

SERMON XII.

“Who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 2:20

IF we were in such a spiritual frame and temper of mind we should be in, and if our lamps were shining as they ought to be, we would wonder much at this text of Scripture. How would we admire that ever the eternal Son of God, the heir of heaven, should have made such poor and wretched creatures the objects of His love, and not only that He should have loved us, but that He should have given us such a testimony of His love as to be content not only to give Himself to be our Head and Husband, but to give Himself unto death for us, and that not an easy death, or an honourable death, but a most painful and shameful death, even the death of the cross.

Now, upon the Lord's day, ye were hearing^t of the lover and of his death; and now we come to speak of the giver and of his gift. The lover and the giver are all one. “Behold, I lay in Zion, for a foundation, a stone; a tried stone; a precious corner-stone; a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.” Now the lover and giver here, is the Mediator of the new covenant, God and man in one person. “He in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell;” and that “the fullness of the Godhead should dwell in him bodily.” This is He who is the lover, and the giver.

When we came to speak of this gift, we held out that our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself to be a man, even to be accounted a sinful man. He knew no sin, and yet was content to set Himself up as a mark for justice to shoot at on account of sin. He knew not what it was to break a covenant; no, but He was content for the elect's sake, that their sin of breach of covenant should be laid upon Him, and

that He should be charged with the breach of the covenant of works.

And next we came to speak of the persons for whom Christ gave Himself. The apostle says, that it was even for me. "Who loved me, and gave himself for me." In like manner, he says, "Even Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." John, the beloved disciple, signifies, that He gave Himself for them that were given Him of the Father, in that noble transaction betwixt the Father and the Son, from eternity. It was even for those that He gave Himself, who are both the fewest and the meanest of folk in all the world. He gave Himself but for very few great folk in the world. Indeed we find them ordinarily the most remote from being the objects of God's love. Hence, even at this time, Sirs, the great folk cannot endure to have Christ and His people in the land. They would have them banished unto the utmost parts of the earth, if they could get them. There would none of them have liberty to dwell in their lands, but they shall not get all their designs in this. It was not for many nobles that Christ gave Himself unto the death of the cross. But as for poor believers, for whom Christ gave Himself, though the men of the world may count such worthy of prison, banishment, persecution, the scaffold, &c., yet let them do so; there is no great matter, for they are even the folk that Christ gave Himself for. Let them bind them in prisons and bonds as they will, yet they are Christ's free men. Christ hath paid all their debt; so that they are neither to be bound, imprisoned, nor banished, let the world think as they please.

Now I come to the third thing, and that is, to speak of the fruits and effects that redound to sinners by Christ's giving of Himself for them. But as it is said of the things that are treasured up for them that love Him, "that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of

man to conceive of it;" so it may be said of the great privileges that redound unto the soul of man, by the Lord's giving of Himself for it. But we must not stand here, but come to point out some of these benefits and privileges that redound to the soul by the death of Christ. And,

1st, There is peace made up between God and man. Ye know, Sirs, that God and man were at variance. The distances, you know, became so great that the Lord drove Adam out of the garden, and placed an angel there with a flaming sword in his hand, which turned every way, to keep man from the tree of life. There was an utter enmity, if we may so speak, between God and man. This is the benefit flowing from the death of Christ to us, that this variance is done away, and the poor believer, for whom Christ gave Himself, hath access unto the throne of grace, to make his suits known unto God. That veil is now done away, and we have now access to come "through that veil, consecrated for us, that is to say, the veil of His flesh."

2ndly, We have not only this advantage by Christ's giving of Himself for us; but also we are hereby redeemed from the slavery and bondage of sin and Satan, and from the power of darkness. "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light!" He gave Himself for us, and hath purchased life for us, that we might be freed from this bondage. He having satisfied justice, believers are set at liberty. "If the Son therefore make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

3rdly, Ye have this privilege by Christ's giving Himself for you, namely, access unto the throne of His grace, to "find help in time of need." There are many amongst the sons and daughters of men that think it no great privilege to have access unto the throne of grace. But such do not evidence themselves to be among those for whom Christ gave Himself; for, I am confident of this, that souls that know

their need will think it no small privilege to have liberty of access unto a God in Christ, to make known to Him all their wants, and to speak to Him concerning those who injure and trouble them. This is one of the benefits we have by the Lord's giving of Himself for us; for if Christ had not given Himself, as ye were hearing, we had been so far from this liberty of access to God, that on the contrary, we would have run as fast from Him as ever Adam did to hide himself amongst the thick boughs, when he heard His voice walking in the garden.

4thly, Another privilege that redounds to souls through Christ's giving Himself for them, is, Nearness to God. By this the believer in Christ is advanced to be near of kin to God. There is, indeed, such a nearness between God and these souls for whom Christ died, that they cannot be separated. There is no union in the world so near as this union between Christ and His Church; for it hath the properties of all the closest unions among the creatures. It is their standing relation that God is their Father, and they are His sons. He is the Husband, and they the spouse. He is also called their elder Brother. Nay, He is all relations to them. A child can never go more familiarly to a father than they are allowed to come unto Him, and make known their requests to Him. Never wife could go more familiarly to her husband to ask anything, than the believer in Christ is allowed to go to the Lord for anything he wants. Sit up, Sirs, and sleep not; it may be, ye will get sleeping enough, for hearing of preaching, ere it be long.² Those for whom Christ gave Himself are advanced to be very noble folk. I assure you, though the men of this world think not very much of their honour, there are none in all the world that can lay claim to such nobility as believers in Christ can do. It is said of Caleb that he had another spirit with him, and "followed the Lord fully." Whenever souls begin to be made to act faith upon Christ, and the Lord begins by the effectual call of the gospel to call them unto Himself, then

a change is wrought upon them; then they become men of other spirits, even of far more noble spirits, than they were of before. When they thus become men and women of other spirits, then they follow the Lord fully. Now, Sirs, that believers are advanced unto such a state of nobility by Christ's giving Himself for them, will more easily appear, if we consider,

1. Who is their Father? He is the Lord Jehovah, God of peace. He is their Father, and they are begotten through the blessing of God, by the immortal seed of the word. Now, must not those be men and women of noble spirits, that have no less kindred than the Lord Jehovah, the mighty Prince in whom is everlasting strength. And,

2. This will appear that these are men of nobler spirits than any other in all the world. If ye consider their food, it is not the food of the world, or the husks that the men and women of this world eat. No, that will not serve them. Their food is no less than the food that cometh from the Lord. It is no less than His flesh and His blood. As He Himself says, "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." Ye may see from this, that believers in Christ are men and women of noble spirits, for they cannot feed on common food and the husks of the world, sin and lusts. No less can prove satisfying food unto them than the flesh and blood of the eternal Son of God.

3. It will appear that they are the most noble folk in the world, if ye consider the language that they speak. They do not speak that broad blasphemous language that is spoken up and down the country. They do not speak that cursed language of Ashdod. What then is the language that they speak? Why, it is that noble speech and blessed language of Canaan: "Five cities in the land of Egypt shall speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of Hosts." Be-

lievers are a people of a pure language. That they are a noble people, then, appears from their parentage, and their food, and their language; no food will satisfy them but the food we have spoken of; no language pleases them but that blessed language of Canaan. But having spoken unto these points already we now come to a word of use.

USE 1. Is it so, that Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God hath not only loved an elect world, but hath given Himself for them? Well, Sirs, you that find yourselves of that number ought to be much employed in praising God. I assure you, this duty of praise is most incumbent upon you all for whom Christ hath given Himself.

USE 2. Is it so, that Jesus Christ hath loved you, and not only so but given Himself for you? Then Christ will withhold nothing from you. For if He would have withheld anything from you, would He ever have given Himself for you, and given Himself to be poor, and a man of sorrows, to suffer weariness and travail for you, and not only in His body, but in His soul. For you He endured travail in His soul and made Himself a whole burnt offering. I say, He gave His soul as well as His body for you. "He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." Well, then, what will He withhold from you, believers? And what stand ye in need of but He will give it you? He that withheld not Himself, but gave Himself wholly, soul and body for you, what will He withhold from you.

USE 3. Is it so, that Jesus Christ, God's Eternal Son, gave Himself for you; is it not a shame to refuse Him anything that He asks of you? He asks your heart, saying, "My son, give me thine heart." Well, Sirs, it is a great sin and shame for you to refuse Him your hearts, seeing that He gave Himself wholly for you. He insists that ye should follow Him and cleave closely unto Him through good and bad report, through affliction and persecution, even "through

fire and water, unto a wealthy place.” Well, then, be ashamed if ye refuse to do these things for Christ. He refused not to be scourged for you, buffeted for you, nay, crucified for you. If ye do not give yourselves to Him, embrace and close with Him, woe will be unto you for ever! But it may be some here will enquire, “If Christ is indeed making offer of Himself unto us, and hath given Himself for some, how shall we know whether we have got Him yet or not?” We may not stay here. But we shall point these few things whereby we may know this. And,

1st, If you have got or received Christ you will know that you have done so “by your following God fully,” with Caleb. There is the disposition of a godly man, it is that “he followed the Lord fully.” If you be souls that have closed with Christ, ye will be still following after Him; not desiring to run before, but to follow after Christ. You will always study to have Him in view, that so ye may follow Him. You will not be fools, taking a by-way. This will not serve your turn. If you be souls that have gotten Christ, you will be labouring all you can to follow His steps. And then,

2ndly, You will know it by your labouring hard after God, as children of light. “Walk as children of light.” I say, If you be souls that have gotten Christ, ye will be labouring by all means to walk as children of the light; you will have fervent affection to God and to the people of God, as it becometh the people to have.

3rdly, If you have closed with Christ, you will walk habitually as in the sight of God. In Gen. 17.1, where the Lord is making the covenant with Abraham, He says to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect.” You that have gotten Christ, you will be always walking as in the presence of a holy God, and will be loath to do anything displeasing to Him.

4thly, if you have gotten Christ you will be making much room for Him in your hearts. Believers in Christ know that He is a great King, and must have much room in the heart. If you have got Him, there must not be a lust or idol left in all your bosom. No, you will be providing a large upper room for Him. You will put away all other things that you may solace yourselves in Him. You will be still saying with the Church in Hosea, "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses." "The best of them is as a brier: and the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge." "We will not say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our Gods." And, "What have we to do any more with idols?" Now, Sirs, are there any amongst you making such great room for Christ in your hearts? nay, I fear Christ gets not the least room in them, for they are full of something else. And,

5thly, If ye have gotten Christ, ye will have a longing desire of soul after Christ. For there was never one that enjoyed anything of Christ, but would still enjoy more of Him. I will tell you what these souls that have gotten Christ are like: They are like the horse-leech, that cries still, "Give, give;" or like unto the grave that is never full. The soul in this case will never be full of Christ till it is perfected in glory, till his soul be so filled with his beloved that he can hold no more. Will one kiss of His mouth satisfy that soul? No; "But let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." Let me seek salvation of Him with all my heart. "But I must have more of Him," says the spouse; "He must lie all night between my breasts. I must have continued communion and intercourse with Him. I must have Him fully and wholly, and that not for a day or an hour; but I must have Him and enjoy Him fully, not only in the day, but also in the night. He must lie all night between my breasts."

Lastly, If ye have gotten Christ ye will be much employed about the work of mortification and self-denial. When Jesus comes unto a soul, He works in that soul much self-

loathing and self-abhorrence. The soul that hath gotten Christ will say with the apostle, "Those things that I counted gain, I now count loss for Christ."

This leads me to another point of doctrine, which is this: That the soul that is beloved of God, and for whom Christ hath given Himself, is much engaged in the exercise of self-denial. The apostle says not, "That the Lord loved me, and gave Himself for me, on account of anything that was in me;" but, "Christ loved me, and gave Himself for me, even me, who was a persecutor; for me, who was a blasphemer; for me, who was such and such." How much, then, was this minister, Paul, engaged in the exercise of self-denial?

Again, you may observe that the soul that is loved of God, and for whom Christ hath given Himself, will be much in the exercise of mortification; or it is a duty lying on all those who are loved of God, and for whom Christ hath given Himself, to be much engaged in this work of mortification and self-denial. Ye must not think that this is only the work of ministers and men in eminent stations, to deny themselves; no, you have Jesus Christ Himself saying, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." But that we may come to speak more particularly to the words, there is a threefold self that must be denied.

First, Natural self.

Secondly, Sinful self. And,

Thirdly, Regenerated and renewed self.

1. Natural self is the man consisting of the soul and body united. This a man must deny comparatively, or when it comes in competition with the glory of God and your own soul's edification.

2. There is a sinful self, which is the old man, and unrenewed heart, with the affections and lusts. This sinful self

we are to deny wholly and absolutely. We must not rest till we get all crucified and nailed to the cross of Christ. And,

3. There is a regenerate and renewed self—that is, the new man. This believers are to deny as to any merit in it. Indeed, believers should be seeking after more of the new man as their treasure; and they should make use of all means whereby they may be enabled so to hold it, that Satan and lust prevail not against it. There are some folk that deny the grace of the Spirit of God in this; but that which we press upon you hath these few things in it. And,

(1.) A knowledge of themselves. The man that would deny himself, must know himself. But,

(2.) As he must know himself, so he must loathe himself. And,

(3.) He sees vanity and emptiness in self. He sees that he is altogether insufficient of himself to do anything that is really good. The person that denies himself, as he is one who knows himself, and one who loathes himself, is a person that sees nothing in himself but emptiness, and has nothing in himself to trust unto in the matter of salvation. Therefore he must be denied to himself, and must lay the weight of his salvation upon another, even upon Christ. And there is this in self-denial, that as the man sees his own emptiness, so he is still emptying himself of all the old stuff. Old things must pass away, that all things may become new. So that if ye would know what self-denial is, it is even to throw all Satan's household stuff out at the door, and have no more to do with it.

(4.) As ye must labour to cast out Satan's stuff; so ye must labour to have these things of God's providing brought in. Ye must have furniture brought from a far country; and ye must have it from home. Think not, Sirs, that these souls

are denying themselves aright, that are crying down all that they have; unless they be also seeking the graces of God's Spirit to replenish their souls.

In a word, to deny yourselves is to forsake all things in yourselves, when they come in competition with the glory of God; and to be still seeking furniture from above. That it is a duty incumbent upon all to deny themselves will appear from these few things following. And,

1st, It is what Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant, requires; as appears from the forecited text, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." This may be a sufficient reason for it, that it is Christ's will. If ye would not be rebels against Him, set about this work. Folk think it a great matter to be a rebel to an earthly king; but believe me, it is another matter to be a rebel to God. Well, then, ye see, Sirs, that self-denial is a duty lying upon one and all of you; and ye must set about it, if ye would not be found rebels against the God of heaven, and ye know rebellion against God, as the Scripture expresses it, "is as the sin of witchcraft."

2ndly, A second reason is this, that when ye look into yourselves, and consider what ye are by nature, you see nothing in yourselves but a heap of lusts, which rebel against God.

3rdly, Consider that Christ, who was the Heir of heaven, was content to be denied to all the pleasures of heaven for you. And think ye that it is too much for you to be denied to your sinful lusts and pleasures in the world for Him, who, though He was "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person," thought nothing to be so far denied to Himself as to come into the world, and take on Him flesh, and be born of such mean parents as had nothing to offer up for Him, in the days of His nativity, but two turtle doves; who not only was contented to be

denied to worldly riches and honours, but even to His own life. Have ye not good reason, then, to be denied to yourselves; since He was content to deny Himself to purchase salvation for you? And,

Lastly, To move you to this duty of self-denial, only consider the saints of God recorded in Scripture, and you will see that this has been their choice work. There are some in this age, too, that you would think have been much engaged in this duty, by their suffering for the cause and truths of God. But will ye look to these, that were contented to endure grievous deaths for Christ; that were sawn asunder, &c. I says, Sirs, consider the worthies mentioned in Scripture, that cloud of witnesses whom we are to imitate, and ye will see that this self-denial was a lesson that they were much in learning. But before we come to the application of this doctrine, we would speak to some few things that ye should not deny.

Whatever we have of conformity to the Lord should not be denied, but in point of merit or any worth, as if it might be any compensation to Christ for what He hath done, or any satisfaction to the justice of God, for our sins. And,

Take good heed, Sirs, that ye be persons loved of, and in covenant with, God. Seriously consider what ye should not deny. And,

1st, Ye must not deny God. Therefore it is said, "They eat my people as bread, and call not upon the Lord." Ye may deny Him, by a life and conversation, like the practical atheists of the world.

2ndly, Deny not your profession; for there is much required of you that are loved of God. Encourage yourselves by "And they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the

word of their testimony;” that is, by adhering to their profession. They overcame that red dragon, who fought against Michael, and his angels, whose design was to drown the woman with the man-child fleeing into the wilderness. Now, would ye overcome that red dragon, that is coming down into our land to destroy the woman with the man-child; to drive the Church of Christ out of her temple; and to make her flee away to the wilderness, to other cities, and to foreign lands—would ye overcome this red dragon that is likely to come amongst us now, that is likely to draw down the stars of heaven, and that is killing and banishing the people of God? then adhere to your profession which you must now overcome by. And,

3rdly, Beware of denying any of the truths of God. John has this in his commission to write to the church of Philadelphia. “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” See, that ye consider well what is written in the Bible, and hold that which is there. For if ye degenerate from that, the vengeance and curse of God will be upon you; as we have it: “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.” Sirs, let the word of God be written in your heart. Through His strength, stick to your profession; and let the truths of Christ be so near and dear to you, that they may be as a girdle about your loins; that ye may part with your sweet life before you part with them. And,

4thly, Ye may not deny your covenant-engagements; ye may, by no means, deny the covenant you have solemnly sworn. For David gives it as a mark of the man that shall dwell on that high and holy hill; that he is a man that will not swear, nor forswear; he will not break his oath, though it should be to his hurt. So, ye must not deny your covenant, though it should be to your hurt; though it should be

to the loss of houses, lands, goods, &c.; yea, and your own life also. It is said, "They like Adam have transgressed the covenant." Many a time the Lord charges this sin upon the people of Israel by the prophets. Now we must tell you in the name of the Lord this day, that ye should beware of breaking the covenant. In the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus, we debar and excommunicate all such from the table of the Lord, as are not resolved to adhere to these covenants that the lands are under to the most high God. And,

5thly, You may not deny the going about Christian duties. Many cry down praying, and preaching, and communicating, except they take the communion upon their knees. Daniel was discharged by the king, from worshipping the true God for a certain time. But he was a man much given to the practice of self-denial. You know that the decree was established by the law of the Medes and Persians. But Daniel goes to his own house and, his window being open towards Jerusalem, prays three times a day. In like manner, ye must not deny your Christian duty and exercises, let the great men of the world make all the acts and laws against them that they please. Do not think, Sirs, that we preach rebellion against any man. We are not pressing any man to rebel against our rulers; but we would have you know, that we are to follow their laws no farther than their laws are according to the true word of God. Therefore, I say, ye must not deny the going about of your Christian duties.

6thly, Ye must beware of denying your assistance to Zion, in the time of her affliction. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Beware of denying your help to Zion. I pray you, if you love your means so well, that ye will bestow nothing upon the poor afflicted people of God that are imprisoned, and banished up and down the world; will ye help them with your prayers? I wot well, ye

may say with a certain man, "That many prayers of the people of God will do more for Zion, than ten thousand men armed with the sword, will do against her."³ Therefore, beware that ye deny not Zion the help of your prayers, in the time of trouble. "If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth." O Sirs, there were many prayers put up for Zion in former times. She was well remembered. But, I trow, she is now like a poor stepchild put to the door, whom the stepmother forgets to take in again; or like a poor little one at night, that hath none to take care of it. So it is with the Church, and poor banished people of God. There are few to take care of them. You that are believers know, that if you would not deny your duty, ye should not deny your help to Zion. If any of you forget Zion, it is a clear mark that ye are none of the people of God; for if ye were, ye would love God, and ye would love His people; and if ye loved them, ye would evidence it at such a time as this.

7thly, Ye must not be denied to the love of God. David would not be denied to the love of God, whatever he was denied to. Says he, "Many say, Who will show us any good?" and that is the world's voice. They would have the fat things of the world. But what says David? What would he have? "Lord," says he, "lift up upon me the light of thy countenance." "I shall be denied to houses, lands, crown, and kingdom, and all," says he, "but I cannot be denied to the love and favour of God." Now, Sirs, these are the things that ye should constantly adhere to. But let us press them upon you as we will, ye will not stand to them unless God Himself press you to stand to them. Whenever the temptation comes ye will go with it, swearing contrary to the covenant ye have sworn, unless grace prevents. I am afraid many folk will not hesitate much to do this.

But we come now to speak of those things that ye should deny, or be denied unto. And,

1st, Ye must be denied to all those things that are sinful, and contrary to the word of God. Such things you are to deny absolutely and wholly. And,

2ndly, Ye must here consider that there are some things that ye must deny comparatively, or when they come in competition with the glory of God; that is, ye must either deny these things or dishonour God, so far ye are to be denied to them; and I will mention three or four of these things. And,

1. Ye should be denied to your own life, when your life comes in competition with the glory of God. I will assure you, this is not an easy thing, but it is a thing you must resolve to do. Well, then, are there no Shadrachs, Meshachs, and Abednegos, who, if matters shall come to such a pass, that either their life must go, or they must worship the idol, will readily say, "Be it known to thee, O king, though it should be so, yet we will not worship the idol that thou hast set up?" I assure you there are many idols now going to be set up in the land; and we hope that many, ere they bow to them, will be denied even to their own life, and will, with Moses, "Refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, rather choosing to suffer affliction with the people of God." They will rather choose to go to Barbadoes, France, or Holland; they will rather choose to take banishment than to worship these idols. But,

2. Ye must be denied to the world; for it is with many as it was with Micah, who said, "They have taken away my gods: and what have I more?" Ay; but if thou refuse thy self-denial in this respect, thou canst not be Christ's disciple.

3. Ye must be denied to the wrongs and injuries ye receive in the world. Therefore ye have an example. When the Jews were stoning that holy man, Stephen, to death, he said,

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” And that pattern of prayer, “Lord, forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” And again, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And,

Lastly, Ye must be denied to your gifts, your judgments, your duties, and even to your graces, such as faith, love, hope, and all the rest of the graces of the Holy Spirit. These things ye must be pressing after, and yet ye must be denied to them, so as not to lay the weight of your salvation thereon. Ye must still be in the exercise of these duties, and yet ye must be denied to them. When ye have done all ye can do, ye must say, “We are unprofitable servants.” I assure you, in the name of the Lord, if a soul were looking on the most special duties that ever he went about, he might see as much imperfection in them as might make him say of all duties that there is nothing in them all that deserves anything, so that he would see himself obliged to fly solely to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Now we come to another thing in the words, and that is, The way in which this godly man knew that Christ loved him, and gave Himself for him. Why, if ye would ask Paul this question how he attained this, he would have said, “Why, it was even in the way of being much in the duty of self-examination; it was by seeing these fruits and effects that the giver had wrought upon the soul.” Hence

1st, We would have you consider that seeing it is a duty lying upon one and all to be much engaged in the work of self-examination, a duty never without difficulty, and yet a duty necessary at all times, yet the Lord calls for it at some times more especially. And,

1. When a church or particular person is under affliction or trouble. At such a time especially the Lord is calling for this. Believers should be much in examining themselves as

to the reasons that they are thus afflicted and troubled. This ye see in the third and fourth chapters of the Lamentations. The Church was under very sad affliction, even as we are now. She is persecuted, and her worthy teachers removed to corners. Her ordinances are gone, and there are none frequenting her solemn feasts. What does she in that case? “Let us search and try our ways and turn again unto the Lord.” Would you know your duty, in the day of Joseph’s affliction, in the day of the Church’s trouble? Then be much in self-examination to see what is in you that hath offended the Lord, and made Him deal with you; that so He is taking His farewell of these covenanted lands, and scarcely leaving a meat or drink-offering amongst us as a token for good. Go to the duty of self-examination, and see what injuries are in you that hath been a help in this.

2. A second special time when God calls for this duty, is when folk are under desertion, and death approaches: such was David’s case. He goes to this work, and saw on what terms he stood with God. Therefore after self-examination he says, “Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, well-ordered in all things, and sure.”

3. A third time when God especially calls for this duty, is before souls approach unto the table of the Lord—before they communicate with the Lord. This is a time when God calls for this duty of self-examination. Are you intending to approach unto the table of the Lord? Then know what God is calling for at your hands. “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” And I assure you, Sirs, in the name of the Lord, that there is good reason why a soul should be much in this exercise, before approaching unto the table of the Lord.

(1.) Because the Lord, the Master of the feast, comes in to visit the guests, and to see how they are all arrayed and

prepared. Examine, then, and if any pin in your exercise be wrong, go away to Christ and say, "Thou must set this right, that I may come before Thee, having the preparation of the sanctuary." This is a reason why souls should examine themselves well before they come to the table of the Lord, for Christ will come through and visit them.

(2.) A second reason why folk should be much in this duty of self-examination before they approach the table of the Lord is, Because it is very requisite that they come to the great day of the King's coronation. It is requisite on such a day that they come with many requests. Communion days are the days of Christ's manifesting Himself as the Great King. Communion days have been sweet days in Scotland; but alas! Christ and they are gone! Alas! Christ is gone, and communion days are gone. We have all the blame of it ourselves. Many of us have, with the Gadarenes, bidden Christ depart out of our coasts. Why, rather than Christ should not go away many of us will abjure Him, and perjure ourselves that He may not abide amongst us. We will have Him away at any rate. But, I say, it is a great reason why folk should examine themselves when they come to these deal days, that then folk should present many requests. On such an occasion folk should know their need. Is it not by self-examination that you come to the knowledge of your many wants? For He "fills the hungry with good things; but the full soul goes empty away." We dare promise you in the name of the Lord that hungry souls that dare say their errand is to get Christ, and that they have much ado for Him when they get Him — we dare promise you in His name that ye shall either get Him, or a token from Him, or at least good news from Him as to your getting Him. He never sent away a poor soul from Him that had an errand without something.

(3.) Folk should be much in this exercise before they come to a communion, because it is very requisite that folk when

they approach unto the table of the Lord should be self-condemned. Now, I say, that it is in the duty of self-examination, with the Lord's blessing, that ye come to get a particular view of the things for which ye are worthy to be condemned.

(4.) Self-examination before the Lord's Supper is very necessary, because it is in order to a great and important business. I assure you, Sirs, ye have need to be well prepared; for communicating aright with Christ is a most hard and difficult business, more difficult than ye are aware of. Communicating with God is a business of another concernment than the generality of mankind think it to be. Many a soul has got much good at a communion; and many a soul has got that loss which they have never repaired again. And though many have got over it afterwards, yet it hath cost them many a sad day's weeping and mourning. "For this cause, many amongst you are weak and sickly; and many sleep," saith the apostle.

2ndly, We would have you here consider that it is a duty incumbent upon one and all of you who do examine yourselves, not to rest satisfied with your own examination, but to be entreating the Lord that He would examine you. Therefore David says, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me." As if he would say, "I have been at the work of self-examination, and I cannot be satisfied with my own examination, till Thou searchest and triest me." Nay, serious souls cannot be satisfied with their imagined examination. And no wonder that it is so, since they have often deceived themselves and made themselves think they were something, when they were just nothing. And then,

3rdly, That soul looks upon the enjoyment of God as of greater concern than to be ventured upon its own testimony, or upon the testimony of another, or upon any other than that of God Himself, who is "faithful and cannot lie."

As Job says when his friends were labouring to persuade him that he was a hypocrite: "I will not believe you; but if God say it, I will believe it." "Oh that I knew where I might find him! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

4thly, I would have you look to what is good in yourselves, as well as to what is evil; for there are many of the people of God that look only to what is evil in themselves, and hence they are poor melancholy creatures. O believer, thou mayst look to what is good in thee as well as to what is evil. If thou seest any good in thee, bless God for it, and acknowledge Him as Paul doth. "By the grace of God," says he, "I am what I am." But, on the other hand, the wicked still look upon what they think to be good; but Satan blindfolds them, so that they never see what is evil. They look always on that which is seemingly good; they think themselves something, when they are just nothing. But thou that art a believer in Christ, it is thy duty to look both upon that which is good and upon that which is evil. You may see the spouse doing so. "I sleep," says she; she looks on what is evil in herself; but she looks also to that which is good in herself. Says she, "But my heart waketh."

But we may not here insist. Therefore we shall give you a few directions, as to your going right about this duty of self-examination. And,

1st, Ye must begin this work with prayer. Why so? Because your strength and supply must come from another airth than from yourselves. Ye must have the candle of God coming down from heaven to enlighten you, before you can go through all the chambers of your own heart and soul. And,

2ndly, Ye must acquaint yourselves with the law of God, for how shall ye examine yourselves unless you know the rule you should be examined by? David says, "I have hid

thy word in my heart, that I offend not thee. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

3rdly, If ye would go rightly about this work of self-examination, ye will be labouring to fit yourselves for the task in secret. Therefore when the Lord, in His word, calls folk to set about this duty, alluding to the eastern custom of girding themselves for work, He calls them to gird up their loins. Therefore, I say, ye should labour by all means to be fitted for this work. And,

(1.) I say, ye should call in all your thoughts and summon them all in the name of the great God at such a time to wait upon the diet of self-examination. And,

(2.) Ye should choose a place convenient for the purpose, for fear of being interrupted in the midst of it, before ye bring it to any considerable length or to a close.

(3.) You should set yourselves to deal as ingenuously with yourselves as you can. For a soul can never go about the duty of self-examination aright unless it set itself against itself. And,

(4.) Ye should, in the name of the great God of heaven, command all the affections and faculties of the soul to come, and be free and ingenuous with you. Let not your treacherous lusts rest in your bosoms; send them all out to answer for themselves. Do not cover any of them with the devil's mask; but seek to see them as they are.

(5.) Go about this work as in the sight and presence of God. I say that ye should labour to know that He with whom you have to do is the great and everlasting God. Ye should go about this work as in His sight, before whom ye must be answerable; and in going about this duty ye must condemn yourself, for “he that condemneth shall not be condemned.” And,

Lastly, As ye must begin with prayer, so ye should end with prayer. When ye have, through God's help, found all these lusts, then pray to Him that He would subdue and kill all these iniquities in you; nor neglect to praise God for anything good ye find in yourselves in the exercise of self-examination.

But we may not stand now, time being so far spent, to tell you the things that might be further said concerning self-examination. I shall, therefore, only give you two or three marks whereby ye may try whether ye have gone about this duty of self-examination in a right way and manner. And,

First, All the heights of legal pride betwixt Christ and your souls will be done away. The poor soul has looked through his heart, and seen many traitors against God and His loving-kindness in Christ, so that he sees himself to be worthy of a thousand deaths, and there is never a word in the poor man's mouth but "Guilty, guilty." And,

Secondly, The soul that hath examined itself aright will cleave stedfastly to Christ and His finished work. "Indeed," he wilt say, "I have contracted much guilt; I am a rebel, and Thou mayest justly send me to hell; but, Lord, here am I come unto Thee, and I acknowledge myself guilty; yet, Lord, I beg Thy pardon; I am come unto Thee for mercy, and I shall never go to another; here I lie down at Thy door; here I take witness that I shall never die at another door; I confess I am guilty, and I am worthy of death; but if I fall into the hands of anyone, let me fall into the hands of the living God." But then,

Thirdly, Although ye be passing the sentence of condemnation upon yourselves, yet ye will be waiting to hear what "God the Lord will say." Ye will say, "Indeed I am condemned, and worthy to be condemned; but I would gladly hear what the sentence of free love and free mercy will be

concerning me.” Ye will be saying, “I am worthy of hell, and of excommunication from God, and from the glory of His power. I have nothing to say to the contrary, yet I will wait to see what free mercy and free love will be for me; I will hear what God the Lord will speak.” Are there any such souls amongst you? Sirs, Christ is going away from amongst us, because He cannot find such souls amongst us—such as are condemning themselves, and likewise waiting to hear the sentence of free mercy towards them.

Now, there is another point from these words; but I shall only name it, and leave it to yourselves to enlarge upon.

It is this, that folk may attain to the assurance of it, that Christ hath loved them and given Himself for them. Ye see the example of the apostle who could say, “He loved me, and gave himself for me.”

But I shall not stay upon it now, but desire you to think upon what ye have heard. And may the Lord bless it. Amen.

Footnotes:

1. This sermon seems to have been preached about, or after the year 1662, either on the Fast-day, or Saturday, after the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.
2. This was in a few years sadly accomplished, when all the faithful servants of Christ were thrust out from their flocks.
3. It is said that Queen Mary said she was more afraid of John Knox’s prayers than ten thousand armed men, which may be here referred to.