

HEAVEN upon EARTH in a Serene and Smiling good Conscience.

SERMON I.

ACTS 24. verse 16. And herein do I exercise my self to have always a Conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

A Good Conscience is a singularly good Companion, the worth and benefit whereof is not readily so well known until men be brought into some strait; then indeed the passing great and singular worth and usefulness of it clearly discovers itself: as we may see in Paul's case here, who being arraigned before the tribunal of an heathen Judge, and having many enemies, and these too of his own nation having delivered him up; Among other grounds of Consolation and defence that he hath to sustain himself by, this is one and not the least, that ??????Page 2did bear him witness, that it was his endeavour and work to live so before God and men that he might not have a challenge from it; and this makes him speak boldly against all his Accusers, and is better to him and more valueable then all the Arguments and Rhetorical Discourses that a Tertullus, yea a Tully, or the most eloquent Orator in the World could have used for him.

These words hold out a Compend and Sum of a Christian walk, and an excellent partern for Believers, Herein do I

exercise my self, and so forth. where we have these three things considerable;

First, The apostle's great design and aim. viz. To have a conscience void of offence, that he might so walk as never to offend his Conscience, nor to give it an ill report to make of him.

Secondly, The extent of this design and aim, and that in a twofold respect. 1. In respect of the Object towards God and towards men, i. e. he would do duty to both, and be found without offence to either. 2. In respect of all Actions, Companies, Places and Times; he was so exercised always, not after a Sermon or Communion only, not under some heavy Cross, or after some notable outgate and delivery only, but he aimed, designed, and endeavoured to be so constantly and equally.

Thirdly, The manner of his going about this, Herein (saith he) do I exercise my self, i. e. it was a business that took him up and held him seriously at work; he was as a man who fighting for his life in a Barras, or at a single Combat carefully handles his Arms, even so did he carry and behave himself in all things as if his life had stood on every action or word.

I shall at once and together propose several Doctrines clearly deducible from the Text, the prosecution whereof will help to clear both the words and the matter contained in them.

The first whereof is, There are many sorts of offences both toward God and toward men that we are subject and liable to.

Page 3The second is, There is within every man a Conscience that takes notice of every piece of his carriage, and is accordingly affected with it, and affects the man for it.

The third is, What-ever things are offences toward God or Men are also offensive to the Conscience, whatever sin strikes against his Law wounds the Conscience.

The fourth is, It's a very good, choice, and excellent thing for a Believer to walk so, as to keep a Conscience always void of offence toward God and toward Men; and on the contrary it is a very ill thing at any time to have offence toward either of them lying on the Conscience.

The fifth is, It is the duty of all men and more especially of Believers to walk so, as they may always keep a Conscience void of offence, yea it is not only a duty, but we may look on it as an excellent mean for advancing of Holiness.

The sixth is, Where men honestly aim to keep a Conscience always void of offence, it will be an exercising and uptaking thing.

The seventh is, Where this exercise is neglected and not seriously carried on, the Conscience is left to stumble at, and to abound with, offences.

As for the first, That there are many kinds of offences which People are subject to, toward God and Men; It is a thing uncontroverted by all, and we need say little of it; only first, There are sins against the first Table, which are offences toward God, being immediately against him? And there are sins against the second Table, which although they be against God, yet immediately they touch and reflect on men. 2. There are sins against God that are secret, which God only is witness to: and there are open sins which scandalize men, Paul endeavoured to eschew all these, for all are ins against the Law of God and wounding of the Conscience.

The second is, That there is a Conscience within every man which takes notice of every peice of his carriage, and is accordingly affected with it, and affects him for it: This is the ground of all that follows, and had need to be morePage 4particularly spoken unto: This truth then contains these three things, 1. That there is a Conscience in every man that takes notice of every peice of his way and walk, hence it is said to bear witness, 2 Corinthians 1:12. This is our rejoycing, the testimony of our Conscience, and so forth. and it is also said to accuse or excuse, Romans 2:15. it witnesses for men and excuses and comforts them when they do well, and witnesseth against them, accuseth and reproveth them when they do evil; and so is to them as a Check, Captor or Censor: The apostles aim to have a Conscience void of offence suppons that he and every man has a Conscience, and that it takes notice of every thing, and will take offence if it be a thing that thwarts with it: We shall not in this

place stand to debate what Conscience is whether it be a power or a faculty, an habit or an act, which as it would not be much for your edification, so it would transcend the reach of many of you; only in the general we may call it a power wherewith God hath indued the soul of man to take notice of all his thoughts, words and actions.

2. We say ts accordingly affected with every thing, when the man does right it is pleased, and when he does wrong its offended and wounded, as we may see 1 Corinthians 8:10, 11. so 1 Sam. 24:5. Its said Davids heart smote him, and Prov.18:14. this is called a wounded spirit.

3. As it is affected so it affects the person, when a man has done well, it excuses and clears him, and when he has done evil and wronged it, it challenges and accuses him; in which respect Conscience is called a Iudge, pronouncing sentence by absolving or condemning men; Scripture and the experience of all sorts of people and times clear and prove this, 1. The Scripture says of Heathens, Romans 2:15. That their conscience bears them witness and their thoughts the mean while accuse or excuse one another; it holds out this to have been in Adam, who immediately after the fall, Genesis 3:10. says, I heard thy voice and was afraid, terror seized on him; it mentions this also to have been in Iosephs brethren, who Genesis 42:21. say, we are verily guilty concerning our brother; and in David in that forecited 1 of Sam. 24:5. where itsPage 5said, that his heart smote him; it's clearly also supposed 1 Iohn 3:19, 20, 21. where the apostle says, If our heart condemn us, God is greater then our heart, and knoweth all things, if our heart condemn us not, then

have we confidence towards God; where we would take notice, that what is here, and sometimes in the Old Testament, called the Heart, is in the Text and else-where called the Conscience, which supposeth this to be in every man: It is further clear from the daily experience of all in all times; for sometimes it is pousing to duty, sometimes it is challenging for the omission of duty, or for commission of the contrary evil; sometimes it is speaking peace, sometimes it is marring peace and denouncing war as it were; all which plainly evidence that there is such a thing in men, so Herod when he heard of Christ's Miracles, his Conscience puts him in mind of Iohn the Baptist whom he had beheaded, and disquiets him with fears that Iohn might have been raised from the dead; something of it appears likewise in Achab, when it puts him to put on Sack-cloth; all which (I say) plainly evidence that there is such a thing in men, and beside full Scripture-proof, there are none but if they observe, they will find their thoughts the mean while, either accusing, or else excusing them.

For further clearing of this, we shall speak a little first, To what this Conscience is, if it be possible satisfyingly to explain it. 2. To the use and ends of it, and why God hath placed this in man; where we shall show the several sorts of Consciences that are in men, good and evil.

For the first, to wit, What Conscience is, we may for coming at the understanding of it, consider the name Conscience, which signifies a co-knowledge, or a knowledge going along with our knowledge: which we

may consider, First, As looking to God's knowledge going alongst with ours, and ours going alongst with his, and thus it implyes as his knowledge of all our thoughts, words and ways, so our knowledge together with his of these, or our taking notice of them with respect to his knowledge. 2. We may consider it as reflex-knowledge joined with a direct knowledge, as for instance when a man hath a direct knowledge of Prayer as his duty, and a reflex knowledge going along with the practise or exercise of the duty, whereby he sees and discerns himself, either to behave suitably in it, or to be faulty; in this respect Conscience is a practical knowledge taking notice by a reflex act of a man's ways. 3. We may consider it as comprehending a knowledge of God's Law, and then it signifies a knowledge of ourselves compared with the Law, it hath knowledge of the rule, and so of what is duty and what is sin, and withall it hath in it the knowledge of ourselves and of our conformity or disconformity to the rule; Conscience then in this respect is a man's knowledge of God's will and of himself as compared with it. 4. We may consider this co knowledge as it supposeth beside the knowledge of ourselves, the knowledge of something taking notice of us, or of something deputed in us by God to keep a record of all our carriage and particular actions, and so it is looked on as some way different from us; hence it is called a Testimony, the testimony of our conscience. Hence also a man will appeal to his Conscience; and it doth when in any measure in exercise, impartially and incorruptly bear witness, and a man Conscience will

speak against him as if it were at all no part of him, neither can he command it silence; however then we call it, It's a power deputed in the soul of man by God, taking orders from Him and from His revealed will and word, and accusing or excusing the man as He directs; It's called Prov. 20:27. The candle of the Lord, it is above man in its sentencing and accusing, and will not be commanded by him.

To clear it yet a little further, there are in Conscience these Three things, 1. There is the laying down of some ground, such as the Law, or the word of God, by which it puts a man to trial; which is, That we call the major or first proposition of the Argument: As we may see in Iudas when his Conscience wakened, it layes down this ground (which is done by light) he that is guilty of innocent Blood, hath broken the Law of God, and may expect horrible Wrath. 2. There is an assuming, which is the minor or second Proposition of the Argument, or the Assumption, if the man be guilty of such and such sin; As thus, But I Iudas am guilty of Innocent Blood, and have broken the Command of God, (and this the Conscience by its Testimony confirmeth) Then 3. It draweth the Conclusion, and speaks forth the man's Lot, and gives out his Doom, what he may expect; as in the present instance; thou Iudas mayest expect horrible Wrath from God, this Conscience applies, and layes home unto him; every Conscience hath these Three in less or more. The way of Conscience its Reasoning and Concluding, is different from a man's Knowledge and Light; For a man may see Sin and not be touched

with it: It differs likewise from the memory; For a man may remember that which affecteth him not. It differeth from Self-examination; for that, if it be mee examination, brings a man only to know that he lyes under such and such Sins, so and so circumstantiaed; though it make use of all these Three as it's Instruments, yet it go beyond them, and hath a Pricking, Stinging, Paining Power; It Accuseth, Sentenceth, Smiteth and sharply Censureth: Whereas, before Conscience act it's part, a man may look often on his Sins, and yet but overlook them; And as to things that are right, Conscience doth not only or barely look on them, but it hath an approving Testimony, which proveth comfortable; there is such a thing as this in every one of you, which will let nothing pass, but more or less will take notice of it, and either accuse or excuse you for it.

As to the 2d. The use of Conscience, or the Ends wherefore God hath put this in Men and Women, which I shall draw to Three heads; that may be as so many Reasons of the Doctrine.

1. He hath done so for this end, that by it he may keep up his Sovereignty, Power and Terribleness; and keep men under the awe and dread thereof; For this which is called Conscience, will make the stoest to tremble, it will Write and Impress so vvely and deeply these great Truths, that none shall be able to blot them out, that there is a God, that there is a Judgment to come, and that all will be called to Reckoning, which none will get eschewed, It will fix and fasten such selfconvictions on

Sinners, as will make them un-avoidably condemn themselves: So John 8:9, 10. When the Scribes and Pharisees bring a women taken in adultery to Christ, intending thereby to trap and insnare him, He sayeth, He that is without sin amongst you, let him cast the first stone at her; Whereby their Consciences were made to bear such faithful Testimony against them, and to carry such terror with it, that they were all forced to steal away one by one; and yet they needed not to have thought shame on account of anything we hear men could have challenged them for; But Conscience had such an awe and force on them, that there was no resisting of it. Scripture-history does also tell us that such is the power and force of Conscience, when it is awaked, that it will make the knees to smite one against another, even of aBelshazzar, and will make a Gouverneur Felix to tremble.

A Second end is, That God may hold Men and Women at their duty, in going about these things which are commanded and prescribed by him, and in abstaining from forbidden sins; For, if there were not some awe from Conscience, what extravagancies would they loosly run into, who have no fear of God and of his Word? And thus Conscience hath a force to put men to duty, in these respects. 1^o It discovers Duty, and holds it before them, when the Lord hath commanded to Pray, read the Scriptures, to keep the Church, and wait upon Ordinances dispensed there; to keep holy the Sabbath day, and so forth. Conscience puts a man in mind of these, and when he neglects any one of them, will say to

him, thou shouldest be in another place, or about other work; so when Davids heart smote him, it helped him to see his Duty. 2. There is an obligation to Duty laid on by Conscience, so that the man cannot shift it, hePage 9cannot, he dare not say, such a thing is not my duty, for Conscience beareth it in and layeth it on him convincingly. 3. There is an efficacy in Conscience to pouss to duty, from this comes that restlessness and disquiet that is often in Men and Women, when duty is omitted that they can have no peace until it be gone about. 4. Conscience inviteth to duty, by promising peace upon the performance of it: On the other hand, Conscience hath influence to restrain from Sin. 1. By discovering such and such a thing to be Sin, and though the Soul would notwithstanding endeavour to digest it, yet Conscience makes a challenge to go down with it. 2. By threatening the Sinner when it's warning is neglected, and not taken; telling him that he shall repent it one day, and that it will make him repent i. 3. By taking away the sweetness of Sin, and leaving a sting in place of it; as when Achabkilled Naboth, it said, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And from this arise challenges, and fears of the execution of threatned Judgments, which quite mar the comfort the man expected, in the enjoyment of such and such a thing; in all which it keeps a majestick and stately divine way becoming God's deputy, and bears witness for him against the Sinner.

A 3d. end is, To abbreviat (as it were) God's process in judging men, to justifie and clear him, and to make way for his Sentence whatever it be; 1. It conduceth ??? it

were, to the opening of the Books, to the sisting and putting of all persons in a posture before him to be Sentenced by him; it doth in a manner all, so that God hath little or nothing to do, as it were, for it discovers to a man what was his Duty, and his Sin. 2. It citeth him to compear and answer for neglecting such and such a duty, and committing such and such a Sin, and he cannot possibly shift compearance. 3. When he doth compear, it giveth in a Lbell of Accusations against the Man, and a Catalogue of all his Sins, in thought word and deed, this and this (will it awefully say) thou didst at such and such a time, in such and such a place, aggravated byPage 10such and such circumstances. 4. It serveth to be a witness, yea in place of a thousand witnesses, and there is no denying or shifting of what ever it beareth witness to; All which we may see in Iosephs brethren, Genesis 42:21. who say one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we Would not hear, therefore is this distress come upon us; The Law discovereth that it was a Sin, Conscience challengeth and accuseth, they are cited, the accusation is given in and proven, this and this they did, and did it with all these circumstances; not a pitiful word that Ioseph spoke, nor a tear that he shed in the anguish of his Soul, beseeching them to desist, but they remember it now; and there is no shifting of the challenge and accusation, nor covering of it, as they had done before to their aged Father Iacob; but they must needs now take with all, and confess we have sinned, and are very guilty concerning our Brother, and

so forth. 5. It passeth Sentence, and in this respect, the heart is said to condemn when the thing is evil, and to absolve or not condemn, when the thing is good, 1 Iohn 3: 20, 21:6. When it hath Sentenced and Condemned, it leaveth not the man so, but goeth on and executeth the Sentence, and turneth a gnawing worm to bite and gnaw, and as an Executioner to Buffe and Smite, to Damp and Torment the Man; Thus ye may see how useful Conscience is to help forward God's Judgment, and to vindicat him in his Sentence: And as it is thus with a guilty Conscience, so it is with a Conscience absolving, it will absolve when men condemn as we may see in Paul here; when men give in a lybel and accuse, it will discharge, as Acts 23:1. Men and brethren I have lived in all good conscience before God untill this day: and when Conscience hath absolved it maketh cheerfull, as 2 Corinthians 1:12. Our rejoycing is this, the testimony of our conscience, and so forth. And 1 Iohn 3:20. If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God: So then we see Conscience hath these Three great uses and ends, 1. To keep people inPage 11awe of God, and of his greatness, and to keep them in mind that they must give an account to him. 2. To hold them at their duty, and they should be very loath to contradict it. 3. If duty be neglected, to record all their faults, and to accuse and sentence them therefore, and never to leave pursuing them, for Conscience will continue as a worm in hell gnawing forever and ever.

The First Use serves to bear in this truth on you; that there is such a thing as Conscience, the most ignorant

and profane and haughty of you all, whether young or old, one and other of you have a Conscience, that taketh particula notice of every thing in your walk, that recordeth all, that accuseth or excuseth; and though ye take not head to it now, ye will one day be made to know it; take it therefore for a certain truth, that ye have such a thing within you, that ye have a Knowledge with your Knowledge, even a Conscience that remembreth when ye would forget.

The minding of this is useful, 1. To make people cast out with Sin rather than with their Conscience. 2. To make them wary that they take not liberty in secret to Sin. 3. To make them take kindly with reproofs for Sin; Remember therefore that there is a Conscience in every one of you? Ye will possibly think it needless to press this, and I wish it were so, but we may shortly point at these evidences, to prove that many on the matter think they have not a Conscience.

The First is, That they take so little pains to prevent a quarrel from their Conscience; how many omit, balk and step over Dutie, and go on in Sin? Which they durst not do if they believed that they had a Conscience. 2. The few challenges that most have under many Sins, and their living in such peace and security, as if they had not a Conscience to disquiet them, many Men and Women know, and are as little acquainted with challenges and convictions, and stand in as little awe of Conscience as if they had none at all; Hence we use to say, that such a man has not a Conscience, because, thoughPage 12he

have it, he regards it not; and such a man has a Conscience, because he maketh use of it, and listens to what it says. 3. That people seek more to approve themselves in outward and seen Duties, than in inward and secret ones, and look more after men's Approbation than God's, and lean more to, and lay more weight on outward testimonies from men, than to, and on inward ones from their own Conscience. If Conscience were really believed to be, there would be as great awe of God, and as great loathsomeness to Sin in secret, as before many witnesses.

But ye will Object and say, seeing every one hath a Conscience, what can be the reason that many care so little for Conscience?

Answer, 1. What is the reason that men care so little for God? If they care not for the Lord and Master, it's no wonder they care so little for the Deputy and Servant; shall we therefore think that there is not such a thing at all as a Conscience in such? No, by no means; it will prove indeed, that they slight Conscience, but not that they want a Conscience. 2. There is in many men a contending with and provoking of Conscience, which in God's righteous Judgment maketh a silent Conscience; when the Lord maketh Conscience quick, and sets it on to reprove and check for Sin, and men do not listen to its checks and reproofs, Conscience offendeth, and will not reprove: Conscience being God's Deputy, taketh Orders from him, and when God will not vouchsafe a word of reproof on a man, neither will it; Ephraim is joined to

idols let him alone, saveth the Lord, Hos. 4:17. And from Romans 1:20, 21. We may see the cause why God giveth up the heathen to a reprobate mind, to do things that are not convenient, To be their going cross to the light of nature, and their natural Conscience, and not only doing things sinful, but taking pleasure in them that did them; therefore they are given up to do greatest things without check or challenge: Hence it is thus in part at least, with many Professors within the visible Church, forPage 13thwarting with Conscience; and indeed a silent and dumb Conscience is a great plague, for if it cease to be a reprover, and speak not, men, nay, even godly men, may and will sleep on, as David, after the going over the belly of his light, and blunting the edge of his Conscience slept long enough, until Conscience at last roused him up: Hence also the apostle speaketh of some Consciences which were seared with an hot iron; which is not so to be understood, as if Conscience were flesh, or of a fleshly substance, only he maketh the comparison, that as a man's flesh is sensible of, and affected with the prick of a pin, so is Conscience with Sin, while tender; But as the flesh of a Man or Beast, when it is seared or burnt, a considerable thirst will not much, if at all affect it; So is Conscience, when stupified, and made senseless, by multiplied Sins against light, it groweth so cauterized and seared, that hardly any Sin, or challenge for Sin is felt. 3. Men want not a Conscience, though they hear it not always speaking; for Conscience may often be speaking when they take not head to it; As is abundantly clear inDavid and Iosephs brethren, for

that which is the Death? evil of a natural man, may sometimes be the sore and dangerous sickness and distemper of a child of God; And though Conscience may speak but softly for a time, yet thereafter it will speak louder, and make it known that it spoke when it was not listened unto: The day cometh when the Books will be opened, and Conscience will speak plainly, smartly, and home, and it concerns you all to know, that Conscience is not absent when it is quiet; but that it will speak, and speak to purpose in due time, and that as a party with whom there is no Trysting until it come before the great Judge, and then it will give in what it hath to say; and it will then be evidently known that there was a Conscience in the prophanest person, who most cauterized it, by going over the belly of it's Light and Suggestions.

The 2. Use speaketh to you that live at randome taking great Liberty and Latitude to yourselves beside the Rule,Page 14O! do you believe and remember that there is a Conscience within you, and that it will call you to a Reckoning? sure, if ye did in good earnest, ye would be other manner of men: It's generally granted, that there is a Conscience in all, and the prophanest will have Conscience often in their mouth (and indeed their Conscience is little worth) when they stand in no awe of it, but rather trample on it; Let me tell you, the greater Light ye have, and the moe means and warnings ye are privileged with, the greater will be the aggravation of your guilt, and the more dreadful will be your Ditty, and Doom from God, and from your own Conscience; If

Conscience will be an impartial Witness, and severe Judge against all, even Heathens, who never heard the Gospel. O then! what access will it have, terribly to reprove, condemn, smite and gnaw you that live under the Gospel, and hear the word dayly? Many of you have some stickling and stirring of Conscience within you; but alace! ye know not what it meaneth, and would be quite of it, but from this Word, be exhorted to know who hath appointed it, and for what end it is appointed, and make use of it's warnings; ??? for others that know it, and go on sleeping securely in your Sin, I must say this to you, that the more knowledge ye have of it, it will certainly make you to have the more dreadful wakening? When all the kindreds of the earth shall houl at the seeing of the son of man? and stand trembling at his presence. O! what a scrich and cry will Conscience have in that day, louder (I conceive) in some respect, then the Trumpet itself, setting home the Truth of Challenges, bearing witness of the fact, and representing the horrour, terror and torment abiding them; therefore think on it, O! think on it, all ye who continue in Sin and will not be reclaimed, who mock at all Warnings, and break all Bonds, and will not be subject to Discipline, ye shall not be able to shake off the Bod of Conscience, but it shall bind you as the Colar of your Coat, and keep you bound until ye be isted before the Judgment Seat of God.

Page 15Use 3. Seing ye have a Conscience, let it not be silent, idle and usle? but put it to speak, and do you hear what it saith, and take you warning from it; it will not be Bribed, Budded, nor Boasted; It's a sore matter to have a

Conscience, and never to take notice of it, nor of what it sayeth. I shall now only, seing there are some good and some evil Consciences, as they are, or, are not informed, beseech you to study to have a well informed Conscience, especially, since, where it is well informed, it cannot easily be budded, nor soon prevailed with, to suffer things to come under debate and controversie wherein it is clear: a just regard too, and the right use-making of Conscience would notably promote Holiness, and nothing readily doth more obstruct it then the not taking heed to Conscience, and not laying due weight on what it says. Though many of you do now look on it as nothing, or a thing of little moment, yet ye will find it to be a greatly momentanious thing, O! that God who hath given us Consciences may be graciously pleased to give the right use of them.

SERMON II.

ACTS 24:16. Herein do I exercise my self, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

IF we take a view of, and look through Christians and professors of Religion, that may have the Root of the matter in them, and may in charity be supposed to be effectually called, there will be found as great a graduallPage 16difference amongst them, as amongst men of any other calling whatsoever; And if we will compare them generally with the apostle, as to the constant vigorous driving of this notable and noble design, there will be found great in-equality, and much lamentable un-likness; Herein (saith he) do I exercise my self to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men? This was his great Work, and it is indeed a sweet Work, yea a short sum and compend of a Christians Life.

When we discoursed last from this Text, and had drawn some general Doctrines from it, for clearing the words, we spoke more particularly to this Doctrine, viz. That there is in all men and women a conscience that taketh notice of every piece of their carriage, and is accordingly affected with? and affecteth men for it; Some thing which affecteth them as it is affected; if their carriage be good it speaketh good to them; if evil, it speaketh evil to them, Hence its said, Romans 2:15. Their conscience

bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another; Something also was spoken to what Conscience is, and what is its office: We shall now add a third Doctrine (though it be not the third in the order that we proposed the Doctrines at first) which is this, That Christians ought so to walk? yea if they be tender they will aim and endeavour so to walk? as in nothing they may give their conscience offence. The foregoing Doctrine is common to all, viz. To have a Conscience, but this to walk friendly with the Conscienc, so as not to offend or wrong it, is not common to all, but peculiar to him who is a Christian in earnest; as the apostle speaketh of himself in the preeceeding Chapter, ver. 1. Men and brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day, (supposing him to mean since his conversion) and 2 Corinthians 1:12. Our rejoycing is this, the testimony of our conscience, and so forth. and Hebrews 13:18. We trust we have a good conscience in all things willing to live honestly: and his pitching on this as a great ground of his consolation in straits, is a clear evidence that it is not a common thing, but peculiar to the tender Christian: Hence is thePage 17confident approaching of the Saints to God, as we may see in David through the Psalms, in Hezekiah? Isa. 38:3. Remember I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart; and in Job chap. 27. vers. 6. So 1 Iohn 3 21. Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.

For further clearing of this point, we shall show First, What it is not to offend the Conscience. 2. That a

Believer ought to walk (and if he be tender, will walk) so, as he may not offend his Conscience. And 3. Make use of the Doctrine.

For clearing of the first, we shall show 1. What offendeth the Conscience. 2. What it is not to offend Conscience. The first of these may be comprised in these three generals; 1. That whatever is sin against God offendeth the Conscience, for Conscience being God Deputy? substitute by him, and sustaining his place, and vicê in a manner in the Soul to give sentence for him, whatever offends and wrongs God, must also offend and wrong the Conscience; and though every sin doth not always at present sensibly and feelingly affect the Conscience? yet it maketh way for that, and proveth to be an offence and wrong done to it, in that it layeth the ground of a Challenge. 2. That is an offence and wrong to the Conscience which is against light and knowledge? and though the impulse of Conscience, according to that light, be not always so vigorous, yet where there is a thwarring with light, there is a daring of Conscience? and a contradicting of it, and (as it is Rem. 14 22.) a man then condeneth himself in that which he alloweth, and layeth the ground of a challenge against himself in that wherein he hath light and clearness. 3. Conscience is offended or wronged when anything is adventured on that is contrary to the Impulse of it; as when Conscience sayeth that such or such a thing ought to be done, and we notwithstanding leave it undone; or when it sayeth such and such a thing ought not to be done, and yet we do it: since Conscience (as we said before) takes notice of all a man's thoughts,

purposes, Page 18 words and ways, to give in a word for God, when that which it says for him is slighted, it cannot but be offended and wronged.

Secondly? Not to offend, but to keep friendship and a good understanding with the Conscience, supposeth and taketh in, these things, 1. To have the judgment clearly informed anent the mind of God; for though Conscience be above us, yet it is under God, and therefore it ought to be informed from his Word; and we lay a stumbling-block before it, when we endeavour not to have the eye single (as the Lord speaks) and the understanding clear. 2. To listen and lend the ear to hear what Conscience sayeth, and after deliberation to be swayed and determined according to what it saith, in doing or forbearing, for unless we take heed to the voice of Conscience, we know not when we please or displease it. 3. To ply and steer a straight course according to the dictate and direction of Conscience, to take orders (to speak so) from it, so as when Conscience pointeth at such and such a thing as evil, to stand and sist there, without daring to meddle with it, or move towards it? and when it holdeth forth such or such a thing to be a duty, straight way to give obedience to it; herein mainly consisteth a good Conscience (considering it with respect to its exercise, when once made good) to have our Conscience saying nothing against us, and without having ground to say anything against us; when it cannot challenge us and say that it injoined us to do such or such a thing, and that yet we did it not, or that it injoined us to forbear such or such a thing, and that yet we went on to the doing of it,

so that when we come before God it may have nothing to reprove or challenge us for, nothing to condemn us in; but as it holdeth out our duty to us from the Word, just so to endeavour to behave in all things.

For the 2d. thing proposed to be spoken to, viz. That a Believer ought, and if he be tender, will walk so, as he may not offend his Conscience; These three things will confirm it. 1. The very nature and office of his Conscience;Page 19If so be that Conscience speaketh for God and is appointed by him as his Deputy, to be a remembrancer of Duty, and a restrainer from Sin, then the awe of God and love to him will make a man that is tender, walk according to the directions of Conscience; hence it is that Romans 13:5. the commands that are laid on for God's sake, are also laid on for conscience sake, Wherefore (saith he) ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake; that is from the awe of God, that putteth us to our duty, and from respect to Conscience his Deputy; in this respect the voice of Conscience is the voice of God; for as a man cannot be tender who refuseth to hear the Word of God, so neither can he be tender who refuseth to comply with the directions of his Conscience speaking the mind of God to him. A second reason is drawn from the great advantage that floweth from the testimony of Conscience; it giveth much quietness and sweet peace in all straits and troubles, and much confidence and holy boldness in approaching to God, If our conscience condemn us not, (says Iohn) then have we confidence towards God; In a word, whatever condition a man can

be in, it proves his friend, nay his best friend. A third reason is taken from the great prejudice that cometh to a man through his thwarting and coming in tops with Conscience; he wanteth that sweet inward peace that passeth all understanding to keep and garrison his heart and mind, whereby he is much exposed and laid open; God looketh terrible-like upon him, and he hath no access to him with boldness and confidence; when the Conscience is disquieted, troubled, and as it were through other, or confused, and fears arise, and challenges are wakened therein, these threaten a challenge from God, and portend a storm of wrath to follow: hence is Davids complaint, Psalm 32:3:4. When I kepted silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring? and so forth. and his lamentation throughout the 51. Psalm; and to this purpose the apostle Iohn speaks very weightily, If our heart condemn us. God is greater then our heart, and knoweth all things, where he plainly insinuats, that the Heart or ConsciencePage 20its condemning, is the forerunner of God's condemning, and an evidence of it; and that withal the latter is, as more absolutely infallible, so more terrible then the former; where these three go along together, it is impossible where a person is tender but he will be loath to top or thwart with his Conscience.

As for the Uses which we proposed to speak to in the Third place, they may be drawn to these fou, 1. For information and instruction in the matter of Duty. 2. For tryal, and to evidence who are sincere Believers. 3. For reproof. 4. For exhortation; there being need of all these,

especially to such Christians who take but little heed to their Conscience.

The first Use sheweth what is Believers duty; they should by all means learn to know and take up what Conscience saith from the Word of God, and labour to have their Conscience well informed; and take notice of what it speaketh ere they do anything, and what are Conscience thoughts of it, after it is done, and accordingly to be affected, determined and swayed. It is true, the Law of God is the supream rule, and to be hearkened to in the first place; but that which we are now speaking to, is, concerning taking advice from Conscience, which 1. Doth make the Law speak more sensibly, lively and aloud, then before. 2. It maketh it speak more plainly, for when people's reason will be ready to shuffle by a word, that sam word coming into, and taking hold of the Conscience, will become more clear and convincing, and it maketh the understanding, being thereby made more single, to take it up better. 3. It maketh the man more impartial, when the Word cometh not to his judgment only, neither will he leave the Word with his light and reason simply- nor to debate with his inclination and affection; but putteth the Word and his Conscience together and taketh the meaning of it some way immediatly from his Conscience, it maketh him single and unbiased (as I said before); and sometimes a Conscience will speak when the judgment hath little or nothing to say; so itPage 21decideth often betwixt the opposite reasonings of the judgment for both sides. 4. The advice and dictate of Conscience is much more

powerful then that of the simple judgment and reason, and adhereth better and more closely then affection or inclination; Conscience being more directly God's Deputy, and in a more immediate subordination to him i sticketh more enaciously by duty; and it being as a check to our humours, and as a Compass to steer our course by in all things, we are to be swayed by its advice; hence some who can almost debate nothing in reason, yet will not dare for Conscience to do such a thing.

Some necessary Questions relating to practice arise from this Use, which we shall speak a few words to. As 1. If any other thing beside Conscience may have an impulse to duty? 2. If other things may have an impulse to duty (whether it be credit, interest, inclination, will, or affection,) how may the impulse of these be decerned, and differenced from the impulse of Conscience? 3. Whether the dictates of Conscience may always be followed, seing its impulse may be wrong? 4. What should be done in such a case, and how may we difference what is right? 5. Whether a man and his Conscience may be friends and agree together in a wrong cause or practice?

For the first Question, Whether anything beside Conscience doth or may pous to duty? We answer affirmatively, Manythings may court us which by their impulse do often hwart with Conscience, hence is the inward combat in the Christian betwixt the Flesh and the Spirit; the Flesh doth pouss to one thing, and Conscience to the contrary; therefore Gal. 5:17. it's said, The flesh

lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these two are contrary one to another; and Romans 7:23. the apostle speaketh of a law in his members rebelling against the law of his mind, and leading him captive to the law of sin in his members; more particularly these things (as we hinted before) may have an impulse toward the doing of duty, As first? Mens credit, hath a strong impulse, where anything crossing it, is apprehended to occur. 2. MensPage 22interest hath often an impulse, so as to carry on a selfish design, it will make gain seem to be godliness. 3 Mens natural inclinations, will and affections, have an impulse also, and the impulse of these will sometimes be exceeding like to the impulse of Conscience, and here we may consider these three things which they have influence upon. 1. They may have influence to mar a man's light and pervert his understanding, as it is said of a gift,It blindeth the eyes of the wise, and perverteth the understanding of the prudent; so men's credit, interest, and natural inclination, may in a sort bribe the understanding and blind the judgment insensibly, and the man not know of it distinctly at least. 2. When they have perverted the judgment they may engage the affections? and these drive violently. 3. If the man yield not to such a thing, his credit or interest will vex him like Conscience, and take rest and quiet from him; as we see in Herod, Matthew 14:9. who when the dancing Damsel suited for the head of Iohn the Baptist, was sorry (or grieved,) nevertheless for his oaths sake, and for them who sat at table with him, he commanded it to be given

her; Folk would have thought that it was his Conscience that made him sorry, but indeed it was not Conscience but Credit; therefore it is said, not only for his oaths sake, but for them that sat at table with him; it's like if his oath had been given in privat, Conscience would not much have troubled him; and while it's said he was sorry or grieved, it sheweth plainly that his Credit suffered him to get no rest until the ll turn was done; under pretext of keeping his oath; Herod was predominantly swayed by these who sat at Table with him, and would have it thought that he was to be excused because otherways he could not forsooth keep his oath, who yet had broken many an oath, and made no bones of them.

For the second Question, How may the impulse of Conscience be known and discerned from the impulse of Credit Interest, inclinations, Will and Affection? Answer, By the Word, To the law and to the testimony, Isa. 8:20 Conscience is subject to that, and Conscience never readilyPage 23pouseth against duty holden out by the Word; Conscience would never bid Heroa take away the life of an innocent man. 2. If a man be dark and doubtful in a particular, Conscience as Conscience is always single; but Credit, Interest, and th like, have always some by-respect, which stealeth in and drowneth Conscience, representing to it that such and such loss or prejudice will follow on such a thing: Interest and Reputation will make a man say, I would no do such a thing if I could do otherways; but shall I hazard all my estate, and possibly my life also? this I may not do; and when interest and particularity prevail, they make him to

step over Conscience, and to think that he doth no fault; when it is some particular hazard that swayeth him? interest is satisfied from a supposed necessity, but Conscience acknowledgeth not that rule; in outward things when the man can do no other ways it will put him to choose suffering. 3. When Credit, Interest, and the like pous, their impulse is partial and violent, but the impulse of Conscience is impartial and sober; Conscience swaying the man, pouseth him from the awe of God, and from love to him, and to all that is known to be duty, impartially, as to pray, read, meditate, confer, and so forth. but when interest, credit, or inclination swey him, they will drive him to one thing and not to another, and more especially to that which may satisfie his humour? and that violently; but for the more exercising duties of Religion, as to humble himself before God, to repent of sin, to meditate, and so forth. it doth not pous or but very coldly and slowly: as some men will have an impulse to provide for their families, and they will ride and run for that, but if any object of Charity offer, or if there be any hazard of loss for Christ and the Gospels sake, these will be silent there, or if Conscience mutter, it will not be much regarded in what it says. Now if Conscience swayed the man here, there would be an impartial respect had to one duty as well as to another. 4. Where Interest, Credit, Inclination, or Affection pous, they drive not only violently and partially, but irrationally, and cannotPage 24stay nor endure to reason and debate things, or to be disswaed from the thing towards which there is an inclination and

will, neither will give a hearing to what may be said to the contrary: But Conscience in its impulse, is rational and sober, goes to the Word, and would hae matters calmly seasoned and debated, and is the better satisfied the better the business be debated and cleared, because it likeh and loveth rational service: Romans 12:1. and therefore layeth every thing to the rule, and readily conteteth with corruption, with which inclination sideth.

5. When Credit, Interest, and inclination in their impulses are thwarted, they storm, they vex and torture the man; but when the impulse of Conscience is thwarted, it hath a kindly pricking and stounding, the impulse of interest or inclination being thwarted, conuseth and putteth thorow other (to spek so,) and being but a carnal fit of passion, maketh rothy, light, and distemperedly passionae; but it the impulse of Conscience be thwarted, it weighteth and stingeth deeply.

6. The impulse of Conscience affecteth constantly, and choppeth evenly, though sometimes in its chopping it will be more quick then at another time, yet where it swayeth, it leaveth not off, but continueth chopping this year and the next, and accounteth a thing evil or good in another as well as in a man's self, and in himself as well as in another, and at all times; but when a man is poussed by credit, interest, inclination or affection, he is like a distempered man in a Fever whose pulse beateth not evenly, he is not constant and equal, but up or down as the particular that affecteth him, ??? his humour, or cometh near him: as for instance, a man swayed by his interest will dispute for the government of

such a person this year, and for the government of another the next; for such an interest this year, and for a contrary one the next; for one sort of government in Church or State as best this year, and for another as best the next; because his own particular interest cometh in to side with it; and so he changeth his Principles according to his Interest, and disputes for onePage 25thing to day, and for the contrary the next, thus his interest forgeth and frameth principles to maintain it; which is an evidence that such men's great principle is their interest, and that they are ??? swayed from a native principle of Conscience, else they would be more evenly and constant: therefore beware to take every impulse for the impulse of Conscience, many men wofully abuse Conscience by their pretentions to it, as if some weighty, nay some extraordinary bond were on their Conscience, when as indeed inclination or affection or some other such thing pouseth them on.

The Third Question is, May not even Conscience sometimes err and go wrong? May it not pouse to that which is evil and sinful? and should it then be followed? Answer Conscience may err, or go wrong two wayes, 1. In respect of Light, by thinking that which is wrong to be right, 2. In respect of Practice in application of the Rule: And therefore it is needful to speak a word for clearing of both; And First, In the general, when we say that men should walk according to their Conscience, we understand it of a Conscience well informed, and in the exercise of Duty, as knowing its Masters will and doing it; for a wicked man may have a good Conscience in

respect of Light to tell him what he shall do, and to challenge him when he doth wrong, though yet he will not obey it; Therefore we say for a man to have a good Conscience, is, to have a well informed Conscience, and doing duty accordingly.

For further clearing of this, There are Ten sorts of Consciences that men ought not to be guided by; Whereof Five fail in the Major or First proposition, in respect of Light; and other Five fal in the Minor, or Second Proposition, in respect of Practice or Application: The Five sorts that fail in the Major Proposition or in respect of Light, are these. 1. An Erring Conscience, when the Judgment is mis-informed, and accounteth Duty to to be Sin, and Sin to be Duty, as it was with these of whom the Lord speaketh, Iohn 16:2. The time comethPage 26when whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service; Though an erring Conscience be not so properly to be called Conscience, for it rather gives offence then edifies, yet this Conscience, such as it is, putteth a man into a strait, that he can neither do nor forbear; that is, it necessarily, while it remains, involveth him in sin whether he do or forbear; Hence it is said of such a Conscience. ligat sed non obligat it bindeth up the man, but doth not oblidge: For the man that hath ths erring Conscience, making him think that such or such a thing is a necessary duty, when in the mean time it is a Sin; in following the impulse of his Conscience, sinneth against the Law of God; as suppoe it be in persecuting, or killing; te Servants of God, which he thinks good service; neither will the error of his Conscience excuse

him here, because he should have endeavoured to have it better in. For These that sin in the law shall be judged by the law: And if he forbear to do such a thing he sinneth against his Conscience, for he supposing it to be God's mind which it directeth, and his Conscience being to him in place of God, he is guilty, as if what he doth were done directly and immediately against God; for to him it was so, and he thought so, and thus, through his own culpable ccession, it layeth a necessity of sinning on him, whether he do or forbear; yet it never oblidgeeth nor can oblidge him to go contrary to the Law of God? as suppose he thinketh that such a Minister, who is an honest and faithfull man, should be Deposed or Excommunicated, it doth not oblidge him to persecute an innocent and honest man, and yet if he endeavour it no, he sinneth against his Conscience, in countenancing of that Person, which he in his mis-apprehension judgeth to be Sin: This may seem to be somewhat strange and paradoxal; but it is the wofull effect, and bitter fruit of the want of Light, and of a well-informed Conscience, and it floweth not from the nature of the Word of God, nor from the nature of Conscience, but from our own Corruption, making no use, or an ill use of the Word ofPage 27God, the Superior of the Conscience: So that there is hardly a worse thing then ane Erring Conscience; Because, whether the man that hath it forbear, or do, to him it is Sin; only, if the thing be indifferent, it oblidgeeth to do, or forbear; for when the Word determineth not, Conscience (though mis-informed) casteth the ballance to the side which it judgeth to be necessary; As for instance, it a man think it

a sin to hear the Word with the head un-covered, he is obliged to cover his head, and contrarily; for Conscience there casteth the ballance: but when the thing is unlawful on the matter, it may bind him up, while it remains in an Error, so as he cannot without sin counteract it's dictat; but it never oblidgeh him to sin.

2. An Opinionative Conscience, is not a good guide, That is, when a man hath some sort of Light, or apprehension of a thing to be Duty; yet fearth that it may not be Duty, and hath some ??? or ??? about the matter; For 1. This is not Faith, but Opinion and in matters of Faith, Opinion cannot be a ground to rest upon; Therefore, Romans 14:5. Every man ugh to be fully persuaded in his own mind. 2. In matters of Practice, the impulse of an opinionating Conscience, will not warrand us; For when a man hesitats, he cannot do in Faith; therefore to do; it is sin to him, because he hath not perswasion; and in this respect, as to practice, he is like the man that hath the Erring Conscience, he can neither do nor forbear, but he sinneth. 3. If it be in a truth, not fundamental, Opinion may have weight with him, and swey him to that which is most probable, and hath most conveniencies with it (though in matters of Practice it be otherwayes) and it giveth Conscience peace in this respect, when that which hath most probability in it (as I have just now said) is inclined to

3. A Doubting Conscience (of some affinity with the former) which leaveth a man in an hover, or suspence, that he knoweth not whether such a thing be Duty, or if

such a thing be Sin, or not, certainly here a man isPage
28bound not to do doubtfully: For he that doubteth is
damned; if he do; Romans 14:23. And yet there is hazard
in forbearing, if the thing be duty; yea in this case there
is a necessity of sinning (but still of the man's own
contracting) when there is not a middle, but either the man
must do or forbear, yet in this case its best for a man to
betake himself to the safest side, and to hazard on
suffering rather than on sin; As for example, a man must
either do such a thing of the lawfulness whereof he
doubteth, or be in hazard of losing much, or all that he
hath in the World; He knoweth that suffering simply
considered is no sin, and he is some way matter (to say
so) of his own suffering, but not of his doing; since he
doubteth, and his doubting layeth this obligation on him,
rather to abstain than to do, and to take his hazard of
suffering, for in dubiis tutius est abstinere; and in this case
no man's authority can oblige and bind the Conscience
to a thing as duty, neither can it be loosed by meer
Authority, or respect to men when it doubteth? Because
no man's meer authority can quiet and satisfy the
Conscience; nor keep the man skaitless before God,
when on such an account he doth anything doubtfully.

A 4. Sort is a Scrupling Conscience, which differeth
from the former in this, That it is clear in the main of
duty, but scrupleth and is unclear in some accidental
thing, that goeth along with it; As for instance, when one
would pray, and apprehendeth that in praying he will
take God's name in vain, because it may be some
blasphemous thought is injected into his mind; or when

a man is about some necessary duty of his lawful calling, and hath some thing like an impulse of Conscience to pray, which haunteth, and some way vexeth him; This is a scruple, but upon a light ground, and hath little or no reason for it; yet it is born in with violence, and therefore in this case, a man is obliged rather to go over the scruple and follow his duty; for, although he should endeavour to satisfie his Conscience, by reason in this case, as in the former; yet when the duty is clear, hePage 29 should trample upon what would hinder him, and go on with the duty, and in so doing, he trampleth not upon his Conscience, but upon that which cometh in to mar him in his duty, and followeth, or (to speak so) doggeth his Conscience.

A 5, Sort is a Weak and Infirm Conscience, which especially in indifferent things hindreth a man to use his liberty, as Romans 14:2. One believeth that he may eat all things, another that is weak eateth herbs; he will not take the liberty that God alloweth him, as it was with many in the primo? primitive times, who, thought not all meas to be a like lawful as to their use: Though this sort of Conscience should be informed, in order to its being brought up to the use of its lawful liberty; yet while it is infirm, and hath not clearness in the thing, it ought to lay on Bands for abstention; as the apostle sayeth, 1 Corinthians 8. and last, If meat make my brother to offend, I will not eat flesh while the world standth least I make my brother to offend; because by the example of his eating (as he sayeth before) his weak brother is emboldned to eat also, and so his conscience being weak

is wounded, all which saith that we ought to study to be well acquainted with the Word of God, that Conscience may be rightly informed thereby.

Secondly, There are other five sorts of Consciences that fail in Practise or Application of the Rule, which ought no more to be laid weight upon in practice then the former. The 1. is a too narrow Conscience, that challengeth too soon (with which many in these days are not much troubled, but rather run on the contrary extremity,) as when a man's light is not clear in a thing that is indifferent, as the weak Conscience was wounded for eating a little flesh; thus ane infirm Conscience will readily challenge, and highten a si without ground; which is especially to be found among new beginners, who use to have a number of challenges for this and that, which yet cannot well abide the tryal; several particulars might be instanced in, as they will be sometimes challenged,Page 30and disquieted for coming into such a company; which yet ??? might have done warrantably; for not speaking when possily it was their duty to hold their tongue; or speaking when yet it was their duty to speak; for taking so much meat and drink, which yet is but sufficient for the sustentation of nature; though they question not such ??? and drink to be lawful for the kind, yet they are challenged and troubled without ground; as to the measur and quantity.

2. A too large and gross Conscience, which we fear is the orest and rifest sickness among Consciences, a Conscience that can easily digest manythings, which

being laid to the Rule, would be found sinful, a gross Conscience is opposit to tenderness, and can hear of sin threatned, without fear, which it is lying under, it standeth not on the offence of others; As in Corinth, There were some that went on in the use of their Liberty withour regard of their weak Brethren, not caring whether they offended them or not; it regardeth not other folks Conscience in indifferent things; it will not only confidently come near to ill, but hazard on ill whereas all appearance of evil should be abstain'd from: it's a narrow Conscience abdoeth over far a back, so a gross Conscience cometh over near; it will put persons to eat to drink, and to be cloathed too libeally, prodigally and vainly, because these things are laful.

The following 3d, 4th, 5th, Sort of Conscience are degrees of one and the same kind, some whereof are incident to Believers, some not.

The 3d, Is a sleepy Conscience, such as was in David, in a great measure, when he fell in Adultery, Murther, and in the Sin of vain numbering the people; opposite to this, is a wakened Conscience, that cryeth loud, and knocketh hard, the more sleepy and drousie that Conscience hath been, it rappeth the louder and harder when it is wakened; therefore men had need to be so much the more awar of the frmer gross Conscience, that it draw not on a sleepy Conscience; and when Conscience speakethPage 31not, but is silent now, know that for the time there is ground to fear its being fallen a sleep.

A 4th Sort is a hardned Conscience, which is? when, not only the Conscience is sleeping, but the life is much put out of it by habitual sinning; And when men thus put out the light and life of their Conscience by sinning, God is provoked to put it out by judiciaall hardning (as we see in Pharaoh) that no challenge bits on them: There are lesser measures and lower degrees of this that are incident even to the godly, and not only to several reprobats which come not to Pharaoh his hight.

A 5th Sort it a Cauterized Conscience, that is said in the Scripture to be seaed as with a hot iron; this hardneth in a very high degree, when a man runneth over the belly of his Conscience trampling on it, and doing all in a manner that he can to make it senseless and benumnd, so that he is no more sensible of a prick from it, then dead flesh is of the thurst of a pin, or of a knif; habituall sinning, and the Judgment of God joined together bring on this, which is called, Romans 1:28? giving up to a reprobate mind, so that as it is, 32. Though they know the judgement of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, yet not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

It is not of these Consciences that we mean, when we say that ye should so walk as ye give not offence to your Conscience in anything; the Conscience of many speaketh, but alace they stop the mouth of it; therefore take every sort of Conscience to the Word, and suspect that Conscience that is silent when the Word speaketh.

A 4th Question is, Whether a man that hath an erring Conscience may not have peace and quietness? If so, how may that peace and quietness be discerned from true peace of Conscience? (where also the 5th Question is somewhat at least indirectly touched on.) Answer, A Conscience, may be pleased while it is erring and in a wrong course, but it cannot have true peace; even as we may please our Brother when we flatter him in his sin, and please himPage 32not to his edification; so a man may have not only quietness, but a sort of delight and sainness in an erring Conscience, but no true peace, because it wanteth the Word of God for its ground; even as an hardned Conscience may have quierness and yet want true solid peace; as when Conscience is mistaken or in an error, and agreeth well with the mistake or error, it will be well pleased; so when it is humoured and applauded, it is well pleased, and will make the man think that he doeth God good service, while in the mean time he is doing nothing less; yea it will have a sort of delight and fainness flowing from the delusion of its light, and will make the poor man to be well pleased and satisfied when he gets that which he is seeking, to succeed and go with him.

But how shall it be discerned? Answer 1. It is suspiciouslike when the Conscience is overwell pleased, and when Conscience and men's humours are both pleased together, and when corruption doth not side and take part against it, this (I say) is a shrewd evidence that Conscience is erring; for when a man is going aright about his duty, corruption, will be against him; but when

all is silent it is no good token; when Paul is a delighting himself in the law of God, there is a law in his Members rebelling against the law of his Mind, and leading him captive to the law of Sin in his Members. 2. It may be known by this, when Conscience hath more contentment and peace, and greater delight and fainness in such or such a particular supposed duty, then in all other duties; as for instance when a man thinketh nothing of but undervalueth Infant-Baptism, and must needs be baptized over again; and when he is re-baptized, he hath more satisfaction and (as he thinks) more comfort in that Duty and Ordinance, then in all other duties he goeth about, (though his rebaptizing be indeed no duty called for from him), that is an evidence of an erring Conscience; for if it were the peace, comfort and satisfaction of a well informed Conscience, he would have comfort, if not alike comfort in all Duties and Ordinances; so when some men have morePage 33delight in making others to become Antinomians, or Separatists, or Quakers (they being of such a Judgment, Porswasion and Sect themselves) then in gaining men frePopery to be Protestants, or it may be from being meerly natural men to be in good earnest exercised to Godliness; and like the Pharisees will compass Sea and Land for that end, not to make them children of God, but to proselyte them to their own Sect; That is a shrewd token that it's men's particular Interest and Humour that swayeth them more then Conscience doeth, or if Conscience have influence here, it is an erroneous and mistaken one. 3. It may be known by a man's more

common and ordinary frame and way, it is hard to say that Conscience putteth a man to such or such a thing, and to change his way in such or such a particular indeed to the better, when yet it doeth not set him on endeavours in the strength of Grace to change his way and life in the general tract of it; for as true Grace is uniform, so a well informed and truly good Conscience, makes a man endeavour an universal and uniform change in his way; and without all doubt it is as clear a duty to pray, to search his Conscience, to walk without giving offence, to hear the Word, to meditate thereon, to injure no man, and so forth. and yet he will be strick in such a particular, but prayeth no more, waiteth no more upon Ordinances no better then he had wont to do, and so forth. this looketh very like an erring Conscience, for (as I said just now) Conscience maketh not a man to change in one thing only, but it puts him to endeavour also a change in all: Therefore beware of such deceit, for Conscience is much abused in this time; it is indeed an excellent thing to keep a good Conscience and void of offence; but it's a desperate thing to make a Shoe-horn or Stalking-horss of Conscience, to make it subserve our own humour, and the carrying onPage 34of our own particular Interest; or to leave the Word and to pretend Conscience, and to be swayed by Interest, under pretext of Conscience: There is great need then to look well to the Word, and to have the Word and Conscience going hand in hand together; to keep near God, and to walk in holy fear that Conscience have not anything wherewith it may charge us justly.

SERMON III.

ACTS 24:16. And herein do I exercise my self to have always a Conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

There are many sad mistakes about a Christian life, and the serious and zealous following of Holiness; for men either diminish from Holiness as to the extent of it, or dispense with and take a liberty and latitude to themselves in the following of it.

In this Text we have a short and sweet sum of Paul's life, (an excellent copy and pattern of a Christian walk and conversation,) wherein he giveth us a view of these two. 1. of his aim and design, to walk so as he may have a Conscience void of offence toward God and toward men; and that in an universal extent always, or at all times and in all things. 2. of his manner of prosecuting it, Herein (saith he) do I exercise my self: he is seriously taken up with it, it is his great business, his one thing as he calls it, Philippians 3:13.

We spoke of these two generals. 1. That there is in all Men and Women a Conscience that taketh notice of their actions, and is ready to be offended with their miscarriages. Page 352. That Men and Women, and more especially Believers, ought so to live, and if tender, will aim so to live, as they may be friends with their Conscience, and that there may be good terms and a good understanding betwixt them and their Conscience; that

their Conscience may have no challenge against them in anything of their walk either toward God or toward Men: This is clearly and convincingly holden out in Paul's practice here, whose great aim, design, and endeavour was to walk so, as his Conscience might have nothing to say against him in duties relating either to God or to Men, in secret, in private, or in public; This we prosecuted a little, and shown you, that there is a tye and obligation lying on men so to walk and to follow (not an erring and deluded Conscience, but) Conscience rightly informed, pousing, accusing, or excusing according to the Word, for it is Conscience so qualified that is the rule subordinate to the infallibly regulating rule of the Word.

The Uses of the Doctrine (as we show) are four, the 1. For Instruction. The 2. For Tryal. The 3. For Conviction or Reproof. The 4. For Exhortation. We spoke a little to the Use of Instruction the last day, to which now we add; that if men should so walk as their Conscience may have nothing to charge them with, nor? to cast up to them wherein they have thwarted with it; then every man's design in his Christian walk ought to be as extensive as his Conscience is in its office, either in directing, or in accusing or excusing; otherways he cannot have peace in his way, if he disperise with himself in anything which his Conscience doth not dispense with him in; and it will be impossible to have solid peace if he do otherways; so then the walk of a Christian ought to be equally and exactly extended (no less then is the Conscience) according to the rule of the Word.

Beside what we said on this before, anent having clearness from the Word in the Judgment, and hearkening to the voice of Conscience rightly informed; We shall instancePage 36the ?????? of a Christian walk according to Conscience ??? these seven particulars.

1. A man that would walk according to Conscience, must have a respect to all sorts of Duties, in Words, Thoughts and Actions, for Conscience will challenge for an idle word, and for a sinful thought, to Simon Acts 8:22. says the apostle, Pray God if perhaps the thought of thy hear may be forgiven thee: which saith, that sinful thoughts may have influence to ??? the Conscience, and that a man who would keep peace in his Conscience should dispense with himself in none of these. 2. A man that would walk according to Conscience, must extend Duty to all particulars of every kind, to every Thought, every Word, and every action; or according as Conscience, when in case, is pleased or displeased in every one of these, in public, in private, in secret? in ??? or smaller Duties or sins, so it will accuse or excuse; so then as Conscience regardeth all Duties and kinds of them, so it regardeth every particular of every kind. 3. A man that would walk according to Conscience? must aim in his Christian walk at the highest degree in every one of these; though he come short, yet he must not dispense with himself in his short-coming in any of them; for instance, as he must love God, so he must endeavour to love him with all his strength, soul and mind; and as he must be holy, so he must aim to perfect Holiness, and to purify himself even as he is pure; in this respect the least

defect will give Conscience ground of a challenge, and if he in the least but indirectly dispense with himself in it, it will breed a quarrel. 4. Walking according to Conscience, tyeth a man to be in this aim and design always; so as it alloweth of no inerrmission; as for instance, to study Holiness in this or that condition of life and not in another, or under the cross? and not in prosperity; but as the word is here in the Txt, he is always to exercise himself in this study; and though a man should live many years with a Conscience void of offence; if he begin at last, though i be but now and then to take undue liberty, ConsciencePage 37 will take notice of it and challenge for it, because the Word, the superior of Conscience taketh notice of it. 5. To walk according to Conscience, extendeth itself to all circumstances and qualifications of Duty; it looketh not only to the matter of duty that it be good, but that it be spiritually prsecute in all the circumstances of it; it will look to the man's aim that it be single, and if it be not so, it will find fault; it will look to his manner of doing, whether he be spiritual, lively, tender, zealous and so forth. in what he doeth; and it will look from what principle he acteth, from the strength of Grace or from a gift? from his own Strength or from Christ's; and it will look to what is his end, or aim (as I just now said) whether he be bringing forth fruit to himself or to God, whether his end be to please men and to have their approbation and applause, or to glorifie God and to approve to him; whether it be to stop the mouth of his Conscience or to honour God; Conscience taketh notice of these for founding its accusing or

excusing; and in this it differeth from all Courts among men, it will accuse and condemn where they will absolve, and contra? 6. Conscience will put a man to take notice of all the means, opportunities and helps whereby Holiness may be furthered; and if a man come short in the use of any mean, it will put him to run the back trade as it were, and to take with the guilt, it will say, Man whether mightest thou not have had more knowledge, having had so many opportunities to hear and learn, having had such and such Ministers and Christian friends to advise with and to be instructed by? as the apostle hath it? Hebrews 5:12. Ye might have been teachers of others by reason of time and means, and yet ye have need to be taught the first principles, and so forth. To have a Conscience void of offence, it is necessary to use every mean to further us in the knowledge of God's will, and to attain to the practice of it. 7. Conscience will look especially to what use we make of our Holiness, and to what we lay before Conscience to answer its challenges, whether we bring our good Mind, our Prayers, External Performances, and our following of Ordinances, Page 38 to stop the mouth of it, and to silence the challenges, and quench the fire (to say so) of Conscience, or whether we bring the blood of Jesus Christ that blood of sprinkling: if we compare Hebrews 10. vers. 2. with vers. 22. and Hebrews 9. vers. 9. with vers. 14. we will find this latter way and of the former to be the only safe way: These sacrifices that are offered year by year continually can never make the the comers thereunto perfect: but having a high-priest over the house of God, we may draw

near with a true heart and full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. These gifts and sacrifices could not make them that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience, but the blood of Christ? who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purgeth the conscience from dead works to serve the living God: and though the Conscience will challenge a Believer where there are defects in the former rules, yet it is quieted and satisfied where there is serious and suitable application made to, and of the sufferings and satisfaction of the Redeemer, i so be he dispense not with himself as to his short-coming in them, and if the use that he makes of his Holiness in the largest extent and highest degree of it, be not to found his righteousness thereon, but to honour God thereby in gratitude to him, to edifie others, and to evidence to himself the soundness and reality of his believing and gracious state. This sheweth the vast extent of Holiness, and what it is that men are called to; and thereby we may also see that many sadly mistake Religion, and what that perfect walk is that a Christian ought to have before God; and we may say on the whole, if this be to walk according to Conscience, then cerainly not many but very few walk according to t, which is a lamentation and should be for a lamentation.

The 2d. Use is or tryal, If a Believer when he is in case, and right, will have it for his exercise, to walk so as he may have a Conscience void of offence toward God and toward men, then this will be a differencing mark,Page

39betwixt a Believer and an un-believer, the one singly aimeth, and seriously endeavoureth to have a good Conscience, and to walk so, as in nothing he may offend his Conscience; The other hath no such design nor endeavour: If then this Doctrine hold true, and if this be the Believers exercise, to walk so as to please his Conscience in all things, and in nothing to offend it, sure such a Conscience is proper and peculiar to the Believer; and so may be an evidence of one that hath an interest in Christ: This will be more clear, if we look, 1. To the use that the Saints recorded in Scripture make of a good Conscience, and that the Scripture willeth and alloweth them to make of it, in their tryals, and troubles, in their straits, and difficulties, as 2 Corinthians 1:12. This is our rejoicing? the testimony of our conscience and so forth. And in this place Paullyeth to it, as his refuge, and comforts himself by it, in and against his present strait; now if it were not a Character and mark of a Christian indeed, it would not be, nor be allowed to be made such a ground of peace and quietness to Believers in their straits. 2. It is clear from the nature of Conscience, its testifying, which is not its own or from and for itself only, but also, and principally from and for God; Therefore 1 Iohn 3:19? 20, 21, 22. it is said, Hereby we know we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before God, for if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things, but if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God; And 1 Pet. 3:21. It's called the answer of a good conscience; That is such an answer as giveth quietness

and a good Testimony to Believers, when all speak against them, or speak evil of them: Now this answer of a good Conscience is not a man's bare apprehension that his Conscience is good, but it takes in these Three? 1. Not only the Conscience its saying nothing against the person, but positively speaking for him, 2. It is such a Conscience as hath its testimony grounded on the Word of God, 3. It's the Testimony of a Conscience soberly reflecting on itself, and trying itself, in the major proposition, toPage 40wit i such a thing be true; and in the minor propotion, ??? such a thing be true i reference to itself in particular, and finding both propositions to hold true, then t confidently draweth the Conclusion.

But here some will be? like Object? and say, If a good Conscience be an evidence of a persons saving interest in Christ, Alace! I fear I never had that evidence and mark, neither am I like to have it: Which Objection ministers ground for these two Questions, 1. If a Believer may ever, or at any time have a good Conscience? And 2. What are the Characters and Properties of such a Conscience.

For Answer to the First, We would distinguish a good Conscience, which may be understood, either 1 Legally, and so it is a Conscience giving Testimony to the fulfilling of the Law perfectly; taking it so, excepting Je??? there was never a man since Adams fall, that had a good Conscience or a Conscience altogether void of offence toward God and toward men. Or 2. A good Conscience may be understood Evangelically, or in a

Gospel sense, or, as i draweth it' Conclusion, not from the Law, but from the Gospel; and in this sense Believers may have, and often actually have a good Conscience; thus, and in this sense, David, Hezekiah, Paul, and others have drawn comfort from the Testimony of their good Conscience, not drawing its Testimony from, nor founding it upon the Law? and the perfect purity that it requireth, but fm, and upon the Gospel, and the purity that it graciously ??? in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For the 2d, viz. What are the Properties of this Conscience? (which will clear the former, and also clear, how it comes, that when Conscience challengeth for sin, yet it may be said that the Believer hath a good Conscience and may take it as a mark of his saving interest in Christ) I shall give th 4. or 5. Properties of a good Conscience, ??? when there may be sin. The 1. whereof, is, When Conscience is universal, and impartial in its putting??? duty, thus sayeth the Psalmist, Psalm 119:6. Page 41 Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all thy commandments; When the Conscience dispenseth not with itself, in the least duty or sin, but its design, aim, and endeavour is to be in the obedience of all commanded duties, and in the degree that is called for; It is on these two that David goeth Psalm 18. vers. 20, 21, 22. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands hath e recompensed me; for I have kept the wayes of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God; as i he had said, I halvd not the Bible, nor the Commands, nor did I mis-interpret them; neither did I depart

wickedly, I never resolvedly allowed my self in any sin, so as to oppose one sin, and to indulge, and connive at another; For all his judgements were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me, I endeavoured to set them alwayes as a compass before me by which I allowed my self to steer my whole course; I was also upright before him, and kept my self from mine iniquity; The sin that I was most given unto, that had most power over me, and to which I had the manyest and strongest assaults of temptations, I kepted my self most watchfully from that.

A 2d. Propertie of a good Conscience, in a Gospel sense, is, That it is a Conscience very single, having a just regard for all these things required in a Christian walk, whereof we spoke before; it's very observant of the performance of all duties, looking not only to the matter, but to the Spiritual manner of ging about them; it is single in its motives and ends, laying due weight on that which Christ sayeth, If thine eye ??? single, thy whole body shall he full of light; That is a mark of a good Conscience indeed, when a man in his actings is swayed with respect to the honour of God, and doth not what he doth to be seen of men, nor to have somewhat to ??? of before God, but he seeketh to have Christ increasing, though he should decrease, and is connt to be ??? upon, if it may contribute to the exaiting of him; and would fain be up at the due manner of performing all called for dues; even to be in case withPage 42the apostle, Hebrews 13:18. to say, W trust we have a good conscience in all things willing to live honestly; This is our aim and design, and if it be

otherwise with us in anything, we approve not ourselves in it. A ThirdProperty is, That such a Conscience is delighted, and made glad, or grieved and made sad, according as it is enabled to manage this great design, and to prosecute and attain this noble end, or not; In this respect, a Believer may have a good Conscience, even when he faileth, and cometh short in his duty, which would quite mar a legal Testimony of Conscience, or the Testimony of a legal good Conscience; Thus Paul hath a good Conscience,Romans 7:22. Even when he is wrestling against Sin, and crying out in the fight, O! miserable man that am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? For he findeth himself delighting in the Law of God after the inward man, and that his design is, to be honest and single for God: It is not so much the challenge of Conscience, as that there should be ground for it, that affeeth and troubleth him; when he thinketh with himself, what may I, and must I be before God, when Conscience taketh notice of so manythings to be amiss in me? It is from this ground (I say) that Paul comforteth himself, that he alloweth not himself in that which he did, and reckoneth his Evangelically good Conscience, and his sincerity to be his renewed part, and as such sideth and taketh part with it, and condemneth the un?renewed part. A 4th Property, or Character, is taken from a Believers walking, in reference to his challenges; This is not the mark that he wanteth challenges, but its drawn from the influence that challenges have on him; Which comprehends three different Characters, 1. A Gospel good Conscience

taketh quickly, and easily with a challenge, and is soon troubled and melted. 2. It is made quickly to loath and conemn itself for sin? and so Conscience and the man agree well together, when Conscience sayeth to him? thou art a Sinner, thou ar lost, Justice must be satisfied, and thou canst not do it, he sayeth so likewise. Page 433. When challenges put yet further at him, and pursue him yet harder and clossr, the good Conscience makes him ee to the Blood of Christ, and sets him a seeking of pardon from God, in the Court of Grace, when the man is some way condemned in the Court of his own Conscience, and then he obtaineth peace, even in the Court of Conscience; For when God speaks peace in and through Jesus Christ, the Conscience also speaks peace; and thus though the man hath not a good Conscience in a Law?sense (as I said before) yet in a Gospel-sense he hath; and he mindeth to keep friendship with God, and with his Conscience, though he cannot quiet, pacifie and satisfie it in a Legall way, yet in a Gospel way he may: And this is even it, that the Saints have in their appealing to their Conscience, for the great ground of their peace, viz. The sincerity of their Practice, and their fleeing to Christ's Blood, to the Blood of sprinkling, for quieting their Conscience in the croud of challenges for their short comings and failings in practice, and that very warrantably from the Word of God; whoever sincerely take this way, though they have challenges of Conscience, they have yet notwithstanding a good Conscience: Such a Conscience challengeth by the Law, yet absolveth by the Gospel; challengeth on account of

the Rebellion of the Law in the Members, and yet absolveth in respect of the Law in the mind; it condemneth the man as loathsome in himself, and in his own duties and righteousness, and yet absolveth him as founding his peace on Christ, and sinking and putting to silence all challenges, and accusations in that Blood of Sprinkling, that speaking Blood that hath a cry to out-cry the loudest cries of the most clamorous and guilty Conscience: And what can be justly said against this, since Christ's Righteousness is perfect, and God's promise faithful, and Christ's Blood of force and efficacy to quiet and give the answer of a good Conscience.

But it may be asked here, May not a natural un-renewed person, or a hypocrite have the Testimony of a good Conscience? or how far may his Conscience be good, and wherein lyeth the difference betwixt his good Conscience, and the Believers good Conscience? I know this is a piece of the Spiritual pride and vanity of many of you to boast of a good Conscience, and really it would make a tender Conscience some way to loath to hear you speak so confidently of it; I shall therefore in the First place Answer to the Question how far the Conscience of a natural man, or an hypocrite may be good? and then show you how, and wherein it is defective, and what are the differences betwixt it and the Believers good Conscience.

For the First? I would say this in generall in the First place, that we are not now speaking of slepie, erring, dead and hardened Consciences; the Testimony of these

is little worth; neither is every thing Conscience that many men think to be so, Conscience must act according to the word, else it withdraweth itself, from that due subordination it standeth in to God, and to his Law; Conscience is obliged to abide and stand by God's Testimony, but God is not obliged to stand by its Testimony; we would therefore beware of mistakin Conscience, more particularly in the 2d. place, a natural man may have something like a good Conscience? and may come the length of these four Steps according to his light, . He may have a negative good Conscience, that is, a Conscience which doth not actually challenge him, yea, a Conscience that hath no gross thing to challenge him for; he is, it may be, no Murtherer, no Adulterer, he defigneth no Oppression, nor deceit in his Dealing, and so forth. and on this ground he possibly thinketh that he hath a good Conscience, though he hath no positive Testimony of a good Conscience all this while. 2. He may someway have a good Conscience, in respect of such or such a particular act, in respect of being free of a challenge on account of a wrong design, of doing such or such a thing, or in respect of moral sincerity and ingenuity; such as was in these men that followed Absolom in the simplicityPage 45of their heart; and in Abimelech, who, in taking Abraham's wife, meant no evil? no anything, but what was lawful, and therefore he saith, That in the integrity of his heart e did it, that is, he had a moral honest design, and was free from grounds of challenge about what others might have been ready to charge him with, as to that action. 3 He may come a great

length, as to the duties of the second Table of the Law, so as he may not wrong his neighbour in word nor deed; he may design no man's hurt, he may wish evil to no man; thus very probably it was with that Pharisee, who came to Christ and said, All these have I kept from my youth, the poor man speaks as he thought, not knowing the Spiritual meaning, and extent of the Law; Therefore, when he is bidden sell all and give to the poor, he went away grieved, he had no gross sinister design; it's also said, that Christ loved him, or pitied him as a civil man: And Its indeed on this ground? that meerly civil men so much magnifie and cry up their Conscience, and place all their Religion in that, being much darkened, and insensibly prejudicat as to their Light; when they come up the length, or near the length of that light, Conscience speaketh, and giveth its Testimony accordingly, and they have thence a sort of peace? but it is not the peace of a truly good Conscience. 4. A natural man, or a hypocrite may come a great length in respect of the external duties of Religion, and may have a kind of a good Conscience in that respect; as he may pray, and have some moral sincerity in it? and o as he would ain have a hearing, and would some way have his heart praying, ay he may have a kind of delight in approaching to God, as its said of those hypocrits, Isa. 58:2. He would ain know what is Duty, and what is Sin, and he doth not deliberately thwart with his light; in this respect, Paul sayeth of himself before his Conversion, that as touching the righteousness of the Law he was blameless; and Romans 10:1. He beaeth the Iews record, That they had a zeal of God, but

not according to knowledge; and what IPage 46pray was this, but Conscience un-informed in, and ignorant of the righteousness of God? from which ignorance of Christ's righteousness, and of the way of coming to him, it came to pass that they went about to establish their own righteousness: So then the natural man, or hypocrite, when he hath come the length of some honest meaning, is disposed to think that he hath done very well and that he hath a good Conscience; yet though he may have a good Conscience in some respect, or in these respects mentioned, and the like, yet to have it simply, and positively from solid and good grounds, giving him a good Testimony, is impossible; and the reason is, because he hath not the Word going along with his Conscience, in reference to his whole carriage, and in reference to the principles, motives, ends and designs of his actions testifying for him, and therefore I say, he hath not the Testimony of a truly good Conscience.

For the next Question, Wherein is this Conscience defective? and what is the difference betwixt it and a believers good Conscience? Or, how may it be known as differing from an honest Gospel Conscience? Answer 1. In respect of its rise, there is a defect in the Judgment, for if the eye be blind, if the understanding be dark, the Conscience must be so too; They have (saith the apostle of the Iews) a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge, and being ignorant of the righteousness of God, they go about to establish their own righteousness; However zealous they were of God, or others, such may be, yet they are ignorant in three thing, 1. In the extent

and spiritual meaning of the Law; supposing (for instance) that a man keepeth the Sixth Command, when he is not guilty of any gross act of Murther? and the Seventh, when he doth not actually commit Adultery, or Fornication, not knowing or considering that a look arising from the flame of lust within, is a breach of that Command; and so proportionably in other Commands: Even as the Pharisees conformed the Law in the meaning thereof to their own practice, and not their practicePage 47to the meaning of the Law. 2. They are ignorant of the way of God's righteousness, and of that which, giveth the Conscience solid ground to speak peace; many if they have an honest meaning in their praying, reading of the Scripture, waiting on public Ordinances, if they put their bodies to some sort of pittance, or be ready to give if it were the half of their estates to have their souls safe, and if they have a sort of seriousness in all this, think that all is well with them, and that they have a very good Conscience; if this peice of ignorance were well discerned, never one soul out of Christ would have peace, because none out of Christ have solid grounds of peace, for none have their hearts sprinkled from an evil Conscience but these that are in him. 3. They are ignorant of their particular case, they know not what sins they are guilty of, nor what Conscience sayeth of them, they think it speaketh better things to them then indeed it doth; some guess at it, some mis-interpret it, and some repel it: whereas if they were soberly reflecting on, and impartially looking to their manner of proceeding in every thing, they would see that they mistake their

Conscience exceedingly. This then is the first defect, viz. a defect in the Judgment. The 2d. Is a defect as to singleness and sincerity in the natural man's best condition, such are never single when at their very best, even when they are most serious in Prayer, they are but going about to establish their own righteousness; when they fast, and give alms, and the like, it is that they may have some ground for a good opinion of themselves, or that others may have a good opinion of them, being always acted from selfy motives and for self-ends.

A 3d. defect, Is the want of unbiased Affections, these being partial and biased will put the man to reason and dispute for the silencing of his Conscience; and this eye not being single the whole body is full of darkness; Affections being inclined or swayed to this or that side, they will seek to way Conscience to that side they incline to: This is it that maketh some to follow after and toPage 48haunt the company of those who are erroneous in their judgment, notwithstanding that they have good reason to the contrary laid before them from the Word of God, which they reject, and that without challenge, being quite byased and prejudged in their affections; thus many natural men lay this for a conclusion, that so much only, is Holiness, and that no more is needful, and what is more is but superfluous niceness, and so they prejudice their Conscience by that.

4. It is defective in this, that it maintainth not its peace? nor answereth its challenges from Christ's blood? it is not sprinkled with clean, but with foul Water (to say so); it

may be? it putteth the man to take on some resolution, or to come under some vow, as to somewhat that it may be is no commanded duty of Religion, nor hath any valuable influence upon it; or he will as it were sprinkle his Conscience with his tears; thus many will grant that they have sinned, but withall, they think and will be ready to say, that they have a good heart, or a good meaning, or that such and such a man well esteemed of, hath such a sin, and is as guilty as they are; or that many have had such sins who yet have gone to Heaven; on such and others the like pitiful grounds they found their peace, and by such silly shifts they seek to quiet their Conscience; yea sometimes from the consideration of the possibility of pardon, many conclude confidently that they are actually pardoned; We shall forbear to say anything further at this time, God bless what ye have heard, through Jesus Christ.

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SERMON IV.

ACTS 24:16.

Herein do I exercise my self, to have alwayes a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

A Good Conscience is an excellent and very soveraign Cordial to be carried about and along with us in all conditions, and more especially in afflicted ones; but as excellent things are usually come at with the greatest difficulty, so is it in this matter, there being so many so various and so great difficulties in the way of taking up the nature of it aright, and in the attaining and maintaing of it; and there being so very many who claim to it most unwarrantably and unjustly, though poor deuded Souls they are disposed to think that they do so on good and warrantable grounds; all which make this Doctrine concerning the exercise and practice of a good Conscience to be exceeding difficult and tickle.

Ye may remember the point we spoke a little to last day, was, That Believers ought, and when they are right, will have it for their exercise and study to have a Conscience void of offence toward God and toward Men; whence we drew this Use, That it is an evidence of a sound Believer when right and in a good frame, even to be thus exercised; a tender, lively, and good frame of soul ay be known by this, that the person aimeth singly and endeavoureth seriously to have a Conscience void of offence.

In clearing of this Use, there are some Doubts that arise on the one side when Conscience speaketh good to a personPage 50without a warrant, in which case it is very dangerous to take direction from it; and some Doubts arise also on the other side, when Conscience doth challenge and condemn, when there is no ground for it; something therefore must be spoken for clearing and solving both the one and the other.

The last thing we left at was, That seing some natural men, civil moral men and hypocrites may think they have a good Conscience, that they are right and have the testimony of it, how shall that testimony be discerned? or wherein doth it differ from the testimony of a truly good Conscience, that giveth a Believer ground to draw this conclusion from it, that he is real and sincere in the work of Grace?

For clearing of this matter relating to these Consciences, that speak good when there is no ground for it; There are two sorts of persons that fall here, and are thereby culpably accessory to this delusion of and from their own Consciences, 1. Some fail in mistaking Duty and the rule of Duty, supposing that to be an acceptable duty which is but the shadow and appearance of duty; and this makes all self righteous-men and legal-hypocrites who thwart not the dark or dim light of their Conscience, but rather follow and comply with it, to think that they have a good Conscience: as it was with Paul before his conversion. A 2d. sort are these who take with sin, but think that they have a good Conscience, and on this ground their

Conscience speaks peace to them though it hath no warrant to do so, supposing themselves to be Believers, on that ground Conscience speaketh peace to them when it hath no warrant nor are they Believers indeed: And thus alace! many that are reputed by themselves and others to be Believers, fail; these are presumptuous hypocrites, as the others are legal hypocrites; and this kind of Conscience may be called a presumptuous Conscience, that speaketh peace and applyeth mercy when it hath no ground for either. In answer then to the Question, we shall give some differencing CharactersPage 51or characteristick differences betwixt the Believers good Conscience, and these other sorts of Conscience, some whereof agree more to the one sort, and some more to the other, and some to both, but take them together.

The Characters are these, 1. A really good Conscience is not easily attained nor maintained, it putteth a man to considerable exercise re he come at it, and to no less how to keep it. Herein do I exercise my self, and so forth. saith the apostle; security and negligence are no good tokens; there are these two things that a man of a good Conscience is exercised in. 1. To prevent the ground of a challenge from his Conscience, by endeavouring to give it no offence; against which the presumptuous hypocrite sinneth, who fancieth that he hath peace and it may be, thinketh much of it, and yet is not troubled nor taken up how to prevent the giving of offence to his Conscience, nor his meeting with a challenge from it; the legal hypocrite also sinneth here, in bounding and

limiting his Holiness to such or such a small measure of it, without so much as aiming any further. 2. He is exercised to satisfie his Conscience when it is offended; hence is the application to the blood of sprinkling, the exercise of repentance, the self-loathing, and sharpness of challenges, that Conscience hath with it until it recover, even such exercise as will in a manner break the bones and turn the moisture into the drought of summer, as it is Psalm 51. and Psalm 32. this good Conscience cannot look on sin and not be troubled; and therefore they who ordinarily and habitually can look on sin without trouble or sorrow, and judge it a very easie business to quiet and stop the mouth of their Conscience, who speak peace to themselves when lying still under guilt unrepented of and unremoved, carry about with them a shrewd token of no good Conscience.

The 2d. Character whereby it may be known, is, the mean and way that a man taketh to quiet his Conscience when it is wakened; A good Conscience as it yieldeth a man peace and testifyeth well concerning his state; so that peace riseth not so much from this that he hath no sin, as from Page 52 his flying to Jesus Christ for the pardon of sin; he may have peace as to his sincere and universal aim at Holiness, and as to his honest and serious endeavour to abstain from every known sin, as it was with David, Psalm 18:20, 21, 22. but as to the satisfying of Divine Justice he hath no peace, but in resting on Christ's satisfaction alone; for though his way may be and is good in respect of his single following of duty, for he readeth, prayeth, meditateth, and so forth. yet

corruption in a great measure polluting all these works and duties of his, as to the acceptation of them on their own account and for themselves; he finds that they are in some respect but dead, as wanting much of the soul and life of them, neither can he have peace until he betake himself to Christ's blood: though he were communicating every day, praying every hour, and so forth. yet he hath no peace in these until Christ's blood speak peace; as we may see in David, who though he had peace intimated by Nathan, yet is not thorowly quiet for all that, and therefore he prayeth Psalm 51. Cause me to hear the voice of joy and gladness; there is no healing of his wound until a word from God himself do it: It is on the contrary an ill token, when a Conscience seeth sin, and can speak peace to itself on this ground, that there is mercy in God; and yet never applyeth the blood of sprinkling, to purge it from dead works; nor seeketh to have the Word spoken as it were from God's own mouth: and on the other side the legal Conscience will make amends to God, will give him Sacrifices enough, and perform many duties to him, looking for his acceptance only on account of these, and that is as ill a token; but a good Conscience resteth not on any of these; but though it hath the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit to offer to God, yet it doth not rest on that nor on any duty, but is put beyond these, to rest on Christ and on his Sacrifice, Purge me with hyssop. and so forth. saith David, Psalm 51. And this is a clear and certain differencing mark, even to consider well whereon Conscience resteth for

peace after a challenge, and to make sure that it resteth thus on Christ.

Page 53A 3d. Character is, That a good Conscience will both challenge and speak peace at one time; it can stand up and defend itself against a challenge; thus when the Law on the one hand comes and charges it with many defects in duty, and denounceth wrath against it because of these, it will humbly take with them; and yet on the other hand, in the very time it can betake itself to Christ and produce a word of peace that it hath ready at hand from him; this we may see in Paul, 1 Timothy 1:13. I was (says he) before, a blasphemmer, a persecuter, and injurious: but I obtained mercy. It is an evil token when men either have only challenges and no peace, or only peace and no challenges at all; as it is also an evil token to offer to maintain peace by shifting challenges; or to give over pressing after and maintaining of peace by giving way to challenges: But it is a good token when Conscience can take kindly with and be humbled under challenges, and yet debate against them so as to keep and maintain peace, and can give a warrant for its doing so, which is indeed a great practick in Religion; we may see a clear instance of this in Io, who saith chap. 7:20. I have sinned, what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? where he acknowledgeth that he hath sinned, and cannot make amends; and yet chap. 27:4? 5. he saith with holy boldness and peremptoryness, My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. God forbid that I should justifie you; until I die, I will not remove my integrity from me. When God speaketh or

seemeth to speak wrath, his angry countenance driveth him not away from him, though (saith he chap. 13:15.) he should kill me, yet I will trust in him, but I will maintain mine own ways before him; and vers. 16. an hypocrite shall not come before him; The Hypocrite or legal man giveth it over, when he is thus put hard to it; though it be easie for him to presume while the Law and Wrath break not in, yet when the Law cometh, Sin reviveth and he dieth; as it is Romans 7. it is easie to have peace so long as God speaketh not down-right against it; but when he cometh to set all a man's sins in order beforePage 54him, he will with Iudas run and hang himself, rather then abide that tormenting Conscience of his, terribly denouncing war and wrath from God against him.

A 4th. Character is, That a good Conscience will love to entertain and welcome a challenge, but an ill Conscience cannot abide nor endure a challenge, and if it could, it would have Conscience always silent and quiet, when yet it should not be quiet, neither hath it any ground to be so: He who hath a good Conscience is glad to have sin discovered and Conscience kept waking; he thinketh a sanctified conviction of sin a valueable mercy; and the reason is, because he aimeth not so much at this to have peace in himself, as to have a good and solid ground of peace betwixt God and him, and to remove what may mar it; whereas the Hypocrites great design is to have peace on any terms and by any means, and therefore when a challenge cometh closs and home to him, it is quite marred; It is on this ground that a tender soul will

designedly aggregate sin, and even foster a challenge, as David doth, Psalm 1. Against thee, thee only have I sinned, whereas a Saul will defend his own sinful practice and seek to shift the challenge, as we may see 1 Sam. 15:10. yea I have kept the commandment of the Lord, saith that proud Hypocrite.

A 5th. Character or Difference is, That a good Conscience maintaineth its peace both from the Law and from the Gospel, and will needs have peace in some measure in respect of both, else it will not be satisfied; The evil Conscience again taketh its peace from the one and not from the other, and so taketh a wrong rule or ground for founding and trying of its peace; An honest man that hath a good Conscience, hath respect to the Law and will not thwart it; yea, the challenging and condemning part of it is welcomed, and the threatenings of it have influence on him to make him fear; and as he respecteth the Law, so he respecteth the Gospel, and looketh well to Believing, Repentance, Self-searching, Examination, Meditation, and to his manner of performing these and Page 55 of all his other duties, that none of them come in the place of Christ, or get anything of that which is his due; and though he seem to himself to have faith in Christ, if he endeavour not to have Holiness going along with it, he dare not speak peace to himself: But on the contrary, the legal man or law-conscience, if it be in good terms as he supposeth with the Law, it looketh not to the duties of the Gospel, whether the man be indeed fled to Christ, or be in good terms with God through him; and on the other hand, the

presumptuous Conscience when it heareth the Law and the threatenings thereof, it one way tusheth at these, and under pretext of betaking itself to Christ, it teareth (as it were) away the Law; and this mistaking, halving and dividing of the rule, maketh many men think that their Conscience speaketh good to them, when it doeth not so, but hath rather ground to speak evil and wo. And in the by, ye who think ye have good Consciences, try them by this mark, if ye walk humbly under Conscience-convictions, taking with them, and if they be welcome to you as well as a word of peace.

A 6th. Character or Difference, is, That a good Conscience is holily jealous and suspicious, while an evil Conscience is presumptuously confident and bold; we say a good Conscience is suspicious, and therefore is often putting itself to proof and tryal, taking the sentence of Conscience to the rule and trying it thereby, and taking the answer on deliberation, and not off-hand or by guess; because it knoweth Conscience is but a servant, and therefore will try if it speaketh its masters, even God's language; to this purpose saith the apostle 1 Corinthians 4:4. I know nothing by my self, yet am I not hereby justified; it will either have Consciences sentence and God's sentence going together, or else it will reject and cast it; whereas the most part of men satisfie themselves with the sentence of Conscience, and look not after God's sentence, and mis-interpret Conscience and take its first word (as it were) and put it not to the tryal: Ah! is not this true of many of your Consciences? ye think ye have peace and that all

betwixt God and you, notwithstanding ye be secure, ignorant or profane, but when do you put your Conscience to the tryal? ask your Conscience if in all the Word of God peace be spoken to the Wicked, or to any that is not sincerely aiming and endeavouring to be holy? consider that word Psalm 85. vers. 8. The Lord will speak peace to his people and to his saints; there is not one word of peace for the profane and unholy: How then can your Conscience possibly speak peace? if it presume to do, it will most certainly beguile you; and therefore as ye would not be deceived, sorrow not, neither lay weight upon every word that Conscience speaketh as to your state, especially at first, but try it by the Word; or take its sentence to God and to the Word, and see how he approveth of it, and how his Word doeth warrant it; for (as Solomon saith, Prov. 30:12.) There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, that are not cleansed from their filthiness.

There is yet on this side a 2d. Question, viz. If Conscience may not only think itself to be right, but think so in a high degree, so as even to be persuaded of it, when yet it is wrong? Answer, Without all question it may; And here we may speak somewhat of a deluded Conscience, which is a Conscience that not only is wrong, and erreth, and speaketh good when there is no ground for it; but a Conscience that hath these two things beside in it, 1. It hath a perswasion that it is right. 2. It hath the affections somewhat stirred by it, and a sort of joy in the thing, whereof it is persuaded; It's (I say) a Conscience that not only speaketh good without ground,

but hath a perswasion that it is right, and a kind of joy in its way: That there may be, and is such a Conscience among the generality of Professors cannot be denied, and is clear from what the apostle says, Gal. 5:3. This perswasion cometh not of him that calleth you; There is a perswasion, and yet not of God; and for the other, to wit, That there may be a joy in the thing, see Gal. 3:1. O foolish galatians who hath bewitched you? They had aPage 57sort of conceit and fainness even to a kind fascination and Bewitching conceit, of their being right, neither was there any dealing with them to draw them off that way: There are Four sorts of these Consciences among Professors, according to Four several rises that they have, none of which will warrand them to think themselves to be right. The 1. Rise, is, from laying too much weight on supposed reason; There is a kind of delusion that ariseth from this ground; which was it wherewith the Galatians were carried away, having heard first from the Gospel, of the righteousness of Faith; And thereafter, from some false Teachers, of the righteousness of the Law, as necessary to be added to it, in the point of Justification; They thought there was good reason for such a Doctrine, and that no loss nor prejudice could come by it; and therefore they did join both together. The 2d. Rise, Is, when men lay too much weight on great, though yet but common Gifts, as on liberty in Prayer, and warmness of the affections therein, on Preaching notably, and one standing it out in sharp Tryals with the approbations of others, it may be even of the best, or when they have been helped to do some

extraordinary things, as in the Primitive times, some Professors were helped as God's Instruments to cast out Devils, to speak with tongues, and so forth. who yet were not sound at the heart; it is on this ground that Christ goeth, when He saith, Luke 13:27. And Matthew 7:22, 23. Many shall come to me in that day, saying? Lord, we have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and done many wonderfull works: All which are (as I just now said) but common Gifts, though some of them at least, extraordinary; and when men come to have any measure of these beyond others, they will not be beat from it, but will go to death with it, that all is right with them: The 3d. Rise, is from some supposed spiritual sense and comfort, and from some flashes of joy; These temporary Believers spoke of, Matthew 13. and Hebrews 6:4, 5. attained to some tasting of the good Word of God, and of the Powers of the World to come; such as once come this length, do what they will, and live as they will, have it (as it were) alwayes sounding in their ears, nor suffer they it to go out of their heads, that such and such a day they met with God, and that he spoke peace to them, and therefore they are persuaded that matters are right betwixt him and them; and yet all this while they may be unsound at the heart, The 4th. Rise is, From folks habituating themselves to speak good to themselves, and from maintaining their presumption, and dulling and deadning their own Conscience; whereupon, in God's righteous Judgment, Conscience becometh a plague to them, so that they will dispute and debate with and against any Minister,

Neighbour, or Friend, that would convince them of the evil and danger of their State and Condition; and the heart being by them, thus deceived, speaketh and pleadeth for them, and deceiveth them back again, they are honest olks, and were never heard with their Neighbours, none have anything amiss to say of them, and their own Conscience justifieth them, and what should more? Thus having put out their Light, and blinded their own eyes, they have constrained, and some way necessitated their Conscience to cheat, deceive and beguile them: Such as these are spoken of, Isa. 44: 20. He feedeth on ashes, a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say is there not a lie in my right hand? The heart is ordinarily taken (as was hinted before) for the Conscience in the Old Testament, accordingly Job said, His heart should not smite him while he lived; And it is said, Davids heart smote him: Now such a man as is here spoken of, his deceived heart, or deluded Conscience turneth him aside, so that he cannot deliver his soul, that is, he cannot winde and extricat himself out of that thicket of self deceit, so far as to bespeak himself thus, is it not a lie that I am lipning and trusting to? And yet this is it that many of you have for a good Conscience, even a deceived heart, or a deluded Conscience; speak to you who will, or what we can, itPage 59is in some respect impossible to put you off that ancie, and to awake you out of that dream, that you have a good Conscience: And the reason of this delusion is, that men take not the ground of the Sentence of Conscience from God, according to the rule of his

Word, but from their own misled Reason, or from some common Gift, or from some piece of sense, or some opinion and fancie of their own heart, that is in some sort deceived by them, and deceiveth them. Now all these Delusions may be in these Three respects, 1. In respect of things Doctrinal; A man may be persuaded that Truth is an Error, and an Error is a Truth: 2. In respect of matters of Practice; A man may take an evil Turn or Action for a good one, and have a sort of perswasion that it is so, as the Jews had in killing the apostles; who thought they did God good service, as the Lord foretold, Iohn 16. v. 2. And Thirdly, In respect of a man's estate, who thinketh he is in friendship with God, when indeed he is not, because he draweth his Conclusion from wrong premisses, either failing in the major Proposition, laying down a wrong rule; Or in the minor Proposition, applying the Rule to himself partially: these things ye should take along with you, in what we are to say further on this point.

Now for the Marks and Evidences of a deluded Conscience, beside these forementioned, of a Legal, and of a Presumptuous Conscience, which may be also Marks of this, it hath these Four or Five especially, accompanying it. 1. A certain frothiness of Spirit, or a light unsetled frame; The light that a deluded man hath in his state or way, is but like a Dream, that hath no reality in it. He feedeth on ashes; and such an one will some way make more Conscience of, and take more pleasure in that wherein he is deluded, then in any other Pece or Practice of Religion, as it was with the Jews, in

persecuting the apostles; and with the Scribes and Pharisees in seeking to gain a Prosylite, and yet in all that they do, they are but licking froth or sum, Ephraim feedethPage 60on wind, Hos. 12:1. What exercise of Conscience they have about Religion, is without any sanctifying effect, it stricketh not at the body of Death? nor doth it promove Godliness; it is readily some frivolous thing, that they are so much taken up with, and are so eager in the persuit of, which proveth but wind and ashes, to whom it may be, in some respect, said, as the apostle doth to the Galatians, chap. 3:3. Ye began in the spirit, and seek to be made perfect in the flesh.

A Second mark of this, is; There is alwayes in such a Conscience, an un-distinctness, as to the ground whence the man's consolation floweth, or there is much more supposed peace, comfort, joy and satisfaction, then he can give any solid reason for: And they are hugely disproportioned to the foundation they are built upon, ask an hypocrite, what is the ground of his so firm perswasion, and of the comfort and joy resulting there from? He will readily answer, I think it is so, or I hope it is so, or, if he come to be somewhat more particular, in the account he gives, it will very readily be to this, or some such purpose, God hath been very good and kind to me in such, and such Providences, he hath bestowed on me such and such Gifts and Benefits, which yet are but things external and common; or he will, it may be, say, I prayed to God in such and such a strait, and he heard, and delivered me, and I take that for an earnest that he will hear me also for heaven and eternal Life; as

if Achabs deliverance from a temporary judgement on his humiliation? had been to him indeed the earnest of heaven: Or, it may be he will further say, God hath kepted me from many sins, and bestowed many blessings on me, (which he may do unto, and often doth to meer natural men) and therefore he will be merciful to me; such conclusions are broader then the Premises, and the Superstructures then the Foundations; and yet, alace! the perswasion of many is built upon such sandy Foundations, and is therefore but a delusion, since it hath no solid bottom: Thus some who are carried away with an error,Page 61 will say they cannot defend, nor debate for such a thing, but they are persuaded of it, as if a well grounded perswasion could be without all reason.

A Third Character, is, That a deluded Conscience can never abide, or endure to be contradicted, or put to a tryal, if any man shall say to such a person. that he or she is deluded, they will be ready to hate him; thus it was with the deluded Galatians to whom the apostle is constrained to say, cap. 4. v. 16. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? They will readily cast out with their greatest and best friends, and with the men they were wont to love most, when they gainsay them in their delusions, as Paul sayeth in the forecited place, I bear you record, that if it had been possible you? would once have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me, and am I now become your enemy because I tell you the truth? It's an evil token, when a man now hateth another whom he loved before, and on no other ground, and for no other reason, but

because he contradicteth him, in that particular wherein he is mistaken.

A 4th Character is, (which is of some affinity to the 2d.) That as a deluded Conscience is frothy in its comfort, so it turneth a man forthie in his practice, he is much more concerned, and zealous in smal and minute things than in those of far greater moment; as the apostle insinuateth the Galatians were, where he sayeth to them, chap. 3. v. 3. Are ye so foolish, that having begun in the spirit, ye are now made perfect by the flesh? He straineth at a guat and swalloweth a camel; and is not so much taken up with the whole of Religion, as he is with that particular thing wherein he is deluded. he hath more love unto, and sympathy with these that are of his judgement and opinion in that particular, then with all the rest of the Lord's people that are sound and right; The Galatians could not deny, but that Paul had more grace then many, or all of these Teachers that courted and wooed them so much into that error, and yet they cooled in their affection to him, and were fond on them.

Page 62A 5th. Character is, That a deluded Conscience, i ordinarily bitter and cruel in the effects of it; as it is proud and vain, so it will persecute to the death them it differeth from; hence were the Persecutions of the apostles, and of Paul especially; and we have seen it in poor deluded souls, who have thought themselves oblinded to slay all that were against them, or differed from them in these their delusions; some what of this bitterspirit accompanied the delusion of the Galatians;

Therefore the apostle sayeth to them, chap. 5:15. If ye bite and devour one another, and so forth. And James speaketh to the same purpose of such persons, chap. 3:14. If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth, this wisdom descendeth not from above. Bitter zeal and strife is an evil token, and a bitter Conscience is readily no good Conscience; when a man supposing himself to be in the right, is carried on with a spirit of bitterness (though in other cases, bitterness, through the power of corruption may kyth, yet it is native to delusion.) It floweth from pride in such persons, exalting themselves above all others; Therefore as soon as they are deluded, and go wrong, they must have a Church by themselves, and will join with no other persons, in Christian communion, but such as are of their mistaken opinion.

But a Third Question ariseth here on occasion of the former. viz. whether Believers in Christ need to be afraid of a deluded Conscience? And whether they may not be persuaded, and that with a sort of delight and satisfaction, that they are right when yet they are wrong? (the latter branch of the Question necessarily supposeth the former, which needeth not therefore to be particularly spoken to) We Answer with a distinction, that a Believer may be mistaken and deluded in a particular, but cannot be deluded as to his gracious state, because, being indeed a Believer, its a most true and certain conclusion which he draws concerning his being in a gracious state, though possibly as to some of the grounds whence he deduceth it, he may be mistaken, or he may draw it from

63wrong grounds; yet I say in some particulars he may be deluded; as in taking such or such an error to be a truth; and so the first Three grounds and rises of a deluded Conscience, which we formerly assigned, may agree to him: As, he may lay too much weight on carnal reason, and on common Gifts, as some of the Galaians did and the apostles themselves were in hazard to do, and therefore our Lord saith to them Luke 10:20. Rejoyce not in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but that your names are written in heaven; he may also lay too much weight on sense or comfort; and the reason may be, because when God graciously condescendeth to give them now and then some proof that he loveth them, they being in so far deserted, draw a conclusion quite cross to the design and end of that manifestation, as if he approved them in that particular wherein they are mistaken; for as a Believer when he is right may think himself to be wrong, because of the want of sense, so by the rule of contraries he may think himself to be right, because he hath much sense, when yet he may be wrong: I shall for further clearing, instance it in five or six cases: As 1. When a Believer hath been in some tender frame, praying to God sincerely and hath gotten a hearing, and when some smiling providence meeteth him, and inviteth him to side with such or such a thing, he is ready to think that God calleth him to that thing: or it may be the Christian after Prayer meets with a Scripture that holdeth out that thing which he hath been praying for, whence he rashly draweth the conclusion that he will obtain it, and is ready to think that therein he walks

according to reason, if the thing look rational like to him, and suit the matter of his Prayer; we may see something of this, or very like it in Samuel, if we compare the 15. and 16. Chapters of the first Book of Samuel together; in the end of the 15. Chapter he hath very probably been praying, when he mourned, and chap. 16. v. 1. he is sent by God to Bethlehem to anoint one of Iesses sons to be king; and when (vers. 6.) he looketh on Eliah, he presently and somewhat rashly, yet very confidently saith, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him; he having been praying, and the thing looking so rational and purposelike, was persuaded that he was right, but the Lord reproveth him, and saith to him, Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature, because I have refused him; for the Lord seeth not s man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. How ot may a tryst of Providence be mistaken? I was in Prayer and such a word met me, and such a Providence occurred to me, and did cast the ballance. A d. Case is, when a thing representeth itself to the Believer, not only as lawful and honest, but as conducing much to God's glory and to the good of his work, and he meaneth well in it, how ready is he hence to conclude, that he is certainly called to such a thing, and that it is his duty, when yet it is not so: we may see something of this in David, who 2 Sam. 7:1; 2, 3, and 4. having a purpose to build a house to God, proposeth the matter to Nathan the Prophet, who without consulting God, off-hand saith to him, Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee; and yet notwithstanding

though God loved the thing, and approved of it in its self as a duty; yet it was not God's mind that David should perform it, nor that Nathan should have so positively encouraged him to it; hence when a thing considered in itself is pleasing to God, and may be for his honour, some good people may think it to be their duty, whom yet God never called to such a thing; as for instance, to aim to be a Minister of the Gospel is a good thing in itself, and one may have a sort of impulse to it, who yet may not be called to it. A 3d. Case is, when Believers inclinations and affections are exceeding much towards such or such a thing, very readily there-from they will come to have a sort of perswasion in their Conscience anent that thing; as for instance, when they love one sort of life beyond another, which is not simply unlawful, or one Child beyond another; as we may see in Isaac his strong inclination to bless Esau, Genesis 27. we conceive the good man went not against the light of his own ConsciencePage 65in the matter, but he loved him excessively, which made him take the less heed to what otherways God's promise and way of dealing with his sons might have taught him; even when he is about to die (when men use to be most single,) he is by his excess of affection carried on that same way, though doubtless not inreuding to cross God's purpose anent Iacob. And if I might instance it (without being mistaken by any) in this particular, which doth not seldom come to pass, when two Parties are making choice each of other for Marriaga, they may not only think, but some may be persuaded that they are called to marry such an

individual person, because inclination and affection setteth them on, when yet there may be no such call of God; and so it may be in reference to other things. A 4th. Case is, when Believers think that God's Interest and their own interest go jointly together in such and such a thing or practice, though their own interest swayeth more with them then God's interest, yet they will be ready to alleadge that they care not so much what become of their own interest, but they cannot endure no admit such or such a prejudice should come to God's interest; something whereof we may see in Ionah, to whom the Lord saith, chap. 4. Doest thou well to be angry? I do well (saith Ionah) to be angry to death; and he would do nothing but die, and even in that evil frame of spirit he adventureth to pray to God that he would take away his life; for all which passion and precipitation he alleadgeth a regard to the great concern of God's glory, as if by that dispensation his truth and faithfulness would be reflected on, while yet in the mean time, respect to his own reputation that he thought would run a considerable risk and hazard, had thereby for the time a prevalent influence on him; and the great impatency for the withering of his Gourd, says plainly that his own interest lay there, and his being so very cakered and impatient o so small an occasion, and where so inconsiderable an interest of his own was touched, might have down-right told him that he had need to suspect his impatency in aPage 66greater matter; Thus it was manifestly with godly Baruch, Ier. 45. where regard to his own interest had too great a stroak on his fainting and ighing, for

which he is sharply checked, Seeks thou great things for thy self? seek them not; though no doubt he wanted not respect to the public interest that was now going to ruine in all appearance. A? 5th Case is, when Believers seem to have or indeed have greater manifestations of God then ordinary, whereby while it may be he is only approving and encouraging them, as to the main, they are then in hazard to conclude that he is approving them in some particular thing that was never in his mind. As we may see in Peter, who Matthew 17. at the transfiguration being trysted with a glorious manifestation, draweth this conclusion, It is good to be here, let us build three tabernacles: it might have been thought that he would not have mistaken and gone wrong then, by any time, and yet even then he doth so: There is a very common ground of mistake amongst Believers, who if they win at liberty in Prayer about such or such a thing, and get as they think God's countenance in the duty, they are then very ready to conclude that God certainly approveth of the thing, when yet it may be otherways; but suppose it be so that thou art indeed countenanced in thy duty, yea though thou wert upon the mount with Christ, it will not prove that God alloweth the thing, though he thus manifest his respect to thy self. The reason is that which is said of Peter, This he spoke not knowing what he said. A 6th Case is, when Believers impulse of Conscience proceedeth from zeal without light, or when their light is not proportional to their zeal; for as there may be in Hypocrites light without zeal (which light doth not readily keep them from miscarrying,) so when the

judgment of a Believer is mis-informed, and zeal driveth him without light, he then very readily miscarries; as we may see Acts 21. and 20. James saith to Paul, Thou? seest brother how many thousands of Iews there are that believe, and they are all zealous of the law, and so forth. their zeal was such for the Ceremonial Law of Moses, thatPage 67neither Paul nor any of the other apostles could get them taken off; and Paul was forced to stoop to them in manythings, when it might in reason have been thought that they should rather have ceded to the apostle; Thus Believers when not well informed, but having an honest zeal for God, are like a Ship that hath more sail than ballast, and so cannot well bear up into the wind, nor steer a straight and stedly course; and from this honest zeal of theirs they may err and go wrong, yea even be displeased with others, that will not go along with them in their Error: As all these are incident to Believers, so they would watchfully take heed that in these and other such cases they give not credit to, nor lay weight upon all that their Conscience saith.

A Fourth Question arising from the former is, Whether it may be thus with a Believer, and yet he be in a good frame? Answer, If we mean good frame universally, so, he cannot be; but although he be in many, ye in most things in a good frame, as both himself and others may think, and have good ground to think so; yet he may go wrong in a particular, and in so far he is not in a good frame, as in the instances given before. 1. He may have an honest mind and meaning. 2. In other things he may be very observant of and tender in duty very tractable and

obedient to the faith of Christ? keeping the Church, hearing the Word preached, given to Prayer, and to wait on all Ordinances, as no doubt these believing Jews were, Acts 21:3. he may be in some measure in a praying frame, yea praying in or about the very time he miscarrieth, as we see in that forecited nstance of Samuel, 1 Sam.15. compared with 16. who had been presently praying and offering sacrifice, when he drew that conclusion touching Eliah; Ionah also was praying in that fit of distempered passion, and content to die, and desirous to be in heaven, which supposeth some clearness of his interest; for it cannot in charity be thought that the godly man was desperate or durst so go to God, and yet he was no doubt wrong. Yea 4. He may have great manifestations,Page 68(as we see in Peter on the mount) and yet go wrong in a particular, as he did; This sayeth that Believers, as-well as others, should walk in humility and fear, and never be over confident? it is not sure, in vain that they are bidden work out the work of thier own salvation with fear and trembling; And all men should be very warry unless it be on good grounds, to draw conclusions about the goodness of their estate especially, wherein these greatly failed, who are spoken of, Ier. 2. v. 35. Because I am innocent, surely his anger is turned away from me. Only here, take?two or three differences betwixt the perswasions that are in Believers, and these that are in Hypocrites, when they go wrong. 1. In a Believer it is in some particular, and not as to their state, as it's in the Hypocrites perswasion. 2. It's in some accidental or accessory thing, and not in fundamental

Truths 3ly. It is readily and more ordinarily in some thing not simply, and in itself evil, but in something only that they are not called to of God, though good in itself; in these most readily, and ordinarily, (as I just now said) they may go wrong and stray; but yet they may do so, even in some other things at fits, or under some violent tentations. We shall close up all at this time with these Four or Five Words of Direction.

The 1. whereof is, that which we hinted at before, That Believers would walk softly, humbly and in fear, and not be too confident of themselves, or of their own strength; for though they may warrantably be humbly confident that they shall be carried through without, at least final erring in any fundamental truth necessary to Salvation; yet they may slide in a particular practice, or in a point of truth in such things as are (to say so) accessory, and not absolutely necessary; and therefore they should walk in fear, and be war of a despising, censuring, and condemning humour that useth to go along with them, who think themselves to be right, and others to be wrong; As the apostles exhortation is? Romans 14:3:2dly. Believers had not need to be rash or hasty, inPage 69anything, since much of their erring, whether in opinion or practice floweth from their haste, and suddenness in drawing conclusions; Whereas, if they patiently waited on God, and considered calmly, and at leasure, they might get another Answer; But we often lay down our Conclusion, and then begin to Try (which is a very preposterous course) Whereas we should first try, and then conclude. 3dly. Believers should be exceeding

serious, not only in trying the thing, but in trying their singleness in it; Considering that oftentimes there is somewhat beside awe of Conscience, that swayeth them in such and such a particular (if they could discern it) such as interest, affection, or the like. 4thly. They would also carefully observe, and beware of the bitter fruits that accompany delusion in others, which (though they come not to that hight, yet) may come to a considerable hight even in them, such as are severe censuring and judging of others, bitterness, frothiness, and so forth. 5thly. And in a word, They had need to lippen and trust to God, more then to themselves, according to that notable exhortation, Prov. 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths; That other word which we have, Prov. 28. v? 26. would also be considered, and seriously pondered, He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool, but who so walketh wisely shall be delivered: Let all learn to be humble, tender, and sober; And God bless what hath been said for this end.

SERMON V.

ACTS 24:16. And herein do I exercise my self to have always a Conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

There is no truth that will be more readily granted then this, which we proposed from these Words, namely, That all men, and more especially Believers ought so to live, and walk as in nothing to give their conscience cause of offence: And yet if we shall impartially put the matter to tryal, there is ground to fear, that the life of many will be found to be nothing else then a continued lie, and practical contradiction to the profession of this great Truth.

Because this is, (as we said) so tender and tickle a subject, and because there is so great need to be clear in the true meaning of it, we have been constrained beyond our purpose, to propose, and answer several Questions, and to move and dissolve several Doubts, concerning it, to make the fairer and easier access to the Use; It being so very ordinary for people to think that they have a good Conscience, when indeed they have it not; and so to baffle (to speak so) and abuse Conscience (that should be the most powerfull provoker to a tender and circumspect walk) as to make it a ground of security and un-tenderness.

We spoke a little the last occasion to that Question, whether not only un-regenerat men may think that to be

Conscience? which is not? But also whether it be incident even to Believers themselves to think, and that with some sort of perswasion (I will not say with such grossness of delusion as may be in others) that they are right when yet they are wrong? In answer to which we shown you, they might, and instanced several Cases, wherein.

Now though the last branch of the Question hath its own great difficulty to conceive of it a right; yet since it is or our edification; (fo if Believers may mistake, much more may others,) and since it will make way for confirming a subsequent Doctrine, viz. That it is a most difficult, exercising, and up-taking thing to keep a good Conscience; and since also it hath very great influence upon, and is very useful to our whole life, it being withall the main scope of the Text, to press the keeping of a good Conscience, and the sum and substance of a Christian walk to do so, we shall yet proceed therein a little further, and it will not, we hope, be found to be an impertinent, or wide digression, soberly to do so. That then which we spoke a little to, and will now further prosecute, is, That Believers (though not in reference to their state, yet) in the matter of duty (for both in thinking that to be truth which is not truth, and that to be duty which is not duty, Conscience acteth as the Judgment is informed) may err and go wrong.

In prosecuting of this, we shall First confirm it from some instances. 2dly. We shall touch on some Aggravations, or aggravating Circumstances of the

thing, though not so much in reference to the sinfulness of it, which will make it the more wonderful. 3dly. We shall give some reasons of it. 4thly. We shall speak a word or two to the Use of it.

For the 1. That Believers may thus go wrong, we shall confirm it from 4. Instances; The 1. whereof is, That frequent and famous instance of Bigamy and Polygamy, or marrying of two or of more wives, in the Old Testament amongst the Fathers and Saints; we are far from aggredging their failing in this? and from making it in them so very odious, yea, we think it may be in some respect justly extenuated, and far removed from that degree of sinfulness that it would be among us, and might possibly in some cases had a Dispensation in them; Yet considering 1. The nature of the thing, and the institution of marriage, and that of Mal. 2:15. That he made but one man, and one woman for the man, that he might have a godly seed, neither can the multiplication of mankind have sufficient weight to make it simply to be no sin. 2dly. Considering the frequency of it, or its being in so many, that it became almost ordinary; And 3dly. Considering the effects that followed on it, viz. The many discontents and heart-burnings amongst the Wives and Children in the Families of Abraham and Iacob; It cannot absolutely be excused, in all Cases and Circumstances, else it should make an extraordinary dispensation (if indeed it was) to be very ordinary, which we have no warrant for. A 2d. Instance is in Jobs friends, who were (no question) gracious men, (as the Lord's accepting of them, and Job for them, Job 42:8.

sheweth) yet that they Erred, and were wrong in a Truth in their Judgments, is clear from v. 7. of that Chapter, where the Lord telleth them that they had not spoken right as his servant Job had done; And that they did very un-tenderly handle Job, is also clear. The 3d. Instance is in the apostles and Disciples of our Lord, They were Believers no doubt, according to Christ's own Testimony given them, Iohn 17. 8. And yet we will find them in several things thinking themselves to be right, and that with some sort of perswasion, when yet they were wrong; As in that one tenet concerning the nature of Christ's Kingdom, which they fancied was to be with some earthly Grandour and Pomp, and wherein they expected some Worldy Credit, and Greatness; and in that of Peter, Matthew 16:22. Be it far from the, Lord, this shall not be unto thee; And if all the apostles had been put to a Consultation, it is like they would have dissuaded him as well as Peter did; As when he said, he was to go up to Ierusalem, they said, Master, the Iews sought of late to stone thee, and wilt thou go up thithe? And yet how hatefull this was to Christ, is clear from the whole strain of the Gospel, and from his checking of Peter, at that rate of holy severity, saving o him, Get thee behind me Satan; And the two Sons of Zebedee, Matthew 20:22. Telling them, That they knew not what they asked; And, Acts 1:7. He declareth to them that it was not for them to know the times and seasons which the Father had put in his own power. A 4th. Instance is that which was the very common Tenet, and Opinion of Believers in the Primitive times, among the Iews? viz

That the Ceremonial Law of Moses was not fully abrogated by the coming of Christ, and is clear from Acts 21. and Romans 14. and, 1 Corinthians 8:9. and 10. Chapters, and that there was much un-clearness, in the matter of Christian Liberty; they being some way rooted in their Opinion, anent the distinction of Meats and Dayes, thinking that it was not taken away; And though the apostles determined it, yet they could not easily be brought off from it.

For the 2d. Take some aggredging circumstances, which will make this the more wonderfull. As 1. That Believers may Err? be mistaken, and go wrong, when in a very tender Christian frame; As is clear in the forecited instances of the Patriarchs of Job's Friends, and of the apostles, and Believers in the Primitive Times, for, will any I pray deny, but they were in a good frame, when they had so much Liberty in Prayer, and Preaching, and such successe waiting on it? so that the Devils were subject to them, They were also singularly dauted, and dandled in a manner, by Christ Jesus himself; and had so much access to God, and so much of his countenance, yet continuing still for a great while in some of these their Errors, and Mistakes. 2. That this may be, not only among the more common sort of Believers, but even also amongst the most eminent; for, are there any more eminent then there we have named? viz. The Patriarchs, apostles and Disiples of our Lord? And we may add that of Paul and Barnabas, Acts 15:36, 39. What the particular was about which the contest was, we shall not offer now to decide; it is sure in the matter, one of them

was wrong, and it is like both in the manner, and yet both though themselves to be right. 3. There may be mistakes in very concerning and important Truths: Is not that a concerning Truth, about which Jobs Friends disputed with him, viz. That God would not temporally plague a godly man? And was not that a concerning Truth anent the nature of Christ's Kingdom, wherein the Disciples were mistaken and wrong? And if we speak of matters of Fact, was not that of the Fathers, and other Saints, in the matter of Bigamy, and Poligamy a concerning thing? yet all of them thought themselves to be right, neither did they, (for anything we know) go against an explicit challenge of their Conscience, in that matter. 4ly. It is not one or two, but many that may be under such mistakes, many of the Fathers were mistaken, Job's Friends were so, all the apostles were so, many thousands, yea, ten thousands of the Jews that believed (as it were almost all the Believers of that Countrey) were so, being all zealous of the cerimoniall Law, when yet it was abrogat. 5ly. They may be exceeding fervent and forward, and in that wherein they Err, very bent on it; how vehemently and eagerly did JobsFriends pursue the Dispute, to beat him from a sound principle which they held against him? how serious were the apostles in these things wherin they erred? How zealous were these sound believing Jews for these Cerimonies, even after the matter was otherwise determined by the apostles? And how hot was the contention betwixt Barnabas and Paul? Even so hot, that they parted company. 6thly. They may continue in such mistakes, notwithstanding many evidences that might

serve to bring them off, and against many relevant reasons given them to the contrary, how many unanswerable arguments were adduced by Job to persuade his Friends of their mistake? And yet had not the Lord himself immediately interposed, it's like they might have dyed without taking5with it; How often did Christ refute that Opinion touching the nature of his Kingdom, by preaching of suffering, and of the necessity of his Death, by telling his Disciples expresly, that his Kingdom was not of this World, and that they behoveo become as little Children? And yet notwithstanding of all this, they continued in their Error, not only while Christ was with them before his Death, but even after his Resurrection, as is clear, Acts 1. And we know what were the decrees of the Synod held at Ierusalem, Acts 15. Concerning Christian Liberty, and how it was told the Believers in that time, That an idol was nothing, and yet they adhered to their mistake about their Liberty, and thought still something of the Idol, As Paul sheweth, 1 Corinthians 19: 19:7ly. Their Error, or mistake may be continued in long, and Believers may not only fall hastily, or on the sudden, in an Error of Judgment, or into a wrong practice, but they may live, and ly long in it; It's like that of Jobs Friends ended not in a day, nor in a moneth; and that of the Fathers was for many years together, and that also of the apostles was for several; yea, they may continue so long, that they may die in it, and never come to so much clearness? as once to know that they were wrong; though I say not, that they may die in such an Error and mistake, un-pardoned, yet they may die in

unclearness, as to the things being an Error, yet without prejudice to their Salvation, having an interpretative and virtual repentance of every thing that is wrong and sinfull in them, and so of all among the rest; As the Patriarchs and many Believers in Paul's time went to heaven, who, yet very probably did die without coming to be clear in that particular wherein they were mistaken, or differed from others, who were in the right: shall we think that two godly men, living and dying in some difference of judgement, about somewhat not necessary o Salvation (wherein, yet the one of them must be wrong) die not well, and in the Lord for all that? God forbid; neither can there be any reason given, why they may not die in that wherein they lived so long, though indeed at death they may come to be more impartial in weighing the grounds of the difference, and mistake. 8ly. This may be for some generations; as was that mistake of the Patriarchs, and so it may continue not only in men's own lifetime, but in after generations the mistake may be propagat; as in the Primitive Times, some of their debates were not soon altogether hushed and worn out.

3dly. These things being wonderful in themselves, we shall come now to enquire a little into the reasons of this, and they are of Two sorts. 1. Some speak sinful infirmity in men, even godly men. 2dly. Others speak Sovereignty in the holy God

For the First sort that speak infirmity in us, and are culpable causes of the thing, They may be these, 1. Ignorance, and Unclearness in the Understanding and

Judgment, for the most eminent Believer in his best Condition Knoweth but in part; and as his Judgment is mistaken, so readily will his Conscience be, which accuseth or excuseth according as the Judgment is informed; Conscience pre-requireth, and some way presupposeth Knowledge; And therefore the man that wanteth knowledge, is called weak, so the Conscience of the weak Brother is spoken of, Romans 14. And 1 Corinthians 8. that is, weak through want of Knowledge.

2ly. The best and most eminent Believers have a remainder of Corruption in them; and therefore are in hazard, and in a manner ready to side with, and intertain a mistake, if Believers were free of Corruption, it might be thought impossible that they should thus Err, but that will not be until the Soul be separated from the Body; so long as Corruption remaineth there will be a hazard, and readiness in so far, and in some things to mistake, and to follow the misguiding of a mis-informed Conscience.

3dly. Believers are sometimes rash and hasty in drawing a sudden Conclusion, and too negligent in previous trying; taking that for God's mind, which is not so indeed; as may be seen in Samuel, who taketh Elia for God's anointed; and in Nathan, who approveth of Davids resolution to build the Temple, not only as it was a good work in itself, but as his present duty; much of their Error flowed from hae; As he sayeth in another Case, Psalm 116. v. 11. I said in my haste, all men are lyers.

4ly There may much of this evil arise from the suffering of a prejudice to sit down or setle, when a Believer is prejudged, he may hear manythings, and not take them

well up; so the Disciples had drunk in a prejudice at the Cross, and therefore, when Christ spoke of Suffering to them, it's said, they understood him not. 5ly. Believers are sometimes un-aware ingadged in a Conclusion, that biaseth their light, and maketh their Conscience partial, as in searching and finding out what might clear them, so in seeking out grounds to maintain their Opinion by; Thus Jobs Friends did first apprehend, and take up Job to be an hypocrite, and accordingly thought it their duty to bear in the Conviction of it upon him; and to maintain that Conclusion, they wrest God's providence, and dispensation, not against their present light, nor, it may be from a former Error so much, as from the prejudice they had drunk in. 6ly. Believers may think themselves to be right, when they are wrong, because of a general Custome, or Opinion of such a thing among other Believers; taking such a thing to be the Judgment of others they ingadge in it, without tryal or debate, which is given as the reason of the Patriarchs their so long continuing in Polygamy, viz. That it was become customary, and habitual. 7ly. Beside the instances we gave the last day (which might also be reasons) Believers out of their respect, and love to a good end, may think that such or such a mids is good and warrantable, without so particular examination of the nature of the mids, especially, if it be not grossely, or manifestly sinfull; because they think that such an end is warrantable, as it may indeed be, and yet every mids is not so; though, when the end is good, the midses are often with too little care, 8search and solitude adventured on? as Nathan

thought it a warrantable thing to build a Temple to God (and so indeed it was,) and so questioneth not but that it was Davids duty, and here he was mistaken.

For the 2d. sort of Reasons, They are such as are drawn from God's Sovereignty, who hath some sovereign and holy ends and designs in such a Dispensation, viz. in suffering Believers to be and abide long under their mistakes. As, 1. It may be so ordered to humble all Flesh, and to make all know their nothingness, and to learn that lesson which is taught, Isa. 2. ult. Ceass ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of? It would seem that Believers might be laid weight upon and lipned to, if any might be so, but all flesh is grass, saith the Holy Ghost, which holds true in some respect, even of Believers, as well as of others: This preacheth and proclaimeth man's infirmity, when most eminent Believers are not exeemed from falling into mistakes, and from continuing therein. 2ly. It may e so ordered to make all others walk in fear, and to study watchfulness the more, and withall to lippen less to themselves and more to God: These things (says the apostle 1 Corinthians 10? speaking before of the miscarriages of God's professing people; from every degree whereof it's hard to say that the godly themselves were absolutely exempted) were written for our admonition; wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he all: In his secret and deep wisdom he letteth something be discovered, and emerge as well as written, that all, even Believers as well as others, may take warning, lst they slip and loss their feet when they

are not taking heed. 3ly. The Lord may have some more particular designs in this, though they may be much out of our sight; and though men be under the rule of his Word, and should not walk by these things as rules; yet he will exercise his spotless adorable sovereignty in prosecuting his own holy ends and designs by men's slips, errors and fallings, without being reached with any the least incture or touch of pollution by them,⁹or of culpable accession to them: As in that failing of the Patriarchs, he often holily promoted the accomplishment of his promise to Abraham concerning the multiplication of his seed, though that end did not warrant them in their otherways-unwarrantable practice; for he made the promise of increase and multiplication, when there were but two; and it is not unworthy the remarking, that even these who had manyest wives, had fewest children sometimes; as we may see in Solomon; though yet at some other times God promoted his promise that way; even as sometimes from other things sinful; as in Iudahs falling in incest with Thamar his daughter in law, he promoted the performance of the promise concerning the Messiah his Incarnation. 2ly. For the exercise of his People, and particularly of his Ministers, he will sometimes suffer differences and mistakes to arise;; and indeed they prove to be very exercising now and then to his own, as it was a great part of Jobs exercise, that his friends condemned him for a hypocrite; and how often complaineth he, that they vexed his soul, and were a burden to him? yet if his godly friends had not been suffered thus to mistake and err, he

had wanted that piece of profitable exercise, for no profane men would have had such access to table, and prosecute a dispute of that nature against him; but it exceedingly heightened his exercise, that his godly friends should have been thus at difference and in tops with him: This also furthered the exercise of the apostles, and was the occasion and rise of Paul's being apprehended and committed to prison? viz. when he condescended to purify himself, with these men that were under a vow, according to the Ceremonial Law, as the divine historian gives the account Acts 21. though the Lord had designed to send him to Rome, and in order to that end, Paul must come to Ierusalem, and be in the Temple; and to make way for that, so my Jews shall think, that these Ceremonies of Moses his Law are to be still observed; and the rest of the apostles shall with all think it needful that Paul should condescend so far to please these overzealousPage 80Jews, which he did, and it may be condescended but too far. 3ly. The Lord by the rising of such differences and mistakes, may intend the further spreading of the Gospel, as he did in that instance of Paul's sending to Rome; and in the contention that fell in betwixt Paul and Barnabas; which made them part company; by which the Gospel came to be preached in moe places, when thus parted asunder, then it would probably have been, had they stayed together; and its not unke that they both had their wonted liberty in praying, and preaching? without any direct and explicite challenge breaking their peace on account of that their difference and parting. 4ly. It may be, to make all Flesh

depend on himself, when they may not depend absolutely on their own Conscience, nor on the multitude of Bliervers, nay, nor on apostles, as to some practices and opinions wherein they were not infallibly inspired; seing God may suffer them and Conscience too sometimes to mistake, that neither they nor it may be made the last and supream Judges, but may be kepted always subordinate to himself as such. 5ly. It may be ordered so, to show the sovereignty and freedom of Grace, and also the necessity of it: the sovereignty and freedom of Grace, that will save such that may live long, and even perhaps die in a mistake; it's true we should by all means beware of abusing the freedom of Grace to sin; yet notwithstanding he will have it seen that these whom he saveth and eminently counnanceth are not without sin: and the necessity of Grace, for keeping them when they cannot keep themselves; yea it may be also for the praise of Grace; that if at any time the Believer is kepted right and free from errors and mistakes, the praise may not be to himself whether as to anything of the truth or of the practice of Religion; because many more eminent, better gifted, and more tender then he, have fallen; wherefore it must be God that by his Grace maketh the difference, who therefore should only have all the praise. 6ly. That Believers may learn to glory and oast alone in him and not in their agreement with othersPage 81that are godly, nor in their own mind and Conscience simply, nor in their good frame, nor in their many gifts; and that they may not idolize any of all these, for if they were always in the right, in a good frame, and so forth. these things

would readily be thought too much of; therefore the Lord sweepeth all these things away, that none may glory in anything that is in themselves, or in others; but that they that glory may glory in the Lord, and be made to profess and proclaim the absolute necessity of having God, to be all; and eminently sovereign above all things, and to know, that though Christians were in the Mount with Christ; that yet it will not be that alone which will keep them right. 7ly. It may be thus ordered, that God may show the special usefulness of his Word; and that his own people may know the necessity of studying it, and of cleaving to it; and that they may know, acknowledge and adore his deep and infinite wisdom, in giving that for a rule to walk by, when they see that the best, and in their best frame may err and mistake; and that the providences of God may be mis-interpreted and mistaken: The Lord will therefore have his people to esteem highly of his Word and of the preaching thereof; and to hold them closs by that, because any other way, they may go wrong; and indeed if men were not thus hedged in, they would very readily think that their own opinion, or the opinion and practice of others, were a sufficient rule for them, and would not care for the Word? Yea 8ly. The Lord may possibly have in his secret justice this design in the mistakes and errors of the godly, even that these who have prejudice and enmity at godliness in the Saints, may be judicially therein hardned; for if in another case it be just with God, to give men up to strong delusions, to believe lies, because they receive not the truth in love, why may it not also be just with him judicially to harden

them in their unjust prejudice, who without all reason take up and entertain the same against godliness and the godly, by suffering some of them to slide sometimes into errors and mistakes? by which they come in his righteous judgmentPage 82to be so ar plagued, as to think that now they have reason for their prejudic; and i may be to say, we thought them always to be such and such persons, and now we see and find them to be so; who ??? more weight on the practice of any then on his Word; and who will be ready to cry more out against an infirmity in a godly person, then in others; and more, then they can be prevailed with to fall in love with their grace; how many a corrupt and wicked man hath justified and maintain'd his own bad practice from some failing in the Saints? not to excuse their sin, but rather thereby, to blind himself and to put out his own eyes more.

In the 4th place according to the method proposed, take a word or two of use. And 1. May not this instruct us that all Flesh is Grass, that when we look to ourselves we should be humble; and that there is need, great need of fear and trembling in our Christian walk? whoever they be that dare to abuse this Doctrine anent the Saints infirmities, mistakes and errors, to foster themselves the more securely in their liberty of sinning, God shall (if continued in) one day make it turn to the aggravation of their guilt and to the heightning of their judgment; and however, for the time they heighten their sin exceedingly in proposing the Saints faults to follow them, and not their grace and virtues: whereas this is the genuine and kindly use that all should make of them, to be watchful,

to walk in ear, ad to take heed lest we also fall, considering that if it hath been done o in the green tree, what may we fear who in comparison are but dry trees, if the Lord shall leave us (as justly he may) to follow our own councils? it would become us to wonder that we go not wrong and further wrong, and to look well that we be not vain of our own standing.

The 2d use serves to teach us that we should not take every thing to be right where of for the time we may have a sor of perswasion, neither that which many good people may think to be right: God hath given us another rule, that should be looked to and walked by, as SovereignPage 83nd infallibly regulating, according to which we should regulate our own, and the Consciences and Practices of others.

Therefore 3ly. Learn hence, so much the more accuratly and exactly to put every thing to proof and tryal, that we may see whither it be so in very deed as Conscience dictateth; By all means let Conscience be laid to the rule of the Word, let us betake ourselves and our Conscience, to the law and to the testimony, and if it speak not according to these, it is because there is no light in it; at least in so far; and if even Believers may thus err and mistake, O! how much more and more sadly may others, who sleep on in their security, without fear of being mistaken and of going wrong in matters of greatest and most lasting moment, let be in lesser ones? putting nothing seriously to the trial, and will yet notwithstanding boast of a good Conscience.

The 4th use serves to teach Believers and all of you, that ye have need to walk near God, and in closs and constant dependance on him, not simply lipning or trusting to your own council or Conscience, but to him for direction and guiding.

The 5th. use, Serves to exhort Believers to be very thankful, and to take it for a great and singular mercy? when their Conscience challengeth them for sin; and stricks in closs with that which is the Spirits work, Iohn 16:8. I will (saith Christ) send the spirit, and he shall convince the world of sin; O! but be it a merciful, profitable and comfortable thing, when God helpeth you impartially to search out sin, to hear the Conscience it's impartial verdict of it, and to be kindly and deeply humbled for it, and to flee to the blood of sprinkling for the pardon of it.

use 6th. See here the necessity of knowing God's mind better, and of understanding his Word better, otherwise we may err, and go wrong, and not know it; Let me say in a word, that it will be impossible to reach, and attain the scope of this Text, if we study not to knowPage 84God's Word, and his mind in his Word better; The ignorance that is amongst us, may prove a great Rise, Occasion and Cause of many sad mistakes, and errors, if the Lord in mercy prevent not; Let God bless this Word, and make it to have it's own use, for our edification and warning.

SERMON VI.

ACTS 24:16. Herein do I exercise my self, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

THE great Scope of these Words is, to point out that holy Precisness, Accuracy, and Circumspection which was in Paul's. walk, and ought to be in the walk of all Christians; And that is, to endeavour to have always a Conscience void of offence toward God and toward Men.

The Doctrine that we insisted on last was this, That Christians ought to endeavour so to walk, that in nothing their Conscience may have a Challenge against them; and when we came to speak of the use, we proposed Four. The 1. whereof was for Information, and Direction, how to carry in a Christian Life, and it is in a Word, so as in nothing we may thwart our Conscience either in omitting any Duty, or in committing any sin. The 2d. use. was for tryal, as the Words bear out Paul's attainment, and his comforting himself on this ground, that he always exercised himself to keep a good Conscience; Whence we show that it is a good Mark of Sincerity, when a man is taken up, how to keep a Conscience void of offence; and several Doubts and Questions were occasioned, in prosecuting of this use, which we endeavoured to clear, and answer.

But because we see that such Questions are almost endless, and know not if it would be to your Edification

to propose moe of them, we have resolved to break them off abruptly; and shall only speak somewhat in answer to an Objection, or Question which cannot well be passed by, and it is this.

Can that be a mark of Sincerity, to endeavour to have a Conscience void? of offence, seing even Believers may often have ane evil Conscience? How then, I say, can it be a mark of Sincerity, and of a sound Believer, to have a good Conscience?

In Answer to this, we shall First show, how Believers may be said to have an evil Conscience? 2. How it is not in-consistent with the Doctrine, nor with the use.

For the 1. We would distinguish Three things in Believers, in reference to their Conscience. 1. Something wherin their Conscience may justly challenge them. 2? something that their Conscience without ground may challenge them for. 3ly. Something that may be taken for the language of Conscience, which indeed is not, by which the Conscience may come to be mistaken.

1. We say, That there are some Things? or Cases wherin upon just ground the Believers Conscience may challenge him, and wherin he may be said to have an evil Conscience; As beside several others, in these, 1. If we take it to be ane evil Conscience, that is not only silent and mute, and ceaseth to be a reprover, for even gross Sins; but also, when wakened, justly challengeth, accuseth, and condemneth for them; a Believer may fall under it both ways, as we may see in Iosephs Brethren,

and in David, who had an evil Conscience, the first way when it was asleep, and the second way after it was wakened; though an evil Conscience considered with respect to the second way, belongeth properly to this head. 2ly. If we look on an evil Conscience, as itsPage 86restless, disquieting, and vexing, called evil in respect of the effect of it. To wit, as it speaketh evil; so the Believer may have an evil Conscience, in respect of particular Acts; for which he is justly challenged; for he may thwart his light, and may contract guilt, and bring himself under the desert of wrath, because of that guilt; which bringeth on trouble, at least inward in his mind, and Conscience, if not outward also; As we may see in David, after his adultery; in Peter, when he denied Christ, and in many others; certainly, as to such particular practices, Believers may be said to have an evil Conscience. 3ly. If we consider a Believers state, and look upon Conscience, as speaking his being in an evil state; though doubtless it cannot warrantably charge him with, nor challenge him for that, nor can it have just ground to say to the Believer, that his state is evil; yet it may very warrantably, and on just ground be silent, as to giving him a positive Testimony, as to his good state, when he hath in such and such particulars provoked God, and caused him to hide his Face; as when David fell so oully, his Conscience might warrantably withdraw, and its like did withdraw its comfortable Testimony concerning his good state before God? and though Conscience here be in its duty, in withholding its Testimony from the Believer, while he is in such a Case,

yet as it doth withhold it, and so deprives him of the comfort resulting therefrom, it may, in so far, be called an evil Conscience to him; though it be not in itself, and sinfully so.

2dly. The Conscience may also challenge a Believer, for some things without ground or unwarrantably; which we may see beside others, in these Three. 1. Conscience may charge a Believer with being an Hypocrite, even as to his State, when he is, it may be, much overcome with the power of unbelief, and hath the evidence of his sincerity much darkned, and seeth manythings very contrary thereto, that may seem to speak his being out of Christ, when yet indeed e is in him: The many sadPage 87plunges and difficulties that Believers have fallen into' wherein they have been pu to think so hardly of themselves (and not against the pesent light of their own Conscience neither) prove that Conscience may speak so and so hardly to them concerning their usound and Hypocritical State, and yet without ground; especially, when it holdeth not at the Negation, or Suspension of its comfortable Testimony, concerning their gracious State, but positively asseeth the Believers being in black nature still, and o in an evil Stae. 2dy. Conscience may challenge for that which is not Sin, and so for that which it hath no ground to challenge for? as we may see, 1 Corinthians 8.vers. 7. Compared with the penult vers. In the 7. vers. The apostle sayeth, There is not in every man a like knowledge? for some with conscience of the idol eat it, as a thing offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled; And vers. 12. He saih. That their

conscience being weak, is wounded; Their light being weak, and supposing such a thing to be wrong, when it was not so, they were challenged by their Conscience without just ground: Thus it is very ordinarily for young beginners in Religion to be peirced, and wounded with challenges for manythings, that these who are more strong, and fully grou, will not at all be roubled for, neither have ground to be troubled for; as these who could eat every ort of meat, asking no question for Conscience sake. 3dly. Conscience may challenge for a sin that hath been pardoned, as if it were not pardoned; yea? it may challenge for a sin, the pardon whereof hath been intimated; as we may see in David and Job, who were pardoned, and yet under their affliction, the sins of their youth did stare them in the face; and the Conscience will readily challenge for old iniquities? though pardoned, either when Believers break out into some new Act of gross Si? as we see in Davids Case; or when they are under some extraordinary, and very sadly circumstantiated dispensation of Providence, sorely assaulted by tentation, and unbelief, crying loud, as it were, all is wrong there, as it was in a measure with holy Job.

Page 883dly. We said, That some things may be taken for the Language of Conscience, which are not; or we may mistake Conscience, and think that it speaketh so and so, and doth challenge, when it doth not speak so, nor challenge; which may be the reason of men's supposing the Conscience to be good, when it is not, or contrarily; and this cometh to passe, especially, in two

Cases. 1. When our Incarnation is thwarted, or our humour is (to speake) grieved, in which Case, Melancholy, or Discontent, or some other Grief, are readily taken to be Conscience; As we may see in Achab, when he got not the Vine-yard of Naboth, he laid himself down on his Bed, and would eat no Bread, but it was not from any challenge of his Conscience, but because his Inclination, and Humour was crossed; some degrees of which may be found with Believers. 2ly. When Conscience speaketh, only as to somewhat in part, or only concerning such or such a particular, and we draw a Conclusion much broader, then that which Conscience doth speak, will bear; As when it saith to the Believer, in this or this particular thou art not right; and he hence conclud, that he is right in nothing; and very ordinarily it is thus with Believers that are not so clear, distinct, and strong in their Knowledge and Faith; When Conscience sayeth, that such or such a thing is wrong, they are ready to conclude that all things are wrong, and nothing right, because one thing is wrong; So when Conscience pointeth forth such an end, not only to be lawful, but even laudable, we may be ready to think, that it alloweh also of all, or most midses, without discrimination, that lead to the attaining of the end.

Now 2ly. To answer to the Objection more directly, ad so to show how this is not in consistent, neither with the Doctrine, nor with the Use; We say then. 1. That it is neither of these two last sorts of things we spoke of, that is meant, when we say that an endeavour to keep a good Conscience in all things, is a mark of sincerity; for we

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speak of a Conscience that mistaketh not, and of a Person that doth not mistake his Conscience; And therefore though Conscience prejudge a man of the comfortable application of this Mark, yet it ceaseth not for that to be a Mark. 2ly. When we speak of it as a Mark of Sincerity, we mean not so much of a persons actual attainment, as of his sincere endeavour; when he dispenseth not with himself, in any sin, nor in the omission of any known duty, but is aiming honestly in every thing, to approve himself to God, as it is, Hebrews 13:18. We trust (saith the apostle) we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly; The Testimony is founded more on the sincere aim and endeavour, then what is actually attained. 3ly? In the Doctrine, we said, A Believer in a good frame, will so aim to live as he may have a good Conscience in all things, and the Objection supposeth only, that when he is not in a good frame, he cannot have a good Conscience; and that we grant; for he may indeed? by his carnal frame and walk, spoil and rob himself of the comfortable application of this Mark, and so there is no inconsistencie here. 4ly. This standeth firmly as a truth, that though a Believer had many other Marks, yet they cannot bear him comfortably through, if he want this sincere endeavour to keep a good Conscience; And it is so very necessary to a Christian walk, that a Believer dare not conclude his sincerity, when he (contrary to his light) dispenseth with himself in the commission of any known sin, or in the omission of any known duty.

The 3d. Use is of Reproof and Conviction; If so be Christians ought o to walk, and when they are tender, will so walk, as in nothing they may offend their Conscience; then there is a clear ground here to reprove them, who profess themselves to be Christians and Believers, and yet aim not at this, to keep a good Conscience, yea, who, in a manner cut out the ears, shut the eyes, and stop the mouth of their Conscience; Is this Christianlike think ye? Happy were they, if Conscience had not an ear to hear, a tongue to speak, nor an eye to see, whoPage 90live so, as if they cared not what Conscience hath to say to them: if men should in all things walk according to Conscience; then the most part fall unde the discovery of their Rottenness, that never so much as honestly aim to keep a good Conscience, though generally few will deny it; but it will be readily said here, who are these that will sin against their Conscience? Therefore we shall speak a word to these two, 1. Can it be that men will in against their Consciences 2ly. How cometh it to pass that men sin against their Conscience?

For the 1. Needeth it proof, That men will sin against Conscience, and be careless to keep a good Conscience? 1. I would pose, put you to it, and ask you, whither is there sin in you or not? And if sin be in you, then sure Conscience is offended. 2dly. I would ask you, Is there not sin against Light? Did ye never that which ye knew to be sin? Do you not know Fornication, Drunkenness, Tipling, Lying, Swearing, Vanity of thoughts, Ide words, Neglect of Prayer, want of Seriousness in it, and so forth. to be sins? And do you not often go about duty, knowing

yourselves to be under the guilt of these Sins. 3dly. I would ask, Sin ye never against Convictions of your Conscience? According to that word, Romans 1. ult. Who knowing the judgement of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death yet not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. Will any of you dare to say, but that you have been convinced, that Drunkenness, and Tipling, or the like, was a Sin? and yet ye have gone on in it. over that Conviction. 4ly. Have you not been challenged for sin? And yet ye have gone over the belly of these challenges of Conscience, even when it hath been presently stinging for such a sin: And on the contrary? when Conscience hath been putting at you, and poussing you to such and such a duty, and saying, It is no time now to put it off, and shift it, yet, have not these suggestions and challenges been slighted, and these poussings to duty, smothered, and the Spirit grieved? 5thly. Have there beenPage 91no engagements sometimes come under, to abstain from such and such a sin, and to perform such and such duties? And have not all these engagements been broken? Even meerly natural men have come this length, as to come under such engagements, who yet have flidden back from them, and violated them grosly. 6ly. Have ye not had your own kind of spiritual exercises? Your outcryings under the sense of sin, and apprehensions of wrath in fits of sickness, or under hard and heavy Crosses; and yet notwithstanding, have you not continued in the same sins? And if all these be clear, can ye deny that ye have sinned against Conscience? Or dare

ye say, that ye have endeavoured to keep a good Conscience, in all things? I grant that people fall into sin diverse wayes; some fall out of infirmity, and through the force and violence of temptation, and a great sweat, and high-springtide (as it were) of corruption, giving them no leave to advise; as it was with Peter: Others sin presumptuously, as these did, who are spoken of, 1 Timothy 1:19. Who put, or thrust away a good conscience, and erred concerning the faith, and made ship-wrack of them: They sin with presumption, and with an high hand, and their falling into sin is not rashly, but deliberately, and designedly, with the full bencil and inclination of their will, whither their Consciences be silent, or speak to them; they have such and such a sinful design, and they will needs follow it over the belly of all Convictions; and will not quite their old courses, but with the dog, do return to the vomit: Now, if this be a just, and wellgrounded Reproof, what will the condition of most part of men and women be found to be, when brought to evidence their Sincerity by this Mark, even an honest aim, and serious endeavour to keep a good Conscience? And if this be a good and desirable thing, as indeed it is? and as few or none of you will deny it to be; why do you thus put off, linger and delay to come at it? If ye should incline it, how can ye shift this Conviction? Conscience may be silent for a time, but it will speak, andPage 92speak loud, when Sickness and the Cross cometh; As we see it did in Iosephs Brethren; in such a case, many of you will find that Conscience hath been much slighted; O! when Death shall come and stair you in the

face, what a terrible thing will a guilty Conscience be found then to be? The terror of mad Dogs, of wild Boars, of felrce Lyons, and Tygers, will not be so terrible as an evil Conscience will be, when awakened, and having death at it's back; Nay, suppose that Conscience should not be awakened while ye are alive, and in this world, but that ye should slip, and sleep away like Lambs, Hauing no bands in your death, and that ye should die applauded of all men; yet what will ye do with your Conscience? or how will ye stand before it, when ye shall be sisted before God's Tribunal, and when the Books shall be laid open? Are there not many now in hell, who, if we could hear their language, would very readily bid us, beware to thwart with our Conscience, and to make it our enemy? Wo to them that take an evil Conscience with them to their Grave, it will be a worm that will gnaw eternally, and an inward poison and Venom Stinging, Burning and inflaming the very bowels (as it were) and all that is within the man, beyond what is here conceivable. We would therefore earnestly beseech, and obtest you soberly to think on it; for there are many of you whom this Challenge, and Reproof will reach; And if we should say otherwise to you, who never had it for your aim, to keep a good Conscience, and who were never exercised to, nor seriously taken up with Religion, we would but cheat and beguile you: Is it possible that ye can thwart with the Law of God, and not also thwart with your own Conscience? or can you thwart with your Light, and your Conscience be still silent? Or shall the having and keeping of a good Conscience be ane

exercise to Paul? And do you think to come so easily, and without all labour to it? These, and other such, are palpable evidences of an ill Conscience; It is not sure a good Conscience that yeeldethPage 93you peace and quietness in such a Case, but it is your deep security, and your being regardless of wh Conscience sayeth, that lull and rock you a sleep.

For the 2d. How cometh this to pass, or how can it be that men and women thus thwart with their Conscience? Answer. 1. It needeth not at all to seem strange, seing God and his Word are thwarted with; will they think we stand in awe of Conscience, who stand not in awe of God, and who do not lay weight on his Word, to regulate their Conscience by it? This is the great ground of people's thwarting with their Conscience, and of their regardlessness of it, even their not standing in awe of God. 2dly. The most part never consider their obligation to Conscience, nor what is the consequence of thwarting with, or of going cross to their Conscience; therefore it is, that they care not what Conscience sayeth; is there any considerable number of persons, who think that thwarting their Conscience, is such a terrible thing, at it is indeed, and as one day it will be found to be? Many had rather have a very little money in their hand, then the Testimony of their Conscience; and this regardlessness ariseth from the ignorance of it, and of what great concernment it is. 3ly. Men, even by accustoming, and habituating themselves to thwart with their Conscience in lesser things, do, by little and little stupify, and in a manner, put out the life of their Conscience, and s the

apostle hath the word, They cauterize, or sear it as it were with a hot iron: Hence it is, that when some truly tender Christians are troubled with, and have for the matter of their exercise, any little things, or things that have in them but the least appearance of evil, others will be ready to pray to be saved from such madness and folly, because they were never accustomed to, nor acquainted with any challenge, or exercise of that kind, but have taught themselves a way of stepping over their Conscience; and this provoketh God to give them up to a reprobate mind, to do things which are not convenient? They harden themselves by resisting the Challenges ofPage 94the Word, and Rod of God, and of their own Conscience; and are judicially hardned, so that either Conscience sayeth nothing at all to them, or they do not at all value what it sayeth; Thence, and therefore it is, that the prophanest have most ordinarily fewest challenges, and these few that they have, they trample on them; and stifle them, as but un-regardable, and trifling things; Whereas the most tender Conscience hath readily manyest challenges: Though I deny not but that sometimes challenges will bear in themselves irresistibly on the profanest of men, but they are to such very unwelcomeguests, and they endeavour quickly to smother them, or to drive them out again. 4ly. Many bias their own Conscience, and teach themselves shifts? not so much to satisfie their Conscience, as how to answer it, and to stop the mouth of it, and to please their own humour; if they can give a reason for such and such a thing (such as it is) to their Conscience, they think they

do very well; Thus deceiving themselves, and being deceived; for a deceived heart hath led them aside: Hence it comes to pass, that in some things men take as much pains to bias their Conscience, and to have it saying as they say, as one man would take on another to satisfie him and to bring him over to be of his mind in any matter: Hence also is the debating, and strugling exercise that some will have within themselves, before they can be brought to an ingenuous confession of that they are guilty of. 5ly. People seek to please their Conscience, when they cannot bias it; and when Conscience challengeth, they will make amends; As (it may be) they will pray when they are going to commit such or such a Sin; as some profane men will do, when they are going to fight a Combate or Duel; this is to bribe the Conscience: Thus many Papists, when they have done an evil turn, will give so much to the poor, or dot so much to some pious work, or use, as they judge to be a sort of recompense; what else is this but to bribe Conscience in one thing, to hold it's tongue in another thing? so some though they tiple all the day, think they do well,Page 95if they have been a while in the Church, and will seek to stop the mouth of their Conscience with that at night; for they could not at all keep quarter (to speak so) with their Conscience, if they had not some form of Religion; And therefore they will (to speak so) be brave Religious men in some things, that they may get a Dispensation to themselves in other things. But none of these will be found Law-byding, when God cometh to reckon. 6ly. People in a sort bargain with their

Conscience, like these spoken of, Isa. 28:15. They make a Covenant with death, and are at agreement with hell; and (like Naaman, if that was indeed his meaning) they will yeeld Conscience such or such a thing, but no more; They must have a Dispensation in, and a liberty of making Reservations, and Exceptions, of some one or moe things; Though this may not always be done distinctly, formaly, and explicitly; yet it is so on the matter, implicitly and interpretatively; But that Covenant with death however made, directly or indirectly, shall be broken, and that agreement with hell shall not stand, and the hail of God's wrath will sweep away the refuge of lies; and Conscience will speak at last, but not with, or under such covers of figleaves, that men now wrap themselves in: Therefore I beseech you dally not with Conscience, for it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of it, when it is wakened, as it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, who acteth in, and by that Conscience.

The 4th. and last Use, Is an Use of Exhortation; seing it is the duty of all men, and more especially of Believers to walk so, as in nothing they offend their Conscience; we exhort you in the name of the Lord, that ye would order your Conversation so, as in nothing your Conscience may have a challenge against you; ye will all readily think that this is very reasonable; and indeed, if we prevail not in this, wherein can we expect to prevail with you? We seek no more of you, but that ye would so walk as that living and dying, your Conscience may not flee in your face, but may give you this Testimony,Page

96that ye have aimed to keep a good conscience in all things, and to live onestly: Ye may possibly think that this is a fair general, and that he is a very gross and profane man that will deny it; and yet we would think that many of you were come a great length in Religion, if we could prevail with you but this far, as that in all things, living and dying, (as we said) ye might study to have a good Conscience: And this being no contraverted, nor debeatable thing, we may with the more confidence press it upon you, especially, seing it is the very Soul and Life of Religion, and where that is not? there is nothing of truth in Religion.

That this exhortation may be the more clear and cogent, we shall speak a word to these Three 1. To what this is to keep a good Conscience in your walk. 2. To some motives to stir you up to it. 3. To some helps to it.

For the 1. It includeth these Four, which should go along in your walk; 1. That ye commit no known Sin, for there will be no good Conscience, if that be adventured on; Ye who know that ye should not take liberty in drinking drunk, in swearing, in profane or idle speaking: and so forth. Walk so as ye may not thwart your Knowledge. 2ly. It taketh in this, That as ye would commit no known Sin, so ye would ommit no known duty; because, though every sin doth wrong the Conscience, yet the sin that we know, and yet commit, and the duty that we know, and yet omit, doth more directly strick against Conscience; ye who know that the Sabbath should be kept holy, that ye should pray in secret, and in your families, that ye

should not offend one another, and so forth. Beware of hazarding on these contrary to your light. 3ly. It takes in, and supposeth, that ye do nothing doubtingly; for Romans 14. He that doubteth, and doth is damned; he is sentenced, and judged as to that particular. 4ly. It includeth this, to endeavour to be right in the manner o performing all duties, and to have a single end; It is not enough to pray, or to be in the practice of any other commanded duty,Page 97that will not quiet the Conscience, if ye study not to be right in the manner, and to do it for the right end; The want of these requisit qualifications of acceptable Duties, will make such things as are lawful on the matter, turn to be grounds of challenge from the Conscience: But somewhat to this purpose hath been spoke of before, therefore it hath now been but touched.

2dly. For Motives, 1. There is nothing that is a more clear duty; It is written in the hearts of all by nature, Heathens have it engraven on their hearts, as we see, Romans 2:15. Their conscience beareth them witness, and their thoughts excuse or accuse one another; and they have called it a brazen wall to have a good Conscience, as to a sound walk in their moral sense. 2dly. there are many and great advantages attending it, As namely, 1. It giveth a man much boldness in approaching to God. 1 Iohn 3:20. If our hearts condemn us not, then have we boldness towards God, when we go to pray. 2. It giveth ground also to expect ane hearing, 1 Iohn 3:22. Whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do these things that are pleasing

in his sight; and cross not our light and Conscience in neglecting any of them. 3ly. It keepeth a man from much sin; and is that, think ye, little advantage to have little (comparatively at least) on a man's score to reckon for? 4thly. It maketh a man's life cheerful, so Prov. 15:15. He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast; Which is nothing else, but a heart cheerful in God from the testimony of a good Conscience. And this is it on the matter, which guardeth the the heart and mind, so that no cares can considerably disquiet it, as we have it, Philippians 4:7. The heart is guarded, yea, garisoned (as the word is) with peace, that there is no storming, nor intaking of it by outward troubles: It is the joy that strangers inter medle not with. 5thly. It is a sweet and strong cordial in affliction, when Christians are persecuted by Strangers, or by false Brethren, are in Sickness, in Prison, in Perrils by Sea or Land, and so forth. This is our rejoycing, the testimony of our conscience, sayethPage 98the apostle 2 Corinthians 1:12. in the midst of afflictions? 6thly. And more particularly. It is a sweet and soveraign Cordial when death approacheth, Hezekiah can say then, Remember, Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart; It putteth the Soul in a posture of dying, somewhat like old Simeon, and giveth some ground to say with him, Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. The Necessity of it will yet further appear, if on the other side, we look to the disadvantages that wait the want of it, though men could be content to live a heartless life, to

hazard on sin, to neglect Prayer, and other duties; yet they would consider the terrour that followeth an evil Conscience, and how it breedeth and breweth a hell within their own Bosom: There is then a necessity, an absolute necessity of a good Conscience, that quarrels be not, and abide not betwixt God and us forever.

3ly. For some Helps or Directions to keep a good Conscience (and we wish we were all in a posture and frame of Soul to meet with, to receive, and make suitable Use of them) 1. Endeavour to have light and clearness in the matters of God, and what concerneth your own good; Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind, as it is, Romans 14:5. It is not possible, that ye who are grossely, or very ignorant, can keep a good Conscience; ye know not when ye sin, nor when ye do duty aright; yea, although ye may do duties, or things good on the matter, the want of knowledge, maketh you want the Testimony of that good. Alace! that many wise and rich men, that can speak well of the things of this world? should be quite ignorant of the things of God? and many of you would think shame of it, if we would point you out. 2ly. Advert and take heed to what Conscience sayeth; The truth is, most men, take heed to what may further their designs in externalls, to what their wit and reason carveth out to them, and to what their own light thinketh, or (as it were) overly sayeth is right, and presently step to it, and never ask what science well informed from the word sayeth; This maketh many men say, and do in their haste, that which they repent of afterward: Therefore ye should learn to put Conscience

to speak, consult not with your designs, nor with your wit and reason only? nor mainly, but retire, and consult seriously with your Conscience, Commune with your heart, and be still, stand in awe and sin not? as it is, Psalm 4:4. Consult not with Flesh and Blood, let not their advice come in betwixt God and you, and finally determine you; but reason with yourselves, think, this and this our inclination sayeth, and this and this our overly light sayeth; but we will put Conscience to it, and hear what it sayeth; and yet it's but an inferior Rule, and therefore we should not take every thing from Conscience without ground, but hear what the Superiour Rule of God's Word sayeth; And this is a right circle wherein ye should turn yourselves, even to try your Light by bringing it to Conscience, and then to try your Conscience by putting it to give a reason from the Word.

3ly. Be exceedingly aware to thwart with your Light in the least thing, and abstain from every thing that seemeth to come in tops with it; For Conscience is a very tender thing, if we stand not in awe of Conscience, we may provoke God to give us up to do what we will, and to send us, Like lambs to feed in a large place; Therefore I say again, beware of thwarting in the least thing with your Light, and your Conscience.

4ly. As ye would hear what Conscience sayeth, before ye do anything; so when ye have done it, ye should consider how ye carried in it, according to your Light, and whether ye have had a good Conscience in such a thing, both as to the matter, and the manner, and put your Conscience to speak to that, and hear what it sayeth concerning what is done. There

would be in this much singleness; for if the eye be evil, it will make the whole body full of darkness; Hence Paul putteth a good Conscience, and Sincerity together, 2 Corinthians 1:12. If we should speak never so many good words, and do never so many good things on the matter, if we be not singly minding God's honour in them, they will not be acceptable: The want of Sincerity will be as the dead ie, in many a man's pot of Ointment, of called for duties; that will make it cast forth an evil and stinking smel, the savour of a good Conscience will sure be wanting where singleness is not, or where Conscience is made subordinate to our carnal Interests; Many may have a resolution to do such and Duties, who yet make these to keep level with carnal designs? and interests; It's impossible, when men come not as new born babes to drink in the sincere milk of the Word? that they can profit, let be grow thereby. 6ly. Be frequent and serious in making humble and believing applications to the Blood of Christ, to the Blood of sprinkling, that thereby your Consciences may be sprinkled and purged from dead works: for the great ground of your pace is not your seriousness and sincerity, but his satisfaction; many of our works and duties, alace! want life, and if they be not sprinkled with the virtue of his Blood, they will be but as so many dead weights on the Conscience; and indeed there can be no truly good Conscience, whatever else be, if this be neglected: Let then these that would be at a good Conscience make use of these? directions and helps, and they shall doubtless come the better speed: Now? we are sure that this is the Truth of God, to wit,

That we should endeavour to have, and to keep a good Conscience in all things, and alwayes toward God and men? which a very Heathen, were he present with us would not contradict; and it is very useful for you; though it may be, some profane wretches will be ready to say, What needeth all this niceness? And as it is a Truth, and a most concerning Truth, so nothing will make your life more truly cheerful and comfortable; And if it be neglected, or slighted, all your Knowledge, all your Disputes about Religion, all your Tastings of the good Word of God, all your Prayers, or what else ye can name, will be to no purpose; And seing it is so very important, and concerning aPage 101Truth; we leave it on you before God, and put it home to your Conscience, to make it your exercise to have always a good Conscience void of offence toward God and toward men. We mind not to come back again on thisText, nor to touch on the rest of the Doctrines at first proposed from it, what we have said being principally, if not only, designed; and most, if not all the other Doctrines being one way or other reached in the Prosecution of these that we have at length spoken to: The Lord graciously bless what ye have heard.