

SERMON IX.

Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence ; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.—VER. 8, 9.

THE Apostle's scope in this chapter is an enumeration of the grand particular blessings which we have in Christ ; which blessings are either such original blessings to which we are ordained from eternity, and shall enjoy in the end and issue of all, or they are such blessings as in the world were wrought for us in Christ, and are applied unto us in this life in and through Christ. There are *decreta finis*,—that is, of our journey's end, &c., that God means to bring us unto. Perfect holiness in the 4th verse ; adoption or glory, through being sons, in the 5th verse ; a perfect complacency of God for ever in us in his beloved Son, mentioned in the 6th verse, for the sake of his Son's person, and what he is in himself, the natural Son of God, and the beloved one of God, and communicated to us by our relation to him and union with him. There are likewise *decreta executionis*, the decrees of execution, or of the way to that end, heaven ; which are these that follow in the 7th, 8th, and 9th verses—redemption through Christ's blood, &c. And these benefits depended upon what moreover Christ wrought and did for us ; he redeemed us by his blood. And this he performed in this world ; and in respect to this work he is to be considered as Redeemer, and our persons considered by God the Father as sinners, children of wrath, &c. And here begin the benefits of application.

Remission of sins is the first, and is the foundation, and is put for the whole of justification, as his blood speaks his whole obedience and redemption in parts,—viz., the price as paid by Christ, and the benefits purchased, which are redemption, &c. Then, secondly, there is the work of vocation, our first conversion to God, and of faith and sanctification ;—the whole work, as it is imperfect from first, and wrought in us from first to last, which God hath begun to work, and will continue to perfect till the day of our death. And this is expressed by those words of the 8th verse, 'wherein he hath abounded in all wisdom and prudence.' He by these two words expresseth the chief and leading principles of sanctification wrought in us, and which comprehend in them the whole complex of the work of grace in this life wrought in us first and last. For the Apostle being to contract and crowd up these benefits into a compendium, he speaks *synecdoches*, and mentions parts for the whole of each kind, which he afterwards dilates upon in particulars.

I shall now repeat nothing more of what I delivered on the former verses. I come immediately to that which is the next benefit here before us ; his having 'abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence,' &c.

It is, as you will see by the opening of it, the blessing of conversion, and of our calling, and the working faith, and also our imperfect holiness, which God works in us here by the gospel. And he saith three things of it :—

I. HE SHEWETH YOU THE GREATNESS OF THE BLESSING ; he saith that God hath abounded in grace in bestowing it : in which grace it is he hath abounded.

II. YOU HAVE THE BLESSING ITSELF, and both the parts of it : both the inward calling, working ‘wisdom and prudence’ in us ; and the outward calling, ‘having made known the mystery of his will,’ &c., in the preaching of the gospel, and the revealing of it.

III. YOU HAVE THE CAUSE OF BOTH, and that is his good pleasure : ‘according to his good pleasure.’

IV. And then, fourthly, (for I may add that,) you have THE CAUSE OF THAT GOOD PLEASURE TOO : ‘which,’ saith he, ‘he had purposed in himself.’ So you have the division of these 8th and 9th verses.

Divines, you know, make two parts of our calling. There is *vocatio externa*, that is common to all men that hear the gospel, and to whom the mystery of the will of God is made known. But then there is an internal calling, a work upon the heart, whereby he doth work wisdom and prudence in us to embrace this word, and to lay hold upon this mystery, and give up our souls unto it.

And then for the inward calling, you know divines reduce it to two heads. First, *the working of faith* ; secondly, *the working of holiness, or change of heart and life*. All is reduced to these two, holiness and faith, as I shewed you out of the first verse of this chapter : there are the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. Now accordingly the Apostle hath two words here. Here is *wisdom*, which is the principle of faith ; and here is *prudence*, which, as I shall shew you, is the principle of sanctification, and is put for the whole work.

I. To begin first with that whereby he setteth out the *greatness of the blessing*—‘wherein he hath abounded toward us,’ ἐπερίσσευσεν. To open that word a little, ‘abounded.’ The word in the Greek is taken either to signify an abundance that one hath and hath received, taken *passively*, as I may so express it ; as when in Scripture we are said to ‘abound in grace,’ as in some places we are ; or else it is taken *actively*, as it implieth abounding in the giver, in the bestower, when one bestoweth out of abundance. As there is *plenitudo fontis*, and *plenitudo vasis*, a fulness in the fountain, and a fulness in the vessel ; both are said to be full, but the fountain is said to be full as that which communicateth, as that which bestoweth, which fills the vessel, and the vessel is said to be full as having received all from the fountain ; so we are said to abound in grace, when he has filled us with it. ‘Of his fulness,’ which is the fulness of the fountain, ‘we have received grace for grace,’ saith the Apostle, John i. 16. So now here is πλήρωμα *fontis*, and πλήρωμα *vasis*. Here is signified the abounding of the fountain, namely of God, as a fountain communicating ; and the abundance of the vessel, of us receiving. Now it is the abounding of the fountain that is here meant. And of that there are two meanings too, which I find in Scripture ; two significations or uses of the word.

First, It referreth to something abundantly or largely bestowed. When God doth largely or abundantly bestow, then he is said to abound ; or as they do translate it, 2 Cor. ix. 8, where the same word is used, ‘He is able to make all grace to abound towards you.’ The meaning is not, he abounded in wisdom by making wisdom abound in us ; for always when it is so taken it is joined with an accusative case, as it is there in that place of the Corinthians with πᾶσαν χάριν. But here it is not πᾶσαν σοφίαν, but ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ, not making grace abound ; but (which is the second meaning of the word or

phrase, 'in which God abounded') it doth not only import that God did cause wisdom, &c., to abound, but that he out of abundance of grace in himself bestoweth wisdom. And so I find it to be used Luke xv. 17, abounding in bread, in my father's house, says the prodigal. It is in the genitive case, as it is here; 'bread enough,' so we translate it: so here God aboundeth in his grace, and it is all one as to say his grace aboundeth; or as the English phrase, when we say one 'aboundeth in love,' it is all one as to say 'his love is abundant.'

So that the meaning of it in a word is thus (to gather it up for the weaker understandings :) that God out of abundance of grace in himself bestoweth upon us, in converting us, wisdom and knowledge, wisdom and prudence, faith and holiness, as you shall hear afterwards; and his scope is to magnify the riches of grace that is in God, in bestowing such benefits on us. His grace aboundeth in the doing of it. And so it is all one with what Paul saith of himself in 1 Tim. i. 14 (a parallel place to this.) Paul speaks there of his conversion, as he speaks here of the Ephesians', and every Christian's calling and conversion and works inherent in him. He saith here, 'wherein God abounded,' namely in grace. So he saith there, 'The grace of God was exceeding abundant toward me' (exceeding abundant, *ὑπερπεπληρόνασε*, it was over-full) 'with faith and love which is in Jesus Christ,' some way answerable to receive it. Here he reduceth the work of calling to two heads too, faith and love, faith and holiness, for love is the principle of holiness; and wisdom and prudence do, by a metonymy, or by a synecdoche rather, imply both these. So that that which Paul saith of his own calling there, the same he speaks of our calling here, and the one expresseth the other. There he saith the grace of God was over-full, it overflowed; so the word signifieth. And here his comparison is from a fountain. Grace gushed out from God's heart as a fountain, when he first bestowed saving wisdom and prudence, when he first converted them. This is the meaning of the words, 'wherein he hath abounded toward us.'

I should not have stayed so long upon the word but for the sake of some observations which this expression will afford.

Obs. 1.—When you would set a right value upon any blessing bestowed upon you, you are not to value it chiefly by the blessing itself bestowed, but by the grace in God out of which it comes. He doth not say here he gave abundance of wisdom and abundance of prudence, though all the quantity is noted here, but he saith he abounded in grace when he did it. The Apostle would have them set the value of this blessing upon the grace which was the fountain of it. 'Wherein,' saith he, or 'in which he hath abounded toward us.' My brethren, learn to value spiritual blessings and temporal blessings likewise, not by the things themselves, but by the love of God from which they come. A small blessing may be out of abundance of love. So in what we do for God, a cup of cold water, the widow's mite. God may abound in grace to thee in bestowing it, when the blessing is in the matter of it but little. What is the reason that many good souls, that have true grace wrought in their hearts, are so unthankful? They look to the grace wrought in them, and they see that there is but a little of that, and therefore they value all by what they find in themselves, by the blessing wrought: 'I find but little in me, if any at all.' And while thus they value the blessing by what they find in themselves, they prove unthankful to God. Whereas that little grace thou hast, that little faith, be it but as a grain of mustard-seed, it proceeds out of abundance of grace in God. 'Wherein he hath abounded toward us,' saith he here, in working the least beginning of true wisdom and

prudence in the least saint. God abounds infinitely in his love to thee, when thou hast but the least beginnings of grace in thee, as small at first as Nicodemus had.

If you mark Paul's expression in 1 Tim. i. 14, the place even now quoted, he doth not say that his faith and love in Christ were exceeding abundant. No, but saith he, the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant in bestowing faith and love upon me. He looks not to the quantity of his faith or his love, but he looks at the grace of both; and how doth he magnify that? He had said before two things of himself. First, saith he, 'I was a persecutor and injurious;' I hated the saints; there is the first. But, saith he, 'I did it ignorantly in unbelief;' I was an unbeliever, and I was a persecutor. Now, for God to work faith instead of unbelief, and love to the saints instead of persecution and hatred of them, in me, that was once an unbeliever and a persecutor, the grace of God was exceeding abundant herein. He looks not to the work wrought, but he looks to the grace that bestowed it, considering the circumstances of the condition he was in before.

Obs. 2.—Observe what thing it is that this big swelling word 'abounded,' overflowing, gushed out, as I may so say, is used about. What is it that he shewed abundance of grace in? It is the work of conversion, working in them wisdom and prudence, that is, faith and holiness; as you shall see by and by.

The observation, then, from thence is, That God sheweth abundance of mercy in converting of a man. It is an abundant grace he singleth out, that you see here eminently, and Paul, in that other place, said it was overfull; he was, saith he there, exceeding abundant, speaking of his conversion.

To give you another scripture for it, 1 Pet. i. 3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath'—done what for us?—'begotten us again.' There is an abundance of mercy eminently above all other works in a man shewed in his conversion.

I might enlarge upon this, but I will only give you one reason, and so pass from it. It is the fundamental mercy to all grace and glory. It is the first appearing of the love of God to a man: Tit. iii. 4, 5, 'After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.' God's love is like a river or a spring that runs under-ground, and hath done so from eternity. Where breaks it up first? Where bubbleth it first? (as the word in the text signifieth; it is a similitude I have used before, but the words in the text will bear it.) Where doth this fountain begin to bubble up or issue forth? When a man is first called, then that love that hath run from everlasting under-ground, and through the heart of Christ upon the cross, breaks out in a man's own heart too. And it is the fundamental mercy of all grace and glory whatsoever.

My brethren, the word here used doth compare God to a full fountain, which was restrained till the fulness of time came, when he would break forth in love to a man. Oh! when shall it once be? saith he. And when the time comes, his love and mercy gush out upon a man, when he calls and converts him. This is the meaning of the word in the Greek. It was the time of his espousals, a time of love. So much for the first thing in the text; that whereby he sets out the greatness of this blessing, 'wherein he hath abounded toward us.'

II. I come, secondly, to *the blessing itself*; wherein, as I told you, there

are two parts. Here is first the internal part, the work of grace upon the heart, expressed here by *wisdom* and *prudence*. And here is the external calling, in the 9th verse, 'making known the mystery of his will,' &c.

He expresseth conversion, and the whole work inherently wrought in us, by the making of a man wise. It is usual in the Scriptures, and you may oft-times meet with it: Ps. xix. 7, 'converting the soul—making wise the simple;' Prov. ii. 10, the beginning of conversion, and so all along, the increase of all grace to the end, is expressed by wisdom entering into a man's heart, 'If wisdom enter into thy heart,' and so goes on to do more and more: not into thy head only,—a man may have all that, and be a fool in the end, —but when it entereth into the heart, and draws all the affections after it, and along with it, 'when knowledge is pleasant to thy soul,' then a man is converted; when God breaks open a man's heart, and makes wisdom fall in, enter in, and make a man wise.

Wisdom.—It is taken sometimes for the doctrine of the gospel, in which a stupendous divine wisdom is to be seen and adored: 1 Cor. ii. 7, 'We speak,' saith he, 'the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom,' &c. Speaking of the doctrine of the gospel, he calls it the wisdom, and the hidden wisdom of God.

Or else, wisdom is taken for the gift of saving grace, working a principle in the soul, whereby our souls are made able to take in all the truths of the gospel effectually. And so it is taken in this very chapter, ver. 17, for the grace of wisdom in the knowledge of Christ, and to be wise to salvation. He prays there that they 'may have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ;' that is, to have the Holy Ghost working wisdom in them, and giving a principle to be capable of all the spiritual saving truths that discover the knowledge of Christ, and to enlighten that principle, to take them in and wisely to apply them to themselves; in one word, to be wise unto salvation.

Some have thought that in 1 Cor. i. 30, Christ is said to be made, in this sense, 'wisdom' to us, as particularly intending the grace of graces, namely the principle of faith,—now, it is certain it is a distinct thing from sanctification and justification, as there the apostle useth it,—and that it is made thus distinct from the other, and set first, because thereby we are enabled to take in all the spiritual truths of the gospel, so as to have a man's soul saved. Christ is made wisdom to us when the soul is humbled, emptied of itself; and when a man comes to himself, his eyes are enlightened to behold, and he is made wise to lay hold upon, that offer of mercy made to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we must not exclude that objective wisdom—that is, all that wisdom which God in the doctrine of the gospel contrived and prepared, which is called 'the wisdom of God in a mystery'—with which the apostle in that chapter had outfaced the Greeks that were so for wisdom; that, in comparison of which all the wisdom in this world, civil, moral, natural, he says, is foolishness and comes to nought, and which the doctrine of Christ utterly outshined. And so I judge that in that place, 1 Cor. i. 30, both this inherent spiritual wisdom in us, and objective wisdom which is in our Christ, as revealed in the gospel, are meant.

Now if you ask, which of the two are meant here, whether wisdom taken for the doctrine of the gospel, or for the gift of God working faith in the heart? I answer you, as I have said, it is taken for the *gift of wisdom* wrought in a man's soul, whereby he applies all the truths of the gospel and wisdom of the gospel to himself. For—

First, So it is taken plainly in the 17th verse, where he calls it the 'Spirit of wisdom and revelation,' by the Holy Ghost working wisdom in a man, and then revealing to that new eye of wisdom spiritual truths.

Then, secondly, it is taken rather for the *gift of wisdom* bestowed upon us, than for the *doctrine of wisdom* revealed in the gospel, because that follows in the 9th verse, 'having made known to us the mystery of his will;' therein the doctrine of wisdom is revealed. Therefore, when he speaks of wisdom and prudence in this 8th verse, he meaneth a heart made wise and prudent, the work of wisdom in a man's soul.

And then again, thirdly, there is this reason why it is meant of the gift of wisdom and of faith wrought in us, by that parallel place, and indeed almost parallel epistle, Col. i. 9, where the apostle prays that they may be 'filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;' and that word, 'spiritual understanding,' puts it out of doubt that the knowledge of spirituals within us is meant.

Fourthly, And then that it is particularly meant faith, a fourth reason for that is this: that when the apostle comes to dilate this general head of the work of God, thus here expressed by 'wisdom,' &c., inherent in us, into diverse particular works wrought in them, which he doth in ver. 11-13, both to Jew and Gentile, he enumerates and instanceth in their believing on Christ. 'In whom,' saith he, 'we have obtained an inheritance'—viz., the Jews—'who first trusted in Christ.' The like saith the 12th verse. Then coming to the Gentiles, 'In whom,' saith he, 'ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.' So that his scope is to lay open the grace of faith and spiritual knowledge.

Now, brethren, to shew you how wisdom and prudence do differ, that is the second thing I must make good; for here are two things mentioned, 'He hath abounded toward us in wisdom and prudence.'

To open this, I shall difference them unto you by their objects. You know there are two sorts of things revealed; the first are *Credenda*, as we call them, things to be believed, all evangelical truths, the mysteries of salvation, the revelation of God's free grace, and of Christ, and of all he hath done and is made to us. Secondly, There are *Agenda*, things to be done and practised by us; that strictness and holiness of heart and life which they that do believe are to take up. Into these two is the whole will of God divided; it consists either in things to be believed by us, or in things to be done by us. It is that division the apostle makes, 1 Tim. i. 19, 'Holding faith and a good conscience.' By 'faith' he means the doctrine of faith; all things that are delivered to us to believe, we are to hold these fast. And by a 'good conscience' he means, by a *metonymy*, holiness and obedience, the things we know we ought to do, whereof a good conscience is the principle. Now then, as all things in the Word are reduced to these two heads, so all the works of grace upon a Christian's heart are reduced to two heads:—

First, A principle of wisdom, to take in and believe and see the worth and excellency, as by faith we do, of things that are to be believed by us, and which God revealeth for our salvation. And—

Secondly, To have a principle of prudence, savingly, spiritually, and effectually to see that holiness and obedience we owe to God, if we believe, and if we be saved, and so to see them as to have the heart taken with them. And that is prudence.

First, Wisdom is that gift of knowledge or faith whereby we believe all spiritual truths that are to be believed, and our hearts are affected with the goodness of them. For, brethren, therein lies wisdom, to see the excellency

of a thing, and to be taken with it, and to choose it. A man is wise when he is wise for himself, as it is said, Prov. ix. 12; when a man knows what is good for him. That same merchant by whom and by whose carriage the conversion of a sinner is expressed to us, was a wise merchant; for he saw a pearl of great value, and he had the wisdom to like it, and to sell all he had for it; and this was by faith wrought, as I shall shew you by and by. When wisdom enters into the heart and becomes pleasant unto a man, as it is said, Prov. ii. 10,—takes the whole man,—when a man sees by faith those spiritual things so really as his whole heart is drawn after them, he chooseth them as excellent for him; this is wisdom. You have it expressed by the Apostle, in Phil. i. 9, 10, for he useth several expressions in several epistles, as his manner is, but intends one and the same thing. He prays, ‘that their love may abound in knowledge and in all judgment, that they might approve the things that are excellent.’ Where you have such a knowledge as works a love to the things known, and an approving of the excellency of them, this is spiritual knowledge, this is wisdom; for *ἐπίγνωσις*, the chiefest part of wisdom, as Aristotle saith well of it, is to discern what is good, and to pitch upon it and choose it. Now, when a man sees all the truths of the gospel and the excellencies of them spiritually, so as all his heart is taken with them, and they become pleasant to his soul, not the knowledge of them only, but the thing; when they are as the only pearl for which he sells all; then is a man made ‘wise to salvation’—you have the expression, 2 Tim. iii. 15. When a man is made wise to save his own soul, sees the things of the gospel so as he is taken with them, and hath the wit never to leave them after, this is the first thing that is wrought.

Now, my brethren, it is faith that doth enable you thus to see the excellency of spiritual things, to choose them, to embrace them, and never to depart from them. Therefore faith is truly called wisdom here. I will give you a scripture in which you shall have two instances of it, to name no more. It is in Heb. xi. 13, 24. At the 13th verse, ‘These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but seeing them [by faith] afar off, [for that is the meaning,] they were persuaded of them, [they believed the truth of them,] and they embraced them,’ they laid hold upon them as good for them. This faith makes you to do, to see all the spiritual things in the Word really, and to embrace them as good for you. And the other instance is that of Moses, ver. 24, ‘By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.’ Here faith made him wise. He saw what was the best bargain; it made him put a value upon the true riches; it made him to leave all the world, to refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, or whatsoever preferment else he had at court, and to choose affliction rather with the people of God, because by faith he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. So that now, to have that wisdom as to see spiritual things, the real nature of them, to set a value upon them, to approve the excellency of them, to be taken with them more than with all the things of the world, and he hath that light and knowledge of them begotten in his heart which he can never sell away again, but it works his heart off from all things else,—this man is a wise man; and this is wrought in your hearts by faith. This is the first thing.

Secondly, Prudence is that principle of wisdom that doth change the heart; which, as faith looks out to the truths of the gospel, and the promises

of the gospel, to Christ and to God, and free grace, and the like ; so this spiritual prudence looks out to all that is a man's duty, that God requires of him again,—to holiness, to obedience, to the whole law of God, to the whole will of God ; and a man's heart is taken with them too, and that man whose heart is drawn by them, through seeing the excellency of them in his judgment, is a wise man, is a prudent man. What is it that turns a man's heart to righteousness and holiness ? It is a spiritual knowledge of what holiness is, and what that obedience is that we ought to perform to the Lord. I will quote you one or two places for it : Luke i. 17, where the very same word is used that is used here. He tells us there that the end of John's ministry was to turn men ; to what ? 'The hearts of the fathers to the children,' that is the first that respecteth matters of faith. The Pharisees had in their doctrine led many from the gospel and from the faith of Abraham, and the children of Israel did not believe as their fathers did. He turns them to their fathers, to believe as Abraham did, and not as the Pharisees taught them. And then it follows, 'and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,' of the righteous. It is the same word in the original that is translated here for prudence in my text. That wisdom that doth make a man righteous, that changeth his heart, makes him take in all that holy and righteous law of God, see an excellency in it, that it is right in all things, as the prophet David speaks, Ps. cxix. ; this is *prudence*. And this is the second thing wherein conversion lies : to make a man a prudent man, prudent with the prudence of the just ; to make a man righteous, to make a man just, to make a man holy. It is a practical skill, as I may so call it, which God imprints upon a man's understanding, that frames the heart and makes him wise to do good. You read in Jer. iv. 22, where the prophet, speaking of wicked men, saith, 'They are wise to do evil,' they are wise enough there ; 'but to do good they have no knowledge.' Now to have an understanding to do good, to have such an understanding as changeth a man's heart and makes it conformable to the law ; this is *prudence*. And it consists in two things, that I may open it unto you :—

First, It consists in enabling a man to take in all the rules of holiness, or the more fundamental rules of holiness, in a spiritual manner, to know the rule spiritually. A man's heart must be changed to do that. The Apostle prays, Rom. xii. 2, that they may be 'renewed in their minds,' (to be changed there, is to have their minds turned ;) to what end ? 'That you may approve,' saith he, 'of that good and acceptable will of God ;' to take in the will of God, or any part of it, in the spiritualness of it, to approve it in the excellency of it, and to esteem it right in all things. My brethren, to know the rule spiritually, is from spiritual prudence ; it is from grace to say the law is holy, spiritual, good. The carnal part of the law, carnal men say it is good. But to say of the spiritual, the holy part of the law that requires the whole heart to be obedient to God,—as such principles as these, to lie in no known sin, to aim at the glory of God more than at a man's self, and the like,—for a man to take in such principles as these, and to approve them from his very soul, this is wisdom, this is prudence, this is part of the prudence of the just that makes a man righteous.

Again, in the second place, it imports a skill that God imprints upon the mind of a man to manage his whole man, to do according to what he knows. 'We know not how to pray as we ought.' The Holy Ghost comes and imprints a skill upon a man's heart, and teacheth him how to pray acceptably to God, which no man in the world can do. To make an acceptable prayer to God, is as much as to make a world ; to have the skill of it, to have the knack of

it, as I may call it, to have the wisdom in the performance of any holy duty; for there is a skill, a wisdom that belongs to the performance of holy duties. When you take an apprentice you teach him two things; you teach him the rules of your trade, but when he hath learnt the rules he must by use get a skill in his fancy to enable him to work. Now, that which men get by time and use, which you call habits, that doth God imprint in every godly man's heart when he first turns him. As he teacheth him the rules, so he imprints the habit of skill, a spiritual wisdom to manage his heart. To be able to pray, to believe, to do all things acceptably, this is prudence, this is that holy skill, for God undertakes to teach us; he takes no apprentice but he teacheth him his trade. This is my covenant, saith he, 'they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest; they shall be all taught of God.' It is part of our indenture and his indenture with us, as Ps. xxv. 12. He imprints a holy skill in the heart, that guides a man's feet into the way of peace, as the expression is, Luke i. 79.

It is, my brethren, expounded in that parallel place I quoted but now, Col. i. 9, 10. He prays that they may be filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding. For what end? 'That they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, being fruitful in every good work.' Now, to have that skill as shall so guide and frame the heart to the law and will of God, that a man shall be able to walk worthy to well-pleasing, to do that which is acceptable to God in some measure, this is this spiritual prudence which is put for all sanctification, as wisdom is put for faith. So that here you have the two parts of conversion: here is wisdom, which is put for faith; here is prudence, which is put for that principle of sanctification which doth change and turn the whole man, make it obedient to the will and law of God.

And now I have opened it, I will cast in but this. Here you see four particular blessings, for now I shall so rank them in ver. 7, 8: here is redemption, 'in whom we have redemption through his blood;' here is justification, or forgiveness of sins, that is a second; here is wisdom, which is put for faith, believing spiritual truths revealed in the doctrine of the gospel; here is prudence, which is put for that principle of light which changeth a man's heart, and makes him holy, and sanctifies him, and so it is put for sanctification. Well, then, here you have the same four blessings which Christ is made to us, reckoned up, 1 Cor. i. 30, 'Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom,' there is one; 2. 'Righteousness,' there is justification, or forgiveness of sins; 3. Here is 'sanctification,' which prudence is put for; and, 4. 'Redemption.' And so I have done with the opening of the words.

You will ask me now, why doth the apostle express the work of grace, faith and sanctification, by wisdom and prudence?

One reason is this, because he useth several phrases in several epistles. Sometimes he calls it spiritual 'wisdom and knowledge,' sometimes 'wisdom and prudence,' sometimes he calls it 'sense,' *αἰσθησις*, as I remember he expresseth sanctification; so that light that sanctifieth a man is a spiritual sense, whereby a man tasteth the goodness of spiritual things; so he calls it in the Philippians, as the other is in the Colossians. This is one reason; he useth several expressions in several epistles.

Secondly, he wrote to the Grecians, and to the Asiatics, to those at Ephesus, who were all for wisdom, they liked nothing but what had wisdom in it. The Jews' humour was to seek for a sign, the Greeks were for wisdom, and therefore they refused the gospel, because to them it was foolishness, it had

no wisdom in it. Saith the apostle, Here is wisdom ; seeing you prize wisdom so much, I will speak to you according to your own desires. Mark what a blessing God hath bestowed upon you ; he hath made you wise to salvation, he hath made you able to keep the law, and to obey the will of God ; which prudence doth change your hearts, saith he ; therefore, he expresseth sanctification by wisdom and prudence. He speaks to them in their own language.

A third reason is this, because the truth is that the work of grace lies in working upon the understanding of a man ; it lies in working spiritual knowledge in a man ; however men little think of it, it is a light let into the heart that saveth a man, a different light from that wicked men have. Eph. iv. 22, he bids them 'put off the old man, and put on the new.' How must they do that ? 'Be renewed,' saith he, 'in the spirit of your mind.' If the spirit of a man's mind, if the understanding be renewed, it changeth the whole man presently. Therefore, because the main of the work of grace, or at least the first of it, lies in working upon or renewing the mind, therefore it is expressed here by wisdom and prudence. You have the like, Col. iii. 10. The image of God is renewed ; it is renewed in or by knowledge. God when he doth frame and paint his image upon the heart, what doth he ? He lets it in by the understanding, openeth a man's eye to see spiritually what true holiness is, and what the love of God is, and how a man must aim at the glory of God ; and with this light let into the mind and understanding, the heart being taken with it, the image of God is framed in men's spirits. Therefore it is expressed by *wisdom* and *prudence*.

But here is one particle yet more to be explained, 'all wisdom.' Do we receive all wisdom and prudence when we are turned unto God ?

The meaning therefore of that is this : it is taken, first, for all kinds, for all sorts, something of everything, as we use to say. They are made wise to believe truths, and they are made wise to do what they know ; their duties in their callings, their duties in their relations. There are several parts of the will and mind of God which God instructs a man in, so far forth as it is necessary for him to know to be saved. 1 John ii. 20, it is said, the Spirit teacheth us 'all things.' What is the meaning of that 'all things ?' Why, all things necessary to salvation, all things that go to save a man ; and so the poorest soul that is knoweth all things, hath all wisdom and prudence in him. He hath all necessary knowledge to save his soul if God should call him presently ; therefore it is called all wisdom and prudence.

And, in the second place, it is called all wisdom and prudence for the excellency of it ; it is instead of all wisdom, and better than all wisdom else, as, ver. 10, he calls the saints 'all things in heaven and in earth.' Why, there are more things in heaven and in earth besides them ? Yea, but they are worth them all ; God looks upon none else, cares for none else ; they are his all, as if there were no other thing. So here, 'all wisdom and prudence,' because this is instead of all, it is worth all ; this is the whole man, as the expression is, Eccles. xii. 13. For whatsoever else is in a man, whatsoever wisdom and knowledge he hath else, it is worth nothing ; he that hath this hath enough, he hath all.

Then, thirdly, take in all believers, whom he speaks of here collectively, and they have all wisdom and prudence amongst them. The Apostle speaks here of himself and of the rest of the apostles, and of all that are called by the gospel. He speaks generally and collectively of all saints ; they have amongst them received all wisdom and prudence ; it is in the pack of them.

And then in Christ there are all treasures of wisdom and knowledge laid up for us, and we are complete in him ; so saith the apostle, Col. ii.

And all wisdom and knowledge is hid in this word, and if thou hast grace, thou hast a principle to understand it savingly more or less ; if thou wilt dig for wisdom, thou hast a principle of wisdom which a wicked man wants ; thou hast all wisdom and knowledge *in semine*. And though we know but in part, yet in Christ is hid all wisdom for us, and all the wisdom that is in Christ is made ours too, for our good ; and we shall one day know it all, that is more. This wisdom and prudence will bring thee to know all the treasures that are in Christ, and therefore God hath abounded to thee, *in semine*, in all wisdom and prudence when first he turns thee.

All the gifts of the apostles and prophets, they are all ours, all thine when thou art once called ; therefore God hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.

And then, lastly, and, it may be, chief of all. The apostle speaks of it in relation to them under the Old Testament ; they received truths but by piecemeal, at 'sundry times,' as the expression is, Heb. i., now one and then another. But now, under the gospel, God hath hidden nothing, he hath unlocked all ; therefore the least in the kingdom of heaven is said to be greater than John the Baptist, the least saint knows more than John Baptist did. So, comparatively to those under the Old Testament, God hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and knowledge. And so much for the opening of the words.

I will come now to gather some observations from them (for I see I cannot instance in all I meant.) The first observation is this :—

Obs. 1.—A godly man only is a wise man. He that is turned to God, he that is made wise to save his own soul, he only is a wise man, and all the rest of the world are fools ; because let them seek for whatsoever excellency they will, yet they lose their souls in the end. 'Thou fool,' saith Christ,—he thought himself a wise man to get riches,—'thou fool,' saith he, 'where will thy soul be to-night?' He was a fool for his labour. A man that knows how to believe savingly, and that is wise for his soul, that man is only the wise man. Other men are wise in their generation, as Christ distinguisheth it ; they are wise in their kind ; take them in the world, and there they are wise indeed, and wiser than the children of light. But, saith the apostle, God hath chosen the fools of the world to confound the wise ; he did it on purpose, it was his plot. The chiefest thing the wise ones of the world brag of is their wisdom. God hath taken out fools, that have less understanding, makes them able to save their souls ; and at the latter day, who is the fool then ? Thus he confounds all the wise ones in the world. They are only wise that are wise to salvation.

I will give you a scripture for it. It is in Job xxviii. 28, 'Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom ; and to depart from evil is understanding.' That is the understanding, the only understanding ; and if men be wise never so much in anything else, they are fools.

Obs. 2.—Whomsoever God saveth, he doth give them so much knowledge in spiritual things as shall make them wise. Let them be never so ignorant before, they that are come to years of discretion, they shall be wise to save their souls. Do but observe it ; men that had but little wit in them before, when they are turned they will speak of faith and of Christ and of the mysteries of salvation exceeding strongly and wisely. What is the reason of it ? When God is master and teacheth a man, how soon is he learned whom he

teacheth! No such schoolmaster as God is; he aboundeth toward a man in wisdom and prudence, so that a man hath abundance of knowledge the first day almost. You shall see it in many poor men that are turned to God. I will give you but a scripture for it, and so pass from it. Isa. xxxv. 8: the prophet speaks there of the times of the gospel, when Christ was to preach the word, as appears by the former verses. He tells us there that Christ is 'a way, and a highway,' that way that leads to life, 'and it shall be called, The way of holiness,' (which men miscall, and call by a thousand other nicknames, but that is the true name of it, The way of holiness,) 'and the unclean shall not pass over it.' Take an ungodly man, he shall never hit on the way, let him be never so wise; for so the opposition implies, as you shall see by and by. For whom, then, shall this way be? 'It shall be for the wayfaring men; though fools, they shall not err in it.' Art thou a wayfaring soul that art a-going to heaven, and hast a mind to go to heaven? And art thou simple, hath God given thee a heart to desire to be saved and to seek after Christ? Take the greatest doctor in the world; if wicked, he shall not find out the way that thou shalt find. Another man, a fool, shall find it; he shall not err in it, because God, whomsoever he doth save, himself is the master, and teacheth them this wisdom. And so much for that 8th verse; I will speak a little of the 9th, and so I will have done.

Ver. 9, *Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, &c.*

Here, as I told you, he comes to external calling, the making known to us 'the mystery of his will,' whereby he doth work spiritual knowledge and understanding in a man. Now, to open this a little.

What is meant by making known? You all know that he did it by the preaching of the apostles; he doth it now by the preaching of the word, and by the Scriptures opened to you, whereby all that hear it and know it are called.

But what is meant by 'the mystery of his will?' for this is the only, the chief hard thing here.

Some men do take it thus, to shew the difference between the knowledge of believers and others. Others may know the will of God, they say, but there is a mystery in the will of God which only godly men know, and God reveals it to them. As in Col. i. 27, 'To whom God would make known'—speaking of the saints, as you shall see by comparing the 25th and 26th verses together—'the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints; to whom he hath made known the riches of the glory of this mystery.' My brethren, the mystery of God's will, and the riches and the glory of it, the saints only know.

But I rather think that the aim of it here, (though this be a truth, and I shall have occasion to mention it by and by,)—yet I think the main thing intended here is not to express the difference of wicked men's knowledge of the gospel, and godly men's. But it is taken for the substance of the gospel itself. The doctrine of the gospel is called the mystery of God's will, 1 Tim. iii. 16, 'Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh.' The doctrine of salvation by Christ was a great mystery.

Here I must open two things to you:—

1. *Why it is called a mystery.*
2. *Why the mystery of his will.*

First, Why it is called a *mystery*. A mystery is that which is a secret hidden, a thing unknown, which could no way have been known unless it had been revealed by him that knew it. A mystery is properly a thing

hidden, 1 Cor. ii. 7, 'We preach the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world.' Therefore it is a mystery, because it is hidden. So a secret unknown is called a mystery in 1 Cor. xv. 51, 'Behold, I shew you a mystery.' What is that? 'We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.' Some men shall not die at the latter day. Who knew this before? It was a thing unknown, it is not in all the prophets, nor in all the Old Testament; it is a thing we had not known, had not Paul told it us; it was a mystery.

Now to come to the gospel, it is a hidden mystery, the most hidden secret that ever was. It was hid where all the world could not have found it; no, all the wit of men and angels could not have found it where it was hid. It was hid in God's breast, in God's heart, 'hid in God.' You shall see the very expression in Eph. iii. 9, 'To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.' If you will know, saith he, in what field it lay, it was hidden in God.

Hid from whom?

First, From all the wise men in the world; they could never have found it out. Those that search into mysteries of state, and would know *arcana imperii*, think they are wise men, and that they know great matters. What saith the Apostle? 1 Cor. ii. 8, 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which none of the princes of this world knew.' They that have all secrets in their heads, and know how to govern states and kingdoms, none of them all knew this, nor could ever have known it.

Nay, secondly, the gospel was hid from all the saints in the Old Testament, as now it is revealed. In Col. i. 26, the Apostle saith it was hidden from 'ages and generations,' from all the generations past; hid from the beginning of the world, as you have it, Eph. iii. 10. You shall find in 1 Pet. i. 10, 11, that the very prophets that wrote the Scripture did not fully understand what themselves wrote in all things concerning the gospel. 'Of which salvation,' saith he, 'the prophets have inquired and searched diligently,'—they inquired by prayer, and searched diligently by study of their own writings,—'who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you.' They had them in their writings indeed, but they ministered them to us, and that was the chief answer they could get upon all their prayers and study.

Lastly, It was hidden from the angels. The angels were near God, but they were not in his bosom; they were his favourites, indeed, they were courtiers, they stood round about him, but they knew none of it. No, God hid it from them. Not a creature knew it, not an angel in heaven knew it, as we now know it. Nay, the churches know it before the angels know it, and the angels do learn of the churches. That is part of the hiding mentioned, Eph. iii. 10: it was hidden in God, 'to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places'—that is, to angels—'might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.' They learned the gospel of the Church; therefore they come to hear sermons. Brethren, the churches are full of angels, they love to hear the gospel preached; and you know Peter tells us they pry, they bow down their necks; it is in 1 Pet. i. 12, 'which things the angels desire to look into.'

Thus the hidden gospel is a mystery so hidden as none could have known

it. Adam knew the law; it was written in his heart. We have principles of the knowledge of the law in our consciences; when we hear the law preached, we have a principle in our own consciences within us that goes along with what we hear, and answers to it; we cannot deny it. But there is not the least footstep of the gospel in the wisdom of all the men in the world: there is nothing in the heart of man to answer to it. If the gospel be revealed, God must create light. When it was first discovered, he created light in their hearts to whom it was revealed. We were nothing but darkness. Saith the Apostle of himself as well as others, 2 Cor. iv. 6, 'God, that commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.' God must bring in a light, saith he, or else not we nor any of the apostles could ever have found it out.

What is the reason of this?

Because it is the 'mystery of God's will,' which reason we have in the text. Who could have known that God would ever have saved sinners? Who could ever have thought it? He had said, he had pronounced it as his will, it was gone out of his mouth, 'In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die the death.' Here was a riddle now for all the angels in heaven. How could they have known the mystery of God's will, that he would save sinners? Adam stood trembling, poor man, and the devil thought all cocksure. I shall damn them, thought he, as sure as I have damned myself. And all the angels stood mute, till God himself came and makes the promise to us. Rom. xi. 32, saith the Apostle, 'God hath shut up all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.' That God should let man sin, and permit sin to spoil his creature, and when he had done, should mean to save it, and have mercy upon those that are shut up under unbelief,—'O the depth,' saith he, 'of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!' so it follows in the next words, 'how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! Who hath known the mind of God? or who hath been his counsellor?' Who could ever have known this, had not God revealed it, that this was his will? No counsellor, my brethren, but one; that is 'the wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God,' as he is called, Isa. ix. 6. Therefore in John i. 18, where the Apostle speaking of the gospel of grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, as the law came by Moses, (he speaks of the revelation of this gospel in opposition to the law;) saith he, 'No man hath seen God at any time,' that is, hath known the mind of God. That is meant by seeing God there, it is a Jewish proverb of knowing God's mind. 'The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared it.' None in the world could have declared this will and mind of God, but only He that was in his bosom, that was familiar with him, his only Son; therefore he came down from heaven, and first broached the gospel: 'which was first preached by the Lord himself,' saith the Apostle, Heb. ii. 3.

Moses, my brethren,—St John speaks of him in the verses before, and he saith the law was given by Moses,—Moses was very intimate with God; he 'saw God face to face,' so the expression is, and God shewed him his glory. 'The law,' saith he, 'was given by Moses;' yea, 'but grace and truth,' the gospel, 'came by Jesus Christ.' Though Moses saw God face to face, he was not in his bosom, as Jesus Christ only was; and he only could reveal it, he only knew this mystery and mind of God.

I should likewise shew you that it is a mystery for the depth that is in it; but I shall let that pass. For an observation—

Obs. 1.—*Let all that live under the gospel, and saints especially, acknowledge what an infinite favour of God it is to know this mystery of his will, as you do ; that God will save sinners, and that you see the reason of it too.* For it is brought down to you in a plain manner ; you see such a satisfaction in Christ as will satisfy a man's reason. Bless God for that infinite mercy. You see how dainty God hath been of his gospel ; he kept it hidden from all ages and generations till the apostles' times ; above four thousand years. And saith our Saviour, Luke x. 24, Blessed are your eyes that you see, and your ears that you hear, such things as all the prophets and kings have desired to see and hear, and could not. 'I tell you,' saith he, 'many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them.' Thou wouldst wish thyself to be a king, if thou desirest to be happy ; or thou wouldst wish thyself to be a prophet, an old prophet, such a one as Elias was, or Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or some of them ; nay, wish thyself as Solomon and David was, both prophet and king. Thine eyes and ears are more blessed than they. For these kings, saith he, and these prophets, neither could see nor hear those things which you both see and hear. Why ? Because you hear and know the Mystery of His Will. My brethren, it is the greatest privilege in the world. Our Saviour Christ was a man of sorrows. We seldom find him rejoicing, but once ; and upon what occasion was it ? Look in the 21st verse of that 10th of Luke, just before these words : 'In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' And so he goeth on in his discourse, 'Blessed are your eyes,' &c. ; that is the coherence of the words. Doth our Saviour Christ, our Head, bless God for revealing the gospel to us poor sinners, for to save our souls, and accounts it the greatest mercy of all others bestowed upon us, and shall not we ? Doth Christ himself thus, as it were, fall down upon his knees and thank God for it, and shall not we ?

You will object and say to me, But it is a common mercy ; we see many wicked men partake of it.

I answer *first*, Why do wicked men partake of it ? Because there are saints among them, and live in the places with them ; therefore the gospel comes to them. 'I have much people in this city,' saith God, speaking of Corinth, and therefore he sent Paul to preach amongst them. And so, 2 Cor. iv. 15, 'For all things are for your sakes.' That Paul had all that knowledge, and all those gifts, it was for their sakes, it was for the elect ; and therefore you have reason to be thankful for it ; wicked men should not know a word of it else.

Secondly, Wicked men, though they hear the gospel, yet they hear, but understand not. There is a mystery in the gospel, which wicked men hear, and know not. There is, I say, a mystery in it ; I passed it over before, I will speak but a word of it now : Matt. xiii. 11–14, 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.' Here Christ speaks of the mysteries of the gospel ; a man must have it given him to know it, which is not done to wicked men. Here both heard the same parables : Christ, saith the evangelist, 'spake in parables ;' and so he goeth on ; saith he, 'Seeing, they see not ; and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand,'—that is, they do not understand savingly.

In 1 Cor. ii. 7, the place I quoted but now, 'We speak,' saith he, 'the wisdom of God in a mystery.' It is called wisdom in respect that wicked

men may see and understand a rationality in it ; but there is a mystery in this wisdom which godly men only see, and it must be given them to see it. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him,' Ps. xxv. 14. So that now, though you think it a common mercy, yet it is a peculiar mercy to know the mystery of the gospel ; to know the riches and the glory of it. It is a peculiar mercy to the saints.

Obs. 2.—The mercy lies in this, to know the gospel, the mystery of his will. He doth not say, to know the law. How slightly the apostle speaks of the law. 'The law,' saith he, 'came by Moses.' It is a slight speech, in comparison of 'grace and truth;' that, he saith, 'came by Jesus Christ.' It is the mystery of his will in the gospel that he purposed in himself, the knowledge of which a man should prize. This is the glory of Christ, and this is the glory of our preaching : 'He hath ordained it for our glory,' saith he, 1 Cor. ii. 7. The preaching of the gospel is that which brings in souls : Luke xvi. 16, 'The law and the prophets were until John,' but now the gospel is preached, men crowd into it, press into it, they come thick and threefold to it ; men come in now when the gospel is preached infinitely more than when nothing but the law and the prophets were preached. 'The law and the prophets were until John ; since that time,' saith he, 'the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.' This is it that bringeth men in, my brethren. 'Woe is me,' saith the apostle. Why ? He saith not simply, 'if I preach not,' but 'if I preach not the gospel ;' that is the main thing.

Second, There is but one thing more to be opened, and that is, why it is called *the mystery of his will*.

One reason is this, because the will of God is the foundation of the gospel. What will you resolve it into ? You must resolve it into his will, and into nothing else. 'I will have mercy ;' this is the gospel, but his will is the foundation of it. 'I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy ;' and his will sets his understanding a work, as it were, to find out ways to bring about the salvation of mankind. 'He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,' as it follows afterward in the 13th verse. Hence, therefore, it is called *the mystery of his will*.

I will give you another reason for it, which is the better reason for you, because the most comfortable thing we know in the gospel is the will of God to save sinners. Mark what I say, if thou knewest all that God knows, (it is a great word,) if thou didst not know this thing, that his mind and will were to save sinners, thou wert undone ; the knowledge of this is worth all the rest. To know that God is merciful in his nature, this will not do it. You might have known that and despaired, for it might have been said, It is true, he is merciful in his nature, but the question is whether he will be merciful or no ? 'Yea, but I will have mercy ;' this word is worth all the world, this is the gospel.

It is called the mystery of his will, thirdly, because you might have known that Jesus Christ had died too, yet if you had not known it is the will of God to accept of that death for sinners, you had been undone still, if you could possibly have supposed this. What saith the apostle, Heb. x. 10, when he comes to speak of the sacrifice of Christ, what influence it had into our salvation ? 'I came to do thy will,' saith he ; 'by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.' What is it that saveth you, that sanctifieth you ? It is not simply the offering of the blood of Christ ; if you had heard Christ had died, that would not have comforted you, had it not been for this will : by this will you are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ.

Take an observation or two from hence.

Obs. 1.—You see, my brethren, what is *the pith of the gospel*. It is the mystery of God's will; to know but this, that God will save sinners in the blood of Christ, this is the pith of the gospel. This is that which is essential to salvation; and you see too, that it is but a small thing to know that God will save sinners in Christ. How gracious hath God been! He hath not laid upon you to know all the hard things in the gospel, which scholars know, and many believers that have large understandings know, or else you cannot be saved. But this is the kernel of all, God will save sinners. It is the mystery of his will; dost thou know that? Hath that taken thy heart? Thou knowest that which will save thee, if thou knowest no more; thou knowest that which faith may feed upon, and which will make thee happy everlastingly.

But, saith a poor soul, Will God save sinners indeed? (when the soul begins to believe this in good earnest.) Hath God a mind to save such sinners as I am? saith he: I have reason to be content to be saved then. And so he giveth up his soul to God and to Christ, and so the bargain is made. Faith is to know the mystery of his will; it is resolved into that.

I will give you but a familiar instance, that the knowledge of this one thing is worth all the rest. Suppose that one had lived in Solomon's time, had been a subject to Solomon, a great favourite in his court, and had run into treason, so that it was in Solomon's power to take away his life, and Solomon should yet use him exceeding kindly, open to him all his heart,—you know that he had the most knowledge that ever man had, both in matters of nature and in the book of the law,—and he should tell him all his notions;—and he had as many notions in his head as there were sands on the sea-shore, for it is said he had a heart as large, he had a vast knowledge;—and suppose that Solomon should have told him all these, this poor man, being a traitor and in Solomon's power to put him to death when he would, if he had known but one thing of him, that Solomon would but say to him, 'I will pardon thy treason, I will save thee, thou shalt not die,'—this would have pleased him more than all the knowledge Solomon could have imparted to him. So I say here, we are traitors, and have deserved death, and it is in God's power to destroy us. If now God reveals unto thee that he hath an intent to save sinners, haply he doth conceal other things from thee; thou hast not a large understanding, thou canst not take in much; but this I know, that God hath a mind to save sinners in Christ, and I will give up myself unto him. But dost thou know further that he meaneth to save thee? It is worth all the knowledge else in the world. Why? Because it is the mystery of his will.

Obs. 2.—*See the grace of God in applying himself to all sorts of believers*, in revealing the gospel to weak as well as strong; he hath applied himself to weak capacities. If the gospel lay all in great hidden wisdom and rationalities, and that a man must know all the depths of wisdom in it, all the rationalities of it, the coherence of one truth with another, before he can be saved, many poor weak understandings should have been undone, and never should have come to be saved. God doth load your hearts but with one truth, *I will save sinners in and through Christ*. Hast thou learnt this in the gospel? This will save thee, the gospel is the mystery of his will. And, my brethren, he hath applied himself to weak understandings in faith too. Why did he choose faith of all graces to save a man by? Because the poorest in the world, the weakest understanding, can believe and trust. When he heareth that God will save sinners, he is able to trust God as

strongly and as firmly as the wisest understanding man in the world. Nay, your weak men, they are aptest to believe, they are more suited for faith; let them but have this revealed to them, that God will save poor sinners, it lies but in a trust. When a man's heart is convinced of this, and a poor soul is able to do it, he doth it as strongly as the greatest understanding in the world can do. Thus God hath applied himself.

Obs. 3.—Though the gospel be a mystery, yet you see God hath made it known. Observe from hence, that God cares not who knows it; he kept it indeed hidden awhile, but now he would have all men see it. So it is, Eph. iii. 9, 10, 'That all men might see what is the fellowship of the mystery,' &c. It is the glory of God and of our religion, that we desire to have all known, all the mysteries of it. We do not as the Papists do, that keep things from the people. Know it to the uttermost in God's name, and let all God's people in their sphere and place prophesy; let them be all as prophets, to know the uttermost mystery of God's will. God hath abounded, not to ministers only, but to all his saints, in all wisdom and prudence, and hath made known the mystery of his will to them; let them all get what knowledge they can of it. It was not the nature of other religions to do so. The wise heathens, and the priests of the Egyptians and other heathen nations, had mysteries in their religion, but they kept them as mysteries, they never told the people of them. Popery, you know, is called a 'mystery of iniquity,' as this is called the mystery of God's will; for the devil hath made a gospel for his eldest son, as God hath for his Son. But what is the reason they will not let you know it, but keep you in ignorance? Because it is a mystery of iniquity, and people would come to see the iniquity of it, if they knew the mystery of it. But the gospel, it is the mystery of God's will. Saith God, All that ye know by me is, that I will save poor sinners, that I delight in mercy. I care not who knows this, saith God. It is a matter of grace, and therefore he makes known the mystery of his will. This is the glory of our God, and the glory of our religion, and the glory of the gospel. Would that all the saints in the world understood every tittle of this book! then our sermons would be understood, and we should preach with ease, my brethren. God desires this, and we desire it, to have all men know the mystery of his will.

According to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself.

III. That which remaineth is this, that which was *the moving cause of making known the mystery of his will*, and of calling home those whom he had called, and shall call to the end of the world. It is 'according to his good pleasure, which he had purposed in himself.'

When I opened the 5th verse, I shewed that *εὐδοκία*, the 'good pleasure' of his will, was that which of all things else he is pleased most with, though he willeth other things. Here it is simply said, 'according to his good pleasure,' but the thing is all one. It was out of the good pleasure of his will that he did choose us and predestinate us to glory, to adoption, to perfect holiness, as the 4th and 5th verses have it. And it is out of the same goodwill that he makes known the gospel savingly to any one's heart, and converts him, and turns him to him.

It is a known place, that in Matt. xi. 25, (to confirm this to you,) 'At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight,' *ὅτι οὕτως ἠγάπησεν εὐδοκία*. The word is the same that is here. It was thy good pleasure that thou shouldst put this difference, to reveal it unto

some, and those babes, and pass by the wise and prudent. He speaks it of making known the mystery of his will, the thing in the text. Now, when he saith, 'I thank thee, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes, for so it seemed good in thy sight,' it is not that he doth make the ground, the *terminus* of it, to be in God's hiding of it simply from the wise or from the prudent; but the thing he giveth thanks for is his revealing it to babes. Only, here is the mercy set off the more, there is this foil cast upon it, that he hideth it from the wise and prudent, while he revealeth it unto babes; and herein is seen, by refusing some and taking others, the good pleasure of his will.

It is a like speech too, that in Rom. vi. 17, 'God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which you were delivered into.' He doth not thank God that they were the servants of sin simply; but that which he thanketh God for was, that they had obeyed that form of doctrine they were delivered unto; only seeing they were the servants of sin once, the mercy is set off by this so much the more. Just so here, 'Father, I thank thee, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; for even so it seemed good in thy sight.' I shall have recourse to this place by and by.

You have the like in 1 Cor. i. 21, where the same phrase is used, the same word of God's good pleasure that is here; and it is spoken of God's revealing the gospel to the babes of the world, as you may read there throughout the chapter. 'Not many wise, nor many noble,' &c.; and the reason was this, because God would confound wise men after the flesh, by enabling poor creatures to save their own souls.

I will make but an observation out of this, and so pass from it.

Obs.—God's making known the mystery of his will and the preaching of the gospel, and enlightening of men unto life by the gospel, doth not depend upon, nor is it dispensed according to, preparations in the creature, but it is according to his good pleasure. There are those that affirm otherwise, but this one place, compared with many others, sufficiently confutes it: 'Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure.' If you would know why the gospel is preached in that powerful manner in England or in London, and not in many other places of the world, and not in many other places of the kingdom, it is merely upon the good pleasure of God.

It is a thing that will never be answered. Why did God suffer the Gentiles so long, three thousand years, to walk in their own ways without revealing to them the mystery of his will,—for it was three thousand years and upward after Abraham,—and chose the Jews to whom he would make known his law? 'He dealt not so with any nation,' saith the Psalmist; 'neither had the heathen the knowledge of his law.' It was merely God's good pleasure. Moses tells them, Deut. ix. 6, that it was not for their righteousness; for they were a stiff-necked people. In obstinacy they surpassed all other nations; they were the most perverse and the most unbelieving people of any other in the world. And, Deut. x. 14, 'Behold,' saith he, 'the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people.' It was merely the good pleasure of his will that did it. And why doth Moses mention his title, of being Lord of heaven and earth, but to shew that this proceeded from his sovereignty, that he chose this people and revealed the word to them? All the earth,

saith he, is mine, and I have angels in heaven ; I need no man upon earth at all. He might have left them all to their own ways. 'The heaven of heavens is mine; the earth also, with all that is therein.'

You shall find in that place I quoted even now, Matt. xi. 25, that Christ resolveth it, why God revealed it to babes, into the same principle, by the title he giveth God there when he giveth him thanks : 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou,' &c. God sheweth his liberty in this. And do but mark upon what occasion those words of Christ's come in. 'At that time,' saith the text, 'Jesus answered and said, Father, I thank thee,' &c. Our Saviour had in the 20th and 21st verses upbraided the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. 'Woe to thee, Chorazin ! woe to thee, Bethsaida ! if the mighty works which were done in thee, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, in sackcloth and ashes.' If God had gone and revealed the gospel according to preparations in men, certainly he would not have passed by Tyre and Sidon, and preached it to Chorazin and Bethsaida ; for he saith that Tyre and Sidon would have made better use of it, they would have repented long ago. And Tyre was of all nations the most ingenuous to the Jews ; they helped to build the temple, you know ; yet God passed by them. 'At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to babes.' Thou goest in revealing the gospel by no such conditions in men, but dost it as the Lord of heaven and earth, out of thy good pleasure. And so much for that, 'according to his good pleasure.'

Which he purposed in himself.

IV. These words 'which he purposed in himself,' some copies, and as good as any other, leave *προῦθ' αὐτόν* out, and so they do not refer them to the 9th verse, but to the 10th. 'He purposed in himself to gather together in one all things in Christ.' Yet because some have it, and thus you see it is read, and indeed more generally by interpreters, therefore by referring them to this 9th verse, let us see the reason why these words, 'which he purposed in himself,' come in after all as having relation to his good pleasure.

It might first be said, It is true God doth it out of his good pleasure, but yet notwithstanding, though his own will cast it, is there nothing at all he looks at in the creature why he doth it ?

Nothing at all ! It is, saith he, 'his good pleasure,' which he purposed in himself, merely in and out of himself. He looked to nothing but himself, when he did thus purpose eternal salvation to any, or to call them by the gospel.

And, secondly, whereas they might inquire, and say, Was it out of a fixed will, taken up from everlasting thus ?

Yes, saith he, it was not a mere velleity, but it was a purpose, *secum statutum*, he purposed with himself, unalterably ; so, indeed, Beza saith that God's purpose is mentioned to shew the firmness of election, as in Rom. viii. 28, where the purpose of God is mentioned, to shew the firmness and stability of his will and resolution in it : 'He purposed.'

If the words be referred to the 9th verse, then you may observe from thence these two things out of it :—

1. That effectual calling is the fruit of God's everlasting good-will to us, James i. 18, 'Of his own will he hath begotten us.' It was his will and his purpose he took up from everlasting. His begetting us is of his will, of his purpose, which he purposed, saith he, in himself. And therein now, our

begetting differeth from that of Christ's. Christ is his natural Son. As he is the second Person, he begat him not of his will; as he is man, indeed, so he came under God's decree as well as we; but as he is the natural Son of God, the second Person, he was not begotten of his will: but so are we by an everlasting purpose, by an everlasting decree, which he purposed in himself. So that, my brethren, look how you are called, and when you are called; it was all as God had plotted it from everlasting. He appointed that thou shouldest go to such a sermon, and there hear such a word spoken as should strike thy heart. It may be it was spoken by the by, or it may be thou camest into the church by the by, and thoughtest to go to another place, but God turned thee in. This was plotted from everlasting. God doth his great works by the by oftentimes, and so he converteth souls; yet they are plotted from everlasting. It is his purpose within himself.

There is one word yet in this 9th verse, 'which he purposed in himself.' Some read it *ἐν αὐτῷ*, which he purposed *in him*, namely, in Christ. But because that is so much before and after, certainly he meaneth *ἐν αὐτῷ*, *in himself*; the word signifieth either, as I have formerly shewed what is the meaning of that. He did not view anything in us, or out of himself, when he decreed anything concerning us. God hath no efficient cause to move him but his own will. He hath no final cause that ultimately moveth him, but his own glory and his Son's. He consults with nothing; he looks not out of himself. As he understandeth all things by himself and by his essence, so that, that casteth his will this way or that way, is himself. The meaning is not but that something out of God moved God, if we would speak strictly. I shall shew you why: for, take the glory of his grace, that you know moveth him; so the 6th verse telleth us, 'He did predestinate us, to the praise of the glory of his grace.' Now the praise of the glory of his grace is a thing out of God, for it is that manifestative glory that ariseth from the hearts of men and angels to him, upon his works that he declareth to the sons of men. It is that which ariseth out of all. He looked and saw that, in the creature which he made, there would be such a praise arising. This moveth him, and yet it is out of himself. How, then, is he said to purpose all in himself?

In one word, thus: although the praise of the glory of his grace is but a creature, yet relatively it is God, it is his own, it is himself, it hath relation to himself. 'My glory,' saith he, 'I will not give to another;' no, not this glory which thus ariseth out of the creature; not only his essential glory, but not that manifestative glory he hath out of all things. It is incommunicable to any creature. Though it be not essentially himself, yet relatively it is; therefore, Prov. xvi. 3, he is said to have 'made all things for himself, and the wicked for the day of evil.' And now to say that the praise of the glory of his grace moved him, is all one as to say himself moved himself; because it is his, and it is incommunicably his. So much now for that 9th verse.