

SERMON I.

1 PETER 3:21. (Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good Conscience towards God.)

CONscience is in itself a most excellent Gift of GOD, given to Men, having an excellent nature, being waited with many Rare and choice Uses, and Advantages throughout their whole Life; and when it is rightly used, it is one of the special Freinds that men can have on earth, and one of the great things that this Gospel, and the preaching of it aimeth at; even to direct and help them how to come at a good Conscience, and how to keep a good correspondence with their Conscience, so as they may be comfortablie assured, that they indeed have this good thing? which is called a good Conscience; Yet when Conscience is abused, or not made right use of, it turneth to be one of the greatest unfriends and enemies that men have in this World, nay in that World which is to come.

Page 102Having spoken somewhat to this before, and in the last Observation that we drew from the former Text, which was, that men ought to walk so, as not to offend their Conscience in anything; we shall now speak somewhat to one Direction and help that is greatly, if not mainly contributive and useful in order to the attaining of that notable end; which is this, That men who aim to walk answerably to that Rule, so as in nothing they

offend their Conscience, had need to observe carefully the language of Conscience.

It is not our purpose to stay on the particular consideration of the scope of this Scripture, nor so much as to name, let be to prosecute all the points of Doctrine that may be drawn from it, but only to discourse a little from the Words inclosed, and shut up within a Parenthesis, as they relate to our end and design.

First, then in a word, The apostle is here putting a difference betwixt external service, and the internal power and efficacy of the work of the Spirit of God on the Conscience; And when he is speaking of Baptism, he giveth this Caveat and Advertisement, That it is not the washing of water in that Ordinance, that reacheth the great end of it, But the answer of a good Conscience. 2ly. He sheweth that the differencing, and March-riding Character of the one from the other is, in what answer the Conscience giveth concerning the thing that the man is about; and declareth that it is not simply a good Conscience, but the answer of a good Conscience that giveth ground of Hope, and boldness of Confidence to obtain the Promise.

From the Words these Three Observations arise clearly, First, That there is a faculty in Conscience, that is able to give ne answer to a man concerning his spiritual state and condition, and concerning his Actions; So that if the question about these, or any of them be put to the Conscience? It can return answer, and signifie it's sense, and give it's verdict concerning that which it is

questioned about; The answer of the Conscience implyeth so much. Page 1032ly. That the answer of the Conscience is different and distinct from the outward answer of the mouth or profession; for a man's mouth and profession, and the external ingadgement that he cometh under in Baptism, or any other Ordinance or Duty, may say one thing, or give one answer, when the Conscience may say another thing, or give another answer concerning the man's sincerity in the thing. 3ly. That the answer of a good Conscience, That is, an answer from the Conscience on good grounds testifying a man's sincerity, is a most excellent and comfortable thing.

It is the First of these, that we intend to speak a word to at this time, viz. That there is a way of getting an answer from the Conscience, and of understanding it's mind about anything that men shall put to it: Or thus, Conscience hath a way of making known it's mind, and giving an answer about anything that is put unto it: These words Answer of Conscience, implyeth so much (as we said) especially being distinguished from the externall service, and administration of Baptism spoken of in the words before; And it is yet more clear, if we consider how the scop runneth in comparing of these two together, viz. The verbal restipulation of these that are come to age, and the inward answer of Conscience; There is the Gospel on the one side requiring such a thing, and the answer of the Party Baptised on the other side; and the apostle maketh the answer of the Conscience distinct from that, though sometimes it goeth along with it; so

that a man will not answer more clearly to the thing than his Conscience will, when it is seriously put to it.

This might be branched out in these Three, 1. In respect of a man's state. 2. In respect of some truth of Religion, and of the hearts imbracing of it, 3. In respect of some practice or duty that a man is called to: all these do fall under the answer of Conscience, when it is questioned about them; but it is the last of them that we intend to speak to, viz. it's answer as relating to a ChristiansPage 104duty and practise, about which Conscience being asked or posed, is able to give him an answer; which I shall clear from Two Grounds, and then come to the Use.

The 1. Ground is taken from the Nature of Conscience, which we some way explained, when we began to speak of this subject; Conscience being deputed of God, in man to take strick notice of every piece of his walk and practice, and being the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly, to let men see what God calleth to, and to put them in mind their duty: This (I say) being the office of Conscience, and the end why God hath placed it in men, it is no doubt furnished with such a facultie (if we may speak so) as to be able to give an answer concerning what it is queried about.

More particularly it hath a three-fold power in reference to a man's way; and thus it represents God in Three of his Attributs. 1. It hath a power of counselling, advising and carving out of a man's duty; So that when he doubteth what is to be done, Conscience hath a power to advise him, and give him an answer; And this is called

the dictating of the Conscience, answerable to the Sovereign authority of God, whereby he commandeth all his creatures; to whom Conscience is subordinat; in which respect men are condemned for thwarting with their Conscience, Romans 1. ult. Who knowing the judgement of God, that they that commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them: Here is Conscience dictating to men, what they should do before they do. 2ly. There is a Power, or something in the Conscience, that goeth along with a man's acting, or that waiteth on him in the time of his acting in Duty; And this especially, is called the Testifying of Conscience, or it's bearing witness, concerning the sincerity, or un-soundness of the Act; Not only doth the man's mouth speak, and his hands do, but the Conscience will give answer, if the heart be goingPage 105along with the man's speaking and doing, or not, wherein it represents God's Omniscience, or All-knowledge; Hence it is, That Psalm 27. 8. David saith, when thou saidst, seek ye my face, my beart answered, thy face will I seek? O Lord. And Psalm 16:2. O my soul thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my Lord; This is the language of the sincerity of the heart testifying by the Conscience; or Conscience answering the sincerity of the heart. 3ly. There is a Power in the answer of the Conscience, which is subsequent unto, and followeth upon the Action when done, either approving, or disapproving, either accusing, or excusing, either absolving, or condemning, called the Recognoscing, or Examining of the Conscience; which is done, when

Conscience putteth the man's deed or action when performed to the Tryal, and having tryed it, passeth Sentence on it; Thus Conscience representeth God as Judge, and as a just Judge: Now all these Three being in the Conscience, viz. a power of Counselling, Commanding, and Dictating to a man what he should do, a Power bearing Testimony concerning the manner of his doing, and a power of Recognoscing, and Examining after he hath done: It telleth us plainly that there is such a thing as Conscience declaring it's mind, and giving an answer to men concerning their duty, in what it is put to give an answer about; else they could not know it's mind. The 2d. Ground is taken from the clear and manifest effects of Conscience, it's testifying or answering; What, I pray, maketh a restlessness in the bosom of people? but Conscience its Challenging or Reproving; what causeth tranquility and peace within, when Reproaches and Revilings are without? but Conscience bearing witness to the man of his innocency in, and his being free of these things wherewith he is charged; And what is it that lyeth on a restraint, and bond as it were on the man's Spirit (as Paul sayeth of himself, Acts 20? 22. I go hound in the spirit to Ierusalem,) but the Conscience? It is not only the weight that floweth from the word of God, but also the weight thatPage 106floweth immediately from the Conscience joying with, and backing the Word; Now if the Conscience had not a direct, and distinct language, or answer to give to men about their actions, there could be no such effects following it.

The Uses are Two, The 1. for Direction. The 2. for reproof; The Use for Direction, is, That seing there is such a thing as the answer of the Conscience, whereby it maketh known it's mind, when it is asked concerning our way, we ought, if we believe that we have Consciences to put them to answer, and to observe what they say, and what answer they return; If Conscience hath a Language (I say again) let us put it to speak out, and let us be very ready, and attentive to hear what it speaketh.

To clear this a little, We would consider that there are Two things in a Christian walk, in reference to this correspondencie which a man should keep with his Conscience, The 1. (which is universal and irresistable) is, when the Conscience asketh men, or putteth questions to them, such as, Why did you this or that? Why did you leave this or that undone? As it is 1 Corinthians 10:25. Asking no question for conscience sake. That is, asking no question for answering of these questions which Conscience will ask. The 2d. is, When men ask questions at their Conscience, to prevent it's questioning of them; as indeed we should be taking pains before hand to know, and take up the language of our Conscience concerning our practice in this, and that, and the other particular that it may have no just ground of Challenge against us.

I shall instance this in Three things, and hold at the First for the time? 1. We should observe the language of Conscience before we put our hand to any Duty. 2ly. We should observe the language of Conscience in the

interim, or in the very time of our going about Duty. 3ly. We should observe the language of Conscience concerning Duty, when we have done and gone through with it: InPage 107which my meaning is not, 1. That we should in clear and necessary Duties start, or put questions; but that in things indifferent, in their own nature, and in such Duties as are necessary, and do semper, or ever oblige, though not ad semper, or in all differences of time, but only hic and nunc now and then, to wit, at due and seasonable times; or as to the right timing of these necessary Duties, (forevery thing is beautiful in the season thereof) Wherein a great part of our work along our whole life lyeth, the answer of our Conscience should be observed: For though many conditions, stations and actions be lawful, yet Conscience decideth, whether I be called to such and such a station and condition of life, and whether such a thing be a Duty to me at such a time, and how it ought to be gone about, as to the manner. Neither. 2dly? Do I mean, that we should, in these things expect any extraordinary thing, or somewhat more then an ordinary impulse of Conscience, laying on a sort of constraint or necessity on us, in an immediat way, which would be dangerous; But my meaning is shortly this, that there is a possibility in God's ordinary way to know, what Conscience sayeth, to them that will observe the answer of it, both before, in, and after Duty, and that we should aim, and endeavour to understand and take up that.

For further clearing of this Use, we shall speak a little to some Five or Six Questions: As namely, 1. What this

answer of Conscience is? 2dly: How the Conscience giveth it's answer? 3dly. What is called for from men, to find out this answer? 4ly. How this answer of Conscience may be discerned? 5ly. If this answer of Conscience be discernible at all times? 6ly. What is to be done in such cases, wherein the answer of Conscience is not so clear as men would have it?

For the 1. What this answer of Conscience is? I answer in short, That it is distinct from a man's inclination, from his affections, and from his naked Judgment or Light; There is something in a man's natural inclination, Page 108 that is ready to sway him to this or that, but that is not Conscience; There is also something in a man's affections, as in that which he feareth, or desireth, and loveth, that may sway him; neither is that Conscience but often that which is contrary to Conscience; There is likewise something in men's Light? from which also Conscience differeth; because an natural, and un-regenerat man, that maketh no Conscience of his wayes, may, notwithstanding have a light in his Judgment, by which he is put to come to Church, an possibly to pray, and do other Duties; and yet it may be from no answer, or dictat of Conscience, that he doth these Duties: We conceive therefore that this answer of Conscience, is something different from, and beyond either Inclination, Affection, or bare Light; and that it is Light and Conscience going jointly together? or some conclusion drawn from the Word (for we are speaking here of Conscience as it is in people living in the Church, under the Ministry of the Word) that such a thing is Duty, and

Conscience thereupon putting on to it, or a conclusion drawn from the Word, that such a thing is a in, and Conscience thereupon deterring from it; Thus it differeth from Light simply considered, in as far as it is a Conclusion drawn from such grounds as the Judgment, or Light in the Judgment layeth down to, or before it; It is an answer that not only hath Truth in it, which may be from light; but its ane answer as having a truth in it that is drawn from such a ground warranding such and such a practice; Conscience looking on it, as God's mind, for directing it in it's Duty, and on that account putting on to it.

As to the 2d. Question, How the Conscience giveth this Answer? or how it maketh it's sense and language of things known? In Answering to it we would be sober, and not curious, no more particular then we have ground for; In short then, we conceive that there are these 4. wayes, how, and whereby Conscience giveth It's answer? to let people know when it is pleased or displeased. 1. When it bindeth and tyeth such or such a word, mporting such or such a Duty on a man, that hePage 109can no way get himself rid of; nor it shaken off, as when he is disputing and debateing within himself, whither such a thing should be done or not done? Conscience answereth on good ground, and either biddeth him abstain or do; and hath a pous with it, because the word of God commandeth, or forbiddeth it, and this is not only because there is a word for it, or against it; but clear light drawing a conclusion from such a word, whereupon the Conscience bindeth it on the man, so that it cannot be got

shifted, nor shaken off; For we know that men may know many Duties, and yet not do them; and upon the other hand, that men may be stirred, or poussed on to do that which it's not God's mind they should do; so then it is the answer of Conscience, when the Word, and the Conclusion of Conscience are connected, and joined together; so as the one is the ground of the other, and floweth from the other; and this is the most special way how Conscience maketh it's sense of things known; The Word of God being the rule of Conscience. A 2d. way, is? by some secret discontent, or restlesse in the Conscience, if a man do such a thing as is not Duty, or if he do not such a thing that is pointed out to him to be Duty, either through ignorance or inadvertancy; The Conscience then as it were, hunteth the man with Challenges, disquieteth, and maketh him restlesse until he practise such a Duty, or abstain from such a sin; And this we find to have been often in the Saints recorded in Scripture, they having had no rest until such a thing was done, and such a thing abstained from; which floweth from the nature of Conscience, accusing, or breeding discontent, because of un-answerableness to the Rule. 3ly. Conscience hath a way of signifying it's mind, by making some impression of terror, to back and second more than ordinary convictions of, and threatenings, and challenges for sin; When sin is committed, Conscience convinceth and challengeth; when this doth not the turn, upon the back thereof cometh the threatening, and some fits of terror; sometimesPage 110the threatening is conditional, sometimes the peremptory certification is

added; sometimes again the impression of the threatening will be more sensible, sometimes more insensible: When Conscience giveth advice, and dictateth from the Word, it maketh use of the Commands; but in the sense we are now speaking of, it maketh use of the threatenings; As for instance, It's said in the thrid Command; The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain; Now for any degree of this guilt, Conscience challengeth, and when that is slighted, thereupon Conscience goeth on, and maketh the threatening terrible; for challenges bear in convictions of sin, and convictions represent the threatenings as more terrible; and threatenings bear in the apprehensions of wrath; and hence is the exercise of Conscience in some that wakneth, and raiseth a terrible storm in it. A 4th. Way, How Conscience giveth it's answer, and maketh it's mind known, is by an inconceivable inward calmness, peace, serenity, and tranquility in the Soul; So that when a man reflecteth on his doing of such and such a thing, and comparing it with the Rule of the Word, findeth it agreeable to the same, all his terrors evanish, his mind is calmed, and he findeth much sweet Peace, Delight and Acquiescence in the thing; this is nothing else, but Conscience giving it's answer: all which had great need to be carefully compared with the Word of God, and that his mind therein be very clear; because, as there may be much bastard peace on the one hand, so there may be many groundlesse challenges on the other, which are not to be taken for the language of Conscience.

As for the 3d: Question, What men are to do, that they may find out, and get a clear answer from their Conscience? or what is called for from them, to find out the answer of Conscience? We shall Answer this in these Three; 1. Something is to be done before we put ourselves to the search, or Conscience to give it's answer? 2dly. Something must accompany this Duty. 3dly. Something is called for after this Duty is done. 1. We are to do something before we put Conscience to it to give it's answer. And 1. It is necessary, that men be well informed of the Truth of the thing in general; for to come blindly to Conscience is to tempt it, and make it a snare to ourselves; Therefore (I say) we should be well informed? to the end that Conscience may have ground to give a clear answer; For our Conscience is like the Iudge, and our understanding like the Advocat, that maketh the Cause known; And if all things pro and contra, for, and against, be not proposed and discussed by the Advocat, Conscience, which is the Judge cannot give a distinct answer or verdict; This is the reason why many Consciences do err, because there is not pains taken to inform them. 2ly. When the Judgment is informed, men should put the Conscience to it to answer; They should not content themselves with this, that they have filled their heads with so many Arguments for such a thing, but should let them sink down to the Conscience, and study to know what Conscience thinketh of them; For Conscience (as we said before) is some way beyond bare Light; therefore, when we have gotten Light in a thing; we should not hold there, but take it aside, and

communicate the matter to Conscience; As the Word is, Psalm 4:4. Commune with your heart upon your bed; There is a communing with others in speaking with them, a communing with Books i perusing them, a communing with our Inclinations and Affections, and taking notice what they would be at; and a communing with our Light, if we be clear in the thing; But beside all these, there should be a communing with the heart, or Conscience; which we conceive is often neglected, and men often start, and strick in with things without deliberation, thinking if they have Light for such a thing, that it is enough for making such or such a thing to be Duty: It is true, ane Argument from Light may induce to the thing, yet we are neglective, when we bring it not to the Conscience. 3ly. Men should bring things impartially to the Conscience, we should take heed that wePage 112we be not pre-occupied, or prejudged, lest we get ane answer according to our Idol? as well as we should beware of biasing and bribing Conscience: If the eye be single, the whole body will be full of light, but if the eye be not single, darknesse may be had from the Conscience in stead of light: Not that in clear things, that are Duties at all times, we should be sticking and moe questions, which was Balaam's fault; but in things indifferent, or though lawful, yet not called for at all times, nor from us in such a station or relation; when the question runneth, whether the thing be lawful to us or not? or if we be called to it at this time, we should be single, and take ane answer from Conscience as God cleareth it. 4ly. We should give attention, led to our ear, and take good heed

what Conscience inclineth to, and saith, whither it inclineth this way or that way: As when we ask a Question at???, we use to be silent until they answer, so should it be here; And if Conscience seem not to speak, we should wait on, and not be hastie; especially, we should look well that we distinguish betwixt Inclination, the Affections of Fear, Passion, and the like, and the answer of Conscience; Lest we take the one for the other, we should both take heed that it be Conscience that answereth, and that we take up the meaning of Conscience, it's answer aright: in order to which there should be a quieting, and hushing of all things within the man, that there be nothing to disturb in taking up the mind of Conscience, or that may prejudge Conscience in speaking, and giving it's answer. 5ly When Conscience hath spoken, we should put its answer to proof and tryal, and see if it be the answer of Conscience indeed; We should take the answer of Conscience to the Rule of the Word, and see if it be agreeable to the same; even as we should take our Light to Conscience, that Conscience may testify of it, so when we have gotten an answer from Conscience, we should take it back to Light, and see how it agreeth with the Word; for there is a great correspondence betwixtPage 113these two, Conscience and Light, Conscience serving to ballance Light, and Light to confirm Conscience, which being God's Deputy, set up in man to speak his mind, ere we can follow ought as the language of it, we should ask for his warrand; And if it produce no word for the warrand of what it saith, we should not take it for the answer of Conscience, or at

least it should be looked upon, as a mistaken answer; Hence it is, that some when they get a little lightning after prayer, and do not put it to the tryal, and yet rest on it as an answer of Conscience, are mistaken; Yea, this is the reason why many of God's People, who have some access and liberty in their addresses to him, are mistaken; for it is not access to him, nor liberty simply that warrandeth Conscience to speak, but the Word of God.

As for the 4th. Question, How this Language of Conscience may be discerned, and distinguished, or differenced from men's Light, Inclinations and Affections, of fear or desire, and liking to be at a thing; Which will stir and make restless, as well as as the Impulse of Conscience? We Answer, 1. The answer that Conscience giveth is alwayes from the Word, if it be right; and upon that account, that the Word warrandeth it, it not only sayeth, that such a thing is agreeable to the Word, but presseth to it, because agreeable thereto; As for instance, to allude to that Word, (if not more) He that giveth to a disciple a cup of cold water, in the name of a disciple, shall not loss his reward; We may give somewhat to a man that is a Disciple out of pity, or on some other natural, or moral Considerations and Relations, and Light will direct to that, and the natural Conscience may pousse to it; but to make it the answer of a good Conscience, it requireth a Re-duplication, that we give to him, as, or because he is a Disciple, and member of Christ; so one may Pray, and come to Church, and have an impulse to it, and yet not from a good Conscience, as another doth; because the one cometh as

in obedience to a commanded Duty, the other not, but on some otherPage 114account; The reason is, because Conscience presseth to obedience on that account; but Light, Inclination, and Affection, presse to obedience on another account, as from some selfish Motive, or Consideration, supposing it to be a Duty. A 2d. way to discern it's answer, is this, Light, Inclination, and Affection put to the thing in the general only, but the answer of Conscience respecteth all the circumstances of the thing; Conscience doth not only say, go and Pray, but Pray in this manner, to wit, with Faith, Love, Fear, Reverence and sincerity of Heart; The reason is, because Conscience considereth the Duty, as circumstantiated in the Word, and therefore it's answer is no broader, nor narrower then the Word is; Whereas, when a man is put to such a thing from Credit, Fear or Desire, his practice is extended no further then to such an end; Credit, fear of Loss, or the like, (if he have any regard to circumstances) Levelleth and Moduleth him in all the circumstances of his acting; So as he may attain that which driveth him on to such a Duty; but when Conscience putteth to Duty, that God may be obeyed, and peace in Him injoyed, it regulateth the man in all Circumstances of his Duty, in order to that end; And this is the reason why some are so soon, and so well satisfied with Duty, others are never throughly satisfied; because the one goeth about Duty for the fashion, to guard against, and hold off challenges, or for some other sinister end, and so is still driven on from such a principle, and for such ends: But the other goeth about Duty, in obedience to God, ad so as he may have

peace in him? and while anything is wanting that may mrr that, he is disquieted. 3ly. We may discern it from the nature of the answer, and the effects that it hath on the ???, to whom the answer is given; Conscience being God's Deputy, and the most divine thing in man: Even The candle of the Lord that searcheth into the ??? and inward parts of the belly, and when acting it's part aright, the most excellent representer of God; if it be well observed, answereth. 1. Page 115 In another manner, and with another kind of Authority Boldnesse, and holy Statlinesse then bare Light, Affections or Passions do, which, though they drive more violently, yet not with such divinness (to speak so) nor with such majestick authority. And therefore, 2ly. When Conscience answereth, it some way silenceth lusts? and sinful passions, which confuse, and (to speak so) put a person through other, so that there is not that serenity and calmnesse, that there is in the Soul, when Conscience is asked at, and clearly answereth; The Light of Conscience well informed, being the Light of God, is clear, and quieteth, though often it be not so sensible to us, as our own Inclinations and Affections that agree better with us. 3ly. The answer of Conscience hath more influence on the man to humble and abase him, and to make him vile in his own eyes, because it speaketh God's mind, it serveth to exalt God, and to advance the work of Mortification in himself; But where this is not, and men are soon made frothy and conceity, by the answer which they get? and the very first re of it, is to puff up, and make vain; It's sure, at best, but the answer of Light, and not

the answer of Conscience, nor God's speaking in and by it. We shall proceed no further at this time; That which we aim at, by all we have now said, is in a word this, to show, that as upon the one side, ye should learn to give Conscience some Employment, and seing it can give you an Answer, to put it to it; and not to bear about you such a noble Counselor and Adviser, without making suitable use of it; so upon the other side, that ye may learn to know when Conscience speaketh, and what it speaketh, and that ye may give it obedience, when it speaketh according to the Word: In a word, the right use-making of Conscience is intermixed, and interweaved with the wholepractice of Christianity And where it is rightly observed in one thing, there will be an honest aim to observe it in another, yea in every thing: And this may be another difference, betwixt the answer of Conscience, and that oPage 116Light only, or of any other thing; viz. That the supposed answer of Conscience, or of Light in the Judgment, which is consistent with loosness, is never to be taken for the true answer of Conscience; for? as we cannot keep communion with God, when we are not walking in his way, so we have no warrand to expect keeping of good correspondence with our Conscience, because the language of Conscience is God's language: Therefore it is the Duty of all to walk so, as they may keep a good correspondence with their Conscience; And it is an evidence of a sinful incapacity to discern the language of Conscience; when there is not an constant endeavour to walk according to the strain of a good Conscience in every thing.

SERMON II.

1 PETER 3:21. (Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience.)

AT a former occasion, we proposed this Doctrine from these Words, That the Conscience which is in men hath a way of signifying it's mind to them concerning their actions, to let them know when it is satisfied, and when dissatisfied, and to give them some sense of them, called, The answer of the Conscience: The use of the Point was. That if it be so; Men and Women should, in all their Carriage and Actions indeavour to know what sense Conscience hath of them; They should ask advice of Conscience, and take it's answer before they Act, in the time of their Acting, and when they have done Acting.

Page 117In prosecuting of this use (which is the main thing aimed at) we proposed for clearing it, 1. What this Answer is? Which is especially to be looked to, not as determining simply what is right, and what is wrong, for that is done in the Word; but that in things lawfull and in those Duties? that (as was said) do not oblige ad semper, or in all differences of time, we are by the Answer of Conscience to try our particular call to them, the right timing of them, and the right maner of going about them.

2dly. What way Conscience maketh it's mind known, and giveth this Answer? 3dly. What way should be taken for finding out, and obtaining this Answer? 4thly. How

it may be discerned to be the Answer of Conscience, and not our own particular Inclination and Affection?

There are yet two Questions remaining, for further clearing of this use, to be spoken to. 1. If even when men are desirous to know the Sense and Answer of Conscience, it may not be silent, and no distinct clearness attained to, whither they be called ??? such a thing, or not, or how they are to go about it, or how it should be timed? 2dly. If Conscience may sometimes be silent, or at least not answer so clearly, what then is to be done in that case?

As for the 1. We shall Answer it in two Assertions, and then clear them.

The 1. Assertion is, That sometimes in God's wise, holy, and sovereign Providence, and in his secret, profound and mysterious way of ordering things, it may so come to passe, that men may set themselves to enquire at Conscience, and yet after inquirie not find, at least for a time, so clear an Answer, as to warrand and direct them what hand to turn to.

The 2d. Assertion is, That sometimes Conscience may speak, and answer clearly enough; and yet men from some one tentation, or sinful distemper or another that they are under, and from negligence, and sinful inadvertancy, in taking heed to the answer of Conscience, may think thatPage 118it speaketh not clearly, when it doth, and thus be let in the dark; So that

Conscience is not always to be blamed, as if it answered not, when we think so.

For clearing of the 1. of these, That Conscience may be silent, or not speak so clearly, even when inquired at; we suppose it is clear, not only from the experience of all generations, wherein Believers, (if put to speak) would declare, that they have sometimes been very desirous of Light and Clearnesse concerning their being called to this, or that Place, Station, or State and Condition of Life; As also it may be, as to the way and time of performing some called for Duties, and yet have not attained to clearness therein: This one thing will both clear, and give the reason of it, viz. That Conscience being God's Deputie, whereby his mind is made known, cannot speak, when he keepeth up himself; And seing he may, and will, now and then keep up himself for a time; Conscience, during that time, may, and must be silent; because Conscience cannot speak, but according to his order; And there being wise and holy Reasons moving him (to speak so) to keep up his mind; and that he may, in some sense and respect, deal with others, as it's said he dealt with Saul (whom, in a great strait, he refused to give answer to, either by Dreams, or by Urim, or by Prophets) so as not to give them clearness, by one means nor another; neither from his Word, nor by their Conscience, as calling them to such or such a particular thing; it is no marvel, that in such a case, men be in the dark, and that Conscience keep itself silent. Yet 2dly. For clearing the Matter further, ye would consider two sorts of Causes that this proceedeth from, some whereof are

Culpable, and sinful on our part, procuring this as a just punishment of some former sin, or of some present evil, and sinful frame: other some are sovereign on God's part, yet tending in his secret providence, to promote some designs of good to the Person, of a Believer: as to these Causes that are sinful, and culpable on our part, we shall instance them in four or five Cases.

Page 119As, 1. When there is a sinful Ignorance in the Persons, who desire to be clear in such or such a particular; Through that their ignorance, they are not in case, clearly? and distinctly, but rather very darkly, and confusedly, to propose the matter to their Conscience, so that their Conscience cannot give them a distinct answer: For Conscience is, (as I said before) as a Iudge, and our Light is as the Informer, and as a Judge cannot well decide in a matter, when the Case is confusedly proposed to him, so no more can Conscience, when it wanteth Light: And hence, oftentimes persons in whom there is some zeal, and good affection, are left much in the dark, because (to speak so) they know not the Laws and Practiques, on which Conscience proceedeth; Therefore, Romans 14. It's said of some, that their Conscience was weak, because their Light was weak and dim.

A second Case is, When men, in seeking the Answer of their Conscience, do bound and limit it; They either do not fairly and fully propose the Case to Conscience, or they come not to it with ane absolute submission? (supposing it to be thoroughly informed by the Word) concerning the thing they would have clearness in; and

therefore they take the Answer in part, or but a part of the Answer, and suppose the rest, or leave it to Conscience to be determined; as when men first resolve to do such or such a thing, and leave only the timing of it to their Conscience; Here the Conscience may be limited, and made indistinct in it's Answer, because it is prejudged and left free; It might possibly have been somewhat, not altogether unlike this that was in the rest of the Tribes of Israel, their asking of God about the War against Benjamin, Iudges, 20:18. Where they do not say at first, shall we go up, or shall we for-bear? but first they say, who shall go up?

A third Case is, When Conscience is provoked by men's former miscarriages, then it may be silent, and not answer: Now the Conscience may be provoked these two wayes amongst others. 1. When People use not ordinarilyPage 120to consult Conscience, but at some particular, and solemn times only, and when they are brought to some pinch, or put to a stand; but as for the ordinary course of their Life, they follow Inclination, or a common Light, without advising with Conscience; In that case, when such persons come to advise with Conscience, and to seek clearnesse from it, about such a thing; the Lord may say to them, as he did to his People, Iudges, 10:19. Go and cry to the gods whom ye have chosen, go advise with them; or as Elisha said to the King of Israel, 2 Kings, 3:3. What have I to do with thee? get thee to the Prophets of thy father, and to the Prophets of thy mother: Even so, if Conscience be passed by, and miskent by People in the ordinary course of their life, it

will readily misken and slight them, when they are in a strait, and come to seek Counsel and Clearness from it, and will, on the matter say to them, ye followed the counsel of flesh and blood, in your ordinary walk, and course of life; therefore in this particular, I will not answer you, go and seek Clearness from them whom ye use to consult. 2dly. Conscience is provoked, when we have formerly thwarted with some clear intimations, or answers of Conscience, and have some way detained the truth in unrighteousness, making, as it were, a Prisoner of it, and setting a guard of corrupt affections about it; when such come again to enquire at Conscience, what they shall do in this, or that particular, they may justly get such an answer? as is given, Prov. 1:24. Because I called? and ye refused, I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, I will laugh at your calamity, they shall call, but I will not answer: I gave you answers before, and ye thwarted with them, therefore when ye seek again, ye shall get none: And hence floweth much blindness, and be nummednesse of Conscience in men and women, because they put out the eyes thereof, and frequently repell, and beat back what it says, or answers; so that it becometh cauterized, and the feeling of it weareth almost, if not altogether, away; and it speaketh very little, or none at all to them, being so much baffled, and blunted with many repulses: We may add this Third way, how it is provoked, and that is, when it's askings are slighted; It asketh us why we do such and such a thing, and forbear such and such another? and we

slight what it saith, and ly still in sin; Is it not just that Conscience pay us home in our own measure, and refuse to answer us when we ask it?

A Fourth Sinful Cause on our part, of the silence of Conscience, is, When men come not singly? and in a Spiritual Frame to Conscience, to seek it's answer and advice, but either have an Idol st up before their eyes, and are almost already determined in the thing; or else they bring with them some one or other lust unrepented of; Hence it comes to pass, that though they think themselves submissive in that particular, and possibly may some way be so, yet not being absolutely submissive in all, Conscience keeps silent; To the former, the Lord some way says, as he did to these men, by the Prophet Ezekiel, chap. 14:2, 3. Son of man, these have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face; should I be inquired at all by them? When men come to seek Light, and bring their Idols with them, the Lord that speaketh by the Conscience, will some times, in that case, not suffer it to speak a word. The other is like that which we have, Psalm 66? 8. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer; When men come in a profane temper and frame of Spirit to God, and are not single, and (as I said) absolutely submissive, Conscience will not answer; For Conscience hath not one word to speak, but to them to whom God speaketh.

A Fifth, And last Case is, when men are driven, and stirred up to seek to know the mind of Conscience, from

a corrupt? or selfie principle, and for such or such a selfy end; As for instance, when men seek clearnesse, and resolution from their Conscience, anent such an estate ofPage 122Life, such a calling or station, or anent the undertaking of such a journey, or voyage, and are not put to seek that clearness anent them, out of respect to the honour of God, but from respect only, or mainly to their own interest, profite, pleasure, or credit; As it was with Balaam, Numb. 22:10. That which did put him to ask God's counsel, was not regard to the honour of God, but love to the wages of unrighteousness, as Iude calleth them: And here many fail, and make a silent Conscience, when they are seeking clearness; Which may be known by this, that they would never ask, if it were lawful for them to take such a calling or place, or to ingadge in such an employment, except some pleasure, preferment or gain led them to it; And the reason why they ask the advice of Conscience in the matter, is not that they may be the more stirred up, to improve such a place, employment or state of life for God's honour, but that they may with more quietnesse, freedom and confidence, follow their design, and come by their end; neither do they intend singly (if at all) to follow the answer of Conscience, but would rather have Conscience to follow them; as is clear in Balaam; Therefore, when the Answer cometh contrary to their Inclination, or Affection, or to the selfie end, that they have before them, they will ask over again, as Balaam did; Hence Iames sayeth, chap. 4. v. 3? and 4. Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask a miss to consume it upon your lusts: As men may seek to be

assisted in the performance of Duty, for the praise of men; so they may seek to have Conscience to be on their side, to prevent a challenge from it; And that they may intertain a carnaly confident expectation of what they would be at: Thus carnaly profane and wicked men have often sought advice of the Lord's Prophets, as they did, Ier. 42:1, 2. In these, and the like cases, men may take pains to know the mind of Conscience; and yet the Lord may make it to keep silence, and not to Answer them, or, if it do; to answer them according to the idol of their own heart.

Page 1232dly. Another sort of Reasons may be drawn from God's Sovereignty, so ordering it for his own wise, and holy ends; to wit, for the good of his People, and his own Glory: as he afflicteth them in other things; though not without sin in them, yet not alwayes with respect to their sin; As we may see in Jobs tryal; Even so when they are taking pains for clearness of Conscience, and to get God's mind in such a particular, he may, and sometimes doth blast all their pains, so as they attain not to the desired clearness in it, I say in such or such a particular; because (as was hinted before) the main bussinesse of their eternal state falleth not under these debates; and this we say he doth in his Sovereignty, for these and he like wise and holy ends.

1. That he may emptie and humble his own People, That when they see they cannot win to clearness, and satisfaction in a Particular of so little moment, and consequence, by making that to be so much their

exercise, he mayhide pride from their eyes, and lay them low before him. 2dly. As in this, he mindeth their humbling, so their upstirring; by such means, he puteth them to be more serious in seeking him; for oftentimes, when men find things to go easily with them, they are in hazard to betake themselves unto, and sit down in as easie a way of Duty, and to lack their dilligence. 3dly. He doth this for tryal; to make discovery of the unsoundness of some, and to prove the sincerity of others; he will, by suspending Light and Clearnesse in such a particular? take a proof of folks tendernesse, whither they will forbear, while they are unclear, or, whither they will untenderly go on; It being a main thing that maketh tryal of men's tendernesse, when God, by this means, layeth, as it were, a Bond and Restraint on us, and so putteth us to it, to try whither we will hold here, or proceed further; if there be tendernesse, it will appear in such a case; This discovered Saul, 1 Sam. 28:6, 7. When God answered him not, who went away immediately to a Witch. And hence it is, that many, when they cannotPage 124win to Satisfaction, or Clearness, in a lawful way, they betake themselves to the nixt shift; when others that are tender, will halt, and stand ill, until God further reveal, and manifest his mind in the thing: As the Prophet doth, 2Kings 4:27. Let her alone (saeth he of the Shunamite to his Servant) her soul is vex'd within her, and the Lord hath hid it from me. 4ly. He doth this to make men prize Light more when they get it, knowing that it cometh from God; We are disposed to think as long as we are not much difficulted, and brought

into some notable strait, that our Light floweth from a stock within ourselves, and that we have it at command: Thus, many think little, or nothing of being clear to marry such or such a Person, to take such a place, or to engage in such an Employ, and Station; as it may be of Magistracy, or of ministry; Conscience, as they think, cleareth them at the first hand; but the Lord will have us to know, That to have Light and Clearnesse in any particular, especially of such moment, is a greater matter, and mercy then so, and that it is a sin to flight, and undervalue it, when it is come by. A 5th. and last end is, to draw men to more immediat dependence on himself; that when Conscience is silent, they may come to him, and count themselves to be so much the more in his common, and debt, for any Light that they shall win at; and be made to know, that Conscience is but his servant: all this is clear, frow God's way in afflicting his People, and from many instances in Scripture.

The other Assertion that I proposed to speak a word to, was, That though it be sometimes thus, That Conscience is silent, and speaketh not, at least, so soon, or so clearly, when it is inquired at; yet it is not alwayes so, but sometimes, nay, often Conscience will speak, and answer clearly; and our unclearnesse in that case, may proceed from some one tentation or other; or from our own sinful distemper; or from our negligence, and inadvertancy, as I shall shortly clear in some cases.

1. As a sinful Ignorance in the Person who desireth itPage 125to speak, will make Conscience keep silent; so

there is a sinful Ignorance? that may, and will make us mistake Conscience, when it answereth clearly, And this cometh to passe, when, through Ignorance we know not, nor can take up, the voice of Conscience, as different from that of our Affections, or Inclinations, nor the grounds, by which Conscience doth evidence it's Answer; as young Samuel took God's voice at first, for the voice of old Eli; Thus men may have an impulse, and some exercise of Conscience, a out a thing; and it may be telling? it's mind to them, and yet through their Ignorance, and Inadvertancy no discerning, and taking up what it sayeth, their exercise may continue, and they remain in the dark, anent the particular.

A 2d. Case, wherein folks may remain unclear, or mistaken, where Conscience answereth clearly, is, when their Inclinations, or Affection? swey to one side, and Conscience sweyeth to another; Then readily the Affections make such a noise and clamour, and Inclination and Tentation so swey, and drive to the contrary, that the voice of Conscience is not taken up, yea, scarcely heard: Even as when a Case is proposed to a Judge, and he speaketh soberly, in determining the same; the unsatisfied party raiseth such a clamour and noise, that his determination is not understood, no it may be, so much as heard; so it is, when men are biased with their own Inclinations, and Affections, though Conscience speak, yet these will speak out answers to convince, and persuade to the contrary; As it was with Balaam, who would not understand, as it were, nor take the answer which he got, but went again and again for

another: Or as the People of the Jews did often, when the Prophet told them clearly the mind of the Lord, yet they would needs contradict him (as we see they did, Ier. 43:2) and say, It was not the Word of the Lord, but he was set on by some other, to speak so; their Inclination and Affection being swayed to such a side.

A third Case is, when men's own particular interestPage 126lyeth one way, and the answer of Conscience sweyeth another way; as suppose gain to be on this side, and Conscience speaketh Duty to be on the other; Interest will say, that such a place, calling, or station should be taken and ingadged in, because it hath gain, and preferment with it, but Conscience sayeth, it should be forborn; And here Interest sustaineth the Dispute, and carieth it on toughly, and pertinaciously, against Conscience, with plausible Arguments, that side and sute well with, and much please, and gratifie our flesh; which yet might be very easily refuted, if Interest had not the great hand in proposing, and managing them; Hence the apostle, 1 Timothy6:5. Speaketh of some perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, who suppose gain to be godliness; For when gain presenteth itself, as easie to be found, and come by in such a way, it will readily passe for godliness; This is very dangerous, and maketh the answer of Conscience to be either mistaken, or asten and rejected.

A 4th Case, more readily incident to the people of God, though it may be also in others, is, when fear and unbelief thwart Conscience, pressing to such a Duty; As

suppose it be a Duty that hath many difficulties attending it, as hazard of Life, or of State, of Confinment, or of Banishment; Fear and Unbelief will come in, and dispute, that such and such a thing cannot be Duty, though Conscience say the contrary; So it was with Achaz, Isa. 7:12. I will not (saith he) ask, neither will I tempt the Lord; In his Fear and Unbelief, he will not wait the answer of Conscience, neither an he abide to take God's Word and Direction; But this did not only prevail with wicked, never do-well Achaz, but it was in a measure in eminently godly Moses, Exod. 6:12. Who, in his Fear and Unbelief disputeth against God's clear call, and sayeth, Will Pharaoh hear me? As also, in Ieremiah, Who chap. 1. v. 6. alleadgeth against God's clear call, that he was but a child; And the like of such excuses, and shifts as these being made to God's own calls, andPage 127answers, much more may they be made to the answers of Conscience: And so much for the first Question.

The 2d. Question is, Seing Conscience may be silent, or though it answer, may not be taken up, nor understood, what is to be done in this, and the like Cases? Answer, 1. We should aim to know, if our unclarnesse in such a particular, proceed from the silence of Conscience, or from some Tentation, or distemper of Spirit in us? 2dly. Whither it flow from a sinful Cause on our part, or from God's Sovereignty? 3dly. We should learn how to apply ourselves aright, to take up these causes. 4thly. What it is that we should do, when none of these are discerned? 5thly. What it is that we should do, if our unclarnesse

and darknesse continue? or what general grounds may warrand us in our choice? or, how we ought to make use of these general grounds, when we cannot take up Particulars?

For the 1. Direction in such a Case, we say, when men have unclearnesse, they should inquire, ??? it be ane unclearnesse from a silence in the Conscience, or from a Tentation, or Distemper in themselves; And if this once be known, the Cause is in a manner win; for, if it be known to be a Tentation, or a sinful Distemper, it is not to be stood on, though what we are called to, thwart our own Inclination, and Affection, and speak out matter of Fear and Hazard; As we see in the Case of Moses, and Jeremiah; when God maketh the man to put his hand into his bosom, as it were, (as if the result were to be had there,) that cleareth him, and he yeeldeth; And if it flow not from any Tentation, or Distemper, we should look forward, and inquire from what Cause it cometh.

But it may be Asked here? How shall People know whither their unclearnesse doth proceed from a sinful Distemper in themselves? or from the silence of Conscience, not speaking at all? Answer, To find out this, will be a piece of Christian exerce? and will need much humility, and self-denial an heavenly frame, and muchPage 128serious Prayer to God; And thoug??? be difficult to condescend on particular Rules in ??? Cases, yet we shall give some general considerations, that will help how to find it out; And 1. See i ye be indifferent in the thing, (if it be so in it's own nature) for if it be a

Tentation, or sinful Distemper that prevaieth, ye will not be indifferent, but fixed, resolute, and peremptory; Inclination, Affection or Interest will swey you, to one side and hold you there; And therefore your great work should be, to see if ye be single, and unbiased; And for this end consider, 1. If ye had your choice what it would be; And if the heart confidently adventure to make the choice, and if ye be inclined more to the one side then to the other; it's presumption to say, that ye are indifferent in the thing. 2dly. When you go to Prayer, see that there be not one side that ye incline to, more then another; and that ye slp not insensibly into a Petition, or Desire? that your Light may incline you this way; Somewhat of this seems to have been in that Desire, or Petition which Abraham hath, Genesis 17:18. O that Ishmael might live before thee; As suppose ye were to pray for a way of living, yet it is readily, O! that this were the way of living, calling, or station, rather then another? 3dly. When there are some hopes that ??? may be one thing rather then another, or when providence bindeth you up more from the one then the other, ee how ye are affected with joy or grief, if ye be much delighted, when one of the things seemeth hopeful, and much grieved, when it seemeth to be marred, and crushed, that telleth, that ye are not suitably submissive, and indifferent in the thing: As suppose a Husband, or Wife, or Child, or other near or dear Relation, who is near to death, that ye pray for, and think that ye have attained to submission in the matter; but if there be a little reviving? and that doth much ickle, and lift you up: It sayeth, the submission

hath not been so found and absolute: So upon the other hand, when the Husband, Wife, Child, or other dear Relation drawethPage 129near death, and all hope are gone; and that layeth on an over-chargeight, it giveth the same verdict of your submission, as efore: Or suppose that God offereth to a man, a way of doing good to the Church, and it comes to be much blasted; and the door is more opened to some others of the party, that is on the other fide of the difference amongst honest men, who both designed the advancing of the great Work of the Gospel; Fo the thriving whereof, ye pray by what ever of the sides, or parties; Yet I say, when the one side hath a wider door in Providence opened then the other, that grieves, and some way fres you; It telleth that you are not so indifferent and submissive, as to the successe of the Work, by either of the sides, as ye suppose; For, when it cometh to the Decision, there is a loathnesse to take the answer, that thwarts the Inclination and Affection. 4ly: When doing, and forbearing compete together, so that ye are difficulted in your choice, consider which of the two, Carnal Reason, and the Grounds that it goeth on, sweys you most to; As suppose the Case be, whether to take such a Place, or to follow such a Calling, or Course, that hath much Profit, or Preferment attending it, or to forbear; if ye inquire at Conscience (which should determine you) and yet still remain unclear, if these Grounds swey you, that would swey a meerly natural man, it is to be suspected: Therefore, though in some Cases, God may call a man to such a thing, to such a Place or Station, yet he should search well, and see that

e be clear in his call to it in particular, because there is something here of a self-interest, that will be very ready to cast the Ballance. 5ly. Consider, and compare your own Inclination, with the advice of others in the thing, when it may be ye get diverse advices anent it, and none of the different advisers offer Reasons for their advice, or, if they do when the Reasons of such as complyPage 130not with your own Inclination? are not so narrowly examined, and the reasons of the other, that seem to be more compliant with your Inclination, are listned to? in that Case, what your Inclination sideth with, will easily tell you, if ye be indifferent, and have indeed attained to submission in the thing, or, if ye be led by a sinul diemper: Hence it is, that when some persons seek after clearnesse, in such or such a thing, they will not readily advise with such as they know, or apprehend do, or may differ from them, or that will probably hwart them in the thing; but with others, who, they know, will ???? and ??? satisfie them: Where these, or some of these, are found after search to meet together, there is ground to suspect, that though Conscience hath spoken clea, yet men have smothered, or slighted to notice the answer of Conscience.

2dly. We may add some ??? Directions; as First, Because our own ??? singleness usually maketh us dk, and doubtful, therefore these who would have a good Conscience? nd be in capacity to take up the Answer of it, should keep their eye ???, for if the ee be single, the whole body ?????????? of light? bu i mn in their ??????? any way unsul ??? byasled, they will readily mistake? the

Answer of Conscience. 2dly. We would consider what others think? who will probably be more impartial in our case, then ourselves because, not being in our circumstances? they have not the particular interest to sway them that we have. 3dly. consider, what we would say to another in such a case? to whom the Temptation cometh not so near as it doth to us, who are particularly concerned in the thing; Yea? consider what we would have thought of the thing before it came to our own door, and we to be exercised about it. But 4tly. Consider especially? and try the rise of our purpose, and exercise about the thing? whether it be zealous to the honour of God. that putteth us to consult Conscience or because such a thing is now come in our way, and seems to be waited with such and such external advantages, or to comply much with our humour and inclination; For, when God's honour putteth us not to ask the Answer, we may suspect, that it is not that which determineth us: We would readily never seek Light in such a matter, if it came not thus to our door, and if it were not in our offer; and others will make no such a do, or business, for Light in it, because they are very clear to let it alone: This much for the First Direction, what to do when Conscience is silent, or, its Answer is not taken up, or mistaken; Men should impartially search, and see, that they have not some way determined, and decided the matter before had within themselves, to the thwarting, or smothering the Answer of Conscience; And that their Inclination, or Affection, or some one or other selfish aim? or Interest, sway and bias them not, but that the matter be left betwixt God

and their Conscience singly, and that they be waiting on him for clearnesse, in a humble submissive and self-denyed way.

SERMON III.

1 PETER 3:21. (Not the putting away of the ??? of the flesh, but the answer of a good Conscience towards God.)

BY counsel every purpose is established, and e that neth to council is wise, sayeth Solomo? There are two great Counsellors that God hath given to all them that live within the visible Church, To wit, His Word without us, and ouconscience within us; That by them, we may be helped clearly to know ??? is pleasingPage 132to him, and profitable to ourselves; concerning which counsellours we may not only safely, but with highest assurance, say, that they are happy, who hearken to their Advice and Council.

That which we have have been speaking of from this v. Is the right way of discerning the Advice and Counsel which the Conscience gives, That so we may be the more able clearly and distinctly to follow it.

And in prosecution of this, ye may remember, we came to answer that Case, or Question, what men are called to, or what maybe their duty, when, after some pains taken to know Consciences, Advice and Counsel, they do not discern, and take it up? Seing experience tells us, that sometimes there may be Darknesse, even when men would have Light; In Answering of this, we gave you this Direction, in the first place, after the premitting of some things, for clearing of it; That such as are thus in the

Dark, would once put themselves to it, to try whither their Darkness proceed indeed from Conscience, or from some Distemper, and Tentation within, letting, and hindring them from taking up that which Conscience says; until once this be clear, men cannot make great progresse, for if they should studie to have Conscience speaking, and yet have their own ears stopped, this seems to be but lost labour; There is some other thing called for, that once they may be in a quiet, and composed Frame, to hear what Conscience says to them.

A ad. Direction, for Answer to it, is, When men cannot discern any Temptation, or Distemper in themselves, but that they are content to hear what Conscience would say to them, and yet cannot take it up, then they would set themselves to try whither that silence proceeds from some sinful Cause in themselves, justly procuring that silence of Conscience, as a punishment to them, or from some Sovereign Cause in God, ordering that silence to try them, and to humble them, and that they may, by being kept a while in the mist, more singly give proof of their dependency on him: For, as in other afflictions so in this, sometimes God will exercise his Sovereignty, and if it be once known to be for tryal, the thing that we are called to, is sweetly silent submission to God, and allowing him so to dispose of us as he pleases; As that Word, Isa. 50. v. 10. holds forth, He that walks in darkness, and sees no light, let him in that Case, stay himself on the Lord; He may be kept quiet, and from thwarting with God, if he can take up that to be his design; But if some sinful Cause hes procured

this, Men are put to it, as they would not ly under any effects of God's anger, to be dealing with him, to have that cause, that hes brought it on removed, that in due time, this sad effect of it may be removed also. It is true, that as in other Cases, so in this, it is not Ordinary nor Common for God to afflict His People with Darknesse, without some sinful Cause; And we may easily know, that among men, who have corruption in them, there is no tryal that comes on them, but there is some cause in themselves, that may procure it, and so may keep them in the dark if God should narrowly mark it: And hence we may gather, that it is very difficult to discern rightly, by clear evidence the one of these from the other; Yet we think in every case it is not absolutely necessary, for godly persons to conclude a designed controversie for sin, though they can never go wrong to take with sin, albeit yet they would not alwayes bind it on God, as if he were quarrelling for it, though he might very justly do so.

Therefore we shall offer Four Differences, and then qualifie them, and give some Directions, how to walk in every one of these Cases.

First, Then, We conceive, when the silence of Conscience, and God's refusing to intimate his mind by it, proceeds from a sinful cause procuring it, in a Person, it will readily look more horrible like; and will have some impression of anger on it, when it comes out with such a word, as that, ??? 10:14. Go and cry unto thePage 134gods which ye have chosen, and so forth. And there is good reason for this; that if it be an effect of sin, or of

anger for sin, it should look liker anger, then when it is an effect of God's meer Sovereignty, which may stand well with his being in good terms with that person whom he so tryes. Secondly. We think the hiding of God's face, and silence of Conscience, when it proceeds from sin as the Cause, readily point out some particular ground of challenge for which the Conscience keeps silence, it hath a word of reproof with it, for some particular fault, as in that same place, ye have done this, and this sayeth the Lord; Though I have brought you out of the land of Egypt, yet ye have served other gods, therefore now I will deliver you no more; Conscience though it will not, in that case give an answer to the thing that is asked at it, yet it will give a reason, wherefore it answers not, and will point at somewhat, that may make it known, that there is just ground for it's keeping silence: Job being thus smitten in holy Sovereignty, Sayes to God, Chap. 10:2: Tell me wherefore thou contends with me; He is indeed now somewhat jumbled, being exercised by the Sovereign Holy Lord; and his exercise is not so much, for this and that sin, in particular, as to know wherefore God deals so with him. 3dly. When this silence of Conscience proceeds from a sinful cause, it leaves the Spirit of the Person in a far greater distemper, and confusion, then whenit proceeds meerly from God's Sovereignty; For this having it's rise from Sin, it hath the greater influence to the stirring of corruption; Therefore in such a case as this, men are much disposed to sret, as ye may see in Saul. and others, who were ready. when God answered them not, to take another, and

sinful way of their own; But when God exercises in Sovereignty, as the Conscience hath readily more quietnesse, so there is more sweet Submission and Patience. 4ly. Persons would take a reflect look on the frame of their own hearts, before their darknesse came on them ??? they were careless, and carnal secure, untender, and remis in stirring upPage 135themselves to obtain Light from God; If darkness or any other affliction come on them, in such a case, it speaks this. That they were sadly surprized in that distemper; but if it come on them at such a time, when they have a Testimony within them, that they were making Conscience of their Duty, it would seem to say, that God is not looking so much at their sin, as to some Sovereign end, e would bring about by that Rod: If ye consider holyIoh, who is the eminent Patern of God's exercising a a man Sovereignly: the Case and Frame, he was overtaken in, by his affliction, was a most tender one, rising in the morning? and offering Sacrifices for his Children; and as he says Chap. 3:26 I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet, yet trouble came; That is, If I had been secure and carnal, I would have thought the less to meet with such troubles? but I was not at crnal ease, but was seriously at my Duty; It was this that made him that he could not see what it was that God pointed out to him for his exercise.

We would now in the nixt place, give you these qualifications. 1. That when God exerciseth from Sovereignty, yet, even then, there may be somewhat of terrour, reproof, and challenge, and somewhat of corruption stirring; and the reason is, because we have

corruption in us, and are not without the guilt of sin, and therefore Temptations have just ground to challenge, and corruption is ready on every occasion to be ed, and provoked; We would give this as a Second Qualification, that oft-times God's dealing with, and exering of his People, is mixed with some respect, both to their sin, and to the good end, that he intends to bring about thereby to them: And yet there are these ??? things, that we would look to in these Cases? First? That though corruption may stir, yet comparatively it ???ar lesse in the one case, then in the other: If ?????? affected with sin, even? when he was afflicted in God's Sovereignty; What would, he have been, if he had been chastised for his sin, and surprized in a sinfulPage 136distemper, when his affliction came on him? adly? Though it may be so for a time, yet if God remove the exercise, he will make it otherwise, he will compose the heart, and make the exercise effectual for that, for which he sends it; As ye see in the case of Job, who, though he was somewhat discomposed for a time, yet before God leaves him, he calmes him, and makes him lay his hand on his mouth, Chap. 40. and 42:3dly. That even then, though persons may discompose, and put themselves through other, because they have not caried suitably, and fair under the exercise; yet there will be some honest Testimony of Sincerity, when they look back to their carriage before, and even in the time; for Sovereignty in such exercises, will not prejudge his people's interest in him; Therefore ye see, that Job is clear, and resolved in this, that he will retain his integrity.

Lastly, we would come to show you what is meet to be done, in this case, Which, though there may be considerable difficulty to come by, yet a Believer should not be idle, when his Conscience keeps silence; Therefore I would give you these Three general Directions. 1. That Persons would endeavour to compose, and calm the frame of their own Spirits under that darknesse, be from what cause it will; if it be from God's Sovereignty exercising; This is suitable, that we study to comply, and strick in with these ends, and designs that God drives at, in exercising us so, such as, the humbling of us, the emptying of us of all self-conceit, the making of us to loath ourselves, so as to say with Job, Behold I am vile, The clearer knowledge of our own feeblenesse and sinfulness, our making greater account of Light, and coming at a more near closs and constant dependance on God; whatsoever that exercise proceed from, this is alwayes a Christians duty; And we have it warranted to us from Jobs example, and from the Churches example, Lament. 3.

A second general Direction is, That whither God chastite for sin or not, yet we would take a look of our ownPage 137carriage, that we may see what sin or sins we can find out, that might have been ground for him, thus to quarrel with us; that so we may repent of them, obtain his Peace, and recover his favour and friendship, in referrence to these sins; This sure cannot be any bad fruit, whatsoever be the cause from which it proceeds; because though God take not such narrow notice of our sin, yet it well becomes us to take such notice of it, ye see Job doth this,

when he says to the Lord, Thou makest me to possess the sins of my youth; We would look well to this, and set ourselves seriously to have our peace made up again with God, and to come by the intimation of the pardon of these particular sins, that if so be, our darknesse continue, we may have some quietnesse of Conscience; and this may also be the way for wining to the other; it is sure, very suitable, that when a Person is in the dark, as to some one particular duty, soberly to consider how often Conscience spoke, and I took but little notice of it, how little Conscience I made to practise clear duties; and therefore I am justly bemisted, and in the dark, as to this, this helps to humble. There are these Three things we would have you to look back on, when we call you to reflect in such a case on your wayes, First. Look back, and see if there was not something amiss before that darkness came on, that might have procured it, and drawn on this, as a chastisement of that; And here you would go back, if it were not only some few years, but seven years, and moe too, and see what sins, and sins against Light in particular, ye have fallen in; And how, when Conscience did challenge for the same, ye took but little notice of it; If I say it were after seven years, yea thrice seven (as Iosephs Brethren were made to do) ye would call these sins, or that sin again to mind. 2dly. Look well if ye have been serious in searching out the mind of Conscience, and if ye have taken pains to use all means to get Light; ye want Light, and it may be ye have not studied to be well acquainted with the word, nor have been single in prayer to God. Page 138 for obtaining of it;

ye would also look, if there hath been any defect in advising with Conscience, or in proponing the case to Conscience, and discovering the same, ye would endeavour to amend it, and to make a new addresse, as it were to your Conscience before God, for finding out Light. 3dly. Look back on your carriage, since that darkness began; for Christians may possibly have been in a tender frame, when this darkness came upon them; yet because they get not Light so soon as they would have it, and because the ord keeps up himself for a time, it may be their impatience has broken out, and there has been sinful wrangling with God in secret, and the heart hath been somewhat raised, that he should deal so with them, especially? hen they have found that they have been honest in the main; somewhat of this was in Job, who took on him, under his dark exercise (as himself confesseth) to meddle too much, and too boldly with God's secrets, that were too wonderful for him; It may be often thus with Believers, who, though they may be in a good frame, and keeping up the peace when the dark exercise comes on them, yet confuse themselves by other miscarriages under it, and by their carnalnesse in reference to it; Whereby it comes to passe, that the exercise that at first came from God's Sovereignty, turns in the continuance of it, to be for their sin a chastisement, which they are made to take with, whither they will or not; We think this was Jobs case, and he was made to take with it, ere the exercise was removed from him: These things ye would look to, and reflect on them, that

you may know how to apply yourselves accordingly, and to do as they shall call you, and as the case requires.

The Third General Direction is, That however things be, persons that are in the dark, and yet would be clear of God's mind about such and such a Duty, would be looking well about them, that they may see, if there be yet any present thing called for from them, if there be anything left undone which they may do, and which they should do, for finding out God's mind; and they would go thro' God's appointed means, and throw them again: There are Three or Four particular Directions in this General one, First, Such as would be at the knowledge of God's mind, would betake themselves to him, and stir themselves to be at more immediate nearness to him; That when the Conscience speaks not to them, they may go to the Lord himself, to get some word of answer from him, as Habakkuck did, Chup. 2. v. 1. While he says I will get me to my watch tower, and so forth. The Prophet had his own darkness there, and was in some little dump, the vision did not speak for the time, what course takes he in this case? He resolves to act the part of a watchman, who goes up some steps higher, and yet again some steps higher, even until he come to the top of the watchtower, that he may thence see the more clearly; even so the nearer that any be to God, they are in the greater capacity to take up the mind of Conscience: for then there is both the greater awe on the Conscience to make it speak, and the greater clearness in us to help us to take it up: And when we win not to clearness in the utterroom (to say so) of Conscience, We would go in to

the Holy-place, and if we win not to clearness there neither, we would go in to the most Holy-place, until we come even to the Mercy-seat itself; Where God useth not to fail to give his answer: For there is one thing that doth Christians much wrong, which is, That when they cannot win to take up God's mind so soon as they would, they pray more faintly, and are discouraged to approach the nearer to God; whereas they should do the just contrary, after Jobs example, who says, in his dark condition, Chap. 23. v. 2. O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat: The Second Direction in reference to this is, That persons would observe well, what measure, or degree of Light God gives them; and would welcome it thankfully, and carefully make use of it, though they come not to clearness in the whole case together, and at once; if they win toPage 140know what to do to day, or for the present ow, they would (as I said) welcome that, and make use of it; Thus it's said of Abraham, Hebrews 11:8. That by faith being called of God, he forsook his countrey, and went out, not knowing whither he went; sometimes God will call a person to go this step, and he will not for the time, let him know where the nixt shall be; he should lift as it were, that foot, and make that step, while he hath Light, and so on, from one step to another, until the darknesse make him stand still. The Third Direction, is, That though we come not to clearness at the first, yet we would wait on, and not be hastie; It's a notable follie, to be either rash in acting, or hastie in giving up with God, when he will not speak to us at the first; my meaning is, That we would neither do

the thing that we are in debate about before we be clear in it, for that is to do doubtingly; neither should we give it over, but should be waiting on in renewing our applications to God, until he think meet to speak to us; The vision, (says the Lord to Habbacuck) is yet for an appointed time, though it tarry, wait for? it; There are some times that God will only say this much to a person, wait, and that is an answer; more will come to the waiter in due time; and we may be encouraged to wait, if we will consider, that honest waiters have a promise of Light: If one should say here, I am in the mean time sadly exercised; I Answer, it may be meet thou should be in exercise, that exercise may be good for thee; Nay, it may be thou makes a piece of exercise to thy self, because thou wouldest know more then is his mind, thou shouldest for the time know. The Fourth Direction, is, There would be silent stouping to, and reverend adoring of the wisdom, and Sovereignty of God, in ordering darknesse in such a particular, which is not a necessary duty; so that the person cannot stir, nor move towards it; It may be for the good of the party, that he is thus, by this darknesse restrained, and hedged in, which, though it be not now known, may be made known, hereafter, to satisfaction.

Page 141 It may yet be enquired, when there is silence in the Conscience, as to such or such a particular, if there may not be use made of general Rules given in the Scripture, for directing us in our walk? And if Conscience may not have peace, in walking according to these Rules? No doubt, for keeping a good Conscience,

we would, in our respective Stations, and Capacities, learn by Consciencious reason (that is reason drawn from Scripture grounds) to order our Conversation so, as the Conscience may have nothing to say against it; As for instance, suppose a person be debateing, whither public Station, or a more privat way of living be the thing he is called of God to, and it may be there is not such distinct, and particular clearnesse given about the thing, he would in that case, betake himself to the general Rules in Scripture, how to discern the Lord's mind, in the matter.

And for your better help herein, I shall First, Touch on some general Rules, that the Scripture layes down, according to which we would walk. 2ly. I shall, offer some helps, how to collect and apply, from these Rules. 3ly. I shall show the warrantableness of quieting our Conscience, in walking according to them; First, then I shall name Four general Rules, to which we would have an eye in reference to lawful things; The First whereof is set down, 1 Corinthians 10:30. Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God; We should choose that state of life, and calling (and so in other such things) that may conduce most to the glorifying of God; So we are to enter in the Dispute, or Debate, whither may this or that contribute most to that end, and accordingly the Conscience may well rest quiet, if it once come to any clearness, that this, or the other contributes most to God's Glorie, therefore it should be followed. The 2d. General Rule is, 1 Corinthians 14:26. Let all things be done to edifying; There is a difference between things lawful, and things expedient, or edifying, All things are lawful

for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not; Sayeth thePage 142Aposile, 1 Corinthians 10. v. 23. There is an expedience, and regard to the edification of ourselves, and of others, that we would be swayed with; as whither the doing of such and such a thing, at this time, or another will edify? others most, and profit them most, as to the saving of their souls; or help ourselves most, in the mortifying of some Lust, or in furthering of us to some Die; Here Conscience is to close with, and to cleave unto that which is most edifying. A Third General Rule is, Philippians 4:8. Where, when the apostle is shewing them a way how to walk (as we suppose) in the same kind of things; Whatsoever things, saith he, are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, pure, lovely, and of good report, (To wit, with those that are able to judge aight, of things that are so) think on these things; There are manythings lawful, that are not honest; manythings lawful, may not have a good report; and manythings that are lawful, may not be lovely; Now, when two lawful things are before us, we would consider which of the two are most Christianly honest, and most Lovely, which of them hath the best report, and is best thought of among them that can discern best; and though a thing be lawful in itself, yet if it be not honest, and of a good report, it may give cause of ill speaking, that is not to be allowed; As for instance, suppose in the matter of Marriage, there be two single people, it is lawful for them to Marie; Yet suppose them to be unequal, as to their Rank and Quality? the one a great Man, the other a poor

Woman, and despicable, or contrarily; or vastly unequal, as to Age or Parts, and accomplishments; and that such a match is not honestly reported of; Or is not counted gracious and tender like in a professo of Religion, Man or Woman; though it might be simply lawful, yet in that case, He or She is to walk according to the apostles Rule, even according to this Rule: Particular Circumstances, I grant, will very much vary the the case; Yet that Rule would be still tenderly looked to. A 4th. General Rule, is, 1 Corinthians 7:17, and 20. Page 143 As the Lord ??? called every one? o let them walk? let every man abide in the same calling wherein he is called; Which supposeth, that Christians being once clear, that the Lord hath called them to be in such Callings and Stations, and to sustain such Relations, as of Magistrats Ministers, Merchants, and Tradsmen, Husbands, Wives, Masters? Servants; They should, for keeping a good Conscience, continue quiet, and satisfied in them, without covering pre-posterously, or itching curiously to be out of them; and without daring to move from them without a clear and convincing call from God; and that they should make Conscience to discharge the respective duties incumbent on them, by virtue of these Stations and Relations while they are in them.

The other thing we proposed? was some helps toward the right application of these Rules; And here there is great need to look very narrowly to our own way of proceeding: I shall name Four things in reference to this; TheFirst whereof, is, that though we walk according to a particular Rule, yet we must have a special respect to

circumstances that may have great influence upon varieing of the Case, and would therefore be well observed; for Cases at all times, and in all persons are not a like; There is a time (sayeth the wise man, Ecclesiastes3.) forevery thing under the sun: Sometimes folks ought to speak, and sometimes they ought to keep silence, sometimes to laugh, sometimes to weep, sometimes to get, and sometimes to ??? and so of every thing under the Sun; and here we would consider the Person. who does such a thing; it may be honest in one person, and not in other; Thus Nehemiah says should such a man as ???? Especially more noted Christians should look to this; Then we should consider the place wherin such a thing is done, and the ?????????? it is done; We would also consider the consequences that may follow on the doing of such a thing? both as to the persons self, that his own peace be not marted, and as to others; thatPage 144they be no way stumbled, or made worse; We cannot apply such or such a particular practice suitably, and aright to the Rule, except we present, and offer the Case to be tryed by the Rule, according to all it's circumstances; A general view of such and such a Case, and of the Rule will not do the turn here. A 2d. Help, For making application of the General Rule, is, that we would look well to God's Dispensations, and to these things in his way of dealing with us inwardly; and in his providence to us outwardly, that would seem to point out o us one thing rather than another, this rather than that: Providence, it's true, can never make a new Dute; or a thing that is sinful to be

lawful, but Providence may tell a man when he is called to put in practice such and such a positive Dutie; As for instance, where he should live, and in what state of life; because providence may sometimes shut such a door, that he cannot win out, and open another; He would, in this case? take the way that God in his providence offers, and points out to him; As suppose a person undertaking a Journey, or Voyage, about his lawful affairs, and he knows not well what fellow travellers, or what Fellowvoyagers he may have, such a fair occasion is offered? and it may be, not another for going to such a place; he may quietly take that occasion, as that which providence seems to point out to him; Thus the apostle Paul Acts 21. finding a Ship going to, or near the place whither he was bound, steps in without asking what company was in her? such cases are frequently incident, when either on the one side, God in his providence opens this, or this way and door, and not another; or, on the other side, when he seems to open two wayes, and they are both lawful, and alike obvious; Then we would look which of these contributes most to the glory of God, and which of these seems to be most countenanced by Divine Providence, most eazable, and likeliest to make the end effectual. A 3d. Help. Is, in our singleness in our motions, and in our yeelding to that which afterPage 145examination, and deliberation we have found, or supposed to be most agreeable to the general Rule; ??? that when Conscience has proposed the case, it hath a Testimony in itself, that it hath made that proposal sincerely and impartially? that respect to the glory of

God, and the edification of others? was the thing that mainly swayed us, and in led us to this, or that hand, and that we apprehended this way to be most conducing to that end? In this case, though Conscience speak no so directly for the clearness of such a thing, yet it cannot readily quarrel with a person, who hath singly endeavoured before hand to satisfie it, and who hath it's Testimony, that God's Glory was the thing that mainly swayed him, and nothing else; This w^e conceive, is that whereof the Apoile speaks, 2 Corinthians 1. v. 12. This is our^e rejoycing, the ??? of our conscience, and so forth. These Three things being put together, the Conscience may have peace, the thing itself being lawful; because this general Rule will bear it out in Scripture-reason, which Conscience will not speak against.

There is only one word further, I would speak to this purpose, Christians will be ready to think, that all the difficulty lyes here, even in being single and sincere, and indeed it doth so; for the want of it mas peace, and the having of it, gives great ground of peace: I shall give you therefore, Three^e Qualifications^e whereby ye may try your sincerity. First, Consider, and try what frame of heart ye are in; for if ye be not in a good frame of heart, it can hardly be said, that sincerity sweyes you; There would, therefore much tendernesse be studied, and to have a deep impression of the Majesty of God, of the awe and dread of Him, and of his Word on our Spirits. 2dly. Look what weight challenges for by gone neglects, o^e??? performances of duties, or un-straightness in any of them have with you; For sincerity is never readily more

evident, then when we have distinct reflections upon our ways, and the suitable sense of some bygon sin; in that case, we will no be in such hazard,Page 146to give way to or to comply with what may breed a challenge afterward. 3ly. Try it by what Conscience ye make of present known and clear duties, it's a good token that persons are ???, when there is no clear duty, but they make Conscience of it, labouring to be universal, and equal in the practice of all known duties, and when they ar not hazard on anything without clearness; but when a person is clearly convinced, that such a thing is sin, and continues still in the practice of it; and that such a thing is duty, and continues in the neglect o it; And yet thinks that he is swayed by sincerity, such a one must needs be deluded, since, in such a case, no reason can be given for it: I am old? here to say, that in the great Day, there shall never Man no Woman be ound to have a Testimony from their Conscience of sincerity, who have not aimed, and endeavoured to be universaly sincere.

The 4th. Help, is That Christians would endeavour to be in a very tender frame? in the nearest communion with God, and in the greatest measure of Heart-melting, and of ouring it out before God, that may be win at; Though I do not say that it is impossible for Christians to mistake even in such a frame: But my meaning is, that the rule would be looked to, and laid before us, and that we would study to make application of it with the least by-respect, and with the greatest singleness, and that then we may with some safety conclude what side to swey to: I would not in all this have us debating duty, but our

particular call to duty. This may be looked at by many as a very great and hard work, and they may think, that all this makes a great deal of business about keeping a Conscience void of offence; and it doth so indeed. I would have you considering ???three words for answering such thoughts. 1. That? ??? great and difficult work to keep a good Conscience; and ye will find it that ??? i now one day to your cost, to have been a great work, and n up-taking exercise; yet we would not think the worse of it for that, sincePage 147there is nothing excellent that hath not difficulty in it. 2dly. I would say this, that ye would consider that though there are several things indifferent in themselves, as eating and drinking, marrying, living here or there, and so forth. Yet to us in the practice of them, and as they are circumstantiated, they are not indifferent, but when done they are either sinful, as not being according to the rule; or approven and acceptable, as being according to it; We would therefore be very watchful and tender in our doing and using of things in themselves lawful, nam perimus licitis. 3dly. Let me say that I do not intend by what I have said to put your Consciences on the rack, or to stint and limit you by Art, as it were, to find out light; for I know these things are not alwayes explicite, even in many conscientious persons; But that which I design and drive at by this discourse, is, that ye may seriously mind and look after the thing, and endeavour to walk according to these rules on the matter, and to have the testimony of your Conscience, that it is these rules you allow

yourselves in such cases to be swayed and guided by;
This will give you peace, and nothing less will do it.