

rich ware to sale, give you wisdom to prove wise merchants, to your eternal advantage and upmaking.



## A Sermon preached after the Communion,

On Psal. 85. 8. *He will speak peace to his people, and to his saints: But let them not turn again to folly.*

**I**T is hard to know, in spiritual exercises, whether it be more difficult to attain some good frame, or to keep and maintain it when it is attained; whether more seriousness is required for making peace with God, or for keeping of it when made; whether more diligence should be in preparing for a communion, or more watchfulness after it: Sure, both are required; and it was our blessed Lord's word, *Matth. 26. 41. after the first celebration of this his supper, Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.* Here that saying holds eminently, *Non minor est virtus, quam quærere, parata tueri*: No less virtue and valour is requisite to maintain, than to make a purchase or conquest.

In the words (to leave the introduction and scope) there are, 1. A great mercy promised from the Lord to his people, *viz. He will speak peace to them.* 2. A special caveat and advertisement given them, pointing at their hazard, *But let them not turn again to folly*: That is, let not his people and saints, to whom he hath spoken peace, return to sin; let them beware of bounding and dallying with God's mercy, and of turning his grace into wantonness, of cooling in their affections to him, of slipping back to their old way, and of embracing their old lovers and idols; for that is folly, even *in folio*, to speak so.

We shall first propose six observations from the words, and then apply them. First then, Observe, *That sin against God is an exceeding great folly; 'tis the foolishest and maddest thing in the world*: Therefore it is here called *folly*, to wit, in an eminent way and degree. 'Tis that which doth most, yea, that which doth in effect only mar and interrupt saints peace. That which, *v. 2.* is called *iniquity*,

ly, which he so graciously pardoned, is here called *folly*, because of the folly and madness that is in sin : And it is on this ground and account, that the sinner is so often called a *fool*, and *simple*, in the book of *Proverbs* ; and, *Eph. 5.* the apostle exhorts Christians to *walk, not as fools, but as wise* ; and, *Luke 15* the prodigal is said, when converted, to *come to himself*, as if he had been in a distraction and beside himself, all the while he was going on in his sinful way. This may be further clear, if we look, 1. To the vanity of the matter wherein men sin. Is it not folly for a man to sit tippling and debauching away his time, to be given to harlotry and filthiness, to neglect prayer, to curse and swear, to let his mind rove upon things that never were nor will be, and wherein there is no profit ? There is a great vanity in the matter of sin. 2. If we look to the sad effects and bitter fruits of sin, and to the great prejudice that comes by it, it will be found to be desperate madness, and dear-bought pleasure, which is but fancied and imaginary, and no real pleasure ; it mars the life of grace and of peace with God, and *treasures up wrath against the day of wrath* : See this verified eminently in *Ahab*, that prodigy of profound policy (*whose counsel in those days with David and Absalom, was, as if one had enquired at the Oracle of God*) the upshot of whose deep wit was rank folly, when he went and hanged himself : See it also convincingly made good, in the rich man in the gospel, to whom 'tis sadly and surprisingly said, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be taken from thee, and whose then shall those things be ?* And what advantage or wisdom is it, I pray, for a man to *gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul* ? O madly foolish bargain ! 3. If we look to sin with a spiritual eye, we will see folly in the very appearance and manner of it ; a wicked man in sinning is foolish-like, or looks as like a fool, as *David* did, when he played the *mad-man* before the king of *Gath*, *scrabbed on the doors, and let his spittle fall on his beard*. Is it not folly to see a man *labouring in the fire for very vanity, loading himself with thick clay, pursuing the east wind* ? He is just like a man in a frenzie, who imagines himself to be a king, and to be riding in great state and triumph, when in the mean time he is a poor, naked,

pitiful and despicable creature, in the eyes of all that behold him. 4 If we look to the spring, fountain and cause of it, there can be no just nor relevant reason given for sin; 'tis therefore, no doubt, folly. Is there, or can there be any thing that evidenceth mens folly so much, as their coming in tops with God, their walking in the way of death, their loving simplicity (as it is, *Prov. 1*) and their quitting the way of life? Now, the word of God is true wisdom, and the way of life is therein clearly holden forth, and God as our Pattern; and is there any thing more reasonable, than that we should live like, and be conform to the word of God, and to him of whom we ought to be followers? But sin thwarts with the whole word of God, and with God himself.

Take this passing word of *Use*; Study to be established in the faith of this truth, That sin, whether in doing that which is evil, or in the omission of duty, is the greatest folly. Such of you as will not be convinced of it now in time, within a few days or years ye shall be convinced of it to purpose, and to your eternal prejudice; the most blockish shall then see it to be folly, a highly hurtful, prejudicial, shameful folly, and desperate madness; the rich *glutton* and *Ahithophel*, and thousands more of worldly-wise-men, find it to be so, to their cost, in hell; Therefore the apostle saith, *Rom. 6. 21. What profit have ye in those things whereof ye are now asbamed?* And, had we spiritual eyes to discern the condition of the most part of men and women, who evidently ly still in black nature unrenewed, who slight the offers of grace, and who will not receive Jesus Christ; the veriest idiot in the world would not be a sadder spectacle to us, nor affect our hearts with more pity and compassion, than the lamentable case of the souls of such persons would; because *they forsake their own mercy, the sure mercies of David, and follow after lying vanities*, and weary themselves with a vain pursuit after that which cannot profit them. Alas for this folly!

Secondly, Observe, That, notwithstanding the greatness of this folly, God's people and saints were sometimes deep, yea even drowned in it, and are yet in part taken with it. Needs this any proof? *Ab!* *sinful nation* (saith the Lord to his  
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professing people, *Isa.* 1. 4.) a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers: The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but my people doth not know: O beastly Israel! inferior to the very brutes thro' the folly of sinning against God; and saith he, *Jer.* 2. Be astonish'd, O heavens, and horribly afraid; for my people have committed two great evils, they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and digged to themselves broken cisterns, that can hold no water: O egregious folly and demerited choice! How many professors of religion are there, who are foolish virgins? and how many foolish practices are there among the godly themselves? Let it not then be thought strange (as a word of *Use* from it) that not only among external professors, but even among real saints, there be found many acts of folly; tho' I grant it to be both sad and stumbling, when it is; which should, therefore, so much the more make them guard against the same.

Thirdly, Observe, God will sometimes speak peace to them that are given to folly, or are often found playing the fool. Of the truth whereof, as many as ever heard the gospel, and did partake of the grace of it, and are before the throne, and hope to be there, are as so many proofs, witnesses and living monuments. I shall clear what this speaking of peace is, in three steps: He speaks peace to them, 1. In his offering of peace to them, and by his meeting and treating with them in and by that offer, in his intreating or inviting them earnestly to come to him, who have wearied themselves, and spent their labour on that which profits not; pressing them to return, and assuring them that he will heal their backslidings, *Isa.* 55. *Jer.* 3. *Hos.* 14. and preaching peace through Christ Jesus, *Eph.* 2. counselling them to come and buy eye-salve of him, &c. and by his knocking and waiting at their door for admittance and entry, *Rom.* 3. Are not these words of peace to a foolish Church? 2. In making peace with some, when (as it is, *2 Cor.* 5. 20?) he not only prays and requests them to be reconciled, but really reconcileth them to himself, and saith, Peace be to you; pardoneth sin, taketh away the band-writing of ordinances that was against them, giveth them a discharge of their debt; that, when their sin is sought for, it is

is not to be found, because he hath pardoned it: And, *Hos.* 2. this is called an *aluring*, or (as the word is) a *speaking to the heart*. 3. In his not only taking away the controversy, and making peace; but in his intimating that peace, saying to the pardoned sinner, *Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace, I am thy salvation*: And then the promise, *John* 14. 21, 23. is fulfilled, when Christ breaks open doors, and comes in and *supps*, and *dwells*, his *Father and he*; and one main dish that is set on the table (to say so) is *peace*, as *v.* 27. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you*. 'Tis peace from God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. There are some special times wherein God speaks peace, such as solemn treating times and communion-days; and other special occasions are, when there hath been more than ordinary diligence in prayer, more than ordinary sorrow for sin, peace is readily spoken on the back of it; as also, trying and sadly exercising times are usually times of the intimation of peace: In a word, when and where his gospel comes, and is made lively, peace follows on it; and this is your time. O that peace may be found to have been spoken to many at this occasion!

Fourthly, O serve, *That in and about those times, when God hath spoken (or very urgently offered to speak) peace, there is often some restraint on people, as to the prevailing of their folly*; Some stop to the current of iniquity in its wonted manner and measure, in some more, and in some less; some more aw of God readily being on people then! Many will have a sort of righteousness, like a *morning-cloud and early dew, that soon passeth away*; some tickling of their affections, that quickly vanisheth; as the Lord saith of many of the *Jews*, that were hearers of *John*, who was a burning and a shining light, that they rejoiced in his light for a season: So, *Psal.* 106. 12. *Then believed they his words, they sang his praise; but they soon forgot his works, they waited not for his counsel*: And, *Psal.* 78. 34 *When he slew them, then they sought him: Nevertheless they flattered him with their lips, and lied to him with their tongues: for their hearts were not right with God, neither were they steadfast in his covenant*. And something of this was also, even in Christ's hearers, and in the *Galatians*, who at first would have plucked out their eyes, and given them

to *Paul*: So in the parable of the sower, some seed springs up and hath a fair appearance, but soon withereth; and other some holds out: So likewise at fasts and communions, affections will be readily somewhat stirred and warmed, and there will be many brave purposes and resolutions, such as were in the people, *Exod. 19.* when they said, *All that the Lord commands we will do.* And they look demur and grave-like for two or three days: the tippler keeps some days from the tavern; he that prayed not in secret nor in his family, will, it may be, pray for some time about and after such occasions; others will go further on: And yet it is but some restraint on their sin, or some fit and flash of affection, that is transient and quickly gone; and they turn again to folly. And even the godly themselves are here often found in a great measure guilty, as the following note will clear.

*Firstly, Observe, That even those people and saints, who have sometime been given to folly, to whom God hath spoken peace, and who have restrained their folly for a time, thereafter may much fall back to folly again.* The admonition here given, *Let them not turn again to folly,* supposeth this. This needs not much proof: If ye shall go through the saints recorded in scripture, ye will find sad instances of it; *David*, after peace was spoken to him, falls into adultery and murder; *Hzekiab*, after a sweet word of peace was spoken to him, *Isa. 38.* falls into the folly of pride and vain ostentation, *Chap. 39.* *Peter*, after peace spoken to him, denieth his Master; *Jehobaphat*, after peace spoken to him, fell once and again into the same sin, and once even after he was reprov'd for it; as is clear, *2 Chron. 18, 19, & 20. Chapters.* Or there may be a falling into some other sins, or out of one sin into another; as it was with *David*: This may befall real saints, yea eminent saints, even pillars in the house of God. Was there not peace spoken to the disciples, in that sweet sermon, *John 14, & 15, & 16. Chap.* and yet that sad word follows, *Ye all shall be offended because of me this night*; and *Peter*, to whom that sweet word was spoken, *I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not,* doth foully fall into folly quickly after: What then may befall the more common sort of professors,

sors, who know not what it is to stand before the least temptation? The *reasons* of this may be, 1. Because the devil falls presently on, and seeks, as it were, with seven worse devils to re-enter the soul, and busks this bait of the temptation, and presents it in a new shape; old courtiers (to speak so) and lusts set on, and essay what hearing they can get. 2. Because tho', by peace spoken, temptations and corruptions may be bound up, yea, and somewhat mortified; yet they are not slain outright; they may lurk for a time, but still live. And, 3. Because his people are ready in such a warm sun-blink to grow (as it were) wanton, and under such a cessation from their lusts, to cast by their arms, to grow secure, to grow somewhat too sain, and to dream of an easy life; thus it was in a measure with *David*, as he confesseth, *Psal. 30. I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved.* If they get peace for a little, who but they? *They are lords* (in a manner) *and will not come unto him*; or, if they win to a few tears and some liberty, they are readily puffed up, and in some sort bid their souls take them rest; as if they needed to trouble themselves no more; Therefore there are new on-sets, and the Lord lets them see how *vain* they are, even *in their best estate*; as we may perceive, in the Lord's dealing with *Hezekiah*, and with *David*, in that *Psal. 30. Thou didst hide thy face* (saith he) *and I was troubled.* O what folly, vanity and out-breaking of corruption do often follow on the back of a seeming work of turning to God, and a tender-like frame in professors of religion! So, *Psal. 106.* it is said, that *they provoked him at the sea, even at the Red-sea*; Even where and when they were in such a frame, that *they believed his words, and sang his praise*; they soon forgot his works, and waited not for his counsel: Which was, in a manner, at the very table to lift the heel against him. And O how sad and lamentable a thing is it, to be unwatchful after a communion, and an offer or an intimation of peace!

*Sixthly, Observe, That there is nothing more called for from a people, who have been given to folly, and have had peace spoken to them, than to take heed that they turn not again to folly; to take heed that they fall not into the same sins that they seemed to have abandoned and turned away from; that it be not with them, according to the true proverb,*

*proverb*, The dog is returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire, as it is, 2 Pet. 2. 22 Under which similitude, the apostle powerfully dissuades professors of religion from turning again to sin, by shewing the loathsomeness of it; it being as abominable, as a man's licking up that again which he hath vomited. This then is the duty that the Lord calls for; 1. That you should abstain from the sins that you have been given to, such as tippling, drinking drunk, swearing, sabbath-breaking, neglect of prayer and the like, and do so no more; not only not to relapse into the same sins, but that ye abstain from every other sin; It is not enough that a man break off from one sin, and take up with another; it is not sufficient, tho' a man will not be drunk in his neighbour's house, if in the mean time in his own house he tipple, play the good-fellow (as ye call it) and mispend his time. 2. Ye would consider, what engagements and resolutions ye have come under, and that ye fall not back from them; In a word, it is, Not to be as ye were wont to be; and that ye be found in no known sin, nor defective in any known duty.

We come now to the more particular and close application of the whole, in these *two Uses*. The *first* whereof is, for *advertisement* and warning, *Let him that stands, take heed lest he fall*; let him not look on himself as incapable to be stollen off his feet: Alas! persons may be in a manner exalted to heaven, and in a very good frame, in their own imagination and apprehension, and it may be in some measure really; and yet be brought back to the puddle and mire again, after they have shaken themselves and come out of it. In prosecuting this, we shall, 1. Shew wherefore we press it; And, 2. Wherein, or in reference to what we press it.

As for the first, viz. Wherefore it is that I do press this advertisement: And indeed it is not without very good ground, as ye will easily perceive, if, 1. Ye look to, and consider the best saints, and in their best condition; how soon are even they taken off their feet? Was not *David* often in a very good spiritual condition? and yet, how soon and foully did he fall into folly? Was not *Adam* in a good and desirable condition, when there was no quar-  
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rel betwixt God and him, nor any ground for it? and yet how soon was he ensnared? Was not *Peter* in a good state and frame, when Christ said to him, *Bless'd art thou Simon Bar-jona; flesh and blood hath not revealed that unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven?* and yet, within a very little, he turns again so far to folly, as to be the devil's instrument to tempt Christ; as is clear from *Matth. 16. v. 17.* compared with *v. 22.* Were not the disciples in a good condition, when our Lord had preached to them both the preparation and thanksgiving sermons, before and after the communion? and yet *they all were offended because of him, and forsook him and fled*, and that very quickly, even that same very night. Now, when such tall cedars fall, what need have we, who are but in comparison silly shrubs, and but as small straws, to take warning? 2. If we consider, that those sins and falls were often exceeding *sudden*, the same night, in the disciples (as I just now hinted) and in *Hezekiah*, very quickly after his recovery; exceeding *foul*, and exceeding *universal*, as in all the disciples; sometimes repeated, as in *Lot*, *Jethaphat*, and *Peter*; sometimes a plurality and variety of them joined together, as in *David* and *Aha*, and in his people at the *Red-sea* and in the wilderness; And who knows but the same very night, that ye were at the Lord's table, some of you were back at your folly? and others of you before night, may be. We said, not only *suddenly*, but *foully*; as is clear in *Adam*, who, when he had no corruption formerly, fell from God to the devil (and, by the way, many of you are so grossly ignorant, and wofully self-conceited, that ye think, if ye had been in his case, ye would not have done so.) And (as I hinted) what foul faults were *David's* adultery and murder, and *Solomon's* idolatry, at least his tolerating it, after *God hath spoken twice to him?* What a foul fault and fall was that of *Israel's*, after their so solemn engagements, and fair undertakings, *Exod. 19.* when within forty days they detestably and damnably danced before the golden calf? and what a foul fall was that of *Peter's*, to forswear Christ, by denying him with an oath? and of the rest of the disciples, unkindly and unworthily to forsake him and flee? And who knows but, shortly after this occasion, many of you that have been tipplers, may  
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grow worse, it may be, even to be found staggering in the streets? and that others of you, who prayed not before, may be heard cursing? Ye who are believers and saints indeed, would observe this, and know that there is need, great need of *watching and prayer, that ye enter not into temptation*: And if there hath been any idleness, lightness, vanity, mispending of precious time, or the like; guard, O guard against those. The reason why believers fall so often in gross sins, is their playing (as it were) with their petty idols; little things, given way to, lead on to greater and worse. 3. Am I now speaking of any strange, uncouth or unprecedented thing? Have ye never observed, how ye carried and behaved after communions before? Can ye say, but that, as many communions as ye have been at, there have been as many breaches? If ye have never failed before, ye may be secure now; but, if ye have failed and miscarried formerly, be the more wary and watchful now. 4. Have ye any knowledge of, and acquaintance with your own hearts? Is your corruption dead? Are your idols quite slain? or are they not rather like to those strange wives, in *Nehemiah's* time (who were put away) crying on you for pity (O cruel pity!) and weeping on you to be admitted to come home again? And have none of you so much foolish, fond and cruel pity, as to side with them? Hath a communion-day thrust out the devil fully? Are there no living lusts, nor strong corruptions within you? Do ye not see what a ready welcome temptations to sin are like to get? and find ye not a woful propensity to be glad that the restraint and aw-band of a communion-day is over and by? and doth not this press you to watch? 5. Try but how it hath been with you since the sabbath: Is not the bent ye had then, already very much slackened? Is not much of that seeming or really good frame of spirit gone? Is not the great part of your work yet before you? And is it not a greater difficulty, to make out an engagement, than to make it; to perform, than to promise? How is it then, that ye have in a great part laid by your arms, as if all were done? When ye have, as soldiers, put yourselves in battle array, and given your military oath, and gotten the sign and word of command, should you quit your post? beware of that; the matter is

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of greater concernment, than ye are aware of: Ye are yet but in a manner beginning.

For the *second* thing, *v. 2.* What it is wherein, or in reference to what we do press your taking warning, and being wary? And here I would have you, 1. To be aware not only of more gross sins, but even of all such things in general, which temptations use ordinarily to make their approaches and assaults by; as namely, little sins (little, I mean comparatively) *Is it not a little one?* saith Lot of Zoar. O how unsuitable was it for him, to whom the Lord had but a very little before spoken such a great and gracious word of peace, as that, *Depart, for I can do nothing so long as thou art here;* and yet the same night, or the morrow, this escapes him! And readily, when people fall once, they fall over and over again; but ye would beware to seek leave to lurk and lounge a while in such *Zoars*: Beware to say, It is a little sin; say not, I shall not be drunken, but I must have leave to tittle, and trifle over the time. The devil drives sin and temptation, as a carpenter driveth a wedge; he will teach and prompt you to say, We may be cheerful and sport us a while, without regard to the matter, measure or season, tho' ye be not profane: But once let in the point of the wedge by a little sin, and it may become a great one ere all be done, or a grosser one may follow, even as the great end of the wedge doth the lesser. 2. Beware of returning to omissions: Some, it may be, will resolve that they will never tittle, nor swear, nor commit any such things; but they will, it may be, neglect and omit to pray as they have (belike) done these few days past: Tho' they go not abroad to the tavern on the week-days, nor go idly in the fields on the Lord's day, yet they may mispend and trifle away their time at home; as if falling back into omissions, were not a turning again to folly, as well as falling back to commissions. The confessions of many poor creatures (who become publickly and prodigiously scandalous) on their death-beds or on a scaffold, that omissions of duty have predisposed them to, and brought on those gross commissions, may and should awake and alarm us: Ye would therefore, with holy *Job*, *make a covenant with your eyes,* and other senses, and make conscience to keep it.

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3. Beware of falling back to a secure coldrise manner of going about duties of worship alone or in company, in publick or in private: Let none of you think with yourselves, that, now this solemnity is over, ye need not wrestle in prayer, nor watch so strictly over your heart, but let it gad and rove, and not hedge it in on an ordinary Lord's day, as on a communion Lord's day; since there is no liberty allowed for an idle word or thought any day, more than there is on that day: Think it not enough that ye say your prayers morning and evening, and that none can charge you with any offence; God, the all-seeing God, observes you, whether you be universal, sincere and serious in the duties of religion. 4. Beware of neglecting spiritual and gospel-duties; such as, self-examination or self-searching, self-denial, mortification, and use-making of Christ: The neglect of these, and the like, may be some way called gospel-folly. It is no doubt great gospel-folly, when Christ (being freely and fully offered therein) is not improved for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption; when the power of godliness is not aimed at in duty, but people rest and sit down in the form thereof, which yet in some respect is more cumbersome than the power; for Christ improved makes all things go easily with us: Therefore, any of you who have looked on it as folly to neglect these spiritual duties, see that ye return not again to that folly. 5. Beware of unbelief: Have ye not resolved to cast out with that evil, and resolved to be no more jealous of God, tho' ye should meet with difficulties? Believers in Christ, lick not up that vomit again, *turn not again to that folly*, to which there is a secret natural bentness of heart: If (I say) unbelief and jealousy be a folly, take it not up, turn not to it again. 6. Beware of heart-ills. Possibly ye will not give way to more gross evils, and yet suffer your souls to be carried away after idols, or after vain, proud, ambitious, covetous, revengeful, filthy and lascivious thoughts: But, if in very deed Christ get the heart, he must reign in it, and command the eye, -tongue, ears, hands, feet and all. 7. Beware of falling back to the inordinate love of the world, and of letting the heart be too much addicted and glued to, even, lawful pleasures and creature-comforts, to your

your callings, wives, children, houses, lands and incomes of gain and profit; from which there hath been possibly some suitable abstractedness these days past. Ye should not only abstain from oppressing, stealing and deceiving; but ye would also guard against falling back to excessive pursuing after, and (as it were) glutting yourselves with the things of this world, however lawful in themselves. Alas! *primus licitis*: Inordinate love to, and immoderate pursuing after things lawful in themselves, destroy more souls, than things sinful and unlawful in themselves do: The excuses of those invited to the marriage of the King's Son, are founded, not on things simply sinful, but on lawful things, the farm, oxen and married wife. Now the house is swept, and ye are in hazard, if ye guard not, to return to a greater and greedier feeding on those vanities. I dare say, there are multitudes of men and women, who never so much hungered for the communion, as they have longed to have these solemn days over and by, that they might win back to their callings, worldly business and pleasures; O what a weariness have they been to them? as sacred solemnities were to those spoken of, *Amos 8. 5.* who cried, *When shall the new-moon be gone, that we may sell corn; and the sabbath-day, that we may set out wheat?* To many these days of fasting and spiritual feasting and communicating have been as a bridle-bit in their mouths, to restrain them from running on the mountains of their vanity; and who knows but, ere another communion come, the Lord may feed you as a lamb in a large place?

The *second Use* is for exhortation. Would you then know the duty that ye are called unto? this is it, *Let not God's people and saints turn again to folly*: Let not the idler return to his idleness, the tippler to his tippling; the scoffer to his scoffing; the ignorant, who have been at a little pains to learn some questions before the examination and communion, to his negligence in seeking after knowledge, &c. Let not this be; if ye have vomited out these and other sins, lick them not up again. To press this *Use* a little, we would, 1. Give you some considerations from the text. 2. Some directions to help you forward in the practice of it.

For the *first*, viz. Some considerations from the text to press

press it. 1. Is it not a folly to sin once? If so, sure it is much more to relapse into sin. Whether is it more true wisdom to abstain from those sins, or to fall back into them? Is it not more wisdom for you, who have been given to tippling or drunkenness, to neglect of prayer, and the like, now to let alone sin, and to give yourselves to prayer, than to be walking in the street on the *plain-stones*? Is it not more wisdom to be given to edifying discourse, than to be laughing and sporting over the time? Is it not better to come to the Church, than to spend the time idly, in discoursing and waiting for a temptation? And if your conscience assent to the truth of this, then we take witness in your conscience, that it doth so; and this instrument of witness will stand on record against you, if ye shall turn to those sins and to this folly again. 2. Have ye been examining yourselves? and do ye find, that much of your life hath been spent in folly, by some *twenty*, by some *thirty*, by some *forty*, by some *fifty*, by some *sixty* years; and every day's account cast up amounts only to folly, vanity and madness? And is it not enough, and may it not suffice you, that ye have spent so long time in folly, tho' ye spend no more so? 3. Hath not God been speaking peace to some, and given them the intimation of it? so that their souls have been made to say, *God is here*: And have they not gotten the bargain closed, and the handwriting that was against them torn? We hope, there are some such among us. Nay, are there any, but the Lord hath been offering peace to them, treating with them, saying, *Behold me, behold me*, intreating and requesting them to be reconciled? And hath there not been some tickling of the affections of many? If so, will ye be such fools as to fall back, and to wear out the sense of that peace and warmth that any of you have win to? And ye with whom God hath been meeting and treating about the pardon of sin, what a folly will it be, in place of getting a discharge, to increase and multiply your debt? 4. Are there not some engagements on you? Or, whatever be real, is there not a profession of coming under engagements? Are not the vows of God on some of you? Is there not some sin that hath stared you in the face, which ye have resolved to abstain from? And hath there not been some

stirring and tickling of desires to perform what ye have resolved and engaged to? And will ye break all these bands? Will ye repent and rue that ever ye engaged to God? If so, as ye notably play the fools, so the Lord will be about with you, and even spew you out of his mouth, that ye may puddle your fill in the mire of sin. 5. Is there not a great bentness and propension in all naturally to turn again to folly? Is there not *an evil heart of unbelief*, ready to depart from the living God? I have so much charity for you, as that you will grant this; and when the Lord hath said, *Watch*, and tells that *he is at hand that betrays you*, will ye go securely, and not take warning? O what desperate folly would this be! 6. Consider what will come of it, if ye shall fall back, if ye slacken your bent, and, growing cold, turn again to folly? Ye will wear out any bit of good frame that ye have obtained: Ye will blur and sully the real or supposed clearness of your interest, mar your peace, and become in a manner more beastly and swinish in your sinful way than before; at the very thoughts whereof, your hearts should scar, nauseate, and even grow sick. And what will be the upshot thereof? Either ye will repent, or never repent: If ye say, ye will repent; are ye sure that God will give you repentance, if ye shall hazard on some sin? Are not many given up to hardness of heart, who never come to repentance? Know ye what repentance is? have ye not been already essaying and doing somewhat at repentance, and have ye not found it difficult and hard to come by? And, if ye shall sin yet more, will not repentance be yet a greater, more difficult and hard work? And, suppose ye should get repentance, ye shall know the truth of that saying, *Jer 2. That it was an evil and a bitter thing to depart from the living God, and that his fear was not before your eyes*. O what shame and confusion of face will it bring with it, to remember that we had so many warnings from the word without, and so many convictions and challenges from our conscience within, and that yet we went over them, and with a high hand went on in our folly! Will those things be little, think ye? What pleasure or profit can ye have in those things, whereof ye will be ashamed? Yea, suppose ye come to repentance (and a hundred to one if ever ye come

come to it) ye shall weep and mourn bitterly, that ever ye hazarded so on sin, over your light and convictions, and over the belly of your conscience. If ye get not repentance (as I am afraid many never shall) what will come of it? Convictions and challenges will wear out, the heart will grow harder; you will go on laughing at reproofs, mocking at exhortations to repentance and reformation, and regardlessly treading on what might reclaim you; you will be angry at them who brought you under any engagements; ye will become very *Atheists* in your hearts, and as so many profane *Heathens* in your carriage: And when you have lived thus for a time (and the Lord knows how long) will ye not come to die? will not your month come on you? will not your bed take you, or ye take your bed; and then the conscience will either awake, or be silent: If it awake, will not this be your language, which is the language of many a poor wretched creature? Wo is me, I have mispent my time, and have been glutting myself with the world and sinful pleasures; Oh vain world! O bewitching and beguiling world! Alas that ever I was so much taken up with it! And, if the conscience be quiet, what will come of it? Will that sin ly on, and not be sought account of? Know ye not, consider ye not that word, *Gal. 6. Be not deceived, God will not be mocked; as men sow, so they shall reap?* Think ye that God will be inferior to the creature? will not your governor or landlord seek account of you according to your engagement; and shall not the Lord call you to a reckoning? Yea, certainly: And the conscience will then awake and roar on you; then the curse, wo and damnation will seize upon; and take hold of your soul in death; and devils shall carry it thither, where hypocrites are, until the judgment of the great day; and then ye will say, Turning again to sin was the greatest folly and madness: And thus, whether God have a purpose of repentance to you or not, ye shall one day rue it at all the veins of your heart (to speak so) and shall find the folly of it, and that to your everlasting prejudice and loss, if ye repent not.

And therefore, let me press this use upon you, and earnestly exhort you to let these considerations sink down into your ears and hearts: Beloved, we are jealous over-



you, and would God it were *with a suitable godly jealousy!* We are afraid that many, ere we be aware, be down in their former puddle, that ignorance and profanity be as rife as ever; there have been so many fits and good appearances, and of so short continuance heretofore: And now ye have been making some mint; but what will come of it, if ye fall back? If these ordinances shall do you no good, we know not what will do it: I think ye were never nearer to some great *crisis*, to a nick of being lost or gained; we have you (as it were) *in the very place of the breaking forth of children*, so that now you must be either safely and fairly delivered, or prove abortives. Ah! are our fasts and communions to no purpose? Are all your purposes and resolutions, your engagements, and seeming willingness to engage, in vain and to no effect? If ye shall fall back after this, and turn again to folly, I do not much expect that any ordinances or future engagements shall do you much good: We must either look for better and more fruit, or there will be more barrenness and stubbornness; either ye shall be more holy, or more of that old sin of malignity, stoutness of heart against God, and more opposition to godliness shall bud amongst you: We would from our very souls wish you brought well thorow, but are afraid there be a sticking. Why is it, I pray, that we insist so much with you, if we were not jealous over you? Will ye have faces to hold up before God, when ye and we shall be reckoned with, if ye shall fit these warnings? or, what heart can we have to go about his service amongst you, if yet there be a sticking; and when there is some wrestling to get you up the hill (as it were) and ye run further down than ever? O to be mightily helped of God to travail in birth, to have Christ formed in you, and formed in you again! Is it probable, when many of you are brought further up than before, if ye fall further back, that ever ye will win up again? We apprehend, that there are many of you, who shall never again, with so much moral seriousness, be wrought upon, if there shall not be now some abiding and effectual work, but a *turning again to folly*. It is not, beloved hearers, the fruit of one preaching or two, that we are now driving at; but the great scope of this blessed gospel:

pel: Therefore, for Christ's sake, hold at it, come forward, and go not back; *O turn not again to folly*: Else be assured, that the Lord and your own consciences will bear witness, and we his servants will also bear witness against you (as many of you will bear witness against us, if we shall do so) if, after God hath *spoken peace* to you, ye shall *return again to folly*. Let me yet add this one word further, for pressing this; Will ye but consider what we are seeking? is it not your real good and advantage? is it any hard or unreasonable thing that we crave of you, or any uncouth thing, or any thing but that which *Abraham, David, Paul*, and others of the saints, were desirous and studious to be at, yea, and our blessed Lord Jesus himself was content to be at? Tho' he was never indeed tainted with any folly, yet he was content and careful to fulfil all righteousness; and what seek we of you, but that ye would seek and labour to imitate him; that ye would prevent your own loss and ruin, and give Christ a kindly and a hearty welcome, in order to the exercise of all his offices about you; that *his heart may be made glad*, and that *he may see of the fruit of the travail of his soul to his satisfaction*, in the salvation of a number of souls in *Glasgow*? O that we could get you prevailed with to be as serious in these things, as ye are in and for the things of this present life; and that we could get as great vent (to speak so) for Christ's precious wares amongst you, as a man would get for some rare commodity, nay (may I or shall I say?) but even for tobacco! Alas that incomparably precious Jesus Christ, and his purchase, the everlasting covenant, even *the sure mercies of David*, should have less vent and sale, than that and an hundred other commodities have! this is a lamentation, and should be for a lamentation. Always let bygones be seriously reflected on, and see that by all means ye *turn not again to folly*.

As for the *second* thing, proposed, *viz.* Some *directions*, for preventing your turning again to folly: Ye may take these few, and the Lord himself put them home with a strong hand. *1st*, then, Walk in fear; *Serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice before him with trembling. The wise man sees the evil, but the fool passeth on and is confident.* There is a sort of spiritual pride, vanity and self-conceit, reign-

ing amongst ordinary professors, and too much of it prevailing amongst believers, that undoes them. Are there any of you afraid of fornication and adultery, or of turning giddy sectaries and the like? Your want of fear brings you into the mire, ere ye be aware; *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty mind before a fall.* The little fear that is amongst the most part says, that some black turn (as we use to speak) is in their hands, or some foul fall before them: Hence the apostle, *Philip. 2. 12.* exhorts, *Work out the work of your own salvation with fear and trembling*; and, *2 Cor. 7. 1.* to *perfect holiness in the fear of God.* 2dly, Observe well and lay due weight on that exhortation of our Lord, *Matth. 26. 41.* (which hath several directions in it) *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation*; look about you, be not secure, stand by your post, let nothing go out nor come in without strict examination, and seek (as it were) after its pass, and set (as it were) a sentinel at the port of every sense; *And what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch,* saith the Lord, *Mark 13. 37.* Be not secure; watching is a most suitable duty for Christ's soldiers: Fail not to join with it much prayer, not for the fashion, but that which is in the Spirit and fervent; yet lay no weight on it, as if ye could merit any thing by it, but go about it humbly and seriously, in order to the entertaining the life of grace; sit not up in it, but rather double your diligence. 3dly, Keep the heart well; heart-ills are the principal ills: *Keep* (saith Solomon, *Prov. 4.*) *the heart with* (or above) *all keeping*; set your main force to guard it, for there Satan keeps his court and head-quarter, and thence gives his orders to the outward senses: Dally not with sin in the heart, else it will come a further length. 4thly, Forget not your engagements, but let the vows of God ly on you, and have due weight with you: Let not the sins that ye discovered and saw in your self-examination between God and you, before ye came to the communion-table, be forgotten; but remember them, to repent of them, and to renounce them; And when one knot (to say so) of your engagement looseth, cast another faster; or, if a knot were weak, strengthen it, or cast a new one; for, as acts of

faith

faith must be renewed, so must acts of engaging to God. 5thly, Be much in the exercise of repentance for your hy-gone folly; *My sin* (saith David, Psal. 51.) *is ever before me*. Think not repentance to be the work of a day or two; look back and reflect on your old sins of tippling, swearing, enmity at godliness, &c. For, if ye wear out of the exercise of repentance, ye will wear in, piece and piece, on your old sins; against which repentance is a notable bar: Being much in the exercise of repentance, keeps the heart sober and watchful, and loth to hazard on sin, and withal makes sin bitter; but the *Antinomian* way takes off all restraints, and looseth the reins to sin: It is much now to see a penitent; I wish there may be much repentance in secret; but, for any thing that is seen, 'tis very rare. 6thly, In an especial manner, be much in improving the strength of Jesus Christ, to prevent your *turning again to folly*. Do not undertake nor engage in your own strength, but believingly lay all the weight and stress on your Surety; put his name in the band, which he gave to God, for the debt of duty: *Abide in me, and I in you, so ye shall bring forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing*, saith our Lord to his disciples, *John* 15. But how many fail and come short here, while they go about duties, and either quite misken or make but very little use of Christ? Many know very little or nothing at all, what it is to make use of Christ, in order to their making of their peace with God; but O how very few know what it is to make use of his strength to enable them for duty, and to *go through the wilderness leaning on their Beloved!* 7thly, Defer not to make your resolutions and engagements practicable; there are many, alas! who think shame, it should be said, that a sermon had so much weight with them, as to make them alter and change their course at once: It may be, they will consent to be religious, but they must be allowed to come to it by degrees, and to creep toward it piece-mail; but beware of that, lest it prove in the issue to be a shift of thy deceitful heart: Ponder these words well, *Ecc. 5. Defer not to pay what thou hast vowed, for the Lord hath no pleasure in fools*; and, in the Holy Ghost's account, he is a fool that deferreth and putteth off one moment. O! delays are in a special manner dan-

rous here, and Satan will not fail to knit one delay to another. 8thly, Reject all temptations to sin and *turning again to folly*, with abhorrence; say, with *Ephraim*, *What have I any more to do with idols?* Never think on them, but with indignation and holy disdain; for ye are undone, if ye but once listen to them. 9thly, Be often examining, if ye be like and answerable to your communicating, and to your promises and engagements; many know not how it is with them, because they examine not. 10thly, Walk humbly in the sense of your weakness: Trust not to your own heart; for he that doth so, is reputed to be a fool, by the Holy Ghost. 11thly, Be helping one another forward in your way to heaven: *Take heed* (saith the apostle, *Heb.* 3. 12, 13.) *that there be not in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God: But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* To be edifying to others, would, through God's blessing, be edifying to yourselves, and help you to be in good case; to be praying with them would stir up yourselves to more seriousness in the exercise of that duty; to be reproving sin in them, would waken up more hatred of it in yourselves; and to be much conversant in the duties of mutual edification with them that are warm in their love to Christ, to his interests and friends, and diligent in the study of holiness, would readily through grace stir you up to seek after more love and more holiness; as he insinuates in that exhortation to the Christian *Hebrews*, chap. 10. 24. *Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works.* 12thly, and in a word, Endeavour to walk suitably to your light; your own consciences will readily tell you, that it is best to walk so, as ye may abstain from that which ye know to be sin, and to be doing and delighting in that which ye know to be duty. There are very few (if any) duties of religion, but they are one time or another, and many of them frequently laid before you; and not a few shall, I hope, have cause of blessing God eternally, that ever this gospel-light was made to shine so clearly on them: But for such of you, as *detain the truth of God in unrighteousness* (as the apostle says, *some do*, *Rom.* 1.) or make a prisoner of it, by setting a guard of corrupt affections about it; *Whom*  
God

God gave up to vile affections, and to all sorts of most abominable filthiness, because, though they knew that such things ought not to have been done, yet they not only did, but took pleasure in them that did them: I leave it, with all the seriousness I can win to, on you, and take instruments of witness in your consciences, that ye have had great offers, and have made fair mints, and come under, at least, seeming engagements: If ye have not done so, declare so much; but, since ye all profess that ye have engaged, and some have really engaged, *not to turn again to folly*; walk suitably to your engagements, as ye would not have your consciences condemning you, and God who is greater than your consciences to condemn you. Many, I fear, have sleeping consciences, and that will not now speak to them; but the conscience of every one will speak at length, and not keep silence. We shall now say no more, but pray that this word may be blessed of God to you.



*These Five following Sermons were all preached about the Time of the Communion; the first Four within a very few Days before it, as it gradually approached; the Fifth after it,*

On Jeremiah 50. v. 4, 5.

*In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: They shall go, and seek the Lord their God.*

*Vers 5. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.*

## S E R M O N I.

**T**HE repairing and making up of a breach betwixt God and a people, is a matter of greatest moment and concern; and, when men are serious in it, *O* how uptaking is it to them! Which is holden out to the life