwithstanding his mercies, and promises, and pardoning grace.”

* *Qui promittit penitenti veniam, non promittit peccanti penitentiam.* “He who has promised pardon to the penitent, has not promised repentance to the sinner.”—EDIV.
† *De Penitentia.*

True repentance, among other companions, is always attended with these three: "What CAREFULNESS, what INDIGNATION, what FEAR hath it wrought in you?" (2 Cor. vii. 11.)

8. Consider, *sin re-iterated riseth high, adds another figure to increase thy account.*—"Is the sin of Peor too little for you," (old sins in ignorance,) "but that you must this day again turn away anew?" (Joshua xxii. 17, 18.) The Lord keeps an account how often and how often thou hast committed such and such a sin; at length [he] saith, "For three transgressions, and for four, I will not turn away their punishment." (Amos i. ii. *passim.*) When Israel had seen God's works forty years, and tempted him ten times, he swore they should not enter into his rest. (Num. xiv. 22.) In the law, if an ox did gore a man, and the master knew not of it, the ox should die, not the owner. "But if the ox was wont to push with his horn," and the master was told of it, ox and master were both to die. (Exod. xxi. 28, 29.)

Lastly. Though I will not say to thee who art a *frequent* relapsarian, "It is impossible," as to the *malicious* relapser; yet I say, Remember, that every time the bone is broken the more danger; and though thou mayest possibly, after a second breaking, have it well set, yet thou mayest at times, against weather, specially when in years, feel it to thy dying day. Thy sins will lie down with thee in thy grave; and in sickness and trouble thou wilt "possess the sins of thy youth." (Job xiii. 26.)

I conclude all, as St. Jude concludes his Epistle: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from" all "falling" and relapses, "and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen."

SERMON V.

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HOW MAY WE BE SO SPIRITUAL, AS TO CHECK SIN IN THE FIRST
RISINGS OF IT?

Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.—
Gal. v. 16.

THE case of conscience to be discussed this morning, from these words, is, How a Christian may be able to check sin in the first risings of it.

"And without controversy great is *this* mystery of godliness," and, if any other, of inestimable use and moment in the practice of Christianity.