

and you shall find that none but *believers did ever find acceptance with God; all experience confirms this great truth, that *they that are in the flesh cannot please God*. Reader, if this be thy condition, let me beg thee to ponder the misery of it in a few sad thoughts.

Consider how sad it is to be rejected of God, and forsaken by all creatures at once; what a day of straits thy dying day is like to be, when heaven and earth shall cast thee out together. Be assured whatever thy vain hopes for the present quiet thee withal, this must be thy case, the door of mercy will be shut against thee; no man cometh to the Father but by Christ. Sad was the case of Saul, when he told Samuel, "the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me," 1 Sam. xxviii. 15. The saints will have boldness in the day of judgment, 1 John iv. 17. But thou wilt be a confounded man; there is yet, blessed be the God of mercy, a capacity and opportunity for reconciliation, 2 Cor. v. 19. Isa. xxvii. 5. But this can be of no long continuance. O therefore, by all the regard and love you have for the everlasting welfare of your own souls, come to Christ; embrace Christ in the offers of the gospel, that you may be made accepted in the beloved.

SERMON XVIII.

The Liberty of Believers opened and stated.

JOHN viii. 36.

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

FROM the 30th verse of this chapter unto my text, you have an account of the different effects which the words of Christ had upon the hearts of his hearers: Some believed, ver. 30. These he encourageth to continue in his word, ver. 31. giving them this encouragement, ver. 32. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Hereat the unbelieving Jews take offence, and commence a quarrel with him, ver. 33. "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man." We are of no slavish extraction; the blood of Abraham runs in our veins. This scornful boast of the proud Jews, Christ confutes, ver. 34. where he distinguisheth on a two-fold bondage; one to men, ano-

* If any one desires to know the will of God, let him be a friend of God. *Aug.*

ther to sin; one civil, another spiritual: Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin, then tells them, ver. 36. "The servant abideth not in the house for ever, but the Son abideth for ever." Wherein he intimateth two great truths, viz. That the servants and slaves of sin may for a time enjoy the external privileges of the house or church of God; but it would not be long before the master of the house would turn them out of doors: But if they were once the adopted children of God, then they should abide in the house for ever. And this privilege is only to be had by their believing in, and union with the natural Son of God, Jesus Christ: which brings us fairly to the text; "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." In which words we have two parts; viz.

1. A supposition.

2. A concession.

First, A supposition, "If the Son therefore shall make you free," q. d. The womb of nature cast you forth into the world in a state of bondage! in that state you have lived all your days; servants to sin; slaves to your lusts; yet freedom is to be obtained: And this freedom is the prerogative belonging to the Son of God to bestow: "If the Son shall make you free."

Secondly, Christ's concession upon this supposition, "Then shall ye be free indeed," i. e. you shall have a real freedom, an excellent and everlasting freedom: No conceit only, as that which you now boast of is: If ever therefore you will be free men indeed, believe in me. Hence note,

Doct. That interest in Christ sets the soul at liberty from all that bondage whereunto it was subjected in its natural state.

Believers are the children of the new covenant, the denizens of Jerusalem which is above, which is free, and the mother of them all, Gal. iv. 26. The glorious liberty, viz. that which is spiritual and eternal, is the liberty of the children of God, Rom. viii. 21. Christ, and none but Christ, delivers his people out of the hand of their enemies, Luke i. 74.

In the doctrinal part of this point, I must shew you,

First, What believers are not freed from by Jesus Christ in this world.

Secondly, What that bondage is from which every believer is freed by Christ.

Thirdly, What kind of freedom that is which commences upon believing.

Fourthly, Open the excellency of this state of spiritual freedom.

First, What those things are from which believers are not made free in this world: We must not think that our spiritual liberty by Christ, presently brings us into an absolute liberty, in all respects, For,

First, Christ doth not free believers from obedience to the moral law: It is true we are no more under it as a *covenant* for our *justification*; but we are, and must still be under it, as a *rule* for our *direction*. The matter of the moral law is unchangeable, as the nature of good and evil is, and cannot be abolished except that distinction could be destroyed, Mat. v. 17, 18. The precepts of the law are still urged under the gospel to enforce duties upon us, Eph. vi. 12. It is therefore a vain distinction, invented by Libertines, to say it binds us as *creatures*, not as Christians; or that it binds the unregenerate part, but not the regenerate: but this is a sure truth, that they who are freed from its *penalties* are still under its *precepts*. Though believers are no more under its *curse*, yet they are still under its *conduct*: The law sends us to Christ to be *justified*, and Christ sends us to the law to be *regulated*. Let the heart of every Christian join therefore with David's in that holy wish, Psal. cxix. 4, 5. "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently; O that my heart were directed to keep thy statutes." It is excellent when Christians begin to obey the law *from* life, which others obey *for* life; because they *are* justified, not that they *may* be justified. It is also excellent when duties are done in the strength, and for the honour of Christ, which is evangelical; and not in our own strength, and for our own ends, which is servile and legal obedience: Had Christ freed us from obedience, such a liberty had been to our loss.

Secondly, Christ hath not freed believers, in this world, from the temptations and assaults of Satan: even those that are freed from his *dominion*, are not free from his *molestation*. It is said indeed, Rom. xvi. 20. "God shall shortly bruise Satan under your feet:" But mean time he hath power to bruise and buffet us by his injections, 2 Cor. xii. 7. He now bruise Christ's heel, Gen. iii. 15. i. e. bruise him in his tempted and afflicted members: Though he cannot kill them, yet he can and doth afflict and fright them, by shooting his fiery darts of temptation among them, Eph. vi. 16. It is true, when the saints are got safe into heaven they are out of gunshot; there is perfect freedom from all temptation. A believer may then say, O thou enemy, temptations are come to a perpetual end. I am now arrived there, where none of thy fiery darts can reach me: But this freedom is not yet.

Thirdly, Christ hath not yet freed believers, in this world, from the motions of indwelling sin; these are continually acting, and

infesting the holiest of men, Rom. vii. 21, 23, 24. Corruptions, like Canaanites, are still left in the land to be thorns in your eyes, and goads in your sides. Those that boast most of freedom from the motions of sin, have most cause to suspect themselves still under the dominion of sin. All Christ's freemen are troubled with the same complaint: who among them complains not as the apostle did, Rom. vii. 24. "Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Fourthly, Jesus Christ doth not free believers, in this world, from inward troubles and exercises of soul, upon the account of sin. God may let loose Satan, and conscience too, in the way of terrible accusations, which may greatly distress the soul of a believer, and woefully eclipse the light of God's countenance, and break the peace of their souls. Job, Heman, and David were all made free by Christ, yet each of them hath left upon record his bitter complaint upon this account, Job vii. 19, 20. Psal. lxxxviii. 14, 15, 16. Psal. xxxviii. unto ver. 11.

Fifthly, Christ hath not freed believers, in this world, from the rods of affliction. God, in giving us our liberty, doth not abridge his own liberty, Psal. lxxxix. 32. All the children of God are made free, yet what son is there whom the father chasteneth not? Heb. xii. 8. Exemption from affliction is so far from being the mark of a free man, that the apostle there makes it the mark of a slave. Bastards, not sons, want the discipline and blessing of the rod: To be free from affliction would be no benefit to believers, who receive so many benefits by it.

Sixthly, No believer is freed by Christ from the *stroke* of death, though they are all freed from the *sting* of death, Rom. viii. 10. The bodies of believers are under the same law of mortality with other men, Heb. ix. 27. We must come to the grave as well as others; yea, we must come to it through the same agonies, pangs, and dolours that other men do: The foot of death treads as heavy upon the bodies of the redeemed, as of other men. Believers, indeed, are distinguished by mercy from others, but the distinguishing mercy lies not here. Thus you see what believers are not freed from in this world: If you shall now say, what advantage then hath a believer, or what profit is there in regeneration? I answer,

Secondly, That believers are freed from many great and sad miseries and evils by Jesus Christ, notwithstanding all that hath been said. For,

First, All believers are freed from the *rigour* and *curse* of the law: The rigorous yoke of the law is broken off from their necks, and the sweet and easy yoke of Jesus Christ put on, Matth. ix. 28. The law required perfect working, under the pain of a curse, Gal.

iii. 10. accepted of no short endeavours; admitted no repentance; gave no strength: It is not so now; proportionable strength is given, Phil. iv. 13. Evangelical sincerity is reckoned perfection, Job i. 1. Transgression brings not under condemnation, Rom. viii. 1. O blessed freedom! when duty becomes light, and failings hinder not acceptance! This is one part of the blessed freedom of believers.

Secondly, All believers are freed from the guilt of sin; it may trouble, but it cannot condemn them, Rom. viii. 33. The hand-writing which was against us is cancelled by Christ, nailed to his cross, Col. ii. 14. When the seal and hand-writing are torn off from the bond, the debtor is made free thereby: Believers are totally freed, Acts xiii. 39. "Justified from all things:" And finally freed, John v. 24. "They shall never come into condemnation." O blessed freedom! How sweet is it to lie down in our beds, yea, in our graves, when guilt shall neither be our bed-fellow, nor grave-fellow!

Thirdly, Jesus Christ frees all believers from the *dominion* as well as the guilt of sin. "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace," Rom. vi. 14. "The law of the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death," Rom. viii. 2. Now, who can estimate such a liberty as this? What slavery, what an intolerable drudgery is the service of divers lusts, from all which believers are freed by Christ; not from the *residence*, but from the *reign* of sin. It is with sin in believers as it was with those beasts mentioned Dan. vii. 12. "They had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time."

Fourthly, Jesus Christ sets all believers free from the power of Satan, in whose right they were by nature, Col. i. 13. they are translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ. Satan had the possession of them, as a man of his own goods; but Christ dispossesseth that strong man armed, alters the property, and recovers them out of his hand, Luke xi. 21, 22. There are two ways by which Christ frees believers out of Satan's power and possession; namely,

1. By price.
2. By power.

First, By price. The blood of Christ purchaseth believers out of the hands of justice, by satisfying the law for them, which being done, Satan's authority over them falls of course, as the power of a gaoler over the prisoner doth, when he hath a legal discharge, Heb. ii. 14. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood; he also himself took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." The cruel tyrant beats and burdens the poor captive no more after the

ransom is once paid, and he actually freed; and therefore Christ delivers his,

Secondly, By power. Satan is exceeding unwilling to let go his prey: He is a strong and malicious enemy; every rescue and deliverance out of his hand is a glorious effect of the Almighty Power of Christ, Acts xxvi. 18. 2 Cor. x. 5. How did our Lord Jesus Christ grapple with Satan at his death, and triumph over him, Col. ii. 15. O glorious salvation! blessed liberty of the children of God!

Fifthly, Christ frees believers from the poisonous sting and hurt of death: Kill us it can, but hurt us it cannot, 1 Cor. xv. 55, 56. "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?" "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law: But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." If there be no hurt, there should be no horror in death: It is guilt that arms death, both with its hurting and terrifying power. To die in our sins, John viii. 24. To have our bones full of the sins of our youth, which shall lie down with us in the dust, Job xx. 11. To have death, like a dragon, pulling a poor guilty creature as a prey into its dreadful den, Psal. xlix. 14. In this lies the danger and horror of death: But from death, as a curse, and from the grave, as a prison, Christ hath set believers at liberty, by submitting to death in their room; and by his victorious resurrection from the grave, as the first-born of the dead, death is disarmed of its hurting power. The death of believers is but a sleep in Jesus.

Thirdly, The next thing to be briefly spoken to, is the kind and nature of that freedom and liberty purchased and procured by Christ for believers.

Now liberty may be considered two ways; *viz.*

1. As civil.

2. As sacred.

As to civil freedom, or liberty, it belongs not to our present business: Believers, as to their civil capacity, are not freed from the duties they owe to their superiors. Servants, though believers, are still to be subject to their masters, according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, Eph. vi. 5. nor from obedience to lawful magistrates, whom we are to obey in the Lord, Rom. xii. 1, 4. Religion dissolves not the bonds of civil relations; nor is it to be used as an occasion to the flesh, 1 Pet. ii. 16. It is not a carnal, but a spiritual freedom Christ hath purchased for us: And this spiritual freedom is again to be considered, either as,

1. Inchoate.

2. Consummate.

The liberty believers have at present is but a beginning liberty;

they are freed but in part from their spiritual enemies; but it is a growing liberty every day, and will be consummate and complete at last.

To conclude, Christian liberty is either,

1. Privative, or,
2. Positive.

The liberty believers are invested with is of both kinds: They are not only freed from many miseries, burdens and dangers, but also invested by Jesus Christ with many royal privileges and invaluable immunities.

Fourthly, And this brings us to the fourth and last thing; namely, the properties of this blessed freedom which the saints enjoy by Jesus Christ; and, if we consider it duly, it will be found to be,

First, A wonderful liberty, never enough to be admired. How could it be imagined that ever those who owed unto God more than ever they could pay by their own eternal sufferings; those that were under the dreadful curse and condemnation of the law, in the power and possession of Satan the strong man armed; those that were bound with so many chains in their spiritual prison; their understanding bound with ignorance, their wills with obstinacy, their hearts with impenetrable hardness, their affections with a thousand betwitching vanities, that slight their state of slavery so much, as industriously to oppose all instruments and means of deliverance; for such persons to be set at liberty, notwithstanding all this, is the wonder of wonders, and will be deservedly marvellous in the eyes of believers for ever.

Secondly, The freedom of believers is a peculiar freedom; a liberty which few obtain; the generality abiding still in bondage to Satan, who, from the multitude of his subjects, is stiled *the god of this world*, 2 Cor. iv. 4. Believers in scripture are often called a remnant, which is but a small part of the whole piece: The more cause have the people of God to admire distinguishing mercy. How many nobles and great ones of the world are but royal slaves to Satan, and their own lusts!

Thirdly, The liberty of believers is a liberty dearly purchased by the blood of Christ. What that captain said, Acts xxii. 28. "With a great sum obtained I this freedom," may be much more said of the believers' freedom: It was not silver or gold, but the precious blood of Christ that purchased it, 1 Pet. i. 18.

Fourthly, The freedom and liberty of believers is a growing and increasing liberty; they get more and more out of the power of sin, and nearer still to their complete salvation every day, Rom. xiii. 11. The body of sin dieth daily in them: they are said to be crucified with Christ: the strength of sin abates continually in them, after the manner of crucified persons, who die a slow, but

sure death : And look in what degree the power of sin abates, proportionably their spiritual liberty increases upon them.

Fifthly, The freedom of believers is a comfortable freedom : the apostle comforts Christians of the lowest rank, poor servants, with this consideration, 1 Cor. vii. 22. " He that is called in the " Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman," q. d. Let not the meanness of your outward condition, which is a state of subjection and dependence, a state of poverty and contempt, at all trouble you : you are the Lord's freemen, of precious account in his eyes. O it is a comfortable liberty !

Sixthly, and *Lastly*, It is a perpetual and final freedom ; they that are once freed by Christ, have their manumission and final discharge from that state of bondage they were in before : sin shall never have dominion over them any more : it may tempt them and trouble them, but shall never more rule and govern them, Acts xxvi. 18. And thus you see what a glorious liberty the liberty of believers is.

The improvement whereof will be in the following inferences.

Inf. 1. *How rational is the joy of Christians, above the joy of all others in the world?* Shall not the captive rejoice in his recovered liberty ? the very birds of the air (as one observes) had rather be at liberty in the woods, though lean and hungry, than in a golden cage with the richest fare : every creature naturally prizes it ; none more than believers, who have felt the burden and bondage of corruption, who in the days of their first illumination and conviction have poured out many groans and tears for this mercy. What was said of the captive people of God in Babylon, excellently shadows forth the state of God's people under spiritual bondage, with the way and manner of their deliverance from it, Zech. ix. 11. " By the blood of the covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners " out of the pit, wherein is no water." Believers are delivered by the blood of Christ, out of a worse pit than that of Babylon ; and look, as the tribes in their return from thence were overwhelmed with joy and astonishment, Psal. cxxvi. 1, 2. " When the " Lord turned again the captivity of Sion, we are like them that " dream : Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our " tongue with singing."

They were overwhelmed with the sense of the mercy : So should it be with the people of God. It is said, Luke xv. 24. when the prodigal son (there made the emblem of a returning, converting sinner) was returned again to his father's house, that there was heard music and dancing, mirth and feasting in that house. The angels in heaven rejoice when a soul is recovered out of the power of Satan : And shall not the recovered soul, immediately concerned in the mercy, greatly rejoice ? Yea, let them re-

joy in the Lord, and let no earthly trouble or affliction ever have power to interrupt their joy for a moment, after such a deliverance as this.

Inf. 2. How unreasonable and wholly inexcusable is the sin of apostasy from Jesus Christ? What is it but for a delivered captive to put his feet again into the shackles; his hands into the manacles; his neck into the iron yoke, from which he hath been delivered? It is said, Mat. xii. 44, 45. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest and findeth none: Then he saith, I will return into mine house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished; then goeth he, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first." Even as a prisoner that hath escaped, and is again recovered, is loaded with double irons. Let the people of God be content to run any hazard, endure any difficulties in the way of religion, rather than return again into their former bondage, to sin and Satan. O Christian! if ever God gave thee a sight and a sense of the misery and danger of thy natural state, if ever thou hast felt the pangs of labouring and distressed conscience, and, after all this, tasted the unspeakable sweetness of the peace and rest that are in Christ, thou wilt rather chuse to die ten thousand deaths, than to forsake Christ, and go back again into that sad condition.

Inf. 3. How suitable and well-becoming is a free spirit in believers to their state of liberty and freedom? Christ hath made your condition free, O let the temper and frame of your hearts be free also; do all that you do for God with a spirit of freedom; not by constraint, but willingly. Methinks, Christians, the new nature that is in you should stand for a command, and be instead of all arguments that use to work upon the hopes and fears of other men. See how all creatures work according to the principle of their natures. You need not command a mother to draw forth her breasts to a sucking child; nature itself teaches and prompts to that. You need not bid the sea ebb and flow at the stated hours. O Christian! why should thy heart need any other argument, than its own spiritual inclination, to keep its stated times and seasons of communion with God? Let none of God's commandments be grievous to you: let not thine heart need dragging and forcing to its own benefit and advantage. Whatever you do for God, do it cheerfully; and whatever you suffer for God suffer it cheerfully. It was a brave spirit which actuated holy Paul, "I am ready saith he) not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus," Acts xxi. 13.

Inf. 4. Let no man wonder at the enmity and opposition of Satan to

the preaching of the gospel: for by the gospel it is that souls are recovered out of his power, Acts xxvi. 18. It is the express work of ministers "to turn men from darkness to light, and from the "power of Satan unto God." Satan (as one saith) is a great and jealous prince: he will never endure to have liberty proclaimed by the ministers of Christ within his dominions. And, indeed, what is it less, when the gospel is preached in power, but as it were by beat of drum, and sound of trumpet, to proclaim liberty, spiritual, sweet, and everlasting liberty, to every soul sensible of the bondage of corruption and the cruel servitude of Satan, and will now come over to Jesus Christ? And O what numbers and multitudes of prisoners have broken loose from Satan at one proclamation of Christ, Acts ii. 41. But Satan owes the servants of Christ a spite for this, and will be sure to pay them if ever they come within his reach; persecution is the evil genius of the gospel, and follows it as the shadow doth the body.

Inf. 5. How careful should Christians be to maintain their spiritual liberty in all and every point thereof! "stand fast (saith "Paul) in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and "be not again entangled in the yoke of bondage," Gal. v. 1. And again, "Ye are bought with a price, be not ye the servants "of men." It is Christ's prerogative to prescribe the rules of his own house; he hath given no man dominion over your faith, 2 Cor. i. 24. One man is no rule to another, but the word of Christ is a rule to all: follow not the holiest of men one step farther than they follow Christ, 1 Cor. xi. 4. Man is an ambitious creature, naturally affecting dominion; and dominion over the mind rather than over the body. To give law to others, feeds pride in himself; so far as any man brings the word of Christ to warrant his injunctions, so far we are to obey, and no farther; Christ is your Lord and Lawgiver.

Inf. 6. Lastly, Let this encourage and persuade sinners to come to Christ; for with him is sweet liberty to poor captives. Oh that you did but know what a blessed state Jesus Christ would bring you into! "Come unto me (saith he) ye that labour and are "heavy laden:" and what encouragement doth he give to comers? Why this, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The devil persuades you, that the ways of obedience and strict godliness are a perfect bondage; but if ever God regenerate you, you will find his ways, "ways of pleasantness, and all his paths peace: you "will rejoice in the way of his commandments as much as in all "riches:" you will find the worst work Christ puts you about, even suffering work, sweeter than all the pleasures that ever you found in sin. O therefore open your hearts at the call of the gospel: Come unto Christ, *then shall you be free indeed.*