

## SERMON XXX.

Of the Instructiveness of the Death of CHRIST, in his seven last Words; the first of which is here illustrated.

LUKE xxiii. 34.

*Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

**T**HE manner in which Christ died hath already been opened in the *solitude* and *patience* in which he died. The third, to wit, the *instructiveness* of his death, now follows, in these seven excellent and weighty sayings, which dropped from his blessed lips upon the tree, whilst his sacred blood dropped on the earth from his wounded hands and feet; so that on the cross he exercised both his priestly and prophetic office together, redeeming us by his blood, and instructing us by his words.

These seven words of Christ upon the cross are his last words, with which he breathed out his soul. The last words of a dying man are remarkable; the scripture puts a remark upon them, 2 Sam. xxiii. 1. "Now these be the last words of David." How remarkable are the last words of Christ.

These words are seven in number; three directed to his Father, and four more to those about him. Of the former sort this is one, *Father, forgive them, &c.* In which we have, *First, The mercy desired by Christ*, and that is forgiveness. *Secondly*, The persons for whom it is desired, [*Them*,] that is, those cruel and wicked persons that were now imbruing their hands in his blood. And, *Thirdly*, The motive or argument urged to procure that mercy from his Father, *for they know not what they do.*

*First*, The mercy prayed for, that is, forgiveness; *Father, forgive.* Forgiveness is not only a mercy, a spiritual mercy, but one of the greatest mercies a soul can obtain from God, without which, whatever else we have from God, is no mercy to us\*. So great a mercy is forgiveness, that David calls him *Blessed*, or rather admires the blessedness of him, "whose transgression is forgiven, "whose sin is covered." This mercy, this best of mercies, he requests for them, *Father, forgive them.*

*Secondly*, The persons for whom he requests forgiveness, are the same that with wicked hands crucified him. Their fact was the most horrid that ever was committed by men: they not only

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\* אֲשֶׁר אֵין מִן הַחַיִּים *Felicitates hominis*, i. e. O the happiness of the man. *Montanus.*

shed innocent blood, but the blood of God; the best of mercies is by him desired for the worst of sinners.

*Thirdly*, The motive or argument urged to procure this mercy for them, is this, *for they know not what they do*. As if he should say, Lord, what these poor creatures do, is not so much out of malice to me as the Son of God; but it is from their ignorance. Did they know who, and what I am, they would rather be nailed to the cross themselves, than do it. To the same purpose the apostle saith, 1 Cor. ii. 8. "Whom none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Yet this is not to be extended to all that had an hand in the death of Christ, but to the ignorant multitude, among whom, some of God's elect were, who afterwards believed in him, whose blood they spilt, Acts iii. 17. "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it." For them this prayer of Christ was heard. Hence the notes are,

Doct. 1. *That ignorance is the usual cause of enmity to Christ.*

Doct. 2. *That there is forgiveness with God, for such as oppose Christ through ignorance.*

Doct. 3. *That to forgive enemies, and beg forgiveness for them, is the true character and property of the Christian spirit.*

These observations contain so much practical truth, that it would be worth our time to open and apply them distinctly;

Doct. 1. *That ignorance is the usual cause of enmity to Christ.*

"These things (saith the Lord) will they do, because they have not known the Father, nor me," John xvi. 3. What thing doth he mean? Why, kill and destroy the people of God, and therein suppose they do God good service, (i. e.) think to oblige and gratify the Father, by their butchering his children. So Jer. ix. 3. "They proceed from evil to evil; and have not known me, saith the Lord," *q. d.* Had they the knowledge of God, this would check and stop them in their ways of wickedness? and so Psal. lxxiv. 20. "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty."

Three things must be inquired into, *viz.* what their ignorance of Christ was. Whence it was. And how it disposed them to such enmity against him.

*First*, What was their ignorance who crucified Christ? Igno-

rance is two-fold, *simple*, or *respective* \*. Simple ignorance is not supposable in these persons, for in many things they were a knowing people. But it was *respective*, particular ignorance, Rom. ix. 25. "Blindness in part is happened to Israel." They knew many other truths, but did not know Jesus Christ; in that their eyes were held. Natural light they had; yea, and scripture light they had; but in this particular, that *this was the Son of God*, the Saviour of the world, therein they were blind and ignorant.

But how could that be! Had they not heard at least of his miraculous works? Did they not see how his birth, life and death, squared with the prophecies, both in time, place, and manner? Whence should this their ignorance be when they saw, or at least might have seen, the scriptures fulfilled in him; and that he came among them in a time when they were big with expectations of the Messiah?

It is true, indeed, they knew the scriptures; and it cannot but be supposed the fame of his mighty works had reached their ears: But yet,

*First*, Though they had the scriptures among them, they misunderstood them; and did not rightly measure Christ by that right rule. You find, John vii. 52. how they reason with Nicodemus against Christ; "Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and see: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." Here is a double mistake: *First*, They supposed Christ to arise out of Galilee, whereas he was of Bethlehem, though much conversant in the parts of Galilee: And, *Secondly*, They thought, because they could find no prophet had arisen out of Galilee, therefore none should.

Another mistake that blinded them about Christ, was from their conceit that Christ should not die, but live for ever, John xii. 34. "We have heard out of the law, that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, the Son of man must be lifted up? who is the Son of man?" That scripture which probably they urge against the mortality of Christ, is Isa. ix. 7. "Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end, upon the throne of David," &c. In like manner, John vii. 27. we find them in another mistake; "We know this man whence he is; but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is." This, likely, proceeded from their misunderstanding of Micah v. 2. "His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Thus were they blinded about the person of Christ, by misinterpretations of scripture-prophecies.

*Secondly*, Another thing occasioning their mistake of Christ, was the *outward meanness* and despicableness of his condition. They

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\* αἰτλῶς, *vel* κατὰ τι.

expected a pompous Messiah, one that should come with state and glory, becoming the king of Israel. But when they saw him in the form of a servant, coming in poverty, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, they utterly rejected him: "We hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not," Isa. liii. 3. Nor is it any great wonder these should be scandalized at his poverty, when the disciples themselves had such carnal apprehensions of his kingdom, Mark x. 37, 38.

*Thirdly*, Add to this, *their implicit faith* in the learned rabbies and doctors, who utterly misled them in this matter, and greatly prejudiced them against Christ. "Lo, (said they) he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing to him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?" They pinned their faith upon the rulers' sleeves, and suffered them to carry it whether they would. This was their ignorance, and these its causes.

*Thirdly*, Let us see, in the next place, how this disposed them to such enmity against Christ. And this it doth three ways.

*First*, Ignorance disposes men to enmity and opposition to Christ, by removing those hinderances that would otherwise keep them from it, as checks and rebukes of conscience, by which they are restrained from evil; but conscience binding and reproving in the authority and virtue of the law of God, where that law is not known, there can be no reproofs; and therefore we truly say, 'That ignorance is virtually every sin.

*Secondly*, Ignorance enslaves and subjects the soul to the lusts of Satan; he is "the ruler of the darkness of this world," Eph. vi. 12. There is no work so base and vile, but an ignorant man will undertake it.

*Thirdly*, Nay, which is more, if a man be ignorant of Christ, his truths, or people, he will not only oppose, and persecute, but he will also do it conscientiously, i. e. he will look upon it as his duty so to do, John xvi. 3. Before the Lord opened Paul's eyes, "he verily thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Christ." Thus you have a brief account what, and whence their ignorance was, and how it disposed and prepared them for this dreadful work. Hence we learn,

*Inference 1. How falsely is the gospel charged as the cause of discord and trouble in the world.* It is not light, but darkness, that makes men fierce and cruel: as light increases, so doth peace, Isa. xi. 6, 9. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them; they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." What a sad condition would the world be in without

gospel-light! all places would be dens of rapine, and mountains of prey. Certainly we owe much of our civil liberty, and outward tranquillity to gospel-light. If a sword, or variance, at any time, follow the gospel, it is but an accidental, not a direct and proper effect of it.

*Inf. 2. How dreadful is it to oppose Christ and his truths knowingly, and with open eyes?* Christ pleads their ignorance as an argument to procure their pardon. Paul *himself* was once filled with rage and madness against Christ and his truths: it was well for him that he did it ignorantly: had he gone against his light and knowledge, there had been little hope of him, 1 Tim. i. 13. "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, and in unbelief." I do not say, it is simply impossible for one that knowingly and maliciously opposes and persecutes Christ and his people, to be forgiven, but it is not usual, Heb. vi. 4, 5. There are few instances of it.

*Inf. 3. What an awful majesty sits upon the brow of holiness, that few dare to oppose it that see it!* There are few or none so daringly wicked, to fight against it with open eyes; 1 Pet. iii. 13. "Who will harm you whilst ye are followers of that which is good:" *q. d.* who dare be so hardy to set upon known godliness, or afflict and wrong the known friends of it? The true reason why many Christians speed so bad, is not because they are godly, but because they do not manifest the power of godliness more than they do: their lives are so like the lives of others, that they are often mistaken for others. Cyprian brings in the wicked of his time, thus scoffing at professors, "behold, they that boast themselves to be redeemed from the tyranny of Satan, and to be dead to the world, how are they overcome by the lusts of it, as well as other men\*:" Look as the poverty and meanness of Christ's outward condition was a ground of their mistake of him then, so the poverty and meanness of our love to God, heavenly-mindedness, and mortification to this world, is a disguise to professors, and a cause why they are not more owned and honoured in the consciences of men at this day. For holiness, manifested in its power, is so awfully glorious, that the consciences of the vilest cannot but honour it, and do obeisance to it, Mark vi. 20. "Herod feared John, for he was a just man."

*Inf. 4. The enemies of Christ are objects of pity. Alas, they are blind, and know not what they do.* It is pity that any other affection than pity, should stir in our hearts towards them. Were their eyes but open, they would never do as they do: we should look

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\* *Ecce qui jactant se redemptos a tyrannide Satanae, qui prædicant se mortuos mundo; nihilominus cupiditatibus vincuntur.* Cyp.

upon them as the physician doth upon his sick distempered patient \*. Did they but see with the same light you do, they would be as far from hating Christ, or his ways, as you are, *Simul ac desinunt ignorare, desinunt odisse*; as soon as they cease to be ignorant, they cease to hate, saith Tertullian.

*Inf. 5. How needful is it before we engage ourselves against any person or way, to be well satisfied and resolved that it is a wicked person or practice that we oppose?* You see the world generally runs upon a mistake in this matter. O beware of doing you know not what! for though you do you know not what, Satan knows what he is doing by you: he blinds your eyes, and then sets you to work, knowing that if you should but see what you are doing, you would rather die than do it: you may now do you know not what; but you may afterwards have time enough to reflect on, and lament what you have done: you may now do you know not what, and hereafter you may not know what to do. O beware what you now do!

*Doct. 2. That there is forgiveness with God, for such as oppose Christ out of ignorance.*

If all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men, then this, as well as others, Mat. xii. 31. We are not, with Theophilact, to understand that place of the *certainty* of pardon; much less, with Origen, of the *desert* of it; nor yet, with Janse-nius, of the *facility* of it, but rather of the *possibility* of forgiveness: it shall be so to some; it may be so to you; even those whose wicked hands had crucified Christ, may receive remission by that blood they shed, Acts ii. 23, 38. compared.

I have two things here to do: *First*, To open the nature of the forgiveness, and shew you what it is. *Secondly*, To evince the possibility of it, for such as, mistakingly, oppose Christ.

For the *First*, *Forgiveness is God's gracious discharge of a believing penitent sinner, from the guilt of all his sin, for Christ's sake.*

*It is God's discharge*: there is indeed *fraternal* forgiveness, by which one man forgives another; so far as he is interested in the wrong, Luke vi. 37. There is also a *ministerial* forgiveness, whereby the minister of Christ, as his mouth, and in his name, declares the pardon, or ministerially applies the promises of pardon to penitent offenders, John xx. 23. But none can absolutely and properly forgive sin, but God only, Mark ii. 7. The primary, and principal wrong is done to him; Psal. li. 4. "Against thee,

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\* I met with many given to wine, lust, and ingratitude, and many distracted with furious ambition; on all these the wise man will look with as much compassion as a physician does on his patient. *Seneca on Anger.*

“and thee only” (i. e.) thee mainly or especially, “have I sinned.” Hence sins are *metonymically* called debts, debts to God, Mat. vi. 12. Not that we owe them to God, or ought to sin against him; but as pecuniary debts obliges him that owes it to the penalty, if he satisfy not for it; so do our sins. And who can discharge the debtor, but the creditor?

*It is a gracious act to discharge.* “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgression for mine own name sake,” Isa. xliii. 25. And yet sin is not so forgiven, as that God expects no satisfaction at all; but as expecting none from us, because God hath provided a surety for us, from whom he is satisfied, Eph. i. 7. “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”

*It is a gracious discharge from the guilt of sin.* Guilt is that which pardon properly deals with. Guilt is an obligation to punishment. Pardon is the dissolving that obligation. Guilt is a chain with which sinners are bound and fettered by the law. Pardon is that *Aquafortis* that eats it asunder, and makes the prisoner a free man. The pardoned soul is a discharged soul, Rom. viii. 53. “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth, who shall condemn? It is Christ that died.”

*It is God’s discharge of a believing penitent sinner.* Infidelity and impenitency, are not only sins in themselves, but such sins as bind fast all other sins upon the soul. “By him, all that believe are justified from all things,” Acts x. 43. So Acts iii. 19. “Repent therefore, that your sins may be blotted out.” This is the method in which God dispenseth pardon to sinners.

Lastly, *It is for Christ’s sake* we are discharged; he is the meritorious cause of our remission, “As God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you,” Eph. iv. 32. It is his blood alone that meritoriously procures our discharge.

This is a brief and true account of the nature of forgiveness.

*Secondly,* Now to evince the possibility of forgiveness, for such as ignorantly oppose Christ, let these things be weighed:

*First,* Why should any poor soul, that is now humbled for its enmity to Christ in the days of ignorance, question the possibility of forgiveness, when this effect doth not exceed the power of the cause; nay, when there is more efficacy in the blood of Christ, the meritorious cause, than is in this effect of it? There is power enough in that blood, not only to pardon thy sins, but the sins of the whole world, were it actually applied, 1 John ii. 2. There is not only a sufficiency, but also a redundancy of merit, in that precious blood. Surely then thy enmity to Christ, especially, be-

fore thou knowest him, may not look like an unpardonable iniquity in thine eyes.

*Secondly*, And as this sin exceeds not the power of the meritorious cause of forgiveness; so neither is it any where excluded from pardon, by any word of God. Nay, such is the extensiveness of the promise to believing penitents, that this case is manifestly included, and forgiveness tendered to thee in the promises, Isa. lv. 7. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Many such extensive promises there are in the scriptures: and there is not one parenthesis in all these blessed pages, in which this case is excepted.

*Thirdly*, And it is yet more satisfactory; that God hath already actually forgiven such sinners; and that which he hath done, he may again do: yea, therefore he hath done it to some, and those eminent for their enmity to Christ, that others may be encouraged to hope for the same mercy, when they also shall be, in the same manner, humbled for it. Take one famous instance of many; it is that of Paul in Tim. i. 13, 16. "Who was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious. But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.—Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to everlasting life." It is no small encouragement to a sick man, to hear of some that have been recovered out of the same disease, and that prevailing in an higher degree than in himself.

*Fourthly*, Moreover, it is encouraging to consider, That when God had cut off others in the way of their sin, he hath hitherto spared thee. What speaks this but a purpose of mercy to thy soul? Thou shouldest account the long-suffering of God thy salvation, 2 Pet. iii. 15. Had he smitten thee in the way of thy sin and enmity to Christ, what hope had remained! But in that he hath not only spared thee, but also given thee a heart ingenuously ashamed, and humbled for thy evils: doth not this speak mercy for thee; surely it looks like a gracious design of love to thy soul.

*Inference 1.* And is there forgiveness with God for such as have been enemies to Christ, his truths, and gospel? *Then certainly there is pardon and mercy for the friends of God, who involuntarily fall into sin, by the surprisals of temptation, and are broken for it, as ingenuous children for offending a good Father.* Can any doubt, if God have pardon for such enemies, he hath none for children? If he have forgiveness for such as shed the blood of Christ with wicked hands, hath he not much more mercy and forgiveness for such as love Christ, and are more afflicted for their sin against him,



than all other troubles they have in the world? Doubt it not, but he who receives *enemies* into his bosom, will much more receive and embrace *children*, though offending ones.

How pensive do the dear children of God sometimes sit, after their lapse into sin? Will God ever pardon this? will he be reconciled again? May I hope his face shall be to me, as in former times? Pensive soul! if thou didst but know the largeness, tenderness, freeness of that grace, which yearns over enemies, and hath given forth thousands, and ten thousands of pardons to the worst of sinners, thou wouldst not sink at that rate.

*Inf. 2.* Is there pardon with God for enemies? *How incexcusable then are all they that persist and perish in their enmity to Christ!* sure their destruction is of themselves. Mercy is offered to them, if they will receive it, Isa. lv. 7. Proclamation is made in the gospel, that if there be any among the enemies of Christ, who repent of what they have been, and done against him, and are now unfeignedly willing to be reconciled, upon the word of a King, they shall find mercy: But "God shall wound the head of the enemies, "and the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses," Psal. lxxviii. 21. "If he turn not, he will whet his sword; "he hath bent his bow, and made it ready; he hath also prepared "for him the instruments of death: He ordaineth his arrows against "the persecutors," Psal. vii. 12.

This lays the blood of every man that perishes in his enmity to Christ, at his own door; and vindicates the righteousness of God, in the severest strokes of wrath upon them: This also will be a cutting thought to their hearts eternally: I might once have had pardon, and I refused it: the gospel trumpet sounded a parley: fair and gracious terms were offered, but I rejected them.

*Inf. 3.* Is there mercy with God and forgiveness, even for his worst enemies, upon their submission; *How unlike to God then are all implacable spirits!* Some there are that cannot bring their hearts to forgive an enemy; "to whom revenge is sweeter than life\*." 1 Sam. xxiv. 16. "If a man find his enemy, will he let him go?" This is hell-fire, a fire that never goeth out. How little do such poor creatures consider, if God should deal by them, as they do by others, what words could express the misery of their condition! It is a sad sin, and a sad sign, a character of a wretched state, wherever it appears. Those that have found mercy, should be ready to shew mercy: and they that expect mercy themselves, should not deny it to others. This brings us upon the third and last observation, *viz.*

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\* *Est vindicta bonum vĩa jucundius ipsa.*

Doct. 3. *That to forgive enemies, and beg forgiveness for them, is the true character and property of the Christian spirit.*

Thus did Christ: "Father forgive them." And thus did Stephen, in imitation of Christ, Acts vii. 59, 60. "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.'" This suits with the rule of Christ, Mat. v. 44, 45. "But I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of God your Father which is in heaven."

Here I shall first open the nature of this duty, and shew you what a forgiving spirit is; and then the excellency of it, how well it becomes all that call themselves Christians.

*First*, Let us enquire what this Christian forgiveness is. And that the nature of it may the better appear, I shall shew you both what it is not, and what it is.

*First*, It consists not in a *Stoical insensibility of wrongs and injuries*. God hath not made men as insensible, stupid blocks, that have no sense or feeling of what is done to them. Nor hath he made a law inconsistent with their very natures that are to be governed by it: but allows us a tender sense of natural evils, though he will not allow us to revenge them by moral evils: nay, the more deep and tender our resentments of wrongs and injuries are, the more excellent is our forgiveness of them; so that a forgiving spirit doth not exclude sense of injuries, but the sense of injuries graces the forgiveness of them.

*Secondly*, Christian forgiveness is not a *politic concealment of our wrath and revenge, because it will be a reproach to discover it; or, because we want opportunity to vent it*. This is carnal policy, not Christian meekness. So far from being the mark of a gracious spirit, that it is apparently the sign of a vile nature. It is not Christianity to repose\*, but depose injuries.

*Thirdly*, Nor is it that *moral virtue, for which we are beholden to an easier and better nature, and the help of moral rules and documents*. There are certain virtues attainable without the change of nature, which they call *homilitical virtues*, because they greatly adorn and beautify nature; such as temperance, patience, justice, &c. These are of singular use to conserve peace and order in the world: and without them, (as one aptly speaks) the world would soon break

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\* *Manet alta mente repostum.* Virg. Eneid. lib. 1.  
Deep graven in her heart the doom remain'd. *Dryden.*

up, and its civil societies disband. But yet, though these are the ornaments of nature, they do not argue the change of nature. All graces, in the exercises of them, involve a respect to God: And for the being of them, they are not by natural acquisition, but supernatural infusion.

*Fourthly*, and lastly, Christian forgiveness is *not an injurious giving up of our rights and properties to the lust of every one that hath a mind to invade them.* No; these we may lawfully defend and preserve, and are bound so to do; though, if we cannot defend them legally, we must not avenge our wrongs unchristianly: This is not Christian forgiveness. But, then positively,

*It is a Christian lenity, or gentleness of mind, not retaining, but freely passing by the injuries done to us, in obedience to the command of God.*

*It is a lenity, or gentleness of mind.* The grace of God demulces the angry stomach; calms the tumultuous passions; new-moulds our sour spirits, and makes them benign, gentle and easy to be entreated; Gal. v. 22. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness," &c.

This gracious lenity *inclines the Christian to pass by injuries; so to pass them by, as neither to retain them revengefully in the mind, or requite them when we have opportunity with the hand:* Yea, and that freely, not by constraint, because we cannot avenge ourselves, but willingly. We abhor to do it when we can. So that as a carnal heart thinks revenge its glory, the gracious heart is content that forgiveness should be his glory. I will be even with him, saith nature: I will be above him, saith grace: it is his glory to pass over transgression, Prov. xix. 11.

And *this it doth in obedience to the command of God:* Their own nature inclines them another way. "The spirit that is in us lusteth to envy; but he giveth more grace," James iv. 5. It lusteth to revenge, but the fear of God represseth those motions. Such considerations as these God hath forbidden me; yea, and God hath forgiven me, as well as forbidden me: they prevail upon him when nature urges to revenge the wrong. "Be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you," Eph. iv. 32. This is forgiveness in a Christian sense.

*Secondly*, And that this is excellent, and singularly becoming the profession of Christ, is evident; inasmuch as,

*This speaks your religion excellent*, that can mould your hearts into that heavenly frame, to which they are so averse, yea, contrarily disposed by nature. It is the glory of Pagan morality; that it can *abscondere vitia*, hide and cover men's lusts and passions. But the glory of Christianity lies in this, that it can *abscindere vitia*, not

hide, but destroy, and really mortify the lusts of nature. Would Christians but live up to the excellent principles of their religion, Christianity shall be no more out-vied by heathenish morality. The greatest Christian shall be no more challenged to imitate Socrates, if he can. We shall utterly spoil that proud boast, "that the faith of Christians is out-done by the infidelity of Heathens\*." O Christians yield not to-day to Heathens! Let all the world see the true greatness, heavenliness, and excellency of our represented pattern; and by true mortification of your corrupt natures, enforce an acknowledgment from the world, that a greater than Socrates is here†. He that is really a meek, humble, patient, heavenly Christian, wins this glory to his religion, that it can do more than all other principles and rules in the world. In nothing were the most accomplished Heathens more defective than this forgiving of injuries: It was a thing they could not understand, or, if they did, could never bring their hearts to it; witness that rule of their great Tully: "It is the first office of justice, (saith he), to hurt no man, except first provoked by an injury." The addition of that exception spoiled his excellent rule‡.

But now Christianity teaches, and some Christians have attained it, to receive evil, and return good, 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13. "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat." This certainly is that meekness wrought in us by the wisdom that is from above, James iii. 17.

This makes a man sit sure in the consciences of others, who, with Saul, must acknowledge, when they see themselves so out-done, "Thou art more righteous than I," 1 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17. Had we been so much injured, and had such opportunities to revenge them, we should never have passed them by, as these men did.

This impresses and stamps the very image of God upon the creature, and makes us like our heavenly Father, who doth good to his enemies, and sends down showers of outward blessings upon them, that pour out floods of wickedness daily to provoke him, Mat. v. 44, 45. In a word, this Christian temper of spirit gives a man the true possession and enjoyment of himself. So that our breasts shall be as the Pacific sea, smooth and pleasant, when others are as the raging sea, foaming and casting up mire and dirt.

\* *Non præstat fides, quod præstitit infidelitas.* Cecilius ad Minucium.

† *Veritas Christianorum pulchrior est Helena Græcorum.*

‡ On which rule Lactantius thus speaks, "O what a simple and beautiful sentence did he spoil by the addition of two words!"

*Inference 1.* Hence we clearly infer, *That the Christian religion, exalted in its power, is the greatest friend to the peace and tranquillity of states and kingdoms.* Nothing is more opposite to the true Christian spirit, than implacable fierceness, strife, revenge, tumults and uproars. It teaches men to do good and receive evil: to receive evil, and return good. "The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality, and without hypocrisy; and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace," James iii. 17, 18.

The church is a dove for meekness, Cant. vi. 9. When the world grows full of strife, Christians then grow weary of the world. and sigh out the Psalmist's request, "O that I had the wings of a dove! that I might fly away and be at rest." Strigellius desired to die, that he might be freed *ab implacabilibus odiis theologorum*, "from the implacable strife of contending divines."

The rule by which they are to walk, is, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay it, saith the Lord," Rom. xii. 18, 19. It is not religion, but lusts that make the world so unquiet, James iv. 1, 2. Not godliness, but wickedness, that makes men bite and devour one another. One of the first effects of the gospel, is to civilize those places where it comes, and settle order and peace among men. How great a mistake and evil then is it to cry out, when atheism and irreligion have broken the civil peace; this is the fruit of religion! this is the effect of the gospel! Happy would it be if religion did more obtain in all nations. It is the greatest friend int he world to their tranquillity and prosperity.

*Inf. 2. How dangerous a thing is it to abuse and wrong meek and forgiving Christians?* Their patience and easiness to forgive often invites injury, and encourages vile spirits to insult and trample upon them: but if men would seriously consider it, there is nothing in the world should more scare and affright them from such practices than this. You may abuse and wrong them, they must not avenge themselves, nor repay evil for evil: true, but because they do not, the Lord will; even the Lord to whom they commit the matter; and he will do it to purpose, except ye repent.

"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord," James v. 7. Will ye stand to that issue? had you rather indeed have to do with God than with men? When the Jews put Christ to death, "he committed himself to him that judgeth righteously," 1 Pet. ii. 22, 23. And did that people get any thing by that: did not the Lord severely avenge the blood of Christ on them and

their children? yea, do not they and their children groan under the doleful effects of it to this day? If God undertakes, (as he always doth) the cause of his abused, meek, and peaceable people, he will be sure to avenge it seven-fold more than they could. His little finger will be heavier than their loins. You will get nothing by that.

*Inf. 3.* Lastly, *Let us all imitate our pattern Christ, and labour for meek forgiving spirits.* I shall only propose two inducements to it: the *honour of Christ*, and *your own peace*: two dear things indeed to a Christian. His glory is more than your life, and all that you enjoy in this world. O do not expose it to the scorn and derision of his enemies. Let them not say, How is Christ a lamb, when his followers are lions? how is the church a dove, that smites and scratches like a bird of prey? Consult also the quiet of your own spirits. What is life worth, without the comfort of life? what comfort can you have in all that you do possess in the world, as long as you have not the possession of your own souls? If your spirits be full of tumult and revenge, the spirit of Christ will grow a stranger to you: that dove delights in clean and quiet breasts. O then imitate Christ in this excellency also!

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## SERMON XXXI.

The second excellent Word of CHRIST upon the Cross,  
illustrated.

JOHN XIX. 27.

*Then saith he to his disciple, Behold thy mother.*

**W**E now pass to the consideration of the second memorable and instructive word of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, contained in this scripture. Wherein he hath left us an excellent pattern for the discharge of our relative duties. It may be well said, the gospel makes the best husbands and wives, the best parents and children, the best masters and servants in the world; seeing it furnishes them with the most excellent *precepts*, and proposes the best *patterns*. Here we have the pattern of Jesus Christ presented to all gracious children for their imitation, teaching them how to acquit themselves towards their parents, according to the laws of nature and grace. Christ was not only subject and obedient to his parents whilst he lived, but manifested his tender care even whilst he hanged in the torments of death upon the cross. “Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother.”