

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, *פירע מוסר*. 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

^a Eccl. xii. 9, 10.
^c Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

^b Eccl. xiii. 18.
^d Ps. lviii. 4, 5.

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

^e Jer. vi. 10.
^g Jer. viii. 5.

^f 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.²

(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,³ *μῶν εαυτῶν*—so the Seventy—he *hates himself*; despises himself; for *Animus cujusque is est quisque*—*The soul is the man*.

There is a despising of 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 acceptation.

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.

² 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, *Ecl. 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,^m 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

^l Isa. xxii. 13.

^m *Ecl. 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

* Isa. lii. 1.

† Heb. ix. 14.

‡ Ps. cvi. 30.

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

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

^e Ps. x. 6. ^f Jam. i. 22, 26. ^g Ps. cxxvii. 2.
^h Eccl. v. 17. ⁱ Isa. v. 8. ^k 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. 25.

^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,^o 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? 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*:^o 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.

^o Pa. cix. 18.

^o John iii. 36.

^o Job xv. 25, 26.

^o Hos. xii. 6.

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.*^r

[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

^r 2 Tim. i. 12.

^a Prov. xxviii. 20.

^t 1 John v. 18.

^u 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 show'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 design'd, 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 suppress'd, 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 briars 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.⁷ 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

⁷ Acts xiii. 46.

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

What a disparagement is this to a rational soul, to be wholly taken up in such sordid employment, and to be made a perfect drudge to the body; to have had souls given us for no other end but to preserve our bodies from putrifying; and the powers of sense employed for no other purpose, but to be caterers to the desires of sense! This is that sore evil which the apostle saw under the sun, as an error, the servant of the prince, and the prince attending as a servant to him.^a When the wits are set on work to satisfy the appetites and passions, 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 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 soul's loss and detriment, who, to spare a little to the body, come short of great advantages to the soul, which it might gain to itself either here or hereafter. 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 hindered from sowing and reaping; and such is the idleness of those who, to save a little labour to the body, lose the benefit of the means of grace to the soul: this will be found very imprudent to try at last, when profit and loss come to be considered.

Those who do so who indulge the appetite of the flesh to the soul's hurt and damage; who not only lose to the body, but their souls might reap, because they cannot bear to have 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 towards the body, and as far as it is gratified, the soul is precluded by it, the heart is overcharged with surfeit-drunkness, 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 to put a knife to their throat.^b

Those who, like the Israelites in the wilderness coveted quails, would not live without flesh, and God gave them what they desired; but at the same time he sent leanness to 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 their bodies 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

^a Eccl. x. 5, 6, 7.

^b Ch. xi. 4.
2 m 2

^c Prov. xxiii. 1, 2.

^d 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*:¹ 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 ημετερα*,—*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' ημιν*—*the duty which is ours*, but the issues of our worldly affairs to be the *τα εκ εφ' ημιν*—*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.²

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; *ανταγραφον*—*a counter-price*.³ 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*.⁴ 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,

¹ Ps. xxxv. 17.² Cant. viii. 12.³ Prov. iv. 23.⁴ Matt. xx. 28.⁵ Isa. xliv. 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; their business is to win souls.^r 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 soul 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;*^s for souls that are despised may even be despaired of: who will pity thy soul, and snatch it as a bragg 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.^t 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,^t 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.^u

(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.*^v

(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.^w

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.^x 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.^y Notice is taken in the character of Jehoshaphat, that he walked in the first ways of his father David:^z 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,^a 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.

t James i. 8.

u Gen. xlix. 4.

v Josh. xxiv. 21.

w Hos. vi. 4.

x 2 Pet. ii. 20.

y 2 John 8.

z 2 Chron. xvii. 3.

a 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.* 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. *εν τη αμαρτια ημων, 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.