

SELF-CONSIDERATION NECESSARY TO SELF-PRESERVATION:
OR,
THE FOLLY OF DESPISING OUR OWN SOULS,
AND
OUR OWN WAYS.

DISPLAYED IN TWO SERMONS TO YOUNG PEOPLE.

THE FORMER ON PROV. xv. 32.

THE LATTER ON PROV. xix. 16.

TO THE READER.

I WAS far from any thoughts of publishing these two plain discourses, when I preached the former of them, at the request of Mr. Billingsley and his catechumens, the 25th of the last month, being Monday in Whitsun-week, a day of leisure; having designed not to trouble the press any more till the fifth volume of EXPOSITIONS was ready for it, which, if God spare my life and health, and continue his gracious assistances, I hope will be by the end of this year, and which (to answer a question that I am often asked) I purpose shall contain the four Evangelists and the Acts, if the Lord will.

The importunity of the many who earnestly desired me to publish that sermon, should not have overcome me to alter my purpose, if the advice of some of my brethren, whose judgment I have a value for, had not overruled me, to think it might be worth while to take so much time from my greater work, as the preparing and enlarging of that sermon for the press would require.

And this made me the more easily to yield to those who very earnestly pressed me to publish the latter sermon, which was preached the day following, at the request of Mr. Gordon and his catechumens.

It grieves me, (yet not so much as it should,) to see among the *children of my people*, a great carelessness and unconcernedness about the things that belong to their everlasting peace. I lament it in myself, and therefore I hope I shall not be blamed, if I thus endeavour, as God enables me, to awaken myself and others to a due seriousness in those things which relate to the soul and eternity; I think it can do harm to none; I hope it may do good

to some. And nothing more likely to cool and compose the heated and disquieted minds of men, than thus to turn their zeal into the right channel.

June 4, 1713.

MAT. HENRY.

THE FOLLY

OF

DESPISING OUR OWN SOULS.

PROVERBS xv. 32.

He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul.

SOLOMON'S proverbs being generally designed to instruct us in our duty to God and man, many of them are particularly intended to dispose us to receive those sacred dictates, and to make way for the rest, by opening the ear to instruction, and bowing the heart to comply with it. If people were but willing and desirous to learn, the teacher's work were half done; but (as says the proverb of the ancients) "They who will not be counselled cannot be helped." How should those attain to knowledge and grace, who will not be reconciled to the means of knowledge and grace?

In this text Solomon gives such an account of those (in a few words) whom he found he could do no good to, as makes their folly manifest before all men. Though this princely preacher made it his business still to teach the people knowledge; though his sermons were elaborate and well studied, for he gave good heed, and sought out and set in order

many proverbs; though his discourses were plain and practical, sententious and methodical; though he took pains to find out acceptable words, and that which was written was upright, even words of truth;^a yet there were those who were never the better for such a preacher, and such preaching. Now Solomon gives this short account of them, and then leaves you to judge concerning them; they refuse instruction, and in so doing they despise their own souls. We who have the gospel preached among us, and Wisdom herself by it teaching in our streets, may truly say, *Behold, a greater than Solomon is here*; and yet, as to multitudes, he stretches out his hand in vain; even Israel is not gathered, his ministers labour in vain among them. And what is the reason?

I. They refuse instruction. The fool in the text, (and he is, without doubt, more despicable than the fool in the play,) is described to be one who refuseth instruction, *פִּירֵק מוֹסֵר*. We have the same words, and thus translated,—*Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction*;^b that neglects instruction, (so some,) puts it far from him, and sets himself at a distance from it; not only because he hates it, but because he fears it. That strips himself of instruction, (that is another signification of the word, not only *elongare*, but *denudare*,)—*shaking off* his education, as a garment he will not be heated with, or hampered with, makes himself naked, to his shame. Nay, the original word has a further signification, (*ulcisci*,) he that will be *revenged on instruction*; that takes it for an affront, and studies revenge, if he be told of his faults.

The word for instruction the margin reads *correction*; for in our fallen state, when we are all wrong, that which instructs us must correct us; we cannot be taught to do well, but we must be showed wherein we have done ill. *The rod and reproof give wisdom*. The corrections of providence are intended for instruction; *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest and teachest*. But many, though they cannot help being chastened, yet refuse and reject the instruction designed them by the chastening, and will not learn any of the many good lessons designed to be taught them by the chastening: instead of that, they strive with their Maker, and kick against the pricks; they will not comply with the correction, or answer the ends of it. They refuse discipline; they will not be under check and control, will no more be admonished.

1. They refuse to hear instruction; they turn their backs upon the word, and will not come where it is preached, if they can help it. Wisdom cries, and they get out of the hearing of her cries, one to his farm and another to his merchandise. A little formality of devotion they can dispense with, to save

their credit, and keep up their reputation among men, *missu non mordet*—and *being dismissed it no longer stings*, but the close and powerful application of the word, as a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, they cannot bear. They cannot go so far as Ezekiel's hearers, to whom his preaching was as a lovely song,^c charming enough, and which, as they heard it, helped to lull them asleep; but it is to them as the sound of a trumpet, the alarm of war; it makes their ears to tingle, and therefore they get as far as they can from it.

2. They refuse to heed it; like the deaf adder, they (if they should come within hearing of it) stop their ears, and will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, *charm he never so wisely*.^d If they cannot keep it from sounding in their ears, they keep it from sinking into their hearts, and, if possible, will keep it from going any further. They do not value instruction, they see no need of it, and, therefore, do not desire it. *The word of the Lord is to them a reproach*,^e they are weary of it; yea, though it should come from the mouth of Christ himself; witness the lawyer that complained, *Master, in so saying, thou reproachest us also*, Luke xi. 45.

3. They refuse to comply with it; they will do as they have a mind, whatever they are told or taught to the contrary; they have loved strangers, and whatever you can say to put them out of love with them, after them they will go.^f They hold fast deceit, though they are told of the deceitfulness of it, and refuse to return.^g This is the way of many, who are running headlong upon their own ruin, and hate to be stopped.

But it may be thought improper for me to insist upon this now, when I am called to address myself to a number of serious young men, who are every Lord's-day evening catechised in this place, and who are so far from refusing instruction, that they covet it, they delight in it, they are forward to receive it, and, as the good ground, drink in this rain, that comes often upon them; who have piously projected and combined to set up this exercise, and diligently attend it, not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of many; for what is said to them, is said to all; and whoever will, may come and feed upon that bread of life which is broken to them.

Yet to them it may be of use to hear of the sin and folly of them who refuse instruction, of the many that do so.

(1.) Bless God, who made you to differ; and let his grace have all the glory, which has given your hearts, by nature corrupt as others, such a different bent from what it was, from what others are; that you are crying after knowledge, when others are crying out against it; are seeking it as silver,^h when

^a Eccl. xii. 9, 10.

^c Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

^b Eccl. xiii. 18.

^d Ps. lviii. 4, 5.

^e Jer. vi. 10.

^f Jer. viii. 5.

^g Jer. ii. 25.

^h Prov. ii. 3, 4.

others are seeking silver only, and not it; are delighting to know God's ways, when others are delighting in the by-paths of sin and vanity; are helping to let many into the knowledge of Christ, when there are those who are contriving to take away the key of knowledge; you have reason to say with thankfulness, *Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?*¹ You ought not to take a pride in it, the honour of it is spoiled if you do so, you have nothing to boast of; but you ought to give God the praise, the honour of it is doubled if you do so, for you have a great deal to be thankful for. Who teacheth like God?

(2.) Take heed, lest any of you should, notwithstanding this, be found among those who refuse instruction; who are pleased with it, and yet are not ruled by it. It is not enough for you to have a pleasing relish of divine truths, but you must be delivered into the mould of them; your souls must be transformed by them, and conformed to them. The instructions given you, must be transcribed and copied out into your whole conversations, must guide and regulate them, must not only restrain them from the gross pollutions of sin, but must beautify and adorn them with every thing that is excellent and praise-worthy. You who are so much in the mount with God on the Lord's day, ought to show it, as Moses did, by the shining of your faces, in all instances of wisdom and grace, all the week after. That man does but shame himself, who boasts how long he went to the writing-school, and yet writes a bad hand; or to the dancing-school, and yet has a graceless carriage; much more does that man do so, who boasts how much he has been conversant with the principles of the Christian religion, and yet submits not to the laws of it, nor practises according to it.

(3.) Pity those who refuse instruction, and do not despise them, but if you can do any thing, have compassion upon them, and help them. You may have an opportunity, perhaps, in your common converse, to influence some who have hitherto turned a deaf ear to the calls of God, to be willing to hearken to Christ, and to bring them in by degrees to a liking of those truths of God which they have been prejudiced against, and those instances of serious godliness which they have looked upon with contempt; and they that will not be won by the word, may be won upon by your conversation with them.^k

(4.) What is said of the folly of those who refuse instruction, is the commendation of the wisdom of those who receive instruction. You do well for yourselves, and so it will appear shortly; and therefore go on and prosper, for the Lord is with you while you are with him: encourage yourselves and one another in so good a work, and be not weary in well-doing.

II. They who refuse instruction thereby make it to appear, that they despise their own souls; they evidence that they have very low and mean thoughts of their souls. Now this is here mentioned as a very absurd thing, and that which no rational man will own himself guilty of, and yet which every wicked man is really guilty of. He who refuseth instruction,* *μὴν εαυτον*—so the Seventy—he *hates himself*; despises himself; for *Animus cujusque is est quisque*—*The soul is the man*.

There is a despising ourselves which is commendable, and our duty, the same with denying ourselves, abasing, abhorring, and humbling ourselves. The poor in spirit despise themselves; those who are willing to suffer rather than to sin, despise their own lives, and do not count them dear. This gracious self-contempt is a qualification for the greatest honour and advancement, to which nothing is a greater bar than self-conceit, and making an idol of ourselves.

But there is a despising of ourselves and of our own souls, which is culpable, and of pernicious consequence, such a piece of folly as is the cause of abundance of other folly, and particularly this of refusing instruction. By giving us divine revelation for the enlightening and directing, the renewing and sanctifying, of our souls, God has put the greatest honour imaginable upon them, has distinguished them not only from the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of heaven, but from many and mighty nations of the earth. Now if we regard not the dictates of divine revelation, we throw away this honour that God has put upon our souls, and declare that we do not value it.

The honour of the soul is, that it is rational and immortal: now they who refuse divine instruction despise their own souls under both these considerations; for the design of that instruction is to cure, direct, and cultivate the rational powers of the soul, to support their authority, and assist their operations; if, therefore, we have any value for that part of their honour, we shall receive that instruction. It is likewise intended to prepare the soul for its future and immortal state, and so to secure to it a blessed immortality: if, therefore, we have any value for that part of our soul's honour, we shall reckon the instructions of God's word well worthy of all acceptance.

But I shall speak to it more generally, that I may take in more of the many instances of contempt which people put upon their own souls. And being desired to address myself particularly to young people, I know not how I could better serve the design I have in view, which is to engage them to be truly religious betimes, than by possessing them with a value for their own souls, and arming them against the folly of despising them. If the soul is

¹ John xiv. 22.

^k 1 Pet. iii. 1.

the man, (as certainly it is,) as there is a holy self-love, so there is a holy self-esteem, which is necessary to that due concern which we all ought to have about our souls and eternity.

Take this then for the Doctrine ;

That it is the greatest absurdity and folly imaginable for men to despise their own souls. Or thus, It is the original error of wilful sinners, that they undervalue their own souls.

In prosecution of this I shall endeavour, I. To show who they are that despise their own souls. II. To prove the absurdity and folly of it. III. To make some application of it.

I. How do people make it appear that they despise their own souls? Who—where—is he that is guilty of such a gross absurdity?

1. Some despise their own souls in opinion ; who advance notions of the human soul that derogate from the honour of it, and put men upon a level with the beasts that perish ; that care not how mean a character they put upon the soul, so they can but place their own souls from under God's government and judgment.

The atheists and Sadducees of the age, that believe there is no substance but matter, and shut out all incorporeal nature out of the number of beings, and consequently make their own souls to be only a particular species of matter modified and put in motion, so as to produce sense and perception, and that that is it which thinks and apprehends, that reflects and deliberates, doubts and determines, chooses and refuses ; that all the performances of philosophy and politics are the products of matter and motion ; and, in short, that man is but a very little above the beasts, whereas the word of God has made him but a little below the angels. The absurdity of these notions is philosophically demonstrated by Dr. Bentley, in his " Confutation of Atheism from the Faculties of the Soul." But it is no wonder that men can look within them and say, " They have no souls," when they are such fools as to look about them and say, *There is no God*.

Many who would be thought to understand themselves better than their neighbours, that they may get clear of the obligations of reason and conscience, under colour of wit, wage war with Wisdom ; and that they may not be charged with neglecting the salvation, or incurring the damnation, of their own souls, choose rather to despise them, as not capable either of salvation or damnation ; and that they may not come under the imputation of acting unreasonably, ridicule reason, as the *ignis fatuus*—the vapour of the mind ; so it is called in a profane poem which I remember to have seen in manuscript long since, (I know not whether ever it was printed,) called, " A Satire upon Man." It began thus :

Were I (who to my cost already am
One of those strange prodigious creatures man)
A spirit, free to choose for my own share
What case of flesh and blood I'd please to wear,
I'd rather be a monkey, dog, or bear,
Or any thing, than that vain animal
That boasts himself of being rational.

Those who speak thus scornfully of that noble rank of beings, and of the faculties and capacities of their own souls, make me think of that of Solomon, Eccl. x. 3. *When he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.*

Those despise their own souls who deny the immortality of them ; who, that they may justify themselves in living like beasts, expect no other but to die like beasts. *Ede, bibe, lude, post mortem nulla voluptas—Let us eat, drink, and play, for after death there is no pleasure. Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die,* and there is an end of us. What a contempt do they put upon this candle of the Lord, who think it is put out by death ! whereas, it is only taken out of a dark lantern and set upon a candlestick, where it extends its light much further. And how ridiculously do the pretenders to free-thinking insinuate that Solomon, in his Ecclesiastes, (ch. iii. 21.) speaks doubtfully of the existence of the soul in a state of separation from the body, *Who knows that the spirit of a man goes upward?* whereas, he speaks so very expressly, and with the greatest assurance, of it in the same book, (ch. xii. 7.) that *when the dust returns to the earth as it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it ;* and in that other place only speaks as one in the dark concerning the manner of its removal to that separate state ; none knows the way of the spirit,^a either into the body, or out of it.

The sober heathen will rise up in judgment against such men of this generation, and will condemn them ; for though they had no divine revelation, as we have, to acquaint them how man at first became a living soul ; that there is a spirit in man, and that the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding ; that death itself cannot kill the soul ; and, that it shall be redeemed from the power of the grave ; yet had admirable notions of the excellent nature of the human soul, and of its immortality : they looked upon it to be a ray of divine light, a spark of divine fire. *Quid aliud vocis animam quam Deum in corpore hospitantem—What can you call the soul but God dwelling in the body?* says Tully. He could not say, that the soul of man was made in the image of God, and after his likeness, because he was not told so, as we are, but he says that which is equivalent.

But among you here, I hope, I need not enlarge

^a Isa. xxii. 13.

^a Eccl. xi. 5.

upon these things; you know and believe that God has given to every man a soul of his own which is immaterial, intelligent, and immortal, which is formed by the Father of spirits, is nearly allied to the world of spirits, and must shortly remove to that world. The Lord strengthen and increase our faith herein, and fortify us against the sly and subtle insinuations of those who lie in wait to deceive!

2. Many more, who give not in with the notions of those who thus in opinion despise their own souls, and professedly degrade them, yet in practice despise them; as those who will give to a great man his titles of honour, and yet look upon him as a vile person, who is to be contemned. As many, who profess they know God, and his glory, so many, who profess they know the dignity of their own souls, yet in works deny both the one and the other.

Those despise their own souls, (1.) Who abuse them. (2.) Who hazard them. (3.) Who neglect them. (4.) Who prefer their bodies before them.

(1.) Those who abuse their own souls, may truly be said to despise them. Those we do injury to we put the greatest contempt upon, as not worthy to have right done them. Solomon fastens this brand of foolishness and madness upon those who sin against God, that they wrong their own souls, to that degree, that they may be said to be in love with the death and ruin of them.^a Those who wrong their servants, and abuse them, show that they despise them, and set them with the dogs of their flock: so those who without compassion, or even sense of equity and justice, put despite upon their souls, do indeed despise them. O what base usage many people give their own souls, and, as the ostrich against her young ones, are hardened against them as though they were not theirs.

[1.] Those abuse their own souls who devote them to the service of Satan; as all wilfully wicked people do, who make themselves his children by doing his lusts,^b and surrender themselves his slaves and vassals, to be led captive by him at his will,^c and held fast in his snare; who, being children of disobedience, yield themselves not only to work for, but, which is worse, to be wrought upon, by the prince of the power of the air.^d The faculties of the soul are employed in doing Satan's will, and serving his interest, so that the man seems listed under Satan's banner; he is for Baal, and not on the Lord's side; with Beelzebub, and, therefore, not only not with Christ, but against him.

It is the honour of our souls, that they are made to be the *temples of the Holy Ghost*, the living temples of the living God; they are capable of being so, and intended to be so; than which, what greater honour could be put upon them? But how then do those dis-

honour their own souls who suffer Satan, that apostate from God and rebel against him, the head of the apostasy and rebellion, to keep his palace as a rival with God, nay, and to keep garrison as an enemy against God, in the soul; and are willing not only that his goods should be in peace, and unmolested, but that all the powers of the soul should be employed for him, and be armour for him to trust in.^e

It is the honour of our souls, that they have a relation to heaven, are in alliance with that upper world; and though they have by sin very much lost their acquaintance with it, yet they are still, through grace, capable of keeping up a correspondence with it, and stand fair for an inheritance in it. What greater dishonour then can they put upon themselves, than by entering into a league with the devil, (and all who go on still in their trespasses do so, instead of entering into a war with him,) who left his first estate there, was shamefully thrust out thence, cast down to hell, and is in no manner of hopes, as we are, to retrieve the honour from which he is degraded? Shall fire from heaven mingle itself with fire from hell? or that spirit of a man, which is the candle of the Lord, the light which lighteth every man that cometh into this world, come into the interests of the rulers of the darkness of this world? can it forget itself so far?

It is the honour of our souls, that they are made capable of serving God, of doing his will, carrying on his work, and so of pleasing him, and praising him, and advancing the interests of his kingdom among men: those souls, therefore, are basely abused that are subjected to the power of Satan, and are under his conduct. Our Saviour has represented this to us in the parable of the prodigal son, who when he had spent and wasted all his portion, (representing the wretched havoc which outrageous sinners make of their knowledge and gifts, the sparks of virtue that were struck into their minds by a good education, and the convictions of their own consciences,) then disparaged himself to the last degree, when he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine;^f representing the slavery, that is, both the ignominy and the drudgery, which sinners submit themselves to, by giving themselves up to the service of Satan, and looking upon his temptations not as the assaults of an adversary, which are to be resisted, but as the commands of a master, which are to be obeyed; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage; as all those are who are the servants of corruption.^g

What! Is the devil a master good enough for a soul that has God for its Maker? Is feeding swine, making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof, work good enough for a soul that is capable

^a Prov. viii. 36.
^p 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^b John viii. 44.
^c Eph. ii. 2.

^e Luke xi. 21, 22.

^f Luke xv. 15.

^g 2 Pet. xxi. 19.

of glorifying and enjoying God? Are husks, the food of swine, proper provision for a soul that is capable of being feasted with angels' food? What disparagement is it to a soul to serve its enemies, that tyrannize over it, and seek its ruin, especially since, if it had any spark of honour left in it, it might, by divine grace, easily and certainly not only regain a glorious liberty from them, but gain a more glorious victory over them! O that the sounding of the jubilee trumpet, which proclaims the release of captives, might awaken and animate poor enslaved souls, to think their own liberty from Satan's yoke worth struggling for, and to exert themselves accordingly. Let them apply to their own case what God by the prophet says to the Jews in Babylon, *Awake, awake, put on thy strength*," O Zion. Put on thy strength, O soul, put on a holy resolution, in dependence upon divine grace, no longer to be ruled by a base lust, and led captive by Satan; throw away the rags of thy slavery, and put on thy beautiful garments; be bold and appear great; for if thou wilt but take Christ for thy Redeemer and Ruler, and give up thyself entirely to him, he will undertake, that henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean, that have no right to rule thee, but a design to ruin thee; sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace. And therefore, as it follows there, *Shake thyself from the dust*, the dust of the earth, dirt it should rather be called, that dust into which by sin thou art not only fallen, but in a manner turned; for dust thou art, earthly and carnal, and corrupt thou art; shake thyself from that, and arise and sit down, to consider what thou hast to do, and resolve to loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion: despise not thyself, despise not thy own soul, any longer, by a sneaking submission to the tyranny of Satan, but reach out to, and take up not short of, the glorious liberty of God's children.

[2.] Those abuse their own souls who defile them with the pollutions of sin; who having devoted themselves to the conduct of the unclean spirit, are unclean like him, and work all manner of uncleanness. All sin is defiling to the mind and to the conscience, brings a blot and stain upon the soul, which renders it odious in the eyes of the holy God, and nauseous, and uneasy too, to itself, whenever it comes to have spiritual senses exercised; renders it unfit to approach to God, and to eat of the holy things, as ceremonial pollutions under the law did. Now what an abuse is it to the soul, whose happiness consists in the enjoyment of God and itself, to be thus made offensive to both, afraid of its God, and ashamed of itself! What mean thoughts have those of their own souls who can do them this indignity, do them this injury, rather than deny them-

selves the gratification of a base lust! Let us, therefore, show that we have really a value for our own souls, by hastening to make use of the water of purification provided for them in the blood of Christ, that the conscience being sprinkled with that, may be purged from dead works, and so restored to the service and enjoyment of the living God, and the privileges of his sanctuary, from which we had debarred ourselves.*

But fleshly lusts are in a particular manner defiling, all the irregular inordinate use of the pleasures and delights of sense; these are said to war against the soul, against its purity and peace, and enjoyment of itself; they are a reproach and disparagement to the soul; and, therefore, we sadly abuse our souls when we think to refresh ourselves by bathing in the filthy, muddy streams of sensual pleasures, by which we do but defile ourselves, and like the sow wallow in the mire.

It is the honour of our souls that they are capable of spiritual and heavenly pleasures, of entertaining themselves with divine contemplations and devout affections, the pleasures of which may be brought near to the delights of blessed spirits above, that are already entered into the joy of our Lord. And those maintain the honour of their souls, who by faith and love, by prayer and meditation, keep up their correspondence with heaven. But how do those despise their souls, and this honour put upon them, who not only neglect those heavenly entertainments, but disfit themselves for them, and exclude themselves from them, by the guilt they contract every day in the use of the pleasures of sense, which become pleasures of sin to them!

For the soul to be thrown from its rest in God, where only it can find true rest, to be shut out from its communion with God, to be put in confusion in its approaches to God, and made uneasy to itself, is to have a deal of wrong done it, and a great deal of contempt put upon it; and all this they do in their own souls who go a whoring after their own inventions, and so are defiled with their own works, with their own ways."

[3.] Those abuse their own souls who deceive them with lies and falsehoods; those certainly put a contempt upon them who put a cheat upon them, and delude them with flatteries to act against their own true interest. A man justly reckons himself affronted, and resents it accordingly, who is imposed upon with sham and banter; it is a reflection upon his understanding, as if he were not able to discern the fraud, as well as a wrong to his interests, which are prejudiced by it; and yet, perhaps, he is doing the same thing to his own soul. Taking advantage of its credulity in favour of itself, he not only suffers it to persist in its mistakes, and guards

against the rectifying of them, but does all he can to rivet and confirm them.

How many cheats do people put upon their own souls, which will turn at last to their own ruin, for self-flatterers and self-deceivers will prove in the end to have been self-destroyers ! How do they make themselves believe the strangest and grossest absurdities, and proceed upon them as if they were undoubted truths ! There is none bad, but they are so upon some bad principle, which if it were true, would bear them out ; but it is a strong delusion. The wicked heart is a deceived heart, that turns men aside ; and none perish, but it is with a lie in their right hand.^a And it is with lying vanities that they are deceived who forsake their own mercies.^b They who mock God, and think to put a cheat upon him, do but deceive themselves, and put a damning cheat upon their own souls.^c

When the word of God, which is a discernor of the thoughts, tells us what sinners say in their hearts ; or, as sometimes it is in the original, say to their hearts, we may thence infer what slights they put upon their own souls, and how they abuse them. The fool appeases his conscience with this, that there is no God ; or if there be, that he may go on securely in his wicked way, *for the Lord hath forsaken the earth ;^d He hath forgotten, he hides his face, and will not require it.^e The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard.^f* Did ever any man banter another, as sinners banter their own souls, run them down with assurance, and beguile them with fraud and artifice.

When the soul begins to be afraid of the wrath of God, and to think of fleeing from it by repentance, it is abused with this suggestion, that there is no danger ; as God is not so strict in his demands, so he is not so severe in his punishments, as the Scripture makes him to be. God has indeed said, *There is no peace to the wicked ;* but when the sinner comes to apply it to himself, he tells his own soul, *I shall have peace, though I go on to walk in the way of my heart, and to add drunkenness to thirst.^g* He says in his heart, *I shall not be moved, for I shall never be in adversity.^h* He is drawn into an opinion, and lulled asleep with it, that heaven is a fool's paradise, and hell is but a bugbear to frighten children, and therefore he is taught to mock at fear, and not to be affrighted, and not to believe that it is the sound of the trumpet.

They who flatter themselves with a conceit that the external professions and performances of religion will serve to bear them out, and bring them off, in the judgment of the great day, though their spirit and conversation be ever so disagreeable, give the lie to their own consciences, and tell a lie to them,

and in both abuse and despise their own souls. Thus the apostle tells us, that he who only seems to be religious, and is not so really, deceives his own heart, seduces it, misleads it, and so abuses it ; and, that they who are hearers of the word only, and not doers, do but deceive themselves ;ⁱ they put a fallacy or false reasoning upon themselves, and not in a small matter which one may safely make a jest of, but in a matter, of the greatest consequence, which every man is concerned to be in good earnest about.

Let us, therefore, do this justice to our own souls, and put this respect upon them, to tell them the truth. Let one faculty deal faithfully with another ; for if they act separately, it will be to the ruin of the whole. Let the understanding be true to the conscience in informing it right concerning truth and falsehood, good and evil ; and then let the conscience be true to the soul in applying it, otherwise we put a contempt upon our own souls.

[4.] Those abuse their own souls who distract and disquiet them with inordinate cares and griefs about this world, and the things of it. As those despise their souls who wallow in the mire of sensual pleasures, so do they who make them work in the mines, and tug at the oar, of worldly pursuits ; who rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrow,^j in the business of this world ; who are careful and cumbered about many things, and have their hearts burthened and quite overcharged with an anxious solicitude, not only what they shall eat and drink, but what they shall do to get estates and grow great in the world.

It is our duty to labour, working with our hands the thing that is good. It is our sentence, to eat our bread in the sweat of our faces ; and it is our sin and folly, and an abuse to our own souls, if, all our days, we eat in sorrows and darkness,^k always in fear of losing what we have, and always in care to make it more, to lay house to house, and field to field,^l with an insatiable and boundless desire. If we be hurried hither and thither with the cares of this world ; if our souls be put upon the rack, always to the stretch in pursuit of lying vanities ; if we be of doubtful mind, live in careful suspense,^m if we hover as meteors in the air, (so the word signifies,) so that we have no rest or enjoyment of ourselves, we abuse our own souls.

It is the honour of our souls that they are made capable of working, for the glory of God, and the securing of eternal life ; of working for another world, in preparation for it, working out our own salvation ; and of working with another world, in concert with it ; of doing the will of God as the angels do it who are in heaven. What a disparagement then is it to these souls, to make them slaves

^a Isa. xliv. 20. ^b Jon. ii. 8. ^c Gal. vi. 7. ^d Ezek. ix. 9.
^e Ps. x. 11. 13. ^f Ps. xciv. 7. ^g Deut. xxix. 19.

^h Ps. x. 6. ⁱ Jam. i. 22, 26. ^j Ps. cxxvii. 2.
^k Eccl. v. 17. ^l Isa. v. 8. ^m Luke xii. 29.

and drudges to the world, and to keep all their faculties employed in the work of the beasts that perish, while those high and noble services for which they were designed, are last and least thought of! Covetous worldlings are said to load themselves with thick clay, and with a continual perplexity about it; such perfect pack-horses do they make of their souls, and so fast do they chain them to this earth, when they should be mounting up with wings like eagles heavenwards.

Let us, therefore, maintain the dignity of our own souls, by disentangling them from the world, and the cares of it, and managing ourselves with a holy indifference as to those things, rejoicing as though we rejoiced not, and weeping as though we wept not, and letting our souls dwell at ease, in an assurance of the wisdom and goodness of the Divine Providence working all for our good at last, and putting it out of the power of any worldly cross or disappointment to disturb us in that repose. This is to treat our souls respectfully, and as they ought to be treated, reserving them for the employments that become them, and that they are fitted for. Let us think it below us to fill our heads with contrivances about those things, which, when we have compassed them, we cannot fill our hearts with the enjoyment of them; nor suffer the losing of that to be vexation of spirit to us, the having of which is but vanity, and no satisfaction of spirit.

[5.] Those abuse their own souls who divide them a portion of the things of this world, and put them off with those things. As the soul is abused by an inordinate coveting and pursuing of the world, so it is abused by an inordinate complacency and repose in the world; for though that may give it a present easiness, and so seem to befriend it, yet it cuts it off from its true happiness, and lays a foundation for an eternal uneasiness.

Those know how to value their own souls, who can be content with a little of this world for their passage, because there is better in reserve; but those greatly undervalue them, who could be content with it all for their inheritance and home.

It is the honour of the soul, that its original and alliance is heavenly: it stands in relation to the upper world, and, therefore, it is a debasement to it to let it take up with the things of this world for its felicity, which can neither suit its capacities, nor satisfy its vast desires. This is excellently expressed by Mr. George Herbert;

If souls be made of earthly mould,

Let them love gold;

If born on high,

Let them unto their kindred fly:

For they can never be at rest

Till they regain their ancient nest.

It is the honour of the soul, that it is spiritual, and is capable of spiritual enjoyments, spiritual riches. Those, therefore, put a slight upon them who think that the entertainments of sense, which we have in common with the brutes, are sufficient to make them happy, and can call them *their good things*.¹ A father cannot more show his displeasure against a son he is irreconcilably fallen out with, than in making his will to cut him off with twelvepence, who, otherwise, was entitled to a child's part of a great estate: yet much greater is the disproportion between the happiness which the souls of men are born to, and that which the greatest part of men foolishly take up with, as their reward, as their consolation, as their all, and which, therefore, they shall justly be put off with; *Didst not thou agree with me for a penny?* And, therefore, so shall thy doom be.

It is the honour of the soul, that it is immortal, is so in its duration, and has something in its constitution, which, if it were not blinded and biassed by the world and the flesh, would aspire after immortal blessedness; *Non est mortale quod optat, immortale petit—It desires not mortal, but seeks immortal, objects.* How do they then dishonour their own souls, who take up a rest and home for them in those things that will not last so long as they must last, that must be very shortly either buried in our graves, or left to our heirs, and will not go with us to the judgment, nor stand us in any stead in the soul's state of separation from the body; who confine their happiness within the bounds of time, whereas they are not themselves so confined, but are hastening into a boundless eternity! And thus the soul's being must survive, must eternally survive, its bliss, and, therefore, must of course be eternally miserable.

How did that rich man in the parable despise and abuse his own soul, who, when he had his barns enlarged and filled, said to his soul, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, it is all thy own, and it is enough, it is thy all, now, take thy ease, eat, drink, and be merry!*^m If the man had had the soul of a swine, it had been something to talk to it at this rate; but what is this to a soul that must this night be required, that must this night remove it knows not where, and must leave all these things behind, to it knows not who? From his folly let us all learn this wisdom for ourselves, this justice and kindness to our own souls, to lay up treasure for them, not in this world, which we are hastening from, but in the other world, which we are hastening to.

(2.) Those despise their own souls who hazard them, and lay them open to danger, as well as those who abuse them, and do them a direct mischief. What we value we are loth to venture the loss of: those who know how to value their souls will not endanger their souls' lives; yet this is that which

¹ Luke xvi. 23.

^m Luke xii. 19.

multitudes do, without any regret or reflection upon their own folly.

[1.] Those hazard their souls who expose them to the wrath and curse of God every day by wilful sin, upon presumption that after a while they shall repent of their sin, and it shall be forgiven them, and all shall be well. Those have very light thoughts of their own souls, who can thus venture them in hopes of God's mercy, when at the same time they bid defiance to his justice.

It is certain that every wilful sin lays us open to the curse of God, and to the arrests of his law; and it is the soul that is exposed. As the sin is the sin of the soul, so the curse it brings upon us is a curse to the soul: so it is expressed with an emphasis, (Job xxxi. 30.) by wishing a curse to his soul, which will destroy it, and all its comforts, as a curse in the house consumes it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof. A curse upon the soul is a penetrating thing, it comes into the bowels like water, and like oil into the bones." How little account do they make of their souls who run them upon this sword's point, and tremble not at all at the apprehension of their danger! They do in effect say, "No matter what becomes of them." They are by nature as children of disobedience, children of wrath, and that wrath they not only leave abiding on them,^a but are daily adding to it, and treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, not considering what a deluge of wrath it will be when this treasury comes to be broken up, nor what will become of their souls in that deluge; it is as much as to say, they care not what comes of them.

It is true, there is a way of escaping that wrath, by repentance and faith in Christ, but these are God's gift, and his work, for those who pray for them, not for those that presume upon them. It is but a peradventure, whether God will give repentance, whether the Divine Providence will give space to repent, and whether the divine grace will give a heart to repent, a tender heart, to those who have thus hardened their hearts by the deceitfulness of sin. Those have certainly little regard to their own souls, who throw them thus into the fire of God's wrath, in hopes of snatching them as brands out of it, when there is such danger of perishing in it.

But, of all sinners, none do more impudently avow and proclaim their contempt of their own souls, than those do who curse themselves in their passions or vehement asseverations; who challenge God Almighty to damn them, nay, and sometimes explain themselves, and challenge him with a horrid emphasis to damn their souls: as if they thought that their damnation lingered and slumbered too long, they imprecate that which the devils themselves deprecate, and that is, being tormented before the time.

Do they know what damnation is, what the damnation of the soul is, who dare thus run upon God, upon his neck, upon the thick bosses of his buckler, and stretch out their hands against him?^p Those make nothing of their own souls, who make nothing of God's wrath, nor consider what a fearful thing it is for a living soul, who hates holiness, to fall into the hands of a living God, who hates sin, and will reckon for it.

[2.] Those hazard their souls who embark them in a false and deceitful bottom, and in that venture them into the vast ocean of eternity. We have a house to build for our souls, for them to retire to and repose in when a storm comes, when the night comes: now, if we build this house upon the sand, when there is a rock provided for us to build it upon, it is a sign that we despise our own souls, and think any thing will serve to be a security for them; as it is a sign that a man makes small account of his money when he puts it out upon very slender security, and cares not who he trusts with it, nor what hands he lodges it in.

It is a great thing (my brethren) to venture into another world, to be brought to judgment, and to have our everlasting state determined by an irreversible sentence; and it concerns us all seriously to consider, what hope we have that we shall come off well in that day, and what ground we have for that hope; whether it be a hope that will not make us ashamed. You are baptized, you are called Christians, you make a visible profession of religion, a passable, perhaps a plausible, one; you have a form of godliness, and perhaps join yourselves with those who are most strict and serious; and this, you think, will be a good security to you for the favour of God, and the happiness of heaven, though you are strangers to the power of godliness, and are under the dominion of the world and the flesh. It is a sign that you know not the worth of your souls, when you dare venture them thus upon that which will not bear their weight.

Those despise their souls, who can send them to God's bar with no other plea in their hands but that, *We are Abraham's seed*: or that, *I am rich, I have found me out substance; in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me, that were sin*:^q or that, *We have eaten and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets*: or that, *The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we*; though they have no evidence at all for them that they love God, or believe in Christ, or repent of their sins, or that they are sanctified by the grace of God. They would not bring a cause to man's bar supported with no better pleas, that will certainly be overruled; nor venture a rich cargo in an old rotten vessel, that a thousand to one founders at sea.

^a Pa. cix. 18.

^p John iii. 35.

^q Job xv. 25, 26.

^r Hos. xii. 8.

Let us, therefore, show the esteem we have for our own souls, by building upon a firm foundation, and making sure work for them, and preparing that for their removal into another world which will stand them in stead, and which they may triumph in. Let us not think it enough when we die, to say, We commit our souls into the hands of Almighty God, and to cry, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*; but let us make it the care and business of our lives to prepare our souls, and get them made meet to be committed into the hands of God and Christ, and to be welcomed, that it may not be said to them, *Depart, I know you not*: these are not souls prepared for heaven, and therefore heaven was not prepared for them.—Let not us run a risk in the concerns of our souls, but press after that assurance which blessed Paul had attained when he said, *I know whom I have believed*, whom I have trusted with this precious soul of mine, that great trust which I have lodged in the hands of the great trustee, and he is able to keep that which I have submitted to his conduct, and then committed to his care against that day.

[3.] Those hazard their souls, who engage them as a pawn for the world, and the gains of it. They are aiming at great things here below, they will be rich, for they think they must be rich, or they cannot be happy. And this mistake makes way for a thousand more. They are in haste to be rich, and are told, that they who are so cannot be innocent; yet they will hazard their innocence, and with it all the comfort and happiness of their souls, rather than not be rich, than not be quickly rich. Contrary to the judgment of Christ, they think themselves profited if they gain the world, though they should lose their souls at last by it.

Here is a bargain to be made, some worldly design to be compassed, which, with the help of a lie, of a fraud, of a false oath, may bring home a great deal of worldly advantage. They cannot but own that such ill practices are highly dangerous to their souls, that they run a great hazard by them; natural conscience at first startles at such things, but it is for the getting of money, a present gain, and which they think is certain, and not losable. The loss of the soul is future, and they are willing to think it either uncertain or retrievable, and, therefore, they resolve to run the hazard: they flatter themselves with hopes that they may gain the world, and save their souls too; however, if they can but gain the world, let the worst come to the worst, if they do lose their souls, they shall fare as well as their neighbours; and if they alone must bear it, they will bear it as well as they can. Now this is making light of the soul indeed, to hazard its eternal bliss for an inconsiderable trifle of this world's wealth, and then to turn it off with a jest, *If I perish*,

I perish, and there is an end of it; no, there is not an end of it, for it is an everlasting destruction; and those who run this venture will see their folly when it is too late, and will be taught by the loss of their souls to know the worth of them, which they had better have considered in time.

How ready are many vain people to pawn their souls for the truth of every idle word they speak; "Upon my soul it is so." Verily they make light of their souls indeed, who will venture them upon the most trifling occasion. Dost thou know what thou pawnest, man, and what the value of it is? Thou wouldst not be so free of a precious stone, if thou hadst it, as thou art of a precious soul. Those play high that, whether in jest or earnest, stake their souls; and do not consider what a subtle gamester the devil is, that souls are the prize he aims at, and that it is them he lies in wait to deceive, and so to devour: and, if we be so foolish as to hazard their ruin,—let him alone, to make sure their ruin.

Let us, therefore, make it appear that we do not despise our own souls, by taking heed to them, and keeping them diligently, keeping them out of harm's way, keeping them that the wicked one toucheth them not; for there is danger, lest if he touch, he take. Let us avoid all occasions of sin, and temptations to it, all appearances of evil, and approaches toward it, and take heed of a bold adventure in any case wherein the soul is concerned, for fear of the worst. In things of value, and that are our all, it is good to be sure, and folly to run a hazard; to hazard a soul for that which a man would be loth to hazard his life.

(3.) Those despise their own souls that neglect them, and though they do not, or think they do not, do themselves and their own souls any harm, yet are not at any care to do them the good they should do them. They think it is well enough if they do not wilfully destroy their souls, though nothing is done towards the salvation of them; whereas starving the child is as surely the murder of it as poisoning it. Those certainly despise their own souls who make no provision for them.

[1.] Who take no care to get the wounds of their souls healed. Sin is a wound to the soul, a bleeding, killing wound, a wound and dishonour: Jesus Christ has made provision for the cure of this wound, there is balm in Gilead, and he himself is the physician there; by his stripes we may be healed; but in vain doth the physician do his part in prescribing, if the patient will not do his in observing the prescriptions. Christ would have healed them, but they would not be healed; and so, as David complains, *the wounds stink and are corrupt*, and all because of the sinner's foolishness.^a They fester, and are in danger of being gangrened, because no care is taken to get

^a 2 Tim. i. 12.

^a Prov. xxviii. 20.

^a 1 John v. 18.

^a Ps. lviii. 5.

them drest : and thus the wound, not looked after in time, proves fatal.

Those who take no care to get their sins pardoned, and their consciences purified, and their corruptions mortified, leave their own souls as the priest and Levite did the wounded man, because (like them) they have no value for them ; they care not whether they live or die. They feel not the pain of their wounds in conviction of sin, they fear not the consequences of them in a dread of wrath, and so no application is made to Christ ; no inquiry, What shall I do to get my sin pardoned ? What method shall I take to escape the death they threaten me with ? And so the soul is filled with wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores* which are not bound up.

It is certain that those fools who make a mock at sin, and make light of it, are chargeable with this further instance of folly, they make light of their own souls, and are not at all solicitous what becomes of them. By this, therefore, let us all make it appear that we value the lives of our souls, by inquiring, With what will the Lord be pleased ? What shall we do to recover his favour ? with a readiness to do any thing ; to submit to any operation, to go through any course of spiritual physic prescribed, so that we may not die of our wounds. When we are reprov'd for a fault, and warn'd against it for the future, and are call'd to repent of what we have done amiss, if we fly in the face of the reprov'er, and say, we care not for his help, who would help us up when we are fallen ; it is a sign that we do not value our own souls ; for we would thank any one that would offer his service to help to cure a wound in our bodies, or if we had missed our way, would put us in the road again. If, therefore, by falling into sin we have shew'd our neglect of our souls, by hastening our repentance let us show our concern for them.

[2.] Those who take no care to get the wants of their souls supplied, despise them. The soul in its own nature is craving, and has desires which ought to be satisfied ; but the soul in its fallen state is needy, it is miserably poor, it is ready to perish for hunger, as the prodigal in the far country. This world has nothing but husks for it : in our Father's house, and there only, there is bread enough. Now those have no value for themselves, who put off their souls with these husks, and think not of applying themselves to the Father of spirits for the food of spirits, the bread of life.

The soul wants knowledge, wants to be acquainted with God its Maker, with Christ its Redeemer, with the employments it is brought up, with the enjoyments it is designed, for ; wants to be acquainted with the upper world it is akin to, with the future world it is bound for. The needful knowledge of

these things will not be got without care and pains. Now those who will rather let their own souls be destroyed for lack of knowledge, than take that care and pains, show what a small account they make of them. They are in care to furnish themselves with that knowledge which is necessary to their getting a livelihood in this world, but not that which is necessary to their serving, glorifying, and enjoying God ; and so in the greatness of their folly wander endlessly.

The soul wants to have communion with God ; it is tired with the pursuits of the world, and surfeited with its pleasures, and longs to have fellowship with its own relations, to associate with those of its own kind, to have a correspondence with heaven, wants to hear thence, and send thither. There is a way appointed for such an intercourse as this, which would be its life and joy ; but holy ordinances, by which it is to be kept up and maintained, are neglected, and not attended on at all, or not duly attended to ; the great things of God's law and gospel are accounted as a strange thing ; prayer, by which the supply of our souls' wants should be fetch'd in from the fulness which is in Jesus Christ, is either omitted or sinks into a formality ; and in all this a contempt is put upon the soul, as if it were not worth making provision for.

[3.] Those who take no care to get the watch over their own souls kept up, despise them. There ought to be a constant guard upon our own spirits, a jealous eye, and a careful hand upon them, that the first risings of corruptions in them may be subdued and mortified, stifled and suppressed, and the first risings of any good affections in them cherished and encouraged : we must have an eye upon them, as upon children at their book, and servants at their work, to keep them to it ; must have an eye upon these jewels in our hands, that they be not snatched from us. *Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently.** We are intrusted with these talents, and charged to keep that which is committed to our trust. And those who know how to value their souls, will keep them with all diligence, as knowing that out of them, out of souls well kept, are the issues of life.

But how many are there who have precious souls to keep, and never cast an eye upon them, nor make inquiries concerning them, where they are, or what they are doing, or what is likely to become of them ; never retire into their hearts, or commune with them ; there is no care taken to keep out that which is dangerous and prejudicial to the soul's interests, nor to fetch in or keep up that which is necessary, and will be serviceable to them.

And for want of watchfulness and circumspection, the soul soon becomes like the field of the slothful, and the vineyard of the man void of understanding, which, when the stone wall was broken down, was

all grown over with thorns; and nettles covered the face thereof.* There is the picture of a neglected soul; it is all overgrown with vain and foolish thoughts, corrupt and vile affections, like the ground when it was cursed, which brought forth thorns and thistles. By these God is dishonoured, the soul is disgraced, all good fruit is choked, and the earth that brings forth these thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. It is sad to think how many precious souls, that stand fair for heaven, are ruined and undone to all eternity, through mere carelessness.

[4.] Those who take no care to get the welfare, the eternal welfare, of their souls secured; they are hastening into a state where they must be for ever either completely happy, or completely miserable, and never were truly solicitous what they should do to escape that misery, and to lay hold on that happiness: certainly these despise their own souls, they do not think them worth saving; not worth the jailer's inquiry, *What must I do to be saved?* or that young man's, *Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?* A thousand impertinences are inquired after, and the great concerns of the soul and eternity not regarded.

This honour God has put upon the soul, that he has not only by its creation made it capable of eternal life, but by its redemption made it a candidate for eternal life: but those despise this honour God has put upon them, who neglect the great salvation, and think it not worth taking any care about, or striving for; they judge themselves unworthy of eternal life, as is said of the unbelieving Jews.[†] It is not from a penitent sense of the sinfulness of their souls, but from a proud contempt of the capacities of their souls, which they do not think worth gratifying with that life, and the joys and glories of it. They are not at all solicitous what will become of them in the other world, so that they can but have their wishes in this world; nor have the wisdom of the unjust steward, who took care of a house to be in when he was turned out of his stewardship. It is to be feared, that even among those who are called Christians, read the Scriptures, and hear sermons, there are many who never yet put the question seriously to themselves, "*What will become of me in the other world? If I should die to-night, whither would death bring me?*"

Or if they have asked the question, they have not pursued it, nor brought it to any issue, but the matter is still at uncertainties; and they are content it should be so, and put off the prosecution of this inquiry, as Felix did, to some more convenient season; they know not when. When they come to be sick, or come to be old, then they will begin to think of their souls and eternity, and to prepare for another

world, when they find they must stay no longer in this. What low thoughts do these delays speak of their own souls, as if their welfare were to be the last and furthest thing in their thoughts?

And those who seem to be in earnest in inquiring the way to heaven, yet perhaps do not like it when they are showed it, but fly off from the bargain when it comes to be struck; as he did who went away sorrowful from Christ, because he had great possessions. Some value he had for his soul, else he had not gone away sorrowful; but he had a greater value for the world, else he had not gone away at all. Those who have a beloved sin, a Dalilah, an Herodias, a house of Rimmon, which they cannot find in their hearts to part with, no, not to save their souls, show how little they value them; for those who know the worth of them will be glad to accept of Christ upon his own terms, of Christ upon any terms.

(4.) Those despise their own souls, who prefer their bodies before their souls. Man is a creature admirably composed of matter and spirit, that though closely united, have distinct and separate interests and capacities. It is the sinfulness and misery of our fallen state, that the body has got dominion over the soul, and the soul is become carnal; it also is flesh. It will be the felicity of our glorified state, that the soul will have the dominion, and the body itself will become spiritual; but it is the test now, in this state of trial and probation, which of these we will give the preference to, and maintain the dominion of, the soul or the body. Now those may truly be said to despise their own souls comparatively, that prefer their bodies before them, and allow them their principal cares.

[1.] Those who employ their souls only to serve their bodies, and make provision for them, do in effect despise their own souls. The body was made to serve the soul, in serving God, and when it is kept so employed, it is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and upon that account truly honourable: but if, instead of that, the soul be made to serve the body in serving the world, and all its noble powers are kept at constant work to provide for the gratifications of the body and its appetites, this is a great contempt put upon the soul.

Many people live as if they had bodies only to take care of, and not souls; or, as if the reasonable soul were intended only to forecast for the sensitive one; and man had no other prerogative above the beasts, but that, with the use of his reason, he is capable to screw up the delights of sense to a greater degree of pleasure, and make them more nice and delicate; to improve by art the gifts of nature, which the inferior creatures are content to take as they find them; which, after all, does but make the desires of

* Prov. xxiv. 30, 31

† Acts xiii. 46.

is more humoursome, and consequently the sense of sense the less pleasing.

What a disparagement is this to a rational being wholly taken up in such sordid employment, and to be made a perfect drudge to the body; to have souls given us for no other end but to keep bodies from putrifying; and the powers of sense served for no other purpose, but to be caterers to the desires of sense! This is that sore evil which we saw under the sun, as an error, the servant of the back, and the prince attending as a servant of the eye to him.* When the wits are set on work to find satisfactions for the appetites and passions, and the intellectual powers, which should be employed in the noblest speculations, and the most judicious conduct of the heart and life, are employed to the meanest projects, here is a soul despised, and its own powers itself truly despicable.

Those who injure their souls to please their bodies comparatively despise their own souls, and they do not value them as they ought.

Those who do so who indulge the ease of the flesh to the loss and detriment of the soul, who, to spare a little of the body, come short of great advantages to the soul, which it might gain to itself either here or after. The sluggard who will not plough by the sweat of his face, and, therefore, has nothing to gather at harvest, but is forced to beg in winter, prefers his present ease before his future benefit: so the farmer, who, by observing the winds and clouds, is deterred from sowing and reaping; and such is the idleness of those who, to save a little labour and body, lose the benefit of the means of grace for their souls: this will be found very improvident, they will cry at last, when profit and loss come to be considered.

Those who do so who indulge the appetite of the flesh to the hurt and damage of the soul; who not only lose their souls, but their bodies might reap, because they cannot bear their hearts to exert themselves, but involve themselves in a great deal of mischief, because they find in their hearts to deny themselves, and to resist the cravings of the flesh. The sensual appetite is apt to be carried out inordinately toward the body, and as far as it is gratified, the soul is pre-occupied by it, the heart is overcharged with surfeit-drunkennes, and rendered unfit for heavenly converse and pursuits: and, therefore, those who prefer their bodies above their souls, who, as the apostle speaks, are given to appetite, and have not the will to put a knife to their throat.^b

Those who, like the Israelites in the wilderness, coveted quails, and would not live without flesh, and God gave them what they asked; but at the same time he sent leanness into their souls.^c He withdrew his grace from them, and the comforts which used to make their souls

as a watered garden. Those do not know how to value their own souls, who can be content to have them starved and made lean, so that their bodies may be feasted and fattened, and fed to the full.

There is no sin that does more immediately prejudice the soul to please the body, than drunkenness does, for it deprives men for the time of the use of their reason, and profanes that crown, that glory of the human nature, by casting it to the ground, and levelling men with the beasts that perish. The understanding of the man is darkened when he is drunk, his memory in a manner lost, his thoughts in a tumult, and his passions have got clear of the government of reason, and are all in an uproar; his speech bewrays him to be a fool.

The drunkard forfeits man, and doth divest
All worldly right, save what he has by beast.

HERBERT.

Can a man put a greater contempt than this upon his own soul, thus to trample it in the dirt; not once or twice, but often; to make a practice of it, as many do? And besides the present injury that it does to reason, which a night's sleep does in some measure recover, it does a lasting mischief to conscience and religion; it debauches the mind, hardens the heart, and stupifies it; it alienates the affections from divine things, and has been the ruin of many who were well educated, and began well. Drunkards, to gratify the spark in the throat, as they call it, extinguish the fire from heaven, the fire of holy love and devotion, and kindle a fire of vile affections there, which, if infinite mercy do not prevent, will burn to the lowest hell.

[3.] Those who endanger their souls to secure their bodies, despise their own souls, and give the preference to the inferior part of them. It is natural to us when the head is struck at, to venture the right hand for its preservation, which, though dear, is not so dear. When at any time we are brought to this dilemma, that there is no way of avoiding the sin of the soul, but by suffering in the body, and no way of avoiding suffering in the body, but by the sin of the soul, then it will appear which we give the preference to, the soul or the body: they are both dear we will suppose, but then it will be seen which is most dear.

Those who will deny Christ, rather than die for him, and to escape the fiery furnace, will worship the golden image, plainly show that they despise their own souls; for they will rather throw away their comforts in God, and their hopes of heaven, than their hopes and comforts in this world. When the storm of persecution arises because of the word, they will rather make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, than of the world and of a good

* Eccl. x. 5, 6, 7.

^b Ch. xi. 4.
2 M 2

^c Prov. xxiii. 1, 2.

^c Ps. cvi. 15.

estate; and, contrary to the common dictates of reason, will rather cast themselves overboard than their wares: and, though all that a man has he will give for his life, but little of what they have will they give for the life of their souls. Our Lord Jesus has expressly told us, that he who will save his life by disowning Christ, the same shall lose it;^d by saving a transient satisfaction he shall lose an eternal felicity; but whosoever is willing to lose his life, shall find it with infinite advantage in eternal life: but they will not take his word, and, therefore, choose iniquity rather than affliction; a choice which they will certainly repent: it were well if they would repent in time.

But let us show that we value our souls, by making Moses's choice, *Rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*;^e and theirs, who loved not their lives to the death in the cause of Christ; and that of blessed Paul, who counted not his life dear to himself, so that he might finish his course with joy:^f and let us reckon our losses for our religion abundantly made up, if we do but secure the salvation of the soul. When that blessed martyr Bishop Hooper was urged to recant, with this consideration, "Life is sweet, and death bitter:" "It is true," said he, "but eternal life is more sweet, and eternal death more bitter." This was the language of one who put a value upon his own soul; as on the contrary, he who in the like case said, "The fire is hot, and nature is frail, and the truth is, I cannot burn," and, therefore, denied Christ, and turned papist; showed that he preferred his body before his soul, as multitudes do, who will rue it at the last.

II. I come next briefly to show the folly of those who thus despise their own souls; and really the thing speaks for itself; men cannot be guilty of a greater absurdity: their folly will shortly be made manifest to all men; and to themselves too, when all these things, for the sake of which they slighted their own souls, are lost and gone, and the soul that despised itself is for ever abandoned by its Maker to a miserable remembrance of its own folly, in forsaking its own mercies, which would have put a crown upon its hopes, for lying vanities, which put a cheat upon them.

To show the folly of those who despise their own souls, let us consider only these five things: The nature of the soul; its nearness to us; the purchase of the soul; the projects that are concerning it; and its perpetual duration.

1. Consider the nature of the soul, which is too noble, too excellent to be despised; they who despise it despise dominions, and speak evil of dignities. *They pursue my soul*, says Job, (*ch. xxx. 15.*) the word in the original signifies *my principal one*; for

the soul is the principal part of us. Jacob calls it, *His honour*.^g David calls it, *His glory*.^h It is folly therefore to despise that which has such an innate excellency in it, and has so much honour put upon it. The soul of man is no despicable thing, and therefore they are fools who despise it.

The soul is of divine original; it was not made of the dust, as the body was, but it was the breath of the Almighty, had the image of God stamped upon it, and is the master-piece of God's workmanship in this lower world. He who despises the poor, reproaches his Maker, so does he who despises his own soul; he thereby reflects dishonour upon the Father of spirits, as if that work of his hands which he rejoiced in were not worth our regarding.

The soul is of inestimable value; for its powers are great and noble; its apprehensions not bounded by the horizon of sense and time, but reach far beyond it; it is capable of knowing God, and conversing with him, and of receiving a divine revelation in order thereunto; it is capable of being sanctified by the Spirit and grace of God, and employed in praising and blessing God: nay, it is capable of being glorified with God, of seeing him as he is, and enjoying him to eternity; and is this a thing to be despised? The soul is that one talent which they who have received least from their Master are intrusted with; its being a talent speaks it of value, as does the doom past upon the slothful servant who did not improve that one talent, though he was intrusted with no more. The soul is a price in the hand to get wisdom, that principal thing, which is to be laboured for above all gettings.

Self-consciousness is in the nature of the soul; it is capable of reflecting upon itself, and conversing with itself; *Nosce teipsum—Know thyself*, was an ancient dictate of wisdom: and self-ignorance is supposed to be a gross absurdity, when it is asked, *Know ye not your own selves?*ⁱ But those who despise themselves, and are in no concern about their own souls, show that they have no knowledge, no right knowledge, of themselves. This faculty of the soul, which is so much its honour, does not do its part; the light that is in them is darkness.

2. Consider the nearness of the soul. It is his own soul that the sinner despises, that is, it is himself, for the soul is the man, and what is the man but a living soul? Abstract the soul as living, and the body is a lump of clay; abstract the soul as rational, and the man is as the beasts that perish. Persons in Scripture are often reckoned by souls; for the body is but the shell, the soul is the kernel.

Now, to the right value of a thing, it must be considered not only what it is in itself, but what interest we have in it. The loan of a thing is not so valuable as the property. Now the world is but lent

^d Matt. xvi. 25.^e Heb. xi. 25.^f Acts xx. 24.^g Gen. xlix. 5.^h Ps. xvi. 9.ⁱ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

us, whatever we have in it, it is not to be called our own; but our souls are our own; we brought them into this world, and shall carry them out. The soul is called *the darling*:^{*} in the original it is, *my only one*. We are intrusted with but one soul, and therefore, the greater is the shame if we neglect it, and the greater the loss if we lose it. Our souls being our only ones, should be our darlings, not our drudges; being near to us, they should be dear to us, and our constant care and concern should be about them. This is my vineyard which is mine, (such an emphasis does the spouse lay upon the property,) and therefore should be ever before us.¹

Our soul is our own, for we are intrusted with it, as committed to our charge, by him whose all souls are, to be employed in his service now, and to be fitted for a happiness in the vision and fruition of him hereafter; and of this trust we must shortly give account: "Man, woman, thou hadst a soul of thy own, what didst thou do with it? It was lodged in thy hand, where is it? It was to be thy peculiar care, has it been so?" O what folly is it to despise our souls, when we are so nearly interested in them, that we really are good or bad, and it is with us well or ill, according as our souls are or are not well looked after. The concerns of our souls are, as our Saviour speaks, the *τα ἡμετερα*,—*the things that are our own*. The concerns of the world are the *τα αλλοτρια*—*another man's*; Luke xvi. 12. Epictetus spoke much the same when he made the conduct and government of our appetites and passions, *abstine and sustine*, to be the *τα εφ' ἑμιν*—*the duty which is ours*, but the issues of our worldly affairs to be the *τα εκ εφ' ἑμιν*—*the event*, which is God's. The keeping of our hearts is above all keepings, and therefore, they ought to be kept with all diligence, and not to be despised.^m

3. Consider the purchase of the soul, and the price that was paid for its redemption. If we despise the soul, we despise that, which not only the all-wise Creator dignified, but which the all-wise Redeemer too put yet greater honour upon, and so reflect upon his judgment too. We reckon the value of a thing by that which a wise man will give for it, that knows it, and is under no necessity of purchasing it. Our Lord Jesus knew very well what souls were, and had no need of them, was happy without them, and yet gave himself, his own precious blood, to be a ransom for them; *ανταγορον*—*a counter-price*.ⁿ He made his soul an offering for ours, to teach us how to value them. When God would prove the excellency of his people, and his value for them, he mentions this instance of it, *I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee*.^o What a demonstration is it then of the intrin-

sic value of souls, as well as of the kindness he had for them, when he gave his own Son out of his bosom for them, the Son of his love to suffer and die for them.

You see how high souls stand in Christ's book of rates, and shall they then stand low in ours? As silver and gold would not satisfy the desires of a soul, nor its capacities, in *puris ejus naturalibus*—*in its innate purity*, so neither would they satisfy for the sins of the soul, if I may so speak, in *impuris ejus naturalibus*—*in its innate impurity*. We are not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the blood of Christ, which is of inestimable value; nothing less than that would buy them back out of the hands of divine justice, would save them from ruin, and secure to them their blessedness: shall we then despise that which he paid so dear for, and sell that for a mess of pottage, like profane Esau, which he purchased with his own blood?

And let us further consider, that if Christ paid such a price for the purchase of our souls, he will inquire after them, whether we take any care of them or no; as all wise men do after their purchases. If we carelessly lose our own souls, yet Christ will be no loser by it; for if he be not glorified by our souls in their everlasting happiness, he will be glorified upon them in their everlasting ruin. And if they forget the rock that formed them, and deny the Lord that bought them, let them know, that as he who formed them will show them no favour, so he who bought them will say, *Depart from me, I know you not*.

4. Consider the projects that are laid about souls, and what striving there is for them, and for their love and service. Nothing makes men value themselves so much as being courted and contended about. Sirs, you are fools if you despise your own souls, for you cannot imagine what work there is about them. God and the world, Christ and Satan, are rivals for the throne in them: the good Spirit is striving with men's souls, to sanctify and save them; the evil spirit goes about continually seeking to debauch and destroy them. God cannot have a more acceptable present brought him than your souls, *My son, give me thy heart*; nor Satan a more acceptable prey.

It concerns you then to look about you, and to make such a disposition of your own souls as you are obliged to make, and as will be for your true interest: it concerns you to fortify them against the assaults of the worst of their enemies, and to furnish them for the service of the best of their friends.

Think what projects the love of God has to save souls; with what a peculiar care that God, whose the worlds are, even a world of angels, has been pleased to concern himself for the world of mankind,

* Ps. xxv. 17.

¹ Cant. viii. 12.

^m Prov. iv. 23.

ⁿ Matt. xx. 28.

^o Isa. xliii. 3. 4.

the world of souls. He had thoughts of love to a remnant of the sons of men, of the souls of men, before the worlds were; was devising means that his banished might not be for ever expelled from him.^p He sent his Son to seek and save lost souls; and says himself to the returning soul, *I am thy salvation.*^q He has given his Spirit to work upon our spirits, and to witness with them. He has appointed his ministers to watch for your souls;^r their business is to win souls.^s So much is done, so much is doing, for souls' salvation.

Think also what projects the malice of Satan has to ruin souls, to ruin your souls; to get to rule them, and then he knows he shall ruin them. What devices, what depths, what wiles he has in hunting for the precious soul! and how all the forces of the powers of darkness are kept continually in arms to war against the soul! The devil's agents trade in the souls of men; so we find, Rev. xviii. 13. Let us not therefore despise our own souls, but have a careful eye upon them, that they may become God's children, and not the devil's slaves.

5. Consider the perpetual duration of souls, and the preparations that are made in the other world to receive them. Did we but live by that faith, which is the *substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*, we should value ourselves and our own souls at another rate than commonly we do: did we look more before us, we should look more carefully and concernedly within us: and, therefore, our care about our souls, and our care about eternity, are very fitly put together.

Things are valued very much by their duration: gold is therefore the most valuable metal, because most durable. Now this is the great thing which speaks the worth of the soul, and shames those who despise it, that it is an immortal spirit, it is to last and live for ever; it is a flame that can never be extinguished; the spirit of a man is that candle of the Lord which will never be blown out, or burn out; it must survive both the little world, when that is turned into dust and ashes, and the great world, when that is become a vast heap of ruins. O! think of thy soul, as that which will not only live and act when it is separated from the body, but as that which must be somewhere for ever, for ever.

It is an awful consideration when a child is born, to think here is the beginning of a being that must outlive all the ages of time, and whose life will run parallel with the endless ages of eternity. Here is a candle lighted that must burn for ever, in flames either of divine love, or of divine wrath. Here is a perpetual motion set on foot that shall know no stop or period. The brute creatures are mortal; it is not of the particular animals, but of the *κτίσις*, the whole creation in general, that there is said to be

that earnest expectation, Rom. viii. 19. But man will be immortal in his individuals; and is such a soul as this to be despised then?

But this is not all; there is everlasting happiness or everlasting misery designed for souls in the other world, according to their character in this, and according as they are found when they are fetched hence. Were we all sure that our immortal souls would without fail be immortally happy in the other world, they ought not to be despised, but a great deal of care taken of them, to prepare them for that happiness; but the matter is not so,—we are in danger of falling short of that happiness, and forfeiting our title to it, and of being cast away at last, and then we are undone.

Think what preparations of wrath are made to receive sinful souls; the *Tophet* that is ordained of old, and to which they are reserved; the day of wrath, to which the wicked shall be brought forth; and you will see yourselves concerned for your precious souls, that they may be saved from that wrath to come, and will stir them up as the angel did Lot, *Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, stay not in all the plain, escape to the mountain, to the holy mountain, lest thou be consumed;*^t for souls that are despised may even be despaired of: who will pity thy soul, and snatch it as a brand out of the burning, if thou hast thyself no regard to it?

Think what preparations of glory are made for sanctified souls; such as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive.^u Souls must needs be of great value, when there is so much laid out, so much laid up, to make those souls truly happy, whom the King of kings delights to honour. The faculties and capacities of the soul must needs be large, when there goes so much to fill them and bear proportion to them.

Look, therefore, upon the world to come, and then you will see your souls worth taking care of. How lightly soever some people now think of their own souls, I am confident that they will be of another mind shortly, when either the grace of God opens their eyes; for one of the first things that a sinner is convinced of in order to his conversion, is of the worth of his own soul; or, when death having closed the eyes of the body, and so drawn aside the interposing veil of sense, opens the eyes of the mind. When the soul is stript, it will see itself to be no such despicable thing as it now looks upon itself to be. Well, it is good for us always to have such thoughts of ourselves, and of other things, as we shall have shortly when we come to ourselves.

III. Let us apply the subject.

1. Let us see and bewail our folly in having had such low thoughts of our own souls, and that we

^p 2 Sam. xiv. 14.

^q Ps. xxxv. 3.

^r Heb. xiii. 17.

^s Prov. xi. 30.

^t Gen. xix. 17.

^u 1 Cor. ii. 9.

have forgot their dignity, and put dishonour upon them. Evidences there are too many, and too plain, of the low thoughts we have had of our own souls, while we have thought of our bodies with a pride, and pleasure, and concern more than was meet; as if we had bodies only to take care of, and not souls.

We are apt to take up with a cheap and easy religion, are still asking how much will serve just to bring us to heaven, as if we were afraid of doing too much for our own souls, whereas all the danger is of doing too little. We crowd our religion into a corner, and instead of making a business of it as it requires and deserves, make a by-business of it: we are eager in our worldly pursuits, but very remiss and indifferent in holy duties; and this is a sign that we have low thoughts of our own souls.

We converse little with our own souls; we do not commune with them, nor inquire as we should into their state and temper; we show but little concern about them, as if it were an indifferent thing to us whether they were lost or saved. We take no care to balance the accounts of our souls, but let their affairs lie at large and unsettled, and this is an evidence that we despise our own souls; we make ourselves strangers to them, as if they were not worthy our acquaintance. The face it may be is admired, and therefore is often looked at in the glass, but the soul is despised, and therefore never considered.

We are very prodigal of our time and opportunities, and take no care to improve what we have, or to redeem what we have lost, and that is an evidence against us that we have despised our own souls; for those who value their souls, value their time, as knowing that the eternal welfare of their souls depends upon the due improvement of the days of time. What value do those put upon their souls, who sleep in summer, and play in harvest, when they should be laying in provision for their souls against winter; who idle away sabbath time, and the time of the morning and evening sacrifice every day, when they should be doing some service to their own souls, or, which is equivalent, to God with their souls?

Well, let us be ashamed of our own folly in this matter; say, *So foolish have I been and ignorant; surely I am more brutish than any man.* If Christ had not more care for our souls than we ourselves have had, we had been in hell long since. Let us be humbled before God for our contempt of that which God has given us such a charge of, and which we ought to have had such a concern for. The matter is so bad, that it is not capable of aggravation. We ourselves have suffered so much by our neglect, that we are inexcusable if we be not troubled for it, and lay not that to heart which has been not only so great a sin, but so great a damage to us, that

though we have reason to hope that upon our repentance God has forgiven it to us, yet we have reason enough not to forgive ourselves.

2. Let us learn for the future how to put a due value upon our own souls; not to magnify ourselves above our brethren, for they also have understanding as well as we, they are not inferior to us, but to magnify ourselves above the brutes, so as to scorn in any respect to level ourselves with them; and to magnify our souls above our bodies, so as to be more solicitous about our spiritual and eternal concerns, than about any secular affairs whatsoever, even those of the greatest importance.

Let us believe that one soul is more worth than all the world; that this soul of ours is so; and that the gain of all the world, if we could compass it, will not compensate or countervail the loss of it; but the saving of the soul will make us abundant amends for whatever loss we may sustain in providing for our souls, or protecting them.

Let us value our souls, as they have relation to God, whose image they bear, and for whose glory they were made, to show forth his praise, and to qualify us to be the collectors of his praises from the inferior creatures, and to pay them into the treasury above. Let us value them as they have relation to another world, which they were made for, and are hastening to; value them as spiritual, value them as immortal, that they may employ themselves in spiritual work, and entertain themselves with spiritual delights, and may be still aiming high, at glory, honour, and immortality, resolved not to take up short.

Let us not so value ourselves, as to think any good work below us, nor any service we can do to God or our brethren, though it may be the meanest and most despised; but let us always so value ourselves, as to think any evil work below us, and a disparagement to us to do an improper thing, though never so much in fashion and reputation. Let us think our souls too good to be made drudges to the world, and captives to the flesh, and slaves to any base lust. A heathen could say, *Major sum et ad majora natus quam ut corpori sim mancipium—I am superior, and destined to superior privileges than to be the slave of the body.* It is the great soul of man, (so it has been fitly called by some,) that great soul of thine, whose cause we are pleading against thyself, who dost despise it: shall we gain our point, and prevail with you to think more highly and honourably of it, and of its noble powers and faculties?

3. Let us make it appear that we do indeed value our own souls, and do nothing that looks like despising or undervaluing them. You will all say you value your own souls, but what proof do you give of it? Show it me by your works that you have indeed a concern for your precious souls, and prefer them before your bodies, and that you have

nothing so much at heart as their true welfare. Let all who converse with you know, by your constant watchfulness over your words and ways, that you have a true respect for your own souls, and would not do any thing to their prejudice.

Be much in communion with your own hearts, in reflecting upon yourselves, and inquiring what progress you make in the way to heaven; and how you grow in grace, what ground you get of your corruptions, and whether you do not lose ground. Be aware of guilt contracted by your sins of daily infirmity, and renew your repentance daily, and the application of the blood of Christ to your consciences, to cleanse and purify them; and thus make it appear that you value your souls.

Be afraid of sin, of every thing that looks like it and leads to it, and stand upon your guard against every temptation, that you may resist it at the first. Check the risings of corruption, and look diligently, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble and defile you. To sin, is to wrong the soul, and to save that wrong from being its ruin, there is no other way but to repent, and that is to afflict the soul, to be pricked to the heart. To sin, is to make work for repentance, that is the best that can come of it; so that if we have any value for our own souls, we must show it by keeping at a distance from sin, and having not only a dread of it, but an antipathy to it.

We must show that we love our souls by our diligent and constant attendance on the means of grace, by our keeping up secret prayer, and conversing much with the word of God, without which the soul cannot prosper, or be in health. Whatever has a tendency to the good of our souls, and the improving of them in knowledge and grace, and fitness for heaven, we must show our esteem for our souls by improving them, for the directing and quickening, the strengthening and comforting, of our souls, and the renewing of the inward man more and more.

4. Let us value other things as they have relation to our souls, and fix our estimate of them by the value of our souls, and stand affected to them accordingly.

Let us value the Bible as the best book, because it is a book for the soul; it discovers our souls to us as a glass, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* It discovers to our souls the way that leads to their present and future happiness. In the Scriptures we think we have eternal life, life for the soul. It is the excellency of the word of God, that it converteth the soul, it enlightens the mind, it rejoiceth the heart;† and for this we should value it, because it makes the soul wise unto salvation, and furnishes it for every thing that is good.

Let us value the sabbath as the best day of the week, because it is a day for the soul, a day that

befriends the soul's employments and enjoyments, when the body rests, that it may give the soul the more scope; and, therefore, all who have an honour for their own souls, will call the sabbath *A delight, holy of the Lord, and honourable.*

Let us value those as our best friends who are friends to our souls, and fear those as our worst enemies who are enemies to our souls; too often we do the contrary. It is certain, that those who tempt us to sin are enemies to our souls, who court us to forbidden pleasures, and flatter us in forbidden practices, and tell us that we shall have peace, though we go on; yet such as these, most people are pleased with as their friends, delight in their company, and willingly hearken to all they say. It is certain, that those who reprove us for sin are friends to our souls, who faithfully tell us of our faults, and warn us of our danger, and call us to our duty: yet, such as these most people are displeased with as their enemies; so they reckon them, because they tell them the truth. Would we show that we value our own souls, let us learn to say to a tempter, *Get thee behind me, Satan, thou speakest as one of the foolish people speak*; and to say to a reprover, *Smite me, and it shall be a kindness: and that which I see not teach thou me.*

Let us reckon that condition of life best for us, that is best for our souls; which is most free from temptations, especially, to the sin that most easily besets us; and which gives us the greatest advantage for our souls. Our value for our souls should reconcile us to afflictions, which though grievous to the body, yet, by the grace of God working with them, are beneficial to the soul, and yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby. *Blessed is the man whom God chasteneth*; though it be painful and uneasy to the body, if thereby he teach him out of the law, that will be nourishing to the soul.‡

But above all, let us value our Lord Jesus Christ as the best friend that ever poor souls had, who died to redeem and save them. The good Shepherd is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls;§ a good Shepherd indeed, who laid down his life for our souls; who has provided food for our souls, and healing for our souls, and rest for our souls, and an eternal happiness for our souls. O let our souls love him, and prize him, and study what we shall render to him for his love! And what shall we render? All the return he expects is, that since he has approved himself such a good friend to our souls, we should apply ourselves to him accordingly, and make use of him. Let me therefore now, in the close, press this upon you with all earnestness; show the value you have, both for precious Jesus and for your own precious souls, by trusting him with them; commit

* Heb. iv. 12.

† Ps. xix. 7, 8.

‡ Ps. xciv. 12.

§ 1 Pet. ii. 25.

the apostle says it was with the Gentiles, they were carried away even as they were led.* Those make no account of their way, whose hearts are thus weak, thus easy, thus yielding to the suggestions and solicitations of them who lie in wait to deceive, and make them their rule.

3. When we are wavering and unsettled in the course and tenor of our ways, then we despise them. Those who in the course of their lives are of no consistency with themselves, but halt between two, and are continually contradicting themselves, they make nothing of their way, nor bring any thing to pass in it; these are the double-minded men,[†] whose hearts are divided between God and the world, the Spirit and the flesh, as if they had the art of reconciling contraries; and they are accordingly unstable in all their ways, in a continual struggle between their convictions and their corruptions, and sometimes they yield to the one, and sometimes to the other; and thus they go on from time to time, fed with a fancy, as if it would justify the abundance of bad in them, that there is something in them that is good which does condemn it, and witness against it. But this is despising their way, as if it were not worth being entirely submitted to God, but it were enough to be in part so: but those who thus, like Reuben, are as unstable as water, like him shall never excel.[‡]

(1.) It is certain that those have not the concern they ought to have for their own ways, who have not resolution enough to persist in good purposes, and to hold to them. You shall have them sometimes in a good mind under the convictions of the word, or the corrections of the rod; or when they are going out into the world, fresh from under the influence of a religious education; they will then promise very fair, *All that the Lord shall say unto us we will do, and be obedient*; and we have reason to think that they mean as they say, and intend no other; but the buds and blossoms are blasted, their good purposes prove to no purpose; and it is for want of resolution, it is because they have not a just value for their own way, otherwise they would stick to a good bargain for it when they have made it.

You who are young, I hope, are ready to engage yourselves to the Lord, to promise that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes; but will you adhere to it? will you abide by it? Having sworn, will you perform it? Will you with purpose of heart cleave to the Lord? This would indeed put a value upon your way; if you had indeed one heart and one way to fear God for ever. This was it that Joshua laboured to bring the people of Israel to, when he put it to their choice, whether they would serve other gods, or the true God only, and laid before them what there was in the service of God that

was discouraging: all was to bring them to this fixed resolution, and keep them to it, *Nay, but we will serve the Lord.*[§]

(2.) Those who have not constancy enough to proceed and persevere in the good practices wherein they have begun, have not the concern they ought to have for their own ways. Those who did run well, but something hindered them, and drove them off; who had a first love, but have left it, even the kindness of their youth, and the love of their espousals, as if they had found some iniquity in God or in his ways, which yet we challenge them to produce and prove any instance of: those despise their way, who having begun in the spirit, end in the flesh, whose goodness is as the morning cloud and the early dew, which passeth away.^{||}

You who now in the days of your youth are mindful of your Creator, it is a good way in which you set out, make it to appear that you have a value for it, by persevering in it; and take heed lest, having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ, you should through carelessness of your way, be again entangled therein and overcome, and so fall from your own steadfastness.[¶] I beseech you, look to yourselves and your own way, and to every step you take in it, lest ye lose the things ye have wrought and gained, that you may receive a full reward.[‡] Notice is taken in the character of Jehoshaphat, that he walked in the first ways of his father David:[§] it is a pity but those whose first ways are good ways, should not have such regard to them, as still to improve, that their last ways may be their best ways.

4. If we do not apply ourselves to God in our ways, and acknowledge him, we despise our own ways. This honour has God been pleased to put upon our ways, that he has undertaken to be our guide and guard in them, if we look up to him as we ought. If, therefore, we have not our eye up to him, if we make light of this privilege, as all those do who do not make use of it, we lose this honour.

(1.) God has promised those who seek him, that he will teach them the way in which they should go, that he will teach sinners in the way,[¶] will teach them his way, if they will but meekly attend his conduct; that he will teach them in the way that he shall choose, when otherwise they would be apt to turn aside into the way that a vain mind and a corrupt heart shall choose, c. 12. He has promised that he will find out some means or other to make their way plain before them, to guide them by his counsel, to guide them with his eye, by some little intimation of his mind, which they with whom his secret is do understand the meaning of; he knows how much depends upon the right ordering of their way, and how much it is his delight when it is a good

* 1 Cor. xii. 2. † James i. 8. ‡ Gen. xlix. 4.
 † Josh. xxiv. 21. ‡ Hos. vi. 4.

§ 2 Pet. ii. 20. ¶ 2 John 8.
 ‡ 2 Chron. xvii. 3. ¶ Ps. xxv. 8, 9.

may be together for ever praising him. It will be so, if you really have the value you ought to have for their souls, and for your own.

THE FOLLY

OF

DESPISING OUR OWN WAYS.

PROVERBS xix. 16.

But he that despiseth his ways shall die.

WE have here a fair warning to a careless world ; a fair warning given, O that it were but taken ! There are those by whom it is taken. David speaks of it with comfort, that he had taken the alarms which God's commands gave, and, therefore, hoped for the rewards they proposed ; *by them is thy servant warned ; and in keeping them there is great reward.*^a The written word is a word of warning.^a The work of ministers is to warn sinners, they are set as watchmen for this purpose, and are to hear the word from God's mouth, and to warn them from him, and in his name. And this is that warning which they are to give from him ; *O wicked man ! thou shalt surely die,*^b if thou go on still in thy trespasses. O drunkard ! O swearer ! O sabbath-breaker ! O extortioner ! O unclean person ! Whoever thou art, thou shalt surely die ; the God of heaven has said it, and he will never unsay it, nor can all the world gainsay it, *The soul that sinneth it shall die.*

I am here to-day in God's name to warn you, from this text, whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, *O thou that despiseth thine own ways, thou shalt die !* if thou persist in this contumacy and contempt, thou shalt surely die. O that I may give the warning so as to deliver my own soul, and that you may all receive it so as to deliver yours !

There are two things in the text :

1. The sinner's fall and ruin, which we are here warned of : *He shall die ; the wages of sin is death.* It is that which sin, when it is finished, brings forth. It is the birth from that conception, the harvest from that seedness. The end of all those things is death ; that is it which sin has a direct tendency to.

There is a death that is the common lot of mankind ; it is appointed to men, to all men, once to die : and that is the general effect of sin ; it came in at the same door, at the same time : *By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin.* And if our breasts were but as susceptible of just resentments as they are of unjust ones, surely mankind would by

consent detest and abhor all sin, because that is the mother of all mischief ; that was it that introduced all that death which sullies the world's beauty, ruffles its peace, and stains the pride of all its glory.

But there is a death which is the particular lot of impenitent sinners. We lie under a sentence of death for the breach of the original law, but this speaks another death, a much sorer condemnation, which is inflicted for the contempt of the remedial law.

(1.) It is a spiritual death. An impenitent soul dies as a soul can die ; it lies under the wrath and curse of God, which is killing to the soul, is its death ; it is destitute of spiritual life, and of its principles and powers. It is under the dominion of corruption, which is as killing a sickness to the soul as the curse of God is a killing sentence. When Christ threatens concerning those who believe not in him, that they shall die in their sins,^c or as it is, v. 21. *ἐν τῇ ἀμαρτίᾳ ἡμῶν*, in your sin, in that sin of unbelief ; he means not so much that you shall die the death of the body, in an unconverted state, but you shall die spiritually, in the same sense that we are said to be dead in trespasses and sins, Eph. ii. 1. Sinners shall die, that is, their disease shall be incurable, and consequently mortal ; they shall languish of it awhile, and die of it at last.

They shall die, that is, they shall be cut off from all communion with God, which is the life of the soul, and from all hope of his loving-kindness, which is better than life. They shall die ; that is, they shall be dead to God, and to all good ; dead to Christ, as branches in the vine that are withered, which have no communication with the root, nor derive any virtue from it.

This spiritual death is a thousand times worse than the death of the body, and more to be dreaded. The body separated from the soul, which is its life, is only made a just and easy prey to the worms, which feed sweetly on it ; but a soul separated from God becomes a just and easy prey to the devils, as tempters, tormentors, or both. The death of the body is not to be called death to any but to those who die in their sins, and to them it is followed by the second death : to the saints it is but a sleep, for they die in Christ, and the toil of their work ceases while the comfort and recompence of them remains. Those are dead indeed who are twice dead ; the body dying, and the soul dead. O dread this spiritual death ; *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from this death, and Christ shall give thee light and life.*

(2.) It is an eternal death : this is but the perfection of the former, the sinfulness of man and the wrath of God both immutably fastened. He shall die ; that is, he shall perish eternally, he shall die

^a Ps. xix. 11.

^b Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8.

^c John viii. 24.

the second death. The learned Mr. Mede observes, that in Solomon's proverbs hell is called the "congregation of the dead," of *Rephaim*, of the *giants*, so some render it,^d alluding to the sinners of the old world, who were cut off by the deluge, and died together, which was a figure of the eternal punishment of sin in hell,^e and he supposes that Solomon has an eye to that future state of torment, when he says, of the strange and foolish woman, that her house inclines to death, and her paths to the dead;^f and, that the dead are there, and her guests are in the depths of hell.^g Agreeable to which it is here said of the wilful sinner, that he shall die, he shall die eternally, shall go down to the congregation of the dead and damned.

That misery which those inevitably fall into who live and die in their sins, is fitly called death, because, though it is not the extinguishing of their being, yet, which is equivalent, it is the extinguishing of their bliss, and *non est vivere sed valere vita—life consists not in existence but in enjoyment*; they are ever dying, and yet never dead. Death is the most terrible thing we can conceive, especially death by exquisite tortures, when death itself is courted as ease and release;^h and, therefore, hell is represented by the most killing tortures, to which that period is denied, because it is indeed more terrible than we can conceive. The metaphors are nothing to what the thing itself will be; nothing to what it is represented to us, when it is stript of the metaphors. It is *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, to the soul of man that doeth evil*; it is the wrath of an immortal God, filling the conscience of an immortal soul, that went out of this world unpardoned and unsanctified, and has in that world its faculties vastly enlarged, to receive the impressions of that wrath, and to make bitter reflections upon itself; that has no delights of sense to divert the thoughts of its own misery with, nor any hope of ever having benefit by the rejected Saviour, and the resisted Sanctifier.

This is no pleasing subject, nor is it any pleasure to me to dwell upon it, but we dare not pass by it when it comes in our way. I hope you do not desire we should; that you are not of those who would have only smooth things prophesied to you. You had better hear of it than feel it, especially when you hear of it for no other end but that for which the rich man in hell desired his five brethren might have it testified to them, lest they should also come into this place of torment. They who blame ministers for preaching these terrors of the Lord, and with them persuading men, who turn it to their reproach, that they fill their pulpits with hell and damnation, forget how frequently our Lord Jesus preached upon this subject, of being cast into utter darkness, where

there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; of the destruction both of soul and body in hell; of the furnace of fire into which the wicked shall be cast; of the worm that dies not, and the fire that shall not be quenched, the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels; of those who cannot escape the damnation of hell; and many, very many, the like passages we find in Christ's preaching. Such are the warnings we have received from his mouth, and we should be false to our Master, and false to your souls, if we did not give you this warning; and we should fall under his curse, and yours too, for our unfaithfulness. Give me leave therefore briefly to tell you,

[1.] That this second death, of which we give you warning, is a real thing, and no fancy. It is undoubtedly true, that there is a state of misery and torment in the other world, which will certainly be the portion of all who live and die ungodly. It is not the product of a crazed or terrified imagination, nor an engine of state wherewith to keep the world in awe: no, sirs, what we tell you concerning the torments of hell, as well as concerning the joys of heaven, are the true sayings of God. This branch of God's wrath is plainly revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.ⁱ It is so far from being inconsistent with the justice of God to punish sin to this degree, that considering the pomp, pleasure, and prosperity of many wicked people in this world, it is necessary to the maintaining and asserting of the divine justice and holiness; for considering how wickedness seems to be connived at and countenanced in this world, how would it appear that God hates it, and as a governor punishes it, if there were not such a place of torment reserved for it: and, therefore, the day of wrath is called the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.^k And even natural conscience witnesses to the truth of it, when the terrors of the Lord set themselves in array against it. Some have felt such a hell within them, as has been a plain indication of a hell before them.

O that all our hearts were possessed with the firm belief of this truth, that the wrath of God abides, and will eternally abide, upon all those who believe not in Jesus Christ, and submit not to the laws of his holy religion. The devil drew our first parents in to eat the forbidden fruit, by promising them impunity, and facing down the truth of the threatening; though in it he gave the lie to eternal truth. God had said, *In the day ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die*; and has said to us as plainly, *He that believes not shall be damned*: yet, as Satan said then to those who ate of the forbidden tree, *Ye shall not die*, he still says to those who persist in unbelief and impenitence, *Ye shall not be damned*. And shall

^d Prov. xxi. 16.

^f Prov. ci. 18.

^e 2 Pet. ii. 18.

^g Gal. ix. 18.

^h Rev. ix. 5, 6.

^k Rom. ii. 5.

ⁱ Rom. i. 18.

we suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by the same fallacy, or impudent falsehood rather, which was so fatal to our first parents, and to us in them? Shall we credit the father of lies, who seeks our destruction, rather than the God of truth, who desires our welfare?

You who are young, in this age of infidelity, have need to guard against temptations of this kind. Be firmly established in this truth, and hold it fast. The revelation of it plainly comes from God, and, therefore, every suggestion, how plausible soever, that tends to shake your belief of it, must come from Satan, and must be accordingly rejected with abhorrence. Live not a carnal, sensual, wicked life, for then you will be tempted to wish there were no hell, and so by degrees to believe there is none: but by your belief of it be driven to Christ, be restrained from sin, and kept in the way of your duty, and by such good influence upon your hearts and lives, you will have your belief of it confirmed; and it will be so far from being a terror to you, that it will furnish you with matter of comfort and praise, to think that through grace you are delivered from the wrath to come.

[2.] The second death, as it is a real thing, so it is a fearful thing, inconceivably dreadful; for who knows what is the power of God's anger, either what he can inflict, or what it is possible for a soul to suffer; or what a fearful thing it is for a sinner, who has made himself obnoxious to God's justice, and would not come up to the terms of pardoning mercy offered, and has made himself odious to God's holiness, and would not come under the power of sanctifying grace, offered likewise; to fall into the hands of the living God, when he comes to take vengeance, not only for his injured holiness and justice, but (which will add greatly to the account) for his despised grace and mercy?

The condition of all those will no doubt be very sad and doleful, who shall be shut out from the vision and fruition of God in heaven; as all those will be who are not, by the grace of God, made meet for it: but it is observable, and it is what ought to be observed to you who enjoy the gospel, and profess Christianity, that the extremities of the torments of hell are always spoken of as the portion of those, who either might have had a place and a name in the church of Christ, and would not, or have a place and name in it, and do not live up to it. They are the children of the kingdom, the unbelieving Jews who shall be cast into outer darkness,¹ who were invited into the Christian church, but refused the invitation. They are the tares found in the field of the church, and the bad fish enclosed by the gospel net, who shall be cast into the furnace of fire.^m And hypocrites, who shall not escape the damna-

tion of hell, even those who come to the wedding-feast without a wedding-garment.^a It is he who follows Christ, and yet betrays him, whose condition will be so miserable, that it had been better for that man he had never been born.^o And they are those who had talents but buried them; who had opportunity of relieving Christ's poor, and shut up the bowels of their compassion from them, who shall be most severely reckoned with. So that we, for our parts, are all concerned to fear the worst, and with the utmost diligence to flee from the wrath to come; for if we fall under it, (how charitably soever some may be willing to hope concerning those who never enjoyed the advantages that we enjoy, nor made the profession that we make,) it is certain that our condemnation will be more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, (so the Judge himself has told us,) though theirs is no less than the vengeance of eternal fire.^p

Let our holy faith therefore produce a holy fear, as Noah's did, who by faith being warned of a deluge coming, was moved with fear to prepare an ark.^q O that the sinners in Sion might hereby be made afraid, because, of all sinners, it will fare worst with the sinners in Sion! O that fearfulness might surprise the hypocrites, whose doom will be the most fearful; that by this fear sinners may be awakened to cast away the filthy rags of their iniquity, and hypocrites to trust no longer to the cloak of their hypocrisy; that sinners may become saints, and hypocrites sincere: for when we preach such terrible doctrine as this, it is not, as we are sometimes told, to frighten you out of your wits, but to frighten you out of your sins.

[3.] This second death is very near to all who are going on still in their trespasses. If Satan cannot prevail to take away the influence of this truth upon men's minds, by denying the reality or eternity of hell-torments, or by diminishing the terror of them, he then endeavours to do it by representing them at a vast distance, that in that view they may appear small and inconsiderable, in comparison with the things that are present and near. When we tell wicked people that they shall surely die, if they go on in sin, they are ready to tell us, perhaps it may prove so at last; but the vision that we see is for many days to come, and we prophesy of the times that are very far off,^r as the people said to the prophet. If there be such an evil day coming, yet they put it as far off from them as they can, and so it makes no impression upon them.

And is it so indeed? No, certainly; I am to tell thee, sinner, thou who goest on frowardly in the way of thy heart, that there is but a step between thee and this second death, and it may be a short step, and soon taken. There is but one life between thee

¹ Matt. viii. 12. ^m Matt. xiii. 42. ⁿ Matt. xxii. 13.

^o Matt. xxvi. 24. ^p Jude 7. ^q Heb. xi. 7. ^r Ezek. xii. 27.

and hell, and that is thy own, which, perhaps, will be shortly at an end; *Behold the Judge standeth before the door.* As the Saviour of the saints, though he tarry, yet will come, and *will not tarry*; so the judgment of sinners, though it seem to linger, seem to slumber, yet now of a long time it lingers not, it slumbers not.*

It would amaze us if we could see it with our bodily eyes, but (which is next door to it to a believer) our Saviour has set it before us in two parables, what a sudden change death makes with a secure worldling, whose soul is promised the enjoyment of goods laid up for many years, and yet is this night required; or with a secure sensualist, who fares sumptuously every day, and the next news that is heard of him is, he is dead and in hell torments.† In a moment they go down to the grave, from the height of prosperity to the depth of misery.

O that the nearness of this dreadful doom might awaken sinners to a speedy repentance and return to God! Believe it, sirs, it is not a time to trifle, or to be dilatory, yet a little, little while, and the vail will be rent. The days of your probation will be numbered and finished, and you will enter upon the state of recompence and retribution. O that you would bethink yourselves in time, now, at length, in this your day, that you would know and consider the things that belong to your everlasting peace; for though they are not yet hid from your eyes, thanks be to God they are not, yet you know not how soon they may; when the misery, that might have been in time prevented, must be to eternity rued, but cannot to eternity be remedied.

Those are very awakening words of Mr. Baxter's, in a sermon before the House of Commons, which Dr. Bates quotes in his sermon at his funeral, and which I shall crave leave to transcribe here. "The wretch that is condemned to die to-morrow cannot forget it; and yet poor sinners, that continually are uncertain to live an hour, and certain speedily to see the majesty of the Lord to their inconceivable joy or terror, as sure as they now live on earth, can forget these things, for which they have their memory, and which one would think should drown the matters of this world, as the report of a cannon doth a whisper, or as the sun obscures the poorest glow-worm. O wonderful stupidity of an unrenowned soul! O wonderful folly and distractedness of the ungodly! that ever men can forget, I say again, that they can forget, eternal joy, eternal woe, and the eternal God, and the place of their eternal, unchangeable abodes, when those stand even at the door, and there is but the thin veil of flesh between them and that amazing sight, that eternal gulf, and they are daily dying and stepping in!"

Be convinced of the certainty of these truths; that

if we live after the flesh we shall die; that the broad way of sin leads to destruction, and ends in it; that except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish; and then tremble to think how miserable the condition of that man is, who has brought himself to this fearful dilemma, that either God must be false, or he must be damned. But I hope better things of you, my brethren, and things that accompany salvation, though it is needful I should thus speak.

2. Here is the sinner's fault and folly, which brings him to this ruin, and which we are here warned against, and that is, despising his own ways; and the opening of this is what I chiefly aimed at in the choice of this text. Having yesterday in another place, upon a like occasion, showed the folly and danger of despising our own souls, as those do who are careless about their spiritual state, I thought this might fitly follow it, to show the gross absurdity they are guilty of who are careless about their particular actions, and never heed whether what they do be right or wrong; than which nothing can be of more pernicious consequence, especially to young people. And this is that which is here meant by the sinner's despising his own way;—*Qui negligenter instituit vitam et mores—who is careless in the regulation of his life and manners*; so *Piscator: Non curans quo modo vivat—who is heedless how he lives*; so *Mercer*.—The former part of the verse explains it, *He that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.* Those who walk circumspectly in the way of duty secure all the true interests of their own souls, and will be happy for ever. But those who despise their way, and do not govern themselves according to the commandment, do not keep to that, they ruin their own souls.

So that hence we may gather this doctrine,

That it is a very foolish and dangerous thing for men to despise their own ways. Or thus: Those who despise their own ways are in the high road to utter ruin.

In the prosecution of this, as of the former, I must, I. Show when we may be said to despise our own ways; and, II. The folly and danger of doing so; and then make application.

I. When may we be said to despise our own ways, our conversation, and the particular actions of it, which we ought to have a very tender and careful regard to? You shall see the crime opened in six particulars:

1. When we are altogether unconcerned about the end of our ways, we may then be truly said to despise our own way. This inconsideration of the end of our way includes two things, which are both fatal.

(1.) Not designing the great end, which in our way we should aim at, nor directing our ways towards that end. We know very well, that the God

who made us, made us for himself, to show forth his praise; that the Christ who bought us, bought us for himself, that we should not henceforth live to ourselves, but should be a peculiar people to him, should live to him, and be to him for a name and a praise. So that the great end of our being and living is the glory of our Creator and Redeemer; and this end we should at least virtually and habitually aim at in all our ways.

And it is a great honour which the God of heaven has put upon our ways, that he is pleased to reckon himself glorified by them if they be good, and, if in them our light shine before men, glorified by the fruits of our ways.^a That not only such a favourable, but such an honourable, construction should be put upon any thing we can say or do, that it should be acceptable and serviceable to the great God of heaven and earth, who is infinitely exalted above all blessing and praise! That the worms of the earth should be capable of doing the work of angels! Man's honour, in being made Lord of the inferior creatures, is very great: the Psalmist, when he observes him to have dominion over the works of God's hands, reckons him, in that, crowned with glory and honour.^b But his honour in being made the mouth of the inferior creatures in praising God is much greater; that whereas they can only minister matter for praise, man is capable of offering up actual adorations and praises to the Creator; and he is pleased to say, that he who offers praise, glorifies him, and to take it among the titles of his honour, that he "inhabith the praises of Israel;" for this we have much more reason to say, *Lord, what is man, that thou magnifiest him, and makest such account of him?* In my eye, a man looks more truly great when he is in a right manner worshipping his Creator at the footstool of his throne, and giving glory to him, than when he is domineering over his fellow-creatures, and giving law to them, on the highest of the thrones of the kings of the earth.

Nor is it only in the solemn acts of religious worship that we are to glorify God, but even in our common actions, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we must do it to the glory of God;^c that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.^d The general scope and tendency of our conversations must be toward the pleasing and praising of God; his favour must be pursued as our chief good in all we do, and his honour aimed at as our highest end; that we may in all our actions express the honour we have for God, and may excite others to honour him. And when we do thus, to borrow a phrase that commonly passes from man to man, but much more properly from man to God, we do ourselves the greatest honour of subscribing ourselves his "admirers and humble servants."

But if, instead of directing our ways to this great end, we regard not whether we do so or no: nay, if we direct them to a contrary end, and instead of living to God and to his glory, we live to ourselves, we eat to ourselves, and drink to ourselves,^e as God complains concerning his people, to please ourselves, and gratify the appetites of sense, that we may enjoy bodily ease and pleasure; if, instead of seeking his honour, and the honour that comes from him, we seek our own honour, in the praise and applause of men; if self be the centre in which the lines of all our actions meet; we may then be said to despise our ways, and to disparage them, when we make them subservient to an end so mean and trifling, when they are capable of being made to serve an end so great and noble. Belshazzar is said to have lifted up himself against the Lord of heaven, whereas really he debased and diminished himself to the last degree, when he served his base and brutish lusts with the wealth and honour and power that God had given him, and praised the gods of wood and stone, which neither hear, nor see, nor know; and must stand mute to that high charge, *But the God in whose hand thy breath is, and in whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified?*^f

(2.) Not inquiring what will be the last end, in which our ways will terminate and have their period. That which makes our way considerable, that is, the course and tenor of our conversation well worthy our care,—is, that it is either the broad-way that leads down to death and destruction, or the narrow-way that leads up to life and glory. The path we walk in is either the path of life,^g or the path of the destroyer.^h It is not only either a right way that will bring us to the happiness we profess to be journeying toward, or a wrong way that will not; the difference is greater than that, it is a way that will end either in heaven or hell.

And does it not concern us then to put the question seriously to ourselves, Whither will the way that I walk in lead me? where will it lodge me? that if it be the good way that leads to heaven, I may press forward in it; if the bad way that leads to hell, I may hasten back out of it. Whither am I going? what will be in the end hereof? what shall I do in the day of visitation? If I should die to-night, as I am not sure to live till to-morrow morning, whither would death bring me? These are questions which all those who have a concern for their own way will ask themselves frequently; as the pilot who minds his business, often considers what port he is bound for, and then, by inspecting his compass, inquires whether the course he now steers will bring him to it.

But with the most of men this is the last thing in their thoughts; they have not the prudence to foresee the evil, and to hide themselves, but with the

^a Matt. v. 16. John xv. 8.
^w 1 Cor. x. 31.

^v Ps. viii. 5, 6.
^x 1 Pet. iv. 11.

^y Zech. vii. 6.
^a Ps. xvi. 11.

^e Dan. v. 23.
^b Ps. xvii. 4.

simple they pass on, and are punished.^c We earnestly wish, as God did of Israel, that they would be so wise as to consider their latter end; but at the same time, we have reason to complain, as God did of Jerusalem, that *because she remembered not her last end, therefore she came down wonderfully.*^d

Those despise their way who look not on it with that concern, which a serious prospect of the end of it would fill them with; and therefore it is, that they go on securely in that way of the ungodly which will perish; but they consider not the perdition that it will end in, and, therefore, are drawn into it, and drawn on in it, by the allurements of worldly profit and sensual pleasure. That simple unwary youth, whom Solomon speaks of, was made to yield, and in a manner forced, by the flatteries and fair speeches of the adulterous woman, because he considered not what would follow upon it, that it was the direct way to hell, and to the chambers of death; so that he went as an ox to the slaughter, and as a fool to the correction of the stocks; as a bird that hastens to the snare, and knows not that it is for his life. Men would not be brought, as they are, to believe a lie, by which they will all be damned, if they were not given up to strong delusions.

And are there any here who have lived thus many years in this world, and never yet bestowed one serious thought upon this grand question, What will become of them in the other world? who either never put the question to themselves, or, like Pilate, had not patience or courage to stay for an answer; who never yet judged it a matter worth being resolved in? Know then, that you are of those who despise their own ways: and can it be a thing of small account with you, whether you are going to heaven or hell? Is the difference between them so minute as to justify your indifference in this matter? O that at length you would bring this matter to a trial; and not only so, but bring it to an issue, with all the solicitude that a matter of such importance both deserves and requires. Make it to appear that you value your ways, by being inquisitive, as a careful traveller is, whether the way you are in will bring you to your journey's end if you proceed in it, or not, and proceed accordingly. If ye will inquire, inquire ye; and leave not a matter of such moment at uncertainty.

2. When we are indifferent about the rule of our ways, and the measures by which we govern ourselves in them, we despise our own ways. Men's practices will be guided and ruled by their principles, and those who are loose and unfixed in their principles can never be even and steady in their practices. Those certainly despise their way who walk at all adventures, and live at large when they should walk circumspectly, and live by rule.

(1.) We despise our way, if we set aside the rules which God has honoured us and our way with the prescribing of. God has bid us stand in the way and see. Consider what is the way appointed you to walk in, ask for the old paths, for God has not put us to seek for new rules to go by, such as were never heard of before, but such as were from the beginning, and he has said, *Walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls*, spiritual rest in your way, and eternal rest at the end of it. But they put contempt upon their way, which God had discovered such a concern for; for they said, *We will not walk therein.*^e

It is a great honour God has put upon our way, [1.] That he has given us the Scriptures to be the guide of our way; has in them showed us what is good, and what the Lord our God requires of us; has here told us what are the by-paths we should carefully avoid, what the stumbling-stones we should take heed of: his word is *a light to our feet, and a lamp to our paths*, not only a discovering but a directing light. Could a greater regard have been had to our actions by the God who made us, than to give us a divine revelation exactly suited to our case, and accommodated to all the steps that we have to take, on purpose to be our guide to heaven? What an honour did God put upon Israel in the wilderness, though an undeserving people, and upon their passage through it, in that he gave them a pillar of cloud and fire to go before them, and show the way in which they should go, and to direct all their removals and rests! Such a divine conduct are we under, who have the written word to be our guide and counsellor.

But we despise our way if we make not use of this rule, and conform not our hearts and lives to it; if it be an indifferent thing to us whether we be ruled by the word of God, or no; if we never consult that oracle, never try our ways by that touchstone, nor are in care to walk by the light of the law and the testimony. As presumptuous sinners trample upon the law, and do what they can to make it void, so careless sinners cast the law behind their backs, and keep it as much as they can out of their sight, as if it were not worth while to order their conversation according to it. Those who despise the commandment of the Lord,^f who despise the word, and fear not the commandment, they despise their own ways, and shall be destroyed:^g but as many as walk according to this rule, as they put a respect upon it, so they put a respect upon their own way, and peace shall be upon them, and mercy, as it is upon all the Israel of God,^h who are guided and governed by that rule.

Let young people cleanse their way, and make it pure and pleasant, acceptable to God, comfortable to themselves, and beautiful before men. Let them

^c Prov. xxii. 3.

^d Lam. i. 9.

Jer. vi. 19.

^e 2 Sam. xli. 9.

^f Prov. xlii. 13.

^h Gal. vi. 16.

direct their way to the right end, and in the right paths, by taking heed thereto with a constant care and concern, according to the word,¹ which we must always have regard to. [See Mr. Nesbit's sermon to young people lately, on that text.]

[2.] That he has appointed conscience to be a monitor to us concerning our way, according to the Scriptures. As *the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light, so the spirit of a man likewise is the candle of the Lord.*^k Conscience, rightly informed, is an excellent guide in subordination to the Scriptures, and God has showed his care of our actions, by appointing us such a tutor and guardian, such an inspector of our manners, to be always with us, to check us when we do amiss, and to direct and encourage us to do well; to be a voice behind us, saying unto us, *This is the way, walk in it*, when we are ready to turn aside.^l God, by enduing us with a faculty of reflecting upon our actions, which the beasts have not, of accusing and excusing ourselves, has evidenced the concern he has about our ways, that they be straight and good.

But if we have no regard to the admonitions of conscience, and turn a deaf ear to them; if we say to that seer, *See not*; if we smite our hearts for smiting us, or threaten to do so, as the king of Judah did the prophet, *Forbear, why shouldest thou be smitten?*^m if it be all one to us whether our consciences be pleased or displeased, and no care is taken to keep them void of offence; then we despise our own way, as if it were not worth looking into, or looking after. But however conscience may for a time be slighted and silenced, brow-beaten and run down, first or last it will be heard.

O that young people would betimes manifest their concern for their own way, by paying a respect to their own consciences, getting them rightly informed concerning good and evil, sin and duty; hearkening to their dictates, though they be but whispered; keeping them tender and afraid of sin, and keeping up their dominion over appetite and passion, and all the lusts of the flesh and of the eye. Often call upon conscience to do its office, and not only give it leave to deal faithfully with you, but charge it to do so: maintain the honour of the government in your own souls, and the due course of law, and suffer it not to be insulted, obstructed, or made despicable. Thus order is kept up in the soul, and its peace secured; and it is the greatest honour you can do yourselves, to maintain a value and veneration for your consciences.

(2.) We despise our way if we set up and follow their rules of walking, in opposition to those which God has appointed us; and such rules as are not only pernicious, but unworthy to be regarded in the conduct of our way.

What mean thoughts have those of their own way,

[1.] Who are guided and governed by appetite and passion, fancy and imagination, the sight of their own eyes; who will do just what they have a mind to do, whether right or wrong. *Quidquid libet licet—whatever pleases is right*, that is their principle; if it be grateful to sense, it shall be lawful; they will do what is right in their own eyes, and what pleases them, whether it be right in God's eyes, and please him, or no.—*We will certainly do whatsoever thing goes forth out of our own mouth,*ⁿ is the language of those who despise their own way. By this Solomon describes the folly of the young man, *That he walks in the way of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes.*^o

But are those fit to direct a way that leads to eternity? Must the powers that are brutal command a creature that is rational? Must human reason and divine revelation, and the oracles of both, give way to the desires of the flesh, and the more foolish inventions which man has found out since his departure from his God? Nothing is so unseemly as servants on horseback, and princes walking as servants upon the earth:^p nothing so insufferable as these servants when they reign, these fools when they are pampered.^q Can we think that man, who was made to be a subject to his Maker, should be allowed a boundless liberty, and sent out free with the wild ass? No; you mistake yourselves, if you think you may do as you please.

[2.] Those, also, who are guided and governed by the course and custom of this vain and foolish world, despise their own way, who think *that* a leader and director wise enough, and good enough, and safe enough for them. Those matter not much what they do, who resolve to do as the most do, and follow the multitude, though it be to do evil; nor whither they go, who resolve to go down the stream, without asking whither it will carry them. Christ says, *Follow me*, and it will be an honour to us and our conversation to have such a leader, and to follow him whithersoever he goes, who is wisdom itself. The world says, *Follow me*, and we cannot do ourselves a greater dishonour, than to put ourselves under the conduct of such a leader; yet, thus the children of disobedience do, they walk according to the course of this world.^r It is all one to them what they do, so they can but recommend themselves to the gay and the great, or to the worldly-wise, on whom that principle has a greater influence than all the principles of their religion, "*As good be out of the world as out of the fashion.*"

What contempt do those put upon their own ways, who are easily drawn aside from their duty into by-paths, by any one who will put up the finger, and flatter them, and speak a few fair words, and tell them every body else does so! It is with them as

ⁱ Ps. cxix. 9.

^k Prov. xx. 27.

^l Isa. xxx. 21.

^m 2 Chron. xxv. 16.

ⁿ Jer. xlv. 47.

^o Eccl. xi. 8.

^q Prov. xxx. 22.

^p Eccl. x. 6, 7.

^r Eph. ii. 2.

the apostle says it was with the Gentiles, they were carried away even as they were led.* Those make no account of their way, whose hearts are thus weak, thus easy, thus yielding to the suggestions and solicitations of them who lie in wait to deceive, and make them their rule.

3. When we are wavering and unsettled in the course and tenor of our ways, then we despise them. Those who in the course of their lives are of no consistency with themselves, but halt between two, and are continually contradicting themselves, they make nothing of their way, nor bring any thing to pass in it; these are the double-minded men,[†] whose hearts are divided between God and the world, the Spirit and the flesh, as if they had the art of reconciling contraries; and they are accordingly unstable in all their ways, in a continual struggle between their convictions and their corruptions, and sometimes they yield to the one, and sometimes to the other; and thus they go on from time to time, fed with a fancy, as if it would justify the abundance of bad in them, that there is something in them that is good which does condemn it, and witness against it. But this is despising their way, as if it were not worth being entirely submitted to God, but it were enough to be in part so: but those who thus, like Reuben, are as unstable as water, like him shall never excel.[‡]

(1.) It is certain that those have not the concern they ought to have for their own ways, who have not resolution enough to persist in good purposes, and to hold to them. You shall have them sometimes in a good mind under the convictions of the word, or the corrections of the rod; or when they are going out into the world, fresh from under the influence of a religious education; they will then promise very fair, *All that the Lord shall say unto us we will do, and be obedient*; and we have reason to think that they mean as they say, and intend no other; but the buds and blossoms are blasted, their good purposes prove to no purpose; and it is for want of resolution, it is because they have not a just value for their own way, otherwise they would stick to a good bargain for it when they have made it.

You who are young, I hope, are ready to engage yourselves to the Lord, to promise that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes; but will you adhere to it? will you abide by it? Having sworn, will you perform it? Will you with purpose of heart cleave to the Lord? This would indeed put a value upon your way; if you had indeed one heart and one way to fear God for ever. This was it that Joshua laboured to bring the people of Israel to, when he put it to their choice, whether they would serve other gods, or the true God only, and laid before them what there was in the service of God that

was discouraging: all was to bring them to this fixed resolution, and keep them to it, *Nay, but we will serve the Lord.*[§]

(2.) Those who have not constancy enough to proceed and persevere in the good practices wherein they have begun, have not the concern they ought to have for their own ways. Those who did run well, but something hindered them, and drove them off; who had a first love, but have left it, even the kindness of their youth, and the love of their espousals, as if they had found some iniquity in God or in his ways, which yet we challenge them to produce and prove any instance of: those despise their way, who having begun in the spirit, end in the flesh, whose goodness is as the morning cloud and the early dew, which passeth away.^{||}

You who now in the days of your youth are mindful of your Creator, it is a good way in which you set out, make it to appear that you have a value for it, by persevering in it; and take heed lest, having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ, you should through carelessness of your way, be again entangled therein and overcome, and so fall from your own stedfastness.[¶] I beseech you, look to yourselves and your own way, and to every step you take in it, lest ye lose the things ye have wrought and gained, that you may receive a full reward.[‡] Notice is taken in the character of Jehoshaphat, that he walked in the first ways of his father David:[§] it is a pity but those whose first ways are good ways, should not have such regard to them, as still to improve, that their last ways may be their best ways.

4. If we do not apply ourselves to God in our ways, and acknowledge him, we despise our own ways. This honour has God been pleased to put upon our ways, that he has undertaken to be our guide and guard in them, if we look up to him as we ought. If, therefore, we have not our eye up to him, if we make light of this privilege, as all those do who do not make use of it, we lose this honour.

(1.) God has promised those who seek him, that he will teach them the way in which they should go, that he will teach sinners in the way,[¶] will teach them his way, if they will but meekly attend his conduct; that he will teach them in the way that he shall choose, when otherwise they would be apt to turn aside into the way that a vain mind and a corrupt heart shall choose, c. 12. He has promised that he will find out some means or other to make their way plain before them, to guide them by his counsel, to guide them with his eye, by some little intimation of his mind, which they with whom his secret is do understand the meaning of; he knows how much depends upon the right ordering of their way, and how much it is his delight when it is a good

* 1 Cor. xii. 2. † James i. 8. ‡ Gen. xli. 4.

‡ Josh. xxiv. 21. ¶ Hos. vi. 4.

2 N

§ 2 Pet. ii. 20.

¶ 2 Chron. xvii. 3.

‡ 2 John 8.

¶ Ps. xxxv. 8, 9.

way, and, therefore, the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,^b and we are instructed to pray, *Lord, order my steps in thy word.*^c

But now, if we do not think this divine conduct worth asking, if we think we do not need it, or can do well enough without it; if in the most difficult and doubtful cases we go on leaning to our own understanding, and ask not counsel at the mouth of the Lord, we despise our way, we put contempt upon it, and bring more contempt. Thus they did who took counsel, but not of God, and covered with a covering but not of his Spirit, Isa. xxx. 1. They who over-value their own wisdom under-value their own way.

(2.) God has promised them that seek him, to bear them up and strengthen them in their way, to fortify them against the temptations of their way, to furnish them for the duties and services of it, and to work all their good works in them and for them. What an honour has God hereby put upon our way and work, that he has promised us grace sufficient for us, that as our day is, so shall our strength be! to enlarge our hearts, that we may run the way of his commandments, and work in us both to will and to do! But if we slight this grace which he has offered us and encouraged us to ask, and instead of committing our way to the Lord, go on in it in our own strength, as if we had no need of the divine aids, we then despise our way, and it is just with God to leave us to ourselves; to leave the youths who are confident of their own abilities, to faint and be weary, and the young men utterly to fail,^d while by renewed strength from him, the lame man is made to leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing in the ways of the Lord.

5. When we are careless of our past ways, and take not the account we ought to take of them, we then despise our ways. It is our honour that we can look back; it is our concern to look back, because if we have done amiss, there is a way provided to undo it by repentance, and prevent the fatal consequences of it. If we neglect that, we despise our way.

(1.) If we are not willing that others should reprove us for what they see or hear is amiss in us, we have not the care we ought to have for our own way. So many things there are amiss, and so much is it our concern to have them mended, and yet withal so partial are we in favour of ourselves, that we have need of more eyes than our own to discover us to ourselves: and it is a great advantage to us in our way, to have faithful friends about us, to tell us of our faults and of our dangers; This is not well, the other is not safe; this is a blemish to you, and that will be a snare to you.

But there are those who take it as an affront to be

thus admonished, are ready to fly in the face of their reprovers, yea, though they be ministers, reprovers in the gate, reprovers by office; yea, though they be their own ministers, who ought to have some care particularly of their souls; though they be their parents and masters, who rebuke with authority; though they be those to whom they have given the right hand of fellowship, with a mutual obligation to watch over one another; yet they are ready to say to them who show them the false steps they have taken, "What is that to you? meddle with your own business, we know what we have to do better than you can teach us:" and it is well if they bear them not a grudge for it. Is not this an evidence that they despise their way, though it be a way that leads either to heaven or to hell? They would not thus despise their way from one part of the city to the other; for there they would thank any one who would show them where they have missed their way, or are in danger of missing it, and would direct them in the right way.

2. If we are not willing to examine ourselves, and to search and try our own ways, and to call ourselves to an account, and correct ourselves for what we have done amiss, we despise our own ways, and do not make that account of them which God does, and which he expects we should do. He looks upon men when they have sinned, to see what they will do next, whether they will make any sorrowful reflections upon it, and whether their spirits will be grieved for that, by which they have grieved his Spirit: and, if there be any who say, *I have sinned, and have perverted that which was right, and it profited me not,*^e he is pleased with it, and meets such returning souls more than half way with his comforts. But if, on the contrary, when he hearkens and hears they speak not aright; ^f if none of them say, "What have I done? and it is all wrong;" still if they be not brought to that, he is disappointed, and is provoked to say, that his Spirit shall not any more strive with them.

Those despise their way, who never remember against themselves their former iniquities, nor inquire wherein they have erred; who never examine their consciences, nor review the records of them; lie down at night, and never ask what they have done amiss that day; enter upon a sabbath, and never look back upon their week's work; perhaps go to the Lord's table every month, and do not examine themselves how their conversation has been ordered since they were last renewing their covenants with God in that ordinance: and is not this a great contempt put upon their own way? They are willing to take it for granted all has been well, as Ephraim, though he had the balances of deceit in his hand, and loved to oppress, yet flattered himself

^b Ps. xxxvii. 23.

^c Ps. cxix. 133.

^d Isa. xl. 30.

^e Job xxxiii. 7.

^f Jer. viii. 6.

with a conceit that they should find no iniquity in him that were sin,^g nothing very bad, or at least nothing to be seen.

And while they thus neglect to inquire into their own ways, how can they tell what confession of sin to make, and what to pray particularly for the pardon of? and how can they tell what sin to covenant against, and to stand upon their guard against? You that are great dealers in the world, know of what consequence it is to you to keep your accounts even, and often to review them; and those who are shy of looking into their books, it is to be feared, it is because they are not willing to know the worst of their affairs; they suspect they are going behind-hand, and by this means are likely to go more and more so.

And will it not be of dangerous consequence to the prosperity of our souls, if we neglect to look over the books of conscience, that we may renew our repentance, and make our peace with God in Christ? He that is washed needs to wash his feet;^h the sooner the better, and in order to that to observe what filth he has contracted; if he do not, he despises his way. Consideration of our ways is the first step towards conversion from the errors of them, and, therefore, reckon not that you can safely go forward, till you have first seriously looked back.

6. When we are heedless and inconsiderate as to the way that is before us, and walk at all adventures, we despise our own way. If we think it is all one what we do, that God Almighty is neither pleased nor displeased with any of our thoughts or affections, words or actions, and, therefore, do as we please, and ask no question for conscience sake; if, in doubtful cases, we never consider what is our duty, but what is our inclination and secular interest; if we go on in our callings, and never consider how we may glorify God in the use of them, and keep a good conscience; if, like the men of Laish, we dwell carelessly, never look back with any regret, nor forward with any concern, we despise our way.

(1.) If we are in no care to avoid sin, which mars our path, and is a by-path, then we are careless of our way, as a fool upon the road, that never picks his way, but goes, as we say, through thick and thin. The chief, and indeed the only, thing we have to dread in our way is sin, for nothing but that can hurt or hinder us. The sin that most easily besets us, is the weight that must be laid aside; that is it that defiles our way, that disorders and perplexes it; that is the false way which we are to hate.

But those who are careless of their way, are not aware of their danger of sin, and their danger by sin, and therefore rush into it as the horse into the battle;ⁱ they consider not that they do evil,^k nor what a great deal of evil there is in what they do. They have, it may be, deceitful ways of trade, carry

it on by a course of lying and fraud, cheating their neighbours, cheating the government, and go on securely in it, not considering what an abomination to the Lord both the lying lips and the false weights and measures are. They keep up drunken clubs, and in them mispend their time, and unfit themselves for the service of God, not considering that drunkenness and revellings, and such like, are works of the flesh, of which we have been told again and again, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.^l

All the corruptions of our way arise from the corruptions of our hearts, and if we take no care to mortify and subdue them, and to suppress the first risings of them, to get the habits of sin weakened, and to shame ourselves and frighten ourselves out of those inclinations and dispositions which are so hurtful to us; if we do not thus strike at the root, it is a sign that we have not the concern we ought to have for our own way.

Our own corruptions are excited and drawn out by the temptations of Satan. We are told of our danger from that enemy, but are careless of our way if we do not put on the whole armour of God, and in dependence upon divine grace put on resolution to resist him, and repel all his assaults. He has devices and wiles wherewith to beguile the unwary, *latet anguis in herbâ,—there is many a snake under the green grass*, and therefore we have need to look where we tread: and that we may be kept from evil, are concerned to abstain from all the appearances of evil, and to take heed of approaches towards it; if we do not we are careless of our way.

(2.) If we are in no care to do our duty, to be found in the way of it, and to do it as it ought to be done, we are careless of our way. It is not enough to the making of our way good that we cease to do evil, but we must learn to do well, and must learn to do it well, which will not be done without consideration. We must see to it, that in all the duties of the Christian life we *walk circumspectly*, *ακριβως*, *accurately, exactly*;^m must do it by rule, and therefore must do it with care.

What we do that is good, must be done from a right principle, for a right end, and in a right manner; and therefore it must be done carefully, because herein it is so easy a thing to miss it; and if we are carried on in a road of religious exercises only by custom, and not by conscience and a due concern, we do but mock God and deceive ourselves, and it will turn to no good account.

Many an opportunity we have of doing good to others, and getting good to our own souls, which, if we do but walk carefully, we might make a good improvement of; but we lose it and let it slip, and it is a sign we despise our way; for the husbandman

^g Hos. xii. 8.

^h John xiii. 10.
2 N 2

ⁱ Jer. viii. 6.

^k Eccl. v. 1.

^l Gal. v. 12.

^m Eph. v. 15.

that has a respect to his business, and a value for it, will not drop his proper time for sowing and reaping.

What is done in religion without care, is done accordingly. If we go about solemn exercises without solemn preparation, we commonly come off from them without advantage; and if the commandment be not duly observed, it will not be obeyed as it should be. It is charged upon Jchu, that *he took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart.*^a And it is true of many, that they do not walk surely, are in no care to go upon sure grounds, and to take every step right, which is a sign they do not walk uprightly, nor have any true value for their own way.

II. I am next to show what a foolish and dangerous thing it is for us to despise our own ways, and what an absurdity they are guilty of who do so. Believe it, sirs, the ways we despise are not so despicable as we would make ourselves believe they are; but a great deal of stress ought to be laid upon what we say and do, yea, upon what we think too; and consequently a great deal of care and concern ought to be about it.

This will appear if we consider these five things:

1. That the God of heaven observes and takes particular notice of all our ways; even the ways of our hearts, even their thoughts and intents, are *naked and open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do*,^b *προς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος—with whom there is for us an account running*, and to whom there must be shortly an account given up. God sees our ways, not only as he sees all things, but with a particular observation, as things that must be judged of, and by which judgment must be given justly.

It is a general truth laid down, and comes in as an argument against all secret sins, and those which are most artfully and industriously concealed; that *the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.*^c But we should each of us apply it to ourselves, and to our own goings. Job does so: *Doth not he see my ways and count all my steps?*^d David does so: *Thou compasses my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.*^e Now, shall we make a light matter of that which the God of heaven makes such a great matter of, or let that in us pass allowedly unobserved, which he so carefully observes? It is natural to us to have some regard to ourselves, that we observe a due decorum when we are in the presence of our betters, whose eye we observe to be fixed upon us. Therefore we should have a jealous eye upon ourselves, because God has an eye upon us wherever we are, and whatever we are doing.

Therefore we should be very careful and diligent to avoid sin, because all our evil ways are before God; they can none of them be hid from his pierc-

ing eye; he sees all the secret wanderings of our hearts from him, and all the secret risings of our hearts against him, and is much displeased with them. And shall our sins be no provocation to us, when they are such a provocation to him? Does he complain of his people's bent to backslide from him, and shall not they complain of it? Is he broken with their unfaithful heart, and shall they make light of it?

And therefore we should be very careful and diligent to do our duty, because God takes notice of all we think, or say, or do well, and is pleased with it, and it shall be owned in the great day, even a cup of cold water given to a disciple; which should engage us to wait all opportunities of doing good, because God observes all the good we do, especially if it be done in secret; for that shall with a particular regard be seen, and openly recompensed. *The Lord knows the way of the righteous*, and, therefore, they should themselves take cognizance of it, of every path, and every step.

2. That Satan is a subtle enemy, who seeks to pervert our ways, and to draw them into his service and interests. If we despise our ways, yet he does not, but labours with the utmost subtilty and sedulity to draw us aside out of the good and right way, and to seduce us into the paths that lead to ruin. He is represented, and his agents, by the foolish woman, who calls passengers who go right on their way, to come share in the stolen waters. Now if Satan be so watchful and busy to make us turn out of our way, or trifle in it, and lets slip no opportunity of doing us a mischief in our way, we are fools if we be unconcerned, and slip opportunities of doing ourselves a kindness. Our way is beset, and, therefore, we should be never off our guard.

Especially, because then our way is most endangered when it is most despised: when we least consider what we do, our spiritual enemies gain most advantage against us, and make an easy prey of us. Satan's design is more than half accomplished, when he has brought men to an indifference as to their own actions, and let things go just as they will without either forecast or review.

This is a good reason therefore why we should be sober and vigilant, and make conscience of what we say and do, because our adversary the devil is seeking to devour us. Therefore St. Paul is jealous over the Corinthians, and has a watchful eye upon all their ways, because there is danger, lest they should be beguiled as Eve was through the subtilty of the serpent; and of the Thessalonians, lest by any means the tempter have tempted them, and his labour should be in vain.^f And for the same reason we should have a jealousy of ourselves and our own way, lest if we sleep, and neglect our way, we lose

^a 2 Kings x. 31

^b Heb. iv. 13.

^c Prov. v. 21.

^d Job xxxi. 4.

^e Ps. cxxxix. 3.

^f 1 Thess. iii. 5.

our spear and cruse of water, as Saul did when he slept; nay, and our heads and lives, as Sisera did, when he slept in the tent of one who pretended to be his friend.

3. That we have many eyes upon us, that are witnesses to our way. David prays, *Lord, lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies*; ¹ because of them who observe me; so it is in the original. We have need to look about us, for there are many about us who look upon us, to take notice of what we say and do. Let us walk honestly, *εὐαγγεῖως*—*decently*, and as becomes our character, (so the word signifies,) as in *the day*, when we may be seen, and when we are in the midst of those who will observe us.

Some have their eye upon our way, perhaps, to take pattern by it, and that they may learn to do as we do, and then I am sure we ought not to despise our way, because the example of it may have a great influence upon others; so that if we do amiss, others will do amiss too, and so we shall become accessory to their sin, and shall be to answer not only for our ways, but, as the Scripture speaks, *for the fruit of our doings*, as Jeroboam for his sin, wherewith he made Israel to sin. If it be a good reason why we should not make friendship, nor keep company, with an angry man, lest we learn his ways, much more is it a reason why an angry man should moderate his anger, and put on meekness, lest others should learn his ways, and get a snare to their souls,² lest by setting his own house on fire he burn down a whole street. We ought to be very careful what language we speak, whether that of Canaan or that of Ashdod,³ for those about us will learn our dialect, and be either the better or the worse for it.

Some, perhaps, have their eye upon our way to seek for matter of reproach; they watch for our halting, and if we say or do amiss, religion shall suffer by it, and be evil spoken of; and the enemies of the Lord will have their mouths opened to blasphemy, as in David's case.⁴ You who make a greater profession of religion, who attend preaching and catechising more than others, have need to be very strict and regular in your whole conversation; for otherwise, by reason of you the way of truth will be evil spoken of;⁵ religion will be struck at, and wounded through your sides. That which, in others, would be winked at as a small fault, will, in you, be magnified and made a great matter of. Take ye therefore good heed to yourselves, that you may cut off occasion from them who desire occasion,⁶ to reproach the good ways of the Lord, and prejudice people against them.

Some, perhaps, have their eye upon our way, that on the other hand would rejoice to see us do that which becomes us, would have no greater joy than to see us walk in the truth, our strictness and sted-

fastness would be their strength and song: *Now we live*, says the apostle, *if ye stand fast*. We have reason to think that the good angels rejoice, as in the conversion of sinners, so in the even and regular walking of the saints; and, therefore, we are charged to behave ourselves very reverently in the worship 'a branch of our way which is by no means to be despised) because of the angels. Now, if our way be compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,⁷ it concerns us to have an eye to it ourselves; and to run, and run well, the race that is set before us, especially looking unto Jesus.

4. That we must shortly give an account of all our ways. As there is now an account kept of them all in the book of God's omniscience, and of the sinner's own conscience, because we are here in a state of trial and probation; so there must shortly be an account given of them all, and they must all be reviewed, for God requireth that which is past,⁸ and will tell thee, *these things thou hast done*.

It is a folly for us to despise our own ways, and make a light matter of them, and to turn off the errors of them with a jest, when so great a matter will be made of them in the judgment; in the judgment at hand, which follows immediately upon death; in the judgment at last, the public judgment of the great day. Therefore, it concerns us to fear God and keep his commandments, and to see that our matters be right and good, for God shall bring every work into judgment, bring it into the account, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.⁹ This was known and pressed by an Old-Testament preacher, but is much more clearly revealed in the New Testament, which tells us, *We must all appear*, one as well as another, all without exception, *before the judgment-seat of Christ*, to give an account of *every thing done in the body*, and to receive according to it, *whether it be good or evil*. Brethren, these are the true sayings of God; all we are doing now will be called over again in the day of judgment; as sure as we see this day, we shall see that day, and it will be to us according as we are found.

O what a concern should this fill us with, to think that what we are now doing, every day, has a reference to that day; which methinks should make every day a great day, a judgment day, with us: for if we would daily judge ourselves concerning our own way, we should not be judged of the Lord.¹⁰ It would awaken us to consider our ways, if we would but consider how they will appear in that day, when we and they must appear undisguised, in true colours; and with what eye we ourselves shall look upon them, an eye of shame, or an eye of satisfaction, and thankfulness to God. This should especially give check to the looses and extravagances

¹ Ps. v. 8; xxvii. 11. ² Prov. xxii. 25. ³ Neh. xiii. 24.
⁴ 2 Sam. xii. 14. ⁵ 2 Pet. ii. 2.

⁶ 2 Cor. xi. 12. ⁷ 1 Cor. xii. 10. ⁸ Eccl. iii. 15.
⁹ Eccl. xii. 14. ¹⁰ 1 Cor. xi. 31.

of youth: Thou hast a mind, O young man, to lay the reins on the neck of thine appetites and passions, to indulge thyself in a sensual liberty, to walk in the way of thy heart, and in the sight of thy eyes, and this would be a brave way of living, if thou wast never to hear of it again; *but know thou, for all these things God will bring thee into judgment*; ⁴ for all thy indulgence of thyself in carnal mirth and sensual pleasure, unbounded and uncontrolled; for all those merry days and merry nights of thine, from which every thing was banished that was serious, and when God was not in all, not in any, of thy thoughts. Let the thoughts of this take young people off from their inordinate pursuits of the pleasures of sense, and deaden their desires towards them, that they may acquaint themselves with the pleasures of religion, which are spiritual and divine, and as much exceed the other as the richest wine does puddle-water.

5. That according as our ways are now, it is likely to be well or ill with us to eternity. It is the greatest folly imaginable to despise our way in this world, for as our way is, so will our end be in that world which has no end. Those who go upon the water only for pleasure care not what course they steer; but they who go upon business must steer the right course, and secure their point.

Believe it, sirs, and I pray consider it, that you are here upon trial for another world, and it will be to you a world of happiness or misery, according as you pass your trials. As you spend your time, you are likely to spend your eternity. If the prevailing temper of your mind now be vain and carnal, selfish and sensual, earthly and worldly, and you go out of the world under the dominion of such a temper, you are utterly unfit for heaven, and so is heaven for you, it would be no heaven to you. If the general course of your conversation be contrary to the rules of Christianity; if, instead of being constant and devout worshippers of God, you slight and neglect religious exercises, and think meanly of them; if, instead of living by faith in Christ, and in a continual dependence upon him for righteousness and grace, you lay him aside, and overlook him in what you have to do with God; if, instead of living a life of self-denial and mortification, you indulge yourselves in all the gratifications of sense, and are in them as in your element; if, instead of bridling your passions, you indulge them upon every provocation, and are impatient of the least instance of contempt and contradiction, as if humility and meekness were no part of the law of Christ, or the livery of Christians; if, instead of loving all men, even your enemies, and forgiving injuries, you have a jealousy of all, an antipathy to some, and bear malice and ill-

will to all that you apprehend have been injurious to you, or stand in your light, or in your way; if, instead of being charitable and doing all the good you can to every body, you are selfish, and seek your own things only, and are oppressive and hard with those you have power over or advantage against; if, instead of setting your affections on things above, and having your conversation in heaven, you are wholly intent upon the world, and the things of it; if that be the subject of your most serious cares, and the object of your most vigorous pursuits, and you go on in such a course as this to the end of your way, you cannot inherit eternal life; if the word of God be true, and there be any weight in the reason of the thing itself, you cannot; you cannot but perish, eternally perish. And can it then be an indifferent thing to us what our way is? Can it be all one whether we live a godly or ungodly life, when our everlasting weal or woe does certainly depend upon it? O that we were wise and understood this, that we would consider our latter end! then we durst not despise, durst not but consider, our way.

And those who have good hope through grace that they are in the way that leads to life, are concerned to regard their particular paths, to look well to their goings, and every step they take, because they know not how much their vigorous advances in grace and holiness, and their careful improvement of all opportunities of doing good, may add to the degrees of their glory and joy in heaven; nor how much their remissness, and the unevenness of their walking, may take from them: but this I am sure we all ought to fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into that rest, and we having by faith laid hold on that promise, any of us should so much as seem to come short,* should seem either to others or to ourselves, should in the nature of the thing be in danger of it, or should come short of any of that measure to which, if we had been more careful, we might have attained.

Nothing can be more proper to awaken us to put a value upon our own ways, than to lay this to heart, that our present time is seed-time, and as we sow now we shall be reaping to eternity. The husbandman sows his ground with care, because he knows, that when what he sows comes up again, it will appear whether it was sown wisely and well or no, Gal. vi. 7, 8. The matter is brought into a little compass, *If we sow to the flesh in a carnal, sensual life, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if we sow to the spirit, we shall of the spirit reap life everlasting*: and then I am sure it is folly for us to despise our own way.

⁴ Eccl. xi. 9.

* Heb. iv. 1.

THE APPLICATION.

The application of this plain and practical discourse lies upon yourselves, brethren; the Lord help us all to apply it!

1. Let it be a caution to us not to be rigid and severe in our censures of other people's ways, for that is none of our business; (we are incompetent judges of our brethren, for we know not their hearts;) nor of their works, for we know not the principles they act from, or the ends they aim at, nor the one half of what is requisite to be known in order to the passing a right judgment upon them; we can judge at best but by the outward appearance, and, therefore, it is ten to one but we are deceived in our judgment. And as we have not ability, so we have not authority, to judge concerning them; we step into the throne of God if we do: *What have we to do to judge another man's servant? to his own master he stands or falls.* We are to hope charitably concerning our brethren, and to put the best construction upon their words and actions that they will bear; but as to their way, and the end of it, the Lord only knows that, and to him we must leave it.

And this is another good reason why we should not pretend to judge our brethren and their way, because we have enough to judge ourselves and our own way: and here it becomes us as much to be strict and severe, as in judging of our brethren it becomes us to be candid and charitable, and make the best of every thing.

2. Let it be a charge to us to look well to our own ways. Let others, if they be overtaken in a fault, be restored with a spirit of meekness; and let us not be curious in prying into the fault, and examining all the circumstances of it; nor sharp in upbraiding them with their carelessness; but let every man prove his own work, let him bring that to the touchstone, and be very critical in trying it, and earnest with God in prayer, to discover him to himself; and if he find his heart upright with God, then he shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.¹

O that I could prevail with you who are young, betimes to make conscience of what you say and do, and oblige yourselves to live by rule, and not, as most young people, to despise your own way. When you go out into the world, and begin to "be for yourselves," as you say, I beseech you, do well for yourselves. When you are gone from under the influence of your parents and masters, yet still continue under the influence of the good education they gave you, and think not, when you are set at liberty from them, you may live at large. With what grief have I sometimes heard that vain song put into the mouths of young people, which begins, "From grave

lessons and restraints." I cannot repeat it, nor desire to do it, but it is designed to teach them to triumph in having shaken off the shackles of virtue, and laid the reins on the neck of lust. It is time to warm, my brethren, and to show ourselves zealous for the honour of God and conscience, of virtue and serious piety, for that is it I here, in the name of my great Master, contend for, and not the petty private interests of any party: let them take their lot, despise their way and spare not; the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, either the imposition or the opposition of those matters of doubtful dispute; but it is righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It is the great and fundamental law of Christianity, *repentance toward God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*; it is humility and meekness; it is sobriety and temperance; it is chastity and strict modesty; it is justice and equity; it is universal charity and beneficence; that I am pressing upon you: these are the ways that you must walk in, if ever you hope to find rest to your souls; these ways must be your ways, and in these you must persevere to the end, and in these and all the acts of devotion, and the instituted exercises of religion, you must live a life of communion with God. In urging these, I say again, it is time to be in earnest, when the enemies of serious godliness are not only so subtle as secretly to weaken its principles, and sap its foundations under ground, but so daring as openly to attack all its strong holds; when you are taught by a celebrated poet to say,

"Conscience and Heaven's fears, religion's rules,
Are but state-bells to toll in pious fools."

This is instructing you how to despise your own ways; but, *Cease my son to hear the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge;*² and the Lord rebuke those who give such destructive instructions, even the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke them, and snatch those as brands out of the burning who incline their ear to such instruction.

That which I am persuading you all to, both young and old, is, to keep yourselves, and all your words and actions, under a strict discipline. Are you your own masters? Be faithful masters then to yourselves, and not careless ones. (1.) Be strict in your inquiries concerning your present way, and herein deal faithfully with yourselves, and do not despise a matter upon which your all depends. Are you in the broad way that leads to destruction, or in the narrow way that leads to life? among the many who walk in the way of their own hearts, or among the few who walk in the way of God's commandments? Christ is the way; are you in Christ? Holiness is the way; and is it the way of holiness that you are

¹ Gal. vi. 1, 4.

² Prov. xix. 27.

walking in? Be willing to find out the worst of your case, you need not be afraid to do so, while it may be amended, be it ever so bad: and be concerned to find it out; for if it be bad, and not amended in time, it will shortly be past recovery.

Take heed of deceiving yourselves in a matter of such vast moment as this is. The word of God has plainly told you once and again, *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man*, and he says I shall have peace, though I go on in it, *but the end thereof are the ways of death*; ^h and will you suffer yourselves to be cheated into your own ruin, when you have such fair warning given you? How bitter will the reflection upon it be hereafter, if you thus put a cheat upon your own souls! Self-deceivers will be self-destroyers, and, for that reason, to eternity self-tormentors.

For the Lord's sake, sirs, and for your own precious souls' sake, bring this matter to an issue quickly, by making your calling and your election sure, and so making your salvation sure. You are busy to make other things sure, that neither can be made sure, nor are worth making sure: O that you would make this sure, which may and must be made sure, and leave it no longer in suspense! You cannot but tremble every step you take, as long as your own consciences tell you, if you give them leave to be faithful, that it is a step forward in the way of sin and death; but if you have good ground to hope, that through grace you are walking in the way of good men, that leads to life and happiness, you may go on cheerfully; you may sing in that way. Believe this matter therefore worth settling.

(2.) Be strict and impartial in your reflections upon your past ways, and do not despise them because they are past, for they are not past and gone, not gone out of God's remembrance: *Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, consider your ways.*ⁱ Set your hearts to your ways; so the word is; apply your minds seriously to think of them, and lay the concern of them near your hearts. Compare the temper of your minds, and the tenor of your lives, with the rule of God's word, which is right and strait, and therefore of use to show you the crooked ways into which you have turned aside; as far as you have varied and deviated from that, you have gone wrong. Find out the particular obliquities of your thoughts and affections, your words and actions, that you may know what to sorrow for, as the plague of your own heart, and what to get healed; for a disease that is known is half cured. Be particular in your reviews, that you may be so in your penitential acknowledgments; may be able to say not only, "I have done evil," but, "I have done this evil;" and not only so, but, "Thus and thus have I done;"

as Aaron, who on the day of atonement, (that day to afflict the soul,) was to confess over the scape-goat all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins,^k the sins themselves and all the aggravations of them. And usually the more particular we are in the confession of sin, the more comfort we have in the sense of the pardon, and the better fortified against temptations to relapse and return to folly: *Dolus versatur in generalibus—Deceit employs general confessions only.*

It is good to be making penitential reflections, every day, upon our sins of daily infirmity; and the more frequently this work is done, the more easy it will be. "Even reckonings make long friends:" if we daily audit accounts with our own consciences, and examine what we have done each day; if in the close of every week we do as God did, look upon the week's work, and behold all that we have done; if, before we attend on the Lord at his table, we be particular in censuring ourselves for what has been amiss, and renew our repentance, and fetch in fresh assurances of the divine favour in Christ, we shall show that we have indeed a value for our way, and the great day of account will be no terror to us.

3. Be very circumspect and considerate as to the particular paths that are before you. Do nothing rashly, but every thing with due care. Let David's resolution be yours, and stick to it, *I said I will take heed to my ways.*^l He who walks uprightly, walks surely, will see to it that he goes upon sure grounds, in opposition to walking at all adventures, and going on frowardly in the way of his heart. You put contempt upon your ways if you do not make conscience of them. Dread that wicked notion, that it is all alike what you do; though you be ever so poor and low in this world, and ever so inconsiderable among men, and your way ever so little taken notice of, yet God's eye is upon it, and, therefore, yours should be so. Do nothing rashly, for fear of doing amiss.

As those who value their own souls cannot but think themselves concerned to keep their hearts with ^m diligence, so those who value their own ways cannot but see themselves as much concerned to ponder the path of their feet; which direction follows the former, and is given in pursuance of it. Whatever you go about, consider diligently what is set before you; stand not gazing about you, and making your remarks upon other people's ways, but let your eyes look right on, and your eyelids look straight before you, for your concern is with your own ways; let not your eyes turn, lest your feet follow them to the right hand or to the left. Let heaven be the fixed end you walk towards, and the Scripture the fixed rule you walk by, and then you will walk steadily and with a holy security.

And as those who value their own souls cannot do

^h Prov. xiv. 12; xvi. 25.

ⁱ Hag. i. 5, 7.

^k Lev. xvi. 21.

^l Ps. xxxix. 1.

better for them, than to commit the keeping of them to God, as to a faithful Creator, and to Jesus Christ, the Bishop of souls, who has taken the oversight of them, not of constraint, but willingly; so those who value their own way cannot do better concerning it, than to commit their way, to commit their works, unto the Lord. Having chosen his word for your rule, be led by his Spirit. *I know* (says the prophet) *that the way of man is not in himself, neither is it in man that walketh to direct his steps.*^m We ought, therefore, in all our ways to acknowledge God, and to depend upon the conduct and support of his grace which he has promised to those who seek him, and

refer it to him to choose out their way, and to sit chief; in dependence upon which, every good Christian may promise himself the same satisfaction that the Psalmist pleases himself with, *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.*

And, now, am I leaving you at parting under any serious, solicitous concern about your own way, resolving for the future to walk more circumspectly than you have done, in the strength of divine grace? And is this your resolution? The Lord keep it always in the imagination of the thought of your heart, and thereby establish your way before him.

^m Jer. x. 23.