

HEAVEN upon EARTH,
In the serene Tranquility, and calm Composure;
in the sweet Peace and solid Joy
of a good CONSCIENCE;
sprinkled with the Blood of Jesus,
and exercised always to be void of offence toward
GOD and toward MEN.

Brought down, and holden forth in XXII very searching
Sermons, on several Texts of Scripture, to that purpose.

Wherein many weighty and momentuous Cases of
CONSCIENCE, greatly influencing a tender Christian
walk, are Soberly, Solidly, Succinctly and Satisfyingly
Discussed; Several of which are not readily to be met
with in the Writings of other Divines on this Subject.

By that Learned, and eminently Conscientious
Minister of the Gospel,
Mr. JAMES DURHAM,
Some-time Preacher thereof at GLASGOW.

1. Pet. 3. v. 16.

Having a good conscience: that whereas they speak evil
of you, as evil doers, they may be ashamed, that falsely
accuse your good conversation in Christ.

EDINBURGH, Printed by the Heir of Andrew ???
Printer to the Most Sacred MAJESTY, ANNO DOM
168?

ERRATA.

Courteous Reader,

Please ere thou read to correct these few escapes of the Press, as page 12. line 36. read grossest for greatest. p. 22. l. 36. r. inclination. p. 26. l. 20. r. dictateth, p. 30. l. 22. r. as for its. p. 33. l. 29? delet no more? p. 57. l. . r. ofascination. l. 2. d. conceit, l. 20. r. on for one. p. 61. l. 22. r. first for 2d. p. 74. l. 4. r. thought, p. 75. l. 29? r? this for all. p. 87. l. 21. r. ordinary. p. 99. l. 10. r. thus for think. p. 104. l? 37. r. only for any. p. 119. l. 28. r. not left. p. 136 l. 2. r. ere for if. p. 142 l. 26. r. persons for people, p. 15 l. 34. r. consideration. p. 151. l. 4. r. censor, p. 156. l. 29 d. divine, p. 182. l. 15 put a point after testimony. p. 195 l. 34. r. bings. p. 204 l. 30. r. as for is l. last, r. is for s, p. 234. l. 20. r. rational creature, p. 235? l. 4. r. concerning them by self-examination. p. 256. l. 4. r. some way for some. nay l. 25. r. had for hand, p. 270. l. 5. r. (as if he said) p. 303. l. 3. r. ourselves, l. 10 r. repentance p. 308, l. 4. r. allowed, p. 309. l. 7. d. full, p. 311. l. 11. d. so p. 325. put, after sacrifice, p. 338. l. 12. r. observe more especially. p. 342. l. last, r. persons. p. 343. l. 1. r. their for his p. 344. l. last, r. them for it, p. 348. l. 20. r. a mistaken law. p. 353. l. 8 r. he, l. 18. d. is. p. 358. l. 29. r. creature. p. 361. l. 6. r. for making. p. 364. l. 8. r. fain.

Any other lesser literal escapes, mis-pointings, or misplacings of some very few parentheses, as thou wilt pardon, so thou wilt easily correct.

GEneroso vir, and amico suo multis nominibus plurimum Colendo Domino Alexandro Durhamo, Domino de Largo, Clarissimi Authoris Filio Germano, and ex multis quos illi Deus gratiosé dederat liberis nunc tantum superstiti; qui defunctum patrem (virum illum non tantum apud Nostrates, sed etiam apud Exteros Celebrem and vere magni nominis) quamvis non passibus aequis, pro suo tamen modulo, in vijs Domini serió sequitur; egregias has de Consciencia Conciones Conscionatoris conscienciam tenerrimam and plane divinitus illuminatam suaviter spirantes; in sinceri amoris tesseram and perpetuae observantiae testimonium, D. D
Johannes Carstares.

TO The READERS, And more particularly to the Inhabitants of the City of GLASGOW.

The Micro-cosme, or little World? Man, a notably curious Compend, and abridgement? (as it were) of the larger one, and the great Master piece of all the visible works of GOD; w when he came from under the hand of the Omnipotent Creator in the first Edition, a little Model, and Representation of the Divine Perfections; having impressed on him that blessed and beautiful, that amiable and admirable conformity to the Image and likeness of GOD, wherein consisted? the preeminence of His Nature, above that of all other Creatures in the Visible or Sublunary World; being one of the great excellencies that a created nature is capable of, and a clearer ray of Divine Majesty, then his dominion over the other Creatures; and which only made him capable of the enjoyment of God, as being that which assimilated to him, and brought him to the nearest approaches to Glory: All the faculties and powers of his Soul carried this glorious Character vvely ingraven on them; His Body also had somewhat? of the same Image stamped on it, though not in respect of its figure, and shape or natural use, but as an essential part of his nature, it was interested therein by a participation of original righteousness; For it was man's person that was made holy, though his Soul was the first proper Subject of that con-created habit, and principle of holiness, yet his body (as I said) as an essential part of his nature, did participate thereof, by a peculiar communication of that holiness to ??? as far as it was to be influential on moral operations; and hereby

were the Parts and Members of his Body, in that state of innocence and integrity, made Instruments and Servants unto righteousness and holiness: His Understanding was a lamp of clear and pure light, without any the least measure or mixture of culpable darkness or ignorance, it was able clearly and distinctly to represent all objects, competent for him to know, with wonderful readiness and facility: His Will was (to say so) straight as a rush, without any the least sinful crook, o sinister bias? inclining only and perfectly to that which was good? and altogether averse from every thing that was evil; there being a thorough agreement betwixt his will, and the will of God, so that he willed what he willed, and illed what he illed: All his Affections moved only and constantly towards right and commanded objects, and that with perfection of regularity in all their motions? His Memory was of strong retention, neither knew he, while he remained such, what it was o forget anything that was suitable, and incumbent for him to remember: His Conscience was in excellent case o reflect, and there being no ground for any challenge, reproof, or ???, it did only commend and applaud? in a word, it did most faithfully and exactly act the part of God's Deputy, following his orders punctually and precisely, and so was kept in an undisturbed calm, and perfectly serene tranquility: The Members of his body were servants only to righteousness, and with holy alacrity, subserved the soul in all its operations; But, ah! the entering in of cursed sin, made a sad, sorrowful and stupendous Catastrophe, setting o fire as it were the whole course of

nature, and putting its very foundations some way out of course, and deplorably defacing the curious stately, magnificent, beautiful and glorious Fabric of this little Man; quite vitiating and corrupting all the faculties, powers and parts of his soul and body, which by the exact and exquisite symmetry and harmony thereof, through the image of God concreated with him, made him, while it remained in its integrity, incapable of all such motions, or actions, which should be subservient unto, or compliant with anything contrary unto, or different from it: His Understanding, the leading faculty, and the eye (as it were) of the soul, became an abyss and dungeon of darkness, covered all over with fogs, mists and clouds of ignorance, errors and mistakes, so that becoming of a spiritual and holy man, a carnal and corrupt man, He did not receive, neither could he know savingly the things of God, he became quite blind, having lost his visive faculty, as to all spiritual discerning: His Will the ruling and governing faculty, utterly lost its rectitude, and became crooked, froward, perverse, rebellious and obstinate, strongly inclined and bent to evil, to all evil, only to evil, always and constantly to evil, and altogether averse from every thing truly good; willing that which God nilled, and nilling that which he willed: His Affections turned all mutinous, disorderly, disturbed and confused, furiously rushing on prohibited objects, as the horse rusheth into the battle; and what movings of them were toward any commanded object, these were altogether irregular, not so much as one of them moved toward any such object, purely or primarily, because it

was a thing commanded: His Memory, quite lost its retentive faculty, as to the remembering of anything spiritually good, in the way it should have been remembered, it became in that respect as a leaky vessel, all such things slipping and running through and out of it: His Conscience being deed and made guilty, became clamorous, unquiet, challenging and accusing, boisterous and stormy, filling him with horror; and (when not stupefied and benumbed with spiritually Lethargic Security, or Cauterized) putting him upon the rack, and making a kind of hell in his bosom, so that he was Magur issabib, terror round about? even his own Burrio and tormente: All the members of his body were yielded to be the weapons of unrighteousness to sin; So that all the faculties and powers of his soul, and members of his body, were on the sudden up in arms in hostility and rebellion against God, proclaiming and waging war with him, and on the matter blasphemously bidding him a defiance: O! ad and sorrowful revolution, in and on the Little world Man. Heu quantum mutatus abillo! God made him upright, but he sought out to himself many inventions; wo to us for we have sinned, and the crown hath fallen from our head: And by the loss of our original righteousness, and the corruption of our whole nature, with the innumerable actual sins and transgressions that flow from thence, we bear, alas! a great deal more of the Image of the Devil, and of the Brute, then we do of the Image of God. The re-introduction, restauration, and renovation of the pristine beautiful conformity to the glorious Image of God (with their reconciliation and

justification through his satisfaction to divine justice) in some of the universally lapsed and lost posterity of Adam, even all the elect and gifted ones to the Mediator to be redeemed, sanctified and saved by him, in order to the capacitating of them to enjoy fellowship with God, (forefaulted by the fall) and that by a new Creation (the very splendor and glory of the whole Creation) was the great earned and business, for which Christ Jesus came? into the world; who being the head and foundation-stone of this new Creation, hath graciously undertaken to prepare, sanctify and glorify his mystical body, or all the elect given to him by Jehovah: which he accordingly effecteth, and bringeth to pass, by regenerating them, by sanctifying them, and by carrying on this work of sanctification in the growth and gradual advances thereof, until it be perfected and consummated in glory: whereby the Image of God in men is again renewed, and restored both in their souls and bodies respectively, in a good measure now in this life, and shall be perfectly in the life to come; where, as they shall all see him as he is, intuitively face to face, and enjoy him fully and immediately, without any the least moments interruption through all eternity, so they shall be like him, perfectly like him, according to Creature capacity; resembling him to the very fe: All the faculties and powers of their souls partake of this renewed work; The Understanding being savingly enlightened; the will rectifyd; the Affections reduced unto order; the Memory strengthened, and the Conscience much cleansed and calmed, and put into a capacity as to accuse and condemn, so to excuse, allow

and absolve, as there is just ground for either; and they put to make it their great business about which they allow themselves to be exercised, always to have it void of offence toward God and toward men? which Conscience with the concerns thereof being the great theme and Subject of these choice, searching and savoury Sermons (wherein if there be anything that doth not so fully answer expectation, let it be imputed to the writer from his own mouth, whose cople was so very incorrect, that the fitting it for the view of the world hath caused no small labour to me) I need say the less of it, only in general, I would humbly offer these few things.

First, we would above all things look well that once we have a good Conscience, not only Morally (that is when Conscience judgeth \diamond itself bound to own God's revealed will for its rule, and when it impelleth or pusheth the man to act according to that rule, and withall the more ordinary disposition of his will is ??? comply with these impulses of his Conscience, which may be where there is no special or saving grace,) but Graciously so; which necessarily pre-supposeth a state of regeneration, and the hearts applying itself by faith (the gift of God) to the blood of sprinkling, which both purgeth and pacifieth, cleanseth and calmeth the Conscience, which speaketh better things then the blood of Abel, yea hath a cry able to out-cry the loudest cries of the most clmourous and guilty Conscience, and is that wherein all disquieting challenger and ccusations for sin are only afely sunk and and put to silence, so as they shall never again swime above, and rak to the final sorrow and

shame of such as are led through grae to take this course with them; as thenow-sunk and any other way silenced challenges of most men and women, will once most certainly rise on them, and speak at a high rate against them, never any more to hold their peace from grievously galling and gnawing accusations; For to the unclean and unbelieving nothing is pure, but even the minde and conscience is defiled.

Secondly, The Conscience being thus made good, we would endeavour by all suitable means to keep it so, that we may be in case on warrantable and good grounds to say with the apostle, We trust we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly: Hebrews 13. v. 18. And if at any time the Conscience of the Christian be defiled, and wounded by new contracted pollution and guilt; and challenges begin thence to arise, and to disturb the peace and sweet repose of the Soul; there would be on all such occasions, fresh believing applications made to the blood of sprinkling, that thereby the heart may be sprinkled from an evil conscience, and the Conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God; and endeavours would be renewed in the strength of grace to walk more tenderly, without offence toward God, and toward men: toward which these Sermons abound with varietie of choice and excellent directions and helps.

Thirdly, and more particularly we would study to have our Conscience well and throughly informed, by intimat acquaintance with the minde and will of God revealed in the Scriptures of truth, as to all things that we are called

to believe and do, so that it may be in case to discharge its office and dutie aright, whether in Dictating or in Testifying, or in judging: an ill informed Conscience, especially where there is any zeal, or forwardness, strongly pusheth and suriously driveth men to many dangerous, distracted and destructive practices; hath not this driven men to kill the servants of Christ (as himself foretold) and in doing so to think that they did God service? did not this hurry on Paul, before his conversion, to persecute Callers on the name of the Lord Jesus? and to make havock of the Church, by drawing, and dragging the disciples both men and women bound to Prison, and by cruel persecuting of them even to strange cities, compelling them to blaspheme? so exceedingly mad was he (as himself confesseth) against them; O! what terrible and tragical things hath? this set men on to do, and what work hath it made in some places of the world, beside many lesser impertinencies, extravagancies and disturbances in particular Christian Societies.

Fourthly, We would endeavour to have the Conscience deeply impressed with due and deep veneration, awe and dread of the Majestie of God, the supream Lord of, and great Law-giver to the Conscience; whose Laws and Commands are only properly, directly, immediately, and of themselves obligatory thereof; because the Consciences and Souls of men are properly subject only to God; and because the Law of God written in the hearts of men, and in the Scriptures, is the only rule of Conscience; and moreover because men cannot immediately judge the Conscience, nor know they the

secret motions thereof; and finally because he can only inflict spiritual punishment on the sinning Conscience: all the Laws and Commands of men in what ever capacitie are only obligatory of the Conscience mediately, indirectly, and consequentially; viz. in so far as they are consistent, compliant and agreeable with the Laws and Commands of the absolutely supream Law-giver, or not repugnant thereunto: for certainly he hath not given a dispensation to any power on earth, Civil or Ecclesiastick, to countermand his commands, or to enjoin obedience to commands contrary to, or inconsistent with his own; whose commands are immediately and inviolably binding of the Consciences of Superiors and Magistrates, though the greatest Monarchs on earth, as well as of Inferiours and Subjects, all without exception being Inferiours, and Subjects to him: Yet such Laws of men as do either press or declare the Commands and Law of God, and make for the conservation, and observation thereof, oblige in Conscience; because such Laws as they are such, participat of the nature and force of the Divine Law: and because the Law of God doth directly and immediately command subjection to the Superior Powers: therefore even in reference to the just Laws, and such as are repugnant to, or contrary with the divine Laws, Subjects are obliged in Conscience not to refuse obedience to them out of any contempt of lawful authority (let them not disclaim or renounce the same, as some poor seduced and deluded persons do, in these days, either out of ignorance, or humour, or misguided zeal, to the great reproach of Religion) not to admit of anything that m

have in it the ??? appearance of offence, and scandal that way; because the contempt o lawful authority, and the andal of others, are in themselves sins against the Law of God: yet still as no eer humane laws do directly, immediately and of themselves (as I said) bind the conscience; so neither hath God given a power to any of the Superour Powers on earth to enjo obedience to commands that are cross to his ownnjunctions, which all are oblided indispensably to obey.

And therefore it is not only srange, but even stupendious for any Christians, especially such as pretend to be Protestants, confidently to assert, and bolo publish to the world, as Mr. Hobbs doth in his Leviathan, (a book designed by him, as I have been informed, to complement Cromwel, against the writrs own Conscience, such as it was) p. 168. That no private man is judge of good and evil actions in a Common wealth, under civil Laws; and that the meaire of good and evil actions is the Civil Law (of actions civilv good why not? but of actions simply good and evil (as his assertion carries) wh? what reason, or shdow of reason? God never having given, noassigned such a rule; we may thus throw away ouBibles, as the rule of good and evl aions, and all betake ourselves to the Civil Law as the only Rule) and the Legis ltor the alone Iudge, since he may as well divest a man of humane nature and un-man him, as deprive him of a privat Judgment of discretion, or of a private discreive Judgment in reference to his own actions; the soer exercise whereof is no assuming to himself in the least, the capacity of a public Judge; and it at any timein

anything relating to is ??? acts, this Judgment of private discretin fall to thwart the Law, or public Judgment, he advenes on that cum periclo, or on his pel; but it cannot in reason uttely rob him of it? since (as is said) he can as soon cease to be a man, or a rational creature, as to have that quite denyed him, or taken from him; and to what end or purpose should he be privileged with this above brutes, i the exercise of t shall be forever suspended in the Members of Kingdoms and commonwealths, as almo all men in the world are? what sound and Orthodox Divine, or sound Christian Lawyer ever taught such Doctrine? The learned doctor Ames tell us in the 4. Colary, and very last words of his first book of Cases of Conscience, that Interpretatio Scripturae, vel iudicium scernere voluntatem Dei, pertinet ad quemlibet. in foro constiae pro ???. And page 169. of the fore-cited book, the same Hobbs says, That he who is subject to no civil Law sinneth in ll that e doth against his conscience; yet t is not so with him who liveth in a common wealth, because the Law is the public conscience: whicheems to be inconsistent with, if no point blank contradictory unto what the apostle exhorts to Romans 14. v. 5 Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind, or conscience, to wit, of the warrantableness of what he doth; and to what he asserts, v. 23. whatsoever is not done in faith, (or from this full perswasion of its warrantableness) is sin: He doth not surely write this to Christians n Outopia, or in the ancied new world in the Moon, ut to those who were realy present memoers of the Roman commonwealth, or Subjects of that Impire; neither can it

with any show of reason be supposed (especially by him who in the strain of his Book, as to this matter, makes very little, or rather no difference at all betwixt a Heathen and Christian Magistrat, for whether the Magistrat be Pagan, Mahometan, Jewish? Christian, Popish or Potestant, Heretical, or Orthodox. Seems to e all on to him, and his followers in this debate) that if the Roman Emperour had been Christian he would have written otherwayes, or that his becoming such, would enervat, yea quiteevacuat the strength and obligation of what he writs; for e delivers it as an eternal and un-alterable veritie, Rule who will, and be the Civil Laws what they may be: and while in the 13. chapter of that same epistle, he telleth Christians, v. 5. That they must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake; he seems very clearly to distinguish betwixt the Law and Command of the Civil Power (which Mr. Hobbs calleth the public conscience.) and the conscience of privat Christian Subjects, and to prese upon them subjection to the higher powers, for their own conscience sake; and so to leave to them some exercise and judgement of that their Conscience concerning the matter of their obedience and subjection; otherwayes the obedience and subjection could not well be said to be for Conscience sake, or out of Conscience; for he raight shortly have said, obey the dictats of the public conscience, a the laws of the superiour powers, there being no place for the exercise of the conscience of privat subjects in the matter. There is one divine (such as he is) who in his Ecclesiastick polity more lately, delivers the same doctrine; wherein he not only plainly

Hobbizeth, but also palpably playeth the plagiary, borrowing (not to say stealing) much of what he says to this purpose through his Book, from Mr Hobbs, tho in some few things he oppoeth him, and delivers his sentiments in a finer dresse of language; it may be, that none may think that he is beholden to the other, for that which he would surprize the world with as his own new, and profoundly witty invention, vainly as it were crying _____; let them for me, share betwixt them this glorying in their own shame, that shall not be rolled away: He says that in matters of Religion, and divine worship, subjects are to be ruled by authority and the public conscience; and that in these matters, privat men have not power over their own actions, nor are to be directed by their own judgements, but by the commands and determinations of the public conscience, only with these sory restrictions; If the things commanded do not either countenance vice or disgrace the Deitie; or if the things be not absolutely and essentially evil, whosenature no case can alter, no circumstance can extenuat, and no end can sanctifie: Mr. Hobbs hath only this limitation, if the things be not against the law of nature; in effect both come near to the same, if not to the very same amount, and by both an obligation is pleaded to ly on the Consciences of all privat Christian subjects, to give up themselves to the conduct and regulation of the public conscience, or of the Laws of the commonwealth, as to many at least, of the positive commands of God; doing contrary to which, will not fall within the compasse of these very narrow limitations: which either supposeth without any warrand

or proove, that the public conscience is always infallible as to these (and it is worthe noticing what the learned Monseur Claude hath to this purpose in his deence of the Reformation, where he saith, In effect an absolute obedience and intire resigning of ones self to the conduct of nother in these matters that regard the faith and the conscience, is a duty that we can lawfully tender to none but to God, who is the first truth, the first principle of all justice, to which none can pretend without usuring the just right of God: As is also, what saith Amesius, page 6. of his Cases, That the conscience is immediately subject to God, and to his will, and cannot subject itself to any creature without Idolatry) Or it is the short cut, and compendious way to debauch men's consciences, and to drive all conscience out of the world; being obviously lyable to these following (beside others) great and gross absurdities 1. That privat Christian Subjects are not at all to trouble themselves, or to be at the pains to search the Scriptures, in order to the information of their consciences, and bringing themselves to be fully persuaded in their mind or conscience (which they are expresly commanded to do, Iohn 5:39. and Romans 14:5.) of the warrantableness of what they do, or are enjoined to do in Religion, and in the worship of God; If it be not against the law of nature, which may be easily discerned; for says Mr. Hobbs, it is born with every man, and engraven on every man's heart; He is in all such things to acquiesce without debate or demure, in the determination of the public conscience; and if he shall endeavour to have his conscience informed? the more he

doth to, he but puts his own conscience the more upon the rack, and to the torture, if he must, notwithstanding the clearest information and best grounded perswasion of his own judgement and conscience, stand to, and acquiesce in the resolve of the public conscience; as he must do according to this doctrine; if he sin not, (as hath not hitherto been doubted by any man of conscience) in counteracting his own light, and well-informed conscience? at lea, he cannot but be more disquieted, that he was, according to the command of God, at so much pains in the utit of seeking to have his conscience so well informed; which God never made a just ground of disquiet to the minds of his people: and his acquiescence in the determination of the public conscience or of the law of the land, must be as to many, or most, if not all divine positives in Religion, and the worship of God; for saith Mr. Hobbs page 249. They to whom God hath not spoken immediately, are to receive commands from the Sovereign; and consequently in every commonwealth, they who have no supernatural revelation to the contrary, ought to obey the Laws of their own Sovereign in the external acts, and profession of Religion; which draws dreadfully deep, as wilther appear from some of his instances; If(says he page 271.) it be asked, what if we be commanded by our lawful prince to say with our tongue, we believe not in Christ (he may as well add, we believe not that there is such a person as Christ) must we obey such a command? Profession with the tongue (sayeth he) is no more then any other gesture whereby we signifie our obedience, and wherein a Christian

holding firmly in his heart the faith of Christ, hath the same liberty that Elisha allowed to Naaman the Syrian; a great and grosse mistake, the Prophet allowed no such thing, but without giving any particular answer to his demand, since by what Mr. Hobbs confesseth he could not but know that what he desired (if indeed he desired it some learned men asserting that the words, contain a reflection upon a past unlawful? practice, and a begging forgiveness of it, and not a desire of a permission of anysuch practice for the future) was a sin and unlawful to be done; only bids him go in peace, wishing him well, and God's blessing to him, though not as to that particular; ere, sayeth he? Naaman believed in his heart, but by bowing before the Idol Rimmon, he denyed the true God in effect, as if he had done? it with his lips: (how dare he then be so bold, as to affirm that the Prophet allowed, and approved of his practice?) What then shall we say to that of our Saviour, whoever denyeth me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven? To this (sayeth he) We may say, that whatsoever a Subject, as Naaman was, is compelled to, in obedience to his Sovereign, and doth it not according to his own mind, but in Order to the Laws of his Countrey, that Action is not his, but his Sovereigns, nor is it be that in this case denyes Christ, but his Governour and the Law of his Countrey: O! what a wide door is opened here for grofest distimulation, and juglmg in the matters of God, and for the most palpable inconsistency betwixt the heart of ???, and his actions? The one manifestly contradicting, and elying the other; which

ought, especially in such cases, faithfully to correspond, and exactly to agree? What security, I pray, could men have upon earth one from another, in their Oaths, Covenants, oaths and Coacts, in their mutual Bargainings and dealings, if such a cursed latitude were allowed them, to say, promise and sweat one thing, and resolve another in their hearts? and shall that be allowed in matters wherein the honour of God is so much, and so nearly concerned, which is so abominable in the concerns of Men, all which comparatively are but trifles? Might not all Christian Martyrs of old, and Protestant ones of late, by such obedience to their respective lawful Sovereigns, in the several parts of the Christian World, have escaped and delivered themselves from being burnt alive? and from other bloody, violent and cruel deaths, and exquisite torments? and shall they not according to this detestable Doctrine be looked at, as a company of silly fools who needlessly threw away their lives, which they might thus have very easily preserved? or none of them, we know of, were ever by their Popish lawful Sovereigns enjoined, to say with their tongue, that they believed not in Christ, which yet, sayeth he, they might and should, have done, (keeping their mind to themselves, and to God) and much more those things which they were commanded: Further, page 239, 240, 241. He refers to the decision of the Sovereign, all sorts of Doctrine in effect, and more particularly and expressly, whether the Subjects shall profess, That life eternal and happiness shall be on the earth only? Whether the Soul of man is a living Creature independent on the Body, or doth subsist

separatly from the Body? Whether any meer man is Immortal, otherwayes then by the Resurrection of the last day? whether wicked men shall be tormented eternally, so as not to be destroyed, to die and be annihilated? at length? (to all which himself seemeth to be??? as his own opinions? O! wicked and wretched? O! atheistical, detestable and damnable opinions!) whether I say the Subject shall profess these things or not, he refers to the decision of the Sovereign? by which we may very easily judge in how many, and in how very momentuous things in Christian Religion, he ??? subjects, as to their outward profession and carriage? to stand to and acquiese in the decision and determination of the lawful Sovereign, in a Kingdom, or commonwealth, or of the public Conscience, or Law of ??????, which whether it be not to deny all Conscience ??? Subjects and private persons, in such matters as so nearly concern the eternal Salvation of their Immortal Souls, is obvious at first ??? It puts me in mind of what is reported of a great man (smelling strong of this Conscience-destroying-doctrine) who expostulating with some Countrey men, living under him, for their nor doing somewhat required of them by him; for which nonprformance when they pleaded Conscience, he in a great uffē, not without some execration, replied,—What have the like of you to do with a Conscience? Which was plainly on the matter to say with Hobbs, that they, and such as they should have no Conscience, but what is ductileand governable by the Conscience of lawful Rulers, and Superiours, and that their commands and

prohibitions make things just and adjust; which is (ayeth Mr. Lih in his Body of Divinity, page 378) to make Subjects beasts, and the Magistrat God. 2ly All priat persons living in a Kingdom, or commonwealth must hence furth, according to these Doctors, allown, and not in the feast regard in manythings, and those not of little moment in Religion, and the worship of God, their own Consciences as his Deputies, and have recourse to the public Conscience, or the Law of the Land, as the uniersal Depute set over all the Consciences of privat persons, living therein, nay to it as taking God's own room to make Laws directly, immediatly, and of themselves obligatory of all their Consciences, and to enjoin obedience to them, as so oblidging them; and must, contrary to the Scripture, no more notice the accusing or excusings of their own Consciences, but those only of the public Conscience. 3ly. The indispensibly requisite qualification of the obedience of Children to their Parents, Ephes. 6. v. 1. viz. In the Lord, (whereby the apostle doth undenyably lay it on the Children, to consider and judge by their judgement of private discretion, whether the commands and injunctions of their Parents be agreeable to the mind of the Lord, and such in obedience, whereto they may expect the Lord's approbation) must be casheered and abandoned; for certainly there lyeth no greater obligation on Subjects to obey the commands of the Sovereign power of the Kingdom, or Commonwealth, then lyeth on Children to obey their Parents, who were Sovereigns in Families, before ever there were any Kingdoms, or

Commonwealths erected, as himself every where asserts. 4ly. That if the apostles of our Lord should have been forbidden by the lawful Sovereigns of the Kingdoms, and commonwealths of the World to preach the Gospel, and Baptize, they should in obedience to them have forborne; which Mr. Hobbs plainly without a blush insinuates, when he says, page 311. Our Saviour gave his apostles power to preach and baptize in all parts of the world, supposing that they were not forbidden by their own lawful Sovereigns: Had they not their Commission from their Master in most ample form, without any the least either direct or indirect intimation of such an exception or mitigation? Math. 28:19:20. Go ye therefore (says he to them) and teach all nations? baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I command you; That is, of whatsoever nature they be, whether they be clear by the Law of Nature, or be divine positives, whoever forbid or command you o the contrary; and Mark 16? v. 15. Go ye (saith he to them) into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every Creature, which accordingy they did, v. 20. And they went forth and preached every where, not only where they were not forbidden; did they not preach the Gospel at Jerusalem, notwithstanding they were severaly, not without threatenings, forbidden by their own Sovereigns the Council? and tell them plainly, that they ought to obey God, rather then men, wherein they could not obey both; alleadging that they could not, but speak the things that they had heard and seen, without

any such regard (as might impede them in their work) to the strait threatenings and prohibition, to speak at all, or to preach in the name of Jesus: and least any should say, or think, that this was more than they had warrant for; we are told, after the inhibition to preach, and after their imprisonment for contravening, from which they were miraculously set free; that the Angel of the Lord, who had opened their Prison Doors, charged them thus, Go and stand and speak in the Temple to the people (whatsoever, the Rulers think of it, and notwithstanding they have inhibited and imprisoned you) all the words of this life; of all which the divine Historian gives us an account in the 4. and 5. Chapters of the Acts of the apostles: And why I pray doth he not as well make the supposition of their not being forbidden by any lawful Sovereign, as by their own? since he will not, neither doth deny, that lawful Sovereign Powers, may prohibit strangers within their own Dominions, to preach or practice against the Law, or public Conscience, and chastise them for contumaciousness, and disobedience (excepting always the persons of Ambassadors and envoys sent from other Civil. Sovereigns, which use to be accounted in a manner Sacred and Inviolable) as well as their own native Subjects: and if so, had the apostles been forbidden to preach and baptize, by the Sovereign power of every Kingdom, and commonwealth, whether they came (as they could not readily, nor reasonably expect but they would, all the Kingdoms and commonwealths of the world being then Pagan, excepting that of the Jews) where would they, or could

they have preached and baptized? and what would have become of the Gospel, and of a Gospel Church? Did not Paul and Silas after the Magistrats of the City of Philippi, had (it seems with their own hands, debasing themselves in their ury, below the dignity of their office) rent off their cloaths, laid many stripes on them, and casten them into prison, for their preaching, and teaching customs (as was alleadged by their accusers) Which were not lawful to be received or observed by them being Romans; did they not I say, go in and exhort, or preach to the brethren in the house of Lydia, and that after they were by the Magistrats desired to depart out of the City? as we may see, Acts 16:5ly. That private persons living in Kingdoms or commonwealths do not sin, and shall be kepted harmlesse in obeying the Laws and Commands of their lawful Sovereigns, though cross the dictats of their own Conscience, and it may be cross to the positive Commands of God; The first of these new Teachers, Mr. Hobbs tells us (as we show before in the first absurdity) in the cae of denying Christ before men, most dreadfully threatened by him with denying them before his Father, that whatever a Subject as Naaman was, is compelled eo in obedience to his Sovereign, and doth it not in order to his own mind, but in order to the Laws of his own countrey; that action is not his but his Sovereigns, nor is it he that in this case denyeth Christ, but his Sovereign and theLaw of his Countrey: and page 309. The Civil Sovereign, may make Laws uitable to his Doctrine (for he will have him to be the only Sovereign teacher of the people that are under him Iure divino; which quite ulls

the divine right of all the Ministers of the Gospel) Which may oblige men to such actions, as they would not otherways do and which he ought not to command, and when they are commanded they are Laws and the external actions that are done in obedience to them without the inward approbation, are the actions of the Sovereign, and not of the Subject, who, in that ??? but the Instrument? without any motion of his own at all, because God hath commanded to obey them; Alas! the poor Subject is here by him not only robbed of his judgement of private discretion and Conscience, as to his own acts, which is hard enough; but in a manner, of a humane rational Soul, if not also of a sensitive one, and so degraded and detrued below the very beasts that perish; For he makes him a meer instrument without any motion at all only he somewhat recovers him from his brut, yea infra-brutal state, by making him capable to obey Commands, though against his Conscience: The other Hobbist Doctor, who will not be outstriped by his Master, according to his manner dictateth very Magisterially? That if there be any sin in the command of the Sovereign Power; he that imposed it shall answer it, and not I. whose whole duty is to obey; the Command of Authority will warrant y obedience, my obedience will hallow, at least excuse my action, and so secure me from sin, if not from error: very easie, sot, and smooth Doctrine indeed, for private Persons and Subjects. If its teachers could assure us of its certain and inallible truth, and of its consonance and agreeableness with the Scriptures of truth; But Subjects must not cast their Souls

at hp-hazard, on the bare and unproved asserts of these Gentlemen, who give us no great proof of either their truth or tendernesse in other great concerns of Religion; Especially since the divinely inspired apostle reacheth us quite other Doctrine, while he tells us, more generally. 2. Corinthians 5. v. 10. That we must all appear (ore made manifest) before the judgement seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body (whether commanded by Superiours or not) according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad; And more particularly, Romans 14. v. 12. So then every one of us shall give an account of himself, (not another for him) to God; and Gal. 6. v. 4, and 5. But let every man prove his own work, ad then shall he have rejoycing in himself alone, and not in another; For every man shall bear his own burden; And 1 Corinthians 3. v. 8. And every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own Labour: And indeed these Teachers by their flattering the Sovereign Powers, put them to make a very heavy reckoning and by their pretending to gratifie them, lay on them a great and insupportable burden; Which, when well considered, will be found very much to embitter all the sweet of that exhorbitant, and incompetent power granted to them. I would have none to think, that by anything said, I design in the least to derogat from lawful Authority and the civil Magistrat anything that is due thereunto, God forbid I should; I heartilie acknowledge Magistracy to be the ordinance of God; Romans 13. v. 1, 4. And Magistrats to be by office Ministers of God to us for good; to whom, for begetting and maintaining a just

aw, dread and veneration of them, he hath imparted and communicated some of his own names, or stiles, calling them God's, even such as are his Levetennants, Vicegerents and? Representers on earth; and would beseech, and obtest that all of us mayrender, as unto God the things that are God's, so to Cesar the things that are Cesars. As to fear God so to honourthe King; that every soul be subject to the higher powers, subject not only for wrath, but for conscience sake. That we all submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the King, as Supream, or unto Governours, as unto themthat are sin: by him for the punishment of evil doors, and the praise of them that do well; For so is the will of God, that with well doing we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. That we be subject, to principalities and powers, and obey Magistrates. And that first of all supplications and prayers, and intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men for Kings and ? all that are in authority, that We may lead a quiet and peacable life in all godliness and honesty: Cheerfully allowing to them all that the Scriptures of the old and new Testaments, and the Consessions of Faith of the Reformed Churches of Christ allow unto them: and whoever have taught, or held, or do teach, and hold the contrary, whatever be their pretentions and professions, are not only, not true Presbyterians, but in so far, not true Protestants, yea not true Christians, but the disgrace, shame and reproach of Presbyterie, Protestanise? and Christianity, so far as in them lyes; for their way hath a manifest tendency to

fasten such unworthy imputations on these interesis, though they can cause no inherent blemishes in them, no more then fogs and mists can do in the Sun, abeit they may eclipse and obscure its glory: Let us make the supposition that the apostles of our Lord had taught such Doctrine, as some very few, one or two have of late taught, and do still teach (which yet we cannot with any shadow of truth make; For these divinly and infallibly inspited persons could teach no such Doctrine) What ground of jealousy and prejudice would it have given to all the Secular Powers of the World against the Gospel of Christ? As if the design of it had been to rune all Civil Authority, and to instigat its disciples to root out all Civil Magistrats and Rulers; how would it have set them on, and not without some reason, with implacable fury to have by all means stifled the Gospel-Christian Church, in the very Infancy and Cradle thereof? whereas the Doctrine of Christ, and His apostles teaching no such thing, but most clearly, convincingly and fully, the contrary; it made the Civil powers their persecuting its Preossors utterly in excusable, and their sufferings by them to be truly ous? and it is worthy observation, that the time wherein our Lord Christ, and his apostles? Paul and Peter gave these fore mentioned Commands, and Instructions to Christians, relating to their duty, to the Superiour Civil Powers, was, when Tiberius, Calgula, Claudi us? and Nero were Roman Emperours; none o whom were the best nor near the best? even of Pagan Emperours, and some of them were very Monsters of men. Only it would be carefully looked to, that

foundations be not shaken, and put out of course, and that ancient boundaries and landmarks be not removed; which no Christian Civil Sovereigns, in Kingdoms or Common wealths, keeping them, selves in the Line of due and just Subordination to the Majesty of God, the great and absolute Superiour, and Sovereign, the King of Kings, by and under whom all Kings reign, will allow of, or give way unto, whatever un-hallowed Hobbists, profanely and impiously suggest to the contrary: Whose principles (whatever they pretend to grant to the Civil Sovereigns of Kingdoms, and commonwealths) are a manifest tendence to the unhinging, and utter dissolving of all government? For let us in short, but suppose these four things, which Hobbs very Magisterially, tanquam ex tripode, dictats, and takes fore granted, in his forcited book. 1. That all Religion is bottomd on human Authoritie, and precariously borrowed from the will and pleasure of men, and hath no divine authoritie of its own; whereby (as ingenious and acute Sir Charles Wosly, in his unreason ableness of athiesm, says?) an inrode is made upon its best desence; for indeed (sayeth he) it will never be kept up with any other interest in the Consciences of men; and where it is not supported by conscience? it is ever tottering, and yeilds to the blasts of every humane pleasure; if once (sayeth the same learned Gentleman it be taken foregranted, that the Scripturs have no authoritie but what the Civil Power gives them; they will soon come upon a divine account to have none at all. adly. That the apostles could not make their writings obligatory Canons without the help of the Sovaign???

Powers, and that therefore the Scripture of the new Testament, is the only law there; where the Civil Power makes it so; as if forsooth the Divine Authority stamped thereon by the absolute Sovereign, by the great and infallible Legis lator carried with it no immediat obligati on the Consciences of Men to whom it comes, to receive and obey it as his Law; Whosoever besteveth (sayeth Sir Charles Woolsl) That it is in the power of every state, whether the Gospel shall be authentick, or not, he must needs throw off all divine respect to it, and be in a very fair way to trouble himself little with any devotion arising from it. 3ly. That there is no distinction of good and evil Actions but by the Civil Law, which is unto him the measure thereof; though this distinction of good and evil be deeply and indeleibly engraven on the hearts of all men, as a native and necessary result of the faith of the being of God, as the supream rectitude. 4ly. That there are no ultra-mundan, or eternal rewards or punishments, nor any beyond or beside these that are bestowed or inflicted by the Civil Power in this present life; though from the beginning of the world, throughout all ages, experience hath given in full demonstrative? and undenyable evidence, that men have been mightily impelled and encouraged to do good by the hope of future eternal rewards, and proportionably restrained, pulled back, and deterred from doing evil, by the fear of future and eternal punishments; If (I say) we once suppose these things, we quite ruine and rze the great foundations? not only of revealed and supernatural, but also of natural Religion; without which it is impossible,

that government amongst men, can have any sure or firm basis to rest on; but must needs, according to the prevalency of their selfinterests, crumble into pieces, and end in Anarchy and Confusion. It is not altogether unworthy of remark here, that Hobbs runneth quite cross to the dictats of famed Matchiavel, that prodigie of profound policy, though but a very coarse Divine, who labours much in his Prince to persuade Sovereign Civil Powers of the necessity and advantage, for the supportance of government, of dissembling and pretending at least, a great regard and veneration to Religion; in comparison of whom, the other is but an impolitick Puny, and a far worse divine, even (if it involved not a repugnancy) a diabolick one.

Fifthly, We would take heed that we do not supinely, and carelessly neglect and slight the checks, challenges, rebukes and accusations of our Consciences, in lesser things, or in matters of comparatively smaller moment (wherein yet Conscience hath a concern, as it hath in all our Moral Actions; neither are many, even of our Natural Actions, as circumstantiated quite excluded from its concern) for that insensibly weakens the voice, checks and rebukes of Conscience in more momentuous matters, and may pre-dispose and prepare to trifle with it in these too, and may provoke God, whose deputy Conscience is, to enjn it silence, and to suffer the man to go on securely in sin without check or challenge? while yet in the mean time, he secretly commands it to write up, and keep a record of all these Items against him, and in due time to set them all in order, to marshal, as it were,

and draw them up in rank and file before him in a terrible manner, and to give him at once a most furious charge: challenges and accusations of Conscience, that have been smothered for the time, and slighted after lying long silent, have in some notable strait and difficulty arisen and got up upon men many years thereafter; as these of Iosephs Brethren did on them, full twenty years at least, after their pitielesse, cruel, un-natural, inhumane and barbarous usage of their poor innocent younger Brother: A secure, silent and none-challenging ill Conscience is amongst the worst of ill Consciences, and in some respect worse then a turbulent, stormie and roaring ill Conscience, (if it come not to the hight of despair?) because disposing the man athiestically to think, that because God by himself and his deputy the Conscience, keeps silence, he is therefore like unto the man himself, and that neither he nor his deputy will ever speak again, nor reprove for those things, but that he hath quite forgotten them all, and will not any morecall to a reckoning for them, O! that such as forget God, and sight his challenges and reproofs by their own Conscience, would consider this, least he tear them in pieces, when there will be none to deliver: It may also provoke him to speak that very angry and terrible word, Hos. 4. v. 17. more terrible some way then if he should say, famine, fire, sword, pestilence, and wilde beasts fall on the man, he is joined to his Idols (and so straitly joined that he will listen to no challenges of his Conscience checking him for maintaining the conjunction; nor to any suggestion of it, perswading him to divorce from them, or to unle any

of the knots of that cursed conjunction) let him alone, let him sin on, and by sinning treasure up to himself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement o' God. Beside that such a silent, sleeping and stupified Conscience through often trading challenges under foot, will at last waken and flee in the ungodly man's face, and as a fierce mastive Dog, or ravening Wolf take him by the Throat, and become his Burrio and Tormenter and perhaps, for eviting the trouble and terror of it, put him (though a poor and pitiful, desperat and distracted shift) to be his own murderer and executioner; or if it should keep silence to death, and even then not disquiet him, yet it will in Hell, as a never dying worm gnaw the heart of him, and as a ravenous vulture tear out, as it were his very bowels; and by its yelling and roaring, by its biting and renting the very cul of his heart, make him a hell to himself in hell, and so make a double hell to him: Alas! even the godly themselves may by somewhat of this guilt, raise great storms of trouble and disquiet in their own Consciences.

Sixthly. We would by all means guard against counteracting and running cross to the plain and downright dictats of our Consciences, especially when clearly informed by the Word; for this is a high daring, malepert, affronting, despling and disowning of God's Deputy, and as it were a violent putting him off the Bench; the language whereof is, that if God himself the Lord of the Conscience, were or could possibly be, as much in the man's reverence, as he supposeth his Conscience to be, he would deal with him at the same rate, and serve him

with the same measure: this brings on dedolency, stupidity and caurerizing of Conscience, makes stout against God, hold and impudent in sinning, it makes the man's heart harder then an Adamant, it makes him to be of a brazen brow, and to put on a whores forehead, so that he? will not at all think shame, nay not so much as blush, but confidently wipe his mouth, and say, What have I done? and very readily it brings on all the dreadful effects mentioned in the foregoing Caution; and fills the world of the visible Church with prodigles of profanitie and monsters of mischief, and even in a manner bringsup hell upon earth, when it becomes habituall, and when God judicially gives men up to their own hearts lufts, and to walk in their own counsels, without all regard to what he says to them by his word without them, and by their own Consciences within them.

Seventhly, We would carefully advert that we adventure not to do anything with an unclear, he sitant and doubting Conscience; since it is impossible in this case to do without sin and hazard of damnation, the Holy Ghost having positively and plainly told us, that whatsoever is not done in faith is sin; Rom 14 v. last. That is? not only whatsoever is not done by a person in a state of faith (without which it is impossible to please God) is sin; but also and most agreeable to the scope, whatsoever is not done in the faith and perswasion of the warrantableness theros is so, and that he who thus doubtingly, and without such faith and perswasion eateth, o doth, is damned, or judged. Ibid. It will not asoil the doer doubtingly, or the doubting doer from sin and judgement, to tell him that

his Conscience is in an error, and that he is not to regard what his erronious? Conscience dictats to him, but to act contrarie to it; I sue indeed, that an erring Conscience doth not oblige a man to act according to its blind and erronious dictats, for a man never is, neither can be obliged to sin, he is rather bound to endeavourin God's way to have his Conscience, when in an error, un deceived and well informed, and so to lay aside his error, but yet while his Conscience still continueth in its error, and cometh not to be informed aright, the man is bound up so, that he cannot without sin counteract the dictats of his erring Conscience, which is not for the time apprehended by him to be in an error: neither will it relieve the mn whose Conscience doubteth of the lawfulness of doing such and such a thing, to tell him that more knowing and consciencious, more prudent and pious men then he? are free and clear for the thing whereof he doubts; for other men's Conscience can be no rule to his, unless he were persuaded of their infallibility, and that their Conscience could not be taken with any error or mistake: God hath put a Conscience in every man, as his Deputy, to whose dictats he is carefully to take heed, and hath not made the Conscience of any one man, or Societie of men, his Depute over all the Consciences of other men: I shall easily grant, that when the Consciences of more knowing, more tender and more consciencious men then my self, dictat to them the warrantableness of such and such a practice? I am called to be holily jealous over, and suspicious of my sel, impartially to examine the reasons of their clearnesse,

and on that occasion to search very scrutinously, narrowly, and exactly into the grounds of my own unclearnesse, hesitation and doubting, and to be much and earnest in prayer to God, with unbiased singleness and sincerity? For sending forth his light and truth to guide and lead me: But if notwithstanding all this, my doubt still remains; and it may be also, that there are several other godly and judicious persons that are doubtful and unclear with me; I cannot in that case warrantably give up my self to be implicitly determined by the Conscience of others, whatever their qualifications be, or whatever my veneration may be for them, nor am I bound to act my self with a doubting Conscience; since I am expresly fold by the infallible Scriptures of Truth, that I cannot act in that case without sin, and without incurring the hazard of damnation; and that no man can keep me harmless in doing so, Since every man must give an account of himself to God: And if I shall do one thing with a doubting Conscience, because ??? may be mistaken, and in an error; or because such and such godly and knowing persons are free for it, what a wide door would this open? why may I not do another thing of greater moment doubtfully, and another after that, and third after that? where shall I stay or stop, and when shall there be an end of such Conscience doubting actions? especially in times wherein troubles and tentations snares and offences do abound wherein, as there hath been, so there will readily still be different sentiments and apprehensions as to some lesser and lower truths further removed from the

fundamentals of Religion (where about all are agreed) and so proportionably as to ??? practices among even truly godly men; it not being to be supposed that while Saints so journ, and are militant here on earth, the intellectuals of all of them will be of the same size, or cast into the same mould, that their light will be of the same clearness, and that they will be all of equal mortification, self-denyednesse, tenderness, unhy affedness, fingleness, holy zeal, resolution, courage and boldness; which as it says, that there will be more clearness? and more darkness and doubting amongst them, at least as to some remote things: So it speaks the necessity of mutual Christian for beaance? compassion? and Sympathie? And it hath been a very generally received maxime in matters of Conscience, that in dubiis tuius ist abstinere, in things that are doubtful (at least as to their very substance (to say so) and not only as to somewhat extrinsick to them) is safest? to abstain.

Eightly. We would in the case of indifferent things, wherein we are clear ourselves, and fully persuaded of our own Christian liberty, be very tender of the Consciences of others, who may in that respect be more weak, and not so fully clear and persuaded? about them; least we offend and wound their Conscience; and so indirectly consequently and by the rebound, offend and wound ou ow.Conscience? here the apostles directions, assertions, precepts and practice, Romans 14:1 Corinthians 8:9 and 10. Chapters are singularly useful, admirably apposit and excellent; O! that the Apostolick primitive Christian amiable tendernesse in the matter of

offence, in the use of things indifferent, were brought back to and revived in this much declined and degenerated generation, wherein offences abound, and the love of many waxeth cold; and wherein there is a great propension and readinesse, untenderly and uncharitably to give and to take offence. I do not by this in the least insinuat, that for preventing the offence (or rather displeasure) of any, we may warrantably do or forbear anything that God hath commanded or prohibited the doing of; or that we should or may run cross to the dictats of our own Consciences, or do anything with an unclear and doubting Conscience; which is alwayes sin, and therefore never o be adventured on, offend and be displeased who will; though even in that case, their offence should be a grief to us, as it was to the apostle (whose exercise it was to have alwayes a Conscience void of offence towards God and toward men) who said, Who is offended and I burn not?

Ninthly. We would take heed to, and be aware of pretending Conscience in anything, about which we have no real exercise, doubt or scruple of Conscience; as for instance? in the first place, if professors of Religion should pretend Conscience, for abstaining from such and such a practice, only from long custome of doing so, from the example of others, or from loathness to displease them, or only from dis-inclination to, or aversion from the thing, which they will not readily abide by, if any considerable suffering, whether of emergent loss, or cessant gain be met with on account thereof; whereby it comes to pass that Conscience, and truly

Conscientious persons, are expoed to contempt and scorn; Some standers by and lookers-on, taking occasion to think and say, that such persons have all the while been acted by no real principle of Conscience, but only by humour, or at best by the example of others, to the great reproach of Religion, and the holy profession there of; and such as have a natural and unreasonable prejudice at all serious godlinesse and tendernesse of Conscience, ly at the wait to fish and catch all advantages so fortifying themselves in their prejudice, and are ready to draw their conclusions not only, nor so much against the particular persons, as against the whole generation of conscientious and godly people, yea against godlinesse itself, and tendernesse of Conscience? their prejudice prompting them to think and say, We alwayes thought that sort of men were not truly conscientious and godly, whatsoever they professed; and now we see and find them to be so, and that we were not mistaken, but in the right, when we thought them to be such; they are all such, all of a piece, acted by no true principle of Conscience, but by humour, peevishnesse, or some such thing, notwithstanding of all their high floun pretensions of Conscience; for let them but be put a little to it, and all their Conscience-pretensions will be quite relinquished and evanish, and they will be, and do like others; which gives ground to sober and truely conscientious persons to think, that it were better, and more for the advantage and credit of Religion, and of the real pleas of Conscience, that it were never pretended in such things, where it is only pretended? I will not, I dar not say, but a

truly consciencious person may, by the more close approaches of trouble and suffering on the account of some particular debated practice, or forbearance, be put upon more narrow and exact inquiry into, and examination of the grounds and reasons of that practice, or forbearance; And may after such inquiry and examination, come, from more clear light, to have different apprehensions about the thing, from what he had, before; Though the clearness win at, which is waited with the eschewing of trouble and suffering, would be holily jealous and suspected, and brought to the light of the Word to be thereby scrutinously, accurately and impartially tried, least self-love in such a case bribe (as it were) and bias the persons judgement and light. 2dly. When Conscience is pretended in minute, small petty and comparatively inconsiderable things, while in the mean time little, or no Conscience at all is made of, but vast and unlimited latitudes are taken in, the most momentous, and weighty things of Religion; as the Pharisees pretended Conscience, in tithing the smallest herbs, as mint, anise and rue, while in the mean time, they passed over without making any bones of them. Judgement and the Love of God; which is straining at gnats and swallowing of camels. 3dly. When Conscience is pretended for men's tenacious adhering to human traditions, while in the meantime they make no Conscience of making void the Law of God; as the same Pharisees did, for which our Lord, with holy severity inveigheth against them. 4ly. When Conscience is pretended for not shedding the blood of Innocents; and

yet notwithstanding the same things are adventured on, and wickedly per-petrated, when they come in competition with men's worldly wealth, or preferment, or with the gratifying of great ones in order to the former; as it was with Pilat in the matter of condemning Christ, of whose innocence he was throughly convinced, and accordingly did thrice over hear public testimony to it; yet when he was told, that if he did let him go, and condemned him not to death, he was not Cesars friend, he forthwith proceeded to the condemnatory Sentence, and delivered him to the persecuting and murdering Jews to be crucified; and, poor wretch, he imagined, that the silly shift of washing his hands in water, would wash and purge his deeply fild Conscience, from the guilt and pollution contracted by shedding of that innocent and most precious Bloo bu it stuck faster to, and was more stiffly barkned on his Conscience, then to be so easily washed off: and with such poor and pitiful shifts, do such men think or fancie to pacifie their Consciences, and to purge them from the defilements of the greatest, most clamant and horrid crimes: If Pilat had any real demurr in his Conscience about the thing (as very probably he had) his counteracting it on so base and unworthy accounts, andthen foolishly fancieing, that by such an empty ceremonie, as washing his hands in water, he could be washed from the guilt of so arocious a Crime, were high aggravations of it. 5ly. When men pretend Conscience as the reason of their not committing the least sin, nay of their not doing somethings that are very debateable, whether they be sins or not; while in the

mean time they make no Conscience to stretch furth their hand to, ay with an high hand to adventure on the commission of sins? that are incontravertably very great, and gross, as the Pharisees pretended Conscience, for their not going to the Iudgement Hall, least forsooth, they should be defiled, and so unfitted to eat the Passover, who yet made no scruple maciously to embrew their wicked hands in the blood of the person, that was God, and typified by the Passover. 6ly. When Conscience, or a conscientious regard is pretended for divine institutions and ordinances, meerly and mainly from pickque and prejudice at the most tender and conscientious persons, as if their warrantable and consistent practices, were the grossest violations and greatest viifyings of them, and plain inconsistencies with a just regard for them? How often thus did the Scribes and Pharisees quarrel with our Lord and his Disciples, as breakers and profaners of the Sabbath? because of somethings done by him, and them thereon, not in the least in-compatible with the sanctification thereof; as if they themselves had been more tender of the due observation of the Sabbath, then either the Disciples, or their Lord and Master was. 7ly. (to give no more instances) when Conscience is pretended for keeping, and not breaking of sinful engadgements, vowes and oaths wherewith men have rashly bound themselves; As suppose a man should rashly vow and swear, that he will be avenged at the highest rate on another, because of either an imagined or real, a lesser or greater injurie done him; and as Herod sware, very inconsiderarly and rashly, that he would give

the dancing daughter of the incestuous Mother Herodias, whatever she should ask of him, even to the half of his Kingdom; who asking at her Mothers instigation, the head of Iohn the Baptist (which was of more worth then the whole, let be the half of his Kingdom) and he judging himself bound by his oath, to grant her desire, accordingly gave order (its said, for his oaths sake) to the Executioner to behead him in the Prison without any tryal, or so much as a hearing? though it was indeed against the light of his natural Conscience; he having been convinced, that he was not only an innocent, but also a just man and holy, and accordingly observed him, and did manythings, enjoined him by Iohn, and heard him gladly; as if unlawful and sinful oaths rashly come under, could in conscience bind men to act against the plainest and most palpable dictats of their own Conscience? whereas they ought rather to repent, and pray for the pardon of such engagements, vows and oaths, and forthwith to break them, since *Iuramentum nunquam potest esse vinculum iniquitatis*, an oath can never be a bond of iniquitie, or oblige men in Conscience to commit what is palpably a sin.

Tenthly. We would be aware, that we do not inconsideratly, rashly and precipitantly adventure upon any action, or meddle with any bussiness, especially of moment, before deliberat and serious consulting with our Conscience; (endeavouring always to have it well informed by the Word) which either, makes many such actings and meddlings to be afterwards reflected on with a challenging and disquieted Conscience; or tempts us to

endeavour the biasing, and bribing (as it were) of our own Conscience, towards a sort of justifying us in what we have done? or if neither of these should be, (which seldom cometh to passe) we are greatly in hazard to be very loath, reluctant and shy to hear, and lay due weight upon the after animadversions, and censures of our Conscience upon these actings and medlings, being over and by, and not now reversible: O! how safe and sure might we be in all our actings, movings and medlings; and with how much peace might we reflect on them, if we did alwayes call and admit God's testimonies, and our own Consciences enlightned and informed by them, to be our advisers and counsellours; the neglect whereof makes many rugged, disorderly, irregular and unpeacable steps in our walk: That man only walks surely, that walks uprightly, in single and unbiased compliance with the dictats of the Spirit of God in the Scriptures, and of his own Conscience conform thereunto; most certainly in the multitude of consultations, with such counsellours there is safety.

Eleventhly, We would carefully take heed that we do not baffle and prostitute Conscience, either by swearing at all by our Conscience, let be ordinarily and customarily, (too much incident to many proest Christians, to the great scandal of Christian Religion) which beside the unnecessaryness of it, at least in most cases, is never in any case warrantable; Conscience, though God's Deputy, being but a creature, as Heaven, Earth and our Heads are, Math. 5.v. 34, 35, 36. (by which we ought not at all to swear, being expresly forbidden by the Lord to do so)

and so never to be sworn by; Swearing being a piece, and a very solemn piece of God's Worship, and often put for the whole Worship of God, in the Scriptures, where we are called to swear by him only: Deut. 6. v. 13. and 20. v. 10. or where swearing by it is much, or altogether abstained from and it may be somewhat abhorred, yet we would not dar to debase, vilifie and (as I said) to prostitute Conscience ordinarily, and on every light and trivial occasion, by saying in conscience, or on my conscience; which in common discourse, without any the least necessity, is sure more then Yea and Nay, and so according to the Lord's own determination (precisly to be stood too) cometh of evil; neither will they really be found to be amongst the tenderest or most truly religious and conscientious persons; whatever be their professions of, or pretensions to Religion or Conscience, to whom this is most familiar; for by this customary and habitual solemn asserting every light, minute, and trifling matter (when withall it is offensive to tender ears) men may be tempted in other things to make too boldwith their Conscience, which they thus debase, if not, even upon such petty occasions now and then to swear by it: Conscience is a very tender thing, and would be very tenderly dealt with, and in nothing in the least bourded or dallid with; and we are expresly commanded to abstain from all appearance of evil. 1 Thessalonians 5. v. 22.

Twelfthly. and finally, We would by all means take heed and beware that we do not mock, deride or flout at Conscience, and conscientious Persons (which no man

that hath any Conscience will dare to do, no to deny the power of it? nay the Atheist himself (as Sir Charles Woolsly sayeth well) cannot with all his skill disband his own fears, nor run away from his Conscience, no more then he can run away from himself; he finds seasons wherein he smarts under the lashes of it.) No take up, entertain and harbour any prejudice and pique at them, as if such, by the tenderness, doubts and scruples of their Consciences, disturbed the repose, peace, tranquillitie, and free acting of all the Countreys, Corporations and Societies, greater and smaller wherin they live? and made a very unpleasant, uncheerful and disquieted life to the persons themselves: or to think that it were a great advantage to the World, that all such persons were out of it, or clustered together by themselves only, in some remote corner of it; for whose nice and strait laced (as they call it) Conscience and its inquiries, scruples, and doubts, they cannot get leave to live quiet, and to act with that freedom they would be at: Alas! if such had their desire, and all doubts, checks and restraints of Conscience were removed from men; what confusion disorder, and distraction would the World run into? How instantly would it be turned into a very shambles? How would men, the greatest part of men turn like roaring Lyons, and ravening Wolves, as cruel Tygers, or savage wild Boars, one to another? How would it be filled with violence? rapine and blood? How would the greatest and most abominable villanies walk up and down in it, in the very streets and concourses of the People, un controlled, barefaced, not in masquerad, or under any disguise? How

would reasonable men be as so many incarnat devils, or brut beasts? such would take heed that this be not found to be the interpretative language of these thoughts; O! that there were not such a thing as Conscience God's Deputy in men, in the World; And, O! that there were not a God to appoint, commissiona, and establish such Deputies under him: I shall not deny (having plainly asserted it before) That an ill informed Conscience waited especially with any forwardness, may make very sad work amongst men, and prove a very troublesome and cumbersome neighbour; But alas! why should the blame be laid on Conscience? as Conscience, what evil hath innocent Conscience done? The general great advantages that come to the World with the many mischiefs that are kept of it by Conscience, are infinitely greater, and more valuable, then any little prejudices and disadvantages that now and then, here and there come by the ill?informed turbulent Consciences of some particular persons: neither will I altogether deny, but the tenderest Consciences of truly godly men may sometimes dispose them to jealous, and suspect themselves, where they are not indeed guilty, as it did the eleven honest Disciples, when the Lord told them that one of the twelve should betray him, and through some weaknesse, may now and then disquiet and give them the allarme, when there is little or no ground for it: But I must say, that this may be very easily dispensed, and born with, since that little damage (if it may be called so) will be easily and quickly compensated by its giving the allarme, and causing suitable disquiet, when there is

just ground for it; Here a tender Conscience may be resembled to a vigilant and strict sentinal set to watch a house, lying in midst of Thieves and Robbers; who will sometimes on a mistake awake and allarme, and it may be at mid-night raise all the family, and put them into some fright? as if Thieves and Robbers were breaking in upon them; but they think the lesse of this, and bea the better with it, abeing sure that when the Thiefe or Robber comes in very deed, he will give them the allarme; and there are very few, or none, that will not far rather chue to have one or two, yea everal false allarmes, though somewhat disquieting, then to want a true one, when there is just ground for it; And when, by means thereof they may prevent the cutting of their Throats, or spoiling of their Goods.

Let then the Conscience be well informed by the Word; let its dictats according thereunto, be tenderly complied with, and none of them counteracted; and let its checks, challenges, accusations; with its answers, testimonies and excuses, according to their respective grounds and reasons, be carefully listned to and admitted; in a word, let all study once to have a good Conscience, and to be always exercised to keep it void of offence toward God and toward men: And then great honour and glory would redound to God, the Lord and Sovereign of the Conscience; suitable and due deference would be given to his Word, as that whereby the Conscience is rightly informed; the peace of men's own Consciences would flow as a river; the offending and stmbing of others would be much prevented; the profession of the Doctrine

of the Gospel of Christ would be much adorned and beautified; and men of all Ranks, Stations, Capacities, and Relations; As Magistrats and Subjects, Pastors and Flocks, Husbands and Wives, Parents and Children, Masters and Servants, Teachers and Schollars, Buyers and Sellers, and so forth. would be blessings from God one to another, which would make a little Heaven upon Earth: To all which these few excellent Semons are singularly contributive; That they may therefore come with a special blessing to all the Readers of them, and more particularly to the Inhabitants of the City of GLAS GOW, (where they were Preached many years agoe) is the desire of

Novemb. 1:1684.

Your Servant in the Gospel I. C.

In the epistle, page 5. l. 4: r. renewing. p. 20. l. 29. r. Representces p. 20. l. 6:1:1 Timothy l. last r. professors. p. 22. l. 6. r. upon the Conciences.

Page 1

HEAVEN upon EARTH in a Serene and Smiling good Conscience.

SERMON I.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

may consider, First, As looking to God's knowledge going alongst with ours, and ours going alongst with his, and thus it implyes as his knowledge of all our thoughts, words and ways, so our knowledge together with his of these, or our taking notice of them with respect to his knowledge. 2. We may consider it as reflex-knowledge joined with a directPage 6knowledge, as for instance when a man hath a direct knowledge of Prayer as his duty, and a reflex knowledge going along with the practise or exercise of the duty, whereby he sees and discerns himself, either to behave suitably in it, or to be faulty; in this respect Conscience is a practical knowledge taking notice by a reflex act of a man's ways. 3. We may consider it as comprehending a knowledge of God's Law, and then it signifies a knowledge of ourselves compared with the Law, it hath knowledge of the rule, and so of what is duty and what is sin, and withall it hath in it the knowledge of ourselves and of our conformity or disconformity to the rule;Conscience then in this respect is a man's knowledge of God's will and of himself as compared with it. 4. We may consider this co knowledge as it supposeth beside the knowledge of ourselves, the knowledge of something taking notice of us, or of something deputed in us by God to keep a record of all our carriage and particular actions, and so it is looked on as some way different from us; hence it is called a Testimony, the testimony of our conscience. Hence also a man will appeal to his Conscience; and it doth when in any measure in exercise, impartially and incorruptly bear witness, and a man Conscience will

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Page 49

SERMON IV.

ACTS 24:16.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON V.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON VI.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

89
speak of a Conscience that mistaketh not, and of a Person that doth not mistake his Conscience; And therefore though Conscience prejudge a man of the comfortable application of this Mark, yet it ceaseth not for that to be a Mark. 2ly. When we speak of it as a Mark of Sincerity, we mean not so much of a persons actual attainment, as of his sincere endeavour; when he dispenseth not with himself, in any sin, nor in the omission of any known duty, but is aiming honestly in every thing, to approve himself to God, as it is, Hebrews 13:18. We trust (saith the apostle) we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly; The Testimony is founded more on the sincere aim and endeavour, then what is actually attained. 3ly? In the Doctrine, we said, A Believer in a good frame, will so aim to live as he may have a good Conscience in all things, and the Objection supposeth only, that when he is not in a good frame, he cannot have a good Conscience; and that we grant; for he may indeed? by his carnal frame and walk, spoil and rob himself of the comfortable application of this Mark, and so there is no inconsistencie here. 4ly. This standeth firmly as a truth, that though a Believer had many other Marks, yet they cannot bear him comfortably through, if he want this sincere endeavour to keep a good Conscience; And it is so very necessary to a Christian walk, that a Believer dare not conclude his sincerity, when he (contrary to his light) dispenseth with himself in the commission of any known sin, or in the omission of any known duty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 restlesnesse 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 waketh, 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 toPage 111do 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 warrant 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 prejudice 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 utter room (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 marded, 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?? performance 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.

SERMON I.

ROM. 9:1. I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my Conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.

THE Lord our God is the true God, a God of truth, even truth itself, the first great original and eternal truth, who by the most absolutePage 148perfection of his incomprehensibly blessed Nature is infinitely removed, as from all possibility of being ??? or imposed on by a lie himself, so from all possibility of deceiving or lying to others; and to say (as some daring men of late have done) that God may deceive, if he will, is not only of harsh sound in Christian ears, but to be exploded and execrated; as insinuating, that the glorious Majesty of God might, if he would, and so pleased, cease to be the God of truth, or a true God; Which considering the identification of the Divine Nature and Attributes, is as much as to say, that he might, if he would? cease to be God; As the strength of Israel cannot lie? neither is he a man that he should lie; so he loveth truth in the inward parts; and commandeth men to speak truth every one to his neighbour, and peremptorily, prohibieth all lying, not only all pernicious lying on design to hurt? but also all officious lying, to bring about some good to, or to divert some notable evil from themselves or others; and lying in sport to make others merry, and all emerarious rash lying through customary loosess and???, called (it seems) in the Scripture, the way of lying; And the more that men abhor lying, and love to speak the truth, they

are in so far the ??? like God, and the more unlike the Devil, who abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him, and who when he speaks a lie, speaks it of his own (it's ??? and solely his own and none of God's) for he is a liar, and the father of it: We would therefore watchfully guard against all lying under whatsoever pretext, and look well that we always speak truth, especially when we interpose Conscience, and yet more especially when we appeal to God as witness of the truth of what we say or affirm; According to the practice of the apostle here, who (being one that exercised himself, to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men) no doubt made conscience always to speak truth, more especially, when he had used any more than ordinary solemn protestation, or attestation, as he doth in these words; ThePage 149scope whereof is, to roll away all ground of stumbling from his Country-men the Jews, and from any others who might think because of some of his discourses concerning them, that he regarded them not, and that he was very indifferent, whether they were saved or perished; and to concilia their affection and respect to the Doctrine of the Gospel, and to his person for the Gospels, and their own souls sake: In which words we have 1. His assertion concerning the heaviness and sorrow of his heart for them his brethren according to the flesh; Which he sets down first positively, I speak the truth: Then negatively? I lie not, 2dly. The confirmation of the truth of his assertion, which to make it the more solemn, weighty, and convincing, and (if it might be) the more gaining of the Jews, is threefold, 1. It's in Christ,

insinuating thereby that he is a believer in Christ that asserts this truth, and one that draws strength from Christ to enable him to what he asserts and referreth to the honour of Christ as his main end in it, and withall expects God's acceptance of him therein on Christ's account, and for his sake. The 2. is, My Conscience (an upright impartial and tender thing, when right) bearing me witness as to the truth of what I assert. The 3. is, in the Holy Ghost, That is. it is affirmed by one who hath an enlightened and habitually sanctified Conscience by the Holy Ghost: by one who is acted by him, and in a sanctified frame for the present; Nay, by one infallibly guided and inspired by the Holy Ghost as his Pen-man in writing this as a piece and passage of Divine Scripture.

I shall not here speak particularly to all the points of Doctrine that might be deduced from these words, but to such only as make for clearing the purpose that we have in hand, and that is, the particular influence that Conscience hath on a man in the time of his acting, and the particular respect that he ought to have to his Conscience in carrying it along with him in his actions, Yet we shall passingly point at, and little more? than namePage 150some general Observations, and then come to the particulars that we mainly aim at.

And 1. We Observe this, That a man's Conscience is some way different from himself, as in some respect (to speak so) another Partie, I speak the truth in Christ, I lie not, my Conscience also bearing me witness; I and me is one thing, and Conscience, as it were another, and the

Holy Ghost a third; all which he joins together, yet so as he makes them different Parties: Conscience, I say, considered as Conscience, and more especially, as it's renewed, well informed, and tender in the exercise of its duty, differs from the man himself. 1. In respect of it's place of more direct and immediat subjection to God himself, as it's Master, to receive i's orders from him; whereas the man is more directly and immediately subject to Conscience, by which, as his Deputy, God rules him. 2ly. In respect of it's office, viz. To dictat to man what he should do, and what he should not do, and that according to the light that it hath from God in his revealed Will and Word; Whereas man is not to dictat to his Conscience, but to obey it's dictats in o far as they agree with God's revealed Will and Word. 3ly. In that by it's office also, it is to tell the man that he should direct all his actions to the right end, viz. The glory of God; For it's office is not only to dictat our way, but to injoin to us our end; Man hath not a power or liberty allowed to him to propose to himself, what end he pleaseth, such as Profit, Pleasure, or Credit, as his main end, but is obliged to eye the Glory of God as such; Which Conscience, by virtue of it's office, and acting i's part aright (though, alace it often proves defective therein, being corrupted and defiled by sin) enjoins him to do. 4ly. In respect of the different considerations and sense of things; it will often he displeased, accuse and condemn, when the man himself will be well pleased; It will judge a thing unworthy to be intertained, which the man will judge worthy ??? etertaining. And so Conscience is to be

considered, thoughPage 151having it's ??? in man, yet in many respects? as some way different from him, and ???, as it were to him, and set over him (as ??? hinted before) to be a Guardian, witness, ??? or sensor, to take notice o him in all his actions and carriage.

Let no man then (as the Use of i) think that ever he is, or can be alone, so long as he hath a Conscience within him, for he hath still something to testify for, or against him; to reprove him for what is wrong, and to commend him for that which is right? And though many poor wretches are readie to think, and ??? to fancy themselves to be quiet, and well, when they bli, or cerize, or bribe thei Conscience, yet it will be found to be still waiting on them, and watching them is all they do.

2ly. Observe, That Conscience is a most divine thing? therefore Paul taketh it to be more impartial then himself; and joins it with the Holy Ghost in testifying; if it were not in some respect, a more divine thing th the man himself, such weight would not be laid on it, and it's Testimony; And if we look to these things (hinted at in the foregoing Observation) viz. to the immediat Master of it, God; to the Rul that it walketh by, his Will revealed in his Word; to the end it directs to. or enjoins, the honour of God; and to the whole way of of it's considering, and judging of things, not only as pleasant, or externally profitable to us, but mainly as pleasing to God, and for his honour, as conducing to the advancing of ??? with him, or Conformity to him; It's most divine. The Use teacheth us to lay more weight on Conscience as

spiritual, and as that which taketh up things better, and is a far better dicerner and judge of things then we ou selves are.

3ly. Observ, That the attesting of Conscience is a most grave, important, and solemn thing, buines of highest concernment, and such as ought to be ??? great weight with others; It's so mide use of here; yea t's Testimony is some way to have weight with us, and to bePage 152respected as the Testimony of Christ himself, and of the Holy Ghost; Therefore it's here joined with them in its Testimony; and it cannot be otherwayes, God being (as was said before) the immediat Master of it, and it being so divine a thing; none can attest Conscience, but they must needs attest God with it.

The Use is, To teach us to be more wary in attesting Conscience in a light and trivial way; It's in Scripture Language an attesting Christ, and the Holy Ghost; and when ever we dar not appeal to them as Witnesses, we would beware of appealing to, or of attesting Conscience, or taking it to be a Wites.

4ly. Observe, That there is a great difference among Consciences; for these words, My conscience beareth me witnes in the holy Ghost, imports two things, 1. His attesting his Conscience not simply, but as it's sanctified by the Spirit. 2ly. It not only imports Sanctification in the habit of it, but in it's exercise also; for he knew that a man's attesting of his meer natural Conscience is not of such value, it being a thing that may be easily deluded, and go wrong; but sayeth he, I attest my conscience in

the holy Ghost, and as acted by him; There is a difference betwixt a renewed, and unrenewed Conscience; and a difference betwixt a pure Conscience and a defiled one, To the pure (sayeth the apostle, Tit. 1:15.) all things are pure, but to them that are defiled, and unbelieving, is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience? is defiled; Paul's appealing his Conscience, is as it's opposit to such a Conscience; There is also an evil and a good Conscience, as these words lately spoken of, 1 Pet. 3:21 The answer of a good conscience toward God, clear; There is likewise a cauterized Conscience, and a tender Conscience: yea, there is some difference of Consciences among Believers themselves; some Consciences are weak, some strong; some are sleepy, some waking, some are secure, some in the lively exercise of the Grace of God, and acted by the Spirit, according to the will of God; and this is the Conscience meant here.

Page 153 Use, This Difference would be well observed, for it will not be the Testimony of every Conscience that will bear a man through it must be the Testimony of a Conscience sanctified, and in that particular acted by the Holy Ghost.

5ly. Observe, That there is no Testimony of a Conscience that can be satisfying, but the Testimony of a Conscience sanctified, and in a sanctified frame; therefore he thinks it not enough to say, My conscience beareth me witness, but he addeth, in the Holy Ghost; And in that passage, 1 Pet. 3:21. It's not the answer of Conscience simply, but

the answer of a good conscience, of a waking, tender, spiritual, and well enlightned Conscience, that satisfieth.

Use, Therefore ere men lay much weight on the testimony of their Conscience, they would first put it o proof? and see that it be the Testimony of a sanctified Conscience, and in a sanctified frame; if a man be not of some credit, his Testimony will not be of much weight in any matter; it is even so with Conscience, as to it's Testimony.

6ly. Observe, That sometimes, and in some Cases, Believers may very warrantably attest their Conscience, and appeal to it's Testimony; some Believers in the old Testament, and some in the new have done it: Tho (as we said before) the attesting of Conscience be a very grave and solemn thing, and would not be used at all times, and in all cases, yet at some times, and in some cases, it may be warrantably used, when rightly gone about: I shall name Three or Four Considerations, or Cases from the Text, for clearing of it. 1. Conscience may be attested, when the matter that we assert, requireth such a solemn attesting of it; And these things concur here to clear, that the matter wherein he attesteth his Conscience, is such, For, 1. It is a thing that concerneth God's Glory not a little, that his Servant and Messenger is not walking according to the flesh, 2. It tendeth to the edification of others; for if he had not removedPage 154the prejudice that the Iews had at him, it might have marred their receiving the Truth from his mouth. 3. It tendeth to his own vindication, in as far as it tendeth to the former two

ends, and he will not suffer any blot to ly here. 4. That which he asserteth, is a thing not obvious, and could not well be otherwayes made out; and in this so great and grave a matter, he spares not to attest God, and his own Conscience. 2. Consider the manner of his proceeding; It's spoken in the sight of God gravely and soberly, I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not, my conscience bearing me witnes in the holy ghost; He doth not rashly, and abruptly break out in it, as many do. 3ly. Consider, that he is most clear in the thing, ere he attest his Conscience, he was sure that it was no lie, and that he had no mixture of untruth in it; yea, he is so clear that he dar swear it, and take Christ, and the Holy Ghost to witnes in it: When men dar not attest God in a matter, they should not attest their own Conscience in it, except they think that God will say one thing, and their Conscience another, which is contrary to the nature of Conscience; Men will say manythings lightly, supposing them to be true that they will be loath to attest their Conscience in, until they be very clear, and sure that they are true. 4ly. Add this Consideration, that it is done, when he is in a holy spiritual and lively frame, My conscience (sayeth he) bearing me witnes in the holy Ghost; To attest Conscience in a carnal frame, is as unsuitable, as to rush in rashly, and unmannerly before a grave Judge, to crave a Sentence from him; If our frame be not right, Conscience will never speak out an approving Testimony to us in that particular which we assert, and attest it in; For though, as to the matter it be

true, and no lie, yet as to our circumstantiated attesting of it in so ill a frame, it will not approve us.

7ly. In the general, Observe, That Conscience it's Testimony, when warrantably made use of, is a thing very useful, refreshing, and comfortable to a Believer; Page 155 There is nothing readily, that more comforts him in a strait? it's a singularly good back-friend; Therefore, when Paul hath few other friends, he maketh use of this, and findeth much peace and comfort from it; And hence he sayth, 2 Corinthians 1:12. Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, and so forth. To clear this in a word further: it is in these Three Cases exceeding useful, 1. In the Case of Reproach, I have (sayeth Paul, Acts 23:1.) lived in all good conscience before God untill this day; And 2 Tim: 1:3. I thank God whom I serve with pure conscience from my fore-fathers. 2ly. In the case of some notable Cross, when Christians are brought very low, in a great measure outwardly afflicted, or under great persecution; This is (says? the apostle, 1 Pet. 2:19, 20.) thank worthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully; for what glory is it, if, when ye are buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if when ye do well and suffer for it, and take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. 3ly. It's useful and comfortable as to our own peace in the case of Challenges for guilt, it silenceth, and shoulders out all Challenges, and giveth holy boldness; If our hearts (or Consciences) condemn us not (says Iohn 1. Ep. Chap 3. v. 21.) then have we confidence towards God.

The Use serves to teach us to be much in love with such a way, as we may have the Testimony of a good Conscience in it; and to be much in love with such a Conscience, as may give us such a comfortable Testimony in all our straits and difficulties.

More particularly, we shall speak to that which we mainly aim at, in these Four or Five Observations; Consider then first, What Paul is about here, he is asserting a truth, viz. That he was in great heaviness for his brethren, and kinsmen according to the flesh? And he attests his Conscience that it was so, and that he was honest, and sincere in asserting it; Whence Observe, That there is no action of a man's Life, but Conscience hath a concern in it, and hath something to say to him concerning it; if it were but the speaking of a word, let be the doing of any business, Conscience hath always something to say for him, or against him; So that we may confidently say, there is no action of so little moment, in thought, word or deed; as, whither a man be called to do, or forbear, to speak, or to be silent, but in all these, Conscience hath a sense and consideration of it, and a Testimony to give for, or against the man about it. I am not now speaking of things sinful, or unlawful on the matter, but of such things as on the matter are lawful; As when a man speaketh truth; whither he speaketh it truly, and with an honest intention or not, Therefore when Paul is speaking a truth here, he looks to his Conscience, and hearkens what it sayeth: Put these Four together, and ye will find it clear, that a sanctified Conscience, in a sanctified and good Frame, will always

have something to say, for, or against a man, in every thing that he goes about; I say, a sanctified Conscience, in a sanctified Frame, because that is the Conscience we are speaking of, and the Conscience that most compleatly dischargeth it's duty. 1 If we consider this, That there is no humane action, but God hath given man a Rule, directing how it shall be ordered, how he shall eat, and how he shall drink, how he shall plow, pray, hear, read, confer, how he shall walk in Company, and out of Company, how he shall go about the Duties of his Calling; and it prescribes the manner of doing these things, as well as the matter; Therefore, 1 Timothy 3:16, 1. It's said, All Scripture is given by divine inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, and for correction, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto every good work: It furnishes him with light and direction? not only in the matter (as said) but in the manner of doing. 2. ???, That a man in all his actions is either walking? according, and agreeably to tat rule, or not, his action is eiber conform or disconform to the Rule, there is not a mids; He either doth according to it, or he dothPage 157not according to it; If he do the action as the word prescribeth, Conscience hath something to say for him; if no, it hath something to say against him. 3. ???, that in all actions as they are one or performed, and as ???, God is either pleased or displeased; If the action be done according to his will, he is pleased: if it be not done according to his will, he is displeased. 4. Conider, That a sanctified Conscience taketh up a man's

actions, and considereth him in them, not according to the matter only; bu also as they are agreeable to the Rule for the manner, principle, motive, and end; and estifieth of them accordingly: So that if God have an interest in all a man's actions, a sanctified Conscience hath also an interest in them: I say, a sanctified Conscience, because it most singly pleaeth God's interest.

This is true also of a natural Conscience according to its light, for even such a Conscience (as it is said, Romans 2:5.) beareth witness, and the Gentiles show the works of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts in the mean while accusing or else excusing one another; And there is no natural man, if he take heed to his Conscience, in the doing of any action, but will find Conscience according to its light, speaking either for him, or against him; either acusing or else exusing him? but this is much more to be found in a sanctified Conscience, because it hath much more light, and much more tenderness to act according to that light, and therefore it will find itself much more concerned in the actions of a believer.

The first Use is, for information and instruction in a man's practical point of Religion relating to men's conversation; Most men, ??? think that Conscience is not concerned except in some great things, some papably sinfull things, or some things immediately relating to Religion; and that in all other things they may live as they like, without taking notice of Conscience: But say, and have cleared it? that Conscience hath n ??? and

concern in every action, not only as to putting men toPage 158undertake it, (whereof we spoke before) but also as to their manner of performing the same; It not only puts a man to think, speak, or do? but it's concerned in the manner of his thinking, speaking, and doing; Conscience in every one of these hath somewhat to say, viz. That we are either right or wrong. The reason is? because all a Christian man's actions may be taken up in a two-fold respect, or under a two-fold consideration. 1. In respect of the external action itself, or the matter of it, even though we consider them as indifferent; as whether a man stay at home, or go abroad, eat now, or for bear eating, and so forth. 2. As these actions are Christian, in which respect men are not only to look on the action t self, materally considered, but they are also to look to the rules given to direct them how to walk Christianly in that action; for there are many actions good in themselves, or in the firstrespect that will not be found to be Christianly and religiously good, or good in this second respect; The Christian should love God with all his heart, soul, strength? and mind, Matthew 22:37. He is not his own. he is bought with a price, and therefore should glorifie Go in his body and spirit, which are God's, 1 Corinthians 6:20. hether he eat or drink, or whatever he do, he should do al to the glory of God? 1 Corinthians 10:30. Which three general precepts show that we are not to level our actions as meerly natural mn do, but as it becomes Christians, to level them at his glory, as the great end and scope of them; that to us to live may be Christ, that we may live to him, and glorifie him who hath bought us,

and that from a principle of love to him who hath loved us: Now Conscience cometh not in formally to deal on the first account, that is, as the action is good in itself, or on the matter; There reason and judgement come in rather, and tell when a man doth that which is good or ??? on the matter; But Conscience comes in on the second accoun, and telleth him when his action is done Christianly, ??? wi, in due manner, from a right principle, and to a right ???:Page 159To make this out, it will be needful that we shortly speak a word to these two: 1. We shall show what maketh an action truly Christian and Relgious. 2. We shall show that in all these things that make an action such, Conscience hath something to say to men whether t be so with them.

As for the First, I speak no of the matter of the action, or what maketh it good in that respect, as that it be warantable, and in nothing sinful, as to the matter, such as are aring, drinking, hearing, reading, praying, and so forth.Beside this, there are these Four which must be present, and carefully carried along in every action by the man that would act Christianly, and glorifie God therein; The want of which, or o any of these, will make Conscience to have some-thing to say against him, as ground of Challenge; as the having of them will make Conscience to ay for him, and approve him: The 1. of these is, That a man's action be levelled at an higher end then himself; and that is God's honour, and the fication of others; As for instance, men even in their eating and drinking are not to satisfie themselves, or to gratifie their appetite only, but they are to make their eating and

drinking a mean to prove the honour of God, as the great and ultimate end; sitting down on an our end will furnish a ground of Challenge to the Conscience against the persons. The 2d. is, That it be from a cleanly motive; that not only it be a lawful and good thing which we do, but that it be done out of Conscience to God, and as service to him; for a man may do a good action? and not do it as such; As for instance, one man may give alms, and sin in the doing of it, and another, in giving, may offer an acceptable sacrifice to God; Therefore Christ sayeth, Math. 10:42? and Mark 9:41. Whosoever giveth to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water, in the name as a disciple, viz. Considering him as such, and giving it to him as such a one, or in the name of, and because he elongs to ??? on that account, and under that consideration, and beingPage 160sweyed by that, as his motive, verily he shall in no wayes loss his reward, This two men may suffer both a like unjustly from a churlish Master, or Superiour; The one of whom may have no thanks, nor peace in his sufferings, when the other suffering Christianly, out of Conscience, to God, and in obedience to his Command, that calleth him to it, is accepted and hath peace; This is thank worthy, (sayeth the apostle, 1 Pet. 2:19.) If a man for conscience sake endure grief and suffer wrongfully; So in the love of a Husband to his Wife, and of a Parent to his, or her Child, it's one thing to love on a meer natural account, and another thing to love such a Relation, Christianly, and out of Conscience to God; though the former is not condemned, yet it's this latter that maketh it to be a

consciencious, and acceptable love before God. The 3^d is, That the action be gone about in the right manner, as such a particular action or duty is commanded to be done; As for instance, if it be a word of Instruction, or Admonition given by us to another; that it be given prudently, lovingly, and tenderly; or what ever the action be in reference to others, that our manner of going about it, be such as may adorn the Doctrine of Christ, and make the action to shine the more convincingly to others, because of our suitable way of discharging it; that we may have a Testimony in their Conscience, and may gain them, or further gain them to the love of God, and of godliness: But this cannot be so well instanced in particulars, because several duties require their own suitable way of performing of them. The 4th. thing that must go along, with every Action, is, That it be mixed with Faith, Hebrews 4:2. Not only the Faith of such an Action being good, and lawful in itself, (for that is always presupposed) but these two things here are further requisit. 1. That the Action, or Duty be gone about in the strength of Jesus Christ, so that it may have a Superiour Spiritual principle, to wit, God's strength acting in it, and not our own simply; that croud of witnesses chronicled, Hebrews 11. are said to do all theyPage 161did, this way, viz. By faith, That is not only by Faith? exercised on Christ, for accepting of them, but also by Faith exercised on the strength of Christ, to be born through in the doing of what they did. 2. That not only Faith be exercised for divine strength in doing, and that the doers be denied to their own strength, but that

there be also a resting on Christ, for the acceptation of their Persons and performances; and this is ale requisit, as any of the former; because, though a Person do that which is good in itself, and have all the other requisits to the Action, yet, if there be a falling in this, Conscience will not speak peace; By faith (It's said, Hebrews 11:4, 5. That) Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice then Cain: Both of them offered things that were good, and yet the ones Sacrifice was accepted, and the others rejected; That which made the difference was, that Abel, in his offering, exercised Faith on Christ's Sacrifice, he offered it not as a Satisfaction in itself to God, but with respect to Jesus Christ typified by it, which the other did not; and proportionally there is somewhat required of all these, and more especially of this last in all Actions, to make them truly Religious, and Christian Actions.

Now, For the 2d. Particular, viz. That in all these things, that make an Action to be truly Religious, Conscience hath somewhat to say, and hath an interest, and concern, to testifie for, or against the man; I shall instance this in Sixorts of Actions, to which all a man's Actions (I mean that are properly human Actions, or rationally deliberat Actions) may be reduced, as to so many general heads. The First sort is, natural Actions, as Eating, Drinking, Sleeping, and so forth. In which (what ever many think to the contrary) Conscience hath an interest, because they require the proposing of God's Glory as their end; and he hath prescribed a way how to go about them aright. The 2d.Sort, Is Civil Actions, as men's being exercised in this or that lawful Employment, Trade,

Calling, or Occupation; and here Conscience hath an interest; for it is said, that the plowing of the wicked is sin; Which, when gone about, after the right manner by the Believer, is service to God, as well as his praying. The 3d. Sort is Moral Actions, such as are done from a principle of moral honesty; As for instance, when a man bargaineth, and maketh a promise, anen such and such things to be performed by him; to keep his word, which is morally good, yet is it not truly, Religiously and Christianly good, except it be done in obedience to the command of God, and with respect to his honour; And here also Conscience hath interest; for as a man cometh short of these things requisit, for making it a truly Religious, or Christian Action, it will challenge and accuse in so far, and when they are present, it will excuse, and commend him. The 4th. Sort is, External Duties of Religion; What is it, I pray, that makes the difference betwixt Formal and Hypocritical Service, and Worship? and that which is accepted as service to God? Is it not, that one person performs such Duties conscionably and Christianly according to the Rules prescribed anent the right performing of them, and another not? The 5th. Sort is, Inward Duties (or Graces) such as Repentance, Faith, Love? Hope, and so forth. of all which there are Counterfits, some things very like them, which yet are not indeed these: Conscience hath here likewayes a concern, and makes a difference; As suppose two men are orty for Sin, and we ma suppose them to be someway alike, or equally sorrowful; and yet the sorrow of the one, is accounted the Grace of

Repentance, and the others not, because of the want of the requisits of Gospel, or gracious sorrow, or sorrow after a godly ort, as the apostle calls it, 2 Corinthians 7. v. 11. So in the exercise of other Graces; where Conscience will challenge. and accue, or excue, and approve accordingly. The 6th. Sort of Actions are passive (to speak so) or Sufferings, wherein Conscience hath a concern, and tells the man that he should suffer, as a Christian from such a principle, and for such ends; which he through Grace endeavouring to do, Conscience speaksPage 163peace to him; And though another man suffer the same very things, yet he may want that testimony, because he wants the grounds of it, his sufferings being destitute of the requisite qualifications: And therefore we would never think a thing to be of so little moment, that Conscience hath no concern in it, we cannot do, speak, think, nor look, but Conscience hath some-thing to say of that deed, word, thought, or look, as it is circumstantiat; either to accuse, if not as it ought to be, or to excuse and approve, if right, as to its requisits.

The 2d. Use is for trial of a sanctified Conscience in a sanctified frame, and for differencing it from another Conscience that is not so; a sanctified Conscience, and in a sanctified frame, is alwayes meddling with all the man's actions, not only when he is praying, hearing, reading, or conferring o a spiritual purpose, but also when he is buying or selling, eating or drinking, speaking or keeping silent, abroad or at home, alone or in company, and so forth. It is very like that Paul had said many? things when he was a Pharisee, that his

Conscience medled not much with; but now being a serious Christian, he cannot speak, nor write, but his Conscience medles with it; In a word, a sanctified Conscience is alwayes going along with a man, is still with him, and letting him know that it is with him, and a sanctified man will needs have, and loves to have his Conscience constantly with him; The word Conscience in the Original is significant, and says this much, that when it is right, the Christian and it are joined together; Whereas an unsanctified man parts company (as it were) with his Conscience, he loves not to take it, he will not take it with him, it is a burden to him, he would ain be rid of its company; and it often refuseth to go along with him; It's never the worst Conscience that is often meddling, providing it be owned and listned to when it medleth; a sanctified Conscience medleth, 1. Constantly. 2. It medleth in all sorts of things, it puts the man when he hath spoken to search his heart, whether he thought as hePage 164said. 3. It speaks in the Holy Ghost, according to the mind of God? and interests itself, on God's account, cleanly, spiritually, and impartially, without all by-respect to the man.

The 3d? Use, is for reproof to these that misken Conscience, and take none at all, or but very little notice of it in the most part of their life; Ah! How few are they that think and believe that Conscience is concerned in all their words and actions: And as for thoughts they are looked on by such as free, and therefore they never look, what it says of them, and so spoil themselves of it's testimony, and lose their labour in not respecting it.

The 4th. Use is of Exhortation; and we would seriously exhort you all to amend this great fault reprov'd, viz. the misregarding of Conscience, and to respect Conscience in every thing, and to regard it more in your going out and coming in, in solitude and society, in every thing ye do, suffer not yourselves to be cheated into a groundless apprehension, that any of your actions, even the commonest, as circumstantiat, are of so little moment, that Conscience hath no concern in them; And if it hath, then I beseech you, take heed what: it says, and whether it testifies for or against you; and do not think that Conscience is officious, and medles in a business that concerneth it not, except ye think that there are some parts of your life that should not at all be religious, but that you are left in them to live as you list: It's oft-times our fault that we limit Conscience to this and that particular action that is of some considerable concernment, and some way shut it out as having no concern in these of lesser moment; And many, alace! shoulder it out from the tract of their life; and current of their actions; O! let this by any means be amended.

SERMON II.

ROM. 9:1. I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my Conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.

CHRistians who have such a vigilant and constant attendant as Conscience waiting on them, had much need of watchfulness, that they may be kept in some suitableness of frame for intertaining that companion; Conscience its work, is not only to be advising and deliberating what is to be done, but also to be waiting on when it comes to the acting and performing of what it hath been advising to; and it is indeed no less practise to carry Conscience along in the performing of duty, then it is in taking some pains to consult it, and advise with it at the undertaking thereof, so as we may be answerable to Conscience as to both; oft-times some pains will be taken in deliberating and advising with Conscience what and when we should do, when we will exceedingly relent in taking it along with us in the performance: Whence it frequently comes to pass, that we lose the peace we gained in advising with Conscience at our undertaking the action, by not carrying it along with us in performing: This is the thing which we proposed to be spoken to from this verse, viz. The influence? that Conscience hath on men's acting, and the respect that they ought to have to it, not only before they undertake any action, but in, and along the performing of it. The last Doctrine we spoke to from it was, that there is not any action of a man's life, but Conscience is concerned

something to say concerning it, for or against him; If it were but the speaking of a word, or the asserting of any truth; as we see in this instance of Paul, his Conscience beareth him witness, it hath some-thing to say to him anent his doing it; We cleared this in several, yea rather in all sorts of actions that men have to perform; There being none of them of so little moment, so extrinsick, or so indifferent, but in the performing of them, Conscience ought to be carried along, as having some-what to say for, or against the performer. We shall now add some four or five Observations more from the words; And the first (which we may either take as an Use of the former, or as a distinct Observation by itself) is this;

That men in the time of their going about anything would advert and take heed to that sense which Conscience hath of their actions; And seing it hath some-thing to say, they would be lending to their ear all along the time of their performing the action, and hear what it saith; As before they undertake, they would advise with Conscience that they be right; so in the time of performance, there would be a reflecting on Conscience, to know its sense of our doing; Paul is now speaking and asserting somewhat, and he reflecteth on his Conscience to hear what it will say, and that he may get its testimony, that he is speaking sincerely; he is not now advising with Conscience, to know what he should do; nor to get its censure of what he hath done; but in the very time of his doing, he reflecteth and taketh notice what it saith; He asserteth that he is speaking truth, and taketh a look into his Conscience, to see if it be not so, that he is indeed

speaking the truth, and truly; Or we may take the Doctrine thus, it is a main piece of a tender walk in a Christian, not only to deliberate with Conscience before he do anything, and when he hath done it, to take its censure if it be rightly done, but also to reflect upon his Conscience in the very time of his doing of it, and to hear what it will say of that which he is nowPage 167a-doing, and of himself in the doing of it, And we conceive that this is one of the main things meant by the testimony of Conscience; When Conscience is put to it in the performance of a duty, to know what it will say concerning the man and his action; for if so be that Conscience hath something to say concerning every duty, for or against the man (as it is, Romans 2:15? Their Conscience bearing them witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another) Then it will clearly follow that it is a main piece of a Christians duty to keep fair with his Conscience here? and to take good heed what it saith, in the very interim and mean time of his performing every action; Yea, it is not only a main piece of a Christians walk, but a main evidence of a tender walk in a Christian, viz. When he doth not only aim to be clear in undertaking a duty, but to carry Conscience along with him, and to know what it saith in following forth the duty. Take these two or three words for clearing it. First, Consider that the right performance of our actions and duties, or the making of them such as they should be, dependeth very much on the nick of our discharging them; so that though a man should deliberat never so well before, if he be in a carnal frame, or have

a selfie end o the time of performance, he will be at a loss of his peace, and much miss his mark; as the apostle hath the word, Philip. 3:13. I press toward the mark; In his aiming at holiness and a good conscience, he levelleth all his actions at that mark, the prize of the high calling of God; I shall make use of this similitude for illustrating it, let a man with a Bow or Musquet levell never so well, or take never so just a visie, if his hand waver in the instant of shooting, he cannot readily hit the mark; Even so, though a man (as I said) deliberat and advise never so well with his Conscience before he do a thing, if in the time of doing, he take not heed tenderly and steddily to it, but fall carnal and selfie in it, he cannot have peace as to the performance of that action. 2dly. Consider that we are soPage 168very tickle in our frame (as the duties of holiness are some way in themselves) and our hearts so unstable, light and frothy, that though we should levell them right just now, yet they will be ready quickly to start aside as a deceitful how upon out hand; It cannot therefore be sufficient ground for the testimony of a good Conscience, to deliberat in undertaking, except a man observe and reflect on his Conscience, and study to carry it along with him in the very time of his acting: Our hearts are like to a distempered Clock or Watch, which being just now set never so right, ere we are aware, it will go wrong; it will point the hour aright now, and within a little it's quite out of course, because there is some defect or fault within, the Wheels not being evenly, or the Ballance not justly poised, or some other such cause; Even so though our heart were in a suitable frame just

now, presently, and ere we turn us about (as it were) it's out of frame, so that we cannot well take our aim from it; It is so very deceitful, that it abides not in frame. 3dly. Consider that unless this reflecting on Conscience, in the time of performing the action, or duty, be, a man will be at a loss of one of these two; He will either be at a loss as to his ober composed and holy frame, and turn carnal, which is frequently and readily incident even to believers, or he will be at a loss as to the confidence, boldness, and peace that he might otherwise have in the performance of such an action or duty; for suppose a person to be in a good frame after he hath resolved on a duty, let it be for instance, speaking to edification, going about Prayer, or the making of some lawful Bargain, or the like; and he hath abundant light and clearness in his call to the thing, yet if he look not to, and reflect not on Conscience in the discharge of that duty, when a challenge cometh on the back of it, as if he had been wrong; he cannot well answer nor repell it; his being right being to him in that case (in some respect) little or no better then if he had been wrong; because he observed not ConsciencePage 169in the time of the action: And this is one great reason, no doubt, why believers have so little positive peace when they have done a good turn, because they do not advert what Conscience says to them, in their going about it; They are hereby also greatly at a lose, as to many sweet experiences of God's kindnesse, and condescending in assisting them, and of their own singleness win at, through Grace in the performing of Duties: and we think also, that Christians

living so much by a negative peace (to speak so) flows much from this ground, viz. Their little reflecting in the time of their doing Duty, (if once they be clear in the thing) whither they be suitably serious, and sincere in it; and so letting the opportunity go by, they are not so thoroughly clear in these things, that are evidences of a positive peace, in doing of such a duty rightly, as they might otherways be?

The First Use, Serves, to give you an evidence, and mark of a tender walk, and of a man that is tender in his walk; he is such a man that will not only ask his Conscience ere he begin an Action, but when he is a doing of it, what it thinketh of it: There are Three things that a tender Christian will reflect upon, in the time of his doing an Action or Duty; 1. He will reflect upon his manner of performing it; whither it be a natural Action, such as Eating and Drinking; a civil Action, such as Buying and Selling; a Religious Action, such as Praying, or hearing, and so forth. He will look that in them all he be single; that his Eating and Drinking be to fit him to serve God; That in his Buying and Selling, he seek not only his own things, but the good of his Neighbour, as well as his own good; That in his Praying, or Hearing, he be sincere, that it be in Faith, and according to the will of God, and so forth. 2ly. He will reflect on himself in the performing of his Actions, that he be in a right frame; that he be tender, and sincere, that some awe of God, and of a good Conscience be on him, that his Spirit be sober and composed, that a carnal frame steal not in upon him, in the time of his doing a warrantable Action, or a

commandedPage 170Duty, because that will marr it. 3dly. He will reflect upon his Conscience, that he may hear what it says of the Action; He will not, as it were, take his Testimony from himself, but Conscience being as a distinct thing, some way from himself, he will hear what it sayeth; As Paul doth here, it is truth which he speaketh, and he speaketh it in the right manner? and yet he taketh a look of his Conscience, if he be doing so in very deed, to wit, sincerely, as in the sight of God; yea more, he taketh the Testimony of his Conscience, if it be not so; And thus here he looketh not to, nor reflecteth on his Conscience, to alter any piece of his way, but to have it's sense of that piece of it; He gathers, that the Action is good from the Word; and he inquires if he be, and collects that he is right, in the performance from his Conscience, testifying according to the Word; so that he will not trust himself, but goeth to Conscience, as being more impartial, to take it's Testimony: The reason then (as I said before) why few Christians have solid peace, is this, if the matter of their Actions be good, and if they can answer their light therein, they reflect but little on their Conscience, in the performing thereof, and therefore want much of the peace and consolation that might otherwise accompany them in their Actions, and when they are done, and over: and this evidence of tendernesse kythes rather, when a man is in the Act, then either before or after; for fear, or awe may make a man seek Light before an Action, and a challenge may put him to reflect, and examine when he hath done; But here mainly lyeth the evidence of sincerity, and tendernesse,

when in every step all along the Action, or Duty so far as is requisit, and humane infirmity will admit, he taketh heed what he is doing: and, as we said the other day, That it was an evidence of a tender Conscience, to be alwayes meddling in every thing that a man doth; So we say now, that it is an evidence of a tender man, to listen and hear what censure his Conscience passeth on him, in performing his Actions?

Page 171The 2d. Use, is for reproof; Ah! may we not find? but by overly reflections, if we did advise with Conscience at our undertaking of such a work or Duty, that yet in the time of doing it, there was but little reflecting on our Conscience, if it did bear us witness of our sincerity in going about it; How many times will Men and Women be found Eating, Drinking, Buying, Selling, Going or Riding a lawful Journey, speaking of a Sermon, and so forth. And yet in these Actions, but seldom, or never looking in, if they have the Testimony of their Conscience, that they are right in their going about of these things? Can this, I pray, speak a tender frame, that is so neglective of Conscience? It is certainly an evidence of an untender Frame in Believers; and where ever it is habitual and regnant, it is an evidence of an evil state; For, if one be a tender Christian, when should his Conscience be tender, if not in the nick of the performance of an Action? For that is the time when he will, or should be levelling, least he miss the mark: and knowing how fickle, and unconstant he is, and that he hath a heart like an unsteady hand; how should he guard against it's levity, and unstableness?

The 3d. Use, Is of Exhortation, to advert more to this Testimony of Conscience, in performing Duties; O! Learn to reflect on yourselves in every thing, and to ask yourselves what ye are doing, that ye may know, if ye be right or wrong; if wrong, that ye may take with it, and be humbled for it; if right, that ye may be comforted in it: We conceive this would be a notable guard to tenderness, and keeping communion with God; and a sovereign help to prevent many sins, and much hipocrisie in our way of doing things; even to be taking exact notice, if we be indeed doing that which we profess to be doing, if we be speaking to Edification, if we be praying in earnest, when we pretend to be praying? and so forth.

2ly. Observe, That when Conscience is well satisfied in a particular Action, or Duty? it can signifie it's sense thereof to the man that performeth it, and speaketh aPage 172good word for him; This is the thing that Paul's Conscience doth here; he is sincere in the thing that he asserts, and it beareth him witness of his sincerity, when he adverteth to it: First, I say, Conscience can signify it's mind and sense of a particular Action, or Duty, if it be well pleased, and can speak a good word for the man; it can signify it's mind at any time, but when it is well pleased, it signifies, it by testifying for the man: And 2ly? I say, That not only does it testify it's satisfaction with the Action, but with every thing in it, when there is a right end, a right motive, and a right manner of performance, when Christ is duely respected in it, and made use of for strength and acceptance. And 3ly. I add

this, If men advert to it, and if it be asked; because it hath something to say alwayes, yet men will not hear, nor know what it sayeth, except they advert well, and reflect, and take good heed to it.

3ly. Observe, That it is very strengthening, confirming, comforting, refreshing, and satisfying to a man in a particular Action, to have the Testimony of his Conscience for him; This beareth Paul through here, amidst all challenges that might have been raised, from seeking of himself, or from following revenge, in what he asserts; There is no such thing, saith he, my Conscience beareth me witnes of the contrary: It's not a man's Action simply, that will give him boldnesse, confidence and comfort; for several persons may concur, in one and the self same good Action on the matter; and yet some may have a good, ??? others an evil Conscience in it, were it but as to a man's thought and opinion of himself; For it's not he that commends himself, but he whom God commends that is approven. When Conscience (I say) beareth witnes for a man, It is a very strengthening, confirming and satisfying thing; The Reasons are, 1. Because Conscience is the more single, and impartial Judge and witnes, and therefore a man may lay the more weight on it. 2ly. Because Conscience speaketh, and beareth witnes with respect to God, and when it testifieth on solidPage 173grounds, it is God's Testimony; Now when a Debate ariseth in a man about any of his Actions, the man himself is the partie arraigned the Challenge, or Tentation, is the party accusing, and Conscience is as the Witnes, or Judge that

decideth, and being un-biased, it beareth Witnes, and passeth the Sentence truly, and impartially; It (as it were) sayeth, it's true, he said such and such a thing, and that sincerely; and I know that his thoughts and intentions were honest; and thus Conscience decides the Debate in his favours, if so be he hath it on his side; and so confirms, and comforts him.

The Use is, To exhort you to lay more weight on Conscience, and on it's Testimony, and less weight on any other thing; for it will not be your good meaning, nor good hopes (as ye use to speak) but a sanctified Conscience, in a sanctified Frame, that will be found fittest to decide in any Action.

4ly. Observe, That the Testimony of Conscience speaking for a man, and his performing of a good Action on the matter, are separable; That is, a man may do that which is good in itself, and yet not have a positive and approbative Testimony from his Conscience concerning it; otherwayes Paul needed not to have attested his Conscience, if he had not known, that Conscience it's Testimony might have been separat from what he speaks; It's well enough known, that he was saying, his heart was grieved for the rejection of the Iews; but the question was, if he had said it honestly and sincerely; and he asserts, that he hath Conscience it's Testimony for that, as a distinct thing: There are but too many proofs of the truth of this Doctrine; are there not many, who speak good words, and do good deeds on the matter, who yet have not a good Conscience in the speaking, and doing

of them? As it's said of Amaziah, 2 Chro. 25:2. He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart? So it may be said of many others, that they do that which is good for the matter, but they want the Testimony of a good ConsciencePage 174in the performance of it: This will be further clear if we consider these two things. 1. That there are manythings that concur to make an Action Truly, and Christianly good, such as we spoke of the other day; many care for no more, but that the Action be good for the Matter, but it's moreover requisit, that it be good as to the manner of performance, that it be from a right motive, to a right end, done in Faith, by strength drawn from Christ, and with an eye to acceptance on his account, a corrupt end in Prayer, in coming to the Church to hear, in reading the Word, or in any other Duty, will spoil the Action. 2ly. That there are different Rules to try these by; there is one Rule to regulat us, in the matter of our Actions, and another to regulat our manner of going about them; and a good Conscience looketh to both these Rules; And if anyof the requisit qualifications to the suitable and acceptable performance of them, be absent and wanting, in so far Conscience will withhold it's positive approving Testimony: a good Conscience it's Testimony is like the harmony of a well tuned Instrument; It's one thing to have all the strings on the Instrument, and another thing to have them all in tune; when it is not rightly tuned, though it have on all the strings, it cannot give a sweet, nor harmonious sound; so is it with the Conscience.

The Use is, For exhortation to watchful advertance in every thing to Conscience it's Testimony: Seing there are many that do good on the matter, who yet want it's Testimony, it becomes us to be the more watchful to keep a good Conscience; and seing that Conscience it's speaking for a man, and giving him it's approbative Testimony, and his doing that which is good, on the matter, are not only separable, but are often actually separated, the one from the other? not only in natural, but even in regenerat men? as frquent experience puts beyond debate; We had need (I say) to be the more watchful, both as to the matter, and manner of our doing, least we be at a lose of the Testimony of Conscience for us: And none would think it to be asPage 175easie a bussinesse to keep a good Conscience, as to the manner of performing of Duty, as it is to do so, s to the matter of it. How many come to the Church, but without due preparation, and without having a heart ready to hear, what God will say to them, and meddle with with other Duties, without regarding the due manner of performing them? We ight instance it in all these Six Sorts of Actions, we spoke of the other day, in all which there is a propensnes i us naturally, to degenerat, and go beside the Rule; As namely, 1. In natural Actions of Eating and Drinking, or of loving Husband, or Wife, or Children, men may be very carnal, degenerat, and become like very Beasts. 2. In civil Actions? as Buying and Barganing, wherein men ma turn basely covetous, selfie, and seeking their own things, and not the honour of God, no the good and advantage of others. 3ly. In Moral

Actions, as speaking truth, dealing fairly and honestly; wherein men may turn legal, proud and vain, and seek to establish a self-righteousness thereby to themselves. 4. In external Religious Actions, as hearing the Word, Praying, and so forth. Wherein men may turn hypocritical, and formal, having a show without substance, and a form of godliness without the power of it. 5. In inward Duties, as repentance, contentment, and so forth. Wherein men may turn worldly, and carnal, therefore a worldly repentance from fear of punishment, or of shame in the World, or worldly sorrow that causeth death, is spoken of, 2 Corinthians 7. v. 10. So thee is a worldly contentment. 6. In passive actions, or sufferings; some may suffer from inevitable necessity, and have no thanks for it? as it is, 1 Pet. 2:20. We may, from the unstraightnesse of the end, to which; from the unsoundnesse of the principle, from which; from the unsuitableness of the motive by which, duties are done? and several otherways, prejudice ourselves of the approving Testimony of our Conscience; which we would carefully advert to, that we divide not betwixt a good Conscience, and a good Turn, Action, or Duty.

Page 176But it may be Asked here, What is the reason that it is so difficult to keep a good Conscience, and to carry it along with us, in the very interim, mean time, and nick of performing the Action, above, and beyond what it is, either to deliberat and advise with it before we do, or to reflect after we have done?

I Answer, And give these Two or Three Reasons of it; The First whereof, is drawn from the necessary concurrence of so manythings that must go together, in the performance of an Action; Which makes it easier to resolve before doing, or to reflect after doing, then to perform. The 2d. is, Because there is such a ticklenesse in the frame of our hearts, that they are unstable as water, stable in nothing: There are Three distempers of heart that we are subject to, which all hold forth this difficulty, 1. A declining humour (to say so) or distemper, whereby we are given to backslide, or turn aside like a deceitful bow, that keeps bense while the arrow is a drawing, and when it is at, or in the very letting off, starteth aside. 2ly. A levity, and unsetlednesse, even such that the weathercock is not sooner, and more easily whirled about, by the least wind, then we are by the least breathing of the air of Tentation; So that were we just now in a good and suitable frame for Duty, ere we be aware, we fall off; and a good Conscience requireth a composednesse and stayednesse of Frame. 3ly. A rashnesse, and hastinesse, or precipitance, which makes us, that so soon as we are clear in the thing, to rush forward, and to think all is done that is requisit; so that we wait not to carry Conscience along with us, in our performances; which rash precipitant, and hasty humour, or distemper maketh us often miscarry; As David says of himself, Psalm 116? I said in my haste that all men are liars? and I said in my haste, that I am cut off from thy presence, Psalm 31. So Believers often marr the composednesse of their own frame? by their hsteing? and not taking heed to what

Conscience sayeth, while they are in performing Duty; Thus many post, as it were, throughPage 177their Prayers, speaking of many good things in them from light; but not endeavouring to carry Conscience its testimony along with them of their sincerity, they spoil and marr that which was well intended and begun by them. A 4th. ground, reason, or cause of this is, the great difficulty that there is to maintain and keep up a right frame of heart for any considerable time; and a man will never keep a good Conscience along particular duties, if he maintain not a right frame of heart; though a thing good in itself were never so fairly floored (to speak so) and its ground never so well taken up, yet the least bias or rub easily puts it by, and makes it go out: All which should in reason make us study the more watchfulness.

5thly. Observe (which will help to the Use of the former, and is of some affinity with the first particular Observation,) That persons would endeavour to walk in every particular duty or action, so as they may not only advert to what Conscience says of it, but may also carry it along with them in it, and have the positive approving testimony thereof all alongst the doing of it, which may be, though there be not reflecting on it every moment; That is, not only would they before they undertake anything, be clear that it is a warrantable duty (as was marked before) but further when they have done this, they would so carry Conscience along with them in it, as they may have its testimony that they go about it conscientiously: Therefore Paul asketh not only what Conscience says of the action as to its matter, and as to

his sincerity in undertaking it; but he bringeth it out speaking for him while he is doing it, My conscience (saith he) beareth me witness: The reason of the Doctrine is, because it is not enough to hear what Conscience saith, for it may accuse as well as excuse, but we would endeavour to carry so, as we may have a good testimony from it; Which it will not give, nor speak peace to us, if we study not to take it with us all along the action? This is a notable way to curb sin; Page 178 to mortify lusts; to make us accurate in duties; to keep us from posting (to speak so) through our prayers; from scuching through a Chapter of the Bible; and from trifling in other duties; Why? because we have our Conscience to answer to, and its good testimony to wait for; This is that which giveth holy boldness to a Christian, when 1. He knoweth that what he doth is right for the matter. 2. When he taketh good heed to what Conscience faith. And 3. When he hath its good and approbative testimony: And we think that this is much of what that Text, Act 24. v. 16. aims at; and is the main thing a Christian should exercise himself in, even to have the testimony of his Conscience, for him in this, and that, and the other duty, nay in every duty, to have its good testimony, when he beginneth, when he goeth on in it, or in the time of it, and when he hath closed it; This is it (as I have often said) which furnisheth him with holy boldness and confidence, and giveth him much sweet peace and serenity in his mind, that who ever and what ever speak against him, he is at a point that he is right, having the well grounded testimony of his Conscience for it.

But it may be questioned here, How is it possible for a man to carry a testimony of his Conscience along with him in every action? Can he alwayes be reflecting on every word he speaketh, and on every action he putteth his hand unto? For Answer, we would first distinguish betwixt an explicite and actual inquiring at, and reflecting on Conscience, and an implicite and habitual inquiring at, and reflecting on it; and betwixt an explicite and actual, and an implicite and habitual testimony of the Conscience; And then apply it to the particular answer, that then is an explicite testimony of Conscience, when it doth actually, expressly and down-right speak its mind; and that is an actual and explicite reflecting on Conscience, when a man doth indeed expresly and down-right put himself to it to inquire ConsciencesPage 179sense of his action: An implicite and habitual testimony of Conscience is, when Conscience is not alwayes actually, observably, and expressly speaking by a positive approbation; Yet it is so indirectly, virtually, and on the matter, and is ready actually to do so, when put to it. And an implicite and habitual reflecting on Conscience, is, when men are not alwayes actually and expresly asking their Conscience what it saith; When yet they do it implicately, virtually, and on the matter; and are in a readiness to do it actually, when put to it: Which may be illustrated by the similitude made use of before; The habitual and explicite testimony of Conscience, and reflecting on it, is like the putting of an Instrument of Musick in a right Tune, and then we say it's in Tune, though none be playing on it; because it is ready to give

a distinct and harmonious sound, having all the Strings right in tune; an explicate and actual testimony and reflecting, is like a man's striking or playing on the well tuned Instrument, and bringing out actually the just Musical sound, that was habitually in the tuned Instrument before.

Now to apply this particularly in answer to the question, We say, 1. That in three cases an actual and explicate testimony of Conscience, and reflecting on it? is necessary, 1. As to a man's undertaking of any action or duty, that he be clear in it, that it is a duty 2? In reference to the thing when done, because it is that which giveth him peace; for a man's reflecting on Conscience, and its testimony here, is like playing on the Instrument. 3. It's necessary as to a man's stare. But 2. We say an explicate testimony, and actual inquiring at Conscience is not simply necessary alwayes along the action or duty, or it is not simply necessary, that a man actually reflect and have a testimony from his Conscience alwayes, or in all difference of time along the action, though habitually and implicately he ought: for the keeping of a good Conscience, is like to that general Precept spoken of before, anent doing what ever we do to thePage 180glory of God, at the principal end of all our actions; and that is founded on this; Where it is not necessary, that all along the action or duty, in all difference of time, or in every moment (as I just now said) we should have actual and explicate thoughts of this end, viz. God's glory; but if this end be intended in the whole current of our life habitually, and actually in the entry of every particular

action or duty, though there be not actual and explicate thoughts of it alwayes along the action, we may warrantably expect on Christ's account God's approbation, as doing to his glory: So is it here; As when a man undertakes a journey to such a place, It's sufficient before he set out, he actually and explicitly mind that place, and that he do so now and then by the way, and especially if he observe any turning off, or hazard of going out of the way, or if he hath not often gone that way before? though he have not actual thoughts of it all along everystep of the way: But to clear this in a word or two further, we conceive that these three particularly are necessary for keeping a good Conscience, 1. The habitual Testimony of Conscience, that is, that a man's Conscience be alwayes in a readiness to give him a good testimony; Which imports three things. 1. That he be right in the matter of his practice, that it be nothing sinful that he is about. 2. That he be right in the frame of his spirit, spiritual, stayed and composed. 3. That he be carefully watchful to prevent what ever may ma his peace, and to guard against what may distemper and discompose his spirit; and that withal he be studious to keep his Conscience in a good temper or tune (to speak so) that it may be in readiness to give him a testimony when he calls for it: These three are necessary (I say) in every particular action for keeping of a good Conscience, that a man be in a thing that for the matter is right; that he be in a composed and suitable frame; and that he be watchful against anything that may hinder or distemper him in prosecuting that action. 2. Though an explicate

and actual testimony and reflecting, be not alwayes, or
inPage 181all difference of time necessary; yet it would
be frequent? and the more frequent, readily the better;
Though (for instance) in every word of Prayer one
cannot actually reflect on himself, nor look after the
testimony of Conscience; Yet in intervals this may be
win at, and would be endeavoured: It's in this case some
way as it's in reference to that command anent praying
alwayes, or without ceasing, though we cannot pray
alwayes actually, or continually without interruption; nor
are we obliged to do so; yet we should be frequent in it,
and intermix all our actions with short ejaculations to
God, and alwayes keep ourselves in a praying frame: So
though we cannot alwayes be actually putting
Conscience to it, yet frequently we should, and more
especially, if we be about a duty that is more difficult and
tickle; and wherein we are very ready to go wrong, and
so to lay the ground of a challenge; or wherein God's
honour is some? what more then ordinarily concerned. 3.
It's required here, that we seriously endeavour to keep
things right, and be weeding out (as it were) what is
wrong, as we find Conscience hinting to us; for the frame
of our hearts (as hath been said) is very unstable and
fickle, we would therefore be often mending and righting
it; as a man doth with a Watch that is easily distempered,
he often looks to it, and puts it right: Or it is here as it is
with a Pilot who steereth a Vessel that is very easily by
a little wind put by her course, he beareth up closs in the
eye of the wind, and when he finds her never so little off
her course, he steers about again until he set her right; or

to hold us at the former comparison of an Instrument, to preserve which in tune, it must not only be at first tempered to a just and harmonious sound, and struck upon to give out that sound; But when a man hath played a while upon it, he must be tempering and tuning it among hands (to say so) screwing up this and that, and the other Peg, as the strings slack their benfil, else it will not be kept in tune; Even so while we are endeavouringPage 182to keep a good Conscience, some one Peg or other (so to speak) will readily still be a-unfixing, and we would study to bring things back to their right temper, and watching that carnalness creep not in upon us.

The Use of the Doctrine in a word is, partly to reprove for neglect of this walk, partly to exhort to the diligent and tender practice of it, even carefully to advert to Conscience, and to endeavour to be in good terms with it, in performing every action; in eating, drinking, in bargaining, buying, selling, in riding a journey, in hearing, praying, andc, and not only to hear what Conscience hath to say, but to walk so as Conscience may speak good to us? and give us its approving testimony for helping us to keep this good correspondence with our Conscience in all our actions, which hath so great a stroak upon a Christian walk, upon a chearful and solacious Christian walk; we would now add these following directions to those formerly given to the same purpose; The 1. whereof is? That in undertaking of actions or duties, we would be very deliberat, clear and fixed. 2. We would study to walk soberly, and

composedly, and to be always in a good frame; Rashness, precipitancy, hastiness, inadvertency, levity and untenderness, are very cross to these two directions; as is also parting with Conscience as it were in the way, and not bringing it up with us. 3. We would be much in ejaculatory Prayer, frequenting God's Throne much, often darting up blinks unto him, and into our own selves, and our Consciences, intermixing these. 4ly. We would be much in self examination; This is in some respect, the Life of a good Conscience, for where there is not self examination, or reflection, we either are not right, or else know not if we be right, and no thanks to us, if we be not wrong. 5ly. We would study to have an holy indignation at, and a strick watch set against the very first risings of anything, that may in the least offend Conscience; Alace! We oft times observe not our ownPage 183declinings, and fallings from a good Frame; nor the stirrings of some one Lust and Corruption, or another, which would be resisted in the beginning; for the one of these weareth out the other. 6ly. As we would indeavour, if we would have a good Testimony from our Conscience, much singleness and sincerity? in the whole of our walk; and would in every duty, indeavour to be setting ourselves? as in the sight of God, and under his all seeing eye; nothing more marreth the Testimony of Conscience then unsingleness, and nothing contributs more to it then singleness; It's a good word that the apostle hath, 2 Corinthians 2. v. last. We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God, but as of sincerity, as of God, in the sight of God speak we in

Christ; Preaching is a good work, yet there were many Preachers that had not a good Testimony from their Conscience, in that good work; but Paul had it; and that which made him to have it, was his sincerity and singleness, that he spoke as before God, in the sight of God, without a biase, or any allowed carnalness in his end: if we could preach, and pray? and live and walk thus in all our Actions, O! What sweet peace should we have, living and dying; and O! what skaith, and prejudice doth our inadvertancy? rashness, and carnal walking work to us? and how much doth it deprive us of the benefit of this Friend, in the time of our need? God help us to amend it.

SERMON I.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

exercised and taken up; which maketh it difficult even to them that would say go about it: We shall therefore in answer to this objection, 1. speak something in general. 2. We shall speak more particularly to some directions or helps, for making it easie. In general, We say, 1. That the Duty would not be scared at, because of it's difficulty, for the most excellent Duties that have the greatest influence on the practice of godliness, that strick most at the body of Death, and are most discriminating characters of the godly; hence suitably discharged, are ordinarily most difficult,Page 207and we would love them the better, and prefer them in some respect to others, that are more easie, and which Hypocrites, and meer Formalists may go about; and indeed such a one is this (as hath been shown) And? therefore we have the greater reason to press towards the practice of it. 2ly. We would say, that though it be difficult, yet ye would essay it; and if ye do so seriously, and in the strength of Christ, ye will find it go far better, and more easily with you, then possibly ye expect; And the truth is, that as to these Duties, that are more inward and spiritual? that which is called for from us, is our essaying of, and putting hand to them, and seriously necessitating ourselves to it; which, if we do, we have them, and this in particular, laid before us, in the Promise, As Ezekiel 16:63. That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and so forth. and 36? 31. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and doings that were not good, and so forth. And so particularly we come to speak in the 2d, place, of the Directions and Helps for making it easie. The 1. whereof,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

many men and women live so, that their life cannot abide the tryal; He that doth evil (saih the Lord? Iohn3.) hates the light, neither ??? unto the ???,Page 230teat his deeds should be reprov'd; Its no wonder that a Malefactor desire not to come before the ???; and its as little wonder that a man or woman that liveth a sinful and evil life, deire not to come before their Conscience: Hence it is, that many dare not go to their Conscience, because it never speaks good, but evil to them, (as indeed it hath no other reason) and on that account they even hate it, As Achab did the ProphetMicajah, of whom he said, I hate him, because he never prophesies good but evil to me: And that they will rather consult Flsh and Blood, their own inclination and affection, then their Conscience in a particular; because they dread, it will speak evil to them, especially when they know, that there is something palpably wrong in their way; for in that case, they conclude it will gloum on them, and gall them, and even prick them in the quick. A2d. Reason is, Because folks make not this work of self-examination habitual to themselves, but delay and put off time, until their case become so ravelled, and consused, that they are afraid to medle with it; And though they should, they grow heartlesse, and out of hope to get it righted; just like men that cannot indure to adjust their accounts, which they have suffered negligently to run long on and into great confusion. A 3d. Cause may be this (which respects Believers in Christ) that even where persons make Conscience of their wayes, there is a kind of foolish precipitancy, and haste making; They being disposed to

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON IV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON V.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON I.

HEB. 13. v. 18. Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

It is indeed a very exercising, and up-taking business to attain and come by a good Conscience; but it hath a most sweetly refreshing, and strongly comorting fruit growing out of ???, when it is attained; and who ever hath through grace attained it, have never found reason to think their labour ???, or their pains ill bestowed, or too great: The calmnes, composure and tranquility of Soul, with the hoy and ??? confidence, and boldness to God-ward, with the ???, and joy that result and flow from this difficult ex super-abundantly compensate all the labour and pains bestowed on it: That we may be stirred up, and provoked vigourously to indeavour, in the strength o Christ, the having and maintaining a Conscience, void of? offence toward God and Men, and somewhat of the peace and joy that now from the well grounded assurance of its being attained; we have made choice o these words to speak a little to them: Wherein the apostle, 1. asserts his attaining of this, with confidence and boldness; We trust (sayeth he) we have a good conscience. 2. He proves his assertion? y giving an evidence othe truth of it; o by explicating that which he calleth a good Conscience, in all things (saith he) willing to live onestly; endeavouring in every thing to walk according to the rule, and to approve ourselves to God.

Page 273 We shall in the first place, speak some what shortly to the explication, and scope of the words; There are three expressions in his assertion, concerning his Conscience, which hold forth a very high attainment, The 1. Is, a good conscience; The word good signifies not only that which is profitable good, but also that which is a fair, pleasant and delectable good; insinuating, that it is such a Conscience, as hath some what in it commendable, beautiful, and amiable, fitted to make others fall in love with it; so much the word signifies. 2 Timothy 4:7. and Matthew 26:10. The 2. is, We trust, Holding out the confidence whereby he asserts the having of a good Conscience; its not such trust, as many of us have, which we use to call our good hope, Which is rather a conjecturing, or? guessing, then any well-grounded confidence; but its such a confidence, and perswasion, as is founded on good and solid grounds. The 3. is, in all things, holding forth the extent of it, as if he had said? in our privat walk, as Christians; and in our public employment, as Ministers of the Gospel; in our suffering for Truth, and in our doing for it, even in all things, we have a good Conscience? 2ly. There is the evidence, or expication of this, in the words following; because it might be thought strange, that he should so confidently asert a good Conscience in all things, as if he had been without sin; He explains his meaning in other three words, shewing what he takes to be a good Conscience; The 1. word is willing, which holds out his kindly inclination, and the determinatness of his resolution anent the thing, it was his desire, design, and

delight, to be right in every thing; as Nehemias was, to fear God's name; and though he came so far short, as that the evil which he would not, he did, and the good which he would fain have done, he could not come at it; yet he delighted not, he approved not himself in the evil, neither did he design it, but rather had it for his burden and affliction; as he gives us an account, Romans 7. This then is the apostles meaning in that high assertion, viz. that it wasPage 274his desire, design, indeavour and delight to have it so. The d word, is to live, which in the original, is to converse, and looks to his whole conversation? It? was not only to be holy in such or such a duty, as in praying? preaching and the like; but in all manner? of conversation. The 3d word is onestly, Which is the adverb of the same word called good before, and signfies to live pleasantly, desireably, worthily, or honourably; even to live so as the Gospel might not suffer by anything in his walk; and so, as none of the seekers of God might be ashamed for his sake; and so, as none might be fainted, disheartned, or discouraged to pray for him.

As for the scope of the words, You see they are subjoined to, and connected with the immediately preceeding exhortation, to pray for him, and are given as the reason why they should do so; Paul being made use of by the holy Ghost, as his Pen-man, to write this Epistle, he does (as its ordinary for him in others of his Epistles) commend himself to the prayers of the Saints, to whom he writes: and because he was ill spoken of, aud misrepresented, as an enemy to the Law of Moses, and to the Iwish Ntion; least anything of that should sick with them,

or stand in the way of their praying for him; He obviates their objection (as it were) and says, ye may pray for us, for however we be mistaken, and mis-reported of by many, yet we have a good Conscience, willing, designing, and endeavouring to live honestly, so as the Gospel of Christ may suffer in nothing by us; but that rather the repute, and interest thereof, may be furthered and advanced; And by this he binds on them (as ye shall God willing hear) the exhortation to pray for him.

We intend to insist on the latter part of the verse, yet because the consideration of the scope may be of considerable use, we shall shortly, and but in passing, touch on some observations from it; The first whereof (which is???) is, That a man that endeavours sincerely, and seriously to keep a good Conscience, may yet, notwithstandingPage 275be exceedingly mistaken, and mis-represented in the world; Paul here found it needful to clear himself thus, which he needed not to have done, if he had not been much mistaken, and mis-represented.

2ly. Observe, That a man under many mistakes, misrepresentations, and reproaches, may have a good Conscience; so that a man is not in reference thereto obliged to stand to others thoughts, and judgement of him; Thus it was a small thing for this same apostle, to be judged by man's judgement; As he tells us, 1 Corinthians 4. v. 3. Therefore ye would beware to lay weight on mistakes, mis-representations, or false reports of men; since a good report, and a good Conscience go not always together; Paul went through good report and ill

report, and digested all these things; so that his peace, and the Testimony of a good Conscience were not thereby marred.

3ly. Observe, That clearness as to a good Conscience under mistakes and reproaches, is a great and notable ground of confidence and boldness, to such as are so mistaken and reproached; many times men care but little for a good Conscience; but when all the world (as it were) comes in a man's tops, the confidence of a good Conscience is an excellent, and none-such friend and companion; it hath great weight with Paul here, and is a sufficient counter-poise to all the reproaches and calumnes they could load him with; though he was looked on even as the filth of the world, and the off-scourings of all things.

4ly. Observe, That when men meet with many reproaches, and walk in a way that is attended with a multitude of snares, they need more then a guessing or a conjectural un certainty, as to the Testimony of a good Conscience anent their being right; even a-well-grounded certainty and perswasion; Paul doth not say here, we suppose or hope (as many of you understand hope) but we trust, or are firmly persuaded; men would study alwayes to be clear in what they do, butPage 276more especially, when their way may be offended at, and they reproached on account thereof; and most especially as to that part of their way, that is like to be most offended at.

More particularly from these words considered as a reason of the fore-going exhortation to pray for him. Observe, 1. That a man who hath a good Conscience, and is most clear in it; doth ordinarily lay most weight on prayer, and is most in love with that sweet exercise; so that he will not only pray for himself, but will also desire others to pray for him; Its never a good Conscience in a man, that makes him slight prayer himself, or the prayers of others for him.

2ly, Observe, That a man that hath a good Conscience, will desire, and think himself concerned to endeavour not to be mistaken by others; he will not boast of his good Conscience, not caring what others think or say of him; but will seek to remove any offence that may be taken at his way, or that may give any the least ground to make his integrity to be called in question: as Paul doth here, and 2 Corinthians 12. Where he sayeth, v. 11. I am become a fool in glorying; but adds v. 19. but we do all things (and so this amongst the rest) dearly beloved for your edifying; And the reason is, because a man of a good Conscience will not only study to be tender in his walk, so as himself may have peace within; but will also have regard to the Conscience of others, that they may not stumble and sin, nor the way of God suffer, when he may prevent it; and its a sure evidence of an ntender Conscience, when men care not who stumble at their way, or how others account and esteem of them.

3ly. Observe, (Which is of affinity with the former) That a man that endeavours to have a good Conscience, and

to be clear that it is so indeed, will be very desirous to have a room in the prayers of others of God's people; Or such a man is one that will not lippen to, and lay weight upon his own prayers only, but will also highly prizePage 277Christian fellowship, and desire to have the benefit of the prayers of other Christians: Paul seldom misses this in his Epistles; so Romans 15. Eph. 6. Col. 4. and Philip. 1. He is much in putting and pressing them to pray, and to pray and strive for him together in prayer: The reason is, because a man of a tender Conscience hath a kindly sense of his own infirmity, and a great desire to be forward in the way of holiness, and at much injoyment of God; and would therefore ain have a lift from every one that can help him; such a man hath a native exercise in pursuing, not only after fellowship with God, but also with his people; Whereof this is a main part: And though these may be looked at, but as little things, yet if we compare ourselves with the Rule, and with the practice of tender Christians; we will find considerable defects, as to a good Conscience in them: There is a sort of disdain, or shame in many, to seek the help of others prayers, as if it supposed their being assaulted with some un?couth temptation; or the prevailing of some gross corruption; or the lying on of some extraordinary, and un?heard of Cross and affliction; but the single design of having a good Conscience, and of getting it intertained, would put us, not only to pray ourselves, but also to desire the help of the prayers of others: always, this is a most certain truth, that as a good Conscience is not attained without prayer; so its not entertained, but by

prayer: And its indeed a wonder how many can boast of a good Conscience, and yet neglect prayer themselves, and undervalue the prayers of others for them.

But it may be asked here, 1. What influence hath a Christians good Conscience, in laying on the duty of prayer on others for him? 2. What influence hath a good Conscience, to persuade others to the performance of this duty for the person that hath it, more then for others? Our speaking a little to these two, will lead us in to the discovery of some notable advantages, that attend a good Conscience.

Page 278As for the first, We say in general, that a good Co science hath a notable influence on prayer, and putting others to pray for us; or there is a strong connexion betwixt a good Conscience, and the advantage of prayer, 1. There is a connexion betwixt a good Conscience, and liberty and boldness in prayer, as it is clear, 1 Iohn 3:21. If our hearts condemn us not, we have confidence towards God: A man that hath an evil Conscience, or an accusing and challenging Conscience, hath a sort of ing at, and at best much discouragement in prayer; so that he cannot lift up his face without blushing and shame, but a good Conscience on the contrary helps to boldnes in prayer, and to the exercise of Faith in God, as a Father, so that he can boldly say, our father. 2ly. A good Conscience hath influence on, or a connexion with ou obtaining a hearing in prayer, and on our being confident that we shall get a hearing; For we know (sayeth that poor man, Iohn 9. v. 31.) that God hears not

sinner, but if any man do his will, e hears him; And David says, Psalm 66. v. 18. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not ear me; And its said, 1 Iohn 3:22. Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do these things that are pleaing in his sight: A good Conscience is not indeed a meritorious cause of the hearing of prayer, yet God hath established a connexion betwixt it, and his hearing of prayer, and it hath influence on our expecting a hearing, and on our knowing that we shall get a hearing, 3ly. And more particularly, as to the Scripture now before us; a man that hath a good Conscience, may be confident to put others to pray for him, which another cannot hve; and herein lyes the weight of the apostles argument, Pray for us, for we have a good conscience; On this ground, he pleads for this privilege of the communion of Saints; which he could not have so done, had he not had a good Conscience. 4ly. A mahat hath a good Conscience may more confidently expect the benefit of others prayers, as well as of his own; Whereas a man whose way andPage 279Conscience is evil, though others prayers may sometimes have weight before God to further his change; yet he himself can have no comfort in them while he is such; Therefore while David is praying for his enemies, he says, his prayer returned into his own bosom; but it did them little or no good: Thus we see what advantage it is to have a good Conscience, it makes us capable of the benefit, both of our own and others prayers; and the want of a good Conscience on the contrary,

excommunicas ??? in a manner from the benefit of the prayers of others.

The 2d. Question is, If this argument ought to have any more weight with Christians, in praying for them then others? or if we should pray for them only, that keep a good Conscience, and not for others? We answer 1. That Christians would not limit their duty in prayer only to these; For we see, Moses, David, and many others of the Saints, pray for such, as had no good Conscience; so that we may warrantably pray for others though not having a good Conscience, and may hope to be accepted therein; and that our praying for them shall not be without fruit, and benefit to ourselves at least. Yet 2ly. There lyes a greater ty, and obligation on us to pray for them that keep a good Conscience then for others; even as there doth, to do good especially to these that are of the household of faith; The communion of Saints here binding and linking (to say so) more straitly and strongly; So we are (I say) proportionably more strictly tyed to pray for sincere seekers of God; as the Aposles practice, Gal. 6:16. shews, Where he prays thus, As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and on the whole Israel of God; He prayes for peace to them, as being the most proper objects of the Saints prayers, especially as to God's peace; not having such ground for presenting that, or other suchlike Petitions to God for ??? Yea, 3ly. Not only does it lay on a stronger obligation, but it gives greater ground of encouragement, and confidence to deal with Page 280 God on their behalf, and of hope and expectation to be heard; Peace (sayeth

the apostle) be upon them that ??? according to this rule; He finds here firmer ground to stand on (to say so) in praying confidently, and with hope of success, for such then for others. 4ly. Clearness and perswasion (so far as is in this case attainable) that another is keeping a good Conscience, makes a Christian more willing to pray, and more hearty in prayer for such; a person will pray with the better will (to speak so) for others, when he knows that they are tender; whereas any grossenes in a professor will have influence on the cooling of his prayers for them, and he will be in hazard of being tempted, at least, some way to ly by: We will not say, but there may be often a fault in this; yet there is still a truth in the connexion, betwixt supposing a person to have a good Conscience, and our bearing burden with him, and taking a more kindly lift of his condition in prayer: And this is the reason why the apostle makes use of this ground to press and stir them up to pray for him, and to show that he expected the help of their prayers; And indeed its no small encouragement in prayer to make mention of a persons name particularly to God in prayer, when we know that it is the name of one that is a friend of his, as Abraham is called.

All these serve to commend the great advantages that attend the having of a good Conscience, and to lay a strong obligation on us to pursue after it; and they may some way direct us how to walk, so as we may attain, and entertain a good Conscience; and they may withal help to make some discovery to us, if we be tender in our walk. But we come now to the apostles assertion, We

trust (sayeth he) we have a good conscience: from which we would observe a few things, wherein we shall be more general, 1. Then Observe, That there is a very great difference betwixt Consciences; some Consciences are good, some evil; some are clear and pure, some are unclear, impure, and defiled; As the apostle shews, Page 2812 Tim: 1:3. When he says? I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience; and while he says, Tit. 1:15. To the pure all things are pure, but to them that are defiled, and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their conscience is defiled; Every man has a Conscience, but not the like Conscience: So that (I say) there is a great difference betwixt Consciences; even as great as there is betwixt men: As sin has brought a long train of pollutions and defilements with it, so that they reach the whole man, the very Conscience itself not excepted; o special grace hath a mighty powerful influence where it comes; and reaches the whole man, and the Conscience in particular; though not perfely in this life: think no??? that all men's Consciences are alike; and as ye will not trust every man's word, so should ye not trust every man's Conscience.

2ly. Observe, That there is such a thing attainable, as a good, or clear and pleasant Conscience; otherwayes, if it were simply un-attainable, there could be o ??? no true ground for Paul's assertion here: This good Conscience, in short, is come at thus; 1. There is an exercise, to have a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men, Whereof we spoke from Acts 24. v. 16. This is the tender Christians design which he drives. 2ly. When a

man has been thus exercised, to have a good Conscience; he is in the next place exercised to know the sense of his Conscience, and to have its approbative testimony; And this we spoke to from these words, 2Corinthians 1:12. This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience: and so forth. 3ly. There is a clear and pleasant Conscience; which flows from the former two; When a man has been exercised to have a good Conscience, and to have the Testimony of his Conscience for him, and comes to discern it; There results from these a clear calm, serene, smiling and pleasant Conscience; which is a most heartsome and solacious thing to dwell with, ??? very desirable, delightsome, refreshing, chearful, and spirituallly jovial companion.

Page 282The se serves to show you, that you should not look on a good Conscience as an empty, or airy fancy, or notion, or as a thing that is not attainable, or as a thing that was never attained by any; ye see the Saints have come a good length in it: and next to the glory of God, this is the end, for attaining whereof, they take all the pains to have a good Conscience; even that they may win at this calmnes and tranquility, at this peace, comfort and joy of Soul resulting from a good Conscience; even as men labour, and take pains to win at some thing in the world, that they may have a more convenient, commodious and comfortable life in it: and comparing the words of this text with these of Acts 24:16. Its very clear, that whoever are seriously, and suitably exercised to have a Conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men, they may, through God's blessing, win at a

clear, calm and pleasant Conscience: the one was Paul's study there; the other is his attainment here: If we compare the state of our Conscience with the strai of our former walk; it will very easily be found, that the want of this calm and pleasant Conscience, flows from our not being suitably exercised to godliness, and to the having a Conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men: This, alace! This is it, that wounds our peace, and ??? our spiritual mith, that makes us ow down, and walk heavily (as it were) without the Sun; if there were more serious and hard pressing after holiness, in all manner of conversation among us; we would not readily be such strangers to the serene tranquility, comfort, and refreshing that flow from a good Conscience.

3ly. Observe, That a Believer who is tender in his walk, may win to be very clear, and throughly persuaded, that he hath a good Conscience; and may according to his measure say, as Paul doth here, We trust (or are confident) that we have a good conscience; who is o very firmly persuaded, that he dare, Romans 9:1. (whence we spoke somewhat lately) take the HolyPage 283Ghost to be witnes; so a tender Christian may win to be so very clear and fully persuaded, that he hath a good Conscience, that he may boldly ??? it, and lippen to it, as that which will abide the tryal; yea, in some respect adventure, and hazard his very Soul on it, that it is so of a truth.

But it may be asked, what is it that founds this perswasion, and makes it firm and solid? Answer, The

latter part of the text will give ground to speak to it more fully; but for the time, and in the general, we say that these three do found it, ere ever a man can be thus persuaded that he hath a good Conscience; he must needs take a serious look, and view of his by-gone way, of his present frame, and of his purpose, and resolution for the future, that he may see that all these be in some measure right. 1. Then, for his by-past way, It supposeth that he hath singly indeavoured to have it tender, and conform to the rule, even that he hath been exercised to have a Conscience void of offence, and that he hath reflected, and searched, and found it in some measure to be so; the one of these layes the ground for the Testimony of a good Conscience, and the other draws forth the comfortable evidence of it. 2. As to the persons present frame, there must be Spirituality, Singleness, and some measure of Tenderness; otherwayes it will much obstruct this perswading testimony; for its not enough, that a man has been tender, if he be not in some measure so now; Paul says here, We have (not only we had) a good conscience. 3ly. There must be some deliberatness, and determinatness of his purpose, and resolution to walk with God for the time to come; for if a man do not dedicat and devot himself to the study of holiness for the future, though he be supposed to have had never so much of it in his by-gone life, this firm, and comfortable perswasion will be much marred and obstructed: So then these three must here go together, viz. Holines in a man's by-past life; holines in his present frame, and holines in his purpose for the future:Page 284We will find them all

conjoined in the experience of this same apostle, Philp. 3. where, when he has spoken of his by-gone carriage, how he had counted these things to be loss for Christ, which he sometimes accounted to be gain; and how he had suffered the loss of all things for Christ; Yet he thinks not this enough, but adds as to his present frame, Yea doubtless I count all things to be but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; And v. 12. Not as if I had already attained, or were already perfyte: And v. 13? One thing I do, forgetting these things that are behind, and so forth. He is as serious, and eager, as if he had just now begun; and tells us that for the future, he is resolved to press hard towards the mark, until he obtain the prize: Then he subjoins, Let us then? as many as be perfyte, be thus minded, This is not an absolute perfection in holiness, that he speaks of, or a perfection of degrees, but a perfection of parts, or a perfection of sincerity (though in a higher degree than many Christians win at) as to his by-past life, as to his present frame, and as to his resolution for the time to come: Religion must not be halved, but whosoever would have a clear and calm Conscience, must study to be clear on all hands; no iniquity must be regarded in his heart, no duty resolvedly alked, but holiness in all manner of conversation, must sincerely and seriously, in the strength of grace be followed after.

4ly Observe, That where there is a good Conscience in any one thing, there will be a single and serious endeavour to have a good Conscience in all things; or a good Conscience is of universal extent, as to every thing;

We trust (says the apostle) we have a good Conscience in all things; The reason is, because if a man be conscientious in any one thing, from the principle of a truly good Conscience, that same principle will set him on to endeavour to be conscientious in all things; for its the same Divine Authority that enjoins obedience to all God's Commands; and if Conscience put a man to lay weight on any one thing as commanded, it will put himPage 285to lay weight on all things that are commanded; a quatenus ad omne, and so forth. Therefore David says, Psalm 18:22. All his judgements were before me, and I put not away his Statutes from me; and Psalm 119:6. Then shall I not be ashamed when I have a respect unto all thy Commandments; and of Zacharias and Elizabeth. Its said Luke 1:6. That they walked in all the Commandments of the Lord blameless: This Doctrine hath two Branches, The first is Negative, That there cannot be a good Conscience, but where its universal; The second is Affirmative, That where a Conscience is universal; its an evidence that its a good Conscience; Which we shall not now inist to speak of; I shall only say, that if we compare the universality of the Command, with our obedience thereto; and try if the one be as universal as the other is; if there be a respect had to all the Comnds; to these of the first, as well as to these of the second Table of the Law; to these of the Gospel, as well as to these of the Law; and if we take a view of our Conversation in whole, and in the parts of it, in the Duties of Worship, and in the Duties of our particular Callings, Stations, and Relations; If a good Conscience

hath been singly aimed at in all these, at all times, Sabbath-day and Week-day, in all conditions in prosperity and adversity; in all places, at home and abroad, in the Shop and in the Family; in Journeys by Land, and Voyages by Sea; (for Conscience comes in as concerned in all places, and in all Companies, and will put the question, whether we be called to go to such a place, and to be in such a Company or not, and will expect an answer as to all these Things, Conditions, Times, Places and Companies) If (I say) we try Conscience as to all these, we will find that a good Conscience is a very rare thing; and that it is not so easily, either attained or intertained, as many imagine it to be; and that withall its evident and undenyable hence, that the Consciences of most men and women, are notPage 286so good as they are ready to averre them to be; which they will one day find (if a gracious change prevent not) to their unspeakable and irreparable loss and prejudice.

SERMON II.

HEB. 13. v. 18. Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

TRUE Religion and godliness consists not only in the illumination of the mind, and in the conception and contemplation of the Truths concerning God and the Gospel; but also and mainly in the practise of the known Duties thereof; and very ordinarily there is more of the concern of Conscience, and of its solid peace, in the practise of more common and well known Duties, that are even at our hand, then in the speculation of, and painful search after things that are more mysterious and obscure: We would decry none of these, nor dissuade any from a sober inquiry after them, who are more called to it than others; yet we would give every one of them their own due place; and would by all means take heed that we separate and divide not the power and practise of Religion from the Theory thereof; and that we prefer not the search after some more cryptick and dark things in Religion, to the serious practice of the more plain and obvious Truths thereof: For the preventing whereof, as by other means, so we find the apostle very ordinarily in the close of his EpistlesPage 287after more Doctrinal Discourses, subjoining some plain and familiar Directions, concerning the practice of such Duties, that are generally known and acknowledged; amongst which this is one, viz. Prayer for one another, and more particularly and especially for the Ministers of the

Gospel, pray for us (faith he) in the first part of this Verse: We would then learn conscientiously to improve our Light and Knowledge towards the practice of the Duties of Religion, and most, of these that are most necessary; And particularly we would learn to lay due weight on the practice of this Duty; Ministers would neither disdain, nor think shame to call for the help of the people's Prayers; Neither would people neglect, nor think it needless, or a burden to them, to take a serious lift of their Ministers, in their prayers to God: When we press obedience in all things, as the evidence of a good Conscience, we would press obedience to this amongst the rest, which whoever neglect, will in so far mar the peace of their Conscience before God; For they cannot have a good Conscience in all things, if they neglect or flight this piece of their Duty: Therefore without further insisting in it, we exhort you in the Name of the Lord, Pray for us.

The other thing in the Verse, whereof we began to speak the last day, is the Reason or Motive whereby Paul presses them to this Duty; by which an Objection is obviated; They might be-like say, at least think, that he was an aspersed, reproached, and ill-spoken of man; and that therefore they had but small ground of encouragement to pray for him; No, sayeth he, notwithstanding these aspersions (which are false and groundless) pray for us; for we trust we have a good Conscience in all things: And because this assertion might look bigg, he qualifies it in the words following, wherein he clears what he means, and proves that he

spoke not at random, We have a good Conscience, willing in all things (sayeth he) to live honestly: We may, and doPage 288fail and come short, as to the length we should be ??? but its beside our purpose; our desire, design, and indeavour is faithfully to approve ourselves to God in all things.

Observe 1. Here, that an honest and good Life, or Walk, and an honest and good Conscience go together; There is always a suitableness betwixt the testimony of a persons Conscience within, and the ordering of his Walk and Conversation without; Or thus, as a man's life is, so is his Conscience: If the Life and Conversation be honest, then a man may have, and hath an honest, and good Conscience; but if his Life and Conversation be untender, dishonest, profane and louse, he cannot possibly have a good Conscience, as the apostle plainly affirms, Titus 1:15. And the reason of it is clear, because Consciences well grounded Testimony must be according to Truth, and speak out the thing as indeed it is; and as when the thing is ill and wrong, it cannot speak peace and good; so when the thing is right, it will not speak ill.

For Use of it, do not separat these things which God hath conjoined; Think never to have a good Conscience, when ye have not an honest Conversation: It may be found without the accomplishment of a very diligent search, that many do presumptuously and groundlesly speak and boast of a good Conscience, when there is nothing in their Conversation that looks like it, let be warrands it;

but if ye would certainly know the companion of a good Conscience, take it from Paul, it is even a living honestly: I would only here have you to take this Caveat in the by, when we say that a good Conscience, and an honest life or walk go together, we would not have you to look to the connexion of these two, so severly and rigidly, as if there could not be a good Conscience, but where there is an honest walk in its perfection, without all slips or failings; for we are now speaking of a deliberat, fixed, and settled purpose, and sincere indeavour to live and walk honestly; which mayPage 289consist with slips and fallings of infirmity; This willingness to live honestly can never be separate from a good Conscience: Neither would we have you thinking, when a Christian miscarres in his Conversation, that he can never recover a good Conscience: There are two wayes whereby a Believer may come to quietness in his Conscience. 1. By the exercise of Sanctification which prevents a Challenge; and that is it which the apostle speaks of here, and Acts 24:16. and it is that which we mean in the Doctrine. 2. When he fails and miscarries, there is a recovering of quietness, and of the Testimony of Conscience, by the exercise of epentance and Faith, sprinkling the Conscience with the blood of Jesus; Which flows not so much indeed from the man's holiness and tenderness, for preventing of a Challenge, as from Justification, and the right that the Soul gets to pardon of Sin thereby, wherein the Blood of Christ removes the Challenge and quiets the Conscience; and a Soul may have the one of these, when to its sense it wants the other; or hath indeed but little of

it; It may have some comfortable clearness of interest, or at least the faith of it, when it has in some respect an ill Conscience; as we may see David had Psalm 51. So upon the other hand, we conceive it is not impossible for a Believer to have some tenderness, and a testimony thereof from his Conscience, when he is much in the dark, as to his interest in God.

2ly, From Paul's knitting of these two together, viz. A good Conscience and the qualification of it, an honest walk. Observe, That such as would confidently assert, and assume to themselves this Testimony, that they have a good Conscience, would do it on well qualified grounds and evidences; therefore the apostle here does not content himself simply to assert it; and generally, wherever he asserts this, he holds out something of his practice, shewing thereby, that he was not mistaken, nor presumptuous in his asserting of it: If we consider the extremities that men are disposed to run into, in this matter,Page 290some too soon, and too easily assuming to themselves this Testimony of a good Conscience; others again in a manner shuing, and shifting all things that may give them clearness, as if it were impossible to be win at; We will find that there is good reason to qualify it thus, so as the golden mediocrity, or raids betwixt these-extreams, may be duly observed.

More particularly, It may be asked here, what is the qualification, or evidence, whereby a person may clear, and prove that upon good and solid ground, he assumes to himself this Testimony of a good Conscience, and may

not scrupulously reject it? The apostle holds it out in these words, willing to live honestly; and ye may take it in this Observation, That a firm and settled serious purpose of universal holiness, and honesty in our life, and walk, hath great influence on the peace and tranquility of our Conscience; and is a good evidence of a good Conscience; and withal a choice companion, that waits continually on it: I put these three together, as included in the words, in all things Willing to live honestly; The latter words respect the former, the design being as broad as the effect; and the former prove the latter, the study of universal holiness, a willingness to live honestly. 1, then we say, That this universal honest design is the companion of a good Conscience, it waits always on it; or a good Conscience and this go together, he that hath a good Conscience is honest in his walk, and he that is honest in his walk hath a good Conscience. 2ly. We say, that it is an evidence of a good Conscience; for, if they only have this good Conscience, who are honest in their walk, then where this honest walk is, there must be a good Conscience. 3ly. We say, that it hath much influence on a good Conscience, its in some sort a procurer of it, in which sense, a good Conscience is an effect of an honest walk; so that the more honest a man be in his walk, the more quietness will he have in his Conscience.

Because the Doctrine is very broad, and affords much profitable Use; I shall first clear it, Then 2ly confirm it, and 3ly. make some use of it, and remove some practical doubts that may arise from it.

1. Then for clearing the Doctrine by parts; in it we take in these three ingredients, to make up the evidence of a good Conscience. 1. That a man's walk be honest 2ly. That it be an universal honesty in all things. 3ly. That there be an willingness, or hearty purpose towards universal honesty, whereon the great stress of the quietness of a persons Conscience lyes, viz. The sincerity of the purpose, or a heart-willingness: And we may consider all these, either negatively, so that without this evidence there cannot be a good Conscience; or positively, so that where this evidence is, there is a good Conscience.

For the First, What is an honest walk? 1. We conceive it is not that which most men count honesty, viz. For a man only to think, or fancy himself to be honest; a man's own apprehension is not the rule of his trial, but that which will abide the trial before God. 2ly Honesty here, looks not to absolute perfection, and such as hath no defect; it is a thing that is not ruled, and measured by our will, but by God's will revealed in his word, though it come not up the full length of that which his revealed will calls for: And we conceive that it doth more particularly consist in these four, 1. That on the matter, it be in things allowed and approved of God; For there neither is, nor can be any honest living, except our supposed duties, and our practices be allowed and commanded of God; and here a good intention, or an honest mind, if the thing thwart the word of God; will not prove honesty, because, as to the matter it is not right, as Paul shews, Romans 10. Speaking of the Jews their zeal. 2ly. That there be an

honest end, else though the action be good on the matter, if our end be sinister or selfie, it will marr the honesty of the action; Thus Christ says, Matthew 26:10. of that good woman, She hath wrought a good, or an honest work on me; which he clears to be so, from her end, inPage 292that she poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. It was not out of vanity and otentation, but from an inward hart-respect to me; and at least in God's design, she hath been fore-signifying my burial.

3ly.Honesty takes in rectitude, or straightnesse in the manner of our going about the duty; For if the manner be not right, as well as the matter, the action will not be honest; The word honestly (as we show) signifies honorably, pleasantly, desirably, worthiy; as that word, Matthew 26:10. doeth; Now a thing cannot be commondable and worthy, if it be not right for the manner, its but hypocritical; Therefore its said of the woman that brake the Bx of Ointment on the Lord, That she did wash his feet with tears, and ipe them with her hair out of love, she was tenderly affctionat, and very real in her going about that work: This will seclude many good works on the matter, which are called in this same epistle, dead works, because not done in the loving, lively, spiritual manner, that God requires.

4ly. An honest walk must be from an honest principle; though it were possible, that a man could do all things called for, never so well for the manner, if they be not done from a right principle, he is not honest in his walk; and its on this ground, that all the duties of natural men, of meerly moral men are rejected, as having no honesty in them (as

being but the fruit of corrupt trees, which can bring forth no good fruit, as the Lord expressly affirms) and therefore can have no influence on a good Conscience, because, from a corrupt principle: We need not stand here particularly to prove the branches; they being obvious, To live honestly, takes in all these four, without which a man cannot have a good Conscience; as we suppose will be granted, at least in word, by all.

The next thing to be cleared, is, the universality of this honesty; how it is, that a man in this honest walk, must be universal; A good Conscience must have this property, and he that would have it, must needs study toPage 293live honestly in all things; In things of the first Table of the Law, and in things of the Second; in things that concern the Law, and in things that concern the Gospel; Though a man should ??? never so much external holiness, if he neglect the exercise of Repentance, of Faith, of Mortification, and of other inward Gospel-duties, or Graces, he is very defective, and pursues not an honest walk, in the just extent and latitude of it: So then, a man that would live honestly, must study to be honest in all, not only in duties of Religious worship, but also in the duties of his calling, station, and relation, even in every thing; whereof we had occasion to speak more particularly and fully in the close of our last Sermon.

For further clearing of this universality, Take these qualifications of it; first, this universality must be designed and endeavoured, in respect of men's light and

judgement, to which their walk must be answerable: A man that would walk honestly, must endeavour to know what is commanded, and the meaning of the command; if the eye (in this respect) be not single, the whole body will be full of darkness: the want of this qualification hath made many Legalists, think themselves to be far advanced in holiness, because they were ignorant of the spiritual meaning of the Law; as we see in that man spoken of, Matthew 19. who said to the Lord, pressing on him obedience touch and such commands, all these things have I kept from my youth up; and its like he thought as he said, not knowing the spirituality and extent of the Law; Therefore men's apprehensions and thoughts of their universalness in the study of holiness, cannot be a good and sufficient ground of peace, when they are ignorant of the rule of holiness. 2ly. This universality must be in respect of affection, and estimation; men would not only know their duty, as it is commanded of God, but they would esteem and love every commanded duty; people may know many duties, and yet have but very little, or no love at all to them or esteem of them; which speaks their obedience not to be universal, Page 294 and so not sound: I will not say but a Believer i Christ may find some singular Sweetness, and Soul-refreshing, in some duties of Religion, beyond what he doth in some others; whereby they may be the more endeared, and made the more delightsome to him; yet in respect of the same divine authority, injoining obedience to all the commands, he hath an equal respect and estimation to and of them all; I esteem all thy

precepts concerning all things to be right, sayeth the Psalmist, Psalm 119. v. 128. O! what an estimation puts he on every precept of God; and as if it were not enough for him to say, that he esteemed all his commandments to be right; He adds, concerning all things; and in the preceeding verse he says, I love thy commandments above gold, yea above fine gold; These words hold forth his affection to, and esteem of them; and the universality thereof, is expressed in the following words; many times men are dragged (as it were) by the heels, or by the hair to the obedience of a command, who yet have little, or no love to it, or esteem of it; much therefore of our sincerity may be gathered from our affection to, and esteem of duty; when we are drawn to it, not so much from fear of the punishment that may follow on disobedience to the Command, as from love to and esteem of the thing commanded; which doth not so much force and compell, as it doth sweetly incline and move us to it. 2ly. This universality must be in respect of men's design? and deliberat purpose, to practice all commanded duties, without allowed balking any one of them; which is, when in the prosecuting of holiness, they lay all God's Commandments before them, as David said he did, Psl. 18:22. All his judgements were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me. 4ly This universality must be in respect of our endeavour to prosecute, and use all the midses and means that may further us toward the suitable discharge of all called for duties, and towards the promoting of holiness in all manner of conversation; and endeavouring to carry a

long all thePage 295circumstances that are requisit, to the making of our ctions truly Godly: A man that would have a good Conscience, as to the honesty of his walk, would omit nothing appointed by God, that may promote him in the way of holiness: And, O! how vastly comprehensive this is; it takes in endeavour to prevent and eschew all temptations, snares and impediments, of what ever sort that may marr and let him in, following forth his course of holiness; and in his exercising of Faith in God, through Christ, and dependance on him, to be with speed brought forward to the end thereof; that he may in some measure be in case to say with the apostle, I have finished my course: These words of the wise man, Prov: 3:5, 6. are to this purpose observable, in all thy ways acknowledge thou him, and he shall direct thy paths; Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding; There would not only be an acknowledging of God in this, and that particular action, but in all our wayes; as we would be careful to make use of him, and to trust him, so we would eschew leaning to our own understanding. This universal extent of our endeavour is so necessary, that without it we cannot have peace; for true peace is the result of a man's designed, and in some measure seriously endeavoured conformity to all God's commands; and the breach of any one command will some way marr his peace; There must be then an universal design, and endeavour to keep touches with God, we can never else have solid peace: But where this is, there is fair and ready access to peace, and a good evidence of a good Conscience; according to that notable

word, Psalm 119:6. Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all thy commandments. Its only this universal respect to God's commands that prevents shame, and gives the Believer boldness; and therefore it must needs be a good evidence of, and have a great stoak and influence upon a good Conscience.

The 3d. thing in the Doctrine to be cleared is,Page 296 what is meant by willingness, and a hearty purpose to be univerial, in the practice of holiness, or of an honest life and walk? whereupon, as on its base, we said, the great stress of the evidence lyes, and therefore we would clear it the more fully; and that we may do so, we shall, . premit some distinctions of willingness, that we may know of what willingness it is, that the apostle means. 2ly. We shall confirm both parts of the Doctrine after some few things permitted. 3ly. We shall show wherein this willingness consists, and what are its characters.

For the First, we would have you to distinguish, 1. Betwixt a willingness in reference to the end or benefit itself, and a willingness in reference to the mids whereby that end, or benefit is attained; betwixt willingness to have a quiet Conscience as to the end, and willingness to live honestly as the mids; There is nothing more common among people, then to think that they are willing to have heaven, and to have Christ, that they may get heaven: they think they are very sure, that they are very willing, and love well to be in heaven, when they die, and leave this present world; and yet if this be put to a narrow and just tryal, it will rather be found to be a willingness to

have some benefit, then to be at the mids that leads to it, they would have Christ, peace with God, and Heaven, because they are good, and men naturally have an appee and desire after good; but a desire towards the mids, that leads to the end, is a willingness to be at the practice of holiness, by which we come to a good Conscience, a willingness to deny our own righteousness, and by faith to betake ourselves to Christ for peace with God, and for the pardon of sin, and a willingness to have grace to make us fruitful in every good work: many men and women have the first sort of willingness, who have not the second; therefore so soon as it comes to the use of such means, as may help to further holiness, and to attain a good Conscience they are at a stand; as it was with that man mentioned, Matthew 19. who questionless would have been at heaven, butPage 297when Christ tells him, If he would be persyte, he must sell all that he hath, and give to the poor, and come and follow him; And so puts him to a proof of his willingness, by putting him to will the mids, as ever he would come by the end; It's said, He went away sorrowful for he had great possessions; He was loath and unwilling to want heaven, and he was as unwilling and loath to forgohis riches; and at length, in this debate and struggle, his wealth prevailed, and carried him quite off from Christ; alace! There are many such hearers of the Gospel: however a desire to the mids, as well as to the end, must be in right willingnesse to live honestly; which is the first thing wherein this willingnesse consists. 2ly. We would distinguish, and put difference betwixt willingness to the mids

abstractedly (to speak so) considered, and a willingness to the mids considered complexly with other things, and wayes that ly cross to it, which yet the man loves: Thus when a man is convinced, that such a thing is good and desirable, he will have a sort of desire after it; (as that an spoken of, Matthew 19. had after heaven, and salvation) but when he comes to to look at the thing complexly, as it may be thwarting with some other thing, that he loves better; he doth not actually will it; because he sees that for the attaining of it, he must part with, and forgothat other thing, which he preferreth to it; in this respect, many men may love holiness as good and desirable, and they will readily say, O! to be holy, as that wretch Balaam wished to die the death of the righteous; but when it comes to particulars, that thwart and cross their lusts, and corrupt inclinations, as when they are told, that they must forgive such wrongs, restore such things as they have unjustly taken, and detained, that they must deny themselves, and so forth. they are at a stand: Hence some will give very fair and pertinent advices and directions to others, in reference to the study of holines; and even some very prophane men will sometimes commend the fear of God to their children, while yet in their ownPage 298practice, they lay no weight on it, no regard it; because they consider it not in itself, but as it is complicated with the apparent necessity, of parting with, and closing of such and such particular things, that they have no will to forgoe. 3ly. We would distinguish betwixt a willingness, that is, by fits, and is but some accidental motion (to speak so,) and a willingness that is

deliberat, resolute, fixed and habitual; The former may be under convictions, challenges, and fears, as appears in many of these spoken of, Exod. 19. and Deut. 5:27. Who readily say, under a fit of conviction and of fear, all that the Lord as commanded us we will do; And in many persons in their afflictions, and on their sick-beds, who will say, if they had their health again, and were delivered from such and such a trouble and distress, they would study to be better men; But so soon as they recover health, and such a tempest of trouble is over, they return with the dog to the vomit, their goodness is like the morning cloud and early dew that goeth away; as it is, Hos. 6:4. Its not this willingness that we speak of, but its an habitual fixed willingness, a settled design as to such a thing; as these words, Acts 24:16. hold forth, Hrein do I exercise my self, alwayes to have a conscience void of offence; Its not to have a willingness this or that day or hour, and then to lay it quite by; but its in all our conversation to be willing to live honestly, as the apostle hath it, Romans 7. To will is present with me; This willingness is alwayes in some measure present with serious Christians, it waits still on them; its a constant habitual inclination and propension to such a thing. 4. We would distinguish betwixt a crooked willingness to holiness, out of some by-respect; and an out-right and straight willingness, when holiness is willed and loved on an honest account, o for a straight end: The crooked willingness is a servile and mercenary desire of holines, to pure by it freedom from Hell, and coming to Heaven at best, and often to have respect from men, especially in

a time, when holiness is in any request and respect,Page 299as the Pharisees had in their giving of alms, and making long prayers; and whereof the Lord seems to mean, when he says, Hos. 10. Ephraim is an empty vine, he brings forth fruit to himself; all holiness that is designed or pursued for this? end, for any predominantly selfy-end is nothing before God, but an unstraight or crooked willingness: or ye may look at a single willingness to holiness, as that which is out of respect to holiness for itself; and when we love holiness, and an universality in it, because God loves it, and because its like him, and beautifully conforms to his Image; Thus David sweetly expresseth himself, Psalm 119:127. I love thy commandments above gold, yea fine gold; when there is a worth, amiableness and excellency seen in the Commands, and the things commanded; when they are prized, and a dear respect is had to them all for themselves. . 5. We woulddistinguish betwixt a sluggish willingness, or desire after holiness, and an effectual willingness; There is a sort of willingness that suffers men to ly still with the sluggard; such would fain have knowledge, but they dow not take pains to read, if it were but the Catechism, that they may come by it; they would ain have lusts mortified, but they dow not fast and pray, that such Devils may be made to go out; they would be at holiness, but they dow not use the means appointed by God, to win at it; there is such a desire spoken of, Prov. 13:4. The soul of the sluggard desires and hath not, because his hands refuse to work; he rests contentedly in his desire, and takes no pains to prosecute it, to the

obtaining of that which he desires; even as many lazy bodies would fain be rich, but do not take pains and labour to come at riches; even as it is storied of the Roman young Gentleman, who laid himself down on the grass, and rolled and tumbled there a while, and said, *utinam oc esset laborare*, O! if this were to labour and work: even so it may be in spiritual things; there may be a sluggish desire to be holy, and yet great negligence as to any suitable pains to come byPage 300it: But effectual willingness is that which yoaks the man in good earnest to the use of all appointed means, whereby he may obtain his desired end; as he desires to be holy? so he presses to be at it through all obstructions and difficulties; and though he win not up to perfection, in respect of degrees; yet he dispenses not with himself in his short-coming, nor in the allowed neglect of any mean that may help him forward; Not as if I were already perfete (says the apostle, *Philippians 13:14*. meaning as to the degree) But one thing I do, forgetting these things that are behind, and reaching forth unto these things that are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus: and *vers. 16*. he says, Let as many as are perfect be thus minded; where he speaks of a perfection attainable even here, and implys, that those who are not thus minded, endeavouring through grace to reach forward, to press towards the mark, making it their one thing to attain to perfection in holiness, cannot lay claim to this willingness, which is an evidence of perfection in the sense the apostle speaks of: Now from all these distinctions put together, we may find a clear

answer to what natural and carnal hearts will readily object here, and make discovery of the unwarrantableness, nay of the rottenness of the grounds whereon they found their peace; for since this willingness hath such influence on men's solid peace and tranquility of Conscience; it is not sure, every willingness that will be a certain evidence of it, nor a solid ground to build it upon.

SERMON III.

HEB. 13. v. 18. Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

THOUGH a good Conscience be the thing in all the World, in reference to which, men ought to carry most tenderly; yet if we shall take a view of the way of the generality of people, even living under, and making profession of the Gospel of Christ, we will find that there is nothing that they deal more untenderly in; some on the one hand accounting that to be a good Conscience, which is nothing so, and so, basely prostituting and abusing this excellent thing; others on the other hand looking on a good Conscience, ??? but an airy notion and fancy, never knowing, nor studying to know what the benefit and advantage of it is, they make it useless and comfortless to themselves, and so are utterly deprived of that sweetlyserene tranquility, which is God's gracious allowance on them, that make it their business to have a tender and truly good Conscience.

The Doctrine that we proposed last, was for directing us how to keep a just mids betwixt those two extreams; and its this, That where there is a sincere willingness to be universally honest in the whole of our Conversation, It hath great influence on the peace of our Conscience, Is a notable evidence of a good Conscience, and a choice companion that waits continually on it: Paul here assertsPage 302his tranquility of Conscience on this

ground; and withal explains and qualifies the same, by telling us that in all things he had a willingness to live honestly: Now because this Doctrine is of great concernment to Believers in Christ, as to their solid peace and comfort; and deals with several sorts of men; some of whom, as Antinomians rejecting any such evidence, and disputing against the possibility of universal sincerity; so that according to them there can be no solid conclusion drawn hence for the comfort of Believers: Others, such as Hypocrits, snatching at this consolation, when they have no honesty in their walk; and a third sort (better disposed) who from seen defects and failings in their walk, refusing all the consolations that flow from this ground; say on the matter to the weakning of their own hands, and to the fainting and discouraging of their own hearts, that they have nothing of this honesty, nothing of this willingness to live honest by; We insisted the more on the clearing of these three in the Doctrine: 1. What is meant by an honest Walk. 2. What is meant by universal sincerity, or honesty in our Walk. 3. What is meant by this willingness to live honestly, which is the base on which the testimony of a good Conscience doth mainly lean, and the very hinge on which it is mainly turned, as being the greatest evidence of sincerity: We shall yet premit some things further for clearing of the Doctrine, and then we shall confirm it, which is in substance, and in short this, That a man who hath an universal willingness to live honestly, may have Calmness and tranquility of Conscience,

though there be manythings in his life, for which he may very justly censure himself.

First. Then? let it be premitted, that when we speak of this calmness of Conscience flowing from the universal honesty of a persons Life and Walk; We mean nor, 1. Such a perfection of calmness and tranquility as may stand before God's Judgment-seat; for though we were in case to say with the apostle, 1 Corinthians 4:4. That we know nothing by ourselves; yet are we not thereby justified,Page 303but he that judgeth us is the Lord; who is greater than our Conscience, and sees manythings in us, that we see not selves: Who ever therefore supposeth such a perfection, can never have calmness of Conscience while he lives in the World. 2ly. Nor is this such a calmness as prevents all challenges; a man may have challenges of Conscience and yet have a good Conscience. Neither 3ly. Is it such a calmness, as under it Believers have no ground for, nor use of Repentance and Humiliation; nay Repenis not only consistent with this calmness, but it is a notable mean of it, and a main ingredient in it; its a thing whereby in part it is both attained and entertained; The kindly Gospel-exercise of Repentance for sin will not break our peace, but very readily vacation from this exercise will do it to purpose: And therefore we would carefully distinguish betwixt Repentance, Humiliation and Self-loathing for sin, and the marring of the peace of our Conscience; Yea there may be much exercise wrestling and fighting inwardly in the Spirit of a Christian, and yet considerable calmness of Conscience in that same condition: for that which

gives peace, is not so much the want of all exercise of mind, as a suitable behaviour under that exercise; As we may see in the apostle Paul, who though he was deeply exercised, and sorely combatted with the remainder of a body of Death within him, as he gives a lamenting account. Romans 7. Yet he is the man here who hath this calmness of a good Conscience.

2ly We premit, that this peace and calmness consisting with Challenges and Repentance, and with deep inward exercise, may be, first, where there is no absolute perfection of holiness; though I grant there must be no lower, nor less design, then perfection? Because this peace and calmness in sojourning Saints (of whom we mean all along) is mostly founded on sincere and serious endeavours to attain it, as the apostle speaks Philippians 3:12, 13. Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect, viz. In holiness? But I follow after, and so forth. and yet vers. 15. He asserts a perfection; There is not an attaining of perfection as to degrees, and yet there is a perfection in respect of parts, and in respect of sincere endeavour, and pressing to be at perfection. 2. This peace and calmness that we speak of? may consist with the indwelling of corruption, though not with the reign and dominion of it; I say with the indwelling of corruption, where the stirrings and actings of it are (as it were) protested against, groaned under, and opposed; as it was with this apostle, Romans 7. Who notwithstanding the law of his members rebelling against the law of his mind, yet maintains his peace; because this peace is grounded, not so much on

the intire and absolute Victory over Corruption, as on a real hatred of, a real enmity at, and a real fighting against it. 3. This peace and calmness may consist, not only with corruption indwelling, but sometimes with the prevailing and captivating power of corruption; which is also clear from Romans 7? Where the law that is in the apostles members prevails so far against the law of his mind, that it leads him captive to the law of sin that is in his members; and yet he hath peace; the reason is, because this peace does not only flow from the event of the wrestling or fight, but also from the Christians not yielding in the fight, though he be captivat, and from his entring as it were a dissent from, and protestation against the captivating power of corruption; Therefore (saith he) The thing I do, I allow not and its no more I that doth it, but sin that dwelleth in me) Not, but it was he that sinned, but he allowed it not; Nay (as I said) he protested against the prevailling of sin in himself; Therefore the words in the Original are, The thing I do, I know not, that is, I will not in some respect own it for my deed; and on this ground he maintains his peace, and from it draws his consolation, Romans 8:1. There is therefore now o condemnation to them who are in ChristPage 305Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit: for though sometimes the flesh may prevail, yet (says he) we walk not according to the principles of flesh, but we endeavour, though we? come not up to perfection, to walk according to the Rule, Principles, and dictats of the Spirit.

3ly, We premit, that this peace and calmness of Conscience, may consist with many defects, infirmities, and sailings; yet we would beware of, and watchfully guard against two sorts of sins, that are inconsistent with it; 1. Conscience? wasting-sins, that raise a storm and tempest in the Conscience, such as were Davids Adultery and Murder, Peters denial of his Master, and the like; Which though they may consist with an interest in God, standing still inviolated and not nulled; and though peace may be recovered by the renewed exercise of repentance toward God, and of faith toward the Lord Jesus; yet for the time of the prevailing of such sins, and before such exercise of aith and Repentance, they are to the? Believers Conscience as boisterous Winds are to the Sea; we do not therefore admit of all sorts of sins to be consistent with this Peace and Tranquillity of Conscience; but such only as are sins of more ordinary infirmity against the Souls actual dissent and protestation to the contrary. 2. We would beware of such Aggravations of sin, that make little sins (little I mean comparatively) to become great sins; a man may be captivat by some sins? and yet retain peace; and yet these same sins in another person, by reason of some grievously aggravating circumstances, as if they be committed deliberately, and out over the belly of Light, and of Checks and Challenges, may much waste his Conscience, and greatly wound and mar his peace: In this respect (I say) though the sin in its own nature may be lesser, yet it is greatned by these and such other Aggravations: They are strictly and properly sins of

infirmity, that the Believer doth not consent to, wherewith he is surprised, against which he fights and wrestles, seeking after, and Page 306 longing for Victory over them, and with which he admits of no truce, even when they prevail; as for other ins they will very readily mar the Believers Peace and Tranquillity.

The Doctrine being thus qualified and guarded on all hands, we shall now at length proceed to the Confirmation of it, which is, that wherever there is a sincere willingness to be universally honest in our Life and Conversation, there is good ground for peace and calmness of Conscience; or it is an evidence of a good Conscience and a companion of it.

It may be confirmed from these grounds; 1. Either we must say that no Believer has ever had Tranquillity and calmness of Conscience, which were absurd; or we must say that these who had it, did attain to perfect holiness, and needed no Repentance, which the forenamed Instances of most eminent Saints, as of David and Peter will confute; or if we can say none of these two, we must needs assert the third, viz. That a Believer on his sincere design to live honestly in all things, though he come not up the full length he should be at, may have Peace. 2. That which hath quieted many Believers before us, may be a ground of calmness and quietness to us; for as the ground and cause is common, the effect must also be common; But on this ground many Believers have been quieted before us, Therefore we may likewise on it quiet ourselves: If we look thorow the Scriptures, we will find

the Saints thus quieting and comforting themselves; What is the ground that David comforts himself on? Psalm 18:21, 22, 23. Is it not on this? I have kepted the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God; This sure is not absolute perfection that he means of, for we know he had many defects and failings, but sincerity; for, says he, All his Iudgements were before me; he had honestly designed the keeping of them all; I did not put away his Statutes from me; he balked none of God's Statutes; I was also upright before him, and I kepted my self from mine iniquity; ThePage 307strain of his way was honest, and his slips? and failings were (hitherto its like) of infirmity, and therefore he has Peace: We may see that it was thus also with Hezekiah, Isa. 38. with Job chap. 31. and with Paul Philippians 3. Who was not perfect already, but pressing hard towards it. A 3. ground of Confirmation is drawn from the Scriptures giving such Characters and Descriptions of Believers, and affirming such qualifications of them; on account of which they have a testimony from God, and ground of holy boldness in their pleadings with him; all which look to their honest willingness and sincere endeavour after perfection, and not to their attainment of it; as we see inNehemiah who thus speaks to God, chap. 1. Let thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy Servant, and of thy Servants who desire to fear thy Name; Where we have the asserting of an interest in God? and of a kindly relation to him with holy boldness; And yet they plead not a perfection in the fear of God; but a desire to fear him; Their desire, design,

resolution and endeavour, was to fear him; So Matth 5. vers. 6. They are pronounced by the Lord to be blessed who hunger and thirst after righteousness; Which speaks plainly no absolute perfection; And say they, Psalm 44. All this is come upon us, yet have we not forsaken thee, nor dealt falsely in thy Covenant; Though they had many infirmities and failings, which they did not deny but take with; yet they humbly avouch adherence to God and to his Covenant, so as they did not forsake him, nor deal treacherously in it; they assert their sincerity in cleaving to him, notwithstanding of all that came upon them: This ground is frequently made use of, Psalm 119. and particularly vers. 6. Where the Psalmist says, Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy Commandments; as if he had said, my Conscience shall not blush, nor be confounded, but have confidence and quietness, though there be not a perfect up? coming in obedience to all things commanded, if I have a respect to all, and an honest design and purpose to be at all. 4. it cannot be otherwise, if wePage 308consider, that Conscience will, and must be calm and quiet, when God accepts of a man's way? Now though there be not absolute perfection, yet if there be reality and sincerity, and no short-coming allowe, approven, nor consented to, but wrestled against and opposed; God will accept of our way: Its said, 2 Corinthians 8. vers. 9, 10. That God accepts of a willing mind, according to that which a man hath, and not according to that which he hath not; If a man improve well, seriously and sincerely the outward things given him, though there be some providential

obstruction to the performance, yet on account of his honestly willing mind, he is graciously accepted; Which holds proportionably in other points and parts of obedience; Thus the Lord says, Mal. 3:17. I will spare them as a man spares his Son that serveth him; and Psalm 103:13. Like as a Father pitieth his Children, so doth the Lord these that fear him; The force of the comparison shows that things are not at perfection in them, for then there were no need of sparing or pity; but as there is such compassion in a Father, that though his Son cannot perform things commanded him exactly and perfectly; yet if he be readily and honestly doing what he dow, he will spare and pity him, and he would be an unnatural Father that should do otherwise; So will I do says the Lord with my Sons that serve me: and in this respect the ground of a man's peace and calmness, is not any absolute perfection in himself, but God's Covenant and free grace, and his way of dealing with his own Children, who will in some cases say nothing against them, and Conscience is not allowed to say anything, where he says nothing.

Now if it be Asked how this comes to pass? We Answer? that there are three things that accompany real willingness? that contribute to, and give ground of peace? even though there be failings, 1. A real hatred and abhorrence of the sin. Psalm 119:128. I hate every false way. There is a keeping at a distance with Conscience? wasting sins, so that the man not only abstains fromPage 309acting them, but out of Conscience towards God, from Filial awe and reverence, from love and respect to

him, hates that which he hates; Do not not I (says Davia Psalm 139.) hate them that hate thee; I hate them with a perfect hatred. 2ly. Real willingness keeps off Conscience wasting-aggravations, so that Believers fall not in sins of infirmity with full deliberation; Neither do they allow or suffer themselves to ly still in them; Now its such as these that especially wound the Conscience and raise the storm and tempest of a contraversie there, which greatly marris peace. 3ly. Where this real willingness is in exercise, though sin prevail, yet (as I oftner then once said) it puts the Christian to enter his dissent from, and protestation against it, which in some respect exonerates him; even as in a humane julcatory, where a thing is carried by the peat of the plurality of voices, any Member thereof that protests is exonerated by that his protestation; just o its here, when the soul is surprised, taken unawares, and hurried by the violence of temptation; and though it do not simply and altogether free and excuse him as to the sin, as it may do a man in the other case; Yet it keeps (as it were) a legal right to him, whereupon he may humbly plead with God against his unrenewed part, complain of it, and come to him, and say, It is no more I, but sin that dwells in me: And therefore, from all we may very confidently conclude, that it is not absolute perfection that is the ground of the Conscience its good Testimony, and of the peace that results therefrom, but sincerity, or real willingness to live honestly.

The 1. Use of the Doctrine, serves to show us, That it is a tenet contrary to Scripture, cross to Believers

consolation, and to the nature of hollness, and that withall makes way for lousness, to say that there is nothing in in sincerity, and willingness to live honestly, that can give a Believer quietness, and calmness of Conscience; which Antinomians (on the matter at least) to skar, and fright Believers, not from peace of Conscience, butPage 310from the study of holiness, maintain and press; whereby they labou to ruine, and raze this most comfortable Doctrine two wayes; both which are removed, and refuted by these forgoing caveats, which we gave. 1. They say, that none at all wins to this universal willingness or sincerity: But for answer (as we said before) we speak not of universal perfyt willingness, but of sincere real willingness; There is a great difference betwixt universal honesty up at perfection, and an endeavour after universality of honesty; and its the last that that we say, a Believer may have, and hath (when in case) in its more lively exercise. 2ly. (Which overthrows the former) They say, That a natural man may have this willingness, and so it can be no ground of peace to the Believer: But for answer, we speak not of what a natural man may think he has, but if the qualifications of this willingness (whereof we spoke the last day) be remembred, and well considered, it will be found, that no natural man hath it, neither can have it while he is such; We speak not of what a demented person may fancy he hath, but of what a sober and composed Christian hath.

The 2d. use serves to discover the great unsoundness, and strong delusion, that is in the conclusion, that

hypocrites (the second sort of persons whom this Doctrine deals with) are disposed to draw from it; who are ready to bless themselves, and to think and say, Well's us that there is such a truth as this; for though we fail and come short in manythings, yet we have a good mind, and meaning; and under this specious, and plausible-like pretext, they shrewd, (and as it were) hide all their voluntary neglects, and ommissions of these things which they are called to, in the practice of Religion, and in living honestly, in order to winning at this solid peace and tranquility of a good Conscience; But let me ask such, have ye the qualifications which we assigned of this willingness? Is it a willingness that carries you forth towards coming at the mids, to will holiness,Page 311as well as at the end to will happiness? and that carries you towards the mids, viz. Holiness for itself, and not for heaven or happiness only? is it an habitual willingness, and not by fits and starts? is it single, and not mercenary, nor crooked? And is it effectual, and not sluggish? Though God will graciously accept of willingness, where persons are honest and sincere in their aim and endeavour, notwithstanding of much failing and short-coming; yet where men allow themselves in their short-comings, he will not there accept of willingness: Therefore that word opportunity, is o put in by the apostle, Gal. 6:10. As we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to them that are of the houshold of faith; and Philip. 4. Ye were careful, but ye lacked opportunity; If there be not an opportunity, God will accept of a willing mind, as he did

from the Thief on the Cross; Or, if a man be poor, and have not to give out towards the supply of others, but yet if he have, and yet by shutting of his purse, he shut up his bowels from his poor Brother; Yea, if a man through his own culpable accesion hath disabled himself from that charitable duty, if it be not sincerely repented of, (For he should work with his hands, that he may give to them that want) his willingness will not be accepted: Therefore let none think, that this willingness looseth any, the least latchet or buckle to loosness and sinful liberty; Wo be to them that resolvedly make so cursed an use of such comfortable Doctrine and that suck such poison out of so sweet and strong a cordial, for fainting Saints, under the deep sense of their short-comings, in that which they would as fain be at, as ever they would be saved, and be in heaven: God will not certainly take that for willingness, nor will it be a ground of peace to the Conscience, that is not waited with designes, and endeavours through grace to improve and make use of present opportunities of doing duty, and with some measure of serious pressing towards the mark.

But it may be Asked, Wherein consists this willingness,Page 312or what is implied in it? For answer, I would say there are (beside what is held forth in the distinctions that we offered the other day); These five things in it, 1. An high esteem? an pryzyng of all the steps of Holiness (as was said before) I esteem, (sayeth the Psalmist, Psalm 119. v. 128.) all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; There is no peice of holiness, but the man that is thus willing loves it, and

esteems it, were it to give all his goods to the poor, and his body to be urned, when he is called to it, to be reproached, demed, and ill spoken of, for Christ's and the Gospels sake, as well as to pray, hear the word read, and sanctifie the Sabbath, o do anything that may gain respect to him from men; and that not only from the awe of God, that is on his Spirit, but out of love to the thing; he would not wish oe command to be changed, or alered? even the most sublimely spiritual, and most difficultly practicable, letbe dashed out of the book of God: Whereas th hyporire. f he try narrowly, will find that he doth on the matter, at least wish, that such and such a sin had been allowed, not forbidden at least; and that such and such a duty had not been commanded; as the young man, who was bidden sell all that he had, and give to the poor, could not digest that command, but declared by his practice, and refusing to obey i, that he thought it not to be right, and that he esteemed it not as such and o on the matter wished, there had ever been such a command.

2ly. It hath a desire to be at the thing, the? man's hearts desire is to be at holiness; his great wish is that of the Pslmist, Psalm 119:7. O that my wayes were directed to ??? thy precepts The desire of his Soul is towards the remembrance of him, and of his Name; as it is Isai. 26:8. d with Nehemiah, he desires to fear God's name; He not only desires Peace with God and Heaven, but also holi and honesty in his Walk; He breaths after that as after Heaven; And he cannot be satisfied with the hope o Heaven, some few years hence, if he want holinessPage 313for the time, that want makes his very heart sick. 3ly,

It hath an exceeding great delight in holiness; Nothing is more refreshing to him, thousands of Gold and Silver, a Crown and a Kingdom will not satisfie him so much as holiness; I delight in the law of God (saith the apostle Romans 7.) After the inner man; The Word of God is sweeter to him then the honey? and the honey Comb; Its the joy and rejoycing of his heart; And when he finds any sin prevented, or stricken at the root of it, its refreshing, delightsome, and satisfying to his very Soul. 4. It hath a pressing endeavour after the use of all Means whereby he may win to that pitch of Holiness which he would be at; He would ain be spontaneous, willing of his own accord in following his duty; as its sai oIacob, that he thought his seven years service for Rachel, to be but as a few days, for the love he had to her; so this willingness maketh the Sabbath seem short, and many years in the painful Service of God? when it goes with him, to seem but as a few days; because of the love that he hath to him, and the delight that he hath in the Service of so sweet a Master; It puts him to press hard towards the mark, as a man on the Spur running a Race out over all Rubs in his Way, he pursues as earnestly and eagerly after holiness, as if his Justification before God depended on it. 5. It hath all these deliberately, and some way constantly, and not by guess, as it were, and by fits and starts, or by evanishing little flashes at a Communion, under sickness, or some great fear; out it is (as I just now said) a deliberat and continued willingness, as to the series and strain of it, though it hath its own failings intermixed and partial interruptions; its with him as it was with him who

said, Psalm 119. ver. 57. I have said that I would keep thy words; It is his deliberate choice, as when a man chooseth such a thing, his willingness to it is the result of his deliberation and choice; so this man's heart willeth holiness as his deliberately resolved and determined choice: All ye then that lay any claime to this willingness to live honestly, see well that it be thus qualified;Page 314And I do in the Name of the Lord solemnly Charge such of you whose hearts were never towards holiness, that ye presume not to meddle with the Consolation that waits on this honest willingness, or this willingness to live honestly; and if any such shall offer to drink it, God shall make you with pain, even to renting (as it were) of your very Bowels, vomit it up again, and your confidence shall be utterly rejected, and root you out of your Tabernacle.

The 3, Use serves to clear, ease and comfort, these that design and endeavour to be tender in their Walk (the third sort of persons, with whom we said this Doctrine deals) who will be ready to object, alace we have much corruption, and many failings and breakings forth of that corruption: We shall not deny but take for-granted what ye say; yet your great corruption, and many sins should put you to the serious exercise of Repentance, and self-loathing, but should not where this willingness is, break your peace; because Conscience should pity where God pities, who pities his honestly willing people as a Father pitieth his Children. But such will further object,Ah! our sins have sad aggravations, we know we are wrong, and in ill case, and yet we some way ly still, at least do not

effectually bestir ourselves to win out of it: For Answer, I would enquire, do you allow yourselves in that? There is great difference betwixt your knowing that ye sin, and your sinning willingly; Paul sees a law in his members rebelling against the law of his mind, and yet says, what I do, I allow not; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I know not: I shall readily grant that there would be much honesty, singleness and humility here: Yet God allows peace on a poor captive sinner, who knowing the thing that he doth to be ill, yet approves it not, nor himself in it? But such will yet again object, How can we have peace, so long as we have sin in us? For answer, I would say, That its one thing to have peace with corruption, and another thing to have peace with Conscience;Page 315Corruption and Conscience are as two contrary parties; a man may be in league with the one party, when he is pursuing the War with the other; yea, except a man have War with corruption, he cannot have peace with his Conscience; And though when two parties are in confederacy, a third may come and beat the one of the two off the Field, yet that will not dissolve or break the League, except there be a willing yielding toward compliance with the contrary party; yea, fighting still, and refusing to yield when the beaten party is weak, is the greater evidence of honesty; so is it when Conscience and we are in League together, though corruption beat us, if we yield not, it will not break peace; as it was with holy Ioh, chap. 31. who will do nothing that may wrong his Conscience; and though corruption should sometimes prevail over him, who hath made a

League with Conscience, yet he will not submit to it as his Lord? and lawful Sovereign; and so long as it is thus, it will not break the peace; yea, there may be a good testimony of Conscience under such a sad and wrestling exercise: And though we would not have every Traitor, base compliant, or run-away, to meddle with this Consolation; Yet sincerely-willing Souls, that are doing their outmost to maintain the fight, and to keep the field, and yet fall under a surprisal, and get some defeat, may warrantably lay claim to it, though with much repentance and self-loathing; and may have some peace and calmness in this, that they had not a voluntary hand in their own defeat; Whereas he that is not serious in the fight, can have no such ground of peace, because he has been complying with, or conniving at Corruption, or not seriously striving, nor protesting against it; but where there is a testimony that none of these things are, the League and Covenant that is betwixt the man and his Conscience may stand, and he may have, and ought to maintain his peace.

That we may come to a close of this Discourse and Text, take some Characters of this willingness to live honestly,Page 316where its sincere: And 1. Where it is, the more that Corruption get victory, the more it is hated, and the more holy discontentment follows upon it; The prevailing of corruption stirs, awaks and provocks the Christians indignation the more against it; he was angry at it before; but when at any time it makes him founder, or fall before it, his anger increases and rises to a holy rage against it; Yea when he is wrestling with his own

corruption, and cannot get it mastered, and brought down as he would, he is the more set against it; and in his complaining of it, he will readily have the more weighty and aggravating Expressions of it; as the apostle hath it, Romans 7. when he crys? O wretched man that I am and as Asaph hath, Psalm 73. When he says, So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee: Which is a real proof that he connives not at Corruption, even when it it prevailing over him; he hath not only a hatred of the evil, but even then when it prevaieth, and the more it seemeth to prevail, the more he hates it. 2. Where this willingness is, there is much prayer to God, and wrestling with him therein, to attain more and more holiness; as we may see in the Psalmist, who says to God, Psalm 119. vers, 5. O that my ways were directed to keep thy Statutes; and verse 10. With my whole heart have I sought thee, O let me not wander from thy Commandments; and verse 27. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts; and verse 35. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight, and so forth. We know not if there be many that are much in prayer to God for holiness as a choice and desirable mercy, and that are striving to maintain and keep up the fight against their corruption; but surely if this be not, men cannot have peace on this ground of willingness to live honestly. 3ly. Where this willingness is, there will be nothing a greater burden and affliction to a person, then when corruption prevails; as we use to say, there is nothing that troubles a man more then not to get his will, or to have his will thwrtd and crossed; even so there is

nothing that troublesPage 317the sincere man more than when hypocrisie steals ??? upon him, and his corruption prevails over him, so that he cannot get his will of it: Here we would distinguish betwixt thwarting of the mind, and interrupting the calmnes of the Conscience; The mind may be thwated and crossed by the prevailing of sin, when there is still ground of peace, and calmness of Conscience; its one thing to have disquietness of mind, and another thing to have peace of Conscience broken, the least stirring of corruption may and should, yea, very readily will cross and afflict the sincere Christians mind, when he cannot get his will of it, but holiness being his honest design and purpose, it ought not to break his peace, though I grant it often does so; However sincere willingness makes the man to look on the prevailling of corruption, as his greatest burden, to lament heavily over the body of death, and to cry o because of it, O miserable man that I am, who shall deliver? me from it? Alace, I cannot get my will of it, nor because of it, to be so holy as I would; It is not unworthy the remarking, that all the outward afflictions, and persecutions that the apostle met with, never drew such an expression from him, as the indwelling and stirring of the body of death did, O miserable man tha I am! He could and did rejoyce in the midst of these other tribulations; which plainly says? that he looked at this, as his greatest cross and affliction; and the thing in all the world that made him account himself most miserable: They who under the pretext of willingness to lie honestly, are not troubled with the stirrings and

prevaillings of their corruption, nor know what it is to groan under them, as their burden, who slight challenges, and neglect repentance, neither have, nor can have the solid peace and calmness of Conscience that flow from it. 4ly? A man that is seriously willing to be at holiness, and to live honestly, is a man who is often viewing the inward sinfulness, and corruption of his nature, who is well acquainted with it, and who loaths it, and himself becausePage 318of it, he can (to say so) tell two ill tales of himself, when another, it may be, has not one to tell of him; O! (says he) its at my heart that ails me; none could speak of the sin that was in Paul, at the rate that himself does, though he had less of it dwelling in him, then most of Christians living have: O! but a man that is seriously aiming at holiness, is well acquainted with the frowardness and rebellion of his own heart, and large in the expressions of the deceit, and wickedness that is in it; he will be far from coming to God, as the Pharisee did, in the ruff of his spiritual pride. with Lord, I thank thee. I am not as other men, nor like this Publican; And as many carnal gossellers do, with, we thank God, we have an honest mind, while in the mean time they take liberty to sin, and are at no pains to mortify it, nor to live to God; Nay, but his complaint will sadly be, ah! I have a heart that is like the raging Sea, my corruption leads me captive, all the thoughts and imaginations of my heart, naturally are wicked and ill, only, and continually ill; and yet he rests not on his complaints, but seeks to win above the grounds of them; the reason is, his great desire to live honestly, makes what is contrary to it, to be so much the

more hated, wearied of, and even despyted; he likes his corruption worst, and abhors it most; when it prevails over him; he loves to have sin discovered, but he hates that which is discovered. 5ly. The sincerly willing man makes no great account of his own honesty, he is far from thinking that he hath anything to boast, or to be proud of, he loves holiness so very well, that he thinks not much of what he hath attained, so as to make him halt and sit down there as if he needed go no further; he forgets all that's behind, in that respect, and says with the apostle, Philippians 3. according to his measure, Not as if I had attained, or were already perfyt, one thing I do, forgetting these things that are ehind, and reaching forth unto these things that are before, I press towards the mark, for the ???; He is so taken up with pressing desires, and endeavou to bePage 319forward, that anything he hath attained, he is not much taken, and far less vainly tickled with it, as these proud Pharisees were with their giving of almes: The attainment that many offer, as an evidence of their honest willingness, and their pleading for it with their proud boasting of it, is a shrewd evidence of their real unwillingness, in so far as they sit down contently with what they have attained, and press not at ??? to be forward, as it becomes those to do, that are far behind; The truly willing honest man sees so great a deal of his way before him, that he scarce endures to look back on what of it is past; he is ready to think and ay, I have so manythings to do for God, that I someway forget all the good turns that I have done, as to sitting down with them, or boasting of them. 6ly. The seriously willing man can

never be fully satisfied with any victory he hath obtained over his corruption, or out-gate from it, nor dare he rest on it; Neither hath he peace, until he come to look to God in Christ, and to the hope of outgate through him, I thank God (sayeth the apostle, Romans 7.) through Jesus Christ our Lord; and then followes the conclusion, so then with my mind I my self serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin; And Chap. 8:1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit: This character hath three branches, 1. The man that is wrestling with, and groaning under the body of death, loves well and dearly the hope of an outgate, and now and then longs to have the pins of his tabernacle loosed, and to be freed from that evil neighbour, and troublesome guest of indwelling corruption; and it is unexpressibly sweet and refreshing to him, to look to that desirable day, when he and it shall finally part company. 2ly. He hath never the settled hope of an outgate, but when he looks to God, through Christ; he looks to God, and thinks himself eternally obliged to him, for his giving Christ to deliver him; and he looks to Christ for strength to stand it out in the battel. and for obtaining a full and final out-gate in the close, and at last. AndPage 3203ly. A man that hath this willingness, It highly commends the free grace of God to him, it makes Christ very lovely to him, and withall it makes sin to be exceeding sinful in his own eyes; he loves Christ well, because he hath the hope of an out-gate through him; and he loves grace well, because the poor man, who is wrestling and warring with

his corruption, and often plunged in the puddle, and mire by it, hath through grace the hope of a final out-gate from it; and it makes sin to become out of measure loathsome to him; and the higher Christ Jesus and his grace are exalted, the more vile and abominable is sin in his sight, O! but it be safe for the Soul to ride at anchor betwixt these two.

We shall only add, That this sincerely, and honestly willing man, is one that hath two parts in him; and as he hath two parts, so he labours to give every part its own due; and unless this be done, there is no keeping of peace and calmness in the Conscience; if a man should look on himself, as wholly renewed, it were rank presumption, having still a remainder of corruption in him; And if (being a sound Believer in Christ) he should look on himself, as wholly unrenewed, It were gross unbelief: Therefore he attributes to corruption its due, and is humbled for it before the Lord; and he acknowledges the grace of God in him, and any honest protest against in, attributing it to grace; and gives God the praise of his grace, after Paul's example, who says, Romans 7. I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord; so then with my mind, I my self serve the Law of God, and with my flesh the law of sen; He takes with it, that with his unrenewed part, he serves the law of sin, so that he was not come at perfection in holiness; and yet asserts, that in his mind he serves the law of God, yet so that he served not the Law of God, as of himself, or in his own strength, but as renewed and assisted by grace; For 2 Corinthians 3:5. He says, Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, as of

ourselves to think anything, but our sufficiency is of God; He acknowledges that of himself, as of himself he sinned,Page 321and could not so much as think a good thought, but as renewed, and that not as of himself, but a of God, he served God; his sufficiency being allennarly of him, who enabled him to anything that was good; and as it is, 1 Corinthians15. Not I, but the grace of God in me: the same man that says, he cannot so much as think what is good as of himself, that he can do nothing, yet says, I can do all things through Christ strengthning me, Philp. 4:10. O strange! This way of distinguishing is both a notable evidence of a man that aims honesty at peace, and is the way to peace of Conscience; and otherwayes, if it be neglected, whilst Christians have corruption in them, they can never have solid peace.

SERMON I.

Hebrews 9. v. 13:14. For if the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

It is the great business of Christians to walk so, as they may be in good terms with their Conscience, that from no untenderness in their way, there may be any just ground of challenge, at least none such as may wound the Conscience, and break or marr the peacePage 322and tranquility of it, before God, or disturb, or interupt that sweet serenity, and distinct calmness of a spiritual frame of soul, that he allowes on believers in him, who are exercising themselves to have alwayes a good Conscience: But alace! its not all professors of Religion; Its not all gracious Christians that win at this; who (I mean serious Christians) partly throw the unmortified remnder of corruption still dwelling in them, and partly through their own unwatchfulness, fall often into such sins as defile the Conscience, and obstruct the clear light, and serene tranquility thereof, when in any measure attained: and therefore it is no less necessary to know how a defiled Conscience may be purged, and how we may recover losed calmness and peace, then it is to know how a good Conscience may be win at; for indeed if all our peace, and tranquility of Conscience depended on

our own holy walk only; it would be but a heartless and comfortless work to speak of a good and calm Conscience on that ground; but this is the great, the very great advantage that we have by the Gospel of Grace; which, as it shows the way how to prevent a quarrel from? and so a wound unto the Conscience; so it shows the way how a quarrel and controversie drawn on, may be removed; and this is the thing that now we would speak a little to, from these words; wherein the apostles scope is, to hold out to the Iewes the weakness of their ceremonial worship, sacrifices and washings; and the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice to do their business; and to bring them from resting on that ceremonial worship, to rest upon Jesus Christ alone; and one of the arguments that he makes use of for this end is, That no legal or ceremonial worship, or service, could make him that did the service perfyt, as pertaining to the conscience, as he says, v. 9. None of these things could give a man peace before God, and his own Conscience; but that on the contrary the blood of Jesus Christ, is able to purge the conscience from dead works; And to bring a man that is in a state of peace and freindship with God, after hePage 323hath sinned, and thereby defiled and wounded his Conscience, back to that same peace and calmness that he had before he sinned, and make him in some respect as quiet and calm, as i he had not sinned: And therefore the blood of Christ must be infily preferable to all these ceremonial sacrifices, pugings, and washings; which probably they inclined to join with him.

In the words read, the apostle illustrates, and confirms the efficacy of Christ's blood, by comparing it with the ceremonies of the Law, obviating an Objection, which is this; The ceremonies of the Law had a good use, and why then will ye cry them down? He Answers, they had an use as they respected Christ's Sacrifice, that was in due time to be actually offered, and as they ed it; and also as to a ceremonial cleansing, or holiness; but they could not, as pertaining to the Conscience make a man perfy; And (sayeth he) if these ceremonies had an efficacy, as to the outward man, and making ceremonially and externally clean or holy; how much more shall the blood of Christ be efficacious to the cleansing of the Soul, and inner man? If the ceremonies of the Law had an efficacy toward the admitting of a man to external ordinances; how much more shall the blood of Christ have an efficacy to purge the Conscience from dead works, and to take away the sting and guilt, and the defilement also of sin, and to make it quiet, and so to capacitat the man to be adtted to real fellowship with him in his ordinances? That the comparison may be the more clear, he uses ere a threefold distinction 1. of a twofold uncleanness? one of the flesh? or outward man; another of a man's Sate, and Conscience before God; The firstrelated to the man's practice, and made him that was ceremonially unclean, to be thurst without the camp, and to continue so, until he was legally cleaned; The second marred the man's peace before God. The 2d. distinction is? of a twofold Court? wherein this uncleanness is charged upon the man, The one is a Court wherein the

man's flesh i (as it were) judged,Page 324and that is by men, according to his external prosession; the other is a Court wherein his spiritual ??? is judged, and that is his Conscience: In the first Court, if the moral Law charged him not with guilt, it was not asked, whether his Conscience was guilty or not, but he was on his outward cleansing, admitted to Church privileges; but the second Court, which is called the Court of conscience; looks not a things as they appear before men, but as they are before God; and therefore will challenge when men do not challenge. The 3d. distinction is, of a twofold Sanctification, The first is, that of the flesh, spoken of v. 13. And that is, when a man is made externally clean, or holy, whereby he is admitted to the congregagation; The other is that which is inward, which admits not only to external Church-fellowship, but to real internal-fellowship with God, and to peace and calmness of Conscience: Now for quieting the Conscience, and for giving a man peace, he tells them, that though these external ceremonies admitted him to the congregation, yet they did not purify his Conscience; but that notwithstanding of all these, the quarrel was not taken away before God; and so they could not be the ground of inward peace, nor bring it in to the man's soul and Conscience; but that its the blood of Christ which only doth that; and therefore his sacrifice is more excellent then all these ceremonial Sacrifices, sprinklings and washings; for it admits a man to peace with God and gives him quietness in his own Conscience.

To leave the comparison then; We have, in the latter part of these words (which we intend to insist on) a notable effect, and the great efficacy of Christ's blood, in purging of the Conscience, holden forth in these particulars, 1. It is implied, That the state of a man's Conscience by nature is this, viz. It is polluted and defiled by dead works. 2. That the great mean whereby the Conscience is purged and made clean; is, the blood of Christ. 3ly. The end wherefore the Consciences of men are made clean, is, that they they may serve thePage 325living God. 4. The proof and demonstration of the efficacy of this blood (in these words of the former part of the verse, The blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God;) Is taken from the excellency of the sacrifice of the preist, and of the altar, whereby the sacrifice was sanctified. We shall in passing, Observe a few things that may make way or clearing of the words, and for that which we chiefly intend to speak to from them; And, 1. Observe, That the state of men's Consciences by nature is, That they are polluted by dead works, which are such works as are to be repented of, as the apostle says of them, Hebrews 6:1. Whereby he plainly insinuats, that sins are called dea works, for three reasons, 1. Because of a dead principle they proceed from, they flow from man that is dead by nature, as to any spiritual life, dead in sins and trespasses; and even the sins of Believers themselves are such, as proceeding from them, in so far as they are not quickened and renewed. 2ly. Because of their demerit, and that which they deserve, which is eternal death; final

continuance wherein, doth at last most certainly bring on eternal death. 3ly. Because, though a natural man's performances were never so specious and splendid, yet before God, they are but dead, like a carcase that wants life: So that though the greatest heap of prayers, and of other duties, should be found with a meerly natural man, they are but like to these Apples, which (as its storied) grow at, or about the lake of Sodom, Which appear beautiful to the eye, but so soon as they are touched with the hand, they presently fall into ashes; so the very best of natural men's works, how shineing soever, are but dead works before God; Therefore (by the way) ye would know, that there is a great difference betwixt dead works and living works; And that there are manythings that present fair and are pleasant to look upon, which yet defile the Conscience; ah! How many men and women are there, even living in the bosom of the visible Church, who are in as great danger from, and by that, whichPage 326seems at first blush to be somewhat, as by that which is rely and obviously nothing; all such works are but empty shows counterfis, and very cheats, they have no Soul ??? Lfe in them, being ??? destitute of any??? principle, or end however the world of pro of Reigion do to their own ruine, place all their Religion in them.

If we consider the influencing effect of these dead works on the Conscience, We find it here to be, that they pollute and defile it, as a clear Spring is mudded and defiled by the soul feet of Beasts going thorow it, even so is this Dvine thing, the Conscience defiled by sinful ??? in it, which make it to become as it were a cage forevery

unclean and haeful Bird, or rather as a hold of every oul Spirit; these Lusts as so many oul Spirits, swarming in it, pollute and defile it, whereby it becomes quite another thing: Whence we may draw these two Observations; The 1. Whereof is, That dead works, or sins continued in, do pollue and defile a man Conscience; They make (as I just now said) a clean and ??? Conscience to become polluted and filthy, so that ye ever saw a face more full of foul spots, more deformed by them, then the Conscience is polluted by these dead works, defiling sins; Therefore is this word to purge the Conscience, used there; which is rendred to cleans; Ephes. 5 26. That he might sanctifie and cleanse his Curch; and as simpollues the man in all his powers and fculties, so proportionably it polluts him in his Conscience; which is deeply polluted before it be purged, and cleansed by the blood of Christ: For clearing of it, Consider that there is a threefold pollution that follow??? in the Conscience; 1. In respect of a man's State ?????? before God; it maks him legally unclean; as we use to say of a Murderer, or a Thief, or any ??????, when found guilty by an Assize, that such a person is filed; so a man by committing of sin is ??? guilty obnoxious to punishment, Iyable to wrath, even the eternal Wrath of God, because of it;Page 327This is a legal Pollution or defilement. 2. In respect of a man's present peace and tranquility of Conscience; for though he be in a justified and clean state, and hath (it may be) win at clearness of his interest in God, and to peace and tranquility in his Conscience, so that his peace hath run as a clear, smooth and still River, or Stream; the letting

in of sin is like to the driving of a herd of Cattel thorow a clear running Stream, whereby it is mudded and troubled; so that in stead of Peace, there come in disquieting Challenges; and in stead of clearness, much confusion; as we may see in the sad instances of several of God's Saints, as particularly in David, after his fall; who therefore Psalm 51. prayes to be washen from this filthiness, both from the guilt and from the pollution of sin; and for peace, That God would restore to him the joy of his Salvation. 3. In respect of a sinful propension and inclination to more sin, which follows upon every sin; so that by frequent falling into sin, the very nature as it were of Conscience is altered, that of a loather of sin, it becomes a lover of it, and licks it up as a Dog doth his Vomit, and with the Sow that was washen, returns to wallowing in the mire, as the apostle speaks, 2 Pet. 2. ult. When a person is seemingly washen, and returns to the same sins that he was given to before, his Conscience becomes so filthy, that it can digest the filthiest, and most loathsom sins, it can swallow them down, and glut them over, (to speak so) and never challenge nor quarrel for them; In this sense the apostle says, Tit. 1:15. To the pure all things are pure, but to these that are defiled, and unbelieving, there is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience is defied; The man that follows a course of sin, his Mind and Conscience is defiled, not only in respect of contracted guilt, and in respect of the want of peace and comfort; But also in respect of utter indisposition for duty, and of a sinful inclination to more sin; so that it becomes hardned and cauterizd: There is

such a contagion in sin, that it defiles and pollutes the Conscience all these wayes, that whereas it wasPage 328before pure, It becomes now like a person that hath the Botch, and many Boils and putrifying Sores running in him: Only we would distinguish here betwixt this pollution of Conscience, as it is total in an unrenewed man, and as it is partial in a Believer, a Believer may be defiled in Conscience, when he is offended and stumbled, so as to be tempted by the example of others to do some thing, wherein he is not clear, as some were, 1 Corinthians 8.verse 7, and 10. His Conscience is thereby mudded, jumbled and troubled, and his peace marred, yet he hath not a total and universal defilement of Conscience; And therefore the effects of that uncleanness, pollution and defilement follow not totally and universally oh him.

I shall only say for Use of this: 1. O! that ye knew what an abominable thing sin is, and how dreadfully dangerous it is, thereby to defile and pollute the Conscience, which is the most noble thing in you; sin would sure be more abhorred and fled from: Its really a wonder that men should love dead Works so well, when there is no Botch nor Plague so infectious and contagious, so hurtful and destructive to the Bodies, as it is to the Souls of men. 2 This we may also see, that its no marvel that men who are given to sin, be hard to be wakned and reclaimed; for continuance in sin makes the Conscience full of holes as it were, that all slips and falls thorow it; or (as the apostle speaks) it makes the Conscience to become cauterized, fenseless, and

feelingless? as the flesh is, that a Chirurgion designs to consume away; so I say, continuance in sin, deadens and eats out the very life and feeling of the Conscience; though it will be found to be a Conscience still, and a Conscience that will speak, and speak aloud one day, albeit in God's righteous Judgment, it be silent now. 3. We may also see here the reason why many persons are so very filthy, that sin becomes a delight to them, so that the sin that others could not sleep with, they cannot sleep until they get it committed; because thorow a custom of, and continuancePage 329in sinning, their mind and Conscience is defiled?

2ly. Observe. That a man before he be purged by Christ's Blood, hath his Conscience wholly defiled; Not only in part (as we said of the Believer) but wholly; before he be in Christ, and be purged by his Blood, he is like that wretched Infant described, Ezekiel 16:5. which description sets forth to the life, what these people were before God entered in Covenant with them, cast out in the open field, to the loathing of their persons, unsalted, and unswadled, with their navils uncut, wallowing in their own blood, and having no eye to pity them; And thus are all men and women, without exception? before they be in Covenant with God; they are wholly in a state of irreconciliation and enmity with God; whose Law does not only condemn this and that work, or deed of theirs, but all of them as but dead works; Their very state and person is condemned; their peace, if they have any, is no solid peace, none of God's peace, for there is no peace, nor ground of peace to the wicked, says my God,

Isai. 57. Their inclination is wholly depraved and corrupted; all their Thoughts and Imaginations are evil, only evil, and continually evil, as it is Genesis 6:5. and as that often cited emphatick word is, Tit. 1? 15. To him that is defiled and unbelieving there is nothing pure: Every practice of his, and the use of every thing is to him impure, and his very mind and conscience is totally defiled. And this will be yet more clear, if we consider; 1. The case that the man is in, who is not in Christ; he is without God, without hope, under his curse, and the condemnatory sentence of his Law; and can a man possibly have a clear Conscience that is under God's curse, and hath the Sentence of his Law, standing over his head unrepealed? Therefore he is said Iohn 3. to be condemned already, and to have the wrath of God abiding on him. 2. If we consider that a man in this condition is under the dominion of sin, he is a captive of it, and of the Devil at his will, as it is 2 Tim? 2:26, So that there is scarce any motion, or temptation to sin, but he hearkens to it, and complys with it; hisPage 330heart is open to swarms of lusts, and as a Cage to unclean and foul Spirits, Legions of Devils in a manner haunt him: Now if such a man can have a clear Conscience, ye may easily judge; and yet such is the state and condition of every man by nature; and therefore when Christ speaks of the Renovation of a man, he sometimes calls it the casting out of the Devil, importing thereby, that every man in nature is a common receptacle as it were to Devils.

The 1. Use of this serves to teach us, how we ought on the one hand to loath the state of Nature, and how on the other hand we ought to love and long after a state of faith in Christ Jesus, by whom only our natural state can be changed: Is it not a wonder, that so many rational men and women can live and ly still in their Natural state without minding or looking after a change? Considering that this stands recorded of, and against them, That their very mind and conscience is defiled, and that with dead works; and that all who are not in Christ are so defiled, vile and abominable, that the most stinking dunghill is not so loathsom, as the Consciences of such persons are; O! What heaps and dunghils of Lusts, what pudles and myres, what kennels and sinks of pollution, and noisome, and poisonable filthiness are there? What noisom and poisonable sins are drunk down with pleasure as so much sweet Wine? all which are kept in retentis by the Conscience, never one of them is forgotten, though for the time, the Conscience by its silence, is supposed to have forgotten them; yet it will set them all in order, marshal them all (as it were) in rank and file against the persons who shall be found out of Christ, in a most formidable manner; it will not suffer one sin, nor so much as one aggravating circumstance of any sin to be forgot. It will bring forth all, and charge them home furiously and irresistably; This in God's holy Justice will be the use of Conscience to all such persons; Its not like a Conduit or Pipe, that takes in at the one end, and lets out at the other, but like a standing sink, thatPage 331still retains all that comes into it; O! then what a foul and

filthy bag (to speak o) is the Conscience of many a man and woman? So that no Botch. Bowl, or Impostume, hath such vile? filthy and abominable matter in it, as it hath? O! what a noisom and viely stinking smell will that putrid matter send forth, when God pricks it? This should make you all to loath living in your natural state, and to long without linging to be out of it: Its like that many take it ill o have such things said or thought of them, but I assure you all that are out of Christ, whether ye have a more full or empty purse about you, you have this filthy bag full of sin within you; and while ye securely heap sins upon sins, ye are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and of the righteous judgement of God.

The 2 Use serves to let us see, what a poor and sory ground the most part have for their peace of Conscience; we may in truth wonder how it comes to pass, that many of you can have any peace, having such a puddle of filthiness within you; If it be true that your mind and Conscience is defiled (which are the best things ye have); and one day will clearly and convincingly make discovery of the truth of it; O! how much hypocrisie and presumption will be found to be among you, in stead of true and solid peace? with which ye have nothing to do, so long as these Whoredoms and Witch-crafts (to say so) of filthy sins, are with you unpurged away by the blood of Christ.

The 3. Use serves to demonstrat, and clearly to hold forth the absolute necessity of Jesus Christ, and the transcendent worth and matchless excellency that is in

him, that even when a man is thus defiled and polluted by sins these dead works? there is access by his blood, to get the Conscience purged; and this is the thing that we would mainly point at from these words (and which we intend, God willing, afterward more largely to insist in) not only the necessity of coming to Christ; but of knowing certainly that ye are got out of black Nature into him,Page 332and have gotten your Consciences purged by his Blood: Think ye it a small or little concerning matter; to be lying in a pest house, where thousands dy at your right and left hand, and not to know if ye be cleansed? To have the Plague in your bosom, and not to know whether ye be cured of it or no? and yet such is the state and condition of all of you, while ye are in corrupt Nature: And if ye would (as ye are mightily concerned) have some Evidences whereby ye may be helped to know if ye be as yet purged from this total pollution; there are some things that may be gathered from this Verse to that purpose: And 1. Did ye ever know and acknowledge your Conscience to be defiled? It can hardly be expected that a man having such a Botch, and Plague running on him, can think seriously of, let be? seriously seek after washing, before he know that he is thus defiled, and thereby in such a deplorable state: I speak not now of what gracious change may be wrought in some persons more early, and in their younger years, nor how secretly and little discernibly the work of Conversion may be wrought in some that are come to age; But I speak of God's more ordinary way of dealing, and reclaiming and converting of sinners? When Paul

speaks of himself, Romans 7. He tells us that He was alive once without the law, he was a clean man as he thought, and in his own eyes; before the Lord discovered Sin, and wakened a Challenge for it in his Conscience; But when the Commandment came (sayeth he) sin revived and I died: Now can we think with any shadow of reason, that after God called him effectually by his Grace, that he had more of a ??? nature in him than he had before? sure no; but the body of death, the corruption of his nature, was now clearly discovered to him, and became loathsom, Challenges came to be quick and sharply piercing, and his Conscience began to be touched with the lively sense of its own Defilement; he was before alive, or rather seemed to himself to be so; but now he became a dead man in his own esteem, as he was most really before the graciousPage 333change? was wrought; and sin to his sense revived, and he as to any account of his own righteousness, ???: O! sis, do ye understand this Doctrine? We are afraid that many of you do not understand it, at least in your own experience; and for as abominable as corrupt nature and sin is, that yet ye are leeping securely in it, and are often returning with the Dog to lick up that ile vmit: Its a very shrewd and evil token of a defiled and unclean Conscience, where there was never any Challenge for, nor any the lest kindly sense of its defilement and pollution. 2. Was the Conscience ever wahren with the Blood of Christ? for alwise until that be, it is defiled and polluted; Did ye ever find your Conscience ??? polluted, that ye could not get lived with it, ??? ye was made to run to the fountain

opened up in the house of David for sin and uncleanness? spoke of Zch. 13:1. suppose several of you have had now and then your? own Challenges for sin, but what course ??? ye to ????? did ye strive to close and stop the mouth of your Conscience by betaking yourselves to passe?ime, and to good company (as ye use to call it) looking on such exercise (as too many do) as a fit of Melancholy? or did ??? go ther to betake yourselves, for silencing your Conscience to Prayer and Reading (good in themselves) only? without going to the Blood of Christ? That will not e an evidence of a clean and purged Conscience, but there must be a bringing of i to the Fountain, to Jesus Christ to be cleansed and calmed; Thus it was with Paul Romans 7. who when he saw his pollution, even in but a small remander of it, and was challenged for it, Romans 7. Cyes O wretched man that I am ? who shall deliven ?????? the body of this death? and subjoins, I thank God ??? Jesus Christ our Lord; He can quiet himself no where? ??? nothing but in Christ; It is a good token when persons can admit the thought of no other way of cleansing and ing their Consciences, but by bringing them to Christ and his Blood, especially when the sense of ???, and the aith of the efficacy of his Blood hath brought? ????????Page 334bring them to him as the Fountain. 3. We would ask you if the effect of a clean Conscience has followed your betaking of yourselves to Christ? and that is a clean Life and honest Walk and Conversation; for a purged Conscience will have a purged and honest Walk following on it; and if men have once gotten a cleansed and purged Conscience, they will

be very cheary of it, and loath to pollute it again; and their great work will be to live so as they may not pollute it: But h! how few, how lamentably few have attained to this effect? There are many purgings of Conscience, which are like the sweepings and garnishings of that house, (spoken of in the Gospel) that made it ready for the Devil to re-enter into with seven spirits worse than himself; many after Light and transient touches of Challenges, become more hardned and presumptuous, more secure and carnal than they were before; and their Conscience digests (as it were) greater sins, better and more easily than it had wont to do; and it fares with them according to that Proverb, 2 Pet. 2. It. (often cited) The Dog is returned to his vomit, and the Sow that was washed? to wallowing in the mire; Their corrupt and filthy Nature being still to the ore; they fall a licking up that which formerly they seemed to have vomited out, and return to their former louse carriage. 4. What discord and war is there with any remainder (??? it be yet come to a remainder) of corruption and pollution that is bhind? What resenting and loathing is there of it? If the Conscience be purged, and endeavoured to be kepted pure, new defilements will be very unwelcome? Guests, and exceedingly troublesome to your peace; The bond womans Son (to say so) must not abide with the free-womans in the house, but must be cast out, and will be endeavoured to be cast out: While a man is in black Nature? sin is at home, and any motion to sin is entertained, and even in a manner invited and wowed; but when a man comes to be renewed in his stae, and

Grace gets the dominion, his great care and work is, to get the remainder of corruptionPage 335cast out; and if anything of it come back, or stay still within, that he cannot get cast out, he loaths it, and cannot bear with it, nor dwell satisfiedly in the house beside it: We will not say, but many filthy things may be in a pure Conscience, but it does not comport wel with them, nor digest them; They are as lukewarmwater to a man's Stomach, that he cannot keep, but must needs vomit up again, and he is sick until he do so. 5. Its a good token of a pure Conscience, when the man cannot endure to be at a distance from Christ, but hath many errands to him; would fain be near him; yea, would fain abide constantly with him, as well as in him by Faith, when he would ly beside him as beside the Fountain, to be bleached there (so to speak) because he kws that no sooner wil he go from him, but his Conscience will be defiled; and he loves so well to be clean, and loves Christ so well that makes him clean, that he likes well to be always near him: This is a good token of a person that hath a pure Conscience; Because as it betokens a great loathing of filthiness, so it betokens a great respect to Christ on this account, as to the maker and keeper of the Conscience clean; and on the contrary, its a very evil token when persons will pretend to a pure Conscience, when yet they will not go to the Fountain for a very long time, if at all; and when they go (if we may speak so) they scarce give their Conscience a dip, or a little sprinkling or syning (as we use to speak) but they are away and gone again; But a serious, tender and purged Soul, will no sooner

perceive a foul stain or spot, but it repairs quickly to the Fountain of Christ's Blood to get it washed out; And O! but its precious to him, and he never thinks himself to be right and well, but when he is there and near to him; Its true he cannot always be in Prayer, or in other Duties of Worship; yet he endeavours to be in the habitual exercise of Faith, corresponding with him for attaining and keeping a clean and undefiled Conscience.

SERMON II.

HEB. 9. v. 14. and 10 v. 22. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Chap. 10. v. 22. Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

IF we knew what sort of Consciences we naturally have, and were suitably sensible of the evil state of them, it would be to us as good News from a far Countrey, to hear how they may be gotten purged and made good; and how little soever men think of this now, and how ever easie they fancy it to be to get their Consciences solidly quieted and calmed, there is a day coming, when sleeping and secure Consciences will be awakned, and when it will be found more easie to endure the greatest toil, and the most exquisit torment on earth, then to wrestle with, and to be closely pursued, and constantly haunted by the terrours of an evil and awakned Conscience, which willPage 337roar against men, as a lyon, and tear as it were the very caul of their heart; Then, O! then they who would never be persuaded before, to believe what an evil and defiled Conscience is, nor what the benefit and advantage of peace with God, and in the

Conscience is, shall be made to their eternal prejudice to know the truth of both.

In both these places now read in your hearing, the apostles scope is, to commend the transcendent worth, and matchless excellency of Jesus Christ, and the incomparable efficacy of his most precious blood, from this noble, notable, and non-such effect of it, viz. That when nothing else can lay, or allay the storm, and tempest of an evil Conscience, nor purge it, from these defiling dead works, this blood can do it to purpose, and effectually, when applyed by Faith; when no legal Sacrifice, nor washings, that sanctified only to the purifying of the flesh, could reach, perfyting the comer thereto, as pertaining to the conscience, (as its said, Chap. 9. v. 9.) Neither could deliver him from an evil Conscience, and give him confidence, and boldness in drawing neer to God over the belly of many quarrels, and grounds of challenge, the blood of Christ can; as it is, Chap. 10. v. 22.

We left the other day at speaking somewhat to that natural pollution, that throughly affects the hearts and Consciences of all men, before they be by the blood of Christ purged; and the apostles taking such pains to hold out this, shows plainly, that it is a matter of greatest concernment to Christians, to know the way how to get their Consciences purged from that deep defilement of sin wherewith they are polluted; for is it not his manner to insist in anything that is not of concernment to the people of God, who will readily from the sad and doleful

experience of their own pollution, be induced to think that this truth is such, and ought to be esteemed so by them.

2ly. Observe, That there is nothing that Christians should more aim at, and endeavour more to be in thePage 338practice of, then to be following that way whereby they may get their Consciences purged, and more particularly these who have had their Consciences again defiled, after that they were once purged; no main infected with the Borch or plague hath more need of cleansing from it, then the man whose Conscience is infected, and defiled with the dead works of sin, needs to have it purged from them by the blood of Christ.

We shall but very briefly (to make way for that which we would mainly be at) hint at two or three Observations from both these verses now read, put together; first then? Observe, from Chap. 10. v. 22. That a Conscience not purged by the blood of Christ, is a very evil thing: which we will find to be a very sad truth, if we consider the unpurged Conscience, either as its awakned or as its not awakned, but asleep, which is ill both ways; Its ill, if it be awakned, and the terrours of God be fresh upon it; who can express, or adequatly conceive the terribleness of such a case? The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity, and wrestle through many crosses, but a wounded, a wrath-wounded spirit, or an ill Conscience, roused by the terrours of the Almighty God, who can bear? This hath made some, with Iudas the trai tour, rather to choise death? a violent death inflicted by their

own wretched hands on themselves, then life; whereby they have desperately run themselves under the wrath of God to the full, O? poor silly miserable shift, and evasion, to flee from some smaller fore-parties (as it were) of the wrath of God on earth, into the very strength, and main battel of it eternally in hell, this is infinitely worse then to leap out of the water into the fire; Nay some of the most eminent Saints, by the falling but of some hot scalding drops of God's fatherly wrath and displeasure have been brought neer the length of wishing rather for strangling (though mercifully kept from it, and made to abhorre it) then life; As it was with non such holy Job, who looked on death, a violent death as an easie matter, be what it was to bePage 339under the sense of wrath, and to be set up as the mark for God's arrows to be shot at, the venome whereof, to his apprehension, drunk up his Spirits; though all the while he was kept up in the faith of his interest in God, and of his love to him? To his purpose, Human heavily complains, Psalm 88. I am afflicted, and ready to die from my youth up, while I suffer thy terrours, I am distracted; If it be sometimes done thus in the green trees, even the greenest, what shall be done in the dry? Now the Conscience is in a special manner the receptacle of all the terrors of God; it must therefore certainly be a very ill thing to have an awakned ill Conscience: If an ill and unpurged Conscience be silent and a sleep, its in some respect worse, for it hath this black and dreadful awakning abiding it; and the longer it sleep and keep silence, the the wakning will be the more terrible, and its

cries the louder; Its all the while of its silence and sleeping, treasuring up more wrath, whereby the poor wretch will be payed home with multiplyed increase of terrour, and horrou, O! that ye knew how evil a thing, how very evil a thing it is to have a Conscience not purged from dead works, a Conscience not sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ: as no stranger can intermiddle with the joy of a man's Spirit, who hath a good Conscience, a Conscience sprinkled and purged by the blood of Christ; so no man can to the full represent to you the exceeding terribleness of the terrour of an evil Conscience, when awakned by the wrath of God pleading and pursuing a quarrel with the Soul, which quarrel he is infinitely powerful to avenge; It would be very suitable to be often enquiring at ourselves, what is become of the quarrel? and what solid ground of peace and confidence towards God is there? We will all most certainly, and inavoidably be put on this great tryal, O! suffer not yourselves to be so far deluded, as to think that a silent and stupid Conscience, is a good Conscience, and hath no danger with it, which is as great folly as to think that a feeless and benumbed member of the body is thereby inPage 340o danger, nay the danger is so much the greater.

2ly. Observe, That though all men naturally be under thi evil of an unpurged Conscience, yet in the covenant of Grace, God hath laid down a way how sinners may get their Consciences purged; This is the apostles scope in both these scriptures, even to lay a solid ground for the consolation of Believers, and for a high commendation

of God's grace, viz. That by application made to the blood of Jesus, there is as a real purging of the Conscience from sin win at, as there was access made to persons ceremonially unclean, by these sacrifices and washings under the Law, to external Church-privileges, being ceremonially cleansed thereby: which is not so to be understood, as if the sin committed had never really and actually been, so as the purged Believer should neither remember it, nor repent of it; that is not at all the meaning of the Doctrine, but it is to be understood legally, that as to the removing of the guilt of sin, and as to his having peace with God, and in his own Conscience, it is purged so, as sin cannot stand in the way of his expecting God's favour, nor simply in the way of his delighting himself therein, more then if it had never been; though the man be the debtor, yet there is a way laid down in the Gospel covenant to declare him free; even as a man that has plaid the dyvour or bankrupt, though he cannot simply, and in all respects be made as if he had never been so, yet by anothers paying of the debt, he is before the Judge acquitted, and is reckoned free of the debt, as if it had never been contracted, or owing, and as to any effect that might in law follow on it, to his prejudice; just so is it here with the sinner, that flees to the blood of sprinkling, and the word purging, sufficiently holds it out, especially when it is joined with coming with boldness, and confidence to the throne of God; for if it should be said to such a sinner, how canst thou, how darst thou come to God with such confidence, that hast an ill Conscience through so

much sin? He answers, Let us draw near, or come, having our heartsPage 341sprinkled from an evil conscience; So that as to a confident approaching to God, and application of Christ's righteousness? persons who have made application of the blood of sprinkling, may come to God with as much holy and humble boldness, as if the Conscience had never been defiled and polluted; and the experience of the Saints, who in this way have found peace and confidence, is a great evidence, and confirmation of the truth of it.

3ly. (To come a little nearer) We may Observe in the negative, That there is no way for a man, that has once had his Conscience defiled, and polluted with sin, to be cleansed and purged from it, but by the blood of Christ: If we look through this 9th Chapter from the beginning, and the following 10th Chapter, We will find that the apostles scope is to prove, that it is not the blood of Bulls, or of Calves, nor any one, or all of these ceremonial Sacrifices, washings, or purgations that can do the business; as he more particularly cleareth, v 9. of the 9. Chap. Where the apostle insinuates, That though God appointed many means and mides of purgation, yet if there had been no more but these, they could never have effected the perfyting of a man, as pertaining to the Conscience; Its only the blood of Jesus, that hath this effect: And this one reason will confirm it, viz. That there is no other thing, but the blood of Christ, that can satisfie God's justice, and remove the qurrel, that is betwixt him and the guilty sinner; its he only, in whom God is well pleased; he is our peace; and there is no name under

heaven given, whereby a sinner can be saved, but the name of Jesus; And until God be satisfied, the Conscience cannot be quiet; seeing then that nothing can satisfie God's Justice bu his blood, there can nothing purge and satisfie the Conscience but it; Therefore David prayes, Psalm 51. Purge me with hysop, and I shall be clean? Where he allds, and looks to the blood of Christ, that was ypyfied by the sprinkling of Blood, with a buns of hysop under the law, as the apostle doth here.

Page 342As the Use of this Doctrine, We would have the aith of this great truth well fixed and riveted, that every man's Conscience, whether awakned or not, is still deiled and polluted until it be cleansed and purged by the blood of Jesus Christ; as bodily, or outward exercises profit not as to this; So the mouth of the Conscience will not be stopped, until it get of this blood; So that if it should be said, Who will lay ny thing to the charge of ods elect? As it is, Romans 8. The Conscience will answer, I have manythings to lay to their charge; until that sweetest word that is ubjoined, be spoken to it, for stopping its mouth; its Christ who died, (shedding his blood) or rather is risen again; then, and never until then will it be quiet.

In further prosecution of the Use of this Doctrine, We wold have you to know, that there are four wayes that men are ready to take, for cleansing and purging of the Conscience, some one, and some another of them; which are all (if there be no more) ineffectual for reaching the real purgig? and solid satisfaction of the Conscience, which ye would therefore be aware of; As 1. Some

endeavour to divert their Conscience, and to seek a Suspension of its purging the quarrel against them, pretending some other uptaking business; as Felix did, Acts 24. Who finding himself beginning to tremble at the apostles searching and powerful discourse, and unable to stand before his own awakning Conscience, he seeks as it were a Suspension from it for a time, saying to the apostle (and to ??? Conscience on the matter) Go thy way for this time, and I will call for thee when I have a convenient season? Hence, when some persons are in heaviness, or in some it of exercise of Conscience, they will ??? to some ??? and cund friend, or to some game ??????????way, o possibly to a four hours to drink it down, and the devil is as busy to ??? on the diversion if there be such a friend to make a visit, he helps them to ??? it over, and to bnish that melancholous ???, and so to bring the person to bear down this troublePage 343of his Conscience, as a silly despicable fancy, and as if it were for their good to do so: I beseech you beware of binding up your Conscience thus, else it may grow worse on your hand, its even as ??? a man that hath a sore and aiking hand, should cut it off, or as if a part of his flesh were pained, and he should clap a hot burning iron on it; and yet this is a way that is very frequently taken by men, who cannot indure to converse with their disquieted Conscience, and therefore they labour to quash, and quench any begun exercise in it, whether under sickness or any other cross dispensation, or at a Preaching or Communion: It may be that many of you have had some such thing, and it hath been driven, or it hath worn away,

and ye cannot tell how. 2ly. Another way is also too ryff and ordinary, and that is by seeking to stop the mouth of Conscience, by some other thing, then by the blood of Christ; hence some under terrible convictions will promise and vow, i they drank excessively before, that they will do so no more; That they will not go to such a Tavern? nor to such a company for this and that long time; some will, it may be, after the committing of such or such a gros sin, vow no to ea flesh on such a day of the week, throughout their whole life; they will, it may be, vow to be more religious? but so soon as the conviction, or trouble is over, they remain still the same, and their Conscience lets them alone, they take their own sinful latituds, and are found to have been all along, and still the same old carnal men; because they aimed nor singly at peace with God through Christ's blood, but for the ime to stop the mouth of their Conscience. 3ly. Some sek to compensate the Conscience, or to compensate sin to the Conscience, and not to purge it; they will, it may be, take some pennance on themselves; and this is it that leads not only Papists to their pennances, whippings, pilgrimages, and so forth. but many ignorant Protestants to make peace with their Conscience, by a covenant of works; They will pray, and seek after tears in prayer, they will invite, in a manner themselvesPage 344to mourn, they will give some thing by ordinary to the poor, and set themselves to amend some things for the time to come; and yet the defilement and pollution of Conscience yes on still unremoved, because they never be-took themelves to the right fountain to wash at, to the blood

of Christ to be purged; Hence, the Jews ordinarily betook themselves to their sacrifices, and legal washings and purifyings; when they sinned, if they brought a bullock, calf, lamb or a goat, they thought they had done enough; and therein had a sort of peace, such as I was; but says the apostle, it was not that which made them clean, as pertaining to the Conscience, none of these, nor all of these could purge, or truly pacify it; because they could not take away the quarrel betwixt God and them; and thus many professors of the Gospel betake themselves to external ordinances, or outward performances of duties? and rest on these; I do not condemn, nor dissuade from these duties, which are good in themselves, because commanded by God, but your resting on them; and would have you to put a difference betwixt founding your peace on them, and the founding of it on the blood of Christ applyed to the Conscience by faith; O! seek not thus to bribe the conscience, for as it will not be boasted, so neither will it be bribed. 4ly. There is another way (that being rightly made use of, hath its own commendableness in it) which is, when persons are under some trouble, or disquiet of Conscience, they betake themselves to Conference, it may be with some exercised Christians, holding out their case to them for some ease and quietnesse; which (as I said) is good and commendable in itself, and may through God's blessing do good, if the end be to be helped thereby, to go to the fountain of Christ's blood and wash there, but its our fault, when in the use of this mean of conference, we seek to have our Consciences quieted by arguments, while in

the mean time, the blood of Christ is not by faith had recourse to, for cleansig and calming of it; I suppose the ablest of men,Page 345whether privat Christians, or Ministers of the Gospel, were speaking to us never so convincingly and comfortably, and were holding out evidences? to us, sound in themselves of a good stare, if (as I just now said) there be not believng application made to the blood of Christ, for taking away the ground of the quarrel betwixt God and us, there is no reasoning, nor evidence whatsoever, that will or can give a well grounded peace to the Conscience; considering that the best and most discening men may be mistaken, in their application of these evidences to us: neither is it the end of Conference, to be a ground of peace, when in the mean time, there is no solid course taken how to get our debt paye, and the justice of God satisfied: our main, yea, our first work would be, to be take ourselves to the Cautioner, and to the blood of sprinkling, under the conviction and sense of sin and guilt; and then we may profitably reason ourselves, and admit of the reasoning of others for help to quiet our Conscience; and unless there be actual fleeing to Christ, and to his blood preceeding and going before words of comfort or direction spoken, whether in private or in public; This word of God declares them to be null and vod, as to any advantage to us.

4ly. Observe, That when nothing can pacify an evl and defiled Conscience, nor purge it from dead works, the application of the blood of Christ by faith, can and will purge that Conscience, and give peace and quietness to

it, with holy and humble confidence, and boldness in coming, and drawing near to God, as if in some respect it had never been defiled by these dead works of sin. Its the apostles great scope and design here, to press these two, which are the two branches of the Doctrine. 1. The sufficiency of Christ's blood, as the price that atisfies divine Justice, and quiets the Conscience; for when the Conscience gets this blood applyed to it by faith, it has no ground to crave any further satisfaction, to the justice of God, whose deputy it is, as if something were owing; that blood, as a full and condigPage 346price satisfies for all the debt; How much more (sayeth the apostle here) shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works? The 2d, Branch is that which followeth upon his? as a native use of it, That a Belleer who hath fled to Jesus Christ after the committing of sin, and hath actually applyed his blood to the Conscience, may have quietness in it, and go with boldness and confidence to God, and may on this ground maintain his peace, in some respect, as if he had never sinned: So uos the apostles scope, if we look to the 19. v. of Chap. 10. and forward? Having therefore brethren (sayeth he) boldness to enter into the holiest by a new and living way, y the blood of Jesus, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of saith, having our hearts sprinked from an evil conscience; though it hath been polluted before: This is one of the rarest pearls, and richest Jewels of the Gospel, one of the excellentest privileges of a Belever? and one of the noblest, and notablest exprssions and evidences of the grace of God, and withall the great proo of the reality

and efficacy of the satisfaction of our blessed Lord Jesus, viz. That when the Conscience of the poor Believer is confounded, and in a manner put on the wrack with many challenges for sin, he may mke application of Christ's blood, and on that ground have sweet peace and tranquility of Soul.

For further clearing of this, We shall 1. lay down some grouds for its confirmation. And then, 2ly. make some se of it; As for the first of them, to wit, some grounds to confirm it? Take these few shortly, 1. If by the application of Christ's blood, there be solid peace made up betwixt God and the sinner, it will necessarily follow, that the application of the blood of Christ will urge the Conscience, and ought to be ground of peace and quietness to it, For (sayeth Iohn, Epistle 1. Chap. 3. v. 20.) God is greater then the heart, or Conscience; and sayeth Paul, 1 Corinthians 4:4. Though we know nothing by ourselves, yet are we not hereby justified, but e that judgeth usPage 347is the Lord; This is sound reasoning, God hath nothing to say, therefore the Conscience ought to be satisfied: But it is clear, that by the application of Christ's blood, solid peace is made up betwixt God and a sinner, As Romans5:1. Being justified by saith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; There is no standing controversie, nor quarrel onger then by faith, the blood of Christ is led unto and applyed; Iohn 5:24. He that heareth my word, and believeth on im that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; He shall come to judgement to be absolved, but not to be condemned; for (as it is Iohn

3:18.) He that believeth on him shall not be condemned; And Romans 8:1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ; And 1 Iohn 5:12. He that hath the Son hath life, and so forth. This being the over?word of the Gospel, it will follow, that the Conscience of a poor sinner, that is fled to Christ for refuge, hath good ground of peace, and that there is no ground to the Conscience ormentingly, or anxiously to challenge: And this is indeed no small matter, and yet no presumption after a sinner hath fled to Christ, to quiet himself, and to be at peace on this ground. A 2d ground of confirmation is, the experience of all the Sains recorded in the Scripture, after their falings and fallings into sin; what hath quieted them, may also quiet us; for there is but one way of making peace with God, and the taking of that way workes, as to the main, alike to all: Now its this way, that hath quieted them, its the same faith in all, and alike precious ??? in all, as to the kind; because it hath the like precious substantial effects in all; It is this therefore that must give quetness and boldness to us: That which quieted them was a look, an often renewed look, as guilt was of new contracted, through all these types and shadows, to Christ; all of them had their original and actual pollutions, whereby their Conscience was some wy defiled and disquieted; yet through application of Christ's blood they wan to peace; Purge me,Page 348says David, Psalm 51. with ysop, and I shall be clean, and so forth. Even when the Conscience was writeing his lybel, and he was under challenges for his guilt, he had the faith of his interest, and attained peace,

through application of the blood of Christ, that was to come, signified by purging with hysop: For that ground stands sure, which is laid down, Act? 13:38, 39. Be it known unto you therefore men and brethren, that through this man, is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are ??? from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law o Moses: There is indeed (as if he had said) a large and long ???, and Inditement, that Sin, and te Law, and the Conscience have against you, but be it known unto you, that through Jesus Christ, remission of sins is preached to you, and that through saith in him ye are justified, and fred from the challenges of the Law, and from the terrours of justice, and of the Conscience, even rom all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses: outward means, and misaken law, Christ being miskend and past by, cannot give freedom; but by Christ Jesus ye may have freedom.

A? 3d. Ground of conirmation, is taken from the consideration of the excellency of Christ Jesus, and the efficacy of his blood; from the consideration of the excellency of the Person, who steps in, and ??? his blood for a ransom, which being applyed, the Conscience ought to be quiet, and should not (to speak so) have a face to lay anything to the Believers charge: And this is prest in these two Scriptures on these grounds; How much more shall the blood of Jesus Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge the conscience? In which words, we have three things to hold out the excellency of this sacrifice. 1. The

excellency of the sacrifice itself; its a Sacrifice without spot; all these Sacrifices under the Law were but types of this Sacrifice, and there was alwayes something to be said of them, which argued their imperfection; but no such thing canPage 349be said of his, He was never polluted; by his wonderful conception, by the Holy Ghost, he was kept free from the least tincture, or touch of that pollution that all Adams Sons and Daughters (the Mother of the Lord not excepted) descending from him by ordinary generation are defiled with, and so was a sacrifice, against which severe justice, had nothing to object, being most exactly conform to the Law of God, to the Covenant of Redemption transacted betwixt Jehovah and the Mediator, on which this is mainly founded; but he was compleatly satisfied therewith, as we may see, Psalm 40:6, 7 Where he is brought in saying, Sacrifice and offering, thou didst not desire; all these things were rejected, as having no equivalent value, or worth in them, for aoneing and satisfying provoked divine justice, as is clear from the beginning of the following 10. Chap. and down-ward; Where the apostle cites, improves and applyes the words of the 40. Psalm; Then I said, lo, I come in the volumn of thy book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O! my God; And sayeth he, v. 10. By which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus; The good will of God willing such a thing, and accepting thereof, makes that we are thus purged, and made clean.

But 2ly. Beside the excellency of the Sacrifice, we have the excellency of the Preist that offered it; O! what

pertinent and powerful reasoning doth the apostle use, Hebrews 7. To prove the excellency and pre-??? of Jesus Christ our great high Priest, above and beyond all the Levitical Preists; These Priests were temporal, he is eternal; They were but servants, he is the Son? They were consecrated without an oath, he with an oath, according to the order of Melchisedeck; They offered many Sacrifices and often, He offered but one Sacrifice? and buonce, as it is, v. 27. of that 7th Chapter, and chap. 9. v. 28. and chap. 10. v. 12. and 14. Whereby he hath forever peryted them that are sanctified; And (sayeth he) such a high-Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled separa from sinners, and made higher then the heavens. 3ly. TherePage 350is the excellency of the Altar on which the Sacrifice was offered up; and the Altar is, (as the Lord says) that which sanctifies the sacrifice; This was the God-head of our blesed Lord Jesus, He through the eternal spirit offered up imself: Though, as man he had a beginning, yet as God he had no beginning; and through the God-head, he offered up his humane nature, which had its worth and efficacy from the divine nature, to which it was united in his blessed person; in these three, the worth, value, and transcendent excellency of this Sacrifice is held out; The Sacrifice itself, is Christ as man offered up both in his body and Soul; The Altar on which it is offered, which makes the Scrifice savour so very sweetly to God, to be of such value and worth, and to be so highly acceptable, is the eternal spirit, the God head of the second person of the glorious, dreadful and adorable Trinity; Therefore,

Acts 20:28. God is said to purchase or redeem the Church with his own blood; not with silver or gold, or any corruptible thing, as Peter says; and the Priest is, Christ God and man in one person; He is the Sacrifice, in respect of his humane nature; The Altar, in respect of his divine nature, giving value and virtue to the humane nature; For though his humane nature was in itself unspotted, yet being as such a finite creature, the divine nature to which it was united in his person, did add thereto such a value, as made it in this respect to be of infinite worth and value; and he was the Priest, in respect of both natures, as God man and Mediator for sinners: Now these three being put together, what imaginably can be more desired for quieting the Conscience, then may be had? and is here? Especially if we add, the nature of Christ's offices and his continuance in them: Having such a High priest over the house of God; a Priest living forever to make intercession for all that come to God by him; let us draw near with full assurance of faith; For he who clothed himself with the vail of our flesh, hath torn the vail, and taken down the partition wall that was betwixt God and us; and by his sufferings hath made a new and living way to us through it? into the holy of holies; and from this that sweet word follows, which we have, 1 John 2:1. If any man in, we have an advocat with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; A high-Priest, that hath offered himself in a Sacrifice, to satisfy divine justice; and a high Priest that lives forever, to intercede for the application thereof; hence also most comfortably follows, that he is able to save to the

uttermost? these that come to God through him; able to save them from sin, from wrath due for in, from challenges for in, from unbelief and disquietness of Conscience, and to give solid and perfyt peace. The 4th and last ground of confirmation which we shall name, is drawn from the consideration of the nature of the covenant of redemption, in the reality, legality, efficacy, and extent thereof in reference to sinners; if there be such a Covenant, and paction betwixt God and the Mediator transacted (to speak so) n the eternal counsel of the God-head, wherein it is agreed that Christ shall come into the world, and take on the sins of the Elect, who shall all in time, in due time flee unto him for refuge; And that they, upon their fleeing to him, shall have their sins pardoned; and that his satisfaction shall be accepted for them, as really as if they had payed their own debt, andatisfied justice in their own persons, (had that been possible;) and if on his bargan and transaction all his sufferings are bult; then sure there is in Christ's death a most solid and sufficient ground of peace and quietnesse to the Conscience of a finner, that hath fled to him, and closed with his atisfaction; even as solid and sufficient, as if he had payed the debt himself: For it were blaspheme to imagine such a covenant, so laid down, and for such an end, and not to be most real and effectual for reaching the end; This covenant being most sure, and this being the end of it, as it is Corinthians 5. ult. viz. To make him sin for us who knw no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him: by the same covenant and good will of God, Father, SonPage 352and Spirit,

concurring to lay down this way of Salvation, Christ was made sin for us, not against his will, but with his will, (for he was most willing to undergo the work: as is clear from, Psalm 40. compared with Hebrews 10. And this was the reason, or rather end, for which he was made sin for us; even That we might be made the righteousness of God in him; That he being found the sinner, and dealt with as the sinner, we might be declared righteous; not as if we had never sinned, but that by imputation of his righteousness, and God's gracious accepting of it for us, we are reckoned free, as if we had payed the debt ourselves, in our own persons: and if the covenant betwixt God and the Mediator, had a real effect on Christ Jesus the Cautioner; if he really took on our nature, and in that nature suffered, and payed our debt; if our iniquities in the punishment of them did meet on him, As it is? Isa. 53. The Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all; If he drank the bitter cup that we should have drunken, and satisfied justice for us; then sure the covenant must have a real effect on the other side? as to us; and we have good and sufficient warrand to believe, that God will accept of that satisfaction for believing sinners, that lay hold thereon for making their peace; and that he will as really keep that part of the bargane, viz. To mke the application of Christ's satisfaction forthcoming to them, as he did the other, in exacting that satisfaction from him: as many as are now before the Throne, are joyful witnesses, and glorious Monuments of the reality of this part of the covenant; and indeed there is no more legality (to speak so) in the impuing of

our sin to Christ, then there is legality in imputing his righteousness to us, in giving us absolution, and declaring us righteous through him: for there was no ground for justice to have any claime against Christ, but the will of God, and the covenant of Redemption, wherein Christ undertakes the debt; and there is no other ground for making his purchase forth-coming to the sinner, that by aith layes hold on him; Its the same blessedPage 353design that carries on both parts of the bargan: And now putting all these together, may we not most confidently say, that there is notably good ground for quieting of the Conscience of a sinner, that by faith betakes himself to the blood of Christ; and that such a sinner may with well-grounded Confidence hope for, and certainly expect pardon and absolution, as if in some respect he had never sinned.

We cannot now insist to speak to the Uses of this Doctrine; only from this we may clearly see, 1. How much sinners are obliged to God, and to the Mediator Jesus Christ; and how poor, sorry and miserable a life, and how comfortless and cursed a death we should have had, if he had not laid down a way for purging the Conscience from dead works; even this excellent and wonderful way by his own most precious blood: And therefore defiled and guilty sinners would endeavour to make this Doctrine very dearly welcome, as Paul doth, is 1 Timothy 1. v. 15. When in a transport of holy admiration, he cries, This is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptation, thatChrist came into the world to save sinners; O! Believers in Christ prize his grace highly, and

bleſs him heartily, even with all that is within you, that ever the thoughts of this way of relief, for loſt ſinners were in his bleſſed heart. 2ly. Since it is moſt certain, that naturally we all have evil Conſciences, through the debt of ſin, and defilement of dead works; and that through the blood of Chriſt, if we flee to it by faith, and take hold of his ſatisfaction, we may get our Conſciences purged, and our debt as certainly payed as any man's debt is, who hath in his Charter-chiſt, the diſcharge of a Sum he was once owing. Then let me beſeech you for the Lord's ſake, to make this your great work, to get the application of this blood made to your Conſciences, and to have it on good grounds made ſure, that ye have, by faith made application of it? that ye may not live and die in a conjectural and gueſſing uncertainty about it; O! How mightily momentuous and concerning to you, Page 354 through all eternity is it, to have your defiled Conſciences ſprinkled with that blood; if it be of concernment to you, to have access to lift up your heads with joy, and your faces with boldneſs in that day, when the hearts of many ſhall fall them, for fear of thoſe things coming on them, and their knees ſhall ſmite one againſt another, when their faces ſhall gather paleneſs, and they ſhall weep and houl deſperatly without all hope; Then doubtleſs it is of your concernment, of your incomparably greateſt concernment to get your Conſciences ſprinkled with this blood; otherwayes be aſſured, live as ye will, and die as ye may, this defiled ill Conſcience will cleave to you, as a girdle doth to the loins of a man, and it will yell and roar on you, with

unconceivable terror and torment: It will then be known, and acknowledged by many, to their everlasting shame, and loss, and to their endless terror and torment, that there was a greatly concerning truth in this Doctrine, viz. That the only way how to get a defiled Conscience purged from dead works of sin, is by the blood of Jesus Christ.

A SERMON

on Hebrews 10. v. 22. Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

The confident approaching of sinners to God, is the great design of the manifestation of his Grace in the Gospel; and that they may boldly, though humbly, draw near unto, and have communion with him, is the great fruit of Christ's purchase; the apostle discoursingPage 355here to these Hebrews, of the excellent advantages which they had in and by Jesus Christ (whereof he gives a short summary and abridgement, v. 19:20, 21.) draws thence a pathetick exhortation by way of conclusion, that Believers would make use of, and improve these advantages and privileges, in a confident approaching to God, Let us draw near (saith he v. 22.) in full assurance of faith: But because there are two things that readily stand in the way of Believers their coming to God, he casts in two requisit qualifications of their coming, for removing these obstructions, and to let us see, that though he allow of the well grounded confidence of faith, yet he doth not allow of carnal presumption in approaching to God. The 1. thing that stands in their way is carnalness and deceit of heart; and the qualification which he requires for removing of it, is in these words, Let us draw near with a true heart; Which is not to be understood of a simply siless heart; but of a sincere,

honest and upright heart, a clean heart, loathing and working out the remainder of pollution and impurity; for its opposed to an unclean, deceitful and hypocritical heart, otherways the next words of sprinkling, and washing would not be added: But because, 2ly. Believers win not in this life to that perfection in purity and sincerity, but still they are conscious to themselves of a remainder of deceit, impurity and hypocrisie to be, and abide in them; so that if they have no more but the testimony of their own purity, and sincerity to look to? it will be but as one leg to walk upon, in their drawing near to God; They might therefore object, alace! We have but little if anything of a pure and sincere heart; he answers this, by adding the second qualification, Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water; Which is (as he had said) wherein soever ye be unclean and defiled, and whatever be your impurity, deceit or hypocrisie; come to the blood of Christ, that ye may be sprinkled and washethereby, and then come forward, and draw near to GoPage 356in full assurance of faith; In a word he would have them coming, and coming in sincerity; and whatever lamented over, and loathed deceit and hypocrisie, or uncleanness, they find in themselves; he would not have that keeping them back; because there is an efficacy in the blood of Christ, to purge away both the guilt and filth of sin, and to procure welcome to such as are sincere and single in purifying their heart and way, though they be not perfittly pure, but many degrees removed from it, and because thereof, are under many quarrels from God, and

challenges from their own Consciences; he would have such making use of that blood for removing all quarrels, and so to come forward.

This Phrase of having the conscience sprinkled, is an allusion to that which we have, Exod. 12. v. 7. and 13. Where the Lord being to smite all the first-born of Egypt, to prevent the falling of the stroak and plague on the Israelites, he appoints them to kill a Lamb, and to sprinkle the Lintel and Door? posts of their Houses with the blood thereof, that when the destroying Angel passed thorow to smite the first-born of the Egyptians, he might pass over their houses, that were so sprinkled: and the force of the allusion is this, Mans Conscience in a natural estate, is like that destroying Angel, and as Israel be-sprinkled the door posts of their houses with the blood of the Paschal Lamb? so he would have them to be-sprinkle their hearts with the blood of Christ, as Chap. 9:14. and 12. v. 24. And then their Conscience will not smite them to their hurt, but they shall be past over as the Israelitswere passed over by the destroying Angel.

In the words then these two are clear? 1. That the Conscience of a person un-reconciled to God, is a mighty fearce, and terrible pursuer, ready to seize on him, as the avenger of blood did on the Man-slayer, or as the destroying Angel did on the Egyptians; And, O! but it be a dreadful thing to be obnoxious to God's wrath, and to the challenges, accusations, throws and pangs of a Conscience, that hath just ground of a quarrel against a man;Page 357who hath nothing wherewith to answer its

challenges, and accusations. 2ly. That the efficacy of Christ's blood is such, that it is able to purge the Conscience of such a man that fleeth to it, and to fence and guard him against the wrath of God, and the challenges and accusations of his own Conscience? so that as it hath no just ground to pursue, so it being God's Deputy, it cannot, neither will pursue him as God's enemy, it having no warrant from him as its Sovereign to do so; but as the sprinkling of the houses of the Israelits with the blood of the passe-over Lamb preserved them from being plagued or hurt by the destroying Angel; so there is an efficacy in the Blood of Jesus Christ, to purge and pacify the Conscience of the person, that in good earnest hath believing recourse to it, to preserve him from the stroak of God's justice and wrath, and from the pursuit and accusations of his own Conscience, I say when it is had recourse to, actually applied, and made use of, by Faith.

We cleared and confirmed these two Doctrines, or two Branches of the same Doctrine the other day, and now we come to the Use of them, which is Fourfold, 1. For Information and Direction. 2ly. For the commendation of the bargan of free Grace. 3ly. For the consolation of Believers in Christ. And 4ly. For advertisement and warning to others.

For the First Use, Ye may see here a main lesson of the Gospel, and from this ye may hear glad and joyful tydings to a tossed and troubled Sinner, whose Conscience is pursuing him like an armed man, nay the

Conscience is more terrible, when awakned, then any the greatest army of men: But behold here, there is a way to win to peace, under these tossings and troubles, and to a calme in the midst of that terrible tempest and storm; to an escape and deliverance from the hot pursuer and avenger of blood (as it were) a city of refuge to flee unto, even the blood of Jesus Christ that speaks better things then the blood of Abel, even that blood of sprinkling that speaks peace when it is applied by Faith.

Page 358 In prosecution of this Use, we shall a little clear thse three, 1. What a sinner lying under the lashes of his Conscience, coming to this blood, may expect. 2ly. How he may attain that which he may warrantably expect. 3ly? when he may and ought in a more especial manner to make use of it.

As to the First, viz. What a Conscience-tossed and troubled sinner may expect, by fleeing to the blood of Christ? God's rich and liberal allowance on him is, drawing ear to him with full assurance of faith, coming to him with confidence and boldness, as a Father in all his worship-addresses and applications: The meaning is not, That the sinner under a quarrel fleeing to this blood, hath no ground of humiliation, and repentance for sin, nor of challenges on that account; these may, and should be, where the blood of Christ is made use of, and applied by faith to the persons Conscience; They will not marr this confidence, and boldness, nor full assurance of faith that we speak of (but rather further it) as is clear from the drawing near of the Saints to God recorded in the

Scripture; As for instance, in that woman spoken of Luke 7:38. who weeps, and weeps so abundantly, that she washes the Lord's feet with her tears, yet she draws near to him with confidence; nay this drawing near with full assurance of faith doth not remove all fear, looking on fear as it carries along with it, the consideration of the infinit distance and dis-proportion that is betwixt the majesty of the great God, and a finit seckless and sinful creatures, nor that holy awe and fillal reverence that is due to him, and well consistent with this full assurance of faith, nay inseparable from the lively, and kindly exercise of it: But it supposeth these Four, 1. That the Believer fled to the blood of sprinkling, may boldly go to God in prayer, as if his friendship with him in Adam had never been broken; as the apostle insinuat, v. 19. while he says, Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the hollest, and so forth. There is a liberty and boldness (as I just now said) allowed him to call God Father, as ifPage 359the former covenant had never been broken, by a Son turning a Rebel and Traitor; The covenant of grace under the bond of which he is brought, as God's confederat, making the relation to him as neer, strait, kindly, firm and sure as it was in that other, with considerable superadded advantages.

2ly. That he may meddle with, and make use of the promises, of pardon of sin, of sanctification, of throwbearing in affliction, of quickening, of peace, of comfort, and so forth. according as he stands in need with confidence; and may draw near with full assurance of the faith of God's faithfulness, as to the performance of

them, in his own measure, manner and time; so that if the Believer could as fully and strongly exercise his faith on the promise, as he hath warrant to do; he might with as much confidence, and fulness of assurance cast himself on them, s Adam in innocency, did on the promise of life in the first covenant; because the blood of Christ applied by faith, giveth as real, just and legal a right to the promises of the covenant of grace, as Adam had to the promise of life by the covenant of works; the condition of that covenant, viz. perfect holiness and obedience, is fulfilled by Christ, in our name and room.

3ly. That the sprinkling of the Conscience by the blood of Christ, giveth the Believer a well grounded hope of heaven, of eternal life, and of glory, even of all things that are contained in the promises; Therefore? Hebrews 6:11. The apostle exhorts Christians thus, show forth the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end, and be followers of them, who through faith and patience have inherited the promises: The lively application of faith to Christ's blood, reaches to the full assurance of the hope of all that is contained in the promise; and if the promise be a solid and firm ground, and if faith lean really and strongly to it, hope may well expect the great things in it.

4ly. The Believer who hath his Conscience sprinkled with this blood expect full and through publicationPage 360of absolution and justification in the court, and before the tribunal of God, at the day of judgement, as the divine historian gives ground of hope, Acts 3. v. 19.

And in the court of the word and of his own Conscience here in this life; He hath ground with the apostle, Romans 8. to say? nay triumphantly to boast, and bid an eternal defiance to all that would offer at it, Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies, who is he that condemneth? He may say that indeed, he was owing, and a debter once, but they cannot crave payment of, and satisfaction for the debt from him now, because by the blood of Christ he is acquit; For it is Christ who hath died, yea rather is risen again, who is at the right-hand of God making intercession for us: The believing elect making the right use of this blood, of this most precious blood of Jesus Christ, may humbly, and confidently expect all these things, from and by it? O! great and glorious expectation.

As for the 2d. thing, how or after what manner, or by what means this unspeakably excellent privilege of drawing ??? with full assurance o faith, with holy boldness and confidence to obtain all these great things, may be attained and win at? It is answered in the words going a little before, Having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near, and so forth. Its supposed? ??? That there be a fleeing to Christ for satisfying of divine justice. 2ly. That application be made to him? for ging, pacifying and satisfying the Conscience? ??? it is with the Conscience in this case? as it is with the Sea after a great storm, which after the ceasing of the storm, will, fro some time have its waves much tossed, and ??? in great agitation; so after divine justice is pacified and almed (o speak so)

by the Souls fleeing to Christ for satisfying thereof, there may remain still for a while (shorter or longer, as he shall think fit) some raging as it were, some trouble, tossing, and agitation in the Conscience of the Believer; as we may see in that instance of David, who, after the prophet NathPage 361 had made intimation of pardon to him, yet is still in considerable disquiet, and agitation of his Conscience, as the 51. Psalm gives us an account: Now, as for the attainin of calmness, tranquility and peace to the Conscience, we would say, that whatever is necessary, and requisit ing the application of Christ's righteousness, for making of our peace with God, the same is needful to calme, and give peace to the Conscience: What is that? will ye say, SeeRomans 4:5. To him that worketh not? but believeth on him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness; which being joined, with the words in the text, says, that the way to this peace and calmness, is first, not for persons to staift, or refuse their debt, but to take with it. 2ly. To renounce and disclaim all possibility to satisfie divine justice themselves. 3ly. To flee to Jesus Christ, and through virtue of his satisfaction and blood, and the covenant of his grace, to rest on him for pardon; To believe on him, (tho someway ungodly) who justifieth the ungodly; For it is not enough to take with our debt, and to quite and renounce the covenant of works, except we actually rest on Christ, by virtue of the covenant of grace; This is it which the apostle holdeth furth, Philip. 3:9. Where he says? That I may be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the

law, but that which is through the faith of Christ; He supposeth justice to be pursuing him, and that nothing he can do for himself, will divert justice its pursuit, nor secure him against it; That he is a lost and gone man in himself; he rests not on the discovery of his lost estate, but seeks to be found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is by the Law, but the righteousness which is by faith in him: This is the ground that gives peace with God, and should quiet the Conscience: but when the sinner hath taken this way, if the Conscience be not yet quieted and calmed, there is something further necessary, as first, the actual renewing of that application to Christ, to get not so much a new pardon, as a new extract of that pardon; which he received inPage 362his first fleeing to Christ, that by this renewed application of faith to the blood of sprinkling, he may also quiet the Conscience, so that when the man is fled to Christ, and at peace with God, if he have not peace in his Conscience, he is to cast a renewed look to the promise, and to act faith of new on Christ's blood, to hold it forth as it were unto, and to lay it before his Conscience, taking with his sin, yet holding still by it, that he is fled to Christ, and on that ground, making use of the promise, for the renewed pardon of sin through his blood; in this respect, faith is called, (Eph. 6:16.) A shield; Take unto you (sayeth the apostle) the shield of faith, whereby ye may quench all the fiery darts of the devil; when the challenge is cast in on the Conscience, it (as it were) burns the Believer, even as a fiery, or poisoned dart thrown into a man's body, burns and inflames it; But faith

goes to the fountain of Christ's blood? to the covenant and promises, and draws out of these wells of salvation bucketfulls (as it were) to quench it; or when a challenge comes in backed with temptation, it makes use of the promise, and blood of Christ to answer it; and so faith is as a shield or targe to kepp the dart, and beat it back; it makes the Believer say, I cannot satisfie for this sin; but here is a promise of pardon to the man that is fled to Christ, and to the blood of sprinkling, as I am, and makes use of Christ in the promise, for renewed intimation of pardon, or for renewed pardon, as new guilt is contracted, And thus he is kept quiet, that the challenge wins not in so sar, nor goeth so deep, as to sting him in his vital parts (to speak so) the heart of his peace and quietness is kept still alive, tugh he be in quick and sharp exercise under the challenge. 2ly. Because challenges will not soon nor easily be got removed, nor the Conscience quickly, and without difficulty calmed, as we see in that fore-mentioned instance of David, Psalm 51. There is need therefore of continuing in the fight, and of drawing conclusions from solid and undenyable premises and grounds, to quiet the Conscience,Page 363and ward off challenges, so as they may not wound and quite marr peace; as Paul doth, Romans 8:1, 2. It might have been said to him, Thou hast been complaining of a body of death, and that with thy flesh thou servest the law of sin, and is not that a grievous challenge against thee? It is true (as if he said) But there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ, That is the making use aright of the targe or sheild of faith; But to

put the matter out of doubt, he goes on, and subsumes, and draws the conclusion; (for the words are applicative to himself; and spoken with a considerable regard to his own particular exercise, set down, Chap. 7.) I, by faith, am fled to Christ for resuce, and so am in Christ, and therefore there is no condemnation to me: and indeed, when ever challenges come in from sense, and Conscience put through other, or mingled together (as it were) blown upon by temptation, which will pursue the Believer hardly; Its needful to reason from the grounds of faith, to ward off the blow, and to quit the Conscience: And this, though it be a reflex act of faith, which does not justifie, yet it serves to reason the Conscience into peace and calmness; and there is need of faith acting thus reflexly, though not (as I said) to justifie, yet to bring home the peace and comfort of Justification, and renewed extracts, and intimations of pardon.^{3ly}. Its necessary that Believers quiet themselves positively, by comforting and confirming themselves In the faith of what the promise speaks, and in the hope of what they have to expect: The difference betwixt the former and this is, that in the former we draw home answers from the grounds of faith to ward off the dint, and bitterness of challenges; but that is not enough throwly to calme and settle the soul, therefore the latter is also needful, that the soul positively draw in peace and consolation to itself by believing; Which (as it is, Philip. 4.) is able to guard the heart and mind through Christ Jesus: and we conceive this to be Davids exercise, Psalm 51. Where, by exercising his faith on thePage

364promises, and on the blood of the Messiah to be shed, and by wrestling for the intimation of pardon, and peace, he labours not only to get his Conscience calmed, but even filled with consolation; and because the promises are often somewhat wersh and tasteless (to say so) if not seasoned and quickened by God's voice going along with them, and putting favour and life in them; This is the voice of joy and gladness, which he would so fain, hear:Therefore the Believer insists with God thus, to besprinkle his Conscience; and as he looks to the righteousness, and blood of Christ for Justification, so he looks to it for calming of the Conscience; and this is in effect to be beholden to free grace, as for pardon of fin, so for peace and calmness of Conscience; without which any other thing will not do the turn.

As for the 3d. thing proposed to be spoken of? viz. The times or seasons, or the cases wherein the Believer may and ought, in a special manner to make use of his liberty and boldness, in drawing near with full assurance of faith:There is no question, but a Believer who hath made use of Christ for pardon of sin, and Justification, may also, and should make use of him and his blood for the sprinkling his Conscience, that he may come to God with boldness and confidence, and there is no case wherein a Believer may not aim at this; but more especially he should, in these cases; As first, when he is fallen into more gross guilt, as David was, psal. 51:2ly. When that gross guilt, and grievous sinning is waited with great aggravations; as in that Ps. Davids sin is aggravated mightily by him and yet he makes application to Christ

over all that guilt, and all these aggravations of his guilt. 3ly. When the Believer hath through his folly relapsed in sin; which is not spoken to give a liberty to sin, God forbid, wo to them that make so cursed an use of such blessed doctrine; but to the commendation of God's free grace, and of the worth and efficacy of Christ's blood, and for the incouragement of lost sinners, that would fain be at Christ for pardon and peace: for as longPage 365as the blood of Christ hath efficacy and worth, and as far as the promise extends itself, as long and as far may the Believer reach his faith for coming up to boldness and confidence; although for his humiliation, and keeping humble, he may possibly never win at, not recover his former confidence and boldness; yet looking to the grounds of faith and hope, he may, and ought to study to stretch his faith to the attaining of it; 4ly. He may, and should thus endeavour confidently to draw near to God, when challenges are quick and very sharp; yea, when the challenges of Conscience are sharpest and most peircing; though challenges were as so many troupes of horses rushing in on him, and the Conscience were like a Lyon rampant, standing with his claws ready to to tear, he may and should (humbly taking with guilt) step to confidently, and make application of the blood of sprinkling; and indeed this is the very time when in a special manner he should do it; as it was in the case of the man-slayer, when he was most hotly pursued by the avenger of blood, that was the very time when he was called to flee, and with greatest speed, to the city of refuge; and the allusion is made to this purpose, Hebrews

6:18. That by two immutable things (says the apostle) Wherein it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who are fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us; When may they have consolation and strong consolation? even when they are fleeing with the greatest haste to the clay of refuge, its then that the gates of the city are cast widest open to them; when was it that David made his most earnest and humbly-confident addresse to God for the joy of his salvation? even when blood-guiltiness was staring him in the face, and when his very bones were in a manner broken, and when to his own sense, his grace was very much, if not altogether gone, and when he had (as is were) forefaulted his right to consolation; yet even then he comes foreward, draws near to God, humbly maintains his interest in him, and pleads for former manifestations upon thePage 366grounds of grace5ly. The Believer may and ought, thus to make humbly-confident application to God throw Christ, when he finds, to the great grief of his soul, an exceeding in-disposition to duty; when his praying, repenting, hearing, and so forth. gonot with him, as he would fain have them; if there be a real fleeing for refuge, to the hope set before him, he may and should, even in that case step forward, and draw near with humble boldness; hence, David, Psalm 51. Prayes not only for consolation, but for the lively exercise of grace, while he says to God, Creat in me a clean heart, renew a right spirit within me, and uphold me with thy free spirit: The sense of sin, and exercise of repentance being real and serious, the exercise of faith is then surely native;

and will readily, looking to Jesus, go over all that comes in the way of it: In a word, its then when the humble Believer may draw near with full assurance of faith; even when he hath the real sense of his sin, and danger, and flees unto Jesus Christ for refuge, he is then warranted to run to the city of refuge, and may confidently go on in his errand, viz. To get pardon of sin renewed, consolation restored, and his spiritual frame righted: Its no doubt a foolish conceit, and a prejudicial mistake, for troubled sinners, first, to seek after peace, and then to make application to Christ, or to think that first they must have all the requisits of a good spiritual frame and grace, in the liveliest exercise before they adventure to draw near to God with confidence; I grant these are very desirable, and the souls desire after them very commendable; yet if the Believer resolve never to draw thus near, until he be as he would be, when shall he do it? What if David had stood and stuck at that, Psalm 51? He might have been kept a-back, and so been unwashen all his days; but knowing the way of God's Grace, and the nature of his gracious covenant made with his people, he steps humbly, yet confidently forward in the exercise of faith out over the sense of guiltiness, and all the aggravations of it, over relapsing in sin, over in disposition,Page 367and over many sharp challenges, (all taken with, and lamented over) and makes all these together as so many earands to God.

The 2d. Use serves to commend the bargain of free grace, and to hold out the excellency of this blood of sprinkling, which may also mightily encourage the Believer to step

forward: In prosecuting whereof, I shall 1. speak a word to the efficacy of this blood of sprinkling. And then, 2ly. a word to the necessity of it, as to us.

For the first, To wit, the excellency and efficacy of it, it may be seen in these four, 1. In the noble and notable effects that it produceth, or that come by it, even all the great things contained in the promises touched on before; such as pardon of sin, grace to subdue it, friendship, and peace with God, fellowship with him, conformity to him, the hope of heaven and glory, the sweet serenity, tranquility and peace of the Conscience; its as a hiding place from the wind and rain, and a covert from the florm, yea, even as the shadow of a great rock in the midst of a weary land; when the soul sorely beaten with the storm of challenges, and of the apprehensions of wrath comes under the shadow and shelter of this, it presently finds ease and repose; what shall I say? what can I say? words here may be swallowed up, from this proceed all the glorious privileges of the people of God possessed and expected, in hand and in hope.

2ly. Its excellency and efficacy appears in this; That it hath procured these things, to sinners, to them that had an unclean and polluted Conscience; for who is it, I pray, that may thus draw near to God with full assurance of faith? It is not such as never had an evil Conscience, but such as having an evil Conscience, flee unto this blood, and get it sprinkled therewith; its these who had their Consciences defiled with dead works; and came to it, and got them purged from these dead works. 3ly. The

excellency and efficacy of it shines furth in the tenderness of the Person, that applyes the remedy to such a loathsome sickness, and otherwayes insuitable desease, or by any other hand but Christ's; HavingPage 366?1 page duplicate?Page 367?1 page duplicate?Page 368(sayeth the apostle) such an high Priest over the house of God, et us draw near; The Physician is Jesus Christ himself, his blood is the cure; and he also is the applyer of the cure; and O! how very tender, dexterous and simpathizing is he: he even excells in such cures to admiration; He is a high Priest that is holy, harmless, undefiled, separat from sinners, and higher then the heavens; (He is holy and harmless himself, he loves these qualities, and is able and willing to work them in these that come to him) and such an high Priest became us, He is one that hath compassion on the ignorant, and such as are out of the way; who was in all points tempted as we, yet without sin; That he may from his own experience the more kindly and strongly simpatize with his People, and succour them in all their temptations; an high Priest, that is touched with the feeling of their infirmities; The aking of the least finger, or toe in his mystical body, stounds, up as it were, to the very heart of him who is the head thereof, And Chap. 2. It behoved him to be made like to his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high Priest, and so forth. 4ly. The excellency and efficacy of it appears in this, even in the exceeding great freeness of his applying this cure; There is no more required, but to come and receive it; to come, however unclean, and be sprinkled with his blood; to confess the

debt of guilt, and draw out an extract of the discharge, by virtue of his payment thereof; And if there be any pollution in the Conscience, any challenge, or sore, whatever it be, he furnisheth the remedy and cure freely and frankly.

Now a Word to the 2d thing, viz. The necessity of this blood of sprinkling, If it be so, as we have said, if it be so virtuous and efficacious, is there not here an encouragement for the guilty, to flee to this blood? and is there not a necessity to make use of it, a very pressing, and vehemently urging necessity? for as it was not possible for the man slayer to stand with safety before the avenger of blood out of the city of refuge; so no morePage 369can the guilty sinner stand before his own Conscience? and far less before the Tribunal of God, Who is greater then the conscience, until this blood be fled unto, and until he get his Conscience sprinkled with it: And therefore, seeing ye have Consciences, and guilty Consciences, many sins on your score, and though the Conscience now sleep, it will most certainly once awake, and turn a hot and hard pursuer far beyond what ever any avenger of blood was, and the longer that it sleep, it will pursue the harder; and seing Christ Jesus is as a city of refuge, to whom ye may now flee and be sase; Consider O! consider these words of the apostle of the Gentiles, Acts 13:38, 39. Which we, in the name of the Lord, say over again to you, Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be

justified by the law of Moses; And it is the great end and design of the Gospel, o proclaim the mercat of grace, and to make this offer unto you sinners freely; seing I say, all this is, O! takewith and be humbled under the sense of your guilt, from which ye cannot be pibly delivered any other way, and come forward and make use of it: And be-think yourselves seriously, I beseech you, if this day of salvation be sitten, and if this offer of grace be despised; your Conscience may and will certainly waken upon you, yea warr upon you most terribly, and ye will never get it quieted; but if ye will now in time imbrace, and make use of the offr; We dare confidently say, to the commendation of God's grace, and of the efficacy of this precious blood of Jesus Christ, that the sinner can never lay before Christ that sin, with what ever aggravations of it, nor the disease, how filthy and loathsome soever it be, but the blood of Christ applyed by faith can abundantly satisfie God's Justifie for it, and pacify and purge the Conscience from the guilt and defilement of it; And if God be pacified, the Conscience (beingPage 370his deputy) dar no more challenge and pursue to death no more then the avenger of blood could the Manslayer, when once got within the city of refuge; or the destroying angel, who smote all the first-born of Egypt could, or did destroy the Israelits, whose houses were be-sprinkled with the blood of the passe-over Lamb.

The 3d Use is, For strong consolation to Believers in Christ, And it is threefold, 1. Under the rise of a challenge, when the Conscience pursues; because there is here a city of refuge to run unto, A Mediator for

sinners, A shield, or targe to keep off such a Da, and to quench or ward off the deadly wound of it: Let us make the supposition (and blest eternaly be God, through Jesus Christ, its but a supposition) What if this had not been? How dreadful would the very apprehension of a challenge, let be of the vindictive wrath of God have been? 2dly. To the sinner that flees to this city, there is strong consolation in this respect, that he shall be made welcome; and therefore the Believer needs not skar to make use of Christ, nor to come to this blood of sprinkling; for he waits for imployment, and its the more to the praise of his exquisit skill, the moe be cleansed and cured by him through the virtue thereof; ye may therefore come, and not only so, but, come with full assurance of faith of attaining whatever ye want, and would have. Come therefore Believers boldly to the throne of grace, that e may find mercy, and obtain grace to help in time of need, as on this ground the apostle exhorts, Hebrews 4:3ly. These that have fled to this City of refuge, may quiet themselves; they are at peace with God, and with their own Conscience, their peace is as sure as God's Covenant that cannot be annulled, nor altered, is, And as Christ's purchase is of worth and efficacy; if the covenant of grace be firm and sure, and if this blood of sprinkling be of value and efficacy, they have certainly solid grounds of peace and consolation: and therefore we exhort Believers in Christ on all occasions to flee to this city, to renew your applications by faith to Jesus Christ, andPage 371after every defilement to be-sprinkle your Consciences with this

blood; and then comfort yourselves in it, and bless God, who allows such large and strong consolation on you, and the Mediator, who hath purchased it for you, by this his own most precious blood.

But some tender, and exercised Soul will, belike here, Object, and say; Is it not presumption for me, to comfort my self under challenges for sin? I answer, no, Thou taking with the challenge, and being humbled for the sin that is the ground of it, and betaking thy self to this blood of sprinkling, for pardon and purging; because the apostle commands thee to comfort thy self, and sure he commands none to presume; To whom, I pray is it that he speaks here? Is it not to them that have an evil conscience, at least in part? and what says he to them? Let us draw near in full assurance of faith, and on what ground, Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: When the Conscience through guilt challengeth? we are called to flee to this blood, and having sprinkled it there with, we have warrant, to draw near, and it is not presumption to do so; nay resting on Christ, and comforting ourselves in him, under challenges taken with, argues strong faith, wherein he hath great complacency, and whereby he is much glorified; for presumption will never stand before an evil Conscience, nor credit Christ, when Conscience sharply challengeth: So that if ye come by this new and living way, it is not presumption to lean to Christ; but that is presumption to lean to any other thing; nay the more humble boldness and confidence there be under challenges, it argues (as I just now said) the more and the

stronger faith; because its the more sickerly founded on the covenant of God, and on the blood of Christ; and it gives God most glory, when the difficulty is greatest: It is no great practique to calm the Conscience, when there is no storm, but then indeed it is so, when there are many waves and billows of challenges and discouragements, rising and swelling high in the way, toPage 372go over all these, and to grip hard to this rope cast out by him, and confidently, though humbly, and in fear to make use of this remedy, which he hath graciously proposed: It will never be accounted presumption by him, for serious souls to take to themselves God's allowance on them, which is strong consolation to them who are hotly pursued, and flie to this city of refuge; but it may very readily be accounted presumption to cast at his allowance; he knows well (who hath the tongue of the learned) when to give a word of consolation, and to whom; and we are not to be wier then he.

The 4th Use is for advertisement, and warning to others, who are not Believers, but ly still in unbelief, and slight our blessed Lord Jesus; O! what a dreadful disadvantage, and premunire (to speak so) will ye fall under? your condition is fearful beyond what words can express, or thoughts fully comprehend; Though your Conscience sleep now, It will up upon you, and the longer it sleep, it will (to speak so) waken the hungrier, and gaw the sore: This, O! this, is your great prejudice, ye make yourselves obnoxious to the fearce wrath of the Almighty God, and to the biteing challenges and tormenting accusatsons of your own evil Conscience; which will be more terrible to

you then if hills and mountains did fall on you, the one will be called and cryed for as a favour in comparison of the other; it will in that day appear, that an evil Conscience was, and is a dreadfully evil thing; and ye will have this aggravation of your guilt, even the dispising of the Redeemer, and of the dear price of his precious blood paved for the Ransome of Sinners; of the Physician that offered perfectly at his own cost to cure you; and of the Cautioner that offered freely and frankly to pay your debt; and this will wait upon you, to make the prickings, and peircings the woundings and stoundings, the galings and gnawins of the Conscience moe deep and intolerable: Therefore let e in the name of the Lord, (who is in earnest with you, and we desire accordingPage 373to our measure to be in earnest with you) warn you to flee from the wrath to come; O! know that ye have Consciences, and that they (as I said before) will once awake; and when they shall begin to be roused, O! but they will challenge, and accuse in a dreadful manner; lay your account to meet with such un answerable challenges, and confounding accusations; and if there be no other ground whereon ye can with safety bottom the eternal salvation of your immortal Souls, but the righteousness of Christ; If nothing can possibly purge? and pacify, cleanse and calme the Conscience, but coming to, and washing at this fountain of the blood of Christ; O! come in time; if ye cannot wash yourselves, put him to it, as David doth, Psalm 51. when he cryes, wash me, cleanse me, purge me, wash me throughly from mine iniquities. It will be no excuse, I assure you, it will

be no plea, nor apologie for you in the great day, to alleadge, that ye could not do it; since he offered himself as a fountain to wash at, and to wash you all in particular that hear me this day, and is doing so very seriously just now, if you will imploy, and put him to it: Consider that sad word, Ier. 13:27. Wo unthee, O Ierusalem wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be? it is not, canst thou not make thy self clean? but wilt thou not be made clean? To wit, by me, who am able to do it, and offer to do it freely, if thou beest but honestly willing; This will be the loud and terrible voice wherewith God and the Conscience will in that day cry to many a man and woman that lived under the Gospel, and had this offer, Wo to thee, thou wouldest not be made clean; Thou wouldest not make use of the blood of Christ of this blood of sprinkling, when it was in thine offer; Thou wouldest not come to him that thou mightest have life; Thou wouldst not take him for a Physician to hea thee, but chose rather to ly still wallowing in thy filthiess, and to rot away and die in thy sores and wounds, then to come to him to be cleansed, and cured by him, though he offered to do both very freely: amongst allPage 374the wes that will be denounced then, and executed against sinners, those against professing Christians, who lived under this Gospel, and refused to come to Jesus Christ for Life, and neglected so great a Salvation, will be the loudest and most terrible; the woes of Chorain, and Bethsaida, and of Capernaum will be more inollerable in the day of judgement, then those of Tyre and Sidon; yea, the those of Sodom and Gommorrah; How yet more

terrible and intollerable, suppose ye will be the wo and judgement of them that live now under the clear and bright Sun-shine of Gospel-light? Let me therefore once more earnestly beseech and obtest you in the Name of the Lord, by the love you profess to bear to your own immortal Souls, to take with your sin, and to flee, and speedily to flee to this city of refuge, set open before you; least the avenger of blood, the great avenger of this despised and trampled on blood of the covenant, this blood of sprinkling, over-take you; if you seek not to draw near to God, by this new and living way; but live and die under your defilement, and at distance from him; Wo upon wo, wo upon wo, will eternally take hold of you.

FINIS.