

SERMON I.

2 COR. 1:12. For our rejoycing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-wards.

It is no great bussiness, but a very ordinary thing for a man to be chearful when he is in prosperity, and hath all things in the World smiling on him (though often, even in the midst of that laughter the heart is sorrowful, and there is an emptinesse, and utter insufficiency in all these things, to make the heart truly glad) but this is a great matter, a very rare thing, and to be found but with very few, viz. In the midst of afflictions, reproaches, tribulations and persecutions to be chearful, and rejoycing, and (as it is, Isa. 24:15. to be glorising God in the midst of the fires; This is Paul's practice, and exercise here, who being (as the words before hold forth) brought so near death, that he even dispared of life; who having to do with Professors and Preachers of the Gospel, that made it their bussines to defame his Person, and to depretiat, and disparage his Ministry; Who being riviled, buffeted, persecuted, and counted as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things; who being alwayes delivered unto death; and made a gazingPage 185stock to the world, to angels, to men; and being moreover put to wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but also with principalities and powers, and spiritual

wickedness in high places; yet hath this for his rejoycing, the testimony of his conscience, and so forth.

Not to insist on the Connection, We have in the words these Four things, 1. Paul's continued chearfulnesse, notwithstanding his formerly mentioned ???, This is our rejoycing. 2. The ground and rise of this spiritual, and solid joy, that no affliction can remove from him, The testimony of our conscience; in his affliction and tribulation he taketh a back-look of his way, and findeth his Conscience no simply speaking, but testifying good on his behalf, telling him, that though he and his fellows were accounted deceivers, and unknown. yet they were true and well-known, and so forth. As it is, 2 Corinthians 6. v. 8:3ly. The extent, or amplification of this ground, 1. More generally, we have had our conversation in the world, (which is to be restricted to Paul's Conversation after his Conversion, in his Ministry, and otherways; For, though a natural man may have a blamless visible Conversation, yet it is not such as a renewedman hath for the ground of his rejoycing) 2. More particularly, he not only had a good Conversation, as to the general tract of his Life, but in his carriage towards the Corinthians in particular, with whom he had been so much, and so long conversant; and more abundantly to you-wards; what ever they might, through the suggestion, and instigation of false Teachers, have been disposed, and ready to upbraid him with, yet he had the Testimony of his sincerity, and integrity, as to what all the world could say of him, which he alleadgeth, and more abundantly towards you; Partly to show his distinctnes in searching

his Conscience, not by the Lump (to speak so) but as to the several parts and pieces of his Life; and partly to obviate an Objection, or Calumny that might arise among them, where his conversation was most; and most carped at. 4ly. We have the Characters Page 186 whereby he confirms this Testimony of his Conscience, or the qualifications of it, whereby his confidence of having it, is confirmed; Which are Four, The 1. whereof is negative, not by fleshly wisdom, Not seeking my own ends, nor my own good in a carnal way; neither by carnal reason prosecuting the work of the Ministry; The other three are positive, The 2. Is simplicity, that is, a holy singleness in reference to the end; He was a straight upright single man, and in nothing double. The 3d. is, That is was in godly sincerity; And this not only as it's opposit to gross hypocrisie, and dissimulation, but as it differs from meer moral honesty; he walked not only in a civil moral honest way, as meerly moral and civil men use to do, in their Barganings, and other Dealings, but in godly sincerity, doing every thing as in God's sight; as he says of himself, Chap. 2. v. last. We are not as many, who corrupt the word of God, but as of sincerity, as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ: The 4. Character whereby he proves that he had this Testimony and was assured of it, is, that he did not what he did by his own strength, or by the strength of nature, but by the grace of God; Which shows (as we said before) that this Testimony reached no further then from the time of his Conversion: The first of these positive Characters, or Evidences shows the singleness of his end; The second,

shows his singleness in the way of prosecuting that end; The third shows the principle whereby, or where from he acted; it was not carnal reason that gave him counsel, nor nature that strengthened him, but Grace.

In these words then, we have, First, A short and sweet compend of a Christian and comfortable life, and of the advantage of a good Conscience. 2. We have the way how to attain, and how to entertain, and maintain the same. The apostle (in a word) being now put to it, and having both Foes and Friends on his top, he taketh a back look of his Life, and reflects on what was his carriage towards all men, and towards the Corinthians more particularly, and finds his Conscience testifyingPage 187for him, as to both; and on this Testimony of his Conscience, well proved, and made out, he quietly settles and joyfully cheaeth himself. Having already spoken of what use should be made of Conscience before, and in the time of our doing anything; we have now chosen these words, to show what use should be made of Conscience in reference to what is past: Not to stand on every thing that might be observed from them, we shall astrick ourselves to this scope, viz. To point out the right use making of Conscience, it's sense and Testimony of our Way and Actions, after they are past; and the Duty of a Believer in trying his bygone course of Life, and every part thereof, as to Conscience it's Testimony of it, or as to what Conscience can say concerning it.

1. Then Observe but in passing, That Conscience can signify it's mind to a man concerning his Actions, and

Conversation of a long time past, so that though he hath been in such a Countrey among such a people, about such and such an Action many years ago, Conscience reflected upon, hath a facultie (to speak so) of signifying it's sense thereof, as of every other Action of his Life; much of Paul's time was now past, and a part of it in the Ministry at Corinth, yet looking so far back, his Conscience gives him this Testimony. Which will be further clear, if we consider, first, The experience and practice of the Saints, in attesting their Conscience, in past, and in long since past Actions; Na we suppose there are few, or rather none at all, but their Conscience will sometimes challenge them, for a evil Action that is by their hand, and that for a considerable time; Iosephs Brethren are a famous instance of the truth of this: Now, if it can Challenge, or Accuse, it can also Excuse and Approve a man, and testify for him, when he hath done well; For excusing is as extensive in a good case, as accusing is in an evil. 2. It's clear also, from the office of the Conscience; which (as we show) is not only to dictat, and to be an observing companion, but to be a Judge; whichPage 188supposeth for ordinary, the thing to be past; Therefore, 1 Iohn 3:22. both the condemning and absolving of the heart is spoken of; Which inferreth, that the Conscience (called there the heart) hath a way of recognoscing of, and passing Sentenc on a man's way, and actions, not only, while they are a doing, but when past.

2ly. Observe (which is that we mainly intend to speak to) That it is a main piece of a tender walk, and of the practice of Christian, to be reflecting on his bygone way,

and trying what Conscience sayeth of it; not only (as I have often aid) to deliberat and advise with Conscience before, and to carry Conscience along in the time of the Action; but when the thing is past, it may be many years since, and as to the course of his Life; to be looking in, and reflecting on what Conscience sayeth, for, or against him: This is Paul's practice here; he cannot have the Testimony of his Conscience until he have asked it, and tryed it, and laid his conversation in the general, and his carriage among the Corinthians in particular before it; And if the former Doctrine be a truth, this will follow; that a tender Christian will be reflecting on his bygone way, and trying what his Conscience sayeth of it, and of his Actions; Except we will say that a man may be tender, and not take heed to his Conscience; to which for this end, God hath given it this reflecting power, or facultie (to say so). It will also be more clear, if we look to the practice, and experience of the Saints, who, the more tender they have been, the more they have been in reflecting this way; if we look to Job, we will find, that most of all the discourses he hath, are so many reviews of his Conscience; particularly, Chap. 23:11. He sayeth, My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kpt, and not declined, neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips, I have esteemed the words of his mouth more then my necessary food; How is it that he speaketh so confidently, but from reflecting on, and from the Testimony of his Conscience? Therefore, chap: 27:3, 4, 5. He sayeth, All the while my breath is in me, Page 189 and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils, my

lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit, I will not remove my integrity, my righteousness will I hold fast, my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live; Importing that he cannot find his Conscience challenge him as to that wherewith his Friends did charge him; So likewayes, Chap. 31:1. He says, I made a covenant with mine eyes, why then should I look upon a maid? And he goeth on through the Chapter, particularly making it to appear, that he had been searching, and trying, and taking notice of his way, and of all the pieces and parts of it. And that therein his Conscience had given him a good Testimony: Thus David, Psalm 7:3. sayeth, Lord my God, if I have done this, if there be iniquity in my hands, if I have rewarded evil to him, and so forth. Psalm 26:2. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me, try my reins and my heart; And, Psalm 139:23. Search me, O Lord, (sayeth he) and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me: All which supposeth his own tryal accomplished in, and of his Conscience to have gone before: Yea, not only the Believer, but the Believer in the tenderest frame, is most in this work; Therefore in the most serious exercise of Repentance, under the greatest manifestations of God's presence, and the most abundant pourings out of his Spirit, and when nearest to Death; they are most ready to reflect on Conscience; which sheweth, that not only we should do it, but that the more tender Persons be, they will be the more in this duty: and there is also good reason for it, For 1. A man cannot know his condition except he reflect, and search what his Conscience hath to

say of it; And it's not the bare remembring of the Action, but the considering of it, by bringing it before, and trying it by the Rule of the Word, in the ourt of Conscience, so as to have it's approbative Testimony, that maketh it passe for eurrent. 2ly. Because, as a man knoweth not how to judge of what is past, so neither how to carry for time to come; what he hath to repent of, or what hePage 190hath to amend in his way, except he take a review, and back-look of it, as to the time past: It's the finding of such a thing to be wrong that maketh him say, This I had need to repent of, and this I had need to watch against for time to come; Therefore these two are put together, Psalm 119:59:69. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies, I made haste, and so forth. The examination of his bygone way, helped him to go on right for the time to come. 3ly. Because hardly will a tender man come to prayer without this; He knoweth not what to confesse, nor what to seek, except he reflect, and consider what he hath to confess unto, o to seek from God; And sure a man cannot be tender, if he pray not: Therefore these two are joined together, Zech. 12:10. I will pour (sayeth the Lord) upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Ierusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications, and they shall look upon him whom they have peirced, and mourn; Hence it is found in experience, that the more insight a man hath in his bygone way, the more liberty he hath in prayer; and that deadness and drynesse in prayer flow much from the want of self-reflection. 4ly: Because this is the way for a man to win at peace; and no man can be tender, and have

solid peace that cares not what his Conscience speaks to him, whether good or evil, peace or war; and he can never know what it sayeth except he reflect and try: And it is from this, that even Paul himself cannot have peace, nor joyce, until he try his peace and joy to be the effects of Conscience it's Testimony, and Conscience Testimony to be the consequent of self-examination.

The Uses of the Doctrine are Four, the first wherof, is for instruction, The 2d. For tryal, The 3. For exhortation. The 4. For reproof, and expostulation.

The 1. Use, I say, s for nstruction, would ye know, and be instructed in a main piece of a Christian walk, and practice, here it is, to be often reflecting on your bygone way, and hearing what Conscience sayeth of it; To belooking from your youth up, what ye have done, Page 191 what have been your more habitual thoughts, words and actions, and hearing what Conscience sayeth of them, of such a word or discourse, of such a voyage or journey, and so of other actions; and to be putting it to passe it's Sentence on them, and to be trying whether we have peace in them, and Conscience it's good Testimony concerning them, or not. To this purpose we might alleadge that place, Revelation 4. v. 6, 8. (Which we suppose to be mainly? and most properly meant of tender Ministers of the Gospel, yet it may well by proportion be applied to tender privat Christians) Where these Four beasts are said to have eyes before? and behind, and to be ful of eyes within; Eyes before, intimating that they should be tender in finding out what is to be done; Eyes

within, intimating that they should be watchful over their own heart, and way, over their own present frame and walk, looking not only before, behind, and about them, but within themselves; And Eyes behind, intimating that tender Christians should have, and in some measure indeed have, an eye (as we use to speak of very watchful, and accurately observing persons) in their neck, looking to what sticks and cleaveth to their heels, as it were, when they have past any Action or Duty, as the word is Psalm 49:5. Where the Psalmist speaketh of the iniquity of his heels compassing him about; As knowing well that in every step of his way, he leaveth some owl vestige, or print behind him, and therefore looketh back on it: This then we propose as a piece, and a special piece of a tender walk, viz. That Christians, not only deliberate before they do, and look to Conscience while they are adoring, but that also they reflect, and look back upon the Action, when it is done and past. To clear this a little further, there are Three main things that a Believer is called to, in reference to what is past, 1. Examination of himself, and his way, 2. Laying of himself and his way? to and before his Conscience informed by the Word, 3. Judging of himself according as he findeth his way to be, when he hath laid it before his Conscience: We need not curiously and nicely differencePage 192these, for they go alwayes together when a man is right; His examination of himself, and of his way, the examination of his way by his Conscience, and his selfjudging; yet they may be some way differenced: selfexamination is more large, and extensive, taking in the whole that a man

is concerned in, his ecklenesse, and his need, as well as his sinfulness; but reflecting on Conscience considereth a man's way as sinful, or not sinful only; self-examination is a gathering, as it were, of things together; but reflecting on Conscience is a laying of them to the Rule, a putting of them to the touch-stone; self-examination is the mids, Conscience-reflection is the end; And if any should offer to divide them, the gathering of things together by self-examination, will not signifie much, except they be tryed by Conscience; self-examination is antecedent to the Sentence of the Judge; self-judging is subsequent, as a Ratification of that which Conscience hath said, when we have examined, and found out things, and when Conscience hath on reflection agreeably to the Rule, given it's Sense and Sentence: Our judging of ourselves is our homologating, or owning, applying and taking home to us the Sentence that Conscience hath past, as it were from our own mouth; somewhat like that word, Romans 8:16. The spirit itself beareth witnesse with our spirits, that we are the children of God; In our self examination, and judging we are active, but in Conscience it's passing Sentence, we are passive, as being therein ??? before the Judge, and when Conscience hath said, we say: however we put them together, and have marked it for this reason; because oft-times, when we examine, and take a look of ourselves, and of our way, we are disposed to think that we have done enough, and as soon as the Iditement is read, we run away from the Bar, and do not abide, and stay for Conscience it's decision, as if we knew what it

will say before hand; again some-times we are disposed to Judge ourselves, and to passe, or leap over both examination, and consciences Sentence; being thusPage 193precipitant, and preposterous to prevent any trouble and apprehended horror that may attend the Sentence of Conscience; and are ready to say, that we know not what it will say, before it be put to the ryal; And this is a reason why many will take with a conviction, but it hath no weight with them, nor ??? to them, because it is their own, as it were, and not Conscience it's Sentence; Therefore ye would by all means join together theseThree; use Self-examination, Judge and passe Sentence on yourselves (as we are willed, 1 Corinthians 11:28:31.) But miss not this cupe, viz Reflecting upon, and observing of what Conscience hath to ay; for this ??? the first and the last together, and if they be no thus knit, they will fall assunder and come to nothing.

The 2d. Use is for tryal, take it then for an evidence and mark of a tender Christian, thus to reflect on a persons walk, and actions, when he hath done them? The tender Christian will thus reflect on his way and actions done, though it were for many years past, and will judge impartially according to what Conscience hath to say of them; They here behave like unto faithful Ambassadors, or Messengers, who being Commissionat in some bussinesse, and having gone about it, will sist themselves before these that gave them the Commission to hear their Judgment and Sentence of their management of the bussinesse committed to them; ??? they are unfaithful that receive such a Commission, and never give an

account of their discharge of it, nor wait for the Sentence of its giver; even so tender Christians will not only consult with, and take direction from Conscience, what, and how to do, but will also turn back, and see, if Conscience doth approve of what they have done, and of their manner of doing: Now, when we speak of this, we do not say, that it is always the mark of a tender Christian, that the man hath Conscience speaking for him, for Conscience may be misled, and its Testimony in that case signifies little; But this we say, that it is a mark of a tender Christian to be always singly trying whether it be for him, or against him; and it will be found in the experience of all tender Christians; Whereas these that walk at random without all circumspection, look not thus to Conscience; yea, even Believers themselves, when in an untender frame, desire not much to come in Conscience its sight, (to speak of) The reason is, because, as it is, Ioh. 3. v. 20, 21. Every one that doth evil hateth the light, least his deeds, should be reprov'd; but he that doth truth cometh to the light; (to the light of the Word, and of his Conscience informed by the Word) that his deeds may be manifest, that they are wrought in God. It's no small part (I say) of this Light, even Conscience its Testimony; And it says that the sincere man desireth to know, if he be right or wrong, and that he likes not to entertain the thoughts of any practice or deed of his to be right, when it is not so in truth; and that withall he allows not himself to judge of his deeds merely by himself; but to submit them to the Sentence of his Conscience, according to the Word.

To clear this a little, we shall point at some Characters of a person that is suitably serious and tender, in reflecting on his Conscience, and that 1. In respect of it's extent, and then 2ly. In respect of the effects of it.

First, then, as to the Extent, 1. He reflecteth on, and tryeth all his Actions, even the whole tract and current of his Life, as Paul doth here, his conversation in the World, and towards the Corinthians. 2ly. He reflects on, and tryes his very best Actions, were it even those of a man's Ministry, of his Preaching, Prayer, and so forth. Not as some, who think it enough to reflect only on sinful Actions, such as swearing, lying, deceiving, oppressing, and so forth. Which need but little tryal, the sinfulness of them being often obvious, as it were at first blush; but the tender man tryeth these Actions that have the best appearance, that he may know, if they be in very deed, what they appear to be. 3ly. He is particular in his tryal, he not only tryeth his conversation in the general, but (as Paul doth here) his conversation at such a time, Page 195 so such a place, and in such company; O! in how many particulars doth holy Job instance, Chap. 3. 4y A tender man will go far back; even when old, to the sins of his youth, as David doth, when he prays, Psalm 25:7. Remember not against me the sins of my youth. I remember godly Augustin in his Confessions, goeth as far back as he can remember and not only so, but he says, that when he looked on the little cankerings, and roudness of infants, he was put to think of what were the first out-breakings of his sinful nature, when he was on the breast; David looketh far back, when he says,

Psalm 51:5. I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. 5ly. He is frequent in reflecting and trying, and the more tender, the more frequent; he will not readily let slip, nor suffer to pass one day without it; yea, he will sometimes try often in one day, on the back of this and that piece of his walk, especially of any more Solemn Action; yea, (which is yet more) he will come often over one and the same Action, or thing, so that when he hath taken a look of it to day, he will take another look of it tomorrow; knowing that there is a depth of iniquity in the heart, that is not soon nor easily plumbed; he looketh often on the same Action, that he may find it out, that the discovery and sense of it may be the more fresh, and deeply affecting for his humiliation; it's on this ground that the apostle speaketh of his having a good Conscience; wherof, if the Testimony be approving, the frequent going over it, maketh it to be the more vive, clear, and comfortable.

Secondly, This may be known (as I said) by the effects of it, which are notable; For, 1. A tender man that is frequent in reflecting thus, is a watchful man; The bying of Conscience by it's challenges for past, and bygone???, make him look better to himself for the time to come; and put him, with holy and tender Job, Chap. 31. To make a covenant with his eyes, that he may look right on, and not wander; To covenantPage 196with his Affections, that they wander and range not up and down in pursuit of the World, ad of the variety of vain Objects therein, to the diverting of him from a close and conant pursuit after God. 2. He can give a distinct account of

himself, and of his way, and doth not readily and easily forget things, but is in case to give an account of this which he did, and of that which he spoke; As Job instanceth, in a multitude of particulars, Chap. 31. He can give a legend, as it were, of his Life: which I fear but few of us can do, to good purpose, this way; I remember that holy man Augustin tells, that at such a time, while he was singing a Psalm, he observed his heart ready to stry, and to be more taken up with the external Musick, then with Spiritual Joy in God; and relates several of his pranks, when he was a Child. 3 He is a man distinct, and full in the consession of Sin; He never wanteth an evil tale (to speak so) to tell of himself, yea, he must, and will tell it, when it may glorify God, and edify others; he can speak particularly of the evil of his heart, and of his way, he is not a stranger to it, neither doth he hide his sin as Adam, as Job speaks, Chap. 31. v. 33. It is sure, one great reason, why we are so little in the exercise of Repentance, even that we are so little in the exercise of Self-reflection. 4. He is suitably affected with that which he discovereth; he not only seeth his way with this and that, and the other Action, but it toucheth him; one great reason why we see somany Sins, and are so little affected with them, i, that we take not the Censure of them from Conscience, and consider not duly, what weight it's sense and censure of them should have with us; and by proportion, this is a reason why Christians are so little comforted in good Actions. 5. The reecting? tender man is a praying man; as he is much i cossing of Sin, so he is much in Prayer, and Serious in it, and at no time readily

more frequent, and serious then when his Sin is before him; as Davids sin was ever before him, Psalm 51:3. Which makes himPage 197so very serious in Prayer there; and as he is serious in prayer, so he hath much holy indignation at Sin, and a great loathing at himself for it; he can speak suitably of it, and demonstrat the vilenesse of it to the Life, and aggravat it to the height; while he says, Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; He looks not at it, as a Sin of inimity, but as a sin committed with a high hand; I know (sayeth he) thou lovest truth i the inward parts, but I have thus far plaid the hypocrite coming out with a fair show before men, when sin was raging in secret within me; Thus, 2 Corinthians 7:11. True Repentance is described from it's Effects? t hath holy and high indignation and revenge attending reflections on it; Ezekiel 16. v. 61. and ch. 36. v. 31? There is a remembring? a blushing, a being ashamed, and a loathing of themselves, The man is thus vile in his own eyes, thinks very little of himself, and loaths himself very much? 6. He is well content when he discovereth a ground of challenge where it is, he hunts not after approbation, and applause, but is satisfied to have a just and necessary challenge, as well as to be approven, though the one hath much more peace, and comfort with it then the other; Let the righteous smite me (sayeth the Psalmist, Psalm 141:5.) and it shall be a kindness, and let him reprove me, and it shall be an oyl that shall not break mine head; So when his Conscience smiteth him, it acts in his esteem, the part of a good friend, he welcometh it when there is ground for it, and

repineth not against it. 7. He hath a deep impression of the Majesty of God on his Spirit; for his laying so great a weight on Conscience his Deput, suggests to him the suitableness of thinking highly of God himself, and of carrying with due reverence to him; when men think little of God himself, they think little of Conscience his Depute; and on the contrary, a tender Conscience maketh God very awful, dreadful, and majestick; Therefore Job giveth this for a reason, why he durst not contend with his Servants, because the terrour of God made him afraid; His carrying along with him ConsciencePage 198it's sense of his way, did mightily elevat his thoughts of God. 8. He hath many earands to God in Christ, he seeth manythings amiss that need to be amended, he daily discovers much guilt, which necessariats him to run to God for absolution; Grace both for pardoning of his iniquities, and for healing of his diseases, is always lovely, sweet and fresh to him; And to hear of it, is like a Box of precious fragranly smelling Ointment broken, like Oyl poured into a smaring wound, and as good news from a far Countrey.

By all which, in a word ye may see. 1. That it is a desireable thing to live and walk tenderly. 2ly That it is a most necessary thing, in order to coming by many choice advantages. 3ly. That it is bu a very rare thing, and to be found with but few, notwithstanding it's many rare and excellent effects. 4ly. That it is a very hard and difficult thing to be a tender Christian, and in this frame of true tenderness of Conscience; consulting it, carrying

it along, and reflecting on it in all Actions; that being the principle that keepeth tender in them all.

SERMON II.

2 COR. 1:12. For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you wards.

There are many very sad and prejudicial practical Errors and Mistakes concerning a tender Christians walk, whence it cometh to passe, that most persons lay the great stress thereof on things that will not bear it, while in the mean time, they neglect, and overlook those principal and weighty duties wherein it mainly consisteth, that make less noise and show before men, that are less subject to be countereited, and tend more to the life and power of godlinesse, then these other things, that are of more high esteem with men; among which this duty of often reflecting on a man's Conscience, and trying of his way at it's ba, that he may know it's sense, and receive it's Testimony thereof, is one and not the least; and is, (as we conceive) one of the pieces of a Christian tender walk, that cometh as near to the very Soul and Life of Religion, and hath as much influence on tenderness therein, as either much hearing of the Word, Prayer, Conference, and the like have; to which, when this is joined, theyare very useful, but when it is utterly wanting, they are useless? it being not only an important duty in itself, but alsoPage 200very helpful to other

duties, contributing much to the reaping of those advantages that are to be had by them.

We Observed the other day from these Words, that a tender Christian will be often reflecting on his way, and taking notice what Conscience sayeth of it; and spoke somewhat to two uses of the point, as it cleareth a notable duty, and giveth an evidence and proof of a tender man.

We shall now proceed to speak to other two; The first, and principal whereof is this, If it be a main piece of a tender Christian walk, to be often examiningourselves, and trying what sense Conscience hath of our way and actions; then it serveth for Exhortation to all men and women that would live tenderly, to be putting this in practice, as a main piece of a Christian and tender walk, as a main duty called for from them, and as a main evidence of their tenderness; That is, to be often seriously reflecting on their bygone way, to be often bringing their thoughts, words, and actions before the tribunal of Conscience, for this end, that they may know what it sayeth of them; Not only to be deliberating, and advising with Conscience before they undertake any Action, and to be watchful in going about it, but to be reflecting when it is done, if it be rightly done, and so as Conscience may testify for them concerning the same: This is Paul's practice here, This is (says he) our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience; Which supposeth that he hath been laying his way before Conscience, trying what it said of it, and that he hath received Conscience its Testimony concerning it. That

which we would in a word here commend to you, is, that Men and Women would take a back-look of, and reflect upon all their Actions, Words and Thoughts, and of, and upon all the circumstances of the same; and that they would so reflect upon them, as they may endeavour to know wherein they have Conscience its Testimony for them; or wherein it standeth up to speak against them? That is, that they would not only study to gather into their memory their Actions. Which is presupposed, and to layPage 201them before the Word, but further, when their Actions and the Rule of the Word are laid together, to hear Conscience its Sentence anent their performing of the same.

We shall not insist in particular explication of this Duty, ye have heard somewhat spoken of it these days past; if we could but gain this much of you, as to have you thoroughly convinced, that somewhat lyes on you, in reference to the examination of your hearts, and wayes as to things that are past, and to get you in good earnest, ingadged to make more Conscience of this Duty for time to come, it is the great thing we aim at; and if your Consciences were once duly convinced, and cleared of the necessity and usefulness of the Duty, and ye brought to be in love with it, ye would through grace be easily led on to the particulars requisit to the right way of performing it: Seriousnesse in, and affection to the thing would supply the rouble of many directions; And therefore we would now earnestly press it upon you, to take sometime for this duty of self-searching, and examination, as well as for prayer, hearing, conference,

and other such Duties; and to be as holily solicitous, and desirous to know when ye have done any action or duty, whether it be right or wrong, as ye think ye should be careful to advise before ye do it, that it be good upon the matter; sure the awe of the Majesty of God, and of your Conscience his Depute, and a just regard to your own peace, should incline, swey, and determine you to the one, as well as to the other.

What we would further say in this matter, shall be to show you, what ye should aim at in this self examination, as to the manner of going about it (for we much mar and wound our own peace, by formality and overliness in this, as in other duties) which ye may take up in these Four, 1. We would labour in our self-examination to be up at that distinctnesse, that through grace may be win at, that we may be so very clear, as to be in case to say, I wot well, I was right at such a time, and wrong at such another time; in this I was right, and in that I was wrong; yea, so clear and distinct would we be as we might, if called to it, be ready to give our oath on it;Page 202as Paul doth in the place we spoke on before. viz. Ro. 9:1. I say the truth in Christ (says he) and lie not, my conscience bearing me witness in the holy ghost; There would not be guessing at things, but we would be throughly distinct and clear; Therefore Job speaking of the evidences of his integrity, Chap. 31. Proposeth them by way of curse; being so very confident, that he durst confirm what he asserted, with a curse on himself, if it should be found to be otherwise then he said. 2dly. We would examine, and look on our way until we be brought

under some suitable impression of the awe and dread of the Majesty of God, and of his absolute Dominion and Sovereignty over us; Thus holy? Job sayeth of himself, when thus exercised, Chap 31. v. 23. Destruction from the Almighty was a terrour to me, and by reason of his highness, I could not endure: We never follow our self-examination far enough, until it leave some impression of this kind on our Spirits. 3dly. It would be followed, until we be affected with what discovery we get in the search of our own way; Its not enough barely to take a look or view of it, but we would (I say) look on it so, as we may be suitably affected with it; that either it may give us solid peace and joy, from clearness that we are right, or else a sensible touch with the sharpness of a challenge, for that whereof we are clearly convinced is wrong: And men are never rightly exercised in the work of self-examination, and of reflection on their Conscience, until something of this be; there is a great difference betwixt bare light, and a well informed, and tender Conscience; Consciences sense of a thing is of more weight, and is more divine, and hath some more of the Majesty of God in it, then bare Light, or conviction of the Judgment; It will neither smile nor rown, but it will suitably affect the man with some inward comfort, or sorrow; For it representeth God, either as smiling or rowning. 4ly. We would follow this work of self-examination, and self-reflection, until we be clear, and fully persuaded, as to the Duty we are called to, after such Examination; as when a man findeth things to be wrong; Conscience will say, there is here a necessity of

Repentance, Page 203 and humiliation, and of flying to Jesus Christ, for taking away the guilt thereof; and of setting about the righting and amending of things; and until a man come to be clear in that which he is called to, by self-examination, he followeth it not th a right, and as he ought to do: The apostle speaking of worldly, and of godly sorrow, 2 Corinthians 7:10? 11. Giveth these evidences of godly sorrow (a fruit of self-examination) that it not only was waited in the Corinthians with a fight of the Fault, but it touched them in the quick for it, and affected them with holy indignation at it, and with true zeal to have it removed; And that with all it suffered them not to rest? until they indeavoured by all means a clearing of themselves; Behold (sayeth he, v. 11.) the self same thing ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you; ea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation, and so forth. A man that ffers to et about self-examination, and yet lyes still in the fault that is discovered thereby, and is no more affected with it, then if he were not at all guilty of it, nor any more now after the discovery made in the search, inclined to flee to Christ then when he began; his self-examination is sure not right: We would therefore seriously recommend to you these Four to be well headed, and carried along with you in your prosecuting this work of self-examinaon.

To press this a little, we would consider these three? 1. The clearness of the duty. 2. The profitableness? and excellency of it. 3. The necessity of it; By all which? we may be convinced of a necessity lying upon us, to press

it, and upon you to practise it; The Lord himsel bear in upon us all with a strong hand the conviction of the necessity of it.

For the first, It is as clear a duty, as it is for you to come to the Church to hear; as it is to read? or to pray, or to sanctify the Lord's day; Hence it is that, 1. It is so often commanded? as Lm. 3:40. Hagg. 5. Gal.. 4. and Psalm2:4. Commun with your heart upon your beds, or speak with your hear, or with your Conscience (as often in the Old Testament the heart is putPage 204for the conscience) for it's the Conscience property that giveth the answer, and not the heart; So 2 Cor? 13:5. Examine yourselves whether ye be in the saith, prove your own selves, and so forth. the command is doubled? nay someway tripled. 2. It's clear also from the ordinary practise of the Saints (as hath been formerly instanced) so that hardly will ye find a tender man; but he is thus exercised, and the more tender he be, the more is he so; Tender David was much exercised this way, as he gives an account? Psalm 119:59. I thought (saith he) on my wayes, and turned my feet unto thy Testimonies.

For the 2d. viz. the profitableness and excellency of it, it is not only a commanded duty, but a choise mean for bringing about many excellent ends; I shall instance its excellency amongst others in these three respects. 1. it's excellent in this respect, as it is a most clear, fresh, and refreshful evidence of a tender walk, and of a man that maketh Conscience of his way; He that doth truth (saith Christ, Iohn 3:21.) cometh to the light, that his deeds may

be made manifest that they are wrought in God; He is not only content to abide a trial, but he putteth himself to it; He bringeth his deeds to the light, to see if they be wrought in God; on the contrary, he that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not unto it, lest his deeds should be reproved; Must not this then be an excellent duty, which is so clear a character and property of one that walketh tenderly in all duties? Nay, let all duties be put together, without this none of them, nor all of them in a conjunction, can evidence a man's tenderness; for it's this that giveth him (as it were) a grip of his duties, and putteth them to the touch-stone, and sheweth what reality is in them; what are to be looked ??? acceptable to God through Christ, what not; without this he is but a guesser. 2dly. It's excellent in respect of the great influence that it hath on the life of Religion, and power of Godliness; look to the most spiritual duties, it hath great influence on them, not on a few of them, but on them all, whether it be Mortification and Repentance, it keepeth the heart as it were melting; the word ? Zech. 12:10. They shall look upon him whom they havePage 205pierced, and shall mou and be in bitterness; or humble walking before God, it's impossible without it; or the highning our thoughts of God's grace, and the commending of Christ to us, it exceedingly contributes to that; Every discovered infirmity in the search maketh a new earand to him; or the lively way of going about other duties, as praying in the Spirit, hearing profitably, singing in the Spirit, and so forth. they cannot be performed to purpose without it: A person that hath been reflecting on a by-

past duty as of Prayer, or of a Sermon that he hath heard, will readily have from it a memento or watchword not to be so superficial in the next. 3dly. It's excellent in respect of the many advantages that come by it, as is already hinted in the two former respects, and might be instanced in a great many more; its useful and advantageous for the preventing of sin, for the promoting of holiness, for the composing of the Spirit, for establishing of peace, and for helping to comfortable and chearful walking with God.

For the 3. viz. the necessity of it; this appears much from what is already said; and is so very great, that its impossible to attain to holiness, to mortification, to peace, to be distinct in our way, to be spiritual in any duty, or to be tender in our walk without it: We may say that this duty in respect of a Christian life, is like weeding to a Gardens It's not sufficient, that a Garden have fresh Seeds sown, and fine Plants and Flowers set in it, if Weeds as they appear be not pulled up; without frequent and careful weeding, the weeds will quickly overgrow and choak the Flowers and Plants; It's just so here, there being so many lusts and corruptions in the heart of man, and it's so broody and se tile of these filthy weeds; that unless this self-examination ??? conscionably and seasonably exercised, it will be overgrown by and by, and filled full, with the stinking weeds of those corruptions; and our coming over our heart and way by taking a review of it, is like a careful Gardeners daily coming over his Garden with his Weeding-iron; the one is no more necessary to the Garden then the other is

necessary to our heart and way: And the reason why so many hearts are like the sugard's Garden, all overgrown with nettles and briars, is the neglect of this self-examination: Many alas! take on a profession of Religion, but take no pains to be answerable to it, neither do they look to the weeds and hemlocks of sins, that instead of good fruits to God, spring up in their heart, and over-spread their life: Therefore from all this I beseech you take this word of advertisement, as you would have the profession of your Religion well stuffed and filled up with the power of it, and would not have it as a Ghostly House, having a fair show outwardly, and empty within, or as a painted Sepulchre, beautiful without, and full of rottenness and dead men's bones within, and as ye would not have much false bulk without substance; be much in the exercise of this excellent duty of self-examination, and serious in it.

I shall here answer two or three objections that may be proposed about putting this concerning duty in practice.

And first, It may be objected, that this is a very hard and difficultly practicable thing, we cannot do it, we do not do it, it will not go with us, and indeed there is naturally in us all an aversness from nothing more than from this: And we conceive that who ever will essay it in earnest, will find it to be a difficult duty indeed, more difficult and harder to be gone about, then either Prayer, hearing of the Word, or conference on a spiritual subject; It being a duty wherein the inner man at the Bar of Conscience, and so in some respect at the Bar of God's Tribunal, is

exercised and taken up; which maketh it difficult even to them that would say go about it: We shall therefore in answer to this objection, 1. speak something in general. 2. We shall speak more particularly to some directions or helps, for making it easie. In general, We say, 1. That the Duty would not be scared at, because of it's difficulty, for the most excellent Duties that have the greatest influence on the practice of godliness, that strick most at the body of Death, and are most discriminating characters of the godly; hence suitably discharged, are ordinarily most difficult, and we would love them the better, and prefer them in some respect to others, that are more easie, and which Hypocrites, and meer Formalists may go about; and indeed such a one is this (as hath been shown) And therefore we have the greater reason to press towards the practice of it. 2ly. We would say, that though it be difficult, yet ye would essay it; and if ye do so seriously, and in the strength of Christ, ye will find it go far better, and more easily with you, then possibly ye expect; And the truth is, that as to these Duties, that are more inward and spiritual? that which is called for from us, is our essaying of, and putting hand to them, and seriously necessitating ourselves to it; which, if we do, we have them, and this in particular, laid before us, in the Promise, As Ezekiel 16:63. That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and so forth. and 36? 31. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and doings that were not good, and so forth. And so particularly we come to speak in the 2d, place, of the Directions and Helps for making it easie. The 1. whereof,

is this, That we would essay it with an eye to the promise; for indeed this, and all other Duties ly in Promises; and albeit we cannot pray a right without the Spirit, yet we will essay it on this account; Even so should we do, as to this Duty, how difficult soever it may be. 2dly. And yet somewhat more particularly, we would endeavour to have a sober, serious and sanctified frame, in the undertaking and prosecuting of this Duty; when our Spirits are Carnal, and Discomposed, and when there is a noise and clamour of worldly lusts swarming within us, it is no great wonder though we essay it, that it go not with us, but miscarry in our hand: We would therefore abstract, and compose ourselves, as in God's presence, and study to have our hearts in a sanctified frame; as the Church doth? Lament. 3:28? 29. Sitting alone, and keeping silence with a stopped mouth; We would table and state ourselves before God, pursuing ourselves, as if we were pleading for God against ourselves; and hereby endeavouring a composed and fixed divine frame of Spirit, as being in a special way before him, whose deputy thePage 208Conscience s; and in such a frame reviewing our heart and way; it will not be every Frame, nor any common frame of Spirit that will fit and dispose to go rightly about this businesse. 3dly. We would be frequent in this Duty, and would not sufer reckonings to run long on; for if they do, it maketh the work the more difficult: and thus alace! it is with many, They have been so long a esaying of it, and so little in it, that they think it a desperat businesse to set about it now; Whereas, if men were weekly, daily, and on the back of every Duty?

or Action, stating and putting by their accounts, it would be a great deal more easie: It is with many as to this, as it is with these who have a multitude of businesses on their hand rvelled, confused and through other; Or, as it is with these who have suffered their accounts to ly long over unfitted; Whereas he that is dayly in this work, is like a man that every day fitting, and justing his accounts, doth it easily, and with little pains: And therefore the Direction in short, is, that these who would have their spiritual Accounts easie? would not suffer them to run long on.4ly. We would be much in Prayer, begin it with Prayer, and carry Prayer along with it; and a the heart starts our from it, by a look, by a darted up-bink, or eaculation to God, bring it back again, and arrest it, as it were, and fix it before the Lord; because the heart cannot possibly be kept any, the least moment in God's company, if it be left to itself; There would be a frequently renewed looking up to him, to fix it; I will (saith the Lord, Zech. 12:10.) pour upon the house of David, and inhabitants of Ierusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication, they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and shall ourn. Christians are then tenderest, when looking to God, and so fittest for this Duty, and would therefore be much in it. 5ly. We would not only look on it as a Duty, but as a mean exceedingly contributive to our spiritual good, to the preventing of sin, to the promoving of ???, to the keeping of our Conscience calm and quiet, and to the attaining and maintaining of Peace, (as hath been said:) There are manythings which wePage 209count to be hard, and

difficult, because we consider not the great profit of them; Therefore to make this insuperably like difficult Duty the more easie, we would fill the eye of the Soul with the many and choice advantages that come by it; O! such mortification of Lusts, such progress and advances in holiness; such thriving and growing in Grace, with many other notable effects, that it through God's blessing produceth. 6ly. To make it easie, we would in the going about it, have a manifold respect to Jesus Christ, by the exercise of Faith on him, both in the undertaking, and performing of it; There is a respect to be had to Christ in all Duties; but here (as I just now said) a manifold respect would be had to him. 1: A respect would be had to him as our peace, who only can purge and pacify the Conscience; and take away guilt, and wash us throughly from it: It may be some under-take self-examination as a sort of pennance, or whipping of themselves; and indeed in that case it cannot but be a very hard exercise, when they mind nothing, but the bare ripping up of their sores, and the making of them (as it were) to bleed; but if they went about it with respect to Christ, to bring, and drive them to him, as to the Physician, that would make them to endure the smart and pain; and would make the Duty far more easie; the ??? end of self-examination, not being simply to afflict us, but to send us to Jesus Christ for cure. 2ly. Respect would be had to him, not only as the healer of our sores, and wounds; but also, as the inablet and strengthner of us, to take a seriously reflecting view of them, and to look upon them indifferently, universally, and impartially; The First way of looking to him, maketh

us to go about this Duty, not heartlesly, but with hope; And the Second way of looking to him, for influence and help from him, strengthneth us. 3ly. Respect would be had to him, as the pardoner of Sin (which is more generally hinted at in the first Respect) and therefore, as Sins are discovered in the search, they would be brought,Page 210to him for this end; it makes it a very oilsome, and unpleasant xercise, when Souls come only to the Bar of Conscience to get its Sentence, that mightily faints, and they are ready in that case, to rew that ever they looked after, and searched out their Sin? when they find nothing but bitterness in it; Therefore we say that when a man hath gotten the Sentence of his Conscience, he would come forward, and bring his Sins to Christ, and lay himself and them at his Feet; and when Conscience hath past the Sentence of Condemnation on him, he would flee to him for Abolution; This would make self-examination not to have such un-pleasantnesse, and bitterness in it, as otherwayes it hath, and can hardly but have; and would much prevent our scarring at t, and being frighted from it.

A 2d. Objection, Is this, That some may think and say, that if they shall essay this exercise, they know not where to begin, their condition is so confused, that its like a revelled hesp, or parcel of yarn, they cannot find an end in it, partly through their long and great neglect of the Duty, partly through the confusion of their Spirits, and their Sins looking out on them with a very formidable aspect. To which we would Answer, 1. That though it be so, yet the Duty must not be delayed, nor neglected; The

longer it be ere ye begin, it will be on these, and other accounts still the more difficult; Therefore ye would fall the sooner about it, and the more seiously about it, with the deeper humiliation for so much and so long neglecting of it, and the greater dependence on God for his assistance to win at it. 2ly. In your going about it, when ye discover much sin, and find your case to be very confused; if ye dar not hazard to wade (as it were) into the very midst of it at least at first, ye would endeavour to pich on some particulars, wherein ye may be distinct; as Souldiers use to do with an Army that is too strong for them; they are bussie in gathering up the Sraglers as they come at them; and fall on some smaller Parties: Therefore such of you as seriously,Page 211and sincerely mind this great work of self examination, though ye may incline at first to fall in, on the very bulk and heap of your Sins; yet honestly minding to balk one, but to go through all, before ye give over the work; it will be better to betake yourselves to the search, and examination of such or such a particular Duty, or of such or such a days work and duties; and thus ye will win the better in on it, and through it, and the heap will grow the less; But meddle not with another, until ye have, with some suitableness dispatched, and put by this. 3ly. If ye cannot win for the time so to fix on particulars, take your confused condition such as it is, to think on a while, and look not at this as nothing, that ye have found your condition to be confused; Davids condition was somewhat thus, when he says, Psalm 44. v. 15 My confusion is continually before me; The taking, and

laying of your case confused, as it is, before God and your Conscience, may help to humble, and kindly to affect your heart. 4ly. The more confused your case be, seek to take it so much the more to God, and to draw the nearer to him; let it be made a motive to set you on to deal the more seriously with him, to dispel your darkness and confusion; As Ie does, while he says, Chap. 10. v. 15. I am full of confusion, therefore see thou to my affliction, As if he had said, Lord, I cannot ridde, no order my case, therefore see thou to it, and give me clearnesse; For, though a person have a confused condition, yet he may be somewhat distinct, in laying it out before God, as it is, and may be clear in what Conscience sayeth of it, when it sayeth that it is confused. 5ly. Whether our condition be confused or no, we would be suitably affected with every particular that we find in it; and this may be one reason of our confusion, that we have more clearness, then we improve well; we see manythings to be wrong, but the ight affects us not, neither do we suitably indeavour to epent of the evils which we see, nor to amend them, nor do??? flee to Jesus Christ to get them pardoned andPage 212cured: But when the little clearness that we have is well improven, it's the way to get more; but what need is there of more light, and of more ceariness, when that which we have is not duely made use of?

A 3d. Objection is, Some may think, and say, We are essaying self-examination, and yet we find much difficulty, to know and take up Conscience its language, whether it be awell grounded challenge, or an approving

Testimony: This Objection is much like unto that Question which we spoke to a little in our second Sermon on Acts 24. v. 16. Viz. Whether Conscience its impulse might not sometimes be wrong? To which we Answered affirmatively, and do yet grant, that it may mistake, and be mistaken by us, and what we said there, for finding out the mind of Conscience may be useful here towards the answering of this Objection; Yet we shall now speak a word further to it: For Answer then, we shall easily yeeld, that it is indeed sometimes difficult to find out the mind (to say so) of Conscience, and to understand its language, in reflecting, as well, as in deliberating; either, 1. through the dimness of people's Light, that they scarcely know the Rule. Or, 2ly. Through their being partial and negligent, in comparing their way and actions with the Rule; but either hide it wholly, or at least some circumstances of it, without bringing it forth, and laying it to the Rule; Or, 3ly. It may be through some byase in their affection, that maketh them unsingle, so that they will not take with a challenge, when there is just ground for it; or, 4ly. It may be from some unwarrantable and groundless prejudice at themselves, and their own way, so that they will not take a testimony from Conscience, even when it giveth them a good one: And therefore in your self-examination, ye would carrie some advertisements along with you, which will be helpful to find out the mind of Conscience, 1. Ye would try whether Conscience be impartial, and if ??? speaketh to both hands (to say so,) accusing n some things, and excusing in others; in some things speaking

others challenging for sin; for, if when ye reflect, Conscience speak all, or only peace it is certainly wrong, because in the best there is less or more guilt contracted in what ever ye go about; but, if beside what is right, it points also at something that is wrong, it is Consciences right language; on the contrary when ye reflect, if Conscience speak all to be wrong, though there was some sincerity in your aim, it is mistaken; For when it speaketh a right, it speaketh always according to the mind of God, and what he says is wrong or right, it says so of it also; So in the epistle to Ephesus, Revelation 2. As the Lord chargeth them, that they are fallen from their first love, so doth Conscience; yet as he telleth them, that there is something right, in as far as they had laboured for his names sake, and hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which he hated, and so forth. So doth Conscience also testify the same; and so, in all the rest of the Epistles to these seven Churches; as God is impartial in his Testimony, so is Conscience when right. 2ly. Ye would advert to the ground of Conscience, it's speaking, or to that on account of which it testifies for you, or against you; for, as in our forbearing of one Action and in our choosing of another, we are to forbear, or to choose, and proceed, according as Conscience holdeth ou clear light, and reason for it; So upon the back of any Action, or Duty performed, when we go to reflect, we would try the ground, whether of Conscience it's challenge, or of it's good Testimony; If it challenge, and accuse, try well whether it be indeed a sin, for which it doth so; if it approve, and speak peace, try on what

ground it doth so, Conscience will some way testifie of the Action, but ye would try, if it be sinful, or not according to the Word of God; Which supposeth knowledge in the thing, and of the mind of God concerning it; wherein any, especially more considerable defect, even in conscientious and ender Christians, is waited with its own prejudice; Hence it came to passe (as the apostle gives us an accout, Romans 14.)Page 214that many of the primitive Christians, through the weaknesse of their knowledge, were made to judge such and such things to be wrong, as the eating of such and such meats, (their Conscience judging according to their knowledge) when yet indeed the matter was not wrong; though (as the apostle there sayeth) To him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean; Therefore we would be the more holily jealous over ourselves, least we found our peace on a deluded Testimony of our Conscience; And for preventing of that, we would put t to give its reason for, and evidence of what it testifieth, for Conscience being but a subordinate Judge, we must go, to the law and to the testimony, and see if it speaketh according to that; otherwayes it will not be an honest aim, or a good end proposed to ourselves, in the doing of such or such a thing; or because we are in a pardoned state, that will be sufficient to make the Action truly good and acceptable, and to give us ground of peace. 3ly. Ye would advert, and take good heed, if Conscience challengeth equally, for one sin as well as for another, and for the neglect of one Duty, as well as for the neglect of another; and if, as the sin is comparatively greater, or

lesser, so its challenges be lesser or greater; for, if Conscience its challenge lead you to the Word; the more weight that the Word layeth on sin, the more weight will Conscience lay upon it, when it is right: Sometimes persons will be challenged for some things much extrinsick to Religion, or for omitting this or that wherein very little, if anything of Religion consists, or at least lyeth very remoe; who yet will not be much troubled, for taking of God's name in vain, or for neglect of Prayer, and the like: I remember the saying of a godly man, to a Person under exercise for a little sin, little in comparison of others (for no sin is little in its own nature?) That he thought the hand, or work of the Devil ??? be in it, to lay a ground for Spiritual Pride, because the person was so much troubled with so ittle a thing; or to divert from taking a view of grosserPage 215sins, for their deeper humiliation: when Conscience is right, it challengeth equally, and more or less, as the sin is more or less aggravated; It is an evil in this time, that extrinsick, and remoe things trouble some so much, while in the mean time known sins, and duties are but little minded, and laid to heart; as i forsooth the Consciences of such were more delicat and tender, then the Consciences of the Saints of old; Nay there are not a few, who will disdain to be challenged for neglect of uncontroverted duties, who yet make a great deal o businesse, and noise about these things, that are but of little moment, as if the whole, and sum o Religion lay in them: This certainly shows a great deal of untenderness, and slighting of Conscience, what ever preensions may be made to the contrary; and

while a person is much, or wholly taken up with an extrinsick, or very little thing, which, it may be, is but a meer circumstance, and is more affected with, and exercised about that, then with, and about another of far greater concernment; it is not sure any awe of God, nor of Conscience, but somewhat flowing from the man's own Inclination, or interest, that so mightly influenceth, and stirreth him in the one, beyond what he is in the other. 4ly. Ye would advert in a special manner to this, If Conscience in the challenge maketh the sin vile and abominable to you, and yourselves loathsome to yourselves; When Conscience whets (to say so) the edge of the challenge, not only to the making of God's wrath terrible, and the awe, fear and dread of him weighty; but also to the deep affecting of ourselves with the vilenesse and loathsomeness of the thing, its an evidence, that the Conscience is right; for, as its a good token of the soundness of Repentance, when it maketh sin as such loathsome? so its a good token of Conscience speaking rightly, when it holdeth forth convincingly the sinfulness of sin. ????. Ye may know when Conscience speaketh a right, by the native fruits that follow upon it; such as these, 1. It maketh a deep impression of the awe of God, and of thePage 216fear of sin on the heart; It maketh the Spirit more composed, stayed, and present, when after self-examination rightly gone about, Conscience speaketh its own language, for it knoweth that God speaketh, and hath a sort of divinness with it. 2ly. It maketh the man more watchful, and the loather to adventure on sin, for the time to come. 3ly. It stilleth, and

calmeth the heart; O! but that be a stately and majestick Word, Psalm 46. Be still, and know that I am God. For we cannot conceive God to be speaking, if we be right, but the Spirit will be calmed to hear, and will be gathered in, from its waverings, gadings and vaigings, when it knoweth that he speaketh, all which we may see, Psalm 4:3:4. Stand in awe and sin not; Where he exhorteth to holy fear, and watchfulness; and the mean to bring both about, is, Commune with your hearts upon your beds; Betake yourselves to this work (as if he had said) of self examination; and then the 3d. Follows, Be still, as being stayed and fixed, quieted and calmed, against reilling-to and fro, up and down, and against all struggling with God, and fretting at his providence, because ye have to do with him, and not with men.

We shall not proceed further for the time; only ye may see from what hath been said, if we look singly on it, that there is here a most clear, useful, and necessary duty at all times, and more especially at this time: We say especially at this time, for these reasons. 1. Because of the common and general security, and formal way of going about duty, that is stollen in amongst Christians at this time, and there cannot be a better mean to help this, then to give ourselves to the exercise of self-examination? and to the tryal of our wayes; This seriously gone about would make us reze, and stir up ourselves in good earnest, to cry mightily to God: and if this be a time, that hath such an evil in it, as great security and formality; and if this be a duty? that may throw God's blessing help the same, let none complain of over liness,

coldness, and life-lesnesse in Religion, that is not seriouslyPage 217minding, and going about this, as a necessary, profitable and excellent mean to amend it? 2ly. Because there is much false bulk, and empty show of a profession; Which we are afraid, but a very little tryal will quickly evidence, and discover to be so, even to be unsure work; I will not say, but there may be some sicknesse, and solidity in the profession of some, but it is to be feared, that many others are but building castles in the air, castles of come down when the rain shall descend, the winds blow, and the floods beat, having much more show then substance, and solid work; and the way to make it sicker, sure and solid work, that will abide the tryal, is to lay it to the Rule, and to try it thereby; many profest Christians are like to foolish builders, who build by guess, and by rule of thumb, (as we use to speak) and not by Square and Rule; and if they have but bulk enough, they look not much to the solidity, and straightness of the Fabrick: There are many engadgements come under, many fastings, prayers, hearings of the Word, and so forth. (which are good in themselves, and commendable) but there would be Self-examination, to see what solidity is in them all; else we will be like the men, who expend all their stock on the stone and timber-work of a large house, and leave nothing to plenish, and furnish it within; whereas, when a person is suitably, and seriously taken up with Self-examination, it maketh a house (to speak so) though it should be lesse, to be well filled and furnished; and albeit there be no great noise of a Profession there, yet there is

more kindly Repentance, more seriousnesse in Prayer, and in other Duties, more profiting by hearing of the Word, and more holiness of Life, then where this exercise of Self-examination, and reflection is either altogether or very much neglected, albeit there should be then, a far greater profession. 3ly. Because we have been engaged in, and have put manythings, (to say so) through our hands, these years past; and we are afraid, that many have not much consulted,Page 218nor looked well into Conscience, in meddling with them; There have been several strange, un-couth, and scarcely heard of things in the way of some, and lesser failings, slips and escapes, in the way of others: and no doubt the lesse pains was taken by men to be cleared and satisfied in their Conscience, before such things were medled with, and ingadged in; there would be so much the more pains taken now, to reflect on them when past, and to bring them in before Conscience, to receive it's verdict of them; and sure we can never walk for time to come, with that straightnesse and solidity, if we be not at some point, by Self-searching, as to things past, and present.4ly. Because, if we know not what hath been right or wrong in things past; the dispensations of divine providence, which we have met with, call aloud on us, to examine what God speaketh to us by them; for he hath made us to be witnesses of very strange things, of public dispensations, such as neither we, nor our fathers ever saw the like; and hath not this same place in particular, fallen under strange providences, both as to our Temporals and Spiritualls? and if the dispensations of

God, call and press any to this exercise of Reflection, and Examination, then certainly they call and press us to it: Therefore seing we are called to this, not only as a duty common to all times, but as somewhat peculiar to this time, and to us in this place, we would make the more Conscience of it; and would also know, that if it be slighted, the greater will our guiltiness be, that have so manythings urgently calling us to it: Whether then, ye remember all, or most, or many particulars, or not, remember, and carry along with you this general, that ye have a Conscience, and that ye are called and concerned to remember to reflect on, and to examine your wayes, at the Bar of Conscience well informed by the Word; And if ye be suitably serious in the general, God will graciously condescend to lay particular helps to your hand.

SERMON III.

2 COR. 1:12. For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-wards.

IF a tender Christian walk be an excellent thing, and if the rejoicing of a good Conscience that floweth from it, be an excellent thing; then sure it must be a very excellent and desirable thing, to study thorow acquaintance with our own heart and way and to try our particular carriage by our Conscience informed by the Word; This practice having so much influence on a tender walk, and being so conduceable, to a well-grounded rejoicing in God; for doubtless there can be nothing more contributive to these notable, and noble ends, then to give Conscience its due regard and place, and to lay due weight upon it, in its passing censure of our way, and to be clear, and distinct in its sentence of our bypast carriage and proceedings: We may say of Conscience in this work, as Solomon says of that King? Prov. 20:8. Who sitting on the throne of judgement, scattereth away all evil with his eyes; When Conscience, as the great and sovereign God his Deputy, sits on its Throne (as it were) it hath a Divine Authority, and Majesty,Page 220whereby it scattereth all these evils that haunt the heart; so that they cannot endure and stand before it, but must flee away.

And because this hath so very much influence on a Christian walk, we shall speak a word further to what flows from the Doctrine proposed the other day, and it shall be for an Use of Reproof, and Expostulation, (which we named, as the 4th Use of it) to and with Christians that profess to have a tender walk, and yet much slight this duty, which is a main part of it, and singularly helpful to the whole of it: for if the search of our way, and the trying of it by Conscience be a main piece and part of a tender Christian walk, o that they who are much in the one, have also much of the other; and none have been of a tender Conscience and walk, but they have been tender in this part of it, to have Conscience its sense and Testimony of their by-past walk; then there is ground of Reproof to, and Expostulation with these, who either neglect or slight it; and this is it that we would now speak to? even to reprove and expostular, with many profest Christians, who would be loath to be accounted gross and untender in their walk, who yet neglect this so main a piece of a Christianly tender walk: and before we fall on particulars, we would speak a little to ome evidence for making it out, what just ground there is, to reprove and expostulat on this account, even for the neglect of so clear and profitable a duty; And, 1. May we not in the general charge most for an utter neglect of this, and all, for much overliness in it? ask your own Consciences, if ye were called to an account before God; how ye would answer, as to this particular; durst ye say, that ye have made Conscience seriously, and suitably to reflect upon your case? and

way? and that ye have been tenderly concerned to find out what was right, and what was wrong in it, and to have Conscience its approbatory, or condemnatory sense, and sentence thereof, and to be affected answerably, as you found matters betwixt God and you? We are sure there is nonePage 221of us, though we can say we have been going about other duties of Religion, such as Prayer, Reading, and hearing of the Word, and so forth. But we have reason to charge ourselves with much guilt, as to our little serious going about this particular duty, to be dumb and silent, and to go with a stopped mouth before God, is there any that can say, I have been clean in this matter? A 2d. evidence may be taken from the sad effects, that in our way follow the neglect, or overly performance of this duty; Which when found, they may let us know, and convince us that it is either much slighted, or quite neglected; And 1. We would ask you, how many are acquainted with, and seen in their own Souls Condition, or could on distinct grounds, as having examined, and tryed? their heart and way, passe Sentence upon their case, and say thus and thus it is with me? And if ye be un? acquainted with your own case, does not that say undenyably, that ye walk by guess, as it were, and not according to this Rule. 2ly. What means the exceeding great security, presumption, and self-conceit, that many are in? and under, concerning themselves, and their way? Which not flowing from a well-grounded perswasion of the streightnesse thereof, must it not necessarily flow from their neglect of this self-reflection and tryal? And whence, I pray, is it, that

there is so little repentance for sin? Is it because there is no sin, nor ground of quarrel? No certainly, it must therefore be from men's not reviewing of, and reflecting on themselves and their way, that they may find it out; which plainly says, that this evil is predominant. 3ly. Look to the abounding of sin? to the little growth of mortification, to the liveliness of Lusts, to the rume that Idols have in the heart, and its gading after them; will not these declare, that most persons, but very seldom bring themselves before the Tribunal of their Conscience; otherways lusts durst not set up their heads, as they do; This King would scatter away all evils with his eyes; And men would not have such delight in them, Page 222 if they were often arraigning them at this Bar. 4ly. What means the little solid peace and rejoycing in God, that most professors have, and their living in such a fluctuating, and conjectural way? Is it not from this, that they do not examine, and put to the tryal the grounds of their peace and joy? Now all these sad and woful evidences and effects being put together, it is beyond all doubt, that there is at this time among us, much neglect of this duty of self-examination; by the Consciencious discharge whereof, these dreadful effects might be removed.

These Evidences of the neglect of this duty being palpable; we come now in the Second place closs to the reproof of it, and expostulation for it; and is there not iust ground for both? I dar say, if many of you were alked about this duty, it would be found to be an unknown duty to you; a duty that ye walk not under the conviction of

its necessity; a duty that ye are not mourning for the neglect of, nor imploying Jesus Christ for grace to get it suitably performed: and can that, think ye, be a tender walk, that is so very short, and defective in so main a duty, and in so great a piece and part of a tender walk? when especially persons are not duely sensible of it, nor suitably affected with it; Let me but ask such of you, who make little account of the neglect of this duty, these few questions. 1. Do ye think that there is such a thing spoken of in the Word of God, and that there is such a thing within you as a Conscience; and if ye think ye have Consciences, have ye them for no end nor use? or will ye let them (as it were) be in you, and ly by you, as things given you to no purpose? 2ly. I ask you, is there nothing in your case, or way, that needeth a review? Is all right, and nothing out of order? will ye own these to be truths? If not, ought not this mean to be used for helping you to find out what is wrong, and what is right, if anything be right? It were a strange thing for a profest Christian, to think, or say, that he is altogether right, and that he needsPage 223not to examine himself; and yet he must either think this; or else he says on the matter, that he eares not whether he be right or wrong, which indeed the practice of many says plainly, or he must examine to find out what is right, and what is wrong. 3ly. I would ask you, do you think that your Conscience will be alwayes quiet, because ye command it not to speak; or rather, is there not a time coming, when it will speak, whether ye will or not? or do ye think, because ye have no remembrance of your faults, that your forgetting of them

now will blot them out of your Consciences Register, or rather should ye not judge yourselves, that ye may not be judged? According to the apostles word, 1 Corinthians 11. v. 31. And on the contrary, should ye not think, that if ye do not judge yourselves, ye will most certainly be judged? 4ly. I would ask you, is it not better to put your Consciences to speak in time, when things may be righted and amended, then to let them ly over, and sleep, until they be past remedy? O! When will ye consider, and lay to heart, what trouble, terrour and confusion reacheth, and taketh hold on the Consciences of many at death, and will do so much more at the day of Judgment; and if it were not much better in time to try things, and find out what is right, and what is wrong, that Conscience may not have a just ground of challenge against you in that day, and may not have it to say to you, ye never owned me, when ye was living in the World, and now I will read to you a fearful Inditement and Dittay, that hath stood long on record against you; And upon this arises, the horreur and gawing worm that never dies; hence is the fire blown that never is quenched; all which (I say) flow from Conscience? representing to men and women in a most formidable manner their way, which before they would never believe, nor once seriously put the matter to the tryal, whether it would do so or not.

In further prosecution of this Use, and to make that the more plain, which we would mainly be at in it,Page 224We shall, 1. Speak a little to several sorts of persons who we suppose, are guilty of the neglect of this duty, 2. A little to the evils that follow, and flow from the guilt

of this neglect. 3. To the causes o their continuing in this sinful neglect. 4. A little to what may irect towards the facilitating, and making easy the practice of this duty, and to the making of it profitable and useful.

For the First of these, viz. the several sorts of persons that are guilty of the utter neglect of the duty; or of much short-coming, and overliness in performing it; They may be reduced to these Six The 1. Soft are they that make no Conscience at all of anything in Religion, that never knew what it was to make Conscience to pray, read the word, confer on it, repent, or of any other duty; what wonder is it, that such persons neglect to reflect, and look back on their way, and to examine themselves; for (as Job sayeth Chap. 24: v. 17. of the morning to the Adulterers) their way to them is as the shadow of death; Yet even these would know for a certainty, that their Consciences will speak, and so much the more terribly, as now they neglect to take any notice of them. A 2d. Sort make a kind of Conscience of external duties in Religion, such as hearing, prayer, reading the Scripture, and the like, but do neglect more spiritual and inward duties, such as, the mortification of sin, the humbling of the heart for it, wrestling with God to have victory over it, meditation, and the like: Now this duty which we are pressing, being of that sort, and serving not a little to further Repentance and mortification, and to make serious in prayer, they must, and cannot but neglect it, because they design nor? neither aim at these ends to which it is subservient. A 3d. Sort are such, who may now and then have a sort of tendernes in the

performance of some duties, and in abstaining from several sins? and yet they mind not, nor make Conscience at all of this duty: I suppose there are many of you, who have your own timesPage 225for prayer, reading, and the like, who take no ??? all for this duty: I would as such of you, if you can make Conscience of other duties, because God commands them, who make no Conscience of this? Seing its as clearly commanded as any of these; deceive not yourselves, God will not be mocked. A 4th. Sort are such as make some essays, or rather mints to go about, even this duty, but are overly, generall, confued, indistinct, soon satisfied, and put to a stand in it? taking only a hasty view of it in the by; or a little transient look of it, when they go to prayer; but fall not purposly about it, as a distinct duty, and an up taking work, do not dwell upon, and insist in it, to have the circumstances of their actions, and way un-folded, laid open, made naked and bare, at the Bar of Conscience. A 5th. Sort may come some length in the duty, but they follow not the work, until they be suitably affeted, humbled, and made serious; much less until the duty be made delightsome to them, til i six an impression of the Majesty of God on them, and lay a necessity on them, to imploy Christ more; but it is with them in this matter, as Iames speaketh, Chap. 1. of these, Who beholding their natural face in a glass, go their way, and forget what manner of persons they are; The fruit of their Self-examination is either not attained, or it hath little, or no impression on them; and this is it, which maketh men not to be in love with the duty, because they follow it not,

until they get somewhat of the lovely fruit of it: And here many, even Believers, are as to several degrees guilty. A 6th Sort are also here reproveable, who, though they come a little further, to look on their way, and to desire Conscience its sense thereof, and to be affected with what they find in the search; yet they seek not to be distinct, and throughly clear in the matter; Neither are they impartial, in setting about to discover every thing that is wrong in their condition: but some come to look and see what is right, to strengthen (on the matter at least) their security; others come to see what is wrong (which is somewhat indeed preferable to the other) to strengthen their unbelief, or mis-believing jealousies of themselves, and so make it a sort of Pennance to themselves, as if they were putting themselves on the Rack; whereas an impartial search, and examination of our way (which is the thing called for) sets us on seriously to discover what is right, and what is wrong in our condition, and accordingly to take, and be affected with it; but there is scarce any one, or other, but one way or other they fal, and are more or less guilty in this matter, which would put all according to their respective guilt, to be humbled before the Lord, to seek his pardon, and grace to amend.

That we may be brought to loath the neglect, and overly performance of this duty, I all in the 2d. place name some evils that it brings with it, and that in these Four respects, 1. As it evidences, and speaks out a very untender frame; for if it evidence a tender frame to be exact in this duty, then it certainly speaks out an untender frame to neglect

it, or to be superficial in it; and where the neglect, or superficiality are habitual and regnant, they are shrewd evidences of an evil state: The utter neglect of it says, 1: That such a man cares not for God, and stands not in awe of him; that he cares not whether God be well pleased, or evil pleased, when he will not so much as reflect, and see, if there be an enemy to God within him. 2. It speaks out little respect to Conscience, and says, that men care not whether Conscience be for them, or against them; Yea, it says, that they think on the matter at least, that its an useless thing to have a Conscience; and can he possibly be a tender man, that is not tender in respect to his Conscience? 3. It speaks furth a man not to be in love with holiness; for f Self-examination be a notable mean to promote holiness, and if none without it can be holy; if there can be no Repentance for Sin, no Mortification, and so forth. without it; Then sure the man that neglects it, cares not for holines; It evidencesPage 227a man to be void of all Religion, fearlesse of Judgment, and careless, whether his Debt be payed, or not, when he will not so much as search out what he is owing.

2ly. We may consider the neglect of this duty as t is exceedingly obstructive to the great spiritual good, and advantage that a man should aim a, in the mortification of Sin, and lively performance of duties, viz. To obtain solid peace, and communion with God; and to have any measure of discerning, or spiritual feeling thereof: and can any of these be win at without this? Can ye pray seriously? can ye repent? can ye mortify sin? Can ye praise God, or delight in him, who have not been reecting

to find out sin to repent for, nor considering, whether there e any Grace in you, for which ye should be thankful? And for spiritual joy? can a man possibly have it, if he know not how it stands with him before God? And a man can never know, how t stands betwixt God and him, until he be in some measure clear, how it stands with him before his Conscience, or betwixt him and his Conscience.

3ly. Consider further, the evil of this neglect, in respect of its sinfulness in itself; and indeed it is exceeding sinful, as its a neglect o clear duty, and a breach of a clear command; yea, as its the neglect of a notable mean for the suitable performance of all other duties; so that wherever Prayer, Repentance, Hearing, Reading, and so forth. is commanded, This is also on the matter commanded: And as many duties as are commanded; of as many breaches of these commands are we guilty, when this duty is neglected: Considering, that when ever we are commanded to do any duty, we are commanded also, to use all the means that may further us towards the suitable performance thereof; And this being a special mean requisit to the right performance of every duty, it is therefore commanded in every other commanded duty: We may inance it in the observation of the Lord's day, This helps a man to begin it aright,Page 228It goes along with him, in all the duties of the day; and when its over and by, it helps him to discover his ailings, and short comings; and his actings of Grace, (where it is) and spiritual attainments in these duties; and to be accordingly affected; and the neglect of it, is à breach of

the Lord's day, both before, and after, and in the time of public, or privat, or secret duties of worship, called for on that day; and so proportionably in other duties.

4ly. We may look upon it, In respect of its being a nursery of all sorts of evils; it harbours end entertains Lusts; it hardens the heart, strengthens security; it cherisheth hypocrisie; It brings on formality, and impenitency; It (as it were) locks up in presumption, and carnal confidence; It wears men out from under the awe of God, and from under all due respect to Conscience: The man that makes Conscience of Self-examination, will be afraid of a challenge; but he that uses not, and cares not, to examine himself, pulls (as it were) the bridle out of his own head, runs at random, gives himself up, and layes himself open to every sin and temptation, without fear of challenges: And if ye will look well about you, and observe narrowly; will ye not find, that the man that rusheth impetuously into a course of sin, as the horse rusheth into the Bttel, is very readily he, that quite neglects and despiseth this duty of examination of his way, by his Conscience, or before the Tribunal thereof? And when I pray, are persons most tender, or untender? Is it not when they are most impartial, or most partial in this work of setting themselves down to take a serious review of their case and way, and illing themselves before their Conscience, to review the sentence thereof?

As for the 3d. thing proposed to be spoken of, viz. The causes of this so abominable and groly sinful neglect; they may easily and soon be found out, if we knew and

considered what a nature we have, so very averse from true holiness; yea, the more sublimely holy, Page 229 and spiritual that duties be, the more averse naturally are we from hem: as its much easier to bring a man to the profession, then it is to bring him to the power of Religion; So is it much more easieto bring a man to the practice of many external duties thereof, then to the practice of this one inward duty; It being as it were, a neding knife to Corruption, bringing a man to strick at the very Roo, and Life of it; and it being (as it were) a setting of him on the Black-stone; He is the more averse from it: We may add to this, the consideration of the influence that the Devil hath on us, in this neglect; who knowing well how prejudicial to him, to his kingdom, and interest; and how advantageous to the sinner this duty is; he labours mightily to hold all in confusion, and to keep the soul fast asleep, as that which contributs much, if not most to the gaining of his point; for he knows by experience (very galling to him) that self-examination awakes a man, and gives him a view of himself, and puts him to think, how he may be rescued from this destroyer; and therefore he doth in a special manner, hate, abhore, and set himself against it; And though he will suffer a man to do many other Religious dutes, yet he labours by all means to keep him from this duty, because it help much through grace to make him cast out with himself, and his own way; and so makes Satan in a manner hopeesse of him.

More particularly we may assige these causes ?????? from people's own practice; The 1. whereof is ???, that

many men and women live so, that their life cannot abide the tryal; He that doth evil (saith the Lord? Iohn 3.) hates the light, neither ??? unto the ???,Page 230teat his deeds should be reprov'd; Its no wonder that a Malefactor desire not to come before the ???; and its as little wonder that a man or woman that liveth a sinful and evil life, deire not to come before their Conscience: Hence it is, that many dare not go to their Conscience, because it never speaks good, but evil to them, (as indeed it hath no other reason) and on that account they even hate it, As Achab did the Prophet Micajah, of whom he said, I hate him, because he never prophesies good but evil to me: And that they will rather consult Flsh and Blood, their own inclination and affection, then their Conscience in a particular; because they dread, it will speak evil to them, especially when they know, that there is something palpably wrong in their way; for in that case, they conclude it will gloum on them, and gall them, and even prick them in the quick. A2d. Reason is, Because folks make not this work of self-examination habitual to themselves, but delay and put off time, until their case become so ravelled, and consused, that they are afraid to medle with it; And though they should, they grow heartlesse, and out of hope to get it righted; just like men that cannot indure to adjust their accounts, which they have suffered negligently to run long on and into great confusion. A 3d. Cause may be this (which respects Believers in Christ) that even where persons make Conscience of their wayes, there is a kind of foolish precipitancy, and haste making; They being disposed to

think, that examination of themselves takes up much of their time, and that it is better to spend it in prayer, or in reading, then that way; Not considering, that its much better to have some little thing of Religion solid, then to have a great bulk of many duties without solidiy, or with very little of it; These are like to the builder of a house, who rickleth up stones without Square and Rue, and without Morter, which possibly falleth, and cometh down ere he come at the top of it; A foolish haste to be forward makes our work in Religion to be otentimes very unsolid;Page 231Alace! ts not what blk we have, not how soon we come to have it, but what solidity, and sicknesse we have, that will give us peace, comfort o joy; Our common proverb holds true here, That work or thing that is well done is soon done. A 4th. Cause may be, (which also respects even Believers) that we are disposed to think if we be alwayes about some duty, it matters not so much what duty it be; And hence it often cometh o passe, that the time that should be spent in self-examination, we spend it in prayer, reading, or conference; which readily go the worse with u, that examination is so much neglected: Therefore there would be warinesse, and circumspection here; because that which giveth peace, is not so much, to be much in duty, as it is to be in the duty, that we are called o for the time; there being a linking of duties to another in a Christian walk, (as so many Jewels, Precious-stones, or Pearls in a Chain, necklace, or Bracelet) so as they stregthen and help one another; Meditation helps Prayer, and Prayer self-examination; and self-examination helps

Prayer, and every other duty: And that which beautifies and adorns the Chain of a tender Christian Walk, is the ordering and setting of every duty in its own place, every thing being beautiful in its own season, and place; Thus the blessed man is said, Psalm 1. To bring forth his fruit in his season.

In the 4th. Place (according to the method proposed) We would very briefly give you a few Directions, for facilitating the practice of this duty, and for making it succesful and profitable: and to this purpose, 1. Learn to make Conscience of all the pieces and steps of your way, and this will give you the better heart to look back on it; if Christians were tender in their walk, it would breed ease to them in this duty, in Two respects, 1. It would make it sweet and refreshing, not having an evil and challenging Conscience to meet with, 2. It would leave some savoury impression of the duty upon them, which helps to reflect with profit; whereas, Page 232 when they pass through duty (to speak so) and when they have done, know not what they have been doing; how can they reflect? A 2d. Direction is; Ye would be much in laying out the ??? of your way before God in prayer, ye would not only be much in the petition of prayer, but also much in confession, in reading over (as it were) the legend of your life to God: heartily acknowledging his grace in that which is good and right, and humbly taking with that which is evil, and wrong; for when ye study to look over, and review your way in prayer, it helps you to get the better, and more impartial sight of the particulars thereof in examination, and when ye do not dwell in a manner on

the thoughts of your way in prayer, it makes it the more uncouth, and confused to you in examination: Thus when the Sabbath comes, we would be particular in conessing to God in prayer, the sins that haunts us that day; and this would help to examination; and examination would help to be yet more particular in prayer. 3ly. As for other dures, so for this, ye would have your set times of purpose; I say for this duty as well as for prayer; and would let no other duty shuffe it out of its own place and season; for when we leave the time thereof at an uncertainty, we readily shit and neglect it; As, in prayer, though we would observe and take hold of all providential opportunities for it; yet that doth not hinder, but we have, and should have our particular set times for it, so ought it to be here; Therefore its said, Psalm 4. Commune with your earts, (or Examine your seves,) upon your beds. 4ly. This set time would be, when persons are most fresh and fit for the duty, and have the aitest opportunity to insist in, and to dwel on it, and to follow it until they be suitably affected with it, and until somewhat of it be reached; for when we straiten ourselves, and take not such a time as is fit for the duty, we will not get it followed out to any purpose, and get time also for prayer and other duties; and that causeth overliness readily in all: We would therefore take suchPage 233a time for this duty, that we may not (so far as we can forecast) be diverted, and drawn away from it, by some other thing. 5ly. When some other thing, not then necessary breaks in to divert, and draw us away from it, we would take ourselves again and again, and

endeavour to bring our hearts back, and up to the duty that they get not leave to break louse; for if the heart get a custom of gading, and admitting of diverseions, it will never readily suffer us to be serious in this duty; And therefore by all means, when ye go about this duty of self examination, beware of, and guard against the intrusion of other thoughts whither they be vain, or thoughts of things that may be at another time profitable, but at that time impertinent. 6ly. In your review of your condition, or in your self-examination, endeavour to find out, and acknowledge the good as well as the evil that is in it; and to find out the evil as well as the good; and to e answerably affected with joy, and thanksgiving for that which is good, and with grief and sorrow for that which is evil. 7ly. Endeavour to have your Self examination alwayes in the close of it, leaving some kindly impression of your own sinfulness and unworthiness; and of the necessity, usefulness and worth of God's Grace on you; and laying and leaving you at Christ's Feet for a remedy of every thing amisse in your condition? This is he great scope and design of this duty, and of all we have discoursed on it, even to send us to Chist, and this should be the effect of it, to leave us on him, which would make the exercise of it heart? some, pleasant and profitable to us.

SERMON IV.

2 COR. 1:12. For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in ???, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you wards.

There is hardly anything excellent, and very singularly profitable to men? but it hath some more then ordinary difficulty in the way of coming at it, notwithstanding whereof they are not deterred, nor detained from pursuing after it; the consideration of its excellency with the expectation of the great incomes of advantage and profit by it, makes them the more easily comport with the difficulty of it, and to think all their labour well bestowed, in overcoming that difficulty: So we may truly say of the serious exercise of godlinesse, that it is so transcendently excellent (as being that which beautifully conforms the rational? to the image of God, and capacitates the same to enjoy fellowship with him, wherein its true glory, and excellency incontrovertibly consists) and so very profitable, even profitable to all things (as nothing else in the world is) having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come, That the greatest difficulties should not fright ??????, nor faint us in the vigorous, constant and closs pursuit of it: We shall not deny, but that thisPage 235piece of godlinesse in particular, that lyes in the conscientiously tender ordering, and disposal of all our

actions in order to wining at the joyful Testimony of our Conscience concerning them, hath much difficulty in it, as being contrary to the natural levity, wavering and instability of our hearts, and mightily opposed by Satan, as greedy prejudicial to his interest in the Soul, yet it is so very excellent, and so exceeding useful, and profitable to the Christian (as we made appear from our last discourse on these words) that all the difficulty of it may be the more easily digested; It hath (as the other duties of Religion have, when rightly gone about) its reward in the bosom thereof; O! what sweet peace, what strong consolation, and what unspeakable joy hath the apostle here, from the Testimony of his Conscience after discovering his actions, to be so ordered, by this serious Self-reflection, and examination? whereof special notice would be taken; We shall therefore now proceed to Observe some things more particularly from the Text, to this purpose.

First then Observe, That when Conscience is well pleased with a man's way, it will give a Testimony for him; or when Conscience hath put a man's way to proof, it will not only, in the general speak its sense, but when his way is well ordered, and squared according to the Rule, and he in his design is found straight, and to have taken his aim right, Conscience will, after Examination, excuse, and bear him witness to his joy: Thus is Paul dealt with here by his Conscience, This is our rejoicing (saith he) the testimony of our conscience; Which is not simply Conscience speaking, but Conscience speaking for vindicating him from these aspersions that were cast

upon him, or excusing him (as the word is, Romans 2:15.) And testifying that he was not the man that some men counted him to be; He had this Testimony, That in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom? but by the grace of God he had his conversation in the world? and more abundantly toward them in Corinth; WhichPage 236after search he found to be so: That which we spoke of the nature of Conscience makes this out; for Conscience, when right, speaks of things as they indeed are, and holds forth the mind of God, and gives sentence according to it; when he is well pleased, to declare and pronounce pardon and peace; and when he is displeas'd? to declare anger, and (as it were) to denounce War.

Whereof we would make this Use, Even to learn not only to study to know, take up, and discern the work ??? Conscience, in challenging and accusing (which for ost part it doth, having so much ground to do so) but so its work, in absolving, excusing, and giving a good Testimony.

2ly. Observe, That the Testimony of Conscience, or its bearing witness for a man, after reflecting upon, and searching of his way, is exceeding refreshful, comfortable and joyous? This is our rejoycing (saith the apostle) the testimony of our conscience; There is nothing more heartsome, refreshing and cheering to a tender walker, neither can there readily be anything? on this side heaven, more solacious and joyous to him, then when he hath examined his Conscience, to find it testify

for him; This is the great ground of Paul's joy and rejoicing; though he lived in the midst of manifold temptations, and tribulations; and was accounted to be the most contemptible of men, Even as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things; Yet he had solid peace and joy on this ground, that when he looked back on his way, in the discharge of his Ministry, his Conscience bare him witness, that he had been single and faithful therein; And as it was thus with Paul, so it hath been with many of the Lord's people, who have humbly boasted, and rejoiced in this Testimony of their Conscience within, when men have spoken evil of them, reproached and reviled them without.

For further clearing of this point, we would consider a little, 1. Some particular Cases, wherein this Testimony of Conscience proves in a special manner refreshing, Page 237 and rejoicing. 2ly. We would consider the particular grounds, and attendants of this refreshing and joy; whereby we will easily see, that this Testimony of Conscience for a man, upon the search of his way, is a singularly good thing; for before a man search his way, he cannot solidly acquiesce in the Testimony that Conscience gives of it; nor can look on it as well grounded; because he is not, nor can be sure whether there be any ground and warrant for it, or not; whereas, when he hath suitably searched for the ground and warrant, where they are, they will readily discover themselves to him.

As to the particular Cases, wherein this Testimony proves singularly refreshing and joyous, they are these, and the like, 1. In a Case of external crosses, and troubles in the World; none of these much move a man, that hath this Testimony of his Conscience, it gives him sweet peace amidst them all; We see what mighty troubles Paul, was under, Chap. 11. v. 25, 26, 27. Yet he can, and doth rejoyce in the midst of them. 2. When external crosses and losses have sad aggravations attending them, such as the contempt, and reproach of the men of the World; when he is calumniously represented, as one that turns the world up side down, and who is deservedly so dealt with, Conscience its Testimony in that case gives him peace, quietness and joy; which is the very case wherein the apostle here rejoyceth on this account. A 3d. Case is, When inward challenges, and temptations accompany outward afflictions, when these are mustered up before, and make an assault on the poor afflicted man, and when there are some fearful apprehensions of God's displeasure born in upon him; Then, O! then Consciences Testimony gives wonderful quietnesse; as we may see it doth to holy Job, who sayeth, in this case, Chap. 27. v. 6. My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live; So Chap. 31. throughout; and sure it must be solid, and well-grounded quietnesse, rest? and repose of Soul, that calms a man in this case. 4ly. When the person draws near unto death, and when this KingPage 238of Terrours formidably musters all his Forces, and when there is no escaping out of his hand, and when all comforts fail, and stand by as so many muts, not having

one word to say, for the dying man's relief, or ease; this Testimony doth then readily come forth in its strength, toward the quieting, refreshing? and rejoycing of his heart, and makes him boldly, and without??? fear, encounter death; as the experience of Hezekiah? and many others of the Saints recorded in the Scriptures, maketh clear.

2ly. Consider whence this joy comes, or the grounds and attendants of the joy which this Testimony yeelds, which are Fourfold? 1. It hath with it inward quietness, strength and comfort; The well grounded approving Testimony of the Conscience, calms the heart amidst all storms of outward troubles, or of inward challenges, and tentations, and puts them all to silence, it doth fortify the heart to bear out in what ever tryal; it proves not only comfortable in the holding off challenges, but hath a joy and refreshing, flowing immediately from the very Testimony itself, even a singularly sweet joy, that flourisheth, and flows over and above these; and keeps the heart in a calm serenity; The peace of God, (sayeth the apostle, Philippians 4:7) shall guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; Consciences Testimony warrantably speaking peace, is like a garison planted about the heart, keeping it as an impregnable and invincible strong Hold, or Fort; So that no troubles, nor temptations from without, nor stirrings of Corruption or Challenges from within, do sooner (to say so) set out their head, but it overmatcheth them, and preserves the heart quiet in despyt of them all. 2ly. This does also accompany this Testimony, as a ground of joy, even the

clearing up of the persons interest in Christ, and the evidencing of their sincerity, and the truth and reality of the work of Grace in them; Which is very strengthning and comforting; when a man hath put his way to the tryal in the court of Conscience, and found it to be squared accordingPage 239to the Rule of the Word, and hath Consciences Testimony therein for him; It sweetly evidences to him his sincerity, and so the truth of his interest in Christ, which is attended with unspeakable joy.

3ly. This Testimony gives boldnesse and accesse with confidence to God, to go heartsomly and familiarly to him in prayer under the multitude of temptations, crosses and reproaches; and is not this ground of great refreshing, and joy? When a man may go to God, and pour out his very heart in his bosom, may not only tell him what he needs, but also expect a gracious hearing, and return from him, in whatsoever is needful; If our hearts (says Iohn 1 Epistle Chap. 2. v. 22.) condemn us not, we have confidence towards God, and whatsoever we ask? we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do these things that are pleasant in his sight; Though the man be empty-handed for the time, and hath not in himself, whereupon he can be for the honour of God, either by suffering or doing, he may with humble boldnesse, present his suit to God, and expect from him whatsoever is good, and needful for the man himself, and what ever may be for his own honour in him, and by him.

4ly. This Testimony of a good Conscience hath attending it, a clearing, and up-making, fresh and lively hope of eternal Life; and of a comfortable, glorious, and satisfying out-gate, from all the difficulties, temptations, and troubles that he is in at present, or may be in for the future; it will make him, according to his measure say, as Paul doth, 2 Timothy 4:7, 8. I have fought a good fight I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, Hence forth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, and so forth. And by thus clearing up the Christians hope of eternal life; an entrance is ministred unto him abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: as Peter hath it, 2. Ep. ch, 1. v. 11. And must it not be exceedingly, and even unspeakably refreshing and joyful to the Christian, to have all these trysting together Page 240 in his Case, even while he is here sojourning in the earth? doubtlesse it must.

The First Use of this Doctrine serves for exhorting, and beseeching you all to study, and be in love with a good Conscience; its unknown, what solid sweet peace and joy ye may have by it; O! Endeavour through Grace, to be so tender, straight, and upright in your aim to have a good Conscience in all things, that when ye reflect on your way, ye may have its good Testimony; There will most certainly be more peace found in this, then in the greatest abundance of all earthly comforts, though combined together at their very best; Can any of these calm a man's mind in a storm of challenges for sin, and of the terrours of death? Do they not often rather leave men in greater anxiety, and perplexity, then if they had never enjoyed

them? Yea, often in the very mean time of these injoyments, and in the midst of the carnal joy and laughter that results from them, the heart is sad, through the want of the Testimony of a good Conscience. Therefore we exhort you, in the Name of the Lord, as ye would have a pleasant and cheerful life, and a comfortable and joyful death, labour to have a good Conscience in all things, that when ye reflect on it, it may testify for, and speak good of, and to you; This (as Solomon says) Is a continual feast in Life, and a sovereign cordial against the terrour of Death.

The 2d. Use serves. To let us see the rise, reason and cause of the great anxiety, perplexity and vexation, that is among most men, so that they toil night and day, and have no satisfaction; its even this, that they do not seek after the peace and joy that are founded upon, and result from the Testimony of a good Conscience; no wonder that such persons live, and die utter strangers to all solid peace and joy, which only grow on this Root: This is a main cause also of the little peace, and great heartlesnesse, that is among even Believers themselves, that either they are not so seriously endeavouring to have the Testimony of a good Conscience, or they are not so careful to draw their rejoyceing from it, but are untender in their walk, or are as so many Bees fleeing from this flower to the other of worldly injoyments, seeking to suck some sweetnesse, and satisfaction from them, and do not, as it becomes them, reflect on Conscience; that they may have a Testimony of sincerity

from it; and that on that ground, they may be quiet, cheerful, and joyful.

The 3d. Use Serves, To discover to us, what mighty prejudice flows from, and follows upon the neglect of a tender walk, which layes the ground of this Testimony, and on the neglect of self-examination, a main piece of a tender walk, which helpeth to draw forth this Testimony; and therefore, as ye would have this Testimony, and the refreshing peace, and joy that flow from it in Life and Death, and as ye would have a heart holily triumphing over all crosses and difficulties, afflictions and tribulations, design and indeavour more through grace, to have a tender walk, that ye may lay a ground for this Testimony; and study to be more frequent in Self-examination, that thereby ye may extract, and draw it forth clearly, and convincingly for your peace, comfort and joy: Could many of you be but once prevailed with, to prove, and make tryal, what a comfortable thing it is, to have Conscience by this Testimony smiling on you, ye would be more in love with it, and with the serious exercise of godlinesse, and particularly with Self-examination, that make way for it, However, we are persuaded that ere long, the day will come, wherein many of you shall be made to know the truth of all this in your sad experience, when death shall stair you grimly in the face, and when ye shall neither be able to send nor to flee; O! of what excellent worth will the Testimony of a good Conscience then be found to be, hearing witnes to men, concerning their honesty, sincerity, uprightness, and the tenderness of their walk; many of you will find

it, though ye believe it not now, when ye shall be eternally deprived of such a Testimony; ye shallPage 242then be made to know to your everlasting cost, that the rejoycing of heart flowing from this Testimony of a good Conscience, is infinitely preferable to all the worldly injoyments, and delights of the sons of men: I would beseech such of you, as think yourselves to be wise in this world, to study to be wise in this great point of wisdom; If ye want this Testimony, when it comes to the last reckoning, ye will be forever undone, and will never through all eternity once smile for joy, but weep and gnash your teeth, for the gnawing pain, that the never dying worm of an evil Conscience shall cause to you.

3ly. Observe, That a man that would be throughly acquainted with his way, and clear in the Testimony of his Conscience concerning it, would be particular in the examination thereof; or thus, he would not content himself with a general confused tryal of it, altogether at once, and in the bulk, but he would try it by parts, and parcels; Thus it was with the apostle here; when he says that he had the testimony of his conscience, that his conversation was not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, in the world, he subjoins, and more abundantly to youwards; And so descends to the particular, that was in controversie betwixt him, and these big talking Doctors, that made it their great businesse in the Church of Corinth, to derogat from the just repute of his Person, and Ministry, and tells them, that he had the Testimony of his Conscience concerning his upright and faithful carriage, in preaching the Gospel

to them in particular: When I say, that persons would try their way by parts, or pieces, I mean, that they would try their particular actions, and behaviour in such and such places, at such and such particular times of their Life; because by this means, they come to a more distinct knowledge of their carriage and way; and it is impossible other wayes, when men take up their way together by the lump (as it were) that they can win to distinctnes; which they must needs be at, in some measure, ere they have a well groundedPage 243testimony of their Conscience, from solid and ??? grounds: Again there are some things, wherein a man cannot have a good Testimony from his Conscience? ??? when he reflects under strong Temptations, on the ???wise, and soveraign providence of God, as if he ed not the world, and his people therein aright, as Abihu chargeth Job some way to have done, when he say to him, Chap. 33. v. 12. Behold in this thou ??? not just?though Job will not take with it, that he is a ???; yet he is silent, as to this part of the charge, being, its like, convinced of the truth of it: As also a man may have manythings very blame-worthy in his life, and yet may be in one or moe particulars, wherewith he is charged, clear and innocent; as it was with David, who says, Psalm 7:3. If I have done this, and so forth. He had many blemishes, yet in this particular, he had the Testimony of his Conscience for him: Therefore men would try their way by pieces and parts, that they may disallow of these things wherein they cannot have a good Testimony from their Conscience, and may accept of its Testimony, in that wherein they are right; that they may

reject a challenge, when there is no ground for it, and entertain it where there is ground: a confused general way of Self-examination hath Two bad effects, 1. It keeps persons indistinct in the knowledge of their condition, wherein they have a confused fight of somewhat right, and of somewhat wrong, but know not what it is in particular, because they rest, and sit down upon that general confused look of their case and way, and come not to condescend on particulars. 2ly. Persons readily, either absolve themselves, as to the more general tract of their life; because they see some things honest like therein, which keeps them from taking with just challenges; or else they condemn the whole of their life, because they see somethings wrong in it, which keep them from comforting themselves in the Testimony of their Conscience, as to what is right; therefore we would be particular in trying our way (as I said) by parts, that everyPage 244thing may have its own place and weight with u.

4ly. Considering these words as spoken by Paul, who takes much pains to prove and clear his condition, and speaks of this Testimony, as of a great matter he had attained to, Observe, That it is not easie, but very difficult, even for a man that hath taken pains in searching himself, to obtain the Testimony of his Conscience for him in a particular; Its not so smal a matter, nor so easie a businesse as many suppose it to be; its not only a great and difficult businesse to follow the search rightly; but it is so likewayes to find things right, and to win at the Testimony of Conscience, as to this,

and that, and the other particular: If it were not a great and difficult business, Paul would not lay such weight on it, as he doth. Now when I say its a great and difficult business, I mean, . That it is a rare thing, and such as every one doth not attain to; nay every Believer hath it not, as to every part and piece of his carriage. 2ly. That it calls for much tenderness and sincerity, in the whole of a man's practice, to reach it; It will not be a coarse, and ordinary walk and frame of heart, that will give a man ground for this refreshing Testimony of his Conscience, but it requires much seriousness and sincerity in the exercise of godliness, as is clear here? 3ly. That beside much seriousnesse and sincerity, in the universal exercise of godliness, and much circumspection in the man's personal walk and conversation, much diligence is called for, in searching to find out, and to come by this Testimony of his Conscience; for a man may have matter, and ground for Conscience its Testimony, and yet through the neglect of suitable, serious and narrow Selfexamination, he may be at a great loss, as to its joyful Testimony for him; even as one may be guilty of many sins, and yet be but very little, or not at all challenged for them, through the neglect of Self-examination. 4ly. That it requires much singleness in trying of Consciences Testimony, whether it be well grounded or not; for a man that hath his peace and joy to build on thisPage 245Testimony, must not take every show and appearance of such a Testimony, for the ground of his peace and joy, but Conscience would be put to speak distinctly, and on good ground for it, that? in this, and that, and the other

thing, there was some sincerity; and this must be put to the proof, and exactly tryed by the word, whether it be so or not; As we see here the apostle did, he tryeth his way and conversation, and finds it to have been ???simplicity and godly sincerity, and so forth. From which premises (to speak so) he draws the refreshing conclusion of his joy and rejoycing: Now if we look to all these, or to any one of them, whether to the rarity of it amongst most men, yea even amongst Believers, in some respect; or to the exactnesse and tendernesse of walk that is requisit to be the ground of it; or to the great difficulty that a man will find in coming at a through search of his way; or to the diligence and single that is called for in the tryal of Conscience its Testimony, we will find it to be a most clear and certain truth, that it is not an ordinary, nor easie business, but very difficult, to obtain the well grounded, good and joyful testimony of Conscience, as to our more general and particular conversation.

If it be so (which is the se of the Doctrine) Is it not a wonder from whence the peace that many pretend to, comes? Is it not a wonder, that the most part of men and women can so easily affirm the Testimony of their Conscience to be for them, when there is neither exactness of life, not tenderness of walk, nor diligence in Self-searching, nor holy jealousie, nor impartial and single trying whether it be well grounded or not? And yet they will at the very first confidently pretend to Conscience its Testimony: If many of you were put to it, can you give such evidences or grounds for its

Testimony, as Paul does here? If not, how comes it to pass, that ye are so ready confidently to lay claim to it? And yet, alae! there is nothing more ordinary, in the generality of these that are most carnal and secure, thenPage 246boldly to assert that they have a good Conscience, and an honest heart. Is not this very strange, wonderful, and even ???, that under the clear Sun-shine of Gospel light, Satan should get so great advantage, as thus ???harden the hearts, and blind the Consciences of so many poor wretched creatures, and at this rate to deude and ??? them, as to prevail with them confidently to assert and maintain, that which they call their honesty, which yet is nothing else but rotten-hearted ???, and to ??? their peace of Conscience, which is nothing but a Soul-murtheng, and damning ????

For further clearing of the Doctrine, and inlarging of its se, and for helping you to judge aright of Conscience its Testimony, in your searching after it; We shall propose some Questions, from the requisit qualifications of a well grounded, and refreshing Testimony of a man's ??? for him; which must all be answered in some measure affirmatively, and these Answers solidly, and well proved, and made ou, before you can quietly and confidently rest on Consciences Testimony, as to any part or piece of your way; whether it be in reference to the Sanctification of the Sabbath, to conferring on a spiritual subject, to prayer, to praise, to reading, to hearing, to eating, to drinking, to buying, to selling, to building, to planting, and so forth. But we shall here restrict the inquiry mostly at least, to Religious things, or

actions that are Religious in their own nature. First, then, Conscience must be satisfied in this; Whether that which ye have done, be on the matter approven of God, or not; It is certainly true, ye will say, that prayer in itself is approven, and so it is; but was such and such an expression that ye uttered, and such a word that ye spoke, and the arguments that ye made use of in prayer, right before God? If the matter be not right, Conscience cannot speak for you; Though a man should be as wary and circumspect as may be? in cheating, circumvening, and deceiving of his neighbour, its impossible forPage 247Conscience to give him a good Testimony anent it, or any other such action; because its on the matter sinful; ye must once then be sure and clear in this, that what ye speak, or do in prayer, or any other thing is, as to its matter, according to the will of God.

2ly. Conscience must be satisfied in this, not only whether the thing be lawful in itself; but also whether it be a thing lawful to you, at such a time, and that to which ye are particularly called; For manythings are lawful, which are not expedient; And manythings may be expedient at one time, which will not be expedient at another; take it in the instance of prayer, wherein Conscience will not approve us, though we be right in it on the matter, if it be not rightly timed, or if we be not then called to it; This is to be taken heed to, especially in things that are on the matter indifferent, and in the timing of such commanded duties; to which God hath not set and fixed a particular precise time, but left them to Christian prudence to be gone about, by persons at these

times, which are most seasonable, and as they are called to them.

3ly. When ye are thus clear, as to the matter, season and time, and as to God's calling you to such and such a duty, whether did you acknowledge God in your undertaking of the duty? was he looked to for direction, and guiding in it, and for his blessing on it, and depended on for throw-bearing? according to that notable word, Prov. 3:16. In all thy wayes acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths; In this also Conscience must have satisfaction.

4ly. What Motive did set you on to such and such a duty? and from what principle did you do it? For a duty, or action may be right on the matter? and ye may also be called to it, and yet? if ye be not swayed to it from a right motive and principle, it will marr your peace, and stand in the way of Conscience testifying for you; that is, Though you should do a thing that is right, if ye be not swayed to it out of Conscience, from the awe of God, from love to him, and from obedience to his command, it is faulty in so far, and ye cannot in so far have peace, nor the approving Testimony of your Conscience therein: But if a man indure grief, and suffer wrongfully, for conscience towards God, it is thank worthy, aith the apostle, 1 Peter 2:19. Or if he give a cup of cold water to disciple, in the name of a disciple, he shall not lose his reward. Matthew 10? 42. Thus two persons come to Church to hear the word, the one out of Conscience, in obedience to God's command, and from

love to fellow ship with him, in his ordinances; and the other for the fashion, and because its the custome, or that he may eschew from his own Conscience, the construction, and accusation of his being a grsly proane, and it religious person, or on some such other sinister account; the one hath in so far ground of peace, and the refreshing Testimony of a good Conscience; the other not.

5ly. Conscience must be satisfied in this Question, in whose strength was the duty undertaken? was it in the strength of Christ? and was he depended on for assistance in the going about of it? for it is not enough, that the duty be gone about, and he some way acknowledged in it, unless he be also believably depended on for strength, to inable to the suitable performance of it.

6ly. What was your end in undertaking and prosecuting of such a duty, or action? whether was it some self-end, or the glory of God, and the edification of others? as in your eating and drinking, do ye eat and drink to satisfie your appetit only, or mainly, or to enable you to serve God, and to do good to others, in your station and capacity? In your seeking such and such gifts from God by prayer, whether is it that ye may bestow, or consume them on your lusts? (as Iames says, some do, Chap. 4:3.) Or is it that ye may be helped to adorn the doctrine of God in all things? The proposing of a right end, is a main ingredient in every action, and hath great influence on your peace; We preach not ourPage 249selves (saveth

the apostle, 2 Corinthians 4:5. bt Christ Jesus the Lord; We are (as if he had said) in our preaching not seeking ourselves, but him; nor our own praise, or applause to ourselves, but his glory and exaltation; and this had much influence on his peace and joy; Conscience must be also satisfied in this by any means.

7ly. After what manner was the action, or duty gone about? was it in sincerity and singleness in a spiritual way? was the inner and new man exercised in it? suppose the duty for instance to be prayer, was it gone about in the Spirit? was Grace acted in it? and were ye serious, lively, humble tender, reverend, servent, and so forth. in it?

8ly. Was there nothing wrong in the action or duty? no mixture of corruption with the actings of Grace? no selfnesse mixed with your singleness, or at the best, was there not some mixture of other ends with the main end? Which, though it do not simply make the action, or duty condemnable, and to be rejected, especially when taken with, and mourned for, and Christ made use of for the pardon of it; yet it will considerably weaken Conscience its Testimony, and the joy resulting from it, in so far as these sinful mixtures ae.

9ly. Were ye stretching yourselves to the yondmost in the performance of such an action or duty, to have it right, as to all the former requisits? Was there nothing left undone, that might and should have been done? Was ye not only aiming at the right end, but according to your light, endeavouring to take every way, and make use of

every approved mean, for the compassing and bringing about of that end?

Now if we will all seriously reflect, and look about us, how few, how very few are there to be found, who can answer these questions affirmatively, in any acceptable measure? Who, alace! can say they have done all they should, or even might have done, as to matter and manner, from right principles, and motives, to a right end? That they have used all means, without omitting any, that they have given all diligence? That theyPage 250 have made use of Christ's strength, and been single and sincere, and so forth. in their performances? And yet when all this is some way done, ye must yet answer one or two Questions more, ere ye can have solid peace and joy, from the good Testimony of your Conscience. 1. Whether were ye proud and conceity in the performing of such and such duties? For, if that dead Flee come in on the doing of the best duties, it will make all to stink: and yet oft-times Christians spoil their duties, and very much deprive themselves of the joyful Testimony of their Conscience, even when they have been right for matter and manner; by their being vain, conceity and proud of them.

2ly. Whether have ye washen your best duties in the Blood of Christ? For if this be wanting, it will greatly marr your peace and joy; Now I would again ask you, if ye can say, that your duties have been conform to these requisits? If not, how is it that ye are so secure, and can alleadge that ye have a good Conscience? or how can you

so confidently expect peace and joy from ts Testimony? or think ye nothing to prostitute, and (as it were) to make a bachel of this excellent thing, the Testimony of a good Conscience, as if ye could take it up (in a manner) at your foot? Ah! is there nothing that can make a crack in, or a breach upon your peace of Conscience? ye will possibly say, that ye have all sinned; if so, how can ye have peace to ly down in sin? It is true, the simple having of sin, when it suitably affects, should not quite marr and bereave a person of the Testimony of a good Conscience, where Grace is in the truth of it, and there is sincerity, and singlennesse, in endeavouring to be in case affirmatively, in some measure to answer the questions before proposed; but the utter neglect of these things, a conniving at them, and indifferency, whether the requisits be or not, a not wrestling, and striving in the strength of Christ against sin, and to get duties suitably performed, in the same strength, a not seeking to have men's best duties washen,Page 251(as I said) in the Blood of the Lamb; cannot but quite deprive of the Testimony of a good Conscience, and altogether obstruct the peace, and joy that flow from it: A Believer indeed not allowing himself in his shortcomings, in these things called for, and making frequent application to Christ, for strength to do better, and for pardon of what is wrong, and walking humbly in the sense of his failings, and short comings, may have peace, even though in manythings he fail, and come short; and though there be some mixture of corruption going along with his grace, and of hypocrisie with his sincerity, in his best duties; As we

may see in the apostle Paul Who had a law in his members (which he most sadly bemoans, Rom?) rebelling against the law of his mind; Even when he had this Testimony of a good Conscience, and much peace and joy resulting from it: But a secure ???sinner can never have the Testimony of a good Conscience, nor any the least measure of that solid joy, or peace that flows from it, for (as the Prophet Isaiah sayeth, Chap. 57. v. last) There is no peace to the wicked, saith my God.

SERMON V.

2 COR. 1:12. For our rejoycing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, notwith fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, we have ha our conversation in the world, and mor abundantly to you-wards.

There are many duties, and pieces of Christianity whereof the world neither knows the excellency, nor the difficulty; men are for the most part disposed to think, that Religion is a thing of very little worth, and very easiely come by, when they shall find it convenient for them, to look after somewhat of it; because they never set themselves seriously and in good earnest to practise it, nor to experience the choice and excellent advantages that come by it: And we verily suppose, that there are not two things in Religion less known and believed, then the difficulty of attaining to a well-grounded Testimony of a good Conscience; and the unspeakable excellency of it, with the great advantage that comes by it, when it is attained, and intertained.

We spoke before to you of the great refreshing, and joy which the well-grounded Testimony of a good Conscience yeeldeth, and of the great difficulty that there is to attain, and come by it, as being the result of much diligence, labour, and pains in solid answering of many questions.

Page 253 Before we proceed any further, there may arise here a Doubt or Objection, which would be cleared, and answered, viz. If a particular search, and examination, as to every action and duty be necessary, yea, if it be possible, ere the Conscience can give a good Testimony? and if so, how a person can possibly have peace, in reference to his bygone way, when, in seeking to review it, and to reflect upon it, he finds it impossible to examine every action, and the circumstances of it? We conceive it to be necessary, to answer this Doubt, or Objection, though we confesse, it is very difficult to do it, to full satisfaction, there being especially, extreams upon both sides, some being ready to take an undue liberty, and latitude to themselves, on the one hand, when any allowed qualifications are offered; and others being in hazard to faint, and be discouraged on the other hand, if the matter be kept in a peremptory state, without due qualifications and cautions; And yet we are sure, that the right preaching of the Gospel (if we could win at it) will neither louse reins to lawless and sinsul liberty to carnal persons; nor make sad the hearts of these that ate gracious and tender, nor put them on the rack, nor involve them into a labyrinth of inextricable intricacies, and perplexities. For answer then to the Doubt or Objection, 1. It is indeed expedient, so far as a Believer can win in self-examination, to reach his particular actions, and the particular steps, and circumstances of them, wherein Job, and others of the Saints, have win a great length, and the expediency, if not necessity of it, appears from this, because, by this means, Believers win

to more distinctnesse, and stayednesse in up-taking of their case. 2ly. We think that the distinct examination of all particulars in a man's life, and of the several questions that Conscience may propose concerning them, is not possible in itself; and therefore not simply necessary as to the makeing of this duty practicable; for if we could possibly (as we cannot) go through all our Actions, and all the circumstances ofPage 254them, through out our whole way, it would take up more of our time to examine, then we have for practice: if we should be put to reflect particularly on every thing that we have done, on what hath been committed, and on what hath been omitted, and the several aggravations, and circumstances of every one of these, and to go through every one of them, according to the exact Rule, it would take us many days; yea, if the Conscience should give way to scrupulousness in this, there should alwayes be an examination of our examination (which yet may, and in some cases ought to be) and so on in infinitum, that there should never be an end of this work, to the exclusion of others, clearly called for, which cannot be: That is not then (we conceive) the Lord's end, in pressing on us this duty of Self-examination; whereby he designs to extricat the Souls of his People, out of disquietnesse, and not to involve them further in it. Yet 3ly. We say, that its necessary, as to Believers peace in their duty, that they examine the series of their way, though they cannot reach every particular action, or all its circumstances; and that they think no duty to be so clear, nor any sin to be so little, as resolvedly to passe it, without reflecting on it,

so far as is possible: and in examining the series, and tract of their way, They would consider, 1. The matter of their actions, whether it was good and approven of God, or not. 2. The manner of them, Whether they have endeavoured to do things after the due order, and in the prescribed manner. 3. What they proposed to themselves, as the general main end, and scope of their actions, whether it was the glory of God, or not; we find much of the Saints Testimony of their Conscience, to be founded upon this; as we may see here, in Paul, We have had (says he) our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you wards, not with fleshly wisdom, and so forth. And in David, who ???, Psalm 119? 59. I thought on my ways? and turned my feet into thy testimony; There is great difference betwixt a man's way, or path, and Page 255 every particular step of his way or path; David proposes to himself the series of his way to be examined, and wherein he found himself faulty, he makes haste to go out of it, and turns his feet into God's testimonies; He was endeavouring to be watchful in every step of his way while it was before him, to have it right; but when he reflects, it being impossible (as we have said) to look on every step of his way, and to examine it according to the Rule, he looks upon the series of it; on the matter, manner, and end of his walk, in the tract of his life; and in this respect, he sayeth, Psalm 18:21. I have kepted the wayes of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. As Job Chap. 23. also doth, My soot hath held his steps, his way have I kepted, and not declined. 4ly. Believers would not only look to their way; but there are

some actions, and steps of their way, at some special times, that they would be more particular in the examination of, then at other times, and of every action, though they would not designedly seclude any, as God in providence calleth them to it, and points it out to be their duty; but there are (I say) some particular actions, that they are called to examine more then others: And for further clearing of this, I shal instance it in a few things, As 1. There are some things or actions and duties that more eminently concern a Believers peace, or disquietness; his peace if rightly gone about, and his disquietness if otherwise; Some things whereby God is in an especial manner honoured, and the Believer himself comforted, if he carry rightly; and God highly dishonoured, and the Believers Conscience greatly wounded, if he miscarry; we may instance it in these solemn Ordinances of the Lord's Supper, of times of Humillation with Fasting, of public, or secret personal Covenanting with the Lord? and the like; as here Paul reflects particularly on his Ministry among the Corinthians, and on his way in it, as being of great moment, and says, that it was more abundantly to them ward: thus it is in hearing the Word; in Prayer in our Families,Page 256and in secret; in conferring to edification on Sermons, after we have heard them, or to any spiritual purpose; in sanctifying the Lord's Day, and such others; For in these Duties the rule binds some, nay more strickly; God being in them in a more especial manner honoured or dishonoured; and there is readier access to a challenge, if the person be wrong; and to

peace and comfort, if right in these. 2ly. There are some things that are more tickle and difficult in respect either of the nature of them, or in respect of our particular inclination to miscarry in them; as for instance, when a man in providence hath been cast into a place and company, where he was crouded with snares and strong temptations, he would there examine more particularly, that nothing have stuck to him that may be ground of challenge against him; so in public employments, wherein men are exposed to many temptations and snares, especially when there is somewhat in their own tempratur, inclination, or humour that disposeth to yield, comply, and miscarry; they would there be the more particular in their examination; thus David says, Ps. 18. That he had not wickedly departed from God; that he was upright before him, and had kepted himself from his iniquity; There were some sins that he was not in such hazard of, as he was of others; and as he hand guarded more against them, so he takes a more particular view of these sins that his natural temper inclined him most to, and that he was most in hazard of: which we would take notice of at all times, but especially in these times wherein men hazard on manythings, hand over head, and as it were by guess: So when a man knows that his humour and temper disposes him to be rash and precipitant, hasty and passionate; when he hath been in company with others, when he may have had more than ordinary occasions of provocation, he would there more particularly look back and see what his way hath been, or what hath escaped him in such company.

3ly. A man would especially try and examine himselfPage 257in reference to such sins as he hath been formerly given to, and against which he hath particularly engaged himself; and as the more solemn they and engagement hath been, he should watch the more against them, so also examine the more, if he hath been inangled i them; so say the people of God, Ps. 44? 17? All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither ??? we dealt falsly in thy Covenant; there were many particular sailings in their way, which doubtless they reflected on; but especially they try, how they had carryed in their engagements to God; because they knew that any more gross falling in these would have much influence on God's dishonour, and on the wounding f their own peace: Whatever we reflect on in our way, we would not neglect, nor omit our engagements to God, but would narrowly look back and examine, how these have been observed.

4ly. Men would especially try and examine themselves in these things that cause, or occasion Challenges to them; if there be a particular challenge for anything, that is sure a particular Call, narrowly to try that thing, whether we have been right in i or not; I do not say bt a challenge may be, where there is no just ground for it (and we may be called to try, where we are not to take with a Challenge, where there is no ground for it) but often we are wise behind the hand, and precipitant; and when we have not adverted before hand to prevent the ground of a challenge, the challenge then comes to put us particularly to examine, and try what hath been right

or wrong in our carriage in such a particular. 5ly. What may occasion, or probably bring on some cross, should put a man to try? that when the cross comes he may have peace, in so fr that he hath not medied with such a thing without a clear Calling? 6ly. That which probably may be a cause, or at least n occasion of contending with, or of reproach from, or of offence to others, would put us narrowly to examine; because in all such things, a man's peace will be notablyPage 258tried: and we take this to be the reason, why the apostle instanceth here so particularly in his Ministry amongst the Corinthians, because his carriage in it was controverted by the false Teachers there, as if he had not been faithful, zealous, and single in it. Lastly, When we speak of Believers more particular trying of their way, we mean not only as to these things that are more dark and unclear, but also as to these that are most clear; for even in these, after exact examination, we may find out ground of challenge for what is wrong in our end, or in our manner of doing; and distinct ground of peace, for what is right; that we may be able with some solid confidence to say, this was wrong, and I have reason to be humbled for it; and this was right, and I may be quieted and comforted in it.

5ly. Observe, That though it be a difficult thing to win to a well grounded refreshing testimony of a good Conscience, yet by a tender Believer, it is through grace attainable; Paul speaketh of it here, not only as a thing that he aimed at, but as that which he attained; the experience also of many of the Saints does prove, that it hath been win at; as we may see in Job, David, Hezekiah,

and others: It is moreover clear from the effects that have followed on it in them, such as peace, joy, and rejoicing; all which clearly hold forth so much, that a Believer in his walk may win to a well grounded, and heart-cheering testimony of Conscience for him; if he be tender and watchful in his way to keep a good Conscience, and diligent in self-examination, and sincere and impartial in putting things to a proof, whether they be right or wrong.

The use of this Doctrine serves for instruction, to let us see, that to win at such a Testimony of our Conscience is possible; and from the consideration of the possibility of it, it serves also to encourage us to seek after it: If Conscience be made of self-examination, it is not a heartless, hopeless, and desperat business, as many take it to be, who think (and it may be they have just groundPage 259for that thought, having so evil a Conscience) that it neither will, nor can speak good to them; but it will certainly speak, when there is ground for it.

6ly. Observe, That a Believer who hath the testimony of a good Conscience, would take with it, acknowledge it, and rejoice in it; Paul having, and finding this restimony of his Conscience, ownes it, expresseth, professeth, and avoucheth it. That which I mean here is this, that a Believer would no less take with Conscience its testimony, when it speaks for him, then he takes with a Challenge when it speaks against him; and would be as well comforted by the one, as he is humbled under the

other: the experience of the Saints clears and confirms this, Hezekiah? David, Paul here, and others of the Godly have comforted themselves from the testimony of a good Conscience: we will not, we dare not say, that it is either the greatest or most ordinary fault; but we are sure, it is a fault incident to Believers, that they do not (when studying to have a good Conscience in all things) take more with, acknowledge, and comfort themselves in the testimony of their Conscience; partly thinking that it is presumption for them to own it, or to comfort themselves in it, partly thinking that something else is more suitable for them; and that it becomes them rather to be humbled, because of the many evils that they find themselves to be guilty of, then to be thus comforted; thinking that they have never sufficient ground for a testimony of Conscience for them; which were very hard for Believers to conclude, for it were on the matter to deny that they have anything of the grace of God in truth; for as far as Grace is in exercise, they have ground for this Testimony of their Conscience for them, and so good ground to be comforted, and made joyful from it.

But for prosecuting and clearing of this; we shall give you some Rules or Cautions, which may serve as so many Directions to walk by in this matter, for preventing of mistakes; The First whereof is this, that the testimonyPage 260of a good Conscience to sojourning and militant Saints, doth nor flow from perfection in holiness; otherwise David, Paul, Hezekiah, and others, would never have had it: but it flows from reflecting on the general tract of a man's way, and his finding it to be

in some measure straight before the Lord; as we see it did in David, Ps. 18:21, 22. and Ib 23:11, 12. Though in particular steps they had their own failings.

The 2d. is, That the testimony of a good Conscience may be, where there are challenges for sin; there may be in one and the same Believer, a just challenge for what is wrong, and a good Testimony for what is right; and as he should not on the one hand refuse to take with the challenge, so he should not on the other decline embracing the good testimony: as the Lord teaches plainly in his way of dealing with the Churches of Asia, Revel. 2. and 3. Where, when he reproveth them for what is wrong, he also commends them for what is right; teaching Believers thereby to distinguish well betwixt these two; and so to take with a challenge from Conscience for that wherein they are wrong, as not to refuse its testimony for them when they are right; for the Conscience will always have somewhat to say to such in reference to both these? they that resolve (as it were) to admit only of challenges, and of nothing but pure challenges, suppose themselves to be lying still in their natural and unrenewed state; and they that would be at an absolute and entire good testimony without any challenges at all, must look for that only in Heaven; where all the godly will most certainly have it to their joy unspeakable, and eminently full of glory; and it is a very shrewd evidence of an unsound state; and of a persons being under the power of delusion, to imagine, that he hath only such a testimony alwayes, without any

challenges for sin at all, while he hath still a corrupt nature within him, as all other mortals have.

The 3d. is? That in the self same action, a Christian may, and readily will have both a challenge and a testimony;Page 261 a challenge for something wrong and a testimony for something right therein; according to that word of Nehemiah, chap. 1. Hear the prayer of thy Servant, and of thy servants who desire to fear thy name; He, no doubt wanted not challenges for short-comings, yet he had a Testimony from his desire to fear God's name; And Hebrews 13:18. The apostle sayeth, we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly, and yet there was so much corruption remaining in the eminently holy man, as to raise challenges on him, as we see, Romans 7. But he severs what is right in his own condition, from what is wrong; we would not therefore think, that we cannot have a good Testimony from our Conscience, except there be absolut purity in the duty, or action; This were, as if a man should say, I have no faith, because I have a mixture of unbelief with it; or I have no sincerity, because I have a mixture of hypocrisie with it: we know that Saints use to distinguish, and put a difference betwixt these, as that poor man did, who says, Mark 9. I believe, Lord, help my unbelief; as another may say, I have much hypocrisie, yet I have some ??? with it; as David doth on the matter, Psalm 51.

The Fourth is, That there may be a good Testimony of the Conscience, in a particular action, when as to the

action, complexly considered, a Believer may see ground to be humbled; there being two parts in him, the renewed, and un-renewed part; sometimes the corrupt and un-renewed part may so restrain him, that he cannot do that which he would; and yet he may have some peace here, in as far as according to the renewed part, he allows not himself in that prevailing of the corrupt and un-renewed part, but is afflicted with, and protests against the same; so the apostle says, Romans 7:15, 16, 17. That which I do, I allow not; or what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I; if then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good, and it is no more I that do it? but sin that dwelleth in me, for to will is present with me, butPage 262how to perform that which is good I find not; He wants not ground of challenge from the un-renewed part; yet he hath peace on this account, that he can and doth warrantably distinguish betwixt the law of his mind and the law of his members; and he maintains the peace of a good Conscience in some respect, not as to his being free from all guilt, in respect of his un-renewed, or corrupt part; but in respect of the opposition which the renewed part made unto it; in respect of his corruption he looks at, and cries out of himself, as a sinful miserable and wretched man; and yet in respect of his grace, he looks at, and proclaims himself to be a happy man through Christ Jesus, and on that account heartily thanks God: I grant that Believers have need of much singleness, and selfdenial here; yet they cannot have peace, unless they thus distinguish; and by the way (which might be a distinct doctrine) let me say, that a

Believers not admitting of the Testimony of his Conscience for him, when he hath ground for it, is the cause of much heartlessness, and a mighty obstruction of his peace, comfort and joy; when he knows not, how to wail out the Testimony of a good Conscience, from a croud, and heap (as it were) of challenges for much guilt.

ly. Observe; That whoever would found peace and joy on the Testimony of his Conscience, would be sure, that it be a well grounded Testimony; therefore Paul in asserting the Testimony of his Conscience here, and his rejoicing on that ground, proves, that he had suf ground, and warrant for his doing so; and brings ??? proofs of it viz. That, in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom? but by the grace of God he hd his conversation in the world, and more abundantly to them ward; and indeed, if we consider, 1. of whaighly concernment it is, and how great and ??? a building is built on it, we will find there is much need to have the ground well, and deeply laid. 2ly. If we consider what Rains, Floods and winds of Tentations, Troubles and challenges may descend, beaPage 263and blow upon our building, and put it to the tryal whether it be founded, and be built on the Rock, or on the Sand; we had need to look well on what ground we build, and that it be solid, and durable; we find, many that will have a sort of peace in health and prosperity, who, when sickness, adversity and death come, have their peace to seek, having been all the while but building (as it were) castles in the air. 3ly. If we consider, how easie, and ordinary it is for people here to go wrong, to be mistaken, and to think that all is

well; when, alace! it is nothing so, but all quite wrong, it says, we had need to be sicker; t cryes aloud to us, to look about us, and to make sure, solid, and sicker work.

For further prosecuting of this point, I shall, 1. show how persons may suppose, that they have a good Testimony of their Conscience without a ground, or upon seeming grounds, without any solidity, or reality. 2ly. I shall show what grounds will not bear this Testimony of a good Conscience. 3ly. I shall show what grounds may bear it, or what may be the characters of a warrantable and well-grounded testimony of a good Conscience; most of all which we will find to be in this Text; to our discourses on which we resolve at this time to put an end.

For the First, viz. That people may suppose that they have the Testimony of a good Conscience without a ground, or on but seeming grounds; which is incident not only to natural men, but even sometimes to Believers themselves in some respect; men may gather a conclusion of peace from unsound grounds, and speak peace to themselves, when God has not spoken peace to them; There is a generation, says Solomon, Prov. 30. v. 12. that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness; a generation that foolishly fancy themselves to be right, when yet they are quite wrong: which we suppose comes to pass ordinarily, in these Fourcases, or from these Four grounds. 1. When ???Page 264haive holiness, and do a piece, or part of their duty and work, but go not stitch-through with it, thinking they need not to be so full, so exact, and so

precise, as the command calls for (which it may be they secretly judge to be too severe and rigid) as it was with King Saul, who, when Samul came to him, after the slaughter of the Amlekites, 1 Sam. 15. goes out to meet him, and says to him, Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have performed the commandment of the Lord; and when Samuel answers him, what means then the bleating of the sheep in min???, and the owing of the oxen which I ear? Saul replies, They have brought them from the Amalekites to be a sacrifice to the Lord; He thought that he had ufficiently kept the commandment of the Lord, though he had preserved an Aag, and some ew of the best beasts, especially for such an use: Thus often natural men, if they do (as it were) two parts, or half of their duty, think they have done enough; and that they may have peace o that ground. 2ly. When persons think that they mean well, and have an honest aim and design; and will (it may be) be ready to disput on that ground, with any that would find fault with them, and confidently assert that they have done well? as Saul does with Samuel, in that same Chapter, who says, yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and performed the commandment of the Lord; And that I have reserved these few sheep and oxen, I meant well, it was not from any greed or covetousnesse but to be a sacrifice for the Lora; what, says Samuel? hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? to obey is better then sacrifice, and so forth. That which many men call a good mind, or meaning, s often the cut-throat of their peace, and hardneth them

against just challenges. 3ly. When men are ignorant of the Law of God, it makes them to have peace, when they have no ground or it; such are ready to think, that they have given oedience to God's commands, and that they have the Testimony of a good Conscience, because they know not the extent,Page 265and spiritual meaning of the Law of God; as we may see in that man spoken of, Matthew 19. who said, all these have I kepted from my youth up; He did no grosly dissemble when he said so, but he was ignorant (as I said??? now) of the spiritual meaning and extent of the Law; he thought he was not covetous, if he did no oppress, and knew not what it was to post-pone all things in the world to God, and that he was bound in some cases, and as he called him to it, to quite all, and to follow Christ; and therefore turns his back on Christ, when he is put to the tryal: how many will have a great deal of peace, such as it is, after they have prayed, bee hearing a Sermon? resting on the ??? performance, when in the mean time, they never discerned what it was to perform these duties spiritually; they fancy that they are not guilty of breaking the first???, if they have not down-right worshipped any other God but the true God, and know no spiritual ???; that they are not guilty of murder, if they shed no man blood, and know not, that rash anger is ??? breach of that command, and murder before God; and so in other commands. 4ly. When providence seems to countenance some particular in men's hand, and it goes with them; they are ready to think in that case, they have the Testimony of their Conscience, and so speak peace to

themselves; as we see in Micah, when he has made his Teraphim, Ephod, and molen image, and meets with a vagrant Levit coming along, who ??? to stay with him; Now (says he) I know that the Lord will do me good, sing I have a Levit to be my Priest; He looks on providences furnishing him with a Priest, as God's approving of his making these images: we will also find in Rachel and Leah, two instances of this, Genesis30. Rachel in her barrenness gives Bilhah her maid to Iacob, and when she had brought forth a Son, she says, God hath judge me, and beard my voice; But Leah, when she hath given her maid to him, is more express, and clear, while she says, after Zilpahs bringing forth a Son, God hath givesPage 266me my hire, because I have given my maid to my husband; It is very rare for people, when they seem to be countenanced in such or such a particular, that they have a great mind for, so to reflect on their way, as not sadly to mistake; there may be something of this, even in Believers, in so far as they have unmortified corruption in them; all which says, that we have great need, and are so much the more concerned to study to be impartial, and single, in grounding the Testimony of our Conscience, that we mistake it not; For providence coun us in a particular will not, if there be no more, prove us to be right in it; God not having given us that, as our Rule to walk by, but the law and testimony; by which the Conscience being well informed, and giving its Testimony accordingly; that is the alone Testimony which can yield solid peace and joy.

For the 2d. thing, viz. Some false grounds (even beside these) that men use to rest upon; we shall name these four, that are very unsound, and unsicker, and they are implied in the Text. The 1. is implied in Godly sincerity: for clearing of which, ye would take notice, that there may be a moral sincerity in men's practices that is not godly sincerity; which is opposit to more gross counterfeiting and dissembling; This we find to have been in Abimelech, Genesis 20. who said to God, In the integrity of my heart have I done this; The man said not one thing, when he intended another; this moral sincerity will not prove a solid ground of the Testimony of a good Conscience; therefore we see that God plagues Aimelech, notwithstanding his moral honesty and sincerity; it is true, it may extenuat, and in some respect excuse a man's fault, as it does Paul's persecution, who did it ignorantly, and out of unbelief, and the Iews their zeal, which was not according to knowledge; but as the thing itself was not warrantable, so no such thing can be a solid ground of peace; therefore the Iews zeal does not warrant them in that they did; nor Paul's persecution to be no sin, as neither the one Page 267 nor the other, nor both of them together, warrant these spoken of, 1 Iohn 16. who, in killing the servants of Christ, thought they did God good service; the matter must be right, otherways there can never be ground for a good Testimony of the Conscience; There is somewhat of this kind of sincerity in many Merchants and Tradesmen, which makes them, if they be any way morally honest in their dealings, to think, that they have Religion enough,

and sufficient ground for a good Testimony from their Conscience; but alace, this will not do the business, nor obtain such a Testimony; it is not sure for nought, that Paul puts in this word for a ground of his Testimony, Godly Sincerity.

The 2d. False ground is implied in these words, not with fleshly wisdom; wherein ye may take notice, 1. that there is a fleshly wisdom, providence, or policy, whereby many men square their actions and wayes so, as the mean they pitch on may reach their end; and they may carry the matter so smoothly and handsomely, as not openly to offend, though they make but little Conscience, in the choice of means: but its not from a principle of Conscience, it is but worldly wisdom, which will come to nought. 2ly. Ye may notice here, that though this may keep a man sometimes from outward trouble, and in a sort of quietnesse of mind, and may yeeld him some ground of expectation to gain his point; yet it will not give him solid peace, nor be the ground of a good Testimony from his Conscience: indeed, where a tender well informed Conscience rules, and bears sway, natural wisdom is a serviceable and useful hand- maid; but when a man designs a good end to be compassed by fleshly wisdom, without consulting Conscience in it; though he should succeed, it will never give him peace. Therefore when Paul comes to Corinth to preach the Gospel, he declares that he will not preach nor disput to make a show of his learning, or scholarcraft, nor to draw people's respect and applause to himself, as the false teachers did; but with holy simplicity,Page 268he plainly istructs them

in the knowledge of the truth, and reprove impartially their faults, and so commits the success to God: Thus a Minister may sinfully follow this rule or guide of fleshly wisdom, to come by a good end, to wit, the keeping of people from casting at his Ministry; these false teachers that were in Corinth, who did not (it may be) preach gross errors, and might possibly think they had some good end, yet in their preaching, through much fleshly wisdom, they ought themselves, and made it their great work to gain the people's respect and applause, by conniving at their faults, rather than to profit them, and to gain their Souls: wo, wo to such Ministers, who wink at the sins of their hearers, that they may insinuate themselves on them, and court their favours: but closely to our point, we say, that though men should have never so good an end, fleshly wisdom, and carnal policy will never minister ground of a good Testimony from their Conscience unto them.

A third false ground is implied in these words, But by the grace of God, viz, as the principle of his actions and walk; which insinuates first, that there are some good things which men may do, not from a principle of grace, but it may be from a merely moral principle of pity, or a principle of natural courage, or the like; wherein however beneficial and acceptable these things may be to particular persons, or to humane societies, yet they can lay no solid ground of peace. 2. It insinuates that the thing that makes a man acceptable, and furnishes a good testimony to his Conscience, is, when he doth things from a principle of grace swaying and strengthening him;

and where this principle is not, Conscience can ever give a well grounded testimony to a man, suppose e should Preach and Dispute for the Truth, and give his body to be burnt for it, therefore Paul says, that it was by the grace of God that he had his conversation in the world, and to them-ward.

A fourth false ground, that will not bear out a man is, when he only puts hand to some things, or duties of Religion,Page 269without dsigning and endeavouring in the whole strain and tract of his way to perfect holiness in the fear of God, and to be pure as Christ is pure; and without allowing himself in any sin, or in the neglect, or misperformance of any known Duty; and the reason of the unsoundness of this ground is, that if a truly tender Conscience put a man to one duty, it will put him to all duties; and if it put him to abstain from one sin, it will put him to indeavour to abstin from all sins; and Paul here gathers not his testimony from one action or two? but from the tract of his Conversation.

Now if we lay by ll these seeming and false grounds, it will be found that many, yea most persons have but an empty and oom testimony, and a very ill grounded and unwarrantable peace.

For the third thing we proposed to be spoke to, viz. The grounds of a good testimony; we have them from the Text here in five or six steps, supposing the matter to be right, as all along we have done; The first is, singleness in a man's end, that he be not seeking himself, but God's honour mainly; which is implied in that word simplicity;

a single end conduces much to a man's peace; its a sine quo non to a joyful testimony of the Conscience, and the first step to it here. The second is, godly sincerity, which is not only opposit to more gross hypocriie, dissembling and couterfeiting, but contradistinguished also from meerly moral sincerity; its not only to be honest before men and (to say so) before the Conscience, but also before God; I was also upright before him, and in his eye sight, says David, Psalm 18. See to this purpose, Luke 1 verse 6. and verse 75. and what the same apostle says in the following Chapter, verse last. But as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ; this godly sincerity in a word is, when through grace a man walks so as he may be approven and commended by God, and not by his own Conscience only, let be by men, by whom to be judged either this or that way, is but a small thing as the apostle speaks, 1 Corinthians 4 3. Sincerity puts a man to aimPage 270at holiness and a conformity to God, and suffers him not to think it enough to have no challenge, but to try if there be ground for it. A third ground (which is negative) is in the next words, not with fleshly wisdom, but (as he said) with spiritual wisdom, with that wisdom which is from above; for though leshly wisdom be decryed, yet so is not spiritual wisdom; it being a great help to a circumspect Christian walk, as we show from these words, Eph. 5. Walk circumspectly not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time; and it is nothing else but a spiritually watchful and frugal catching hold of, and improving every opportunity of doing good, and of appearing for God, and the promoting of his interest

within us and without us, as he calls us to it; wisely to observe, and watchfully to guard against whatever may be a diverseion to us from our main work, and to strick in with what may further us in it, so that nothing may wound or marr our peace; Thus holy Job hath some peace from this, I was not (sayeth he) in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet, yet trouble came; It is some ease to his mind, to reflect on his spiritually wise, and thrifty improving of his time, when his great trouble fell on him, That he was not secure, but praying, and offering sacrifice for himself, and his family. A fourth ground is, the acting and exercising of grace, by the grace of God, (sayeth the apostle) That is, I had more then a natural principle exercised in my doing of duty; I did not things in my own strength, but God was depended on, and acknowledged, and his help sought and found: where we may take notice, that the right improving of grace, is the main ground of the good Testimony of a good Conscience, and a noable help to attain it; not only the having of our nature renewed? but our having grace in exercise; to be praying in the spirit, praising in the spirit, hearing in Faith, and walking up and down in his name; not lippening to ourselves, and to our own strength, but to him and to the strength of his Grace. A fifth ground is, That when all this is in somePage 271measure win at, a man be making Conscience of examining, and searching himself, and reflecting on his way, that he may know that it is so; for though Paul had his conversation by the grace of God, in simplicity, not in fleshly wisdom and so forth. yet he had not this joyful testimony of his Conscience

until he put it to proof, and found it to be so indeed; and if he had not done this, he had not had Consciences good Testimony. A 6th and last ground is, when all this is done, that a man be denied to it, and lay the weight of it only upon, and give the commendation of it altogether to the grace of God; that he single himself out? and exclude himself from having any praise of that which he hath attained to; therefore the apostle here attributes all to grace; as he doth in like manner. 1. Corinthians 15. v. 10. I laboured, says e, more abundantly then they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me: and by the grace of God, I am what I am; he takes indeed a large Testimony to himself, for the Corinthians their edification; but attributes all to the grace of God: Now when we speak of acknowledging God's grace, we would not have it done complementingly, or for fostering of pride or vanity, because of its being dispensed to us; but it would be done humbly and soberly; for a little spiritual pride, conceit and vanity, in reflecting upon what men have, or do this way, will be as a dead Flee, that will make this Box of savoury and precious oyntment to send forth a stinking smel; as we se in the proud Pharisee, who vainly and vauntingly said, I thank thee that I am not like this Publican; There is nothing more necessary for keeping the Testimony of a good Conscience clear, then to be very humble under it, and much denied to it.