

We have all of us personal guilt enough upon us, let us not add other men's guilt to our account: to be guilty of the blood of the meanest man upon earth, is a sin which will cry in your consciences; but to be guilty of the blood of souls, Lord, who can bear it! Christ thought them worthy his heart-blood, and are they not worth the expence of our breath? Did he sweat blood to save them, and will not we move our lips to save them? It is certainly a sore judgment to the souls of men, when such ministers are set over them as never understood the value of their people's souls, or were never heartily concerned about the salvation of their own souls.



MATTH. xvi. 26.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

DIFFICULT duties need to be enforced with powerful arguments. In the 24th verse of this chapter, our Lord presseth upon his disciples the deepest and hardest duties of self-denial, acquaints them upon what terms they must be admitted into his service: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

This hard and difficult duty he enforceth upon them by a double argument, viz. From,

1. The vanity of all sinful shifts from it, ver. 25.

2. The value of their souls, which is imported in it, ver. 26.

They may shift off their duty to the loss of their souls, or save their souls by the loss of such trifles. If they esteem their souls above the world, and can be content to put all other things to the hazard for their salvation, making account to save nothing but them by Christianity; then they come up to Christ's terms, and may warrantably and boldly call him their Lord and Master; and to sweeten this choice to them, he doth, in my text, balance the soul and all the world, weighing them one against the other, and shews them the infinite odds and disproportion betwixt them: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

What is a man profited?] There is a plain meiosis in the phrase; and the meaning is, how inestimably and irreparably is a man damnified! what a soul-ruining bargain would a man make!

If he should gain the whole world.] There is a plain hyperbole

in this phrase; for it never was, nor ever will be the lot of any man to be the sole owner and possessor of the whole world *. But suppose all the power, pleasure, wealth, and honour of the whole world were bid and offered in exchange for a man's soul; what a dear purchase would it be at such a rate! "What were this, says "one †, but to win Venice, and then be hanged at the gate of "it?" As that man acts like a mad man, that goes about to purchase a treasure of gold with the loss of his life; for life being lost, what is all the gold in the world to him? he can have no enjoyment of it, or comfort in it: so here, what is all the world, or as many worlds as there are creatures in it, when the soul is lost, if he gain this?

And lose his own soul.] The comparison lies here betwixt one single soul and the whole world. The whole world is no price for the poorest, meanest, and most despised soul that lives in it.

By losing the soul, we are not to understand the destruction of its being, but of its happiness and comfort, the cutting it off from God, and all the hopes of his favour and enjoyment for ever. This is the loss here intended, a loss never to be repaired. The whole world can be no recompence for the loss to the soul, if it be but the loss of its purity or peace for a time; much less can it recompence the loss of the soul, in the loss of all its happiness for ever. When a man's chief happiness is finally lost, then is his soul lost: for what benefit can it be, nay, how great a misery must it be, to have a being perpetuated in torments for ever? ‡ This is the *fine* or *mulct* which is set upon sin, as some render the word. What shall a man gain by such pleasures, for which God will *mulct*, or *fine* him at the rate or price of his own soul? That is, of all the happiness, joy and comfort of it to all eternity.

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? || The question aggravates the sense, and amplifies the loss and damage of the man that sells his soul for the whole world. There is no recompence in all the world for the hazard or danger of the soul one hour; nor would a man that understands what a soul and eternity are, put them into danger for ten thousand worlds, much less for one penny, yea, for nothing, as many do: but to barter or exchange it for the world, to take any thing in lieu of it; this is the height of madness. "The way of buying in former times was not by

* By this hypothetical hyperbole is denoted the great atrociousness of losing eternal salvation. *Glassius.*

† *Non magis juvabitur, quam qui acquirat Venetias, ipse vero suspendatur ad portam.* Paræus in loc.

‡ *Anima vero sua mulctetur*, i. e. If one is punished with the loss of his own soul. *Bez. Maldon.*

|| *Interrogatio exaggerans.*

“money, but by the exchange of one commodity for another;” and to this custom * Brugensis thinks this phrase is allusive. Now, what commodity is found in all the world; or who, that is not blinded by the god of this world, can think that the whole world itself, if all the rocks in it were rocks of diamonds, and the seas and rivers were liquid gold, is a commodity of equivalent worth to his own soul? Hence two notes arise naturally.

Doct. 1. *That one soul is of more value than the whole world.*

Doct. 2. *How precious and invaluable soever the soul of man is, it may be lost and cast away for ever.*

I begin with the first.

Doct. 1. *That one soul is of more value than the whole world.*

I need not spend much time in the proof of it, when you have considered, that he who bought them, hath here weighed and valued them; and that the point before us is the result and conclusion of one that hath the best reason to know the true worth of them. That which I have to do is to gather out of the scriptures the particulars; which, put together, make up the full demonstration of the point, And,

1. The invaluable worth of souls appears from the manner of their creation. They were created immediately by God, as hath been proved, and that not without the deliberation of the whole Trinity; Gen. i. 26. “Let us make man.” For the production of other creatures, it was enough to give out the word of his command. “Let there be light, let the earth and the waters bring forth;” but when he comes to man, then you have no *FIAT*, *let there be*, but he puts his own hand immediately to it, as to the master-piece of the whole creation: yea, a council is called about it; *Let us*, implying the just consultation and deliberation of all the persons in the Godhead about it, that our hearts might be raised to the expectation of some extraordinary work to follow; great counsels and wise debates being both the forerunners and foundations of great actions and events to ensue thereupon. Thus Elihu in Job xxxv. 10. “None saith, Where is God my Makers?” And David, in Psal. cxlix. 2. “Let Israel rejoice in his Makers:” in both places the word is plural. The consultation here is only amongst the divine Persons, no angels are called to this council-table, the whole matter was to be conducted by the wisdom, and

* *Ανταλλαγμα* vocat id quo dato, redimitur aliquid; juxta priscorum commercia, quæ non moneta, sed rerum permutatione constabant. Brugens.

effected by the power of God; and therefore there was no need to consult with any but himself, the wisdom of angels being from him: but this great council shews what an excellent creature was now to be produced, and the excellency of that creature man was principally in his soul; for the bodies of other creatures, which were made by the word of his command, are as beautiful, elegant, and neat as the body of man; yea, and in some respects more excellent. The soul then was that rare piece which God in so condescending an expression tells us was created with the deliberation of the God-head; those great and excellent Persons laid their heads, as it were, together to project its being.

And by the way, this may smartly check the pride and arrogance of souls, who dare take it upon them to teach God, as murmurs at his disposals of us. Shall that soul which is the product of his wisdom and counsel, dare to instruct or counsel its maker? But that by the by. You see there is a transcendent dignity and worth in the soul of man above all other beings in the world, by the peculiar way of its production into the number of created beings: no wise man deliberates long, or calls a council about ordinary matters, much less the All-wise God.

2. The soul hath in itself an intrinsic worth and excellency, worthy of that divine Original whence it sprang: view it in its noble faculties, and admirable powers, and it will appear to be a creature upon which God hath laid out the riches of his wisdom and power.

There you shall find a mind susceptible of all light, both natural and spiritual, shining as the candle of God in the inner man, closing with truth, as the iron doth with the attractive loadstone; a shop in which all arts and sciences are laboured and formed: what are all the famous libraries and monuments of learning, but so many systems of thoughts, laboured and perfected in the active inquisitive minds of men? Truth is its natural and delectable object; it pursues eagerly after it, and even spends itself and the body too in the chase and prosecution of truth; when it lies deep, as a subterranean treasure*, the mind sends out innumerable thoughts, reinforcing each other in thick successions, to dig for, and compass that invaluable treasure; if it be disguised by misrepresentations and vulgar prejudice, and trampled in the dirt under that disguise, there is an ability in the mind to discern it by some lines and features, which are all well known to it, and both own, honour, and vindicate it under all that dirt and obloquy, with more respect than a man will take up a piece of gold, or a sparkling diamond out of the mire: it searches after it by many painful deductions of reason,

* *Veritas in puteo.* i. e. Truth must be drawn from first principles.

and * triumphs more in the discovery of it, than in all earthly treasures; no gratification of sense like that of the mind, when it grasps its prey for which it hunted.

The mind passes through all the works of creation, it views the several creatures on earth, considers the fabric, use, and beauty of animals, the signatures of plants, penetrating thereby into their nature and virtues: it views the vast ocean, and the large train of causes laid together in all these things for the good of man, by God, whose name it reads in the most diminutive creature it beholds on earth.

It can, in a moment, mount itself from earth to heaven, view the face thereof, describe the motions of the sun in the ecliptic, calculate tables for the motions of the planets and fixed stars, invent convenient cycles for the computation of time, foretel, at a great distance, the dismal eclipses of the sun and moon to the very digit, and the portentous conjunctions of the planets, to the very minute of their ingress. These are the pleasant employments of the understanding.

But there is a higher game at which this eagle plays; it reckons itself all this while employed as much beneath its capacity, as Domitian in catching flies; though these be lawful and pleasant exercises, when it hath leisure for them, yet it is fitted for a much nobler exercise, even to penetrate the glorious mysteries of redemption, to trace redeeming love through all the astonishing methods, and manifold discoveries of it; and yet higher than all this, it is capable of an immediate sight, or facial vision of the blessed God; short of which it receives no pleasure that is fully agreeable to its noble power and infinite appetite.

View its will, and you shall find it like a queen upon the throne of the soul, swaying the sceptre of liberty in her hand, (as † one expresses it) with all the affections waiting and attending upon her. No tyrant can force it, no torment can wrest the golden sceptre of liberty out of its hand; the keys of all the chambers of the soul hang at its girdle, these it delivers to Christ in the day of his power; victorious grace sweetly determines it by gaining its consent, but commits no violence upon it. God accepts its offering, though full of imperfections; but no service is accepted without it, how excellent soever be the matter of it.

View the conscience and thoughts with their self-reflective abilities, wherein the soul retires into itself, and sits concealed from all

* Archimedes, when he made a valuable discovery of a new truth, leapt out of the bath for joy, crying, I have found it, I have found it.

† Culverwell.

eyes but his that made it, judging its own actions, and censuring its estate; viewing its face in its own glass, and correcting the indecencies it discovers there: things of greatest moment and importance are silently transacted in its council-chamber betwixt the soul and God; so remote from the knowledge of all creatures, that neither angels, devils, nor men, can know what is doing there, but by uncertain guess, or revelation from God*: here it impleads, condemns†, and acquits itself as at a privy session, with respect to the judgment of the great day: here it meets with the best of comforts, and with the worst of terrors.

Take a survey of its passions and affections, and you will find them admirable: see how they are placed by divine Wisdom in the soul, some for defence and safety, others for delight and pleasure. Anger actuates the spirits, and rouseth its courage, enabling it to break through difficulties: Fear keeps centinel, watching upon all dangers that approach us: Hope forestalls the good, and anticipates the joys of the next life, and thereby supports and strengthens the soul under all the discouragements and pressures of the present life: Love unites us to the chiefest good: "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him:" Zeal is the dagger which love draws in God's cause and quarrel, to secure itself from sin, and testify its resentments of God's dishonour.

O what a divine spark is the soul of man! well might Christ prefer it in dignity to the whole world.

3. The worth of a soul may be gathered and discerned from its subjective capacity and hability both of grace and glory. It is capable of all the graces of the Spirit, of being filled with the fulness of God, Eph. iii. 19. to live to God here, and with God for ever. What excellent graces do adorn some souls? How are all the rooms richly hanged with divine and costly hangings, that God may dwell in them! This makes it like the carved works of the temple, overlaid with pure gold; here is glory upon glory, a new creation upon the old; in the innermost parts of some souls is a spiritual altar erected with this inscription. *Holiness to the Lord*: here the soul offers up itself to God in the sacred flames of love; and here it sacrifices its vile affections, devoting them to destruction, to the glory of its God: here God walks with delight, even a delight beyond what he takes in all the stately structures and magnificently adorned temples in the whole world, Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.

No other soul besides man's is marriageable to Christ, or capable of espousals to the King of glory: they were not designed, and therefore not endued with a capacity for such an honour as this: but

* 1 Cor. ii. 11.

† Rom. ii. 15. 2 Cor. i. 12.

such a capacity hath every soul, even the meanest on earth, and such honour have all his saints: others may be, but they are betrothed to Christ in this world, 2 Cor. xi. 2. and shall be presented without spot before him in the world to come, Eph. v. 27.

It is now a lovely and excellent creature in its naked, natural state; much more beautiful and excellent in its sanctified and gracious state: but what shall we say, or how shall we conceive of it, when all spots of sin are perfectly washed off its beautiful face in heaven, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon it! when its filthy garments are taken away, and the pure robes of perfect holiness, as well as righteousness, superinduced upon this excellent creature! If the imperfect beauty of it, begun in sanctification, enamoured its Saviour, and made him say, "Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one of the chains of thy neck;" what will its beauty, and his delight in it be in the state of perfect glorification! As we imagine the circles in the heavens to be vastly greater than those we view upon the globe, so must we imagine in the case before us.

4. The preparations God makes for souls in heaven, speak their great worth and value. When you lift up your eyes to heaven, and behold that spangled azure canopy beset and inlaid with so many golden studs and sparkling gems, you see but the floor or pavement of that place which God hath prepared for some souls. He furnished this world for us before he put us into it; but, as delightful and beautiful as it is, it is no more to be compared with the Father's house in heaven, than the smallest ruined chapel your eyes ever beheld, is to be compared with Solomon's temple, when it stood in all its shining glory.

When you see a stately and magnificent structure built, richest hangings and furniture prepared to adorn it, you conclude some great persons are to come thither: such preparations speak the quality of the guests.

Now heaven, yea, the heaven of heavens, the palace of the great King, the presence-chamber of the Godhead, is prepared, not only by God's decree and Christ's death; but by his ascension thither in our names, and as our forerunner, for all renewed and redeemed souls. John xiv. 2. "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you."

And, where is the place prepared for them, but in his Father's house? The same place, the very same house where the Father, Son, and Spirit themselves do dwell: such is the love of Christ to souls, that he will not dwell in one house, and they in another; but, as he speaks, John xii. 26. "Where I am, there shall my servant also be." There is room enough in the Father's house

for Christ and all the souls he redeemed to live and dwell together for evermore. His ascension thither was in the capacity of a common or public person, to take livery and seisin of those many mansions for them, which are to be filled with their inhabitants, as they come thither in their respective times and orders.

5. The great price with which they were redeemed and purchased, speaks their dignity and value. No wise man will purchase a trifle at a great price, much less the most wise God. Now the redemption of every soul stood in no less than the most precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. "You know" (saith the apostle there) that we were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold,—but with the precious blood "of Christ, as a lamb without blemish or spot." All the gold and silver in the world was no ransom for one soul; nay, all the blood of the creatures, had it been shed as a sacrifice to the glory of justice, or even the blood which is most dear to us, as being derived from our own; I mean, the blood of our dear children, even of our first-born, the beginning of our strength, which usually has the strength of affection: I say, none of these could purchase a pardon for the smallest sin that ever any soul committed, much less was it able to purchase the soul itself, Mic. vi. 6, 7. "Thousands of" "rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil," or our *first-born*, are no ransom to God *for the sin of the soul*. It is only the precious blood of Christ that is a just ransom or counter-price, as it is called, Matth. xx. 28.

Now, who can compute the value of that blood? Such was the worth of the blood of Christ, which, by the communication of properties, is truly stiled the blood of God, that one drop of it is above the estimations of men and angels; and yet, before the soul of the meanest man or woman in the world could be redeemed, every drop of his blood must be shed; for no less than his death could be a price for our souls. Hence then we evidently discern an invaluable worth in souls: A whole kingdom is taxed, when a king is to be ransomed; the delight and darling of God's soul must die, when our souls are to be redeemed. O the worth of souls!

6. This evidences the transcendent dignity and worth of souls, that *eternity is stampt upon their actions*, and theirs only, of all the beings in this world. The acts of souls are immortal as their nature is; whereas the actions of other animals, having neither moral goodness nor moral evil in them, pass away as their beings do.

The apostle therefore, in Gal. vi. 7. compares the actions of men in this world to seed sown, and tells us of everlasting fruits we shall reap from them in the next life; they have the same respect to a future account that seed hath to the harvest; "He that soweth

“iniquity shall reap vanity,” *i. e.* everlasting disappointment and misery, Prov. xxii. 8. and “they that now sow in tears, shall then “reap in joy,” Prov. xxvi. 5. Every gracious action is the seed of joy, and every sinful action the seed of sorrow; and this makes the great difference betwixt the actions of a rational soul, and those done by beasts: and if it were not so, man would then be wholly swayed by sense and present things, as the beasts are, and all religion would vanish with this distinction of actions.

Our actions are considerable two ways, physically and morally; in the first sense they are transient, in the last permanent; a word is past as soon as spoken, but yet it must and will be recalled and brought into the judgment of the great day, Mat. xii. 36. Whatever therefore a man shall speak, think, or do, once spoken, thought, or done, it becomes eternal, and abides for ever. Now, what is it that puts so great a difference betwixt human and brutal actions, but the excellent nature of the reasonable soul? It is this which stamps immortality upon human actions, and is at once a clear proof both of the immortality and dignity of the soul of man above all other creatures in this world.

7. The contentions of both worlds, the strife of heaven and hell about the soul of man, speaks it a most precious and invaluable treasure.

The soul of man is the prize about which heaven and hell contend: the great design of heaven is to save it, and all the plots of hell to ruin it. Man is a borderer betwixt both kingdoms, he lives here upon the confines of the spiritual and material world; and therefore Scaliger fitly calls him *Utriusque mundi nexus*, one in whom both worlds meet: his body is of the earth, earthly; his soul the offspring of the Deity, heavenly. It is then no wonder to find such tugging and pulling this way and that way, upward and downward, such sallies from heaven to rescue and save it, such excursions from hell to captivate and ruin it.

The infinite wisdom of God hath laid the plot and design for its salvation by Christ in so great depth of counsel, that the angels of heaven are astonished at it, and desire to pry into it. Christ in pursuance of this eternal project, came from heaven professedly to seek and to save lost souls, Luke xix. 10. He compares himself to a good shepherd, who leaveth the ninety and nine to seek one lost sheep, and having found it, brings it home upon his shoulders, rejoicing that he hath found it, Luke xv. 7.

Hell employs all its skill and policy, sets a-work all wiles and stratagems to destroy and ruin it; 1 Pet. v. 8. “Your adversary “the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” The strong man armed gets the first possession of the soul, and with all his forces and policies labours to secure it as his

property, Luke xi. 21. Christ raises all the spiritual militia, the very *posse cæli*, the powers of heaven, to rescue it, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. And do heaven and earth thus contend, think you, *de lana caprina*, for a thing of nought? No, no, if there were not some singular and peculiar excellency and worth in man's soul, both worlds would never tug and pull at this rate which should win that prize. It was a great argument of the worth and excellency of Homer, that incomparable poet, that seven cities contended for the honour of his nativity.

Επὶ αὖ πόλεις διερίζεσι περὶ ριζαν Ομηρεῖ,
Σμύρνα, Ρόδος, Κολοφών, Σαλαμῖν, Χίος, Ἀργός, Ἀθῆναι.

Smyrna, Rhodes, Colophon, Salamis, Chius, Argos, and Athens, were all at strife about one poor man, who should crown themselves with the honour of his birth: but when heaven and hell shall contend about a soul, certainly it much more speaks the dignity of it, than the contention of several cities for one Homer.

What are all the wooings, expostulations, and passionate beseechings of Christ's ministers? What are all the convictions of conscience, and the strong impressions made upon the affections? What are all the strokes from heaven upon men in the way of sin? I say, what are all these but the efforts of heaven to draw souls out of the snares of hell?

And what are the hellish temptations that men feel in their hearts, the alluring objects presented to their eyes, the ensnaring examples that are set round about them, but the attempts of Satan, if possible, to draw the souls of men into the same condemnation and misery with himself?

Would heaven and hell be up in arms, as it were, and strive at this rate for nothing? Thy soul, O man, how vilely soever thou depreciatest and slightest it, is of high esteem, a rich purchase, a creature of nobler rank than thou art aware of. The wise merchant knows the value of gold and diamonds, though ignorant Indians would part with them for glass beads and tinsel toys. And this leads us to

8. The eighth evidence of the invaluable worth of souls, which is the joy in heaven, and the rage in hell, for the gain and loss of the soul of man.

Christ, who came from heaven, and well knew the frame and disposition of the inhabitants of that city, tells us, that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," Luke xv. 7, 10. * No sooner is the heart of a sin-

* As often as we do good, so often the angels are glad, and the devils are sad?

ner darted with conviction, broken with sorrow for sin, and begins to cry, "men and brethren, what shall I do?" but the news is quickly in heaven, and sets all the city of God a rejoicing at it, as is in the chief city of a kingdom when a young prince is born.

We never read that Christ laughed in all his time on earth; but we read that he once rejoiced in spirit, Luke x. 21. And what was the occasion of that his joy, but the success of the gospel in the salvation of the souls of men? Now, certainly it must be some great good that so affects Christ, and all his angels in heaven at the sight of it; the degree of a wise man's joy is according to the value of the object thereof: No man that is wise will rejoice and feel his heart leap within him for gladness at a small or common thing.

And as there is joy in heaven for the saving, so certainly there is grief and rage in hell for the loss of a soul. No sooner had God, by Paul's ministry, converted one poor Lydia, at Philippi, whither he was called by an immediate express from heaven for that service, but the devil put all the city into an uproar, as if an enemy had landed on their coast; and raised a violent persecution, which quickly drove him thence, Acts xvi. 9, 14, 22.

And indeed what are all the fierce and cruel persecutions of God's faithful ministers, but so many efforts of the rage and malice of hell against them, for plucking souls as so many captives and preys out of his paws? for this he owes them a spight, and will be sure to pay them, if ever he get them at an advantage. But all this joy and grief demonstrates the high and great value of the prize which is won by heaven and lost by hell.

9. The institution of gospel-ordinances, and the appointment of so many gospel-officers purposely for the saving of souls, is no small evidence of their value and esteem.

No man would light and maintain a lamp fed with golden oil, and keep it burning from age to age, if the work to be done by the light of it were not of a very precious and important nature: what else are the dispensations of the gospel, but lamps burning with golden oil to light souls to heaven? Zech. iv. 2, 3, 4, and 12. compared: A magnificent vision is there represented to the prophet, viz. a candlestick of gold with a bowl or cistern upon the top of it, and seven shafts with seven lamps at the ends thereof, all lighted: And that these lamps might have a constant supply of oil, without any accessory human help, there are represented (as growing by the candlestick) two fresh and green olive trees on each side thereof, ver. 3. which do empty out of themselves golden oil, ver. 12. na-

and as often as we depart from good, so often the devils rejoice, and the angels are defrauded of their joy. *Aug.*

turally dropping and distilling it into that bowl, and the two pipes thereof to feed the lamps continually. Under this stately emblem you have a lively representation of the spiritual gifts and graces distilled by the Spirit into the ministers of the gospel for the use and benefit of the church, as you find not only by the angel's exposition of it here, but by the Spirit's allusion to it, and accommodation of it in Rev. xi. 3, 4. See herein what price God puts upon the salvation of souls: Gospel-lamps are maintained for their sakes, not with the sweat of ministers brows, or the expence and waste of their spirits, but by the precious gifts and graces of God's Spirit continually dropping into them for the use and service of souls. These ministerial gifts and graces are Christ's ascension-gifts, Eph. iv. 8. "When he ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men;" and what are the royal gifts of that triumphant day? Why, he "gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, "and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, "for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of "Christ." It is an allusion to the Roman triumphs, wherein the conqueror did *spargere missilia*, scatter abroad his treasures among the people. It is reported of the palm-tree, saith one, that when it was first planted in Italy, they watered its roots with wine, to make it take the better with the soil: But God waters our souls with what is infinitely more costly than wine, he waters them with the heart-blood of Christ, and the precious gifts and graces of the Spirit; which certainly he would never do if they were not of great worth in his eyes. O how many excellent ministers, who were, as it is said of John, burning and shining lights in their places and generations, have spent themselves, and how many are there who are willing to spend, and be spent, as Paul was for the salvation of souls! God is at great expence for them, and therefore puts a very high value upon them.

Now all this respects the soul of man; that is the object of all ministerial labours. The soul is the *terminus actionum ad intra*, the subject on which God works, and upon which he spends all those invaluable treasures. It is the soul which he aims at, and principally designs and levels all to, and reckons it not too dear a rate to save it at.

No man will dig for common stones with golden mattocks, the instruments that would be worn out being of far greater value than the thing. This may convince us of what worth our souls are, and at what rates they are set in God's book, that such instruments are sent abroad into the world, and such precious gifts and graces, like golden oil, spent continually for their salvation; "Whether Paul, "or Apollos, or Cephas, all are yours," 1 Cor. iii. 22. i. e. all set apart for the service and salvation of your souls.

10. The great encouragements and rewards God propounds and promiseth to them that win souls, speak their worth, and God's great esteem of them.

There cannot be a more acceptable service done to God, than for a man to set himself heartily and diligently to the conversion of souls; so many souls as a man instrumentally saves, so many diadems will God crown him withal in the great day. St. Paul calls his converted Philippians *his joy and his crown*, Phil. iv. 1. and tells the converted Thessalonians, they were his "crown of rejoicing in the presence of Jesus Christ at his coming," 1 Thess. ii. 19. There is a full reward assured by promise to those that labour in this great service, Dan. xii. 3. "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." The wisdom here spoken of, I conceive not to be only that whereby a man is made wise to the salvation of his own soul, but whereby he is also furnished with skill for the saving of other men's souls according to that, Prov. xi. 30. "He that winneth souls is wise." And so the latter phrase is exegetical of it, meaning one and the same thing with being wise and turning many unto righteousness: And, to put men upon the study of this wisdom, he puts a very honourable title upon them, calling them מצדיקי הרבים the *justifiers of many*, as in 1 Tim. iv. 16. they are said to save others. Here is singular honour put upon the very instruments employed in this honourable service, and that is not all, but their reward is great hereafter, as well as their honour great at present, they "shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and the stars for ever and ever." The firmament shines like a sapphire in itself, and the stars and planets more gloriously again; but those that faithfully labour in this work of saving souls shall shine in glory for ever and ever, when the firmament shall be parched up as a scroll. O what rewards and honours are here to provoke men to the study of saving souls! God will richly recompense all our pains in this work: If we did but only sow the seed in our days, and another enter into our labours, and water what we sowed; so that neither the first hath the comfort of finishing the work, nor the last the honour of beginning it; but one did somewhat towards it in the work of conviction, and the other carried it on to greater maturity and perfection; and so neither the one nor the other began and finished the work singly, yet both shall rejoice in heaven together, John iv. 36.

You see what honour God puts upon the very instruments employed in this work, even the honour to be saviours, under God, of men's souls, James v. 20. and what a full reward of glory, joy, and comfort, they shall have in heaven; all which speaks the great

value of the soul with God. Such encouragements, and such rewards would never have been propounded and promised if God had not a singular estimation of them.

And the more to quicken his instruments to all diligence, in this great work, he works upon their fears as well as hopes; threatens them with hell, as well as encourages them with the hopes of heaven; tells them he will require the blood of all those souls that perish by their negligence: "Their blood (saith he) will I require at the watchman's hands," Ezek. xxxiii. 6. which are rather thunderbolts than words, saith Chrysostome. By all which, you see, what a weight God lays upon the saving or losing of souls: Such severe charges, great encouragements, and terrible threats had never been proposed in scripture, if the souls of men had not been invaluablely precious.

11. It is no small evidence of the precious and invaluable worth of souls, that God manifests so great and tender care over them, and is so much concerned about the evil that befalls them.

Among many others there are two things in which the tender care of God, for the good of souls, is manifested.

(1.) In his tenderness over them in times of distress and danger; as a tender father will not leave his sick child in other hands, but sits up and watches by himself, and administers the cordials with his own hands; even so the great God expresseth his care and tenderness. Isa. lvii. 15. "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Behold the condescending tenderness of the highest majesty! Is a soul ready to faint and fail, O how soon is God with it, with a reviving cordial in his hand! lest "the spirit should fail before him, and the soul which he hath made?" as it is, ver. 16. Yea, he put it into Christ's commission, "to preach good tidings to the meek, and to bind up the broken-hearted," Isa. lxi. 1. and not only inserts it in Christ's commission, but gives the same in solemn charge to all his inferior messengers, whom he employs about them. Isa. xxxv. 3. "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not."

(2.) His special regard to souls is evidenced in his severe prohibitions to all others to do any thing that may be an occasion of ruin to them. He charges it upon all, "That no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way," Rom. xiv. 13. that by the abuse of our own liberty, "we destroy not him for whom Christ died," Rom. xiv. 15. And what doth all this signify but the precious and invaluable worth of souls?

12. *Lastly*, It is not the least evidence of the dignity of men's

souls, that God hath appointed the whole host of angels to be their guardians and attendants.

“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” Heb. i. 14.

Are they not?] It is not a doubtful question, but the strongest way of affirmation; nothing is surer than that they are.

All.] Not one of that heavenly company excepted. The highest angel thinks it no disparagement to serve a soul for whom Christ died; well may they all stoop to serve them when they see Christ their Lord hath stooped, even to death, to save them. They are all of them.

Ministering spirits.] Διεργονα πνευματα, public officers, to whom their tutelage is committed: To them it belongs to attend, serve, protect and relieve them. The greatest barons and peers in the kingdom think it not below them to wait upon the heir apparent to the crown, in his minority; and no less dignity is here stamped by God upon the souls of men whom he calls.

Heirs of salvation.] And in some respect nearer to Christ than themselves are; on this account it is, that the angels delight to serve them. Christ's little ones upon earth have their angels, which always behold the face of God in heaven, Mat. xviii. 10. and therefore saith our Lord there, “Take heed you despise not one of those little ones;” they are greater persons than you are aware of. Nor is it enough that one angel is appointed to wait upon all, or many of them, but many angels, even a whole host of them, are sometimes sent to attend upon one of them. As Jacob was going on his way, the angels of God met him; and when he saw them he said, “This is God's host,” Gen. xxxii. 1, 2.

The same two offices which belong to a nurse, to whom the father commits his child, belong also to the angels in heaven, with respect to the children of God, viz. to keep them tenderly whilst they are abroad, and bring them home to their Father's house at last. And how clearly doth all this evince and demonstrate the great dignity and value of souls? Was it an argument of the grandeur and magnificence of king Solomon, that he had two hundred men with targets, and three hundred men with shields of beaten gold for his ordinary guard every day? And is it not a mark of far greater dignity than ever Solomon had in all his glory, to have hosts of angels attending us? In comparison with one of this guard, Solomon himself was but a worm in all his magnificence.

And now lay all these arguments together, and see what they will amount to. You have before you no ordinary creature: For (1.) It was not produced, as other creatures were by a mere word of command; but by the deliberation of the great council of heaven. And (2.) Such are the high and noble faculties and powers found

in it as render it agreeable to, and becoming such a Divine original. Yea, (3.) By reason of these its admirable powers, it becomes a capable subject both of grace here and glory hereafter. (4.) Nor is this its capacity in vain; for God hath made glorious preparations for some of them in heaven. (5.) And purchased them for heaven, and heaven for them, at an invaluable price, even the precious blood of Christ. (6.) And stamp't immortality upon their actions, as well as natures. (7.) Both worlds contend and strive for the soul, as a prize of greatest value. (8.) Their conversion to Christ is the triumph of heaven, and rage of hell. (9.) The lamps of gospel-ordinances are maintained over all the reformed Christian world, to light them in their passage to heaven. (10.) Great rewards are propounded to all that shall heartily endeavour the salvation of them. (11.) The care of heaven is exceeding great and tender over them. And (12.) The heavenly hosts of angels have the charge of them, and reckon it their honour to serve them. These things, duly weighed, bring home the conclusion with demonstrative clearness, to every man's understanding, *That one soul is of more value than the whole world*; which was the thing to be proved. What remains, is the improvement of this excellent subject, in these following inferences.

Inf. 1. The soul of man, appearing to be a creature of such transcendent dignity and excellency, this truth appears of equal clearness with it; *That it was not made for the body, but the body for it; and therefore it is a vile abuse of the noble and high-born soul, to subject it to the lusts, and enslave it to the drudgery of the inferior and more ignoble part.*

The very law of nature assigns the most honourable places and employments, to the most noble and excellent creatures, and the baser and inferior, to things of the lowest rank and quality. The sun, moon and stars are placed by this law in the heavens; but the *ignis fatuus*, and the glow-worm in the fens and ditches. Princes are set upon thrones of glory, the beggars lodged in barns and stables: and if at any time this order of nature is inverted, and the baser suppress and perk over the noble and honourable beings, it is looked upon as a kind of prodigy, in the civil world. And so Solomon represents it, Eccl. x. 7. "I have seen servants "upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth;" i. e. I have seen men that are worthy of no better employments than to rub horses heels, in the saddle with their trappings; and men who deserves to bear rule, and to govern kingdoms; men, who for their great ability and integrity, deserved to sit at the helm, and moderate the affairs of kingdoms; these have I seen walking as servants upon the earth; and this he calls an evil

under the sun, that is, an *ataxy*, confusion, or disorder in the course of nature.

Now there can never be that difference and vast odds betwixt one man and another, as there is betwixt the soul and body of every man. A king upon the throne is not so much above a beggar that cries at our door for a crust, as the soul is above the body; for the soul of a beggar is of the same species, original, and capacity of happiness, with the soul of the most illustrious prince; and sometimes greater excellencies of mind are found in the lowest rank and order of men. "Better is a poor and wise child, than an old, and foolish king," Eccl. iv. 13. but the soul of the meanest person in the world is better than all the bodies in it; and therefore, to make the noble, and the high-born soul a slave, a mere drudge to the vile body, as the apostle calls it, Phil. iii. 21. "The body of this vileness;" what is it but to set the beggar on horseback, and make the king lacquey after him on foot!

It was a generous resentment that a * Heathen had of the dignity of his own soul, and a very just abhorrence of so vile an abuse of it, when he said, *I am greater, and born to greater things, than that I should be a slave to my body.*

I know there is a debt of duty the soul owes to its own body, and few souls are to be found too careless, or dilatory in the discharge thereof; where one soul needs the spur in this case, thousands need the curb. Most souls are over-heated with zeal for the concerns of the flesh, worn out and spent in its constant drudgery; their whole life is but a *serving of divers lusts and pleasures*, as the apostle speaks, Tit. iii. 3. Imperious lusts are cruel task-masters, they give the soul no rest; the more provision the soul brings in to satisfy them, the more they rage, like fire, by the addition of more fuel. What a sad sight is it to see a noble, immortal soul *enslaved*, as the apostle's word is †, Tit. i. 7. *to wine? to filthy lucre*, to a thousand sorts of vassalage; like a *tapster* in a common inn, now running up stairs, and then down, at every one's knock and call.

O what a perpetual hurry and noise do thousands of souls live in! so that they have no time to retire into themselves, and think for what end and use they were created and sent into this world. All their thoughts, all their cares, all their studies and labours, are taken up about the perishing, clogging, ensnaring body, which must so shortly fall a prey to the worms. How many millions of poor creatures are there that labour and toil all their life long, for a poor, bare maintenance of their bodies, and never think they have any other business to do in this world!

* *Major sum, et ad majora natus, quam ut corporis mei fîm mancipium.* Sen.

† Μη σινω πολλω δεδωλωμενας.

And how many, of an higher rank, are charmed by a thick succession of fleshly delights and pleasures, into a deep oblivion of their eternal concerns ! So that their whole life is but one entire diversion from the great business and proper end of it. James v. 5. "Ye have lived in pleasures on earth," living in them, as the fish doth in the water, its proper element, or the eel in the mud. Sometimes it falls out, at the very close of a vain voluptuous life, when you see all their delights shrinking away at the approaches and appearance of death, that they begin to be a little startled at the change, which is about to be made upon them ; and to cry, O what shall we do now ! Ah poor souls ! is that a time to think what you shall do, when you are just stepping into the awful state of eternity ? O that this had been thought on in season ! but you could find no leisure for one such thought. Now you begin to wish time had been rescued out of the hands of the cares and pleasures of this life, for better purposes ; but it is gone, and never more to be recalled.

Inf. 2. Is the soul so invaluablely precious ? Then the salvation of the soul is to be the great care, and business of every man in this life.

Where one thought is spent about this question, *What shall I eat, drink, and put on ?* a thousand should be spent about that question, "What shall I do to be saved !" If a treasure of ten, or twenty thousand pounds were committed to your trust and charge, and for which (in case of loss) you must be responsible : would not your thoughts, cares, and fears, be working night and day about it, till you are satisfied it is safe and out of danger ? And then your mind would be at rest, but not before. Thy soul, O man, is more worth than the crowns and treasures of all the princes in the world ! If all their exchequers were drained, and all their crown-jewels sold to their full value, they could never make up a half ransom for the soul of the poorest and meanest man. This invaluable treasure is committed to your charge ; if it be lost, you are lost for ever. That which St. Matthew calls the losing of the soul in my text, St. Luke calls *losing himself* ; if the soul be lost, the man is lost. The body is but as a boat fastened to the stern of a stately ship, if the ship sink, the boat follows it.

O, therefore, what thoughts, what fears, what cares should exercise the minds of men, day and night, till their precious souls are out of all danger : Methinks the sound of this text should ring a perpetual alarm in the ears of careless sinners, and make them hasten to the insurance-office, as merchants do, who have great adventures in danger at sea. It was counsel given once to a king, and worthy to be pressed upon all, from the king to the beggar, to ruminate these words of Christ one quarter of an hour every

day; "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Certainly it would make men slacken their pace and cool themselves in their hot and earnest pursuit of the trifles of this world, and convince them, that they have somewhat else to do of far greater importance.

It was not without great and weighty reason, therefore, that the apostle Peter exhorts to all diligence to make our calling and election sure, 2 Pet. i. 10. There are two words in this text of extraordinary weight, *Σπουδασατε*, *Give all diligence*; the word is *study*; the utmost intention of the mind, pondering and comparing things in the thoughts, valuing reasons for, and objections against the point before us, this is study; and such as calls for all diligence where the subject-matter is (as to be sure here it is) of the greatest importance: And what is the subject-matter of all this study and diligence? Why, it is the most solemn of all works that ever came under the hand of man, to make our calling and election *sure*, firm, stable, or fixed, as a building raised upon a square and strong foundation; or as a conclusion is sure, when regularly drawn from certain and indubitable premises: There can never be too much care, too much study or pains about that which can never be too well secured.

Many souls never spent one solemn hour in a close and serious debate about this matter; others have taken a great deal of pains about it; they have broken many nights sleep, poured out many prayers, made many a deep search into their own hearts, walked with much conscientious watchfulness and tenderness, proposed many a serious case of conscience to the most judicious and skilful ministers and Christians; and after all, the security is not such as fully satisfies: And probably one reason of it may be the great weight wherewith the matters of their salvation lie upon their spirits. O that these soul-concerns did bear upon all, as they do upon some! It requires more time, more thoughts, more prayers to make these things sure, than most are aware of.

Inf. 3. *If the soul be so precious, then certainly it is the special care of heaven, that which God looks more particularly after, than any other creature on earth.*

There is an active, vigilant providence that superintends every creature upon earth; there is not the most despicable, diminutive creature that lives in the world, left without the line of providence: God is therefore said to give them all their meat in due season, and for that end they all wait upon him, Psal. civ. 27. who, as a great and provident house-keeper orders daily, convenient provisions for all his family, even to the least and lowest among them: The smallest insects and gnats which swarm so thick in the air, and of the usefulness of whose being it is hard to give an account; yet as the

incomparably learned * Dr. More well observes, these all find nourishment in the world, which would be lost if they did not, and are again convenient nourishment themselves to others that prey upon them.

But man is the peculiar, special care of God; and the soul of man much more than the body. Hence Christ fortifies the faith of Christians against all distrusts of Divine Providence, even from their excellency above other creatures.

Mat. x. 31. "Ye are of more value than many sparrows;" and Mat. vi. 26. your heavenly Father feeds the fowls of the air, and "are ye not much better than they?" and ver. 30. he clothes the grass of the field, "and shall he not much more clothe you?" and so the apostle, 1 Cor. ix. 9. "Doth God take care for oxen? or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written." In all which places we have the dignity of man above all animals and vegetables in respect of the natural excellency of his reasonable soul, but especially the gracious endowments of it, which endear it far more to its Maker; this is the very hinge of the argument, and a firm ground for the believer's faith of God's tender care over both parts, but especially the soul. The body of a believer is God's creature, as well as his soul; but that being of less value, hath not such a degree of care and tenderness expressed towards it, as the soul hath: the father's care is not so much for the child's clothes, as it is for the child himself. Besides, the immediate wants and troubles of the soul, which are *idiopathetical*, are far more sharp and pinching than those it suffers upon the body's account, which are but *sympathetical*; and therefore, whenever such an excellent creature as a sanctified soul which is in Christ, or a soul designed to be sanctified, which is moving towards Christ, falls under those heavy pressures and distresses, (as it often does) and is ready to fail; let it be assured, its merciful Creator will not fail to relieve, support, revive, and deliver it, as often as it shall fall into those deep distresses.

Hear how his compassionate tenderness is expressed towards distressed souls. Isa. xlix. 15. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee."

Sooner shall a woman, the more tender sex, forget, (not the nurse-child, that only sucks her breast, but) the child, yea, the son of her womb, and that not when grown and placed abroad, but whilst it hangs upon her breast, and draws love from her heart, as well as milk from her breast, than God will forget a soul that fears him. Let gracious souls fortify their faith, therefore, in the

* Antidote, §c. p. 82.

Divine care, by considering with what a peculiar eye of estimation and care God looks upon them above all other creatures in the world: only beware you so eye not the natural or spiritual excellencies of your souls, as to expect mercy for the sake thereof, as if your souls were worthy for whose sake God should do this: no, sin nonsuited that plea; all is of free grace, not of debt: but he minds us to what reputation the new creation brings the soul with its God.

Inf. 4. If the soul of man be so precious, how precious and dear to all believers should the Redeemer and Saviour of their precious souls be?

“Unto you therefore that believe, he is precious,” saith the apostle, 1 Pet. ii. 7. Though he be yet out of our sight, he should never be one whole hour together out of our hearts and thoughts. 1 Pet. i. 8. “Whom having not seen ye love; whom though now “ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, “and full of glory.” “The very name of Christ,” saith * Bernard, “is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, and a very jubilee in “the heart.” The blessed martyr, Mr. Lambert, made this his motto, None but Christ, none but Christ. Molinus was seldom observed to mention his name without dropping eyes. Julius Palmer, in the midst of the flames, moved his scorched lips, and was heard to say, Sweet Jesus, and fell asleep. Paul fastens upon his name as a bee upon a sweet flower, and mentions it no less than ten times in the compass of ten verses, 1 Cor. i. as if he knew not how to leave it.

There is a twofold preciousness of Christ, one in respect of his essential excellency and glory; in this respect he is glorious, as the only begotten Son of God, the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image or character of his person, Heb. i. the other in respect of his relative usefulness and suitableness to all the needs and wants of poor sinners, as he is *the Lord our righteousness*, made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. None discern this preciousness of Christ but those that have been convinced of sin, and have apprehended the wrath to come, the just demerit of sin, and fled for refuge to the hope set before them; and to them he is precious indeed. Consider him as a Saviour from wrath to come, and he will appear the most lovely and desirable in all the world to your souls: he that understands the value of his own soul, the dreadful nature of the wrath of God, the near approaches of this wrath to his own soul, and the astonishing

* *Mel in ore, melos in aure, jubilum in corde.* Bern.

love of Christ in delivering him from it by bearing that wrath in his place and room, in his own person; cannot choose but estimate Christ above ten thousand worlds.

Inf. 5. How great a trust and charge lieth upon them to whom the care of souls is committed, and from whom an account for other men's, as well as their own souls shall certainly be required?

Ministers are appointed of God to watch for the souls of their people, and that as men that must give an account, Heb. xiii. 17. The word here translated *watch**, signifies such watchfulness as that of shepherds who keep their flocks by night in places infested by wolves, and watch whole nights together for their safety. If a man were a keeper only of sheep and swine, it were no great matter if the wolf now and then carried away one whilst he slept; but ministers have charge of souls, one of which, as Christ assures us in the text, *is more worth than the whole world*. Hear what one speaks upon this point.

‘† God purchased the church with his own blood: O what an argument is here to quicken the negligent! and what an argument to condemn those that will not be quickened up to their duty by it! O, saith one of the ancient doctors, if Christ had but committed to my keeping one spoonful of his blood in a frigid glass, how curiously should I preserve it, and how tender should I be of that glass! If then he have committed to me the purchase of that blood, should I not carefully look to my charge?’

‘What, sirs, shall we despise the blood of Christ? shall we think it was shed for them that are not worthy our care? O then let us hear those arguments of Christ, whenever we feel ourselves grow dull and careless. Did I die for them, and wilt thou not look after them? were they worth my blood, and are they not worth thy labour? Did I come down from heaven to earth, to seek and to save that which is lost, and wilt not thou go to the next door, or street, or village, to seek them? How small is thy labour or condescension to mine? I debased myself to this, but it is thy honour to be so employed.’

Let not that man think to be saved by the blood of Christ himself that makes light of precious souls, who are the purchase of that blood.

And no less charge lieth upon parents, to whom God hath committed the care of their children's souls; and masters that have the guardianship of the souls as well as the bodies of their families; the command is laid express upon you, that they sanctify God's sabbaths, Exod. xx. 10. to command your household in the way of the Lord, Gen. xviii. 19.

* *Αγρυπνείν* est noctes insomnes agere, quod solent viri *βελήροδοι*, pernox solitudine.

† Gildas Salvian, p. 260.

O parents, consider with yourselves what strong engagements lie upon you to do all you are capable of doing for the salvation of the precious souls of your dear children. Remember, their souls are of infinitely more value than their bodies; that they came into the world under sin and condemnation; that you were the instruments of propagating that sin to them, and bringing them into that misery; that you know their dispositions, and how to suit them better than others can; that the bonds of nature give you singular advantages to prevail and be successful in your exhortations, beyond what any others have; that you are always with them, and can chuse opportunities which others cannot; that you and they must shortly part, and never meet again till you meet at the judgment-seat of Christ; that it will be an inconceivably dreadful day to see them stand at Christ's left hand among the cursed and condemned, there cursing the day that ever they were born of such ignorant and negligent, such careless and cruel parents, as took no care to instruct, reprove, or exhort them. O who can think without horror of the cries and curses of his own child in hell, cast away by the very instrument of his being!

Is this the love you bear them, to betray them to eternal misery? Was there no other provision to be made but for their bodies? Did you think you had fully acquitted your duty when you had got an estate for them? O that God would effectually touch your hearts with a becoming sense of the value and danger of their souls and your own too in the neglect of that great and solemn trust committed to you with respect to them! And you, masters, consider, though God hath set you above, and your servants below, yet are their souls equally precious with your own: they have another Master that expects service from them as well as you. Do not only allow them time, but give them your exhortations and commands not to neglect their own souls, whilst they attend your business: think not your business will prosper the less because it is in the hand of a praying servant: their souls are of greater concernment than any business of yours can be.

Inf. 6. Are souls so precious? Then certainly the means and instruments of their salvation must be exceeding precious too, and the removal of them a sore judgment.

The dignity of the subject gives value to the instruments employed about it. It is no ordinary mercy for souls to come into such a part of the world, and in such a time as furnisheth them with the best helps for salvation. Ordinances and ministers receive their value not from their Author, but from their Object: they have a dignity stamped upon them by their usefulness to the souls of men, Acts xx. 32. the word is the *seed of life*, 1 Pet. i. 23. the regenerating instrument. It is the *bread of life*, and Job xxiii. 12. more than

our necessary food. The word is a *light*, shining in the dark world to direct your souls through all the snares laid for them unto glory. It is the soul's cordial in all fainting fits, Psal. cxix. 50. What shall I say of the word and ordinances of God? The sun that shines in heaven to give us light, the fountains, springs, and rivers that stream for our refreshment, the corn and cattle on the earth, yea, the very air we breathe in is not so useful, so necessary, so precious to our bodies, as the word is to our souls.

It cannot therefore but be a sore judgment, and a dreadful token of God's indignation and wrath, to have a restraint or scarcity of the means of salvation among us; but should there be (which God in mercy prevent) a removal and total loss of those things, wrath would then come upon us to the uttermost. What will the condition of precious souls be when the means of salvation are cut off from them? when that famine, worse than of bread and water, is come upon them? Amos viii. 11. When the ark of God (the symbol of his presence) was taken, it is said, 1 Sam. iv. 13. "That all the city cried out." When Paul took his leave of Antioch, and told them they should see his face no more, how did the poor Christians lament and mourn, as cut at the heart by that killing word? Acts xx. 37, 38. It made Christ's bowels to yern, and move within him when he saw the multitude scattered as sheep having no shepherd, Matth. ix. 36.

Matthew Paris tells us, in the year 1072, when preaching was suppressed at Rome, letters were framed as coming from hell, wherein the devil gave them thanks for the multitude of souls sent to him that year. But we need no letters from hell, we have a sad account from heaven, in what a sad state those souls are left, from whom the means of salvation are cut off: "Where no vision is, the people perish," Prov. xxix. 18. and Hos. iv. 6. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

It is sad when those stars that guide souls to Christ, (as that which the wise men saw did) are set, and wandering stars shall shine in their places. O if God remove the golden candlestick out of its place, what but the desolation and ruin of millions of souls must follow?

We account it insufferable cruelty for a man to undertake the piloting of a ship full of passengers who never learnt his compass; or an ignorant *Empiric* to get his living by killing men's bodies; but much more lamentable will the state of souls be if ever they fall, (which God in mercy prevent) into the hands of Popish guides, or *blind leaders of the blind*.

Inf. 7. If the soul be of so precious a nature, it can never live upon such base and vile food as earthly things are.

The apostle, Phil. iii. 8, 9. calls the things of this world

* *dogs meat*; and judge if that be proper food for such noble and high-born creatures as our souls are. An immaterial being can never live upon material things; they are no bread for souls, as the prophet speaks, Isa. lv. 2. "Why do ye spend money, (i. e. Time "and pains, thought and cares) "for that which is not bread?" Your souls can no more live upon carnal, than your bodies on spiritual things. Earthly things have a double defect in them, by reason whereof they are called things of nought, Amos vi. 13. of no worth or value; they are neither suitable nor durable, and therefore, in the soul's eye, not valuable.

1. They are not suitable. What are corn and wine, gold and silver, pleasures and honours, to the soul? The body, and bodily senses, can find somewhat of refreshment in them; but not the spirit: That which is bread to the body, affords no more nourishment to the soul than wind or ashes, Isa. xlv. 20. "He feedeth "of ashes." "† Ashes are that light and dry matter, into which "fuel is reduced by the fire;" the fuel, before it was burnt, had nothing in it fit for nourishment; or if the sap or juice that was in it, might in any respect be useful that way, yet all that is devoured and licked up by the fire, and not the least nutriment left in the ashes: And such are all earthly things to the soul of man. "I am the bread of life," saith Christ, a soul can feed and feast itself upon Christ and the promises; these are things full of marrow and fatness, substantial, and proper soul-nutrimment.

2. As earthly things are no way suitable to the soul, so neither are they durable. The apostle reduceth all earthly things to three heads, "the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride "of life," 2 John ii. 16. he calls them all by the name of that which gives the lustre and beauty to them, and pronounceth them all fading, transitory vanities, they all pass away; as time, so these things that are measured by time, are *in fluxu continuo*, always going, and at last will be all gone. Now the soul being of an immortal nature, and these things of a perishing nature; it must necessarily and unavoidably follow, that the soul must overlive them all; and if it will do so, what a dismal case are those souls in, for whom no other provision is made, but that on which it cannot subsist, whilst it hath them, no more than the body can upon ashes or wind? and if it could, yet they will shortly fail it, and pass away for ever. So then it is beyond debate, that there lies a plain necessity upon every man to make provision in time, of things more suitable and

* The Greek word Σκυεαλον, for Κυσιεαλον, signifies that which being rejected by us is thrown to dogs.

† Cinis est crassior illa materia in quam combustum redigitur.

durable than earthly treasures are, or the soul must perish, as to its comfort, to all eternity.

Hence is that weighty counsel of him that came to save them, Luke xii. 23. "Provide yourselves bags that wax not old, a treasure in heaven that faileth not," i. e. a happiness which will last as long as your souls last. Certainly, the moth-eaten things of this world are no provision for immortal spirits, and yet multitudes think of no other provision for them, but live as if they had nothing to do in this world but to get an estate.

Alas! what are all these things to the soul? They signify somewhat, indeed, to the body, and that but for a little time: for after the resurrection, the bodies of the saints become spiritual in qualities, and no more need these material things than the angels do: It is madness therefore, to be so intent upon cares for the body, as to neglect the soul; but to ruin the soul, and drown it in perdition, for the sake of these provisions for the flesh, is the height of madness.

Inf. 8. If the soul be so invaluable precious, then it is a rational and well advised resolution and practice, to expose all other things to hazard, yea, to certain loss, for the preservation of the more precious soul.

It is better our bodies and all their comforts should perish, than that our souls should perish for their sakes. Nature teaches us to offer a hand or arm to the stroke of a sword, to save a blow from the head, or put by a thrust at the heart. It is recorded, to the praise of those three worthies, Dan. iii. 28. "That they yielded their bodies, that they might not serve, nor worship any God, except their own God." By this rule, all the martyrs of Christ governed themselves, still slighting and exposing to destruction, their bodies and estates, to preserve their souls, reckoning to save nothing, by religion, but their souls, and that they had lost nothing, if they could save them; "They loved not their lives unto the death," Rev. xii. 11.

Then do we live like Christians, when the care of our bodies is swallowed up, and subdued by that of our souls, and all creature-loves by the love of Christ. Those blessed souls hated their own bodies, and counted them their enemies, when they would draw them from Christ and his truths, and plunge their souls into guilt and danger. This was the result of all their debates with the flesh in the hour of temptation; cannot we live but to the dishonour of Christ, and the ruin of our own souls, by sinful compliance against our consciences? then welcome the worst of deaths, rather than such a life!

Look into the stories of the martyrs, and you shall find this was the rule they still governed themselves by; a dungeon, a stake, a

gibbet, any thing, rather than guilt upon the inner-man: death was welcome, even in its most dreadful form, to escape ruin to their precious and immortal souls. One kissed the apparitor, that brought him the tidings of death. Another being advised, when he came to the critical point, on which his life depended, to have a care of himself: So I will, said he, I will be as careful as I can of my best self, my soul. These men understood the value and precious worth of their own souls; certainly, we shall never prove courageous and constant in sufferings, till we understand the worth of our souls as they did. Consider and compare these sufferings in a few obvious particulars, and then determine the matter in thine own breast.

(1.) How much easier it is to endure the torments of men in our bodies, than to feel the terrors of God in our consciences. Can the creature strike with an arm like God? Oh! think what it is for the wrath of God to come into a man's bowels like water, and like oil into his bones, as the expression is, Psal. cix. 18. Sure there is no comparison betwixt the strokes of God and men.

(2.) The sufferings of the body are but for a moment. When the proconsul told Polycarp that he would tame him with fire, he replied, Your fire shall burn but for the space of an hour, and then it shall be extinguished; but the fire that shall devour the wicked will never be quenched. The sufferings of a moment are nothing to eternal sufferings.

(3.) Sufferings for Christ are usually sweetened and made easy by the consolations of the Spirit; but hell-torments have no relief, they admit of no ease.

(4.) The life that you shall live in that body, for whose sake you have damned your souls, will not be worth the having; it will be a life without comfort, light, or joy; and what is there in life, separate from the joy and comfort of life?

(5.) In a word, if you sacrifice your bodies for God and your souls, freely offer them up in love to Christ and his truth, your souls will joyfully receive and meet them again at the resurrection of the just; but if your poor souls be now ensnared and destroyed by your fond indulgence to your bodies, you will leave them at death despairing, and meet them at the resurrection howling.

Inf. 9. To conclude, If the soul be so invaluablely precious, how great and irreparable a loss must the loss of a soul to all eternity be!

There is a double loss of the soul of man, the one in Adam, which loss is recoverable by Christ; the other by final impenitence and unbelief, cutting it off from Christ; and this is irreparable and irrecoverable. Souls lost by Adam's sin, are within the reach of the arms of Christ; but in the shipwreck of personal infidelity, there is no plank to save the soul so cast away; of all losses, this is

the most lamentable, yet what more common : O what a shriek doth the unregenerate soul make, when it sees whither it must go, and that there is no remedy ! Three cries are dreadful to hear on earth, yet all three are drowned, by a more terrible cry in the other world ; the cry of a condemned prisoner at the bar, the cry of drowned seamen and passengers in a ship-wreck, the cries of soldiers conquered in the field ; all these are fearful cries, yet nothing to that of a soul cast away to all eternity, and lost in the depth of hell.

If a man, as Chrysostom well observes, lose an eye, an arm, a hand, or leg, it is a great loss ; but yet if one be lost, there is another to help him : for *omnia Deus dedit duplicia*, God hath given us all those members double ; *Animam vero unam*, but we have but one soul, and if that be damned, there is not another to be saved.

And it is no small aggravation to this loss, that it was a wilful loss ; we had the offers, and means of salvation plentifully afforded us ; we were warned of this danger, over and over ; we were intreated, and beseeched, upon the knee of importunity, not to throw away our souls, by an obstinate rejection of Christ, and grace ; we saw the diligence and care of others for the salvation of their souls, some rejoicing in the comfortable assurance of it, and others giving all diligence to make their *calling and election sure* : we knew that our souls were as capable of blessedness, as any of those that are enjoying God in heaven, or panting after that enjoyment on earth ; yea, some souls that are now irrecoverably gone, and many others who are going after them, once were, and now are not far from the kingdom of God ; they had convictions of sin, a sense of their loss, and miserable state ; they began to treat with Christ in prayer, to converse with his ministers and people, about their condition, and after all this, even when they seemed to have clean escaped the snares of Satan, to be again entangled, and overcome ; when even come to the harbour's mouth, to be driven back again, and cast away upon the rocks. O what a loss will this be !

O thou that createdst souls with a capacity to know, love, and enjoy thee for ever ; who out of thine unsearchable grace sentest thine own Son out of thy bosom to seek and save that which was lost, pity those poor souls that cannot pity themselves : let mercy yet interpose itself betwixt them and eternal ruin ; awaken them out of their pleasant slumber, though it be at the brink of damnation, lest they perish, and there be none to deliver them.

Doct. 2. *How precious and invaluable soever the soul of man is, it may be lost, and cast away for ever.*

This proposition is supposed, and implied in our Saviour's words in the text, and plainly expressed in Mat. vii. 13. "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." The way to hell is thronged with passengers; it is a beaten road; one draws another along with him, and scoffs at those that are afraid to follow, 1 Pet. iv. 4. *Facilis descensus averni*; it is pleasant sailing with wind and tide. Some derive the word *hell* from a verb which signifies to carry, or thrust in; millions go in, but none return thence: millions are gone down already, and millions more are coming after, as fast as Satan and their own lusts can hurry them onward. You read not only of single persons, but whole nations drowned in this gulph. Psal. ix. 17. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all nations that forget God." How rare is the conversion of a soul in the dark places of the earth, where the sound of the gospel is not heard? The devil drives them in droves to destruction, scarce a man reluctant or drawing back*.

And though some nations enjoy the inestimable privilege of the gospel of salvation, yet multitudes of precious souls perish, notwithstanding, sinking into hell daily, as it were, betwixt the merciful arms of a Saviour stretched out to save them. The light of salvation is risen upon us, but Satan draws the thick curtains of ignorance, and prejudice about the multitude, that not a beam of saving light can shine into their hearts. 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

If our gospel.] Ours, not by way of institution, as the authors, but by way of dispensation, as the ministers and preachers of it; and certainly, it was never preached with that clearness, authority, and efficacy by any mere man, as it was by Paul and the rest of the apostles; and yet the gospel so powerfully preached, is by him here supposed to

Be hid.] If not as to the general light and superficial knowledge of it, yet as to its saving influence and converting efficacy upon their hearts: this never reacheth home to the souls and spirits of multitudes that hear it, but it is never finally so hidden, except

To them that are lost.] So that all those to whom the converting and saving power of the gospel never comes, whatever names, and

* The Latin word, *Infernus*, i. e. Hell, is derived from a verb signifying to thrust in, because the wicked are so hurried and cast headlong into it, that they can never ascend out of it.

reputations they may have among men, yet this text looks upon them all as a lost generation: They may have as many amiable, homiletical virtues, as sweet and lovely natures, as clear and piercing eyes, in all other things, as any others; but they are such, however,

Whose eyes the god of this world hath blinded.] Satan is here called the god of this world, not properly, but by a mimesis; because he challenges to himself the honour of a god, and hath a world of subjects that obey him; and, to secure their obedience, he blinds them, that they may never see a better way or state, than that he hath drawn them into. Therefore he is called the ruler of the darkness of this world, who rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience. The eye of the soul is the mind, that thinking, considering, and reasoning power of the soul; this is, as the philosophers truly call it, the *το ηγεμονικον*, the leading faculty to all the rest, the guide to all the other faculties, which, in the order of nature, follow this their leader: If this be blinded, the will, which is *cæca potentia*, a blind power in itself, and all affections blindly following the blind, all must needs fall into the ditch. And this is the case of the far greater part of even the professing world. Let us suppose a number of blind men upon an island, where there are many smooth paths, all leading to the top of a perpendicular cliff, and these blind men going on continually, some in one path, and some in another, but all in some one of those many paths which lead to the brink of their ruin, which they see not; it must needs follow, if they all move forward, the whole number will in a short time be cast away, the island cleared, and its inhabitants dead, and lost in the bottom of the sea. This is the case of the unregenerate world; they are now upon this habitable spot of earth, environed with the vast ocean of eternity; there are multitudes of paths leading to eternal misery; one man takes this way, and another that, as it is Isa. liii. 6. "We have "turned every one to his own way;" one to the way of pride, another to the way of covetousness, a third to the way of persecution, a fourth to the way of civility and mortality; and so on they go, not once making a stand, or questioning to what end it will bring them, till at last over they go, at death, and we hear no more of them in this world: And thus one generation of sinners follows another, and they that come after approve, and applaud those miserable wretches that went before them, Psal. xlix. 13. and so hell fills, and the world empties its inhabitants daily into it. Now I will make it my work, out of a dear regard to the precious souls of men, and in hope to prevent (which the Lord in mercy grant) the loss, and ruin of some, under whose eyes this discourse shall fall, to note some of the principal ways in which

precious souls are lost, and to put such bars into them, as I am capable to put; and, among many more, I will set a mark upon these following twelve paths, wherein millions of souls have been lost, and millions more are confidently, and securely following after, among which, it is likely, some are within one step, one day, or hour, to their eternal downfall and destruction. There is but one way in all the world, to save, and preserve the precious souls of men, but there are many ways to lose and destroy them: It is here, as it is in our natural birth, and death, but one way into the world, but a multitude out of it. And first,

The first way to hell discovered.

1. And to begin where, indeed, the ruin of very many doth begin, it will be found, that *ill education is the high-way to destruction*; vice need not be planted; if the gardener neglect to dress, sow, and manure his garden, he need not give the weeds a greater advantage; but if he also scatter the seeds of hemlock, docks, and nettles into it, he spoils it, and makes it fit for nothing. Many parents, and those godly too, are guilty of too many neglects, through carelessness, worldly incumbrances, or fond indulgence; and whilst they neglect the season of sowing better seed, the devil takes hold of it; if they will not improve it, he will: If they teach him not to pray, he will teach them to curse, swear, and lye; if they put not the bible, or catechism in their hands, he will put obscene ballads into them: and thus the offspring of many godly parents turn into degenerate plants, and prove a generation that know not the God of their fathers. This debauched age can furnish us with too many sad instances hereof. Thus they are spoiled in the bud; simple ignorance in youth, becomes affected and wilful ignorance in age; blushing sins in children become impudent in age; and all this for want of a timely, and prudent preventing care. Others there are of the rude and ignorant multitude, who are bred themselves much like the beasts they daily converse withal; and so they are fitly described, Job xxx. 6, 7. Go into their houses, and you may sooner find in the window, or upon the shelf, a pack of cards, than a bible or a catechism; their beds and tables differ little, or not at all, from the stalls and cribs where beasts lie down and feed, in respect of any worship of God among them; or if, for fashion-sake, a few words be huddled over in the evening, when their bodies are tired, the man saith something, he scarce knows what, the wife is asleep in one corner, the children in another, and the servants in a third. This is the education multitudes of parents give their children all the week, and when the sabbath comes, the most they learn to know at church, is, where their own

seat stands, and that it is necessary to speak with such a neighbour after prayers about such or such a bargain, or business for the next week.

And others there are, who breed their children as profanely, as these do sottishly; teaching them, by their examples, the newest oaths that were last minted in hell, and to revile and scoff all serious godliness, and the sincere professors of it, smiling to hear with what an emphasis they can talk in the dialect of devils, and how wittily they can droll upon godly ministers and Christians.

Such families are nurseries for hell; and though God, by an extraordinary hand of providence, now and then snatches a soul by conversion from among them, as a brand out of the fire; yet generally, they die as they live, going "to the generation of their fathers, where they shall never see light," Psal. xlix. 19. I know education and regeneration are two things; but I also know one is frequently made the "instrument of working the other, and that "the * favour of what first seasons our youth (generally) abides "to old age," Prov. xxii. 6. We may observe, all the world over, how tenacious men are of that which is *αποπαροδοτον*, delivered to them by their parents. O what a cut must it be to the heart of that father whose son's life shall tell his conscience what a profane son's lips once told his father to his face! "If I have done evil, I have learnt it of you †." Had they felt more of your prudent correction, it might have prevented their destruction. Prov. xxiii. 14. "Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver "his soul from hell." That this is a common beaten path to hell, is beyond all question; but how to bar it up, and stop the multitudes that are engaged in it to their own ruin, this is the labour, this is the work. I cannot be large, but I will offer a few weighty considerations.

The first way to hell barred.

1. Let all parents consider, what a fearful thing it is to be the instruments of ruining for ever, those that received their beings instrumentally from them, and to seek whose good they stand obliged, by all the laws of God and nature.

In vain are all your cares and studies for their bodies, whilst their souls perish for want of knowledge. You rejoiced at their birth, but they will have cause to curse the day they were born of you, and say, "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the "night in which I was conceived." You were solicitous for their

* *Quo semel est imbuta recens, &c.*

† *Si male feci, a te didici.*

bodies, but careless of their souls; earnest to see them rich, but indifferent whether they were gracious; you neglected to teach them the way of salvation, but the devil did not neglect to teach them the way of sin. You will one day wish you had never been parents, when the doleful cries of your damned children shall ring such notes as these in your ears: ‘O cursed father! O cruel, ‘merciless mother! whose examples have drawn me after you, ‘into all this misery. You had time enough, and motives ‘enough to have warned me of this place and misery whilst my ‘heart was tender, and my affections pliable: Had it not been as ‘easy to have put a Bible as a play-book before me? To have chas- ‘tised me when I provoked God by sin, as when I provoked you ‘about a trifle? One word spoken in season might have saved my ‘soul; one reproof wisely given and set on by your example, might ‘have preserved me. Had it not been the same pains to have ask- ‘ed me, child, what wilt thou do to be saved? As, what wilt ‘thou do to live in this world? Or, had I but observed any serious ‘religion in you, had I but found or heard my father or mother ‘upon their knees in prayer, it might have awakened me to a con- ‘sideration of my condition. In my youth I was shame-faced, ‘fearful, credulous, and apt to imitate; had you but had wisdom ‘as other parents have, to have taken hold of any of these handles ‘in time, you had rescued my soul from hell. Nay, so cruel have ‘you been to your own child, that you allowed me no time (if I ‘had had a disposition) for any exercise of religion; yea, you have ‘quenched and stifled the sparks of convictions and better incli- ‘nations that sometimes were in my heart. O happy had it been ‘if I had never been born of you, or seen your faces.’ This must be the result and issue of your negligence, except God, by some other hand (which is no thanks to you) rescue them from their impending ruin.

2. Let all children, whose unhappy lot it is to be born of, and educated by, carnal and irreligious parents, consider, God hath endued them with reason, and a conscience of their own, to enable them to make a better choice than their parents did, and that there is no taking sanctuary from the wrath of God in their parents’ examples. We read, in 1 Kings xiv. 13. of a good Abijah, “in whom was found some good thing towards the Lord “God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam.” Here was a child that would not follow his wicked father to hell, though he had both the authority of a father, and of a king over him. “You must “honour your parents, but still you must prefer your God before “them †.” God will never lay it to your account as your sin,

† *Amandus genitor, sed præponendus Creator.*

but place it to the account of your duty, and comfort, that you refused to follow them in the paths of sin and destruction. No law of God, no tie of nature binds you to obey their commands, or tread in their steps, farther than they command in God's authority and name, and walk in his ways. Your temptations, indeed, are strong, and disadvantages great; but the greater will the mercy of your deliverance be: It will be no plea for you, at the judgment-seat, to say, Lord, my father or mother did so and so, before me, and I thought I might safely follow them; or thus, and thus, they commanded me, and I thought I was bound, by thy command, to obey them. Therefore look to your own souls, if they are so desperate as to cast away their own. If some children had not minded their own salvation more than their parents minded it, they had never been saved.

3. Let this consideration work upon the hearts, and bowels of all serious Christians, to pity, and help those that are like to perish under this temptation; and if their parents be so ignorant, that they cannot, or so negligent, that they do not instruct and warn their own children; you that at any time have an opportunity to help them, have compassion on them, and do it. It is true, they are none of your children by nature; but would it not be a singular honour, and comfort to you, if God should make them so by grace? Thousands of children (and, it may be some of you) are more indebted to mere strangers, upon this account, than to their nearest relations; you know not how much good an occasional word may do them: All have not ability to be so publicly useful this way, as a late worthy minister of our own nation hath been, who, in compassion to the dark and barbarous corners in Wales, where ignorance and poverty shut up the way of salvation to them, at a vast expence procured the translation, and printing of the bible in their own tongue, and freely sent it among them. O you that have the bowels of Christians in you, pity, and help them! What is it, for the saving of a precious soul, to drop a serious exhortation, as you have opportunity, unto them, to bestow a bible, or suitable book upon them? Believe it, these little sums of shillings, and pence, so bestowed, will stand for more, in the *audit-day*, than all the hundreds, and thousands, other ways expended.

The second way to hell discovered.

II. A second way to hell, in which multitudes are found hastening to their own damnation, is the way of affected ignorance, The generality of people, even in a land enlightened with the gospel, are found grossly ignorant of Christ, the true and only way to

heaven, and of repentance and faith, the only way to Christ; and thus the people perish for want of knowledge, Hos. iv. 6. If the tree of knowledge had been hedged in from the common people, as it is in Popish countries; and it had been criminal to find a bible in our houses, there might have been some cloak and pretence for our ignorance: But to be stupidly ignorant of the most obvious, plain and necessary truths, and yet bred up among bibles and ministers! O how ominous a darkness is this, foreboding the blackness of darkness for ever! For if the hiding of the gospel from the hearts of men be a token to them that they are lost souls, how much notional light soever they may have; much more must they be lost to all intents, from whose hearts and heads too it is judicially hidden. They that know not God are in the catalogue of the damned, 2 Thess. i. 8. and if this be life eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent; then this must be death eternal to be grossly and affectedly ignorant both of God, the end, and Christ the way, by the rule of true opposition, John xvii. 3.

Look over the several countries in the professing world; go into the families of country farmers, day labourers, and poor people, and except here and there a family, or person, into whose heart God hath graciously shined; what barbarous, brutish ignorance overspreads them: They converse from morning to night with beasts, though they have souls which are fit companions for angels, and capable of sweet converse with God. The earth hath opened her mouth, and swallowed up all their time, strength, thoughts, and souls, as it did the bodies of Corah and his company. They know the value of a horse or cow, but know not the worth of Christ, pardon, or their own souls: They mind daily what work they have to do with their hands, but forget all they have to do upon their knees; their whole care is to pay their fine or rent to their landlord, but not a thought who shall pay their debts to God. They are so far from putting unnecessary business aside to make way for the service of God, that God's service is put aside as an unnecessary business, to make way for the world: The world holds them fast till they are asleep, and will be sure to visit them as soon as their eyes are open, that there may be no vacancy or door of opportunity left open for a thought of their souls, or another life, to slip in: Or, if at any time they think, or speak of these matters, then the world, like Pharaoh, when Israel spake of sacrificing, is sure to speak of more work.

And thus they live and die without knowledge; there is no key of knowledge (as it is fitly called, Luke xi. 52.) to open the door of the soul to Christ; he and his ministers, therefore, must stand without; pity they may, but help they cannot, till knowledge open

the door: Satan is ruler of the darkness of this world, Eph. vi. 12, that is, of all blind and ignorant souls. Ignorance is the chain with which he binds them fast to himself, and till that chain be knocked off by Divine illumination, they cannot be emancipated, and made free of Christ's kingdom; Acts xxvi. 18. "To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." Ignorance, indeed, incapacitates a man to commit the unpardonable sin; but what is he the nearer whilst it disposes him to all other sins which damn as well as that? By ignorance it is, that all the essays of the gospel for men's salvation are frustrated; that naked assent is put in the place of saving faith, morality mistaken for regeneration, a few dead duties laid in the room of Christ and his righteousness. Indeed it would fill a greater book than this is, to shew the mischievous effects of ignorance, and how many ways it destroys the precious souls of men: but seeing I can speak but little in this place to it, let me bar up this way to hell, if it be possible, by a few serious considerations.

The second way to hell shut up.

1. Let the ignorant consider, God hath created their souls with a capacity of knowing him and enjoying him as well as others that are famed in the world for knowledge and wisdom. *There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.* The faculty is in man, but the wisdom and knowledge that enlightens it from God; as the dial shews the hour of the day when the sun-beams fall upon it. If, therefore, God be sought unto in the use of such helps and means as you have, even the weakest and dullest soul hath a capacity of being made wise unto salvation. Psal. xix. 7. "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."

Augustine tells us of a man so weak and simple, that he was commonly reputed a fool in all the neighbourhood; and yet saith, I believe the grace and fear of God was in him; for when he heard any swear, or take the name of God in vain, he would throw stones at them, and shew his indignation against sin by all the signs he could make.

2. You that are so grossly ignorant in the matter of your salvation, are many of you very knowing, prudent, and subtle persons in the affairs of the world. Luke xvi. 8. "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." Had those parts which you have, been improved and heightened by study and observation about spirituals, as they have been about earthly things, you had never been so ignorant or dead-hearted as you are: You might have been as well versed in your bibles, as you

are in the almanacks you yearly buy and study. You might have understood the proper seasons of salvation as well as of husbandry. The great and necessary points on which your salvation depends, are not so many or so abstruse and intricate, but your plain and in-artificial heads might have understood them, and that with less pains than you have been at for your bodies: What though you cannot comprehend the subtilties of schoolmen, you may apprehend the essentials of Christianity. If you cannot strictly and scholastically define faith, what hinders, if your hearts were set upon Christ and salvation, but you may feel it? Which is more than many learned men do that can define and dispute about it. You cannot put an argument in mood and figure; no matter, if you can by comparing your bibles and hearts together, draw savingly and experimentally this conclusion; I am in Christ, and my sins are pardoned. You cannot determine whether faith goes before repentance, or repentance before faith; but for all that you might feel both the one and the other upon your own souls, which is infinitely better. It is not, therefore, your incapacity, but negligence and worldliness that is your ruin.

3. How many are there of your own rank, order, and education, all whose external advantages and helps you have, and all your incumbrances and discouragements they had, who yet have attained to an excellent degree of saving knowledge and heavenly wisdom? How often have I heard such spiritual, savoury, experimental truths, in conference and prayer from plain rustics, such spiritual reasonings about the great concerns of salvation, such judicious and satisfying resolutions of cases depending upon the sensible and experimental part of religion, as have humbled, convinced, and shamed me, and made me say *surgunt indocti*, &c. these are the men that will take heaven from the proud and scornful *ingeniosi* of the world; not many wise, not many learned and acute. Many knowing and learned heads are in hell, and many illiterate and weak ones gone to heaven; and others in the way thither who never had better education, stronger parts, or more leisure than yourselves: So that you are without excuse.

To conclude, Would you heartily seek it of God, and would the Spirit (which he hath promised to give them that ask him) become your teacher, how soon would the light of the saving knowledge of God in the face of Christ shine into your hearts! No matter how ignorant, dull, and weak the scholar be, if God once become the teacher. You are not able to purchase, or want time to read many books; but if once you were sanctified persons, the anointing you would receive from the Father would teach you all things, 1 John ii. 27. your own hearts would serve you for a commentary upon a

great part of the bible; it would make you of a quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: One drop of your knowledge would be more worth than all learned arts and sciences in the world to you. And is God so far from you, and his illuminating Spirit at such a distance, that there is no hope for you to find him? Is there never a private corner about your houses or barns, or in the fields, where you can turn aside, if it be but a quarter of an hour at a time, to pour out your souls to God, and beg the Spirit of him? Miserable wretch! Is thy whole life such a cumber and clutter of cares and puzzles about the world, that thou hast no leisure to mind God, soul, or eternity? O doleful state! the Lord in much mercy pity and awaken thee. Wilt thou not once strive and struggle to save thy soul? What, perish, as it were, by consent! How great then is that blindness!

The third way to hell discovered.

III. A vast multitude of precious souls are lost for ever by following the examples, and being carried away with the course of this world: It is indeed a poor excuse, a silly argument, That the multitude do as we do; yet, as * Junius rightly observes, men's consciences take sanctuary here, and they think themselves safe in it: For thus they reason, *If I do as the generality do, I shall speed no worse than they speed: and certainly God is more merciful than to suffer the greatest part of mankind to perish.* They resolve to follow the beaten road †, let it lead whither it will.

Thus the Ephesians, in their unregenerate state, “walked according to the course of this world,” Eph. ii. 2. and the “Corinthians were carried away unto dumb idols, even as they were led,” 1 Cor. xii. 2. just as a drop of water is carried and moved according to the course and current of the tide: For look as every drop of water in the sea is of one and the same common nature, so are all carnal and unsanctified persons; and as these waters being collected into one vast body in the ocean, unite their strength, and make a strong current, this way or that; so doth the whole collective body of the unregenerate world, all the particular drops move as the tide moveth. Hence they are said “to have received the spirit of this world,” 1 Cor. ii. 12. one common spirit or principle acts and rules them all; and therefore they must needs be carried away in the same course. And there are two special considerations that seem to determine them by a kind of necessity to do

* What a poor mean defence have they who think themselves safe from the example of their superiors. *Jud. Paral. b. 2.*

† The example of the multitude is a very poor argument.

as the multitude do; the one is, that they find it the easiest and most commodious way to the flesh; here they meet with quietness and safety: hereby they are exempt from reproaches, losses, persecutions and distresses for conscience sake: Rest is sweet, and here only they think to find it. The other is, the prejudice of singularity, and manifold tribulations they see that little handful that walk counter to the course of the world involved in; this startles them from their company, and fixes them where they are. Against such sensible arguments, it is to no more purpose to oppose spiritual considerations, motives drawn from the safety of the soul, or importance of eternity, than it is for a man to turn the tide or course of a river with his weak breath.

Add to this, That as one sinner confirms and fixes another, wedging in each other, as men in a crowd *, who must move as it moves; so they make it their business to render all that differ from them odious and ridiculous: So the apostle notes their practice and Satan's policy in it, 1 Pet. iv. 4. wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you, *ξενίζονται*; they gaze strangely at them. And that is not all; they not only gaze at them as a strange generation, making them signs and wonders in Israel, as the prophet speaks, but they defame, revile, and speak evil of them, representing them as a pack of hypocrites, as turbulent, factious, seditious persons, the very pests of the times and places they live in; and all this, not for doing any evil against them, but only for not doing evil with them, because *they run not with them into the same excess of riot*. Thus the world smiles upon its own, and derides those that are afraid to follow them to hell, by which it sweeps away the multitude with it in the same course.

The third way to hell shut up.

But O! if the Spirit of God would please to set on, and follow home the following considerations to your hearts, you would certainly resolve to take a persecuted path to heaven, though few accompany you therein, rather than swim like dead fishes with the stream into the dead sea of eternal misery.

1. Though you go with the consent and current of the world, yet you go against the express law and prohibition of God: He hath laid his command upon you, "not to be conformed to the world," Rom. xii. 2. "That you live not the rest of your time to the lusts of men, but to the will of God," 1 Pet. iv. 2.

* No man errs to his own hurt only, but spreads madness among his neighbours.
Seneca.

“That you follow not a multitude to do evil,” *Exod. xxiii. 2.*
 “That you go not in the way of evil men.” *Prov. iv. 14.* “That
 “you have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.”
 All these, and many more, are commands flowing from the highest
 sovereign authority, obliging your consciences to obedience under
 the greatest penalties; by them your state must be cast to all eter-
 nity in the day of judgment: you may make a jest of the precept,
 but see if you can do so of the penalty.

2. Other men, in all ages of the world, that were as much con-
 cerned in the world as you, and valued their lives, libertiss, and es-
 tates as well as you, have yet got out of the croud, disengaged
 themselves from the way of the multitude, and taken a more soli-
 tary and suffering path out of a due regard to the safety of their
 souls: And why should not you love them as well, and care for
 them as much as ever any that went before you did? Noah walked
 with God all alone, when all flesh had corrupted their ways;
 Elijah was zealous for the Lord, when he knew of none to stand by
 him, but thought he had been left alone; Job was upright with
 God in the land of Uz; Lot stood by himself, a godly non-confor-
 mist, in a vile, debauched Sodom; David was a wonder to many;
 so was Jeremiah, and those few with him, for signs and wonders
 in Israel; I demand of your consciences what discouragements have
 you that these men had not? Or what encouragements had they
 that you have not? Why should not the salvation of your souls be
 as precious in your eyes as theirs was in theirs? Shall you be im-
 poverished and persecuted if you embrace the way of holiness? So
 were they. Shall you be reproached, scorned, and reviled: So
 were they. All your discouragements were theirs, and all their
 motives and encouragements are yours.

3. Is not the way which you have chosen marked out by Christ
 as the way to destruction? And that which you dare not chuse and
 embrace as the way to life? See the marks he has given you of
 both in that one text, *Mat. vii. 13, 14.* “Enter ye in at the strait
 “gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to
 “destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because
 “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto
 “life, and few there be that find it.” And where now is your
 encouragement and hope that God will be more merciful than to
 damn so great a part of the world? If you will do as the many do,
 dream not of speeding as well as that little flock, separated by sanc-
 tification from the multitude, shall speed. You have your choice,
 to be damned with many, or saved with few; to take the broad,
 smooth-beaten road to hell, or the difficult, suffering, self-denying
 path to heaven. O then make a seasonable, necessary stand, and
 pause a while; consider your ways, and turn your feet to God’s

testimonies : It is a great and special part of your salvation to save yourselves from this untoward generation.

The fourth way of losing the soul opened.

IV. Multitudes of souls are daily lost by rooted *habits*, and long-continued *custom* in sin. When men have been long settled in an evil way, they are difficultly reclaimed : *Physicians* find it hard to cure a *cachexy*, or ill habit of body ; but it is far more difficult to cure an ill custom and habit in sin. Jer. xiii. 23. “ Can the leopard “ change his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin ? Then may ye also do “ good that are accustomed to do evil. The spots of a *leopard*, and the hue of an *Ethiopian*, are not by way of external, accidental adhesion ; if so, washing would fetch them off : But they are innate and contempered, belonging to the constitution, and not to be altered ; so are sinful habits and customs in the minds of sinners : By this means it becomes a second nature as it were, and strongly determines the mind to sin. *A teneris assuescere multum est*, It is a great matter to be accustomed to this way, or that, said Seneca ; yea, *Caput rei est, hoc vel illo modo, hominem assuefieri*,—It is the very head or root of the matter to be so or so accustomed, saith Aristotle. Very much of the strength of sin rises from customary sinning. A brand that hath been once in the fire easily catches the second time. Every repeated act of sin lesseneth fear and strengtheneth inclination. A horse that took an ill stroke at first breaking, and hath continued many years in it, is very difficultly, if ever, to be brought to a better way. What men have been accustomed to from their childhood, they are tenacious of in their old age. Hence it is that so few are converted to Christ in their old age. It was recorded for a wonder, in the primitive times, that Marcus Caius Victorious became a Christian in his old age. Time and usage fix the roots of sin deep in the soul. Old trees will not bow as tender plants do. Hence all essays and attempts to draw men from the course in which they have walked from their youth, are frustraneous and unsuccessful. The drunkard, the adulterer, yea, the self-righteous moralist, are by long continued usage so fixed in their course, and all this while conscience so stupified by often repeated acts of sin, that it is naturally as impossible to remove a mountain, as a sinners will thus confirmed in his wickedness. However, let the trial be made, and the success left to him to whom no length of time nor difficulty must be objected or opposed.

The fourth way to hell shut up by two considerations.

1. Let it be considered, the longer any man hath been engaged

in, and accustomed to the way of sin, the more reason and need that man hath speedily and without delay to repent and reform his course; there is yet a possibility of mercy, a season of salvation left: How far soever a soul is gone on towards hell, none can say it is yet too late. When Mr. Bilney the martyr heard a minister preaching thus, *O thou old sinner thou hast gone on in a course of sin these fifty or sixty years; dost thou think that Christ will accept thee now, or take the devil's leavings?* Good God! said he, what preaching of Christ is here! Had such doctrine been preached to me in my troubles, it had been enough utterly to have discouraged me from repentance and faith. No, no, sinner, it is not yet too late, if at last thy heart be touched with a real sense of thy sin and danger. The word is plain, Isa. lv. 7. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

An abundant pardon thou needest; thy sins, by long-continued custom and frequent repetitions, have been abundantly aggravated; and an abundant pardon is with God for poor sinners: he will abundantly pardon, but then thou must come up to his terms: thou must not expect pardon or mercy when thy sins have forsaken thee, but upon thy forsaking them; yea, such a forsaking as includes a resolution or decree in thy will to return to them no more, Hos. iv. 8. There must be a change of thy way, and that not from profaneness to civility only, which is but to change one false way to heaven for another, or the dirty road to hell for a cleaner path on the other side of the hedge; but a total and final forsaking of every way of sin, as to the love and habitual practice of it; yea, and thy thoughts too, as well as thy ways. There must be an internal, as well as an external change upon thee; yea, a positive, as well as a negative change; a turning to the Lord, as well as a turning from sin; and then how long soever thou hast walked in the road towards hell, there will be time enough, and mercy enough to secure thy returning soul safe to heaven.

2. Canst thou not forbear thy customary sin, upon lesser motives than the salvation of thy soul? And if thou canst, wilt thou not much more do it for the saving of thy precious, immortal soul? Suppose there were but a pecuniary mulct, of an hundred pounds, to be certainly levied upon thy estate, for every oath thou swearest, or every time thou art drunk, wouldst thou not rather choose reformation than beggary? And is not the loss of thy soul a penalty infinitely heavier than a little money? But, as the wise Heathen*

* These things seem cheap to us, which cost very dear, and which we could not purchase, though we should give our house for them. *Sen. Ep. 42.*

observed, *Ea sola emi putamus, pro quibus pecuniam solvinus; ea gratuita vocamus pro quibus nos ipsos impendimus*: We reckon those things only to be bought, which we part with money for; and that we have those things gratis, for which we pay ourselves. Is nothing cheap in our eyes but ourselves, our souls! do we call that *gratis*, that will cost us so dear? Darius threw away his massy crown when he fled before Alexander, that it might not hinder him in his flight. Sure your souls are more worth than your money, and all the enjoyments you have in this world. It had been an ancient custom among the citizens of Antioch, to wash themselves in the baths; but the king forbidding it, they all presently forbore, for fear of his displeasure: whereupon Chrysostom convinced them of the vanity of that plea for customary sinning. “You see, (saith he), how soon fear can break off an old custom; and shall not the fear of God be as powerful to over-master it in us, as the fear of man *?” O friends, believe it, it “is better for you to cut off a right hand, or pluck out a right eye, than having two hands, or eyes to be cast into hell, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”

The fifth way of losing the soul opened.

V. The fifth way, by which an innumerable multitude of souls are eternally lost, is by the baits of sensual, sinful pleasures.

Some customary sins have little, or no pleasure in them; as swearing, malice, &c. but others allure, and entice the soul by the sensual delight that is in them: this is the bait with which multitudes are enticed, ensnared, and ruined to all eternity. It is a true and grave observation of the philosopher †, “That we are impelled, as it were, to that which is evil, by the alluring blandishments of pleasure.” This was the first bait by which Satan caught the souls of our first parents in innocency, Gen. iii. 6. “The tree was pleasant to the eye.” Pleasure quickens the principles of sin in us, and enflames the desires of the heart after it. Every pleasant sin hath a world of customers, and, cost what it will, they resolve to have it. I have read of a certain fruit, which the Spaniards found in the Indies, which was exceeding pleasant to the taste; but nature had so fenced it, and double-guarded it with sharp and dangerous thorns, that it was very difficult to come at it: they tore their clothes, yea, their flesh, to get it; and therefore called the fruit, *Comfits in hell*. Such are all

* Οὐαὶ οὐτι ἐν δα φόβος ευκολῶς λυπαται συνήθεια, &c. Hom. 14.

† Voluptatum blanditiis delinunt, ad ea gerenda omnia quæ prava sunt impellimur. Arist. lib. 2. Eth. c. 3.

the pleasures of sin, *consists in hell*; damnation is the price of them, and yet the sensitive appetite is so outrageous and mad after them, that at the price of their souls, they will have them. Thus the wicked are described, Job xxi. 13. "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave:" That is, their whole stock of time is spent in cares and labours to get wealth, and when they have gotten it, the rest of their life is spent in those sensual pleasures that wealth brings in, or in making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of it. The rich man, in the parable, fared deliciously every day, Luke xvi. where his voluptuous life is described, and in that description, the occasion of his damnation is insinuated. In a pampered and indulged body, is usually found a neglected and starved soul. But how shall the ruin of souls this way be prevented?

The fifth way to hell shut up, by three considerations.

1. Consider how the morality of Heathens had bridled their sensual lusts and appetites, and caused them with a generous disdain to repel those brutish pleasures, as things below a man. "What more foolish, what more base," saith Seneca *, "than to patch up the good of a reasonable soul out of things unreasonable?" "That is the pleasure worthy of a man, not to glut his body, nor to irritate those lusts in whose quietness is our safety †." This is the constant doctrine of all the Stoicks.

O what a shame is it to hear Heathenism out-brave Christianity! and principles of mere morality enable men to live more soberly, temperately and abstemiously, than those who enjoy the greatest pattern and highest motives in the Christian religion are found to do? 'Thou embracest pleasure, saith the Heathen, but I bridle it; thou enjoyest it, I only use it; thou thinkest it thy chief good; I esteem it not so much as good; thou dost all for pleasure's sake, but I nothing at all on that account.' These therefore shall be your judges.

2. Always remember sensual pleasures are but the baits with which Satan angles for the precious soul: there is a fatal hook under them. O if men were but aware of this, they would never purchase pleasure at so dear a rate. "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant; but he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depth of hell,"

* *Quid stultius turpiusve quam bonum rationalis animi, ex irrationalibus neclere?* Sen. Ep. 92.

† *Illā est voluptas, et homine et viro digna, non implere corpus, et sagiuare, nec cupiditas irritare, quarum tutissima est quies.* De Benef. lib. 7. c. 11.

Prov. ix. 17, 18. Pliny tells us that the mermaids have most enchanting, charming voices, and frequent pleasant, green meadows, but heaps of dead men's bones are always found where they haunt. That which tickles the fancy stabs the soul. If the pain, (as Anacreon well observes) were before the pleasure, no man would be tempted by it; but the pleasure being first, and sensible, and the torment coming after, and, as yet invisible, this allures so many to destruction. "At last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder," Prov. xxiii. 32. If sin did sting and bite at first, none would touch it; but it tickles at first, and wounds afterward. O what man that is in his wits would purchase eternal torments for the sensual, brutish pleasures of a moment! * The pleasures of sin bewitch the affections, blind the judgment, stupify the heart, so that sober and impartial judgment finds no place. The heart is enticed, the lusts are enraged; cost what it will, sinners will gratify their lusts.

3. If you are for pleasure, certainly you are out of the way to it, who seek it in the fulfilling of your lusts. If your hearts were once sanctified and brought under the government of the Spirit, you would quickly find a far more excellent pleasure in the crucifying of your lusts, than now you seek in the gratification and fulfilling of them. Rom. viii. 13. "If ye, through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live;" i. e. ye shall live the most joyful, peaceful, and comfortable life of all persons in the world, a life of highest delight and true pleasure; for so far as your lusts are mortified, the vigorous, healthful frame, and due temper of your soul is restored, and your evidences for heaven cleared; both which are the springs of all spiritual delight and pleasure. Can any creature-enjoyment, or any beastly lust afford a pleasure like this? Do not you find the life you live in sinful pleasures quite beneath the dignity of a man? and are they not followed with bitter after-reckonings, gripes and flashes of conscience: *Even in the midst of laughter the heart is sad, and the end of that mirth is heaviness*: O ponder seriously what a trifle it is you sell your precious souls for! Is it not a goodly price you value them at? the fugitive, empty, beastly pleasures of a moment, for the torments of eternity.

The sixth way of losing the soul opened.

VI. There are also innumerable souls lost for ever by the dis-

* *Breve est quod delectat, æternum quod cruciat*; i. The pleasure is short-lived, but the torment is perpetual.

tracting cares of this world which eat upⁿ all their time, thoughts, and studies; so that there is no room for Christ, or one serious hour about salvation. It is too true an observation which Sir Walter Raleigh makes upon the common mechanics and poor labourers, their bodies are the anvils of pain, and their souls the hives of unnumbered cares and sorrows, whilst the voluptuous and rich spend their time and studies in purveying for new pleasures, and filling their heads with projects of that nature. The poorer sort have their heads and hearts filled day and night with anxious thoughts and cares how to get bread, pay their rents or debts, and struggle through the miserable necessities that pinch them on every side; many children, it may be, to provide for, and little or nothing out of which to make it: here is brick that must be made, and no straw to make it of; he borrows here to pay there: debts increase, and abilities decrease; he toils his body all the day, and when his tired carcass calls for rest to enable him for new work to-morrow; the cares of the world invade him on his bed, and keep him sighing or musing there, when, poor man! he had load enough before for one.

And now, what room is there left for salvation work? or how can any spiritual seed that is cast into such a brake of thorns prosper? "The cares of this life, (saith Christ) spring up, and choak "it," Mark iv. 19. Tell not them of heaven and Christ, they must have bread; talk not to them of the necessity or comfort of a pardon, they must pay their debts to men. O the confused buz and clutter that these thoughts and cares make in their heads! So that no other voice can be heard. And thus multitudes spend their whole lives in a miserable servitude in this world, and by that are cast upon a more miserable and restless state for ever in the world to come; one hell here, and another hereafter. And what shall be done for them? Is there no way for their deliverance? O that God would direct, and bless the following considerations to them, if it may be expected they may at any time get through the brake in which they are involved, and find them at leisure to bethink themselves!

The sixth way to hell shut up, by five considerations.

1. Bethink thyself, poor soul! as much as thou art involved and plunged in the necessities and distracting cares of this life; others, many others, as poor and necessitous, and every way as much embroiled in the cares of the world as you are, have minded their souls, and taken all care and pains for their salvation, notwithstanding: yea, though millions of your rank and order are destroyed by the snares of the devil, yet God hath a very great number, indeed the greatest of any rank of men among those that are

low, poor, and necessitous in the world. The church is called the "congregation of the poor," Psal. lxxiv. 20. because it consisteth mostly of men and women of the lowest and most despicable condition in this world; they are all poor in spirit, and most of them poor in purse. "Hearken, my beloved brethren, (saith James) hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom?" James ii. 5.

Now, if others, many others, as much entangled in the necessities, cares, and troubles of the world as you, have yet struggled through all those difficulties and discouragements to heaven; why should you not strive for Christ and salvation as well as they? your souls are as valuable as theirs, and their discouragements and hinderances as great and as many as yours.

2. Consider your poor and necessitous condition in the world, hath something in it of motive and advantage to excite and quicken you to a greater diligence for salvation than is found in a more full, easy, and prosperous state; for God hath hereby imbittered this world to you, and made you drink deeper of the troubles of it than other men: they have the honey, and you the gall; they have the flower, and you the bran; but then, as you have not the pleasures, so you have not the snares of a prosperous condition; and your daily troubles, cares, and labours in it do even prompt you to seek rest in heaven, which you cannot find on earth. Can you think you were made for a worse condition than the beasts? What, to have two hells, one here, and another hereafter? Surely, as low, miserable, and despicable as you are, you are capable of as much happiness as any of the nobles of the world; and, in your low and afflicted condition, stand nearer to the door of hope than they do. Ah! methinks these thoughts do even put themselves upon you, when your spirits are overloaded with the cares, and your bodies tired with the labours of this life. Is this the life of troubles I must expect on earth? Hath God denied me the pleasures of this world? O then let it be my care, my study, my business to make sure of Christ, to win heaven, that I may not be miserable in both worlds. How can you avoid such thoughts, or put by such meditations which your very station and condition even forceth upon you?

3. Consider how all the troubles in this world would be sweetened, and all your burdens lightened, if once your souls were in Christ, and in covenant with God. O what heart's ease would faith give you! what sweet relief would you find in prayer! These things, like the opening of a vein, or tumour when ripe, would suddenly cool, relieve, and ease your spirits; could you but go to God as a Father, and pour out your hearts before him, and cast all your cares and burdens, wants and sorrows upon him; you

would find a speedy out-let to your troubles, and an inlet to all peace, all comforts, and all refreshments; such as all the riches, honours, and fulness of this world cannot give: you would then find Providence engage itself for your supply, and issue all your troubles to your advantage; you would suck the breasts of those promises in the margin *, and say, all the dainties in the world cannot make you such another feast; you would then see your bread, your clothes, and all provisions for you and yours, in God's promises, when you are brought to an exigence, and would certainly find performances as well as promises, all along the course of your life.

4. Say not you have no time to mind another world: God hath not put any of you under such an unhappy necessity; you have one whole day every week, allowed you by God and man, for your souls; you have some spare time every day, which you know you spend worse than in heavenly thoughts and exercises; yea, most callings are such as will admit of spiritual exercises of thoughts, even when your hands are exercised in the affairs of this life: besides, there are none of you but have, and must have daily some relaxations and rest from business; and if your hearts were spiritual, and set upon heaven, you would find more time than you think on, without prejudice to your callings, yea, to the great furtherance of them, to spend with God. I can tell you when and where I have found poor servants hard at work for salvation, labouring for Christ, some in the fields, others in barns and stables, where they could find any privacy to pour out their souls to God in prayer. As lovers will make hard shifts to converse together, so will the soul that is devoted to God, and in earnest for heaven; and though your opportunities be not so large, they may be as sweet, as successful, and to be sure sincere, as those whose condition affords them more time, and greater external conveniencies than you enjoy: more business is sometimes dispatched in a quarter of an hour in prayer, yea, let me say in a few hearty ejaculations of soul to God, in a few minutes, than in many long and elaborate duties. If thou cast in thy two mites of time into the treasury of prayer, having no more, thou mayest, as Christ said of the poor widow, *give more than those that cast in of their great abundance of time and talents.*

5. Lastly, Consider, Jesus Christ is no respecter of persons, the poorest and vilest on earth, are as welcome to him as the greatest. He chose a poor and mean condition in this world himself, conversed mostly among the poor, never refused any because of his poverty: "God accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regard-

* Heb. xiii. 5. Isa. xli. 17. Psal. xxxiv. 9, 10. Psal. xci. 15. Rom. viii. 28.

“eth the rich more than the poor: for they are all the work of “his hands,” Job xxxiv. 19. and that both in respect of their natural constitution, as men, and their civil conditions, as rich or poor men. Riches and poverty make a great difference in the respects of men, but none at all with God. If thou be one of God’s poor, he will accept, love, and honour thee above the greatest (if graceless) person in the world. Poverty is no bar to Christ or heaven, though it be to the respects of men, and the pleasures of this life. Away, then, with all vain pretences against a life of godliness, from the meanness of your outward condition; heaven was not made for the rich, and hell only for the poor: No; how hard soever you find the way thither, I am sure Christ saith, *It is hard for a rich man to enter into that kingdom.*

The seventh way of losing the soul discovered.

VII. The seventh beaten path to destruction, is by groundless presumption; *præsумendo sperant, et sperando pereunt*, by presumption they have hope, and by that hope they perish.

There are divers objects of presumption, amongst which, these three are most usual and most fatal, viz. that they have,

1. That grace which they have not.
2. That mercy in God they will not find.
3. That time before them which will fail them.

1. Many presume they have that grace in them, which God knoweth they have not: So did Laodicea, Rev. iii. 17. “Thou sayest, I am rich, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” Here is a dangerous conspiracy betwixt a cunning devil, and an ignorant, proud heart, to ruin the soul for ever; they stamp their common grace for special; they put the old creature, by a general profession, into the new creature’s habit, and lay a confident claim to all the privileges of the children of God.

2. They presume upon such mercy in God, as they will never find; they expect pardoning and saving mercy, out of Christ, in an unregenerate state, when there is not one drop of mercy dispensed in any other way. The whole œconomy of grace is managed by the Mediator, Jude, ver. 21. all saving mercies come through him, upon all that are in him, and upon no others. God is, indeed, a merciful God, and yet presumptuous sinners will find judgment without mercy, because they are not found in the proper way and method of mercy. Thousands, and ten thousands carve out and dispose of the mercy of God at their own pleasure, write their own pardons, in what terms they think fit, and

if they had God's seal to confirm and ratify them, it were all well ; but, alas ! it is but a night-vision, a dream of their own brain.

3. But especially, men presume upon time enough for repentance hereafter : they question not but there are as fit, and as fair opportunities of salvation to come, as are already past ; and in this snare of the devil, thousands are taken in the very prime and vigour of their youth : that age is voluptuous, and loves not to be interrupted with severe and serious thoughts and courses ; and here is a salvo fitted exactly to suit their inclination, and quiet them in their way, that they may pursue their lusts without interruption.

I cannot follow the sin of presumption at present, in all these its courses and ways ; and therefore will apply myself to the case last mentioned, which is so common to the world.

The seventh way to destruction shut up by five weighty considerations.

1. I would beg all those young, voluptuous sinners, whose feet are fast held in the snare of this temptation, seriously to bethink themselves, whether they are not old enough to be damned, whilst they judge themselves too young to be seriously godly. There are multitudes in hell of your age and size ; you may find graves in the church-yard, of your own length, and skulls of your own size : men will not spare a nest of young snakes because they are little. If you die christless and unregenerate, it is the same thing, whether you be old or young ; there is abundance of young spray, as well as old logs, burning in the flames of hell.

2. If you knew the weight and difficulty of salvation work, you would never think you could begin too soon. Religion is a business which will take up all your time ; many have repented they began so late, none that they began so soon *. Say not, *the penitent thief found mercy at the last hour*, for his conversion was extraordinary, and we must not hope for miracles : besides, he could never encourage himself in sin, with the hope and expectation of such a miraculous conversion ; he was the only example of a sinner that was ever so recovered, in scripture, and this was recorded, not to nourish presumption, but to prevent despair. If ten thousand persons died of the plague, and one only of the whole number infected with it escaped, it is no great encouragement that you shall make the second. O think, and think again, how many thousands now on earth, have been labouring and striving, forty or fifty years together, *to make their calling and election sure* : and yet, to this day, it is not so sure as they would have it : they are afraid,

* I repent, O Lord, that I loved thee too late. *Aug.*

after all, time will fail them for finishing, and you think it is too early for beginning so great a work.

3. Others have begun sooner than you, and finished the great and main work, before you have done any thing. Abijah was very young, scarce out of his childhood, "when the grace of God was "found in him," 1 Kings xiv. 13. The fear of God was in Obadiah, when but a youth, 1 Kings xviii. 12. Timothy was not only "a Christian, but a preacher of the gospel, "in the morning of "his life," 2 Tim. iii. 15. What have you to plead for yourselves, which they had not? Or what arguments and motives to godliness had they which you have not? You shall be judged *per pares*, by those of your own age and size; their seriousness shall condemn your vanity.

4. The morning of your life is the flower of your time, the freshest and fittest of all your life for your great work; now your hearts are tender and impressive, your affections flowing and tractable, your heads clear of distracting cares and hurries of business, which come on afterwards in thick successions: "Remember now "thy Creator in the days of thy youth, whilst the evil days come "not," Eccl. xii. 1, 2. If a man has an important business to do, he will take the morning for it, knowing if that be slipped, a croud and hurry of business will come on afterwards, to distract and hinder him. I presume, if all the converts in the world were examined in this point, it would be found, that at least ten to one were wrought upon in their youth; that is the moulding age.

5. And if this proper, hopeful season be elapsed, it is very unlikely that ever you be wrought upon afterwards: how thin and rare, in the world, are the instances and examples of conversion in old age! Long-continued customs in sin harden the heart, fix the will, and root the habits of vice so deep in the soul, that there is no altering of them; your ears then are so accustomed to the sounds of the world, that *Christ* and *sin*, *heaven* and *hell*, *soul* and *eternity*, have lost their awful sound and efficacy with you. But it is a question only to be decided by the event, Whether ever you shall attain to the years of your fathers? It is not the sprightly vigour of your youth that can secure you from death. What a madness, then, is it, to put your souls and eternal happiness, upon such a blind adventure? What if your presumption, of so many fair and proper opportunities hereafter, fail you, as it hath failed millions, who had as rational and hopeful a prospect of them as you can have: where are you then? And if you should have more time and means, than you do presume upon, are you sure your hearts will be as flexible and impressive as they now are? O beware of this sin of vain presumption, to which the generality of the damned owe their everlasting ruin!

The eighth way of losing the soul opened.

VIII. The eighth way of ruining the precious soul, is, by drinking in the principles of Atheism, and living without God in the world.

Atheism stabs the soul to death at one stroke, and puts it quite out of the way of salvation; other sinners are worse than beasts, but Atheists are worse than devils, for they believe, and tremble; these banish God out of their thoughts, and, what they can, out of the world, living as *without God in the world*, Eph. ii. 12. It is a sin that quencheth all religion in the soul. He that knows not his landlord cannot pay his rent: he that assents not to the being of a God, destroys the foundation of all religious worship; he cannot fear, love, or obey him, whose being he believes not: this sin strikes at the life of God, and destroys the life of the soul.

Some are Atheists in opinion, but multitudes are so in practice; "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God," Psal. xiv. 1. though he hath engraven his name upon every creature, and written it upon the table of their own hearts; yet they will not read it: or if they have a slight, fluctuating notion, or a secret suspicion of a Deity, yet they neither acknowledge his presence, nor his providence. *Fingunt Deum talem qui nec videt, nec punit*, i. e. They make such a God, who neither sees nor punishes. They say, "How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark clouds? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not," Job xxii. 14.

Others profess to believe his being, but their lives daily give their lips the lie; for they give no evidence in practice, of their fear, love or dependence on him: If they believe his being, they plainly shew they value not his favour, delight not in his presence, love not his ways, or people; but lie down and rise, eat and drink, live and die without the worship, or acknowledgment of him, except so much as the law of the country, or custom of the place extorts from them. These dregs of time produce abundance of Atheists, of both sorts; many ridicule and hiss religion out of all companies into which they come, and others live down all sense of religion; they customarily attend, indeed, on the external duties of it, hear the word; but when the greatest, and most important duties are urged upon them, their inward thought is, This is the preacher's calling, and the man must say something to fill up his hour, and get his living. If they dare not put their thoughts into words, and call the gospel *Fabula Christi*, the fable of Christ, as a wicked Pope once did; or say of hell, and the dreadful sufferings of the damned, as Galderinus the Jesuit did, *Tunc credam cum illuc venero*; I will believe it when I see it: yet their hearts and

lives, are of the same complexion with these men's words : they do not heartily assent to the truth of the gospel which they hear, and though bare assent would not save them, yet their assent, or non-assent, will certainly damn them, except the Lord heal their understandings and hearts, by the light and life of religion. To this last sort I shall offer a few things.

The eighth way to hell shut up by six weighty considerations.

1. You that attend upon the ordinances, but believe them no more than so many devised fables, nor heartily assent to the truth of what you hear ; know assuredly, that the word shall never do your souls good, it can never come to your hearts and affections in its regenerating and sanctifying efficacy, whilst it is stopt and obstructed in your understandings in the acts of assent. And thus you may sit down under the best ordinances all your lives, and be no more the better for them, than the rocks are for the showers of rain that fall upon them ; Heb. iv. 2. "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." This is Satan's chief strength and fatness, wherein he trusteth ; he fears no argument, whilst he can maintain his post : the devil hath no surer prisoner than the Atheist ; there is no escaping out of his possession and power, whilst this bolt of unbelief is shut home in the mind or understanding. An unbelieved truth never converted or saved one soul from the beginning of the world, nor never shall to the end of it. Those bodies that have the *Boulema*, or dog-appetite, whatever they eat, it affords them no nourishment or satisfaction, they thrive not with the best fare : just so it is with your souls, no duties, no ordinances can possibly do them good ; as in argumentation, no conclusion, be it never so regularly drawn, and strongly inferred, is of any force to him that denies principles.

2. If you assent not to the truth of the gospel, you not only make God speak to your souls in vain, which is fatal to them : but you also make God a liar, which is the greatest affront a creature can put upon his Maker ; 1 John v. 10. "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar." Vile dust, darest thou rise up against the God that made thee, and give him the lie ? An affront which thy fellow creature cannot put up, or bear at thy hands. Darest thou at once stab his honour, and thy own soul ? Are not the things that thou lookest on as *romances* and golden dreams, mere artifice, neatly contrived to cheat and awe the world ? Are they not all built upon the veracity of God, which is the firmest foundation and greatest security in the world ? Hath he not intermingled,

for our satisfaction, not only frequent assertions, but his asseverations and oath to put all beyond doubt? and yet dare any of you lift up your ignorant, blind understandings against all this, and give him the lie? Surely the wrath of God shall smoke against every soul of man that doth so, and his own bitter, lamentable, doleful experience shall be his conviction shortly, except he repent.

3. Dare any of you give the thoughts of your hearts as certain conclusions under your hands, and stand by them to the last, and venture all upon them.

Wretched Atheist! bethink thyself, pause a while, examine thine own breast; whatever thy vile atheistical thoughts sometimes are, is there not at other times a fear of the contrary? A jealousy that all these things which thou deridest and sportedst thy wicked fancy with, may, and will prove true at last? When thou readest or hearest that text, John iii. 18. "He that believeth not is condemned already;" his mittimus is already made for hell: doth not thy conscience give thee a secret gird, like a stitch in thy side? Dare you venture all upon this issue, that if those things you find in the word be true, you will stand to the hazard of them? If that be a truth, Mark xvi. 16. "He that believeth not shall be damned," you will be content to be damned? Or if, Rom. viii. 13. be a truth, That "they who live after the flesh shall die," you will run the hazard, and bear the penalty of eternal death? If Heb. xii. 14. prove true, That "without holiness no man shall see God," you will be content to be banished from his presence for evermore? Speak your hearts in this matter, and tell us, do not you live betwixt atheistical surmises, that all these are but cunning artifices, and fears, that at last they will prove the greatest verities.

4. Hath not God given you all the satisfaction you can reasonably desire of the undoubted truth and certainty of his word? What would you have which you have not already? Would you have a voice from heaven? the scriptures you read or hear are a more sure word than such a voice would be, 1 Pet. i. 19. Or would you have a messenger from hell? He that believeth not the written word, neither would believe "if one should rise from the dead," Luke xvi. 31. View the innate characters of the scripture, is it not altogether pure and holy, full of Divine wisdom and awful majesty, and in every respect such as evidenceth its author to be the wise, holy, and just God, who searcheth the hearts and reins? Look upon the seals and confirmations of it: hath not God confirmed it by divers miracles from heaven, a seal which neither men nor devils could counterfeit? And do not you see the blessing and power of God accompanying it in the conversion and wonderful change of men's hearts and lives, which can be done by no

other hand than God's? Say not, the miracles, which confirm the gospel, are but uncertain traditions, and except you yourselves see them wrought, you cannot believe them. There are a thousand things which you do believe, though you never saw them; and what you require for your satisfaction, every man may require the same for his; and so Christ must live again in all parts of this world, and repeat his miracles over and over in all ages to satisfy the unreasonable incredulity of those that question their truth, after the fullest confirmation and seal hath been given, that is capable to be given, or the heart of man can desire should be given; and if all this should be done, you might be as far from believing as now you are; for many of those that saw and heard the things wrought by Christ contradicted and blasphemed, and so might you.

5. Satan, who undermines your assent to these things, is forced to give his own: he that tempts you to look on them as fables, himself knows and is convinced that they are realities; "The devils also believe and tremble," James ii. 19. they know and feel the truth of these things, though it be their great design and interest to shake your assent to them: they know Christ is the Son of God, and that there will be a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and that there are torments prepared for themselves, and all whom they seduce from God, Matth. viii. 29. If you ungod God, you must unman yourselves: yea, not only make yourselves less than men, but worse than devils.

6. In a word, let thy own heart, O Atheist, be judge, whether these be real doubts still sticking in your minds, after you have done all that becomes men to do for satisfaction in such important cases. Or whether they be not such principles as you willingly foment and nourish in your hearts as a protection to your sensual lusts, whose pleasures you would fain have without interruptions and overawings by the fears of a judgment to come, and a righteous retribution from a just and terrible God! Examine your hearts in that point, and you will soon find the cheat to be in that I here point you to: you have not studied the word impartially, nor brought your doubts and scruples with an humble, unbiassed, teachable spirit to those that are wise and able to resolve them, much less prayed for the Spirit of illumination; but willingly entertained whatever atheistical wits invent, or the devil suggests, as a defensive against the checks of conscience and fears of hell in the way of sin. You are loth those things should be true which the scriptures speak, and are glad of any colourable argument or pretence to still your own consciences. Is not this the case? The Lord stop your desperate course; your paths lead to hell.

The ninth way of losing the precious soul opened.

IX. Precious souls are daily plunged into the gulf of perdition by *profaneness* and *debauchery*. How many every where lie wallowing in the puddle? glorying in their shame, and running into all excess of riot? The hypocrite steals to hell in a private, close way of concealed sin; but the profane gallop along the public road at noon day; "They declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not;" Isa. iii. 9. "The shew of their countenance testifieth against them." The hypocrite hath devotion in his countenance, and heaven in his mouth; you know not by his words and countenance whither he is going; but the profane hide it not, they are past shame, and above blushing at the most horrid impieties. Look, as God hath some servants more eminent, forward, and courageous in the ways of godliness than others, men that will not hide their principles, or be ashamed of the ways of godliness in the face of danger; so the devil hath some servants as eminent for wickedness who scorn to sneak to hell by concealment of their wickedness, but avow and own it, without fear or shame, in the open sight of heaven and earth. Wherever they come, they defile the air they breathe in with horrid blasphemies and obscene discourses not to be named, and leave a strong scent of hell behind them.

This age hath brought forth multitudes of these monsters, the reproach and shame of the nation that bred them. I have little hope to stop any of them in their career and full speed to hell. They have lost the *sense of sin*, the restraints of *shame* and *fear*; and then what is left to check them in their course? I cannot hope that such a discourse as this shall ever come into their hands, except it be to sacrifice it to the flames; yet not knowing the ways of providence, which are unsearchable, and what use God may make upon one occasion or another of these following considerations, I will adventure to drop a few words upon these forlorn sinners, as far as they seem to be gone beyond recovery; beseeching the Lord to make way for these things to their hands and hearts, and make them the instruments of pulling some of them as brands out of the burning.

The ninth way to hell, by profaneness, stopt.

1. And first, let it be laid to heart, that though the case and state of many thousand souls be doubtful and uncertain, so that neither themselves nor any other know what they are, or to whom they belong! yet thy condition, O profane sinner, is without controversy, miserable and forlorn; all men know whose you are, and

whither you are going. The apostle appeals, in this case, to the bar of every man's reason and conscience, as a thing allowed and yielded by all, Eph. v. 5. "For this ye know, (saith he) that no "whoremonger, or unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an "idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of "God." This is a clear case, there is no controversy about it. Many there be in a doubtful case, but no doubt of these, they are fast and sure in the power of Satan: and as sure as God is a God of truth, they that die in this condition shall never see his face. And to the same purpose again, 1 Cor. vi. 9. "Know ye not that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? be not "deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor "effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, "nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall "inherit the kingdom of God." *Know ye not?* saith he, q. d. "Sure you cannot be so ignorant and blind to think that there is "any room in heaven for such wretches as these. If the righteous "be scarcely saved, where shall the sinner and ungodly appear? "If all strictness, holiness, self-denial, diligence, be all little enough "to win heaven, what hope can there be of those that not only cast "off all duties of religion, but also cast themselves into all the "opposite ways and courses which directly lead to damnation?" He that refuseth his food endangers his life; but he that drinks poison, certainly and speedily destroys it.

2. As far as you are gone in a course of profaneness, you are not yet gone beyond the reach of mercy and all hopes of salvation, if now at last, after all your debaucheries and profaneness, the Lord touch your hearts with the sense of your sinful and miserable state, and turn your feet to his testimonies. When the apostle, in 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. had told us the doom of such men, upon the supposition of their perseverance in that course, yet presently adds, as a motive to their repentance, an example of mercy upon such wretches as these, "And such were some of you, but ye are washed," ver. 11. The golden sceptre of free grace hath been held forth to many, as profane and notorious sinners as you, to blaspheming Saul, to a Mary Magdalen, to a Manasseh. It is not the greatness of the sin, but the impenitence and infidelity of the sinner that ruins him. Well, then, there is a certainty of damnation if you go on, and yet a possibility of forgiveness and mercy before you; a mercy invaluable.

3. Nay, this is not all; but in some respect there is more probability and hope of your return and repentance, than there is of many others who have led a more sober, smooth, and civil life than you have done. Your profaneness hath more dishonoured

God, but the morality and civility of some men secure them faster in the snare of the devil: They have many things in themselves to build up their presumptuous hopes upon, but you have nothing. It is hard for conviction to reach that man's conscience that hath righteousness of his own to trust in; but methinks it should have an easier access to yours, whose notorious courses lay your consciences naked and bare before the word to be wounded by it. Christ's ministry had little success among the Pharisees, who were righteous in their own eyes, but it wrought effectually upon *Publicans* and *Sinners*. Hence Christ told them, Matth. xxi. 31. that "Publicans and Harlots go into the kingdom of God before them." Publicans were esteemed the worst of men, and Harlots the worst of women; yet the one, and the other, as vile as they were, stood fairer for conviction, and consequently for salvation, than those that thought they needed *no repentance*. All this is matter of hope, and runs into a powerful motive and loud call to repentance. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear."

The tenth way leading to destruction marked.

X. Deep and fixed prejudices against godliness, and the sincere professors thereof, precipitate thousands of souls into their own ruin and damnation.

It was not without a weighty reason, that Christ denounced that wo upon the world, Matth. xviii. 7. "Wo unto the world, because of offences." The poor world will be ruined by scandals and prejudices; they will take such offences at the ways of godliness, that they will never have good thoughts of them any more. "This sect is every where spoken against," Acts xxviii. 22. and so Christians are condemned, *δια την φημην*, because of the common reproach, as Justin Martyr complained. All the scandals which fall out in the church, are so many swords and daggers put into the hands of the wicked world to murder their own souls withal. Some have sucked in such opinions of the ways of godliness as make them irreconcilable enemies to them, and fierce opposers of them. And from hence are most of the persecutions that befall the people of God. When you see showers of slanders and reproaches going before, expect storms of persecutions coming after. Slanders beget prejudices, and these prepare for persecutions. O how keen and fierce are the minds of many against the upright and innocent servants of God, whom they have first represented to themselves in such an odious dress and character, as the devil hath drawn them in, upon their fancies and imaginations! So the primitive Christians were represented to the Heathens as monsters, and their conventions in the night, occasioned by the fury of persecutors,

were reported to be for lascivious and barbarous ends, to deflower virgins, and murder innocent children: And by this artifice the Heathens were secured against conversion to Christ. This hath been the policy of hell from the beginning, and it hath prospered so much in the world, that Satan hath no reason to change his hand. But how may this plot of hell be defeated, and the ruin of souls prevented?

The tenth way of destroying souls shut up by two counsels.

1. It will be impossible to prevent the ruin of a great part of the world by prejudices against the ways of godliness, except those who profess them, walk more holily and conformably to the rule and pattern of Christ, whose name is called upon by them. I shall therefore first address my discourse to the professors of religion, beseeching them, in the bowels of Christ, to take pity upon the multitude of souls which are daily ruined and destroyed by their scandals and miscarriages. Did you live according to the rules you profess, "your well-doing would put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," 1 Pet. ii. 15. and consequently the ruin of many might be prevented. I remember * Bernard, speaking of the lewd and loose life of the priests of his time, sighs out this just and bitter complaint to God about it; *Misera eorum conversatio plebis tue miserabilis subversio est*: O Lord! said he, their miserable conversation is the miserable subversion of thy people. O! of how many, who glory in the title of the sons of the church, may Christ say as Jacob did of his two lewd sons, Simon and Levi, "You have troubled me, to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land," Gen. xxxiv. 30.

And how many professors, who pretend to more than ordinary reformation and holiness, do shed soul-blood by their scandalous conversations. † Salvian brings in the wicked of his age upbraiding the looseness of Christians, in this manner; "Behold, those men who boast themselves redeemed from the tyranny of Satan, and profess themselves dead to the world, yet are conquered by the lusts of it." And ‡ Cyprian, long before his day, brings in the Heathens thus insulting over looser Christians: "Where is that catholic law which they believe? Where are the examples of piety and chastity, which they should learn? They read the gospel, yet are immodest; they hear the apostles, yet are

* Bern. in *Convers. Pauli*, Ser. 1.

† *Ecce qui jactant se redemptos a tyrannide Satanæ, qui prædicant se mortuos mundo, nihilominus a cupiditatibus suis vincuntur.* Salvian.

‡ *Ubi est catholica lex quam credunt? Ubi pietatis et castitatis exempla quæ discunt? Evangelia legunt, et impudici sunt; Apostolos audiunt, et inebriantur.* Cyp.

“drunk.” O professors! where are your bowels to the poor souls of sinners? If your neighbour’s ox or ass fall into the pit, you are bound to deliver him, if you can; and will you not do as much for a precious soul, as you would do for a beast? Nay, you dig pits, by your scandalous lives, to destroy them. If you sin, there are instruments enough to spread it, and multitudes of souls ready prepared to take the infection. Say not, if they do, the fault is theirs; for though they are principals in the murder of their own souls, by taking the scandal, yet you are accessories in giving it: He is a mad man that will kill himself with a sword, and he no better that will put it into his hand.

O, therefore, if you have any regard to the precious souls of men, live up to the rules of your profession! O, be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a perverse and froward generation! let the heavenliness of your conversation stop those mouths that accuse you as men of a worldly spirit; let them see, by your moderation in seeking it, your patience in losing it, your readiness in distributing it, that it is a groundless calumny under which your names suffer. Let them see, by your apparel, company, and discourses, you are not such proud, lofty spirits, as you are represented to be. Convince them, by your flexibleness to all things that are lawful and expedient, by manifesting, as much as in you lieth, that it is the pure bond and tie of conscience, which keeps you from compliance in all other things, and by your meekness in suffering, for such non-compliance, that you are not such turbulent, factious incendiaries, as the wicked world slanderously reports you to be. Convince the world by your exact righteousness in all your civil dealings, and by the lip of truth in all your promises and engagements, that you have the fear of God in your hearts, as well as the livery of Christianity upon your backs. In a word, so live, that none may have just ground to believe the impudent slanders the devil raises in the world against you. Let your light so shine before men, that you may glorify your Father which is in heaven. Without your care and circumspection, the shedding of a world of precious soul-blood can never be prevented.

2. Let me advise and beseech all men to be so just to others, and merciful to their own souls, as not to cast them away for ever, by receiving prejudices against godliness, from the miscarriages of some, who make more than a common profession of it. To prevent this fatal effect of scandal and prejudice at religion, I desire a few particulars may be impartially weighed.

First, Very many of those scandals, bandied up and down the world against the professors of godliness, are devised and forged in hell, as so many traps and snares to catch and destroy men’s souls, to beget an irreconcilable aversion and enmity in men to the ways

of God. "They devise deceitful matters (saith the Psalmist) against them that are quiet in the land," Psal. xxxv. 20. So Jer. xviii. 18. "Come, say they, let us devise devices against Jeremiah, and smite him with the tongue." And there is as little equity in the credulous receiver, as there is honesty in the wicked forger of these slanders: with one arrow of censure you wound no less than three, viz. the honour of God, your innocent brother, and your own souls: As to the two former wounds, they will in due time be healed; God will vindicate his own name fully, and the reputation of his innocent servants shall be cleared, and repaired abundantly; but, in the mean time, your souls may perish by the wounds prejudices have given, so that you may never be reconciled to godliness and its professors whilst you live, but turn scoffers and persecutors of them.

Secondly, Examine whether the matters that are charged upon them as their crimes, be not their duties. Sometimes it falls out to be so; and if so, you fight more immediately and directly against God, than men. This was David's case, Psal. lxxix. 10. "When I wept, and chastened my soul, that was to my reproach;" my piety was turned to reproach. They called his tears crocodile's tears, and his fastings, hypocritical shadows of devotion and humility. Thus the very matter of his duty was turned into scorn and reproach. And so it was with the primitive Christians, their very owning of themselves to be Christians was crime enough to condemn them.

Thirdly, If professors of religion do in some things act unbecoming their holy profession, yet every slip and failing in their lives, is no sufficient warrant for you to censure their persons as hypocrites; much less to fall upon religion itself, and condemn it for the faults of them that profess it. There is many an upright heart overtaken by temptation. You see their miscarriages, but you see not their humiliations and self-condemnations before God for them. 'Foul, and fearful (saith a grave divine*) was the scandal of David; and what was the issue? Presently the enemies of God and godliness began to lift their heads, and fall upon David's religion, 2 Sam. xxii. they blasphemed the name of God. 'O, this is he that was so grand a zealot, that the zeal of God's house did eat him up. This is the man, that, out of his transcendent zeal, danced before the ark; this is he that prayed thrice a day, at morning, noon, and night: This is he that was so precise and strict in his family, that a wicked person should not

* Jer. Dyke, of scandal, p. 53.

‘ dwell in his house. This your great, precise zealot, hath defiled the wife, and murdered the husband. Now you see what his religion is, now you see what comes of this profession of so much holiness and godliness.’

O that men would seriously consider their evil in such censures as these! what is all this to religion? Doth religion any way countenance, or patronize such practices? Nay, doth it not impartially and severely condemn them? It is the glory of the Christian religion, that it is pure and undefiled, James i. 27. These practices flow from no principle of religion, nor are chargeable upon it, for it teacheth men the very contrary, Tit. ii. 11, 12. If I see a Papist sin boldly, or an Arminian slight grace, I justly condemn their principles, in, and with their practices, because Popery sets pardons to sale, and Arminianism exalts nature into the place of grace: But doth the doctrine of the gospel lead to any immoralities? Charge it, if you can.

Fourthly, And as senseless a thing it is to condemn all, for the miscarriages and faults of some; which, yet, is the common practice of the world. Are all that profess godliness loose and careless? No; many are an ornament to their holy profession, and the glory of Christianity, and why must the innocent be condemned for the guilty? What is your reason and ground for that? Why might not the enemies of Christianity have condemned the eleven apostles upon the fall of Judas? Had they not as good a warrant for it, as you have for this?

To conclude, You little know what a snare of the devil is laid for your souls, in all those prejudices and offences, you take at the ways and professors of godliness; and what a wo you bring upon your own souls by them. You speak evil of persons and things you know not, and prejudice is like still to keep you in ignorance of them. “Wo to the world (saith Christ) because of offences; and blessed is he that is not offended at me.”

The eleventh way of ruining the precious soul opened.

XI. The eleventh way, wherein abundance of precious souls perish in the christianized and professing world, is the way of formal hypocrisy in religion, and zeal about the externals of worship. Such a generation of men have, in all ages, mingled themselves with the sincere worshippers of God; and the inducement to it is obvious; the form of godliness is an honour, but the power of it a burden. By the former, earthly interests are accommodated; by the latter, they are frequently exposed and hazarded.

We find in the Jewish church, abundance of such chaff intermixed with the wheat, which the doctrine of Christ discovered, and

purged out of the floor, Mat. iii. 9, 12. such were the Pharisees, who were exceeding zealous for traditions, and the external rites and ceremonies of the law, but inwardly full of all filthiness, Mat. xv. 7, 8, 9. Men that honoured the dead, and persecuted the living saints; that revered the material temple, and destroyed the living temples; that strained at gnats of ceremonies, and swallowed down the grossest immoralities.

And well had it been, if this generation had ended with the state and time of the church; but we find a prophecy of the increase of these men in the latter days, 2 Tim. iii. 5. which is every where sadly verified. Religion runs into stalk, and blade, into leaves, and suckers, which should be concocted into pith and fruit: Yea, it is of sad consideration, that amongst many high pretenders to reformation, their zeal, which should nourish the vitals of religion, and maintain their daily work of mortification and communion with God, spends itself in some by-opinion, whilst practical godliness visibly languisheth in their conversations. How many are there that hate doctrinal errors, who yet perish by practical ones? who hate a false doctrine, but, in the mean time, perish by a false heart? It is very difficult to reclaim this sort of men from the error of their way; and thereby save their souls from hell. However, let the means be used, and the success left with God.

The eleventh way to hell, by formality, barred up.

1. No sin entangles the souls of men faster, or damns them with more certainty and aggravation, than the sin of formal hypocrisy; it holds the soul fastest on earth, and sinks it deepest into hell. There was no sort of men upon whom the doctrine of Christ and the apostles, had so little success and effect, as the Scribes and Pharisees; they derided him, when *publicans* and *sinner*s trembled, and believed, Luke xvi. 14, 15. The form of godliness wards off all convictions; their zeal for the externals of religion secures them against the fears of damnation, whilst in the mean time, their hypocrisy plunges them deeper into hell than others that never made such shews of sanctity and devotion: "He shall appoint him his portion with hypocrites;" Mat. xxiv. 51. that is, he shall be punished in hell, as hypocrites are punished, *viz.* with the greatest, and sorest punishment. Hypocrisy is a double iniquity, and will be punished with double destruction: their ungrounded hopes of heaven serve but to pull up their wretched souls to a greater height of vain confidence, which gives them the more dreadful jerk in their lamentable, and eternal disappointment.

2. Blind, superstitious zeal, which spends itself only about the externals of religion, usually prepares, and engageth men in a

more violent persecution of those that are really godly, and conscientious. The Lord opened a great door of opportunity at Antioch to Paul; the whole city came together to attend the discoveries of Christ in the first publication of the gospel, and the poor Gentiles began to taste the sweetness of the gospel; but the devil, perceiving his kingdom begin to totter, immediately stirred up his instruments to persecute the apostles, and drive them out of the country: and who more fit for that work, than the devout, and honourable women? Acts xiii. 15. These stirred up their husbands, and all they had influence upon, under a fair pretence of zeal for the law, to obstruct the progress of the gospel. *No bird (saith one) like the living bird, to draw others into the net.* Men of greatest names, and pretensions to religion, if graceless, are the most dangerous instruments the * devil can employ to the ruin and extirpation of true godliness. Such a zealot was Paul, in his unregenerate state.

3. Nothing is more common, than to find men hot and zealous against false worship, whilst their hearts are as cold as a stone in the *vitals*, and *essentials* of *true religion*. Many can dispute warmly against *adoration of images, praying to angels and saints departed*, who all the while are like those dead images which others worship. Jehu was a zealot against idolatry; and yet the vital power of true godliness was a stranger to his soul, 2 Kings x. 15, 16. The Pharisees spared no pains to make a *proselyte*, and yet all the while were the children of the devil themselves, Mat. xxiii. 15.

This was a sad case, yet what more common? The Lord open the eyes of these men, and convince them, in season, that their zeal runs in the wrong channel, and spends itself upon things which shall never profit them. O if they were but as much concerned to promote the love of God, and life of godliness in themselves and others, as they are about some external accidents and appendages of religion, what blessings would they be to the world, and what evidence would they have of their own sincerity?

The twelfth way to hell, opened.

XII. The twelfth way to hell, in which many souls are carried on smoothly, and securely, to their own destruction, is, the way of *mere civility* and *moral honesty*, wherein men rest as in a safe state, never doubting but a civil life will produce an issue into an happy death. *Moral honesty* is a lovely thing, and greatly tends to the peace and order of the world; but it is not saving grace, nor gives any man a good title to Christ and salvation. Indeed there

* Satan ascends by the rib, as by a ladder to the heart. *Gregor.*

can be no grace in that soul in which civility and moral honesty are not found: but these may be found in thousands that have no grace.

That which ruins souls, is not the exercise of moral virtues, but their reliance upon them: they use their morality as a shield to secure their consciences from the convictions of the word, which would shew them their sinful and miserable state by nature. Thus the Pharisee, Luke xviii. 11, 12. "God I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican;" he blesseth himself in the conceits of his own safety and happiness. Let debauched and profane persons look to it, I am well enough; though, alas! poor man, his being less evil, at best, could but procure him a cooler hell, or a milder flame. This was the case of the young man, Matth. xix. 28. and like a young man, indeed, he reasons. He sums up all the stock of his civil life, and thinks it strange if that be not enough to make a purchase of eternal life. *What lack I yet?* Alas! poor soul, every thing necessary to salvation: the very first stone was not laid, when he thought the building was finished: And this is the case of multitudes, both young and old; and that which greatly confirms, and settles them in this their dangerous security, is the general, indistinct doctrine of some, who pretend to be guides to the souls of others, the scope of whose ministry aims at no higher mark than to civilize the people, and press moral duties upon them, as if this were all that were necessary to salvation: Nay, it is well if some do not industriously pull down the pale of distinction betwixt morality and regeneration, and tell the world, in plain English, *That there is no reason to put a difference betwixt such as are baptized, and live morally honest, and those that have saving grace; and they that do so, are only a few, who are highly conceited of themselves, and censorious of all others, whom they please to vote formal, and moral.*

This, indeed, is the way to fix them where they are; if Christ had not taken another method with Nicodemus, and his ministers had not pressed *the necessity of regeneration, and the insufficiency of moral honesty to salvation*, how thin had the number of true converts been, though, at most they are but a handful in comparison of the *unregenerate*!

O that God would bless what follows, to undeceive and save some poor soul out of this dangerous snare of the devil!

The twelfth way to damnation barred, by three considerations.

1. Blind not yourselves with the lustre of your own moral virtues, a life smoothly drawn with civility through the world: for though it must be acknowledged there is a loveliness, and attracting sweetness in morality and civility, yet these things rather res-

pect earth than heaven, and are designed for the conservation of the order and peace of this world, not for your salvation and title to the world to come. Without justice and truth, *kingdoms* and *commonwealths* would become *mountains of prey*, and *dens of robbery*. Where there is no trust there can be no traffic; and where there is no truth, there can be no trust. Civility is the very basis of human society; a world of good accrues to men by it, and abundance of mischief is prevented by it; but it never gave any man *an interest in Christ*, or *a title to salvation*. The Romans and Lacedemonians, who perished in the darkness of Heathenism, excelled in morality; there is nothing of Christ or regeneration in these things, how much of excellency soever be ascribed to them. Paul, the Pharisee, was a blameless person, touching the law, and yet, at the same time, not only utterly ignorant of Christ, but a bitter enemy to him, and all that were his. Till you can find another way to heaven than by regeneration, repentance, and faith, never lean upon such a deceitful and rotten prop, as mere civility is.

2. *Civilized nature is unsanctified nature* still; and without *sanctification* there is no *salvation*, Heb. xii. 14. Civility adorneth nature, but doth not change it. Moral virtues are so many sweet flowers strewed over a dead corpse, which hide the loathsomeness of it, but inspire not life into it. “* *Morality hides and covers, but never mortifies, nor cures the corruptions of nature;*” and mortified they must be, or you cannot be saved: take the best nature in the world, and let it be adorned with all the ornaments of morality (which they call *homiletical virtues*) and add to these all the common gifts of the Spirit, which are for assistance and ministry; yet all this cannot secure that soul from hell, or be the ground-work for a just claim to any promise of salvation: all this is but nature improved, not regenerated. Morality is neither produced as saving grace is, nor works such effects as grace worketh; there are no pangs of repentance introducing it, it may cost many an aking head, but no aking heart for sin; no such distressed outcries as that, Acts ii. 37. “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Nor doth it produce such humility, self-abasement, heavenly tempers, and tendencies of soul, as grace doth. Cheat not yourselves, therefore, in so important a concern as salvation is, with an empty shadow.

3. Civility is not only found in multitudes that are out of Christ, but may be the cause and reason why they are christless: mistake not, I am not pleading the cause of profaneness, nor disputing civility out of the world; I heartily wish there were more of it to be found in every place; it would exceedingly promote the peace,

* *Abscondit, non abscondit vitia.* Lactans.

order and tranquillity of the world: but yet it is certain, that the eyes of thousands are so dazzled with the lustre of their own morality, that they see no need of Christ, nor feel any want of his righteousness, and this is the ruin of their souls. Thus Christ brings in the Pharisee with his proud boast, that he is “no extortioner, “adulterer, nor unjust, or such an one as that publican,” Luke xviii. 11. O what a saint doth he vote himself, when he compared his life with the others! Well, then, beware you be not deceived by thinking you are safe, because you are got out of the dirty road to hell, when, all the while you have only stepped over the hedge into a cleaner path to damnation. *You have had a short account of some few of those many ways in which the precious souls of men are eternally lost: Let us briefly apply it in the following inferences.*

Infer. 1. If there be so many ways of losing the soul, and such multitudes of souls lost in every one of them, *then the number of saved souls must needs be exceeding small.*

The number of the saved may be considered, either *absolutely* or *comparatively*: In the first consideration they appear great, and many, even a great multitude, which no man can number, Rev. vii. 9. but if compared with those that are lost, they make but *a small remnant*, Isa. i. 9. *a little flock*, Matth. xii. 32. For when we consider how vastly the kingdom of Satan is extended, who is called *the god of this world*, from the world of people who are in subjection to him, how small a part of this earthly globe is enlightened with the beams of gospel-light, and that Satan is the acknowledged ruler of all the rest, Eph. vi. 12. But when it shall be farther considered, that out of this spot, on which the light of the gospel is risen, the far greatest part are lost, also: O what a poor handful remains to Jesus Christ, as the purchase of his blood!

It is of trembling consideration, how many thousands of families, amongst us, are mere nurseries for hell, parents bringing forth and breeding up children for the devil; not one word of God (except it be in the way of blasphemy, or profaneness) to be heard among them. How naturally their ignorant and wicked education puts them in the course and tide of the world, which carries them away irresistibly to hell; how one sinner confirms and animates another, in the same sinful course, till they are all past hope, or remedy: how the rich are taken with the baits of sensual pleasures, and the poor lost in the brake of distracting, worldly cares, except here and there a soul plucked out of the snare of the devil, by the wonderful power, and arm of God. On the one side, you may see multitudes drowned in open profaneness and debauchery; and, on the other side, many thousands securely sleeping in the state of

civility and morality: some key-cold, and without the least sense of religion; others hell-hot with blind zeal, and superstitious madness against true godliness, and the sincere practisers of it. Some living all their days under the ordinances of God, and never touched with any conviction of their sin and misery; others convinced, and making some faint offers at religion; but their convictions (like blossoms nipt with a frosty morning) fall off, and no fruit follows. And as *rubies*, *sapphires*, and *diamonds* are very few, in comparison of the *pebbles* and *common stones* of the earth; so are true Christians in comparison of multitudes that perish in the snares of Satan.

Inf. How little reason have the unregenerate to glory, and boast themselves in their earthly acquisitions and successes, whilst in the mean time, their souls are lost! they have gotten other things, but lost their souls. It is strange to see how some men, by rolling a small fortune up and down the world (as boys do a snow-ball) have increased the heap, and raised a great estate; they have attained their design and aim in the world, and hug themselves in the pleased thoughts of their happiness; but, alas, among all the thoughts of their gains, there is not one thought of what they have lost. O if such a thought as this could find room in their hearts, ‘I have indeed gotten an estate, but I have lost my soul; I have much of the world, but nothing of Christ; gold and silver I have, but grace, peace, and pardon I have not; my body is well provided for, but my soul is naked, empty, and destitute.’ Such a thought, like the sentence written on the wall, would make their hearts fail within them. What a rapture and transport of joy did the sight of a full barn cast that worldling into! Luke xii. 19, 20. “Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;” little dreaming that death was just then at the door, to take away the cloth, guest, and all together; that the next hour his friends would be scrambling for his estate, the worms for his body, and the devils for his soul.

O how many have not only lost their souls, whilst they have been drudging for the world, but have sold their souls to purchase a little of the world! parted, by consent, with their best treasure for a very trifle, and yet think they have a great bargain of it! Surely, if poor sinners did but apprehend what they have lost, as well as what they have gained, their gains would yield them as little comfort as Judas’ money did, for which he sold both his soul and Saviour. Instead of those pleasing frolicks of wanton worldlings, what a cold shiver would run through all their bones and bowels, did they but understand what it is to lose a gracious God, and a precious soul, and both eternally, and irrecoverably!

The just God remains still to avenge and punish the sinner;

but the favour of God, that friendly look is gone; the peace of God, that heaven upon earth, is gone; the essence of the soul remains still, but its purity, peace, joy, hope, and happiness, these are gone; and these being gone, what can remain, but a tormenting, piercing sight of those things, for which you have sold them?

Infer. 3. Hence let us estimate the evil of sin, and see what a dreadful thing that is, which men commonly sport themselves with, and make so light of: it is not only a wrong and injury to the soul, but the loss and utter ruin of the soul for ever.

It is said, Prov. viii. 36. "He that sinneth against me, wrong-eth his own soul." And if this were all the mischief sin did us, it were bad enough; a wrong to the soul is a greater evil than the ruin of the body or estate, and all the outward enjoyments of this life can be; but to lose the precious soul, and destroy it to all eternity, O what can estimate such a loss! Now the result and last effect of sin is death, the death of the precious soul. Rom. vi. 21. "The end of those things is death." So Ezek. xviii. 4. "The soul that sinneth shall die."

Sin doth not destroy the being of the soul by *annihilation*, but it doth that which the damned shall find, and acknowledge to be much worse; it cuts off the soul from God, and deprives it of all its felicity, joy, and pleasure, which consists in the enjoyment of him. Such is the dolefulness and fearfulness of this result and issue of sin, that when God himself speaks of it, he puts on a passion, and speaks of it with the most feeling concernment. Ezek. xxxiii. 11. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked: Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? q. d. Why will you wilfully cast away your own souls? Why will you choose the pleasures of sin for a season, at the price of my wrath and fury poured out for ever? O think of this, you that make so light a matter of committing sin! We pity those, who, in the depth of melancholy or desperation, lay violent hands upon themselves, and in a desperate mood, cut their own throats; but certainly for a man to murder his own soul, is an act of wickedness as much beyond it, as the value of the soul is above that of the body.

Inf. 4. What an invaluable mercy is Jesus Christ to the world, who came on purpose to seek and to save such as were lost?

In Adam all were shipwrecked and cast away: Christ is the plank of mercy, let down from heaven to save some. The loss of souls by the fall, had been as irrecoverable as the loss of the fallen angels, had not God, in a way above all human thoughts and counsels, contrived the method of their redemption. It is astonish-

ing to consider the admirable harmony and glorious triumph of all the divine attributes, in this great project of heaven, for the recovery of lost souls. It is the "wonder of angels," 1 Pet. i. 12. the "great mystery of godliness," 1 Tim. iii. 16. the matter and subject of the triumphant song of redeemed saints, Rev. i. 5. and well it may, when we consider a more noble species of creatures finally lost, and no Mediator of reconciliation appointed betwixt God and them: this is to save an earthen pitcher, whilst the vessel of gold is let fall, and no hand is stretched out to save it.

But what is most astonishing, is, that so great a person as the Son of God, should come himself from the Father's bosom, to save us, by putting himself into our room and stead, being made a curse for us, Gal. iii. 13. He leaves the bosom of his Father, and all the ineffable delights of heaven, disrobes himself of his glory, and is found in fashion as a man, yea, becomes a worm, and no man; submits to the lowest step and degree of abasement, to save lost sinners. What a low stoop doth Christ make in his humiliation to catch the souls of poor sinners out of hell! Herein was love, that God sent his own Son, "to be the propitiation of our sins," 1 John iv. 10. and "God so loved the world," John iii. 16. at this rate he was content to save lost sinners.

How seasonable was this work of mercy, both in its general exhibition to the world, in the incarnation of Christ, and in his particular application of it to the soul of every lost sinner, by the Spirit! When he was first exhibited to the world, he found them all lost sheep gone astray, every one turning to his own way, Isa. liii. 6. he speaks of our lost estate by nature, both collectively, or in general: "we all went astray:" and distributively, or in particular, "Every one turned to his own way;" and in the fulness of time a Saviour appeared.

And how seasonable was it, in its particular application? How securely were we wandering onwards in the paths of destruction, fearing no danger, when he graciously opened our eyes by conviction, and pulled us back by heart-turning grace! No mercy like this: it is an astonishing act of grace. It stands alone!

Inf. 5. If there be so many ways to hell, and so few that escape it, how are all concerned to strive, to the utmost, in order to their own salvation?

In Luke xiii. 23. a certain person proposed a curious question to Christ; "Lord, are there few that be saved?" He saw a multitude flocking to Christ, and thronging with great zeal to hear him; and he could not conceive but heaven must fill proportionably to the numbers he saw in the way thither. But Christ's answer, ver. 24. at once rebukes the curiosity of the questionist, fully resolves the question propounded, and sets home his own duty and greatest

concernment upon him. It rebukes his curiosity, and is, as if he should say,—Be the number of the saved more or less, what is that to thee? Strive thou to be one of them. It fully solves the question propounded, by distinguishing those that attend upon the means of salvation, into Seekers and Strivers. In the first respect there are many, who by a cheap and easy profession, seek heaven; but take them under the notion of strivers, i. e. persons heartily engaged in religion, and who make it their business, then they will shrink up into a small number; and he presseth home his great business, and concern upon him, *Strive to enter in at the strait gate.*

By *gate* understand whatsoever is introductive to blessedness and salvation; by the epithet *strait*, understand the difficulties and severities attending religion; all that suffering and self-denial, which those that are bound for heaven should reckon upon, and expect: and by *striving*, understand the diligent and constant use of all those means and duties, how hard, irksome, and costly soever they are. The word *αγωνίζεσθαι* hath a deep sense and emphasis, and imports striving, even to an agony; and this duty is enforced two ways upon him, and every man else: First, by the indisputable sovereignty of Christ, from whom the command comes; and also from the deep interest and concern every soul hath in the commanded duty. It is not only a simple compliance with the will of God, but what also involves our own salvation and eternal happiness in it: our great duty, and our greatest interest are twisted together in this command; your eternal happiness depends upon the success of it. A man is not crowned except he strive lawfully, i. e. successfully and prevalently. O therefore, so run, so strive, that ye may obtain! if you have any value for your souls, if you would not be miserable to eternity, strive, strive! Believe it, you would find that the assurance of salvation drops not down from heaven in a night-dream, as the Turks fable their Alcoran to have done in that *lail-ato hazili*, night of demission, as they call it; no, no; the righteous themselves are scarcely saved; many seek, but few find. Strive, therefore, as men and women that are heartily concerned for their own salvation; sit not, with folded arms, like so many heaps of stupidity and sloth, whilst the door of hope is yet open, and such a sweet voice from heaven calls to you, saying, Strive, souls, strive, if ever you expect to be partakers of the blessedness that is here to be enjoyed; strive to the utmost of your abilities and opportunities. Such an heaven is worth striving to obtain, such an hell is worth striving to escape, such an invaluable soul is worth striving to save.

I confess, heaven is not the purchase or reward of your striving: no soul shall boastingly say there, Is not this the glory which my

duties and diligence purchased for me? and yet, on the other side, it is as true, that without striving you shall never set foot there. Say not, it depends upon the pleasure of God, and not upon your diligence; for it is his declared will and pleasure, to bring men to glory in the way, though not for the sake of their own striving. As in the works of your civil calling, you know all the care, toil, and sweat of the husbandman, avails nothing of itself, except the sun and rain quicken and ripen the fruits of the earth; and yet no wise man will neglect ploughing and harrowing, sowing and weeding, because these labours avail not, without the influences of heaven, but waits for them in the way of his duty and diligence. Rational hope sets all the world to work. Do they plough in hope, and sow in hope, and will you not pray in hope, and hear in hope? You that know your souls to be hitherto strangers to Christ and the regenerating work of the Spirit; how is it that you take them not aside sometimes out of the distracting noise and hurries of the world, and thus bemoan them?

‘O my poor graceless, christless, miserable soul, how sad a case art thou in! Others have, but thou never feltest the burden of sin; thousands in the world are striving and labouring, searching and praying, to make their calling and election sure; whilst thou sittest still with folded hands, in a supine regardlessness of the misery that is hastening upon thee. Canst thou endure the devouring wrath of God? Canst thou dwell with everlasting burnings? Hast thou fancied a tolerable hell? Or, is it easy to perish? Why dost thou not cast thyself at the feet of Christ, and cry, as long as breath will last, Lord, pity a sinful, miserable, undone, and self-condemning soul? Lord, smite this rocky heart, subdue this stubborn will, heal and save an undone soul ready to perish: The characters of death are upon it, it must be changed or condemned, and that in a little time. Bowels of pity, hear the cry of a soul distressed, and ready to perish.

And you that do not understand the case and state your souls are in, have you never a bible near you? O turn to those places, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. where you will presently find the more obvious marks and characters God hath set upon the children of perdition; and if you find not yourself in that catalogue, among the unrighteous, fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, &c. then turn to John iii. 3. and solemnly ask thy own soul this question, Am I born again? Am I a new creature, or still in the same condition I was born in? What solid evidence of the new birth have I to rely upon, if I were now within a few grasps of death? Am not I the man or woman who lives in the very same sins which the word of God makes the symptoms and characters of damnation? And doth not my *conscience*

witness against me, that I am utterly void and destitute of all that saving grace, and a mere stranger to the regenerating work of the Spirit, without which there can be no well bottomed hope of salvation? And if so, are not the tokens of death upon me? Am not I a person marked out for misery? And shall I sit still in a state of so much danger, and not once strive to make an escape from the wrath to come? Is this vile body worth so much toil and labour to support and preserve it? And is not my soul worth as much care and diligence to secure it from the everlasting wrath of the great, just, and terrible God? O that the consideration of the wrath to come, the multitudes all the world over preparing as fuel for it, and the door of opportunity yet held open to souls by the hand of grace to escape that wrath, might prevail with thy heart, reader, to strive, and that to the uttermost, to secure thy precious soul from the impending ruin.

EPH. v. 16.

—*Redeeming the time (or opportunity) because the days are evil.*

TIME is deservedly reckoned among the most precious mercies of this life; and that which makes it so valuable are the commodious seasons and opportunities for salvation which are vouchsafed to us therein: opportunity is the golden spot of time, the sweet and beautiful flower, growing upon the stalk of time*. If time be a *ring* of gold, opportunity is the rich *diamond* that gives it both its value and glory. The apostle well knew the value of time; and seeing how prodigally it was wasted by the most, doth therefore in this place, earnestly press all men to redeem, save, and improve it with the utmost diligence. In this, and the former *verse*, we have,

1st, The duty enjoined, *Walk circumspectly.*

2dly, The *injunction* explained;

1. More generally, *Not as fools, but as wise.*

2. More particularly, *Redeeming the time.*

3. The exhortation strongly inforced with a powerful motive, *Because the days are evil.*

Among these particulars, my discourse is principally concerned about the redemption of time, or opportunities, which in this life are graciously vouchsafed us, in order to that which is to come: And here it will be needful to enquire,

* Καίρος αὐτοῦ χρόνος.