

“and upbraideth” no man. (James i. 5.) “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find.” (Matt. vii. 7.) But if you will not be at this pains, thy unworthiness is voluntary, and thy complaint of unfitness is mere hypocrisy: and then remember the many woes denounced against hypocrites.

Yet there may be some children of God that are prepared, but yet dare not come, because they do not understand that they are prepared.

To these I say, If through ignorance of your own state you be kept off, why do you not come to such ministers that you judge faithful to help you? You will carry your evidences to men skilful in the law, to judge of your title to an earthly inheritance; and if your body be under some distemper, you will ask your physician what he thinks of you: and why will you not then go to some able minister, and ask his judgment of you, and desire his directions? I dare say, this course would set many a weak Christian at liberty from his doubts and perplexities, which have and may so entangle him, that as he yet hath not seen his right to his privileges, so he may go on in this darkness, for aught I know, to his death. Be therefore persuaded to take advice.

The conclusion is this: I would that all of you whose consciences bear you witness that you are the Lord’s people, and that you have given yourselves up to Christ, would take-up a resolution to be obedient to the Lord in coming to this supper as he hath commanded; and as you have heard this morning, take heed of sinning against light, with your eyes wide open upon it. Sins of ignorance God may wink at; but when you sin presumptuously, though it be against the least command, and persevere in it, I question whether it be consistent with salvation. But if it be, doubtless it will be a salvation through the fire. The Lord give you understanding!*

SERMON XIII.

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A RELIGIOUS FAST. THE DUTY WHEREOF IS ASSERTED, DESCRIBED, PERSUADED, IN A BRIEF EXERCISE UPON—

But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.—Mark ii. 20.

THESE words are an answer to a question, or rather a reply to an objection made by the disciples of John and the Pharisees against Christ concerning fasting, verse 18: “And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?”

Christ returns his answer by a fit parable, as that was his usual way

* In this sermon a few discrepancies occur between the first edition and the second.
—EDIT.

of teaching: verse 19: "Can the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast." And so the duty was not now in season. We have the same story recorded by two other evangelists,—Matt. ix. 14—17; Luke v. 33—35; only with this difference: in Matthew we read, it was only "the disciples of John" that made the objection, but in Mark and Luke is added, "the disciples of John and of the Pharisees." Again: Matthew and Mark mention only fasting; Luke addeth, "Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers?" He means it of the prayers used by them upon their fast-days. Luke also addeth, "But thine eat and drink." Here was the objection.

Wherein we shall, first, consider *the occasion of it*, and then *the persons that made it*, and then *the reply that Christ maketh to it*: which will bring me to the text.

I. *The occasion of it was,*

First. That which is mentioned by all these evangelists,—Christ's entering the house of Levi the publican, who had made him a great feast; and there was a great company of publicans and others present, and Christ and his disciples sat down, and did eat and drink with them. Now this was one ground of the objection, that Christ and his disciples did not use that austerity and abstinence in meat and drinks as they ought, but did too much indulge their sensual appetite; as elsewhere he was accused as a "wine-bibber and gluttonous," (Matt. xi. 19,) especially seeing he did eat and drink with "publicans and sinners."

Secondly. The disciples of John and the Pharisees used several fasts beside the annual fast enjoined by the law upon the seventh month and the tenth day of the month, for the whole congregation of Israel: as we read of their "often fasting;" (Matt. ix. 14; Luke v. 33;) and the Pharisee mentioned, Luke xviii. 12, pleads: "I fast twice in the week;" and Chemnitius in his "Harmony" conjectures they did still observe the fasts of the fourth month, and fifth month, seventh and tenth month, that the Jews observed in the seventy years' captivity, mentioned, Zech. viii. 19; as also that which was observed by Esther and her maidens, Mordecai, and the Jews in Shushan, before her going in unto the king, to speak for the lives of her people; (Esther iv. 16;) to preserve the solemn remembrance of the calamities of those times, he thinks, they kept still those fasts; but besides, they observed many fasts devised and appointed by themselves, which may be reckoned among the traditions of the Pharisees imposed upon their disciples. Now, Christ and his disciples not fasting as they fasted, was another ground of the objection, as is expressly mentioned by the evangelist.

II. Next we may consider *the persons that make the objection*, whereby we may see yet further ground of it. It was the disciples of the Pharisees and John. These Pharisees were the chief ring-leaders upon all occasions in any opposition against Christ: one while, they object against him and his disciples for not observing the sabbath; another while, for not washing before they did eat; and sometimes for his too much familiarity with publicans and sinners, &c.; and here for not fasting. And now they engaged the disciples of John with them, that they might make their objection and opposition the more plausible; for John was in

great reputation with the people. Wherein John's disciples were justly to be blamed for joining with the Pharisees in an opposition to Christ, who were his inveterate adversaries. But John their master being now in prison, they were the more easily drawn-in with them; for had he been with them he would not have suffered such a thing; his great errand and business being to raise-up the reputation of Christ among the people, to remove prejudices against him, to prepare the way for him, and to turn the hearts of the people to him. A pregnant instance whereof we have, John iii. 26—30, where John's disciples came with a story to their master: "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him." But John answered, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom," &c. "He must increase, but I must decrease." John would not suffer any envy or prejudice to remain in the hearts of his disciples against Christ upon his account, but seeks to check it presently. But he being now not present with them, the Pharisees more easily engaged them in this opposition and objection against Christ about fasting, to join with them therein. And the zeal that John's disciples had for the reputation of their master might somewhat incline them also to it; for they saw the people following Christ, which they thought might be some eclipse to it, and consequently to their own [reputation] as they were his disciples.

And, besides, they knowing the austerity and abstinence that was practised by John, his meat being locusts and wild honey, such food as he found in the wilderness; they might be more easily offended at that greater liberty that was taken by Christ and his disciples about eating and drinking. Especially at this time, when their master was in prison, they thought fasting might be more seasonable than going to a feast, as Christ and his disciples did at the house of Levi; as Grotius observes upon the place.

III. Next we have *Christ's reply to the objection*.—And he presents it in a parable, as I said: the parable of a bridegroom, who at his wedding hath his bridemen and bridemaids attending him in the wedding-chamber, who, according to the Hebrew dialect, are here called "the children of the bride-chamber." And is it *then* a proper season for their fasting, while they are in the wedding-chamber, and the bridegroom with them?

Wherein Christ doth represent himself as a "Bridegroom," and his disciples as "the children of the bride-chamber." And he doth now represent himself thus, the rather to put these disciples of John in remembrance of their master's speech, when he called Christ "the Bridegroom." As we read, John iii. 29: "He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom." And should then his disciples fast and mourn, while Christ, the Bridegroom, was with them? And their master John,—he professed that he was "the friend" of this Bridegroom, and "rejoiced greatly" to hear his voice. (John iii. 29.) And therefore why should they be offended at his disciples, that they did not fast and mourn, when their master John rejoiced, and had his "joy fulfilled" in hearing his voice? as we read, John iii. 29. And herein Christ doth intimate to them,

that if they were indeed his disciples, and the children of the bride-chamber, they would not fast neither; for "the children of the bride-chamber cannot fast while the Bridegroom is with them." But he adds: "The days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days." And so I come to the text.

Wherein we may observe by the way,

1. That Christ doth exempt his disciples from observing those fasts that the Pharisees and John's disciples were in the practice of. And the rather, because they were observed, especially on the Pharisees' part, *ex simulato pietatis studio*, "out of ostentation of piety," and for self-justification.* As he did exempt them from their other traditions, so also from their fasts.

2. That the Bridegroom was to be taken away; which is to be understood of Christ's fleshly presence; for his spiritual presence never was, nor ever will be, taken away from his church. And this presence discontinues till his coming to judge the world; and then the cry will be heard at midnight, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." (Matt. xxv. 6.) The Bridegroom that was once visibly present on earth with his disciples, is so taken away, that he will not be in that manner present with them again, till his return from heaven. And his taking away doth either respect the acts of men, who, by cruel hands, took him "from prison and from judgment," and nailed him upon the cross, and took him "out of the land of the living;" (Isai. liii. 8;) or else it respects the act of his Father, who took him up into heaven after he had finished his work here upon earth; as it is said, "Received up into glory;" (1 Tim. iii. 16;) which is the more probable, though there is nothing in the original word, *απαρθη*, to determine it to either sense.

3. He also declares what the practice of his disciples would be after his taking away: "Then shall they fast in those days." So that he doth not deny the practice of fasting to his disciples, but rather commends it; only it was not at present seasonable, as it afterwards would be.

QUESTION. "But why should they fast after he was taken away?"

ANSWER 1. Some say, "Because till then the Holy Ghost was not given in such a degree as might fit them for such extraordinary duties:† as Christ seems to intimate, when upon this occasion he excuseth his disciples, as being not yet fit for such spiritual services: 'No man seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment; nor putteth new wine into old bottles.' (Mark ii. 21, 22.) It is true, they might be able to keep fast-days, as the Pharisees did; but Christ, that values our duties by the frame of spirit exerted in them, would not have them put upon extraordinary duties till they had a suitable measure of the Spirit to enable them thereunto."

2. Others, and I think more properly, understand the words of Christ with respect to the afflictions and persecutions that would come upon the church after his ascension into heaven, which would give them great occasions of prayer and extraordinary supplications, and which would reduce them to such great sorrows and distresses, whereby fasting would be not only seasonable, but that principle of grace that would act them in other duties would also naturally lead them to it; not to take-up again

* CHEMNITII *Harmonia*, in loco.

† CHRYSOSTOMUS.

the practice of these pharisaical fasts, as the Montanists would hence infer, but the duty of fasting as suited to gospel-times.

And these persecutions began early : First by the Jews, and then the Arians, and then the heathen persecutions under the dragon in the Roman empire, and then under the beast with the seven heads and ten horns, to whom the dragon gave his power, and his seat, and great authority. (Rev. xiii. 1, 2.) And Christ foretold this to his disciples before he was taken away, that they that killed them would think they did God good service ; (John xvi. 2 ;) and that "nation should rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom : and there should be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes." (Matt. xxiv. 7.) Now, in these days, should his disciples fast. Not that in these words Christ doth give an institution for fasting, but declares what eventually would come to pass.

Neither doth he determine any particular days and time for fasting ; but only in general, during the absence of the Bridegroom, they should fast in those days. And indeed, as soon as the Bridegroom was gone, they began to have cause of mourning : his absence itself was one great cause, as, when he foretold them of it, "sorrow filled their heart." And so upon several other causes of sadness that should fall-out afterwards, there would be great occasion of fasting and mourning till his coming again.

Thus much for explication. And because my subject is about fasting, I shall not consider Christ in the relation of a bridegroom, as he is here styled, of which might be made a long discourse, which would rather lead me to speak of Christian festivals and spiritual joy, than a religious fast, which is the subject I must attend unto.

Neither need I make any logical division of the text ; but, instead thereof, shall propose these three observations :—

OBSERVATION 1. *There are some times that are more particular seasons for fasting.*

OBSERV. II. *That Christians ought wisely to observe what is the proper duty of the times, and especially when they are called to the great duty of a fast.*

OBSERV. III. *That fasting is a duty to be practised in the days of the New Testament, even all the time of the Bridegroom's absence. So that it is not a duty that was peculiar to the times of the Old Testament and the Mosaic pedagogy, but is to be practised in the gospel-times.*

The last I shall only insist upon, and touch upon the other in the handling of it ; wherein I shall take notice, that fasting may be considered either as, 1. Merely natural. 2. Civil. 3. Religious.

1. *As merely natural.*—Which is only an abstinence from food ; as the Greek word *νηστεια*, "a fast," grammatically imports no more but "a not eating ;" which may arise sometimes from necessity and want of food ; as when the people followed Christ in the wilderness, and continued three days there, and had nothing to eat ; and hereupon Christ wrought a miracle to feed them, because he would "not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way." (Matt. xv. 32.) So when Paul was in his voyage to Rome, for want of provision he and his company fasted fourteen days. (Acts xxvii. 33.) Or else this natural fast is through want of appetite, though food is present. There may be an atrophy upon nature, and man fasts only because he cannot eat. Now this fasting is of no avail with

God. If a man eats not, he is nothing the better; and if he eats, he is no whit the worse. Bodily exercise profiteth nothing of itself. As "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink," so neither is it abstinence from meats and drinks, especially such abstinence as this that is not voluntary, but upon necessity.

2. *Civil*.—When there is a fasting upon a civil account, with respect to some civil end. As when the magistrate doth impose abstinence from meats for a while for some civil good: as Saul imposed it upon the people in his pursuit of the Philistines, that his victory might not be hindered. (1 Sam. xiv. 24.) And such fasting sometimes may be imposed for the increase of provision, and for the public health.

3. *Religious*.—When fasting is attended with duties of religion, and is to some religious end. For the end doth in such things as these specify and denominate the action. And, to give a particular account of it, take it thus:—

A religious fast is the devotion of the whole man to a solemn, extraordinary attendance upon God, in a particular time separated for that end, for the deprecating [of] his displeasure, and for the supplicating of his favour, joined with an abstinence from bodily food, and other bodily delights, and from secular affairs. So that he that fasteth doth for that time separate himself to God, and doth voluntarily dedicate a part of time to his more solemn service; and doth put himself, as it were, under a religious vow, to abide solemnly with God in the duties of the fast he is engaged in.

Now this religious fast is either public or private:—

1. *Public*.—As when a whole city fasts, as in the case of Nineveh; or a whole nation, as in Jehoshaphat's case, who "proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah." (2 Chron. xx. 3.) And the prophet Joel calls to such a fast: "Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord," &c. (Joel i. 14.) When the occasion is public, so ought the fast to be.

2. *Private*.—Which is, (1.) *Either of a particular person*; of which Christ speaks, Matt. vi. 17, 18: "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." And of this private fast, Anna is an instance, of whom it is said, that "she served God in the temple with fastings and prayers night and day." (Luke ii. 37.) And Daniel another, who tells us, in three whole weeks he "was mourning, ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth." (Dan. x. 2, 3.) And Cornelius is another. (Acts x. 30.) And the occasion for private fasting is more peculiarly some private concerns, unless the person that fasts be a public person, and then a private personal fasting may be upon a public account, as Daniel's was. (2.) *Or of a particular family*; which the apostle seems to speak of, 1 Cor. vii. 5; where husband and wife, being of the same family, are advised by the apostle not to defraud one another, but "by consent for a time to give themselves to fasting and prayer." And when the prophet Zachary speaks of families mourning apart, (Zech. xii. 12--14,) it may probably be meant of fasting joined with mourning: and though the word "family" may be understood patronymically, and

extend further than to a particular house, yet it may by analogy be applied to particular houses and the inhabitants therein.

Again: a religious fast is either stated or occasional:—

1. *Stated*.—As the fast of the seventh month and the tenth day of the month was a stated fast to Israel every year; and the fasts the Jews observed in Babylon of the fourth, fifth, seventh, tenth month, mentioned, Zech. viii. 19, were stated fasts; and the Pharisee in the gospel boasted of his stated fasting: “I fast twice in the week.” (Luke xviii. 12.) Against which stated fasts I have nothing to speak, or to censure any men’s practice herein, if the occasion still continues, and it do not degenerate into formality.

2. *Occasional*.—Of which we have frequent instances; as the fast observed by Esther and her maidens, and the Jews in Shushan, was occasional. And so that which I mentioned of Jehoshaphat was occasional. And the fast in Nehemiah’s time, mentioned, Neh. ix. 1, was occasional. These fasts did not pass into any stated course of observation.

Having premised these distinctions, I shall discourse of this religious fast,—

I. *In the sanction of it.*

II. *The manner of observation.*

III. *The occasion that requires and calls for it.*

IV. *The concern that abstinence from food hath in the right observation of it.*

V. *The abuse of the ordinance in the wrong managing of it.*

I. First. *For the sanction of it.*

1. *It seems partly to be dictated by the light of nature*.—For the Heathen observed it, especially when any sore calamity was either felt or feared by them. As in the case of Nineveh, when Jonah denounced destruction to the city, they presently betook themselves to fasting, both king, nobles, and people; yea, the very beasts must be concerned in it. (Jonah iii. 7, 8.) So, when they would make their prayers more prevalent, in such cases they would join fasting with their prayers. As Baal’s priests, when they cried to their God Baal to hear them, the text saith, “They cried” all day “until the evening sacrifice.” (1 Kings xviii. 18, 19.) So that they did not only pray, but fast also. As they used lustrations, sacrifices, festivals, in their religious rites and worship of their gods; so sometimes they had their *jejunia* and religious “fasts;” (as we have some account of this in Tertullian, in his book *adversus Psychicos*;) by which they thought to make some satisfaction for their sin, and to reconcile to themselves the deity they had offended, or to obtain some special favour they had need of.

2. *It is a duty by institution, and that both in the Old and New Testament*.—The fast of the seventh month was by direct institution in the Old Testament. And at other times God called them to it: “Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly,” said the prophet Joel. (Joel i. 14.) And God is said to “choose” it: “Is not this the fast that I have chosen?” (Isai. lviii. 6.) And God’s declaring there in that chapter the right way of observing it, doth prove the duty itself to be of his own appointment. And the New Testament requires it also; for the duty is

of a moral nature, and therefore the obligation of it remains, only with this difference :—

(1.) *We are not to use those rites and outward expressions of sorrow that were practised in those times.*—Which belonged to the rigour of that legal ministration. As rending the garment, (Joel ii. 13,) putting-on of sackcloth, (Neh. ix. 1,) covering with ashes, (Dan. ix. 3,) bowing down the head, (Isai. lviii. 5,) putting earth upon their head, (Neh. ix. 1,) and sometimes putting-off their sandals or shoes, and plucking-off the hair, (Ezra ix. 3,) and making themselves bald. (Isai. xxii. 12.) And the Pharisees used disfiguring of their faces. But, saith Christ to his disciples, “When thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face;” (Matt. vi. 16;) which in their fasting the Jews should forbear, though used at other times; as appears by Daniel’s fasting: “I ate no pleasant bread, neither did I anoint myself at all.” (Dan. x. 3.) “But,” saith Christ, “do not ye do so; but anoint thy head, and wash thy face, &c., and so use not such visible signs of sorrow, that thou mayest not appear to men to fast.”

(2.) *We ought not to fast with that legal frame of spirit which was upon the Jews in those days.*—For every duty in the days of the New Testament is to be managed with a spirit suiting the gospel ministration.

3. As to its sanction, there may be also the addition of *human authority in the appointing of fasts.*—Especially public fasts, when the public state of affairs may require it; the duty in general being of God’s institution, and the voice of providence calling people to it, the magistrate in this case may determine the time, if it be general to a nation; or the pastors and guides of the church, with respect to the several churches over which they preside. For where a duty is required of God, and the circumstance of time not determined, there Christian prudence in magistrates or churches is to be the rule for determination; as the particular times for baptism and the Lord’s supper are left to Christian prudence to determine.

II. *The manner how a religious fast is to be observed.*—And that both with respect to the outward and inward man.

1. *With respect to the outward man.*

(1.) *Abstinence from food* is requisite and necessary so far as may consist with mercy to the body. For the very name of a fast implies this abstinence; and not only the Jews, but the very Heathen, in their fasts did enjoin this abstinence upon themselves and others, as appears by that of Nineveh. (Jonah iii. 7.) And if some cannot bear a total abstinence, some coarser food may be used; as in Tertullian’s time they had their *xerophagiæ*, so called from a “dry kind of food” used by them.*

(2.) As also *meaner apparel* than what may be used at other times; though not to put on sackcloth, yet to lay aside ornaments and richer dresses upon such a day. When the Israelites would express their sorrow for the sad tidings of God’s refusing to go before them, it is said, they laid aside their ornaments. (Exod. xxxiii. 4.) Though they had a command for it, yet nature itself did teach it them; as it did the king of Nineveh, who laid aside his robe when he fasted and mourned. (Jonah

* TERTULLIANUS *De Jeuniis adversus Psychicos.*

iii. 6.) Purple and scarlet and shining apparel are not suitable to such a duty, nature itself being judge.

*Non est conveniens luctibus ille color.**—OVIDII *Tristium* lib. i. eleg. i. 6.

And verily those gay and gaudy dresses which multitudes garb themselves with at this day, are no whit suitable to the sad times upon which God hath cast us.

(3.) Yea, and *humble gestures* also, which may best express a solemn, serious mind. Though no particular gesture is absolutely commanded, yet nothing ought to be discovered either in the countenance or any actions and gestures of the body that may be unsuitable to the nature of the day and the solemn duties thereof; wherein partly the light of nature and the custom of the place may direct and regulate us.

The Jews had three sorts of gestures that were used in worship:—

(i.) The one was bowing the head, called, קדר

(ii.) The other was bending the knee, called, כרע

(iii.) The third was prostration of the body, called, השתחוה

But where there is no particular gesture determined, there Christians are left to their liberty; only it is to be guided by a due respect to the greatest advantage of the duty, and with caution against any just offence.

(4.) *Abstinence from secular affairs* is requisite; for a fast is a solemn devoting a certain part of time to God, and to an extraordinary attendance upon him. And if meats and drinks are to be forborne for to give advantage to the duties of the day, so also bodily labours and secular business upon the same account. The Jewish fasts were reckoned among their sabbaths, and so they were days of rest from bodily labours.

And there was a severe punishment to be inflicted upon the men that did any work upon their solemn fasts of the tenth day of the seventh month; as we read, Lev. xxiii. 30: "The same soul will I destroy from among his people." Though the rigour of that legal ministration is abated under the gospel, yet it holds still in the moral and equitable part of it,—that whatever may hinder the managing of any duty in that manner that is suitable and necessary thereunto ought to be laid aside. But,

(5.) To these I shall here add *the external duties of religion*, and sacred ordinances, to be used in the discharge of the work of the day.

The first is *confession of sin*.—A fast day is for atonement, and therefore confession of sin is necessary. As we read of Ezra, when he heard of the sin of the Jews in their making affinity with the people of the land, he "rent his garment, and sat astonished until the evening sacrifice," and made confession of their sin. (Ezra ix. 3—6.) So in Neh. ix. 1, 2, we read, "The children of Israel were assembled with fasting. And they stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers." And so Daniel, in his solemn fast, which he set himself to in the behalf of the captivity now almost expired, he makes an ample confession of sin, as we read, Dan. ix. 4—11. And as a fast is an extraordinary duty, so confession of sin ought to be more than ordinary in such a day;

* "Gay purple garments ill beseeem
A mind oppress'd with grief extreme."—EDIT.

and what may suffice at another time, may not be sufficient then. It ought to be more extensive with respect to the several kinds and acts of sin, with respect to the aggravations of sin, and with respect to the persons that are under guilt, and with respect to the inward principles of sin in the heart, out of which all actual sins do spring: as Daniel's confession of sin extended to the kinds of it, the several aggravations of it, and to the persons that were concerned in it, as their kings, princes, fathers, people of the land, those "that were near," and those "that were afar off," as we find in that chapter. And this confession of sin is requisite to the deeper humiliation of the soul, to the condemnation of ourselves, and to the justifying of God, whereby he may have the greater glory.

The second is *supplication*.—Which is the imploring mercy from God, either with respect to the pardon of sin committed, or the preventing those judgments that are impending, or the removing such as are inflicted. As we find, Daniel in the time of his fasting, after his confession, made earnest supplications for "forgivenesses" of sin, for the turning away God's anger and fury, for the shining of his face upon his sanctuary, for the repairing the desolations of their city called by his name, and for the people in general. (Dan. ix. 9, 16—18.) And therefore "fasting and prayer" are frequently mentioned together in scripture. (Luke ii. 37; Acts x. 30; xiv. 23; 1 Cor. vii. 5.) Though prayer in general comprehends confession and thanksgiving in it, as well as supplication; yet, in a stricter acceptation, "petition for mercy" doth most properly express the import of the word, and the main matter of the duty. And this the king of Nineveh enjoined in the fast appointed by him: "Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God." (Jonah iii. 8.) So that supplication and crying to God is another great part of the duty of the day.

The third is *hearing the word*.—For the word is necessary both for the discovery of sin for our present humiliation, and for the discovery of our duty with respect to future reformation; both which are necessary to an acceptable fast. And the word of the gospel sets before men a door of hope, that their sin may be pardoned, and judgment removed. It presents God not only as reconcilable, but delighting in mercy; it sets before men many instances of God's hearing prayer, and the prevalence of repentance and humiliation with him, and particularly what acceptance solemn fasting hath found with him in several ages. And all this mightily tends to the furthering the great duties of the day. And it is observed of the fast kept by the children of Israel, that "they read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one-fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the Lord their God." (Neh. ix. 3.) If repentance, spiritual mourning, and soul-humiliation, be necessary to the day, as I shall show presently, then the hearing the word may be of great use thereunto. As when Josiah heard the words of the law, he rent his clothes, and humbled himself; (2 Chron. xxxiv. 27;) and Ahab, upon the like occasion, humbled himself, though not in the like manner; and we read how God appointed Jeremiah, and Jeremiah Baruch, to read the roll that was written from the mouth of God, "in the ears of the people upon the fasting-day."

(Jer. xxxvi. 1—6.) And what was the cause of Nineveh's repentance and humiliation? was it not Jonah's preaching? As our Saviour speaks of it: "They repented at the preaching of Jonas;" (Matt. xii. 41;) though his preaching was only this, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed." The word is effectual through Christ to bring the impenitent to repentance, and to renew the exercise of repentance in those that have already repented; which is a proper work for a fast-day.

The fourth is *renewing our covenant with God*.—Which in private fasts is to be done betwixt God and a man's own soul; and in public fasts by the mouth of the preacher, and the people's consent thereunto. And this covenant is either the general covenant that we renew; or else a particular covenant, with respect to some particular duties that we engage ourselves unto; or else both together. As in the public fast observed by the children of Israel in Neh. ix., both princes and nobles and people renewed their general covenant to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of the Lord; and particularly they covenanted not to give their daughters to the people of the land, nor take their daughters for their sons, as we read, Neh. x. 29, 30; and the covenant being written, their princes, Levites, and priests did seal to it: so if a church or people have contracted guilt upon themselves by the omitting of some duties, or the committing of any sins, for which the Lord may have a controversy with them, it is a proper work upon a day of fasting to engage themselves to a reformation by a solemn renewing their covenant with God. And though we have not a particular instance of this in the New Testament, yet the law of faith that requires men now to take hold of God's covenant, and in all cases to make use of it, so in some special cases [requires them] to renew it also; not that it needs renewing as to the substance or sanction of it on God's part, but we are on our part to renew it with God, by laying new engagements and obligations upon ourselves to carry it in all things according to the law of this covenant, in the re-stipulating part of it.

Fifthly. The next duty of the day is *thanksgiving*.—Though this seems not the proper duty of the day, yet is [it] not to be omitted; for the due consideration of God's mercy tends to the aggravation of sin, and so to make men's confessions and humiliations more affectionate and evangelical. As in that fast I mentioned before, (Neh. ix.,) the Levites did stand up among the people, and begin the day with blessing God: "Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise." (Verse 5.) And so they proceed to recite a catalogue of God's mercies, even from the first call of Abraham, to their settlement in the land of Canaan, which reacheth to verse 25. And all this was to bring in the "nevertheless," mentioned verse 26, with the greater emphasis to their humiliation: "Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets," &c. And the same we may observe in Ezra ix. He takes notice of the "reviving" God had given them in their bondage, and the "nail in his holy place," and the "wall in Judah and Jerusalem," (verses 8, 9,) the more to aggravate the people's sin in doing according to the abominations of the Canaanites, and mingling themselves with the people of

the land. (Verses 1, 2.) The goodness of God is said to lead men to repentance; (Rom. ii. 4;) and therefore mention is to be made of it upon a day when the exercise of repentance is specially in season.

Yea, thanksgiving also is requisite as an attendant of supplication; for the giving thanks for mercy received is an effectual way to obtain new mercy: according to that known saying, *Efficacissimum genus rogandi est gratias agere*: "Giving thanks for mercy received, is the most effectual way to obtain new mercy." Thanksgiving carries supplication in the spirit of it. And if, according to the apostle, "we are in every thing to make known our request with supplication and thanksgiving;" (Phil. iv. 6;) then, whenever we come to God with supplications, we are to couple them with thanksgiving.

Sixthly. The last duty I mention, which is the appendix to the rest, is that of *alms-deeds*.—For, when we come to beg mercy from God, we should not forget to show it to men. And he that "stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor," he may cry, "but shall not be heard;" (Prov. xxi. 13;) yea, his prayers are so far from coming-up as incense before God, that they are an abomination. Cornelius, that was a man much in prayer and fasting also, (as is noted of him, Acts x. 30,) was full also of alms-deeds; and both together came up as a memorial before God. (Verse 31.) Alms-deeds, as they are not to be confined to a fast-day, so surely are not to be excluded. He that will on such a day shut-up his purse, let him take heed lest God shut-up against him his ear, his heart, and his hand. The people complain, Isai. lviii. 3: "Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not?" God tells them, they fasted, but showed not mercy; and therefore fasted not aright: and then tells them what was the fast that he had chosen: "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry? and when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him?" (Isai. lviii. 7.) Certainly those duties that ought to follow our fasting, or else it avails nothing with God, ought not to be shut out of the duties of such a day, if there be call and opportunity thereunto.

Thus I have shown the duties of a fast-day which are *external*, with respect to the outward performance.

2. And next I shall show *what frame of spirit is requisite to such a day*.—Without which all these duties may be externally performed, and yet the fast not accepted. For as the apostle saith of circumcision, it "is that of the heart, in the spirit;" (Rom. ii. 29;) so is that fasting that is well pleasing to God. There may be confession, supplication, renewing the covenant, thanksgiving, alms-deeds; and yet if there be wanting a suitable frame of heart, all this may be but as a body without the soul, or matter without form, that may have praise with men, but none with God.

Now this frame of soul consists in, First. *Self-debasement*. Secondly. *Godly sorrow*. Thirdly. *Filial fear*. Fourthly. *Ingenious shame*. Fifthly. *Inward purity*. Sixthly. *Evangelical faith and hope*.

I shall speak briefly to them all.

The first is *self-debasement*.—God complains of the Jews' fasting: they did hang down their heads like a bulrush, (Isai. lviii. 5,) but their souls did not bow down within them. We call a fast-day a "day of humiliation;" but we have the name, but not the thing, if the soul be not

humbled. What is it for the body to wear sackcloth, if pride cover the heart? or to spread ashes under us, if the soul lie not down in the dust? or to fast from bodily food, if the soul be not emptied of selffulness.

The second is *godly sorrow*.—A fast-day is for afflicting the soul; and how is the soul afflicted without true sorrow? The Hebrew word *עניתי* that signifies a fast, is derived from a root that signifies to afflict; so essential is the afflicting the soul to the day. It was a charge against the Jews: "Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure." (Isai. lviii. 2.) What kind of pleasure it was is not there mentioned; but it was some sinful pleasure that was not congruous to the day. Daniel speaks of his fast, "I was mourning three full weeks." (Daniel x. 2.) As at our funerals many enter the house of mourning and wear black, but there is no mourning within, nor no garment of heaviness covers their soul; so do many enter the day and duty of fasting, but no godly sorrow enters with them into it, or attends them in it. "Every thing" is "beautiful in its season:" (Eccles. iii. 11:) a fast-day wants its beauty, if no true sorrow attends it. We make confession of sin; but if there be no sorrow, we feel not what is spoken; and what will words of confession avail? Ephraim is said to "bemoan himself;" (Jer. xxxi. 18;) and God is said to hear it, and he bemoaned him also. But how can we think God's heart should be affected with our confessions, when our own are not? The Jews upon their solemn days had their solemn sacrifices. A fast-day is a solemn day, and it is not to be without its sacrifices; and the great sacrifice or sacrifices of the day, is "a broken and a contrite" spirit. (Psalm li. 17.)

The third is *filial fear*.—Natural fear hath sometimes brought a people to the duty, and a filial fear is to be exercised in the performance of it; as Jehoshaphat "feared," and then "proclaimed a fast;" (2 Chron. xx. 3;) and so did the king of Nineveh. (Jonah iii. 6, 7.) When God's judgments are abroad, we ought to fear, and this fear should lead us to meet him in the ways of his judgment by prayer and fasting; for all our serving God is to be coupled "with fear;" our rejoicing is to be "with trembling," (Psalm ii. 11,) much more our mourning. In a fast-day we especially deprecate God's wrath, and therefore we ought to have such a sense of it, as may cause sacred fear. There is no affection of the soul but ought to be sanctified to the service and honour of God; and so fear among the rest, and [it] is then to be exercised when we draw nigh to God, especially in the solemn duties of a fast.

The fourth is *ingenuous shame*.—Sin is in itself a shameful thing; and therefore, when it is confessed upon a solemn day, it ought to be with shame. As Ezra, hearing of the sin of Israel after their return from their captivity, he "sate astonished until the evening;" and then riseth up, and rends the mantle, and speaks to God: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face unto thee." (Ezra ix. 4—6.) And, "To us belongeth confusion of face," said Daniel in his fasting. (Dan. ix. 8.) Two things cause shame: one is, to act contrary to our own reason; and the other is, to act unsuitably to another's kindness. The one is absurd, and the other is disingenuous, and both may cause shame. And there are both these in sin, especially when committed with allowance; for

right reason doth condemn it, and it is a high violation of the law of kindness, to return evil where we receive all our good.

The fifth is *inward purity*.—By which I mean not a total freedom from sin, but a freedom from a corrupt end, and the secret allowance of sin, in our fasting. Either of these will spoil the fast.

(1.) *A corrupt end*.—As the Pharisees, who fasted to appear religious before men; and the Jews in Babylon, who fasted; but, “Did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?” saith the Lord. (Zech. vii. 5.) Their end was not right.

(2.) *A secret allowance of sin*.—This made the Jews’ fasting of no avail with God: “They have loved to wander.” There is their allowance of sin. “When they fast, I will not hear their cry.” (Jer. xiv. 10, 12.) There their fast turns to no account. It is said of Ahab, “He rent his clothes, put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted.” (1 Kings xxi. 27.) But still he kept fast his sin, and so [was] not accepted. As when the Jews came to inquire of God, Ezek. xiv. 7, God tells them, he will not be inquired of by them; and why? Because they “set up idols in their heart.” So if men come to God by fasting and prayer, and have in their hearts an allowance of sin, which God the searcher of hearts can know, they bring an idol along with them in their hearts, and their prayer and fasting are rejected of him. David well knew this, when he saith, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” [Psalm lxi. 18.] Though men, while they are fasting and praying, are not visibly acting sin, yet God seeth the aspect of the soul; if that be looking towards sin with pleasure and delight, as that Hebrew word נִחַם there imports, the prayer is rejected. Or if we read the words as the French translation, I think more properly, renders them: *Si j’eusse pensé quelque malice, &c.*: “If I had regarded some wickedness in my heart, God would not have heard my prayer;” the sense is the same to my present purpose.

The sixth is *evangelical faith and hope in God*.—All our confessions, and humiliations, and supplications ought to be joined with faith in Christ, and hope in God’s mercies, or else they want the great ingredients of their acceptableness with God. As in Ezra’s fast, Shechaniah stands up and saith to him, “We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.” (Ezra x. 2.) “To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses,” said Daniel, in his fasting. (Dan. ix. 9.) God’s mercy and Christ’s merits should bear-up our faith and hope, while our sin is casting us down with sorrow. As Samuel endeavoured to bring the people first to a sense of their sin in their choosing a king, and then bears-up their faith and hope by telling them, “The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake.” (1 Sam. xii. 22.) And David, while he was confessing his sins of adultery and murder, yet styleth God the “God of his salvation;” (Psalm li. 14;) and while he was supplicating to God “out of the depths,” as he speaks, and making his supplication, yet he joins therewith faith and hope in God’s mercy: “But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” (Psalm cxxx. 1—4.) All our duties, even our fasting and humiliations, ought to be performed evangelically, which

cannot be, except faith and hope do accompany the performance of them.

III. I next proceed to speak of *the special occasions that call us to this religious fast.*

The first is *the affliction and distress of the church.*—When the Jews were in great distress, then Esther appointed Mordecai and the Jews to fast. (Esther iv. 16.) When the Ammonites and Moabites invaded Judah with a great army, then “Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast.” (2 Chron. xx. 3.) When a great famine was upon the land of Israel, then said the prophet Joel, “Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly.” (Joel i. 14.) And when the Jews were in Babylon, then they kept their fast of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth month, all the time of their captivity, though the several months had respect to some particular calamities that befell them in those months. Sympathy and sorrow are naturally expressed by fasting; and are spiritually to be expressed with respect to the church’s distress by a religious fasting.

The second is *upon the occasion of extraordinary sin.*—If in a particular family, it may be a just occasion for a fast in the family; if in a particular church, or in a nation, it may be an occasion of a more public fast: as the fast of Ezra and of Nehemiah was upon the occasion of the sin of Israel in making marriages with the people of the land. (Ezra ix; Neh. ix.) And “Hezekiah rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord,” upon the occasion of Rabshakeh’s reproaching and blaspheming God, as well as the distress that was upon himself and the people by Sennacherib’s invasion, as we read, Isai. xxxvii. 1. We should mourn over the dishonour done to God, as well as any distress and trouble that may come upon ourselves: and we read of “the congregation of Israel weeping before the door of the tabernacle,” upon the account of the whoredom committed by many of them with the daughters of Moab, and “bowing down to their gods.” (Num. xxv. 2, 6.)

Thirdly. *For the obtaining some eminent mercy, or for success in any great undertakings and enterprises.*—As Esther before she went in to the king to beg for the lives of her people,—she required her maidens, Mordecai, and the Jews to fast. (Esther iv. 16.) And Ezra proclaimed a fast to seek a right way from God, for themselves, their little ones, and all their substance, when they were coming out of the captivity to settle in their own land. (Ezra viii. 21.) When Paul and Barnabas were sent forth to their more public ministry, certain prophets “fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, and sent them away.” (Acts xiii. 3.) And when they ordained elders for the churches, “they commended them to the Lord” with prayer and fasting. (Acts xiv. 23.)

Fourthly. *For conquest over some eminent temptation.*—This may be the occasion of a private fast, when a private person lies under it; or of a more public fast, if the temptation reacheth further: as Christ speaks of some kind of devils that are not cast-out but by fasting and prayer; and the rule may reach to soul-temptations, as well as bodily possessions, whereof our Saviour there speaks. But I hasten.

IV. I shall next speak of *the concern that abstinence from food hath in the duties of a fast.*

1. *That hereby the soul may be more fit for its operations.*—The

pampering and feeding the body is usually injurious to the free exercise of the soul. And therefore the chastening it with due fasting may befriending the soul therein, especially in such exercises wherein the soul is to have least communion with the body.* As the body ought not to be robbed, for the serving of God, of that which is necessary for it, (for God hates robbery for sacrifice,) so, by undue providing for it, we may rob the soul, and rob God of that service which it ought to perform unto him. The body is called by philosophers *το αλογον*, or *bruta pars hominis*, "the brute part of man." And a brute is not so fit for man's service, if he be kept either at too high or too low a rate. *Nec supra negotium, nec infra negotium, sed par negotio*, † is a good rule for the body to be treated by; and, as Aquinas speaks, abstinence from food upon a solemn fast is requisite, *ob elevationem mentis*, "for the elevation of the mind," that it may get loose from the sensitive part, and so more freely ascend to things above: as the apostle kept his body in subjection, that he might with more freedom run the race to obtain the crown that is incorruptible. (1 Cor. ix. 25—27.) Severity to the body may in some cases be mercy to the soul: as David "chastened" his "soul with fasting." (Psalm lxxix. 10.) It was its sensitive part he immediately chastened, that the rational and intellectual part might be more vigorous and active.

2. In this bodily abstinence there is *something of a self-judging* in it.—For by abstaining for a while we judge ourselves unworthy of returning to such refreshings and comforts of nature at all. We are, by abstaining from food, to reckon ourselves unworthy of it.

3. By it we also express *our sympathy with the church's sufferings*.—I mean in those fasts that are kept upon that account. And nature seems to teach men this: as, when David would have had Uriah go to his own house when he was come from the camp, he answered, "The ark, and Israel, and Judah, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into my house, to eat and to drink?" &c. (2 Sam. xi. 11.) As by eating and drinking we express our gladness, so by abstaining we properly express our sorrow and sympathy with others' suffering. Whilst David's child lay sick, he fasted and would eat nothing; but when the child was dead, he then would declare his shaking-off his sorrow by calling for food and eating. (2 Sam. xii. 20.)

V. Lastly. I shall speak of *the abuse of a religious fast*.—And this great ordinance is several ways abused.

1. *There is a pharisaical abuse of it by ostentation*.—When men fast to put-on a disguise of extraordinary devotion and sanctity, as the Pharisees did thus; and by disfiguring their faces and counterfeiting a solemn and dejected countenance, and by mortified habits, &c., did seek to gain the reputation of extraordinary holiness among the people: as the Pharisee in the parable among other things boasted of his often fasting: "I fast twice in the week." Strict piety hath such a real value

* *Jejunium purgat mentem, subleat sensum, carnem spiritui subjicit, concupiscentie nebulas dispergit*; as AUSTIN speaks of it, tom. x. serm. 230. *De Tempore*. "Fasting purifies the mind, elevates the understanding, subjects the flesh to the spirit, and disperses the clouds of lawless lust."—EDIT.

† "An animal ought to receive sustenance in such just proportions as will neither raise it above its labour, nor depress it below it, but will render it equal to the performance."—EDIT.

in it, that some that have it not, yet will pretend to it, as thinking to advance their reputation by it.

2. *There is a mischievous abuse of it, if I may so express it.*—When men's hearts are full of malice, mischief, and cruelty, and will hide it under the disguise of a religious fast. As Jezebel when she was designing against Naboth's vineyard, and life also, she proclaims a fast; (1 Kings xxi. 9;) and those Jews that are reprov'd, Isai. lviii. 1—7, they fasted and fasted, but it was "for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness." They oppress'd the poor, laid heavy yokes upon their necks, and ruin'd them by their cruelties, and yet were very zealous fasters; as our Saviour speaks of the Pharisees, who made "long prayers for a pretence," while they were "devouring widows' houses." (Matt. xxiii. 14.)

3. *There is a formal abuse of it.*—When men have not such sinful ends as I mentioned, but yet rest in the externals of the day, and care not to reach the spiritual part of the duty. They go along with the several duties of the day; but *deest aliquid intus*, "there is that wanting within" that is the proper work of the day. They sit before God as his people, as if they were humbling themselves before him, but there is nothing in their hearts that answers before God to the outward show they make before men. Religious duties, according to scripture-language, are not done, if not done aright: so that as the apostle tells the Corinthians, "This is not to eat the Lord's supper," (1 Cor. xi. 20,) because they did not eat aright; so, when men are formal in fasting, this is not keeping a fast.

4. *There is a Popish abuse of it.*—

(1.) *By groundless fasting.*—As on the vespers of their saints' days, and their Quadragesimas, fasting the holy time of Lent, in imitation of Christ's fasting in the wilderness, which was miraculous, and so not imitable.

(2.) *By making fasting meritorious, and that which is part of satisfactory penance for the expiation of sin.*—As Aquinas speaks expressly, "Fasting is to be used" *ad satisfaciendum pro peccatis*, "to make satisfaction for sin."*

(3.) *By their prohibition of certain meats, which God hath "commanded to be received with thanksgiving,"* and yet allowing others in their room, which are as inconsistent with the abstinence of a true fast as those that their church prohibits; but yet they have the salvo of a dispensation in such cases; and if men will open their purses, they may gratify their palates.†

5. Lastly. *Fasting may be abused by too frequent use, especially public fasts.*—It is an extraordinary duty, and therefore not to be practis'd upon ordinary occasions. The too ordinary use of it may take-off from the reverence and solemnity of the duty. We find [that] the several public fasts upon record in scripture were taken-up upon some eminent occasions. And, besides, it may make religion burdensome; and weak converts may be discouraged that are already brought-in, and those that

* AQUINAS, *Secunda Secundæ*, quest. 147, art. 1. † They forbid *carnes, ova, et lactinia*; ["flesh, eggs, and white-meats prepared with milk;"] but all sorts of fish, and other viands, and junkets, are allowed.—AQUINAS, *Secunda Secundæ*, quest. 148, art. 8.

are without may be prejudiced and hindered. We should not make Christ's yoke heavier than he would have it. Christ did not impose the rigour of the legal ministration upon his disciples, nor the burdensome traditions of the Pharisees; nor did himself practise the austerity used by John the Baptist, nor imposed it upon his disciples.

Thus I have run through the five particulars I proposed to discourse this subject in. And upon the whole shall make some practical use.

USES.

USE 1. *It reproves such who, instead of prayer and fasting when required of them, give-up themselves to all excess of riot.*—Who make their belly their god, so far they are from denying it for the service of God; who practise as it was said of Israel in case of the golden calf, "The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play;" [Exod. xxxii. 6;] and say according to this licentious proverb, quoted by the apostle out of Isaiah xxii. 13, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." [1 Cor. xv. 32.] Though God be visiting the world with his judgments, dashing the nations, like potters' vessels, one against another; yet they care for none of these things; they are loath so far to own God as to fast and pray under his rebukes, and their spirits are too high to stoop to the humbling duties of such a day. Because fasting and praying have been abused, it may be, by some in hypocrisy, they are glad of that excuse to lay it quite aside. The book of Ecclesiastes they value above all scripture, because of two or three verses they find therein, that they can interpret to gratify a sensual life. Chap. ii. 24: "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour." And to the same purpose in chap. iii. 13, and v. 18, 19. But they should consider that Solomon only speaks of the good of man with respect to this life, and the end that God giveth man the good things of this life for, which is, to use them for the outward comfort of his life; which he speaks of in opposition to such "to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour," yet hath not given "him power to eat thereof." (Eccles. vi. 2.) Sure there is a medium betwixt sordid sparing, and luxurious spending; betwixt using meats and drinks to the due comfort of nature, and the abusing them to the great injury of the soul. And though due feasting is lawful, yet still with respect to the proper season, and not to be "slaying oxen, and killing sheep, and drinking wine" in bowls, when God calls to fasting, "and baldness, and girding-on of sackcloth," as the prophet complains. (Isai. xxii. 12, 13.) And who can reckon the manifold evils that arise from this sensual course of life? The Schoolmen, speaking of the sin of gluttony, assign to it five daughters: *Inepta lætitia, scurrilitas, immunditia, multiloquium, and hebetudo mentis circa intelligentiam*; that is, "Foolish mirth, scurrility, uncleanness, talkativeness, and dulness of mind." And Solomon gives an account of the offspring of sensual and inordinate drinking, Prov. xxiii. 29, 30: "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? Who that tarry long at the wine," &c. And as men are hereby injurious

to themselves, not only as Christians, but as men, so they walk contrary to God in the present course of his providence among us.

USE II. We may hence take notice, that *God sometimes calls us to extraordinary duties, as this of fasting is; and in such cases we are not to satisfy ourselves with ordinary.*—Christians should, like those men of Issachar, [Gen. xlix. 15.] be wise in discerning the times, and the proper duties that belong to them. Christ would not have his disciples fast while he was with them; but when he was departed, the duty would come in season. So that if we meet with matter of sorrow and mourning, let us not be discouraged or offended; it will be so until the bridegroom's return.

Now, therefore, let us take a view of the present face of the times, and consider whether this extraordinary duty of fasting be not *now* in season. If we consider the several occasions which call for this duty, are they not all found at this day amongst us?

1. *Is the abounding of sin an occasion?*—Pray consider, whether wickedness is not grown up to a greater height and impudence than in former ages in this nation? What shameful and yet shameless whoredom and drunkenness are among us, and oaths that our fathers knew not! How many of these fools have we amongst us, whom Solomon speaks of, that "make a mock at sin," (Prov. xiv. 9.) and mock at religion as fanaticism, deny Providence, and dispute against a Deity! [So] that now it becomes necessary with respect to many, instead of leading them to the higher points of religion, to convince their reasons of the being of God, and to awake the innate notices of a Deity in their hearts, which are even extinguished by a course of sin. What endeavours are used by many to debauch men into wickedness, and then to glory in what they have done! And, the more to take-off the scandal of sin, they seek to propagate it and make it common, and, if it was possible, to make piety scandalous, and wickedness noble and honourable.

Now, ought there not to be fasting and mourning, when religion is thus despised, the great God dishonoured, and his laws made void? Was not this practised by David? who said, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law." (Psalm cxix. 136.) What we cannot reform, let us mourn over; and mourn the rather, because those that can and ought to do it, so little concern themselves in it.

And hath not the temptation of the times overtaken many that have formerly made great profession, and drawn them to many unworthy compliances for secular advantages; who have thereby laid-up matter to themselves for future repentance and sorrow, and are become to others objects of sorrow also? as the apostle blames the Corinthians about the incestuous person, Why "have ye not rather mourned?" (1 Cor. v. 2.) And was it not to have been wished that all that fear God in the nation should have been better united by this time both in principles and practice, that we might no longer defame and persecute one another until the net be thrown over us all, and it be then too late to relieve ourselves, though not to repent? When many are at work to let-in Popery as a torrent upon us, we should surely endeavour to stem the tide both by fasting and praying unto God, and unity amongst ourselves.

2. *Is the distress of the church of God an occasion for it?*—Look

abroad, and look at home, and you may behold such a sad face upon it, that may reflect sadness upon all your hearts. Where hath God a people, especially in these European parts of the world, but there is a distress upon them? whether ye look into France, Germany, Upper or Lower Hungaria, Silesia, Polonia, &c. And doth not all this make fasting a duty in season? When Nehemiah heard from certain that came from Judah, that the remnant left of the captivity were in great affliction, and that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down, &c., he "sat down and wept, and mourned, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." (Neh. i. 4.) And this he did, though he himself was in a good office in the Persian court. Was our condition ever so good at home, yet we should lay to heart the afflictions of our brethren abroad: for as we are to "rejoice with them that rejoice," so to "weep with them that weep." And what further calamities may yet break forth, we know not; but the sky looks still red and louring, and portends bad weather; and it is our wisdom so to discern the face of the sky, as to betake ourselves to the proper duty of the times. And thus to observe and serve the times is good Christian policy.

3. *Is the agitation of great affairs in the world an occasion for fasting?*—This also requires it of us at this day. Are not the nations embroiled in wars both by land and sea? Are there not also some negotiations of peace on foot? Is not the great council of the land to meet here at home? And do not these extraordinary affairs call us to extraordinary duties, that they may be all superintended and guided to a happy issue in the end?

4. *Is there not a strange stupidity and security upon the hearts of most men?*—That they will not see the hand of God, though they feel it; and though God walks contrary to them, yet they observe it not, but rather walk contrary to him in a course of sin, than meet him by repentance in the way of his judgments. Now, the less others are affected, the more should we endeavour to affect our own hearts; and to fast the more, because they fast not at all; and the more others are widening the breach, to stand so much the more in the gap. (Ezek. xxii. 30.)

Now, if we have these calls from God to this great duty of fasting and prayer, let us not fail God herein; and though we should obtain nothing for others, yet we may deliver our own souls; and we know the respect God had to those that sighed and mourned in Jerusalem, that the prophet was bid to set a peculiar mark upon them. (Ezek. ix. 4.)

And I shall only add this further word of encouragement, which is, that *this extraordinary duty of fasting hath been often answered with extraordinary success.*—As Esther's fast when she went-in to the king; and Jehoshaphat's fast when the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites invaded him; (2 Chron. xx. 1—30;) and Ezra's fast. (Ezra viii. 23.) And upon Daniel's fasting he had the angel Gabriel despatched to him to give him understanding in the things he sought; (Dan. ix. 22;) and again, upon his fasting in chapter x. he saw a vision, wherein a man appeared to him, and told him that he was "a man greatly beloved," and from the first day that he set himself to understand and chasten himself before God, his prayers were heard. And sometimes, where

ordinary prayer hath not prevailed, extraordinary hath had success ; which Christ intimates in saying, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Matt. xvii. 21.)

Those that now fast and mourn in the bridegroom's absence, shall rejoice with him for ever at his return. Then they shall feast, but fast no more, and the days of their mourning shall be ended : as Christ said to his disciples, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." (John xvi. 22.) Though their present fasting and mourning hath a good in it beyond the world's feasting and rejoicing, yet the consequent of it makes it incomparably better. The Bridegroom was once upon earth with his church, but departed, and so gave her occasion of fasting and mourning ; but when he comes again, he and his church shall never fast, and therefore fasting will then never come into season again. As the fast of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth month was "to the house of Judah joy and gladness," (Zech. viii. 19.) so all the fasts kept by the people of God here on earth will be, and that incomparably, more joy and gladness to them in heaven, and that for ever.

But, to conclude all, take these two rules :—

1. *Fasting, being an extraordinary duty, ought to be managed with an extraordinary exercise of grace.*—Christ would have his disciples endued with a greater measure of grace, before he would put them upon this duty ; this new wine must be put into new bottles : so that, as Christ asked James and John concerning his baptism, "Are ye able to be baptized with my baptism?" so may we ask Christians now concerning fasting, "Are ye able to keep a fast?"

2. *Fasting ought to be followed with sincere and universal reformation ; else it avails nothing.*—The Jews' fasting, mentioned Isai. lviii., was rejected upon this account. They went from their fasts to strife, debate, oppression, covetousness ; and no wonder then that they complain, and say, "Why have we fasted, and thou takest no notice?" Nay, this reformation is so necessary, that the denomination of a fast is attributed to it, Isai. lviii. 6, 7 : "Is not this the fast that I have chosen ? to loose the bands of wickedness, to deal thy bread to the hungry?" &c. If moral duties be neglected, the practice of the strictest institutions is unacceptable to God.

* * In this sermon many verbal variations occur between the first edition and the second.—EDIT.